When the GERM Hosts the Antidote:
The Surprising New Birth of Israel's Anti-GERM Pre-K Policy

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Abstract

Since the 1970s, Israel's educational policy has been undergoing a change generated by the neo-liberal agenda. In this light, it is not surprising that since the 1990s, Israel's education system has adopted the main characteristics of the Global Education Reform Movement (GERM). In light of this, the current research will focus on a newly born pre-K policy formation process that set out as GERM-like in nature, but nevertheless ended up with anti-GERM characteristics. Using historical-narrative qualitative tools, this paper will portray and analyze the main factors that generated the new anti-GERMian reform. We will outline conclusions from the Israeli case study to create a potential conceptual framework that highlights a more complex, hybrid, or dual outlook at the GERM containing its antidote within itself.

Keywords

Global education reform movement, GERM, Pre-K, hybridity, educational policy, policy formation

Introduction

Since the 1970s, Israel's educational policy that was characterized by strong social-democratic policy features has been undergoing a change generated by the neo-liberal agenda. Thus it is hardly surprising that since the 1990s Israel's education system has adopted the main characteristics of the Global Education Reform Movement (GERM). In the summer of 2011, it seemed that a shift in the neo-liberal agenda had emerged when a widespread social protest greatly resembling the *American Occupy Wall Street* erupted. The protester's demand for *social justice* yielded a significant reform in Israeli public education policy. At its core lay the demand to expand free pre-K education to the age of three. It is important to note that until 2012, in Israel, free public education was available for children from the age of five (mandatory kindergarten), with the official age for school attendance starting at the age of six.

Younger children in Israel from birth until the age of three, were and still are, under the care of the Ministry of Welfare, which supervises day-care facilities and home nurseries. Despite relating to the social-democratic demand for social justice, the reform of free public education for three and four year-olds contained clear neo-liberal features such as a voucher program for the delivery of the newly allocated pre-K classes. References to curriculum design and organizational structure of the new, post-protest, pre-K classes also

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indicated a GERMian government perspective. Like common neo-liberal and GERM governance mechanisms, a private partner was invited to take part in designing and managing the new both the government and the private partner, the joint professional team assigned to design the reform, did so in a manner that was, most surprisingly, characterized by significant ant-GERM characteristics.

Using narrative and quantitative tools, this paper will present a case study and analysis of Israeli policy formation, and the main factors that generated a reform that was essentially anti-GERMian. The appearance of anti-GERM policy characteristics within a GERMian pre-K educational policy may serve as a fruitful case study for international scholars confronting research fields that are struggling with the adaptation of governance agendas on the spectrum between GERM and anti-GERM. This case study might also inform the work of international policy-makers. It concludes with possible explanations for the surprising shift in governance. Finally, for both international researchers and practitioners, we will use the Israeli case study to outline a conceptual framework that highlights a more complex, hybrid, or dual outlook of the GERM, containing its potential *antidote* within itself.

Conceptual Framework
A Struggle Between Public Governance Agendas in Education

Since the late 1970s, two distinctive, dominant and contradictory, school governance agendas have been shaping the arena of public education in Israel and elsewhere with variations among different countries. These are recognized by policy education scholars (e.g., Adamson, et. al, 2016, Ball, 2012; Bialik, Gibton, & Dror, 2016; Kwong, 2000; Lubienski, 2005), and enacted by policymakers (e.g., Le Grand, 2005; Levin, 2005) and educational leaders at different levels of the education system (e.g., Addi-Raccah, 2012; Whitty, 1997). These two competing governance ideologies represent different moral,

political and economic perspectives (Glatter, 2002; Green, 2005; Manzer, 2003) that shape education governance actions such as: decisions regarding political values; commission procedures and regulations, and delivery actions (Bialik, 2014; Glatter, 2002; Green, 2005).

The first governance agenda was "committed to a belief in a democratic system of 'common' public schools, *operated* and *financed* by the government, which provided a standardized curriculum [and] treated everyone equally, irrespective of social class, culture, race or religion" (Boyd, 2003:5, italics in original). It was rooted historically in a social-democratic and egalitarian world view, maintaining that the state has a central and active role in the remedy of economic, social, and cultural malformations (Barry, 2005; Manzer, 2003), enabling mobility and equal participation for all citizens through the delivery and commission of high quality, accessible, free, and equal public education (Gibton, 2010).

The second governance agenda can be seen from the social–economic perspective as *neoliberal* (Harvey, 2005; Ichilov, 2009, 2010). It was a relatively young ideology in the social field holding that: "free markets - with little government oversight or ownership - would promote competition, improve efficiency, and lead to higher goods and services" for everyone involved in education, just as in other fields of human activity (Adamson, et. al, 2016, p. 1). This agenda emerged as a challenge to what its supporters saw as the failures and shortcomings of the social-democratic public governance model, and the ethos of equality it represented. It offered an alternative ethos of equality, and in its midst the greater freedom given to each citizen to succeed on his or her own, following the logic of an equal free-market (Harvey, 2005; Ichilov, 2009). This agenda was manifested in a set of educational reform efforts, all embodying the neoliberal logic (e.g. "school choice", "school vouchers", "charter schools"), handing the formerly public responsibility over to private sector organizations.

The neoliberal governance agenda and its underlying social-economic values – productivity, effectiveness, accountability and competitiveness – are the foundation of what was termed by Finnish educator and scholar Pasi Sahlberg in 2006 as the Global Education Reform Movement (GERM). This was later termed by Antoni Verger and Hülya Kosar Altinyelken (2012) as Global Managerial Education Reforms (GMER). In essence, these are characteristics of reform and change processes globally adopted by many countries; the aim of which was to solve new and old problems more effectively by adopting logics and methods from the private sector. Among these characteristics are: *standardization via policy,* and *increased external evaluation* of education, based on the belief that defining clear objectives and constantly evaluating them would result in improved quality of education. Proponents believed that focusing standards and evaluation on *core skills,* mainly reading and math skills, would enhance the state's economic prosperity and success; and that by using *traditional pedagogies with "low risk"* for the user and decreasing the usage of experimental, progressive pedagogies high results would be achieved. Proponents also believed in the use of *business-like perspectives and practices* as change and achievement catalysts because of the belief in *managerialism* – the belief in the manager's ability to solve organizational problems impeding achievement (Salhberg, 2006, 2010).

The State of Israel, discussed in the next section, has also adopted the neoliberal trend of the late 1970's, as well as its GERMian characteristics, as part of its educational governance.

Between Social Democratic Roots and Neoliberal Education Policy– Outlines of the Struggle For Governance of the Israeli Education system

In order to better understand how GERM was adopted in Israel, one should be aware of the common governance characteristics prior to its adoption. In general, this was social democratic governance with anti-GERMian characteristics, yet at the same time governance primed for becoming GERMian (Bialik, 2014). Several key aspects of the public education system in Israel date back to the time of the *Yishuv* – the Jewish settlement in pre-State Israel, i.e., in the decades preceding 1948. First, as mentioned earlier, the system was based on *social democratic* principles designed by the founding fathers of Israel (e.g., its first prime minister, David Ben-Gurion), and especially the leaders of the Zionist movement, who had grown up in the socialist world of Eastern Europe. These roots were manifested in social democratic legislation such as the Compulsory Education Law of 1949 and the State Education Law (public education law) of 1953. These laws mandated broad and equal access to high quality, free public education, provided by the State. The laws exhibited clear social democratic characteristics; alongside social democratic distributive aspects, they also encompassed pedagogic anti-GERMian elements, such as defining humanistic, holistic aims in education, while at the same time shaping a teacher figure entitled to a high social status (Dror, 2011; Raichel, 2008). However, since its very beginning, besides strengthening the social-public dimension of educational activity, it simultaneously relied on the Jewish philanthropy system, which played a major role in building the country. Various private organizations, such as Yad-Hanadiv (founded by the Rothschild family), were a central source of funding for a much of the activities initiated by the public institutions in Israel in general, and the education system in particular. These organizations invested large amounts of money in the emerging public education system; however at the same time they also established their own influence when it came to shaping education policy in Israel in general (Dror, 2011). In this context, it was not surprising that public policy reports, which would play an essential role in the GERM policy formation in the decades to come, also articulated how these

private financial organizations interpreted public interest when faced with changes in the global economy.

Another aspect influencing the Israeli education system during the early decades (1948-1970) was the great polarization in the public system, which later became fertile soil for the formation of a GERM policy. This polarization was ideological (for example, general education as opposed to agricultural-rural education), cultural (according to ethnic groups and countries of birth), national (Jewish versus Arab education) and religious (secular, orthodox and ultra-orthodox streams). This polarizing diversity resulted in a system which, although public, is in fact composed of semi-detached subsystems that have been given relatively broad autonomy, due to coalitional needs of various government parties. This autonomy, supported by patchy, fragmented legislation (Gibton, 2010), significantly enabled the development of educational models that exploited this fragmentation and autonomy when adopting neoliberal work patterns For example, the establishment of semi-private schools named specialized schools (with great resemblance to the American charter schools or the UK academy schools) that took advantage of the existence of a semi-public education stream recognized by the Israeli educational legislation (Gibton, 2010).

Thus, even though the system displayed characteristics of social democratic and anti-GERM governance until the late 1970's, from the outset it also contained "dormant genes" of neoliberal, GERMian governance patterns of activity. As will be presented in the research findings, the idea of dormant genes (either neoliberal under the dominant social-democratic genes, or vice versa) played a major part in the formation of the surprising case which is the research object of the current paper.

Governance Characteristics of the Pre-K Education System in Israel

The Israeli pre-K education system represents the tension between neoliberal and social democratic governance. In order to understand it, one must look at the system's structure. The Compulsory Education Law, legislated in 1949 by the first *Knesset* (Israeli parliament), included the right to free education for all children aged five and above. . Younger children were not included in the public education system. To this day, pre-K education in Israel is divided between two main governmental authorities: the Ministry of Welfare, supervising day-care facilities and home nurseries from birth until the age of three (delivery supplied by local private NGOs); and the Ministry of Education, which supervises and operates kindergartens for children aged three to six in state education, state-religious education, and special needs education facilities – services which are offered to the public free of charge. It should be noted that, until the current school year (2016), education below the age of three were under the auspices of the Ministry of Economy, an arrangement in furtherance of its goal of enabling women's employment by providing childcare during working hours (Committee for Socio-Economic Change Report, 2011). Currently, tuition in these day-care facilities is subsidized by the Ministry of Welfare according to various social criteria (such as mother's salary, number of siblings, and the children's degree of being at risk); tuition in these institutions is divided between the parents and the State (Volansky, Sella, Asher, 2015).

Over the years there have been several attempts to expand the application of the Education Law in Israel to include children of younger ages too, thereby transferring them to the supervision of the Ministry of Education. In 1984, the law was amended to include children from the age of three; however, this amendment was never implemented, because of lack of sufficient government funding. In 1999, another amendment was added to the implementation of the law for three-years-olds-a subsidy for low-income families and for families in outlying border settlements. In 2013, the government expanded this amendment to the entire population. This step led to a 19% growth in the

number of children aged 3-4 in day-care facilities (Israeli Knesset Research Division, 2015). During the 2015-16 school year, 477,740 children attended public kindergartens in 17,675 kindergarten classes. The kindergartens operated by the Ministry of Education are under the responsibility and supervision of the Preschool Education Department, and are divided into two age groups: 2-4 years old (pre-K) and 5-6 years old (kindergarten), with the official age for school attendance in Israel being 6 years old. Most pre-K education in Israel is not inclusive, and special needs kindergartens operate alongside the mainstream kindergartens for children aged 3-6.

The role of the inspectorate division in the Preschool Education Department has been updated over the years in line with the various reforms, and is currently responsible for adjusting the Ministry of Education's policy for the preschool system, developing syllabi professional development of educational staff, supervision of education standardization such as reading proficiency, and maintaining optimal conditions according to age characteristics (Israeli Knesset Research Division, 2015). Yet, although responsibilities have been updated and clarified, when considering resources for inspection we should point out that the ratio of kindergartens per inspector, who also serves as mentor and supervisor for the teachers, is quite problematic – currently 100:1 (and often even more, especially among vulnerable populations), making it difficult for inspectors to properly supervise the activities of kindergarten teachers in practice. Among other things, the State Comptroller's report for 2015 recommended redefining the inspectors' role, decreasing the gap between their formal responsibilities and the ones they are required to perform in practice (Israel's State Comptroller Report, 2015).

The report's recommendations regarding the role of the inspector reflect the tension between the need to strengthen structural and managerial aspects, which characterizes most of the reforms in the preschool domain in Israel, and the wish to advance pedagogical value-oriented aspects of education. It should be noted that previous attempts to advance aspects of educational quality in institutions covering birth to three years, and to implement licensing and supervision of facilities, have been unsuccessful (Moshel, 2015; Rosenthal, 2004)

As part of the attempts to increase day-care and home nursery supervision and improve their quality, two recent innovations intended to improve quality should be mentioned. The first was an initiative to establish a preschool national council, a proposal submitted to the *Knesset* in early 2016 and that has not yet been implemented. The second was the implementation of the recommendations to transfer preschool responsibility from the Ministry of Economics to the Ministry of Education, a process gaining only partial success, since as mentioned above, responsibility was transferred to the Ministry of Welfare instead.

Two features reflecting the tension between neoliberal and social democratic mindsets emerge from the above description of the pre-K education system in Israel.

1. Lack of government education policy and a prolonged lack of interest in implementing recommendations meant to improve the system's state and quality.

2. The lending of practical emphasis to the aspects of structuralism and standardization as indices of the quality of preschool education.

It is against the backdrop of these complex characteristics of Israel's pre-K education system, with their typical neoliberal and GERMian features, that this case study was conducted. This is a policy formation that begins as just another neoliberal GERMian maneuver, in the preschool sphere, with a surprising twist along the way.

Methodology

This is a historical-narrative qualitative research, focusing on historical events

(Polkinghorne, 2007). As such, the research procedure initially included documentation of the narrative process as it unfolded. Documentation was not conducted in advance as part of the research, but rather as a professional habit of thick documentation of consultation processes, in what was termed by Margarete Sandelowski as "the impulse to narrate" (Sandelowski, 1991, p.161). Later on, once we decided to conduct this research, this meticulous documentation enabled us to confirm that the case study was not biased in favor of research needs (see below, in addition to other considerations regarding research reliability). Documentation materials included in two field notes notebooks written by the IDE (the private partner) the pre-K policy formation chief consultant, and more than 40 field note reports put out by different IDE consultants who took part in the process.

Next, the case study was arranged into a narrative sequence and placed within a historical context. The narrative-historical element that is presented first in the findings section was gathered from various narrative-historical descriptions related to the story period, defined as 2011 onward. In conjunction with the historical narrative and the original case study narrative, we conducted content analysis on the consultant's documentation data, aiming to highlight the main ant-GERMian elements evident in the GERMian policy formation story. The anti-GERMian elements were analyzed, as will be presented in the finding section, in an "Etic" manner (Harris, 1976). The "Etic" categories chosen were the four categories of action that are typical of an anti-GERMian policy, as appears in the relevant literature (e.g., Shelberg, 2006, 2010): collaboration, transparency, trust and autonomy.

The content analysis sought representation of these "Etic" features in the documentation data in order to identify ansti-GERMian patterns within the GERMian policy formutation process. The considerations for the choice of "Etic" derived mainly from the consideration that, as Harris claimed, "Etic"

categories possess "high inter-cultural validity" (1976, p. 341). This claim constitutes a significant consideration in content analysis that seeks to draw conclusions whose validity extends far beyond their Israeli locality.

Finally, and in the context of the narrative-historical analysis, a conceptual analysis was performed in order to identify and suggest possible conditions enabling the creation of an anti-GERMian policy within the framework of a process that bears GERMian characteristics.

Regarding research trustworthiness and reliability – it should be mentioned that as a narrative research, it is based a priori on an inter-subjective validity statement (Polkinghorne, 2007), making the reader responsible for the mission of naturalistic generalization. As qualitative research, it supposedly relies on trustworthiness and reliability generated by the simultaneous combining of several factors: (a) cross-verification between researchers – only one of the researchers was present at the described policy formation process and so during the research process, she was the one in charge of providing the narrative description. Content analysis, on the other hand, was done in cooperation, with cross-verification of the external researcher regarding the identification of main narrative themes in the analysis; (b) peer review – the full narrative description, as well as the summative thematic analysis, were examined by external reviewers (Creswell & Miller, 2000). The reviewers, who were asked to validate the analysis process, were bothstakeholders in the fields of policy and early childhood in Israel, such as a senior pre-K inspector in the Israeli Ministry of Education, and colleagues from international pre-K educational research and development organizations such as OMEP (World Organization for Early Childhood Education. Where disagreement arose between the researchers and the reviewers, the category was modified until reviewers reached agreement; (c) constructing convincing narrative arguments

(Perelman, 1982), by separating the historical-narrative-descriptive process from the presentation of analysis arguments, as we have chosen to do in the findings chapter in the current paper. Alongside the narrative text, we decided to offer an additional interpretative text of our own, to be scrutinized by our readers using the convincing argument test as well: (d) a final factor (last but not least) in increasing research trustworthiness is maintaining high ethical awareness. As researchers, our obligation is first and foremost to be truthful. This obligation is also the grounds for various ethical considerations maintained throughout the research preparation. Among other things, we requested the approval of the director of the Preschool Education Department of the Ministry of Education (MOE), and that of the head of the Early Education Department in the consulting organization (the private partner) for the purpose of documenting the case study details and writing the research. In addition, we undertook to maintain confidentiality regarding the personal details of all other study subjects, from both organizations, who had taken part in this process.

Findings

In May 2016 representatives of change committees composed of early childhood education inspectors, academics, local authority representatives, and representatives of the teaching staff, presented their conclusions and recommendations for change in policy for early childhood education to the director of the Preschool Education Department in the MOE. The broad scope of public stakeholder's participation, the great trust placed in them for this process and the creative experimental educational methods used to design the policy formation process are anti-GERMian characteristics that emerged during the work process, indicating that an essential shift had occurred. But it was not only the method of work on the formulation of the policy that had anti-GERMian characteristics; it was also the content of the policy decisions themselves. Among other

things, they sought to promote pedagogies of the *whole child* and focus on social and emotional aspects of assessment, at the expense of a focus on quantitative achievements in reading, writing and sciences, as was the case in many GERM policies. From a very distinctly neoliberal early childhood education system there began a noticeable movement towards an anti-GERMian policy, reinforcing the public aspect of the system in the social democratic sense of the term.

In the following findings section, *Part 1* will provide a historical-narrative context beginning from 2011 covering three focal episodes of the ongoing struggle between the clearly GERMian policy of the Preschool Education Department as part of the MOE, and the mostly failed attempts to change the approach. *Part 2* will present a narrative description and analysis illustrated by original participant's voices, of the most recent episode that only took place during the 2015-2016 school year, which is the focal issue of this paper. This focal issue also started out as clearly GERMian: given the background of the new reforms, the Preschool Education Department of the MOE joined up with a private entity to formulate a policy. As will be shown below, seemingly the start of a GERMian story, it in fact became a very surprising policy-formation and policy content process.

Part 1: 2011-2015 Chronicle of the Struggle Between a Declared GERMian Policy and Anti-GERMian factors

1.a The Summer Protest of 2011. The Israeli Version of 'Occupy Wall Street' – Early Childhood Education on the Public Agenda After Long Years in the Wings

In the summer of 2011, Israel witnessed the eruption of an unprecedented social protest against the high cost of living. Public criticism of the government's neoliberal policy, and the protest that swelled to hitherto unknown proportions, led to the establishment of a

committee on social and economic change that would examine various areas of life and submit its conclusions and recommendations to the government.

The committee, headed by Prof. Manuel Trachtenberg, an economist appointed by Prime Minister Benyamin Netanyahu, had 14 members from academia and from the public, and private sectors. It investigated five areas, including making social services accessible to the entire public. The early childhood education system became a test case for the committee, where the conclusion was that the government should take greater responsibility for making education accessible for younger age groups in light of the public's explicit demand for it. Implementation of this recommendation included the opening of about 3,000 new kindergarten classes for three to four year-old children, who had already been included in the Education Law since1984 with the acceptance of the amendment to the law (which had never been implemented).

The committee's proposals promoting a neoliberal policy, which expressed the social democratic voices of the public evident in the protest, were submitted to the government. Six months later these were implemented as system that privatized the operating entities by enabling a *vouchers* policy to permit private provision of additional public education (Bialik, Kafri, & Livneh, 2013). Within a short period, the state absorbed into its civil service some 3,000 new kindergarten teachers, which in many cases did not afford these new educators the necessary professional foundation to provide optimal pedagogy. The short time to implement the recommendations forced the education system to find quick solutions regarding suitable facilities as well as the recruitment and training of educational staff. The emerging educational policy and the long years of a lack of public discourse about early childhood education in general, and for three-year-olds in particular, also influenced the content of the training options, which provided the new educational staff with only partial professional working tools.

The social protest and the subsequent policy processes had significant implications. in the context of the purpose of this paper. The most important of these is that throughout its existence, the early childhood education system is hardly mentioned in the official policy papers of Israel's Ministry of Education (Moshel, 2015). Moreover, even the papers that did relate to the complexity of the early childhood education system in Israel failed to lead to any change in approach, and many recommendations remained unimplemented. Through its social democratic voices of discontent, the social protest brought with it a change in the order of ministerial and national priorities on this issue. However, despite the fact that anti-GERMian social democratic voices managed to promote a significant move, the social protest in fact led to an opposite result. The neoliberal processes and expressions had the upper hand regarding the mode of implementation, leading to another step up in GERMian manifestations in the early childhood education system in Israel.

1.b The Meaningful Learning Reform, 2014– Voices of Change?

Shortly after the 2013 general election in Israel, and with the departure of Minister of Education, Gideon Saar, who had most prominently promoted the GERM policy, in 2014, the new Minister of Education, Rabbi Shai Piron, declared a change of direction. Under his leadership, the Ministry presented the public with an overall reform in the education system entitled *Meaningful Learning*, the aim of which was to "position the system as a decisive factor in the renewal of Israeli society thus making it exemplary, and the promotion and professional advancement of the individual" (MOE website, 2016).

As part of this reform, the MOE declared that it sought to provide freedom to the principals as to the form that *Meaningful Learning* would take in their schools and to the teachers as to the development of learning content and pedagogies. At every opportunity, the Minister repeatedly declared the Ministry's

complete confidence and trust in the educators to lead the reform, and he even went as far as to make the extraordinary move of cancelling the national MEITZAV standardized tests that were supposed to be held that year (the cancellation turned out to be a one-time thing). Minister Piron's call to teachers "to pave the way that suits you and build your own practical curriculum, when it comes to the perceptions and principles (of the curriculum) along with your own particular strengths and challenges", was met with ambivalence by teachers and academic scholars alike. On the one hand, there were voices of change typical of an anti-GERMian policy that stresses holistic pedagogies, empowerment of teachers, increasing trust and so forth; on the other hand, MOE officials and inspectors worked to implement this approach with tools which in many instances were typical of the previous policy. The major part of the responsibility for implementing the reform fell on the school principal as part of the managerialistic mindset typical to neoliberal policy. In-service training for teachers did not undergo any significant change in order to prepare them for their role under this new policy, and the entire implementation was characterized by many attempts of the various MOE departments and national assessment bodies to quickly produce new, uniform processes of standardization to implement the new pedagogical diversity. Moreover, (with the exception of the one-time cancellation of the MEITZAV tests) essentially the standards policy was never abolished, and principals now had to cope with both.

Within this reality of a dual policy, with its internal struggle between the seemingly anti-GERMian "tidings" of the new Minister and the GERMian policy guidelines so deeply entrenched in the system, the MOE's Preschool Education Department was also required to formulate its own policy, a workable situation within limiting circumstances, that would be compatible with that of the Minister. In a step indicative of the confusion of the language of governance, the head of the Preschool Education

Department chose to delineate her part in the policy by teaming up with a private partner, thus, in fact, forming a public private partnership representative of neoliberal policy practices. The private partner in question was the Early Childhood Education Department at the Institute for Democratic Education (IDE), a private educational consulting body, namely a public interest NGO. The IDE had been established 20 years prior, and initially focused on accompanying the establishment of semi-private democratic schools (somewhat similar to American charter schools) and training teachers for these schools. Historically, these were selective schools which charged the parents tuition fees in addition to the public funding they received. These schools promoted an entrepreneurial spirit, connecting with the community of parents and advancing the concept of parental choice in education. Currently, the IDE no longer deals directly with the establishment of charter type schools, and mainly offers systemic intervention programs within the public education system that encourage progressive pedagogical discourse, entrepreneurial initiatives, managerial and educational autonomy, together with the promotion of classic social democratic values such as equality, sustainability, and social solidarity.

The new public private partnership's shared writing of policy materials, brought to the surface the tension between the social-democratic and anti-GERMian educational mindsets, both of which sought to advance the spirit of the Minister's policy on the one hand, and on the other, the neoliberal reality in terms of the existing policy and the very fact of a public-private partnership. Within this complex situation, issues were raised that were pedagogical, holistic, and anti-GERMian in nature, issues that *both* partners decided to promote. One of the topics which played a central role was the reexamination of the role of the pre-K managerial staff, and especially of the public supervisors, about the required change in the quality of the pre-K pedagogy. Between

reducing regulation and high expectations of the creative processes that would develop in the field, and setting high standards outlined across over 50 targets and standards, managers and teachers were given broad autonomy to implement the policy. This resulted in a heightening of the challenge to the public supervisors in the supervisory process. The report of the State Comptroller, which also examined the state of early childhood education, was published shortly after the publication of the jointly written early childhood *Meaningful Learning* education policy Among other things, the report severely criticized the functioning of the department regarding ensuring the quality of the work of the inspector and the lack of proper training for the demands of the job. In light of all this, collaboration between the director of the MOE Preschool Education Department and the IDE expanded and now sought also to adapt the role of the inspector to the principles of *Meaningful Learning* and thus served as a generator of anti-GERMian processes in early childhood education.

1. c The 'Second Assistant' Reform, 2015– Changing the Structure of the Early Childhood Education System

At the beginning of 2015, a new government took office. The new Minister of Education, who, unlike his predecessor, did not come from the field of education but from the entrepreneurial private sector, inherited the results of the protest of the summer of 2011.[1] In addition to the implementation of the recommendation of the Trachtenberg Committee to expand government responsibility to three-year-olds and the opening of about 3,000 new kindergartens, there was both internal criticism from kindergarten teachers and their assistants, and external criticism from parents about the number of children per group and the ratio of staff to children in the new kindergartens that had only began functioning the year before. Given the voices of public protest, the MOE decided to provide a second assistant in kindergartens with over 30 children aged three and four years old.

Like the adoption of the Trachtenberg recommendations, this reform in early education focused on issues of accessibility, structural change and universal mindsets, at the expense of progressive mindsets in terms of the economics, in a manner that represented the neoliberal agenda of the MOE under the leadership of the new Minister following rabbi Piron.

Unlike the *Meaningful Learning* reform described above, an additional assistant in the kindergartens, as well as the dramatic growth in the number of kindergartens, actually added a new burden for the managerial staff and for public supervision. A significant part of the budget for the reform was meant to cater to the rapid increase in the number of kindergartens by changing the structure of the early childhood education system, with a transition from a decentralized system of some 100 or so kindergartens per inspector to a system containing a middle management rank.

With the delivery of the reform, it became necessary to submit plans within a short time to modify the allocated budgets. The quickest and most logical solution, from the MOE's point of view was to base it on the cluster structures that emerged as a local initiative in two cities bringing together 10 to 15 kindergartens under one geographical (or physical) cluster led by a leading kindergarten teacher. The kindergarten cluster structure appeared in early 2004, to satisfy the needs of the MOE inspectors and those of the local authority. It sought to provide a response to issues similar to those the Ministry was facing as a result of adding second assistants to kindergartens. The reform budget included the training of some 400 leading kindergarten teachers for a mid-level managerial role, and an update of their pay structure. A managerialist, neoliberal solution reappeared as a solution to the problems created by the public demand as of 2011for high quality and accessible early childhood education.

The social protest of the summer of 2011 pushed the public early childhood education system to the forefront of public policy, with the government taking far greater responsibility for

the very first time for this young age group. The reforms described above, that arose from the protest constituted an encounter between social democratic and neoliberal forces, which awoke anti-GERMian dormant genes from their slumber, and even sowed new seeds of this type. As can be seen from the historical description of the struggle between the governance agendas, it seems that neoliberalism gained the upper hand time and again. For example, the rapid recruitment of a large number of personnel without an appropriate training program are typical neoliberal characteristics.

Beyond placing early childhood education center stage, it seemed that a further demand was being made of the senior policy makers at the MOE – the demand for trust. The demand for the public's trust, and the public demand for their trust in themselves as being able to take advantage of this new and unique opportunity, and to make the most of it for the protesting public. Inviting a private organization to be a partner in policy design thus seemed to be a step that would adversely affect public trust in the self-efficacy in leading a new policy, but everyone within the public system was to be surprised.

Part 2:
Setting Out to Write a Managerialist Response and Ending Up With….

Adding second assistants to kindergartens, together with the training of mid-level management ranks, created an opportunity for ideological and essential change in Israel's early childhood education system. In order to enable a broad-scope change process, it was decided that the first year would be devoted to the existing and new managerial roles following the change, while for the following years the goal would be to adapt the training of the teaching staff in the field and to redefine their roles.

The first stage was clarification process by director of the Preschool Education Department and its inspectors regarding the long-term potential and goals the change might encompass for the early childhood education system. *"What*

is 21st-century education in the kindergarten? What does it enable? What skills are developed and what does it look like?" These unanswered questions, which invite the kind of in-depth thinking that is uncharacteristic of neoliberal processes created a new space for reflecting on the system. The *"opportunity to dream"*, as it was described by a member of the inspectors group, a participant in the process, opened up the question of the content, the daily schedule and the physical space of the kindergarten. *"An opportunity was created to ask why I do what I do and whether it advances what I want, and not just what 'end point and one standard'"*. In a surprising move, instead of acting as had been customary up till then and rushing to provide an answer for the department's head office, it was decided to add more partners to the dialogue.

A small steering committee was set up, consisting of the director of the Preschool Education Department, MOE representatives, early childhood experts from the IDE and an organizational counselor. The team examined the systemic conditions that would enable a change, the main circles within the system in which it would be proper to act, and the relations and interfaces existing between them. The steering committee as divided into five thematic sub-committees all with the following aim: *"to lead meaningful change in the organizational and pedagogical structure of early childhood education as part of the implementation of the Second Assistant reform."* At the end of six months, the first conclusions were presented by the five sub-committees regarding: the roles of the inspectors; the Preschool Education Department head office; the leading kindergarten teachers; the design of the kindergarten space; and working with local authorities.

The appearance of anti-GERMian characteristics were reflected in the process of leading and managing change in how the sub-committees conducted themselves and the conclusions they submitted. Anti-GERM features such as an invitation to try things out, a deviation from the policy of standards, and

focusing on the values of trust and dialogue among the ranks promoted holistic mindsets throughout the managerial ranks. Proceeding, we will present different aspects of the historical narrative through the prism of the anti-GERM categories we analized, using participant's original voices to illustrate it:

1.Transparency (of process, and not only of end result*)*

In October 2015, the director of the Preschool Education Department invited all the early childhood education inspectors *"to take part in the task force and influence the shaping of the reform and the future of early childhood education."* Each inspector could either chair or be a member of one of the committees according to their field of interest. Despite the steering committee's fears and doubts about the degree of participation that would actually take place, all five committees were chaired by inspectors who chose the position, and they were joined by a total of 30 inspectors (about one-third of all the inspectors in the country) in the various committees. Each committee had to study one aspect of the system and propose a change, to examine *"what they want to change and to what beneficial purpose."* The letter of appointment for the committee chairperson stated that they were invited to set out on *"a learning process, the results of which are as yet unknown."*

The composition of the committees became an issue at the first meeting of the committee chairs. The feeling that this was an opportunity for essential change was in the air, and it was decided, in light of the guiding principles, to include additional stakeholders from the public sector. A call was sent for representatives of local authorities, academic bodies, various divisions within the Preschool Education Department (psychological service,

training), to participate in the process. Many people responded to the invitation and 10 representatives from the different public bodies were added to each sub-committee. The need for transparency resurfaced in the committees' recommendations. The committee dealing with the role of the inspector, for example, wrote: *"The process of appointments to managerial positions currently takes place in a manner that lacks method and relies on the recommendation of an inspector, and is insufficiently transparent and professional"*. This was not the first time that the need to regulate the process of inspectorate appointments had been raised, but there was a sense of primacy in this open and frank process.

The decisions about the phases of implementing the recommendations of the sub-committees were also made transparently, as shown by the proposal to postpone the training of educational staff to the second year of the process, despite the difficulty of managing a systemic change at one level and continuing to behave in the field according to existing patterns.

2. Partnership (not as a neoliberal maneuver to hand out public responsibility)

Participation in the committees was voluntary, even though it required three months of intensive work. Committee members participated in decisions about the process such as how they would work together, what the scheduling and work methods would be. In a document that collated the products of all the committees it was concluded that *"the understanding that the knowledge lies with a variety of officials in the system came up in all the committees"* and that this was translated in some committees into interviews with additional officials (from kindergarten teachers to the Deputy Managing Director of the MOE), and in some cases, to one-on-one meetings.

The initial session was planned to be a festive event to which the participants of all the committees were invited; each committee was

given an opportunity to refine the main task before it and present it to the plenary. One could sense the excitement in being part of this unique process from the following comments: *"This is the first time after 12 years on the job as a trainer, that my place has meaning in the change process"*, *"I am so used to fighting the MOE (as the head of a municipal education department) ... this kind of meeting offers hope"*.

During the three months, the committees worked separately, and yet, partnership was a key issue in each and every committee product. A reading of all the committees' documents revealed that the establishment of a partnership at the various levels in the system was deemed to be a prerequisite for the creation of an organizational culture that promotes holistic-dialogic ideas. The summative document of the committee dealing with the new managerial level stated that part of the job of the leading kindergarten teacher is *"to establish a learning community of kindergarten teachers that enables peer teaching from work in the field, and the mutually beneficial sharing of ideas"*. It also said: *"The role of the leading kindergarten teacher invites a strengthening of the partnership between the early childhood education system and the community"*. The kindergarten committee dealt with interpersonal partnerships: *"Children come together to plan and act out ideas by raising topics that encourage shared investigation"*, and in the partnerships between the children and the environment: *"partnership and involvement of the children in creating the kindergarten and the learning content, in creating learning content and their educational environment in an ongoing dialogue"*.

The process of putting the documents together by the committee teams was a model of the principle of partnership in creation.

3. Trust-Based Relations

Each of the five committees was chaired by an inspector who volunteered, with no added economic benefits. The responsibilities of running the committee included the choice of work process, maintaining contact among committee members, meeting deadlines and putting the materials together into a final product. Each inspector was accompanied by a representative of the IDE to advise her on the work processes, the structure of the committee sessions, and the methods of facilitation. The nature of the partnership with the IDE counselors placed the inspectors center-stage as the leaders responsible for the process. Making the public figure the leader of the process reinforced the sense of trust the other participants had in each other, in the system, and in the feasibility of the process. The committee member's feedback on the IDE counselors stated: *"...counselors who knew how to stay in the background and allow all this to happen."* Each committee dealt with the change from a hierarchical structure to a networked structure. The kindergarten committee referred to the need *"to shift from dichotomous work to teamwork of the kindergarten staff, and from the hierarchical relations of kindergarten teacher - children, to reciprocal relations."* The leading kindergarten teacher committee suggested that a significant part of the role of this middle management level would be *"to build relationships within the cluster of kindergartens based on deep familiarity and trust to create a climate and a culture that enable and encourage open discourse"*. One of the significant expressions of the desire for change in relations arose from the work of the committee on partnership with the local authorities: *"We propose that contact take place as a partnership and not just as cooperation. Partnership involves a common goal with joint responsibility for the education of the children within that local authority. It is true that each partner has different powers according to legislation and historic divisions, according to skills, strengths and professional abilities. The choice to handle the discourse between the Ministry and the local authority from a standpoint of shared responsibility and destiny will upgrade the level of discourse, reduce the*

tendency to blame each other, and as a result, render the dialogue far more effective. It will be up to them to see that they share the responsibility for the educational process and for the creation of a workplace that is safe and professional for the kindergarten staff."

In order to implement relations of trust, the committee proposed four new joint tasks: defining the educational mindset and shared vision, building a joint pedagogical, administrative, and organizational work plan, implementing and assessing the plan, setting up advisory teams to handle and accompany end-cases – crisis management, building and delivering professional development programs (for municipal staff, leading kindergarten teachers, teachers and assistants).

Over time, dealing with work relationships took on different forms among the inspectors: *"Suddenly I understood that I cannot talk about trust relations and not trust my kindergarten teachers"*, *"If I want the kindergartens to allow the children to trust themselves, I have to trust the people working with them".*

4. Autonomy (and not as part of accountability)

In defining the goals divided between the committees, it was stated that: *"at the end of the process, each committee will submit a document containing the guiding principles for the implementation of the recommendations in the specific domain worked on."* Reading the work guidelines highlights the autonomy afforded, beginning with the choice of learning/work process through to how the final document was submitted. Each committee was asked *"to formulate clear definitions …. and within these to maintain a flexible space for practices that are adjusted to suit the community, the kindergarten cluster, the inspector, and the educational staff."* Notably, hierarchal standards of supervision were replaced by professional principles: *"regularities determined in advance, dialogue with the field, partnership between committee members, discussion with other committees and the*

production of several drafts for comment, a focus on the future (what we want five years from now) and what is needed now in order to make it happen." The autonomy of the inspectors arose from the committee outcomes. For example, the role of the leading kindergarten teacher was defined by the relevant committee, which asked for a new layer of professional development and a shift from hierarchical to decentralized knowledge. The committee recommended professional development that stressed aspects of peer learning and sharing of knowledge, challenges and difficulties, unlike traditional learning based on imparting external knowledge. One committee chairperson wrote: *"The relief was in the actual task itself, to create a new function, a task that made it possible to move along a continuum of learning from existing models to going wild with ideas and dreams."*

The autonomy of the committees to submit new and challenging proposals was backed up by the director of the Preschool Education Department who presented the process at the national conference, urging the inspectors *"to believe, to let go and allow … to dream of a kindergarten in which the child can feel, think, desire, be able and actually do."*

Conclusions– Possible Explanations Regarding the Conditions Enabling the Growth of an Anti-GERMian Policy within a GERMian Policy

In this section, and in light of the historical-narrative sections above describing the historical plot of the main forces shaping the framework of the struggle for governance, we would like to propose the two possible explanations for this surprising twist in the plot, and the growth of an anti-GERMian policy within a GERMian one.

1. On Yin and Yang- or That the Black is Already in the White, and Vice Versa

Having a public entity approach a private entity to lead an implementation process is a familiar

neoliberal feature. In this case, the approach seems to have been made to a private entity with a neoliberal agenda however, in recent years the IDE has been emphasizing social democratic characteristics as its public interest vision. The result of this is that the private entity adopted a hybrid approach to the question of governance. Similarly, and as presented in the historical overview, Israel's MOE simultaneously maintained deep social democratic roots alongside a clearly apparent neoliberalism. Thus, what emerged is a hybrid form of governance (Bialik, 2014) in which each entity has representations of two seemingly contradictory agendas.

With the addition of a second assistant into kindergarten classrooms of more than 30 students (the Second Assistant reform) the first thought was that there was room to invest more in the professional development of early childhood education inspectors. This was not the first time; there had been attempts in previous years to expand the role of the inspector from being purely administrative, to a more pedagogical values-oriented role with increased emphasis on professional development. This time, the blend of the IDE and the director of the Preschool Education Department supported the move. Professional development dealt with questions such as: Who is an inspector who leads pedagogy? What kind of inspector am I? What are my work patterns and what kind of organizational culture do they sustain? The new professional development marked the opportunity to put into practice the educational mindsets and pedagogies of the whole child – mindsets that are part of the hybrid nature of the two sides in this partnership. Despite the neo-liberal culture that characterized the MOE, the Preschool Education Department and the IDE were given freedom to experience this kind of professional development. To a great extent, like an encounter between two parents with dark hair who give birth to a blond child thanks to recessive blond genes that they both carry, it seems that the same has happened here. The encounter between both entities in the

partnership, working on a relatively "neglected" age group in terms of policy, enabled the anti-GERMian "genes" within the two entities to create an entirely anti-GERMian outcome. Within this understanding lies an important lesson for various spheres of activity: Policy is never the fruit of a one-dimensional perspective, and the "black and white" separation of public and private hides the complexity and sometimes hybrid nature of the agendas actually existing in the field (Ball, 2012; Bialik, 2014; Beadie, 2008, 2010). It is actually the belief that the agendas contain seemingly contradictory factors that constitutes the basis for empowering dormant or recessive elements within them. We note that such a complex approach to education policy can be found in approaches that see policy as a complex and vague outcome at the expense of a naïve concept of policy as a linear process that is clear and one-dimensional (for example: Ball, 2007, 2012)

2. Adoption of Initiatives From the Field That Conveys Trust- At the Expense of Encouraging Entrepreneurship and Competition

Many years of having no government policy for the 3-4 year-old age group and lack of public interest in early childhood allowed for creative initiatives and solutions in the field. Such initiatives actually grew out of the lack of regular supervision. One important initiative of this nature, which developed in two different local authorities in the center of the country was the cluster model, which, given the lack of any clear policy, created a significant middle management level for kindergartens. While shaping the new policy, the MOE's decision to warmly adopt the model of middle management, originally a local solution, as the best response to the implications of the Second Assistant reform, created a sense of deep trust in the early childhood education inspectors. It created a dual reform effort combining top-down and bottom-up efforts. Therein lay a message that an experiment and deep educational thinking could eventually come together. This expression of trust might have left

its mark on later stages and lit up the path to the sense of belonging, efficacy and ownership regarding the further implementation of the process.

Epilogue and Research Horizons and Limitations

The story at the heart of this research is the formation of an anti-GERMian policy within a neoliberal governance agenda with GERMian features. The policy formation process has only recently ended; therefore it is, in fact, impossible to tell whether or not the new policy implementation process will bring persistent GERM forces back to the spotlight. Moreover, since GERM policy routines have been utilized in the system for so long, it sometimes seemed that the pre-K supervisors who took part in the policy formation process felt comfortable and at ease with the existing situation. It was not uncommon to hear voices such as *"Come on...let them tell us what to do already and what the success criterion is."* The pre-K system, in line with many other public systems, has been accustomed in recent years to GERM work processes based on inspection, competition and expectations of goal attainment. It is thus not surprising to expect that anti-GERMian characteristics such as the ones that emerged during the current process, might evoke suspicion and disbelief in the initial stages of implementation, making it difficult to implement the policy with its old-new spirit due to these practical limitations, Further locally-driven research is necessary to determine whether and how the new policy implementation process will succeed. In regard to further international research, the insights derived from the Israeli case of anti-GERM policy characteristics within a fundamentally GERMian pre-K educational policy, may serve as a fruitful comparative case study for scholars confronting research fields that are struggling between GERM and anti-GERM governance agendas.

Notes

1. Here we note that, as one may understand from the literature review, between 2011-2015 we have related to three different ministers of education. Indeed, the Israeli education system suffers from an accelerated turnover of education ministers in a manner that makes it hard to formulate a policy continuum or a clear strategy.

Author Note

1. The names of the authors are listed alphabetically. The authors contributed equally to this article.

Acknowledgments

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