

RELATIONS BETWEEN DECENTRALIZED LEADERSHIP, INTERVENTION, INVOLVEMENT AND INCLUSION OF PARENTS IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS

Dalia HALFON, Israel, PhD student,
Tiraspol Sate University,
daliahen@gmail.com

The characteristics of an era of information pose a challenge before educators and community policy makers who affect and take part in the education of the young generation. Educational systems that wish to comply with social demands and adjust to the spirit of time face the need to change conceptions, structures and teaching methods.

In the last decade, an educational perception formulated worldwide and particularly in Israel strives towards a change in the system so that it fits itself to the needs of a pluralistic and changing society. Amongst these, the recognition of **centralized** educational system disability to supply variety to the educational need of society requires **decentralization** of the system and reinforcement of the power of schools in designing their educational policy, calling for promotion of schools' autonomy, empowerment of principals and teachers, variety of study programs in teaching methods and an increase of inclusion of parents in the educational activity [27],[36],[38],[39].

Distributed leadership allows for multiple viewpoints that are different and relevant, that can exist amongst individuals, through which people contribute to a group or an organization in a pattern of interpersonal relations, that creates a situation in which the amount of energy created is larger than the sum of activities of individuals [4],[44]. In schools that support an outreach of partnership with parents, the perception of external prestige of school in the eyes of parents is higher [6].

It is common knowledge that the modern era has more changes and upheavals than previous time periods; a school must address changes and deal with them [22]. Otherwise the school would be perceived as irrelevant to the lives of its clients [49].

The review would examine various patterns of involvement, advantages and difficulties behind the theories, that deal in involvement, intervention and inclusion of parents in the Primary school, while the common thread between all the factors in the community is the leadership style of a principal [7]. The willingness to allow parents' involvement is not identical in each country or geographic area, and depends upon the **leadership style of a school principal and teachers' skills.**

Society and community

I shall begin with a distinction between the definition of the term society and community. Those who lived in the end of 19th century, can make a clear distinction between the terms of society and community. A society, as opposed to community, is based on rules of volunteering and rational relationships according to purpose, duty and interest[30]. Mobility in a large society and modern bureaucracy with its laws and purposes are closer to the term of society as opposed to community, which is based on influence. A traditional community is usually homogenous and ethnic; its members are connected in social, religious and business terms. In a community, the status of an

individual is measured according to his functioning in a family and his cultural duties in the community. On the other hand, in society, the status of an individual is gauged according to his skills, occupations and successes. In a community, we would practically never find a private life as opposed to the modern society in which life is free while at the same time there is much privacy [5]. Claims that communities are maintained by a group of people who share the same values add that in recent years, there is a tendency to encourage parental involvement in the educational process of their children; there is a wish to create community activity within Primary schools[30].

The German sociologist Tonnies [30] distinguishes between three types of communities:

- A community based on familial relations.
- A community based on nearby place of residence.
- A community based on friendly ties.

On the other hand, Y. Harpaz [24] has conducted a different distinction of community types:

- Community of **citizens**, a revolutionary change that has begun with the American revolution towards the end of the 18th century, in which there has been determined that all citizens share power; a community perception, which has developed from the bottom up, from citizens to the government.
- Community **based on memory**, is common mainly amongst immigrants. A memory of the country of origin is retained and each population celebrates its holy days and customs. The more traditional/religious the society is, the more significant is the memory and the unification of its members around the community memory is more profound.
- Community of **commitment and responsibility** – community organization in which citizens take responsibility for their destiny and commit to their community.
- **Business** community – a community that develops ways and techniques of negotiation and that characterizes close groups with common purpose; the trade is conducted with unique codes on the basis of business membership.
- Community of **choice** – its members join it from individual reasons, while most are related to their life style and world view. The research literature states that a community of choice dismantles rapidly when it has no firm financial basis.
- Community of "**another**" or "others" – communities of people who have arrived from another place, another life style, differ from the population in their new place (for example a sect).

Communities of "others" have been created anywhere there are refugees and foreign workers, who over time have demanded civil rights.

An educational organization is defined as a system with hierarchical structure, communication networks and organizational culture that is based on a system of rules and norms acceptable by the members of an organization in order to allow the organization to operate for common purposes [41]. In order to be effective an organization has to be a transmission system that takes inputs from its environment and turns them into outputs

that are marketed to the environment [3]. A school is an open system, made of an aggregate of vital systems for its proper functioning. In an educational organization the inputs and outputs are the pupils; while the environment is comprised of school management, teachers, parents, community factors and the Ministry of Education, there is a mutual dependency between the educational systems and the society it operates in[3],[16].

An educational system depends upon the resources of society, and on the other hand society needs the educational system in order to insure its continuity; a school must be in reciprocal relations with the environment it operates in and at the same time with the Ministry of Education it is subordinate to. Schools of the 21st century are in a dynamic, gushing and complex environment; they have to be familiar with the community they operate in and try to identify their educational needs [12].

A good utilization of the human capital that is at the disposal of a school is a factor that would lead towards better reciprocal relations, as a result of which schools would become effective organizations; all the environmental factors would contribute to the system becoming better and more effective[12]. A variety of factors have brought about a creation of partnering relations between schools and community. Mitchell [32] indicates the advantages of the relation between school and home and presents a "broadened" idea of education that encompasses personal, social and moral development and recognition of extended studying to achieve more.

Five criteria assist in distinguishing between the terms of **community** and **community education**: "approach, involvement, mutual management member, community as a source of study and long-term study relations" [43, p.12].

The criterion of **mutual management member** distinguishes between community educational establishments and those serving the community but that are not directly involved. **Community schools** are based on the assumption that educational processes take place not only in the premises of a school; a significant part of those processes take place in the community, such as: family, friends, street, neighborhood, informal educational and cultural establishments, media etc. [24].

A mutual creation operated under a mutual responsibility of the school and the community, which possess the power to supply their needs for themselves, to improve the quality of life in school and the community. In addition, pupils study to become active residents and citizens who are involved and contribute to their communities [9],[49].

Y. Harpaz [24] writes about the **characteristics of community schools**:

- Has a decentralized school structure that allows for partnership in decision making that relates to its policy and programs.
- Maintains a systematic process of planning with all the members for execution and evaluation of school policy and formulation and implementation of annual program.
- Its programs are affected by and derived from the characteristics of the target populations and the needs thereof.

- Integrates between formal study framework and social, artistic and cultural activities that are widespread in the community.

Its resources are based on the human and personal potential of teachers, pupils, institutions in the community, parents, local authority, Ministry of Education and thus a **pooling of resources** is being performed.

The basis of reciprocal relations system between parents and the educational establishment in the technical-organizational and educational field is founded on the right of parents to affect the education of their children, a right based on the principles of a democratic regime. "The phenomenon of involvement is expressed not only in its scope but also in its character"[19].

Inclusion of parents in the educational process has advantages as well as shortcomings. Advantages: complementing equipment, accompanying trips, physical assistance, assistance in the fields of creativity, assistance in deepening the contacts and familiarities with various establishments, fundraising, actual teaching in class, membership in various committees and school management, ending with affecting the educational and ideological policy of a school [13], [26], [35], [40].

Awarding an opportunity for parental involvement and inclusion in the educational process of pupils might improve the quality of parents' life, increase their satisfaction with the school and **improve the achievements of their children** [21], [23], [36]. Inclusion is expressed not only in the field of study achievements and intellectual skills, but also in various personality variables, such as: improvement in self-image, rise in motivation, improvement in study habits, significant decrease of disciplinary problems and absence from school[14],[40]. On the other hand, there is a perception that sees shortcomings and difficulties in intrusion of parents into a school as intervention that interrupts the school in fulfilling its duty and takes energy from it that was supposed to be put in pupils only. School and home are systems that differ in purposes and duties; parents approach school with demands that a school finds difficult to comply: study subjects, teaching methods, values, discipline and equipment. Teachers find themselves dealing with problems that are beyond their duty and ability [31], [46].

A.Goldringer [20] states that parents view themselves as first and foremost factor, to which the principal and the teachers' team are accountable for their actions and policy. It should be remembered that the parents' interest in what takes place in the school is relatively short-term and limited to the study years of their child in the educational establishment[18].

Another difficulty, the conflict between parents' expectations for involvement and teachers' willingness to include them in the educational process, stems teachers' fear to expose their weaknesses and the gap existing in a teachers' work between ideals, theories and actual reality. Meaning that teachers fear that a more profound relationship with parents would reveal a reality that does not always parallel the **halo** of professionalism and the monopoly over knowledge of the teaching profession as a free profession[1], [37].

Teachers specialize in teaching and education and the desire of parents to interfere with the educational process might constitute a threat over their status; interference with their judgment and professional authority might cause bitterness and undermining their autonomy [36], [45]. This situation brings about concerns on the part of teachers, who avoid implementing their professional authority in order to avoid conflicts with parents [37]. Parents' committees might constitute a negative factor, with the desire to enforce their will, who have the power to act to the length of shutting down the school and getting teachers fired [28]. Political groups attempt to gain power in a disguise of parental involvement, by battering the local authority, by attempting to harm the orderly operation of the school.

B .Noy [37] claims that situations of this kind, of parental involvement in a school, cause damages, one of which is an increasing attrition of teachers and principals. Quite often, the entering of parents in the school this way causes a waste of energy that could be directed for the pupils' benefit.

Difficulties and stumbling blocks on the way to realize parental involvement

Despite a broad agreement regarding the vitality and broad contribution of parental involvement, its practical application entails many difficulties. The same is when all factors reveal a principal's desire and interest in the inclusion of parents in the educational process in school, there is no guarantee of success. As mentioned above, parental involvement has many facets. There is no doubt that involvement can contribute and be a blessing, however an improper involvement can be negative and destructive.

Tensions between the school system and the familial system - these are separate systems in duties and purposes, whereas each one needs to respect the autonomy of the other. The problem begins when the boundaries are blurred and inconclusive.

Absence of permanent leadership on the part of parents affects the effective and valuable realization of parental involvement.

Perception of the school principal's duty and policy in involvement – a school principal is one of the primary links for achieving the purposes of the educational system [11]. A principal's work can be summed up into two categories – the pedagogical and managerial fields. In the pedagogical field: design of the school face, teachers' instruction and guiding, handling study programs [25, p.80]. Whereas in the managerial field: organizing the school in terms of resources and aiding materials allocation, teachers and pupils' distribution into classes, maintaining a continuous contact with local authorities on matters of budget, maintenance and daily operation.

The tripartite partnership agreement between a school, parents and management is through strategic management that which guarantees a mutual understanding that would strengthen the school and upgrade it [25, p.35]. The field of public relations, maintaining relations with factors outside the school, which is in the pupil's interest, (parents, community factors, counselors, nurse) leads to marketing techniques which would encourage parents to change their attitude towards school and enhance involvement.

The principal's work includes, therefore, multiple diverse fields. The majority of information regarding the entirety of school subjects as well as execution authority is

concentrated in his hands, and he is the one determining over school climate [2], [29]. Most researchers are in complete agreement regarding the role of a school principal in the dialogue taking place between the institution and pupils' parents. By his being the "head of the school organization", his authority and his being the liaison between a school and external factors make him the decisive factor on matters of quality of dialogue with parents [17].

Success or failure on the level of mutual contacts between parents and school are conditional upon the principal to a large extent. Principals have lots of freedom regarding parent's inclusion policy, as there are no definite instructions on the extent of inclusion. A principal has quite a wide leeway in order to manage his institution according to his personal perception. He has the main power in the institution of control and responsibility, decision-making and supervision. He is the one deciding on the level of parental involvement, areas of their activity and extent of their inclusion.

Another confirmation lies in many studies conducted, mainly in the US, that indicate a principal as having the decisive role in the field of parental inclusion in school. It has been found that in most cases, principals are the ones determining the extent of parents' inclusion and the efficiency of partnership [7], [34], [42]. Due to his position, training and status, the principal is the one that should lead, determine and route the inclusion to correct channels.

A principal must act as a mediator for creating balance between various factors within the school. This perception identifies the problems a principal faces in his role of bridging the different colliding needs and trends in a school, amongst which contradictory demand of the community and parents towards teachers' performance [10], [37].

V.C. Morris, R.L. Crowson, C. Porten – Gehrie A, E. Horvitz [33] have found in an observation conducted on principals that they devote one fifth of their time to interactions with community factors, mostly with parents. Principals perceive this as part of their job, as they consider parents as primary clients of the school who judge their functioning regarding success or failure.

As mentioned above, parents consider the future of their children to be dependent upon the essence and quality of education they would acquire. A principal has to act for the parents' expectations to be realistic and direct them so that he has the ability to activate them for the benefit of the school. He must be able to moderate parents' demands directed at the teachers' team and defend teachers' autonomy in classes; meaning, that he must act to calm parents down without compromising the organizational or professional values that are the propriety of the educational team. R. Shapira A. Goldberg [45] clarifies the importance of the principal's educational view and leadership style as a cross-section that affects decisively the setting of school vision and purposes and the planning of operative targets and various activities to be taken for execution. Amongst other things, it is a principals' duty to reach a consensus and to carry out these purposes in an inclusive manner. The process of achieving consensus is long and demanding, nonetheless vital to the effective functioning of a school.

Decentralization and centralization in education

Decentralization and centralization in education are ways existing one alongside the other in managing the educational system. The distribution of authorities can be encompassed in three primary factors: state, local authority and school. Delegating authorities of a high level in the hierarchy to a lower level is decentralization and the opposite is considered as centralization. In the last decade the central educational system has allowed for decentralization and delegation of authorities to each school and every such organization can declare its ideological identity according to its "vision". There are schools which have chosen to be autonomous or community schools or have avoided identifying with each of these perceptions, while this trend has stemmed from the perception of the organization and principal's character and his reciprocal relations with all related factors in the educational system and the community.

Distributed leadership has several unique factors: leadership as a growing attribute of a **group** as a result of dynamics of interpersonal relations, offers openness for limits of leadership and extends the leaders' network instead of an "only one", to many people in the organization who not necessarily hold formal positions. Additionally, it recognizes specialty, distributed amongst the many as a basis for optimal performance in a group[4], [50].

From the review of the referenced literature, several points arise that deserve to be emphasized in relation to parental involvement and inclusion. In the era of the second millennium, most educational literature deals in the change of schools and their becoming autonomous and inclusive. Parental and community involvement in education has increased, due to a changing reality and processes that encourage parental involvement in education.

Education is a social tool whose purpose is to turn pupils "from creatures that are not conversant with the society and who are alien to it into guardians of its properties and ideas"[30]. Parents inclusion in the educational systems is diverse, the level of inclusion and its character are changing according to the principal's will and support, the type of his leadership style being critical [5], [13]. Partnership between parents and teachers requires adjustment. Being mutually educated throughout all of its stages, it becomes a fascinating and lively experience, filled with interest, experiences and surprises [5], [20], [39].

Development of "social capital" in school communities poses a big challenge, by the fact of assigning part of the responsibility for education over to parents and the community.

It can be said that to a large degree it turns the wheels backwards by taking from the state educational system the full responsibility for the educational results and allows parents to be more responsible for the education of their children and their educational achievements.

A school principal is required a distributed leadership style, a change from a model of "**from the top down**" to a leadership of "**from the bottom up**", a distributed leadership which is more organic, spontaneous, however more difficult to control and be executed. The mission is performed through interaction of many leaders. The social context and

relations between leaders are an integral part of leadership that allows for crossing of lines, or dismantling structural and cultural borders and offers greater potential for organizational change and development [15], [47].

The conditions required from a principal of a distributed leadership style:

- Establishing structural and cultural foundations within the school;
- Establishing learning environments both for pupils and the community;
- Establishing a safe space for learning and partnership, with no fear of damaging criticism;
- Creation of opportunities for cultivation of informal leaders from the community;
- Making it possible for their leadership potential and maximizing it.

This article has reviewed the term of society versus community, various aspects and factors of parents' involvement, intervention and inclusion in a Primary school with their advantages and shortcomings, the role of the principal's leadership style and the parents' implications on the teacher's status. The professional literature dealing in the subject leads to an attitude of parents' inclusion in the educational system, while maintaining and safeguarding the teacher's status, and the school exclusivity in pedagogical and didactical rulings.

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