

SCHOOL PRINCIPALS AS ENTREPRENEURIAL LEADERS EMPOWERING PARENTS OF MARGINALIZED POPULATIONS

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Abstract

This study explores principals in one school over eighteen years who empowered the parents of their students, a population of socially and economically marginalized people.

The school serves the children of undocumented work migrants in Israel from third world countries, and asylum seekers and refugees coming from war-stricken countries. These people are perceived by the law as temporary with no possibility of becoming citizens. However, their children are eligible for education as specified in the Law of Compulsory Education. The principals applied their entrepreneurial skills to organized the parents and empower the parents by mobilizing funding, volunteers, and projects.

Principal as entrepreneurs have a vision, engage in innovations, act proactively, that is, they always seize opportunities for innovation, they use networking often to pursue their goals, and take risks by implementing innovations before assuring the funding. These skills are especially important when leading school in a community that is socially and economically marginalized, as marginalized people face practices of residential and work exclusion, discrimination and oppression from the dominant groups in society, and lack of power and voice. The principals in that school took upon themselves to mobilize the parents, and serve as their voice, sometime by resisting State policies.

This qualitative study used a 'data triangulation' which is the use of different sources to reach the same data set. The different sources include document reading, school observation, interviews with school staff and outside agencies, newspapers, the internet, and protocols of meetings of Israeli parliamentary committees.

It was found that the principals organized the parents by implementing numerous initiatives

(A) principals used mediators.

(B) Principals mobilized the community and the increasing civil society such as third sector anti-deportation organizations to give legal advise to parents. Also, they brought volunteer students of medicine to teach hygiene to students and parents of refugees; they also brought volunteers to teach the language to parents.

(C) Principals provided education for parent: organized field trips for the parents in the country, and provided counseling to parents in raising adolescents in a new culture.

(D) Principals initiated personal development such as forming a choir of parents who sing in school and community events,

(E) Advocacy: acting against the government deportation decision and provided services which the parents could not pay, such as educational and psychological diagnoses to students.

Keywords: *Entrepreneurial leadership, refugee parents, advocacy, triangulation.*

1. Introduction

Principals are required to be autonomous in their decisions and to act as entrepreneurs to implement innovations; yet at the same time they are required to comply with demands from the external environment (Eyal and Inbar, 2007), that consists of parents, regulating agencies, and stakeholders (Goldring, 1995). Principals have to lead the school by bridging the contradictory demands of autonomy and compliance. In their interaction with parents they have a large array of strategies, depending on the characteristics of the parents, such as SES and social and legal status, as well as the principal's perceptions of the boundaries of their school.

This study explores three principals acting as entrepreneurs to empower the parents of one school, serving students of migrant workers and refugees over a period of eighteen years.

2. Entrepreneurial leadership

Entrepreneurial leadership in education is not driven by competition for profit, but rather for its social values. It includes three components: proactiveness – seizing opportunities, introducing new ideas to the school and instilling it with a spirit of innovation; innovation – implementation of the new ideas in programs and projects; and risk-taking – implementing the programs and projects before securing funding and approval of stakeholders, parents or regulating agencies (Eyal and Inbar; 2003). When acting as entrepreneurs, principals have to comply and cooperate with environmental elements such as regulating agencies – Ministry of Education, local authority, stakeholders and parents - with which the school is in direct, daily-basis interaction and influence each other (Goldring, 1995).

3. School-parents relations

Parents-school relations were typified by Epstein (2010) as: 1. Help families establish home environments to support children as students. 2. Design school-to-home and home-to-school communications. 3. Recruit and organize

parent help and support. 4. Provide information to family about how to help students with curriculum-related activities. 5. Include parents in school decisions. 6. Collaborating with the community.

The above types can be classified by degrees of involvement (Goldring and Shapira 1993). Parental involvement refers to participation or reactions of parents when they have no control over the educational processes in schools (in Eyal 2008). Parental empowerment refers to parental control in schools, manifested by the principal letting parents take part in decision-making.

3.1. Refugee and immigrant parents' involvement

Refugee parents are less active in their collaboration with the school than the majority of parents in the host country.

There are several barriers to refugee parents' formal involvement in school: (1) lack of language proficiency (Bergset 2017; Rah et al 2008); (2) time constraints due to family socio-economic status; (3) traditional family structures (Rah et al 2008); (4) cultural differences - for instance, home-school collaboration is not the norm in the refugees' countries of origin (McBrien, 2005 in Bergset 2017), and parents express dissatisfaction with the lack of discipline (Tadmor- Shimoni, 2008; Bergset 2017) in the host country; (5) deferential attitudes towards school authority - perceiving that voicing an opinion about school matters is a lack of respect for the teachers (Bouakaz, 2009 in Bergset 2017); and (6) lack of information regarding the new neighborhood (Eden and Kalekin-Fishman, 2002).

3.2. School strategies to involve parents

Parents are unable to provide academic, emotional, cultural capital and financial support to their children, because they have encountered trauma themselves (Rah et al 2009). Schools use several strategies to enhance parents' involvement: (1) creating a parent liaison position. Who would serve as 'mediator' between school and refugee students and their families; (2) cooperating with community service organisations such as local non-profit organizations; (3) providing parent-education programmes such as learning the host language, teaching parents how to help their children with academic assignments (Rah et al 2009), providing information on Internet safety; (4) advocacy - school leaders help parents access services due to them outside school. For instance, helping parents get medical care, providing employment for parents, and having staff work with parents to revise and update their resumes (Davy 2016).

4. The Israeli case

The relations between school and parents have changed since the establishment of the State in 1948. The Israeli educational system was centralized since its establishment and parents were not allowed to be involved until the 80's (Eyal 2008), due to the mass immigration of Jews into the country and the need to build a national identity. Since then the system has been decentralized, as a result of cutbacks in the budget and recognition of cultural diversity (Eyal 2008), and later on privatization. All this promoted parental initiatives and schools of choice (Shapira and Haymann, 1991 in Eyal 2008). Parents became involved in several areas and levels.

The school studied serves the children of undocumented work migrants in Israel - people who claim to be asylum-seekers and refugees but have not been granted that special status. Their children are more exposed than veteran students to events such as parents being arrested by the police or immigration police, father living abroad, and physical violence in the family (Meir et al., 2016). These people are

perceived by the law as temporary residents, with no possibility of becoming citizens. However, their children are eligible for education, as specified in the Law of Compulsory Education.

The principals applied their entrepreneurial skills to organize and empower the parents by mobilizing funding, recruiting volunteers and initiating projects, and caring for their needs beyond school boundaries.

5. Methodology

This qualitative study used a 'data triangulation', which is the use of multiple sources of data to reach the same data set, to study the phenomenon from different perspectives (Eyal 2008; Eyal 2008; Zambrana et al 2015). The different sources include document reading, school observation, interviews with school staff and outside agencies, newspapers, the internet, and protocols of meetings of Israeli parliamentary committees.

6. Findings

The parents were asked by the school to outline needs and designed a support system to meet them.

(A) Cultural mediator: having a bilingual liaison officer is mandated by the Ministry of Education for all schools with children from foreign countries. In school BR, which serves pupils from 48 countries covering at least 20 languages, this policy was not mandated as the pupils were denied any educational service except for the obligation to attend school. In the first years, one of the qualifications required from teachers was the knowledge of a foreign language which was spoken in school. These teachers participated in all the meetings between parents and school (Eden and Kalekin-Fishman, 2002). Later the more veteran pupils served this function.

(B) Community work: the school works with an anti-deportation non-profit organization. The organization helps parents by advising them how to avoid deportation, and by finding countries that would host the deportees. The organization operates on the school premises.

Volunteering: the principal initiated volunteer work in various areas needed by the asylum-seekers and refugee students and their parents. Volunteer medical students were brought from a neighboring university to teach hygiene and health problems in Israel to students and refugee parents. Volunteers were also brought to teach the new language to the parents; they arranged psychological diagnoses for pupils who underwent traumas, which the parents could not afford to pay; they provided after-school day-care that operated for a while even during holidays, so that the parents could work all day; and informed parents of potential dangers, such as a case of a pedophile in the neighbourhood. A principal also helped a parent with documents of application for family reunification ((Eden and Kalekin-Fishman, 2002; Bergset, 2017).

(C) Education of parents - learning about the host country. When an influx of parents arrived, the school provided them with counseling on parents-adolescents relations, since these are different in Israel from those in their home countries. Also, in order to familiarize the parents with the new country, guided field trips were organized for them through non-profit organizations and museums. In addition, actions were taken to empower parents, such as learning a profession. Parents received professional training, through the school's cooperation with the private sector.

(D) Parents' personal development: the school has a choir of parents who perform in school and community events.

(E) Advocacy - this strategy has a unique pattern in Israel, due to the unique situation in which the students and their parents constantly face deportation. (1) One principal made an agreement with the local police precinct to stop arresting parents who bring their children to school. (2) In August 2010 the State issued a statement which granted legal status (but not citizenship) to children of migrant workers born in Israel who attended school at that time, but not to children of asylum seekers and refugees who were born abroad and were not in school yet, or had graduated at that time (Avnayim, 2011). The principal gathered the parents in a special meeting, saying the school would issue a document acknowledging that their children attend school to prevent deportation, and called the government deportation decision an immoral decision (Fishbain, 2018).

7. Conclusions

This case shows that principals used their entrepreneurial skills beyond their original definition, and used their autonomy and discretion to encourage parents who came with no resources to be active participants in school. The principals did not wait for "big-level societal change to address the inequities that marginalized students are experiencing" (Davy 2016: 174). By extending the boundaries of school they took it upon themselves to help the parents, thus replacing the regulatory agencies; and attempted to incorporate the parents into society.

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