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QUALITY EDUCATION THROUGH ONE VALUE-ORIENTED DECISION: FROM MEASUREMENT TO APPLICATION

Summary

This research study describes the change in education led by the Municipality of Haifa from the year 2004 until today by the Department for Educational Empowerment in the city. This department specializes in the care of children and youths at-risk. Through a unique multi-systemic model, it succeeded simultaneously in reducing the dropping out of students from the public educational frameworks in the city from 30% to 1.5% and in increasing the percentages of entitlement to the high school matriculation certificate from 63% to 75.36%. The change derived from one value-oriented decision based on theories of social justice and equality of opportunities for the entire population in the city. The research is a narrative study based on the stories of the women who lead the activity in the Department for Educational Empowerment and presents the municipality's central place in the leadership of quality education for the children and youths found under its responsibility.

Key words: Quality, Quality in Education, Social Justice, Responsibility, Commitment, Partnership, Equality of Opportunities, Inclusion, Differences.

JEL codes: I23

Introduction

The equality of opportunities in education has been declared since the establishment of the State of Israel. However, this ideal has never been realized, and profound scholastic gaps were created between the students related to the national, ethnic, racial, and gender distributions characterizing Israeli society. The discrimination is expressed in the resources allocated to every group of students, the quality of teachers in the schools, and the different curricula (Yonah & Dahan 2013).

In Israel the gap between a student from a high socioeconomic background and a student from a low socioeconomic background can reach a gap of one academic year or more (Razer et al. 2015). In addition, findings indicate a consistent gap and constant tendency in the favor of Hebrew speaking students

(OECD 2013). Society is obligated to create a social order in which the person can determine his fate and his possibilities for advancement will not depend on his background (Kalinov 2008). The educational systems succeed in combining quality of education with social justice and a high level of responsibility of all the interested parties in the educational system and the municipality (Roussouw 2015). Effective ways of management in the municipality and in the school can change the relation between the social and economic capital, with which the students come to the schools, and their achievements in the continuation (Razer et al. 2013).

Through a two-year research in the city of Haifa, I studied the work model through which there was adjusted treatment of the diverse populations living in the city.

Quality

Quality in education and industry is an elusive concept judged from different angles of values dictated in the organization until the dictated managerial decisions (Roussouw 2015). The world of industry is very advanced in its ability to identify, create, and manage quality, with the aim of satisfying the client (Bashan 2012). In education the government policy is critical to the creation of quality (Ganihar 2010). It is necessary to make an organizational decision to work with disadvantaged populations (Razer et al. 2011) and to develop a perception sensitive to the needs of different populations (Tikly 2010).

In the state of Maryland in the United States, 85% of the population studies in the public educational system, where there are a variety of curricula adjusted to the needs of the different neighborhoods. In addition, there is a regular dialogue between principals, educators, the community, and parents in the district. The students' achievements are not related to race, disability, gender, socioeconomic situation, ethnicity, and other differences (Montgomery Count Public Schools, Application for Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award). A similar story is found in Harlem in New York, where the educational system serves more than 12,000 children and youths and 9,500 adults and succeeds in overcoming the toxic street culture and poverty cycle. In regular teamwork the education is adjusted to the needs of every child in the region, including healthy nutrition, physical education, and different services for the community and families, outside of the study hours as well (Harlem Children's Zone). The Harlem success story inspired the women of the Department for Educational Empowerment in Haifa.

The Research

I first contacted the manager of the Department for Educational Empowerment in November 2014. I interested her in the research and its objectives, and she happily approved the process. In the first year I visited the Department for Educational Empowerment in the Haifa Municipality ten times. Every visit was three to four hours. I talked with the manager and the unit leaders in the department.

The questions directing the research study addressed theories of quality in education that explain the processes of the leadership of change by the Department for Educational Empowerment in the City of Haifa and the management strategies that motivated the change processes in the city. I built a research design that examines the mode of work of the staff of the Department for Educational Empowerment, as individuals and as a team, and the influence of the work model of the department in the municipality on the functioning of the school staffs and treatment and education factors in the community.

Method

The research is a qualitative research in the narrative mode, which can also be called constructivist or interpretative (Shkedi 2003). Narrative is a distinct unit of conversation, focused on a topic and organized over time, and some see it to be a whole life story created from parts of interviews, observations, and documents (Spector-Mersel 2010). When the stories address a group, community, or organization, they can indicate the identity and experiences of development and change of each one of these and the individuals in them (Tuval-Mashiach & Spector-Mersel 2010).

Participants

The staff of the Department for Educational Empowerment participated in the research study: the department manager and six department unit managers. Each one of the participants consented to participate in the research and knew ahead of time the research topic and objectives. Each participant responded to: "Tell me about the change in education in the city in the past eleven years and your place in this process of change". This conversation was very open and free. The written materials were sent via email to the department manager and she provided feedback in the name of all the department workers and the head of the educational system at the time. The feedback comments were given by her in her office both orally and in writing.

Research Instruments

In this research about 200 participant stories were collected. They constitute the main basis of the research findings. In addition, I used statistical reports of the Ministry of Education on the percentages of dropping out, high school matriculation certificate entitlement, and achievements in the sciences of the city students.

Findings

Haifa is the third largest city in the State of Israel and has a very diverse resident population, including Arabs, Jews, new immigrants, religious and secular, and others. Education in Haifa operated according to urban inclusion, in other words, students in first to ninth grades would register to studies in the schools according to their residential area, but from tenth grade, in the transition from the middle school to the high school, the schools were no longer committed to retain all the students. In this situation, every high school selected for itself the students with the highest achievements, and it was hard for weak students with the low achievements to find a high school that would accept them. This caused the division of the high schools in the city into schools that are more successful and less successful, better regarded and less regarded.

The manager of the Department for Educational Empowerment, Mrs. Tali Steinberg, told me:

The educational system in the City of Haifa was an educational system that induced dropping out. The high schools in the city accepted only strong students with high achievements. All the rest of the city students, who did not meet the high threshold of achievements required by the schools, found themselves outside of the educational system in the city, using the regular attendance officers to find an alternative educational framework. This is 30% of the students dropping out from all the city students, and even more.

The manager of the Regular Attendance Unit, Mrs. Shoshana Yosef, adds: "I was forced to go child by child and to examine whether he had registered to a school and to help him register."

The entry into the municipality of people with experience in work with youths at-risk d a great question mark on the massive induced dropping out of weak students from the public educational system in the city. Mrs. Shoshana Yosef continues:

Role-holders here at the Education Department changed. A new manager of the Education and Culture System came, Mrs. Matoki. She had managed a school with a poor and complicated population and there she understood that

there is another way. Then she decided that's it, no more dropping out. A child who began school in the first grade needs to complete twelfth grade.

The departments of education in the municipality were reorganized according to this approach and the Department for Educational Empowerment was established. Mrs. Tali Steinberg relates:

The Department was established eleven years ago with the goal of caring for children and youths at-risk. The first aim that the department was required to cope with is the prevention of the dropping out of youths from the educational system in the city.

Her deputy, Mrs. Liat Balms, explains the causes of the process:

There is no longer induced dropping out of the children, it is necessary to deal with all the children. The system needs to undergo a change and not the children. We opened here a very clear social agenda of social mobility, equality, and the seeing of the excluded and the hearing of the voices of those whose voice cannot be heard.

The name empowerment was carefully chosen. In Hebrew the word empowerment, *ha'atzama*, is also an acronym meaning opportunity, independence, reduction of gaps, excellence, and perseverance¹. These words constitute the new definition chosen to create quality of education in the city.

In large organizations leadership is not simple and for the most part there is confusion in the actions from which to begin. The Haifa Municipality began the process of change through two main actions. The first stage was identification: the problem of dropping out and the need for a diverse solution for the city population were identified. This identification helped the understanding that it is necessary to decide on the issue of dropping out. The second stage in the order of actions was the stage of decision. In the processes of change, the stage of decision is a goal in itself, to which it is necessary to strive. This is a critical stage that can facilitate the setting of directions for action. The action of decision is a concrete action, both rational and emotional, and is focused on the setting of the tasks to be undertaken. In the Haifa Municipality, the decision made was the target of no dropping out. The manager of the Department for Educational Empowerment, Mrs. Tali Steinberg, reconstructs:

The process that occurred in the city occurred first of all with a very clear statement that there is no dropping out as policy of the mayor, Mr. Yonah Yahav. This process that occurred in the city and the statement that there is no more dropping out in the city of Haifa were thunder on a clear day. Till then there were very strong schools in the city and there was entitlement to the high school matriculation certificate of more than 90% and very good data and in essence they taught the strong students. When the municipality declared no

¹ The Hebrew word for empowerment is *ha'atzama* (המצעה). It is also an acronym for opportunity (תזמנה), independence (תואמזע), reduction of gaps (פירעפ פוצמצ), excellence (תוניוצמ), and perseverance (הדמתה).

more dropping out, there was very great drama in the city. And it was clear to us that with this statement and with the policy that we want to lead, we would encounter very strong resistance and we would need to support and help many schools.

The statements of Mrs. Steinberg and the powerful words she used “thunder on a clear day”, “very great drama in the city”, “very strong resistance”, and “help many schools” give the feeling as if there is preparation for an emergency situation. The school principals and teacher staffs responded with great anger. They objected to the process and attempted to refuse. The thought that from this moment their schools need to accept weak students caused an uproar on the part of the school leaders in the city. There was great concern on the part of the school principals that parents from the upper socioeconomic class would transfer their children from the state public schools to the private schools in the city because of their objection to their children studying with students weaker than them. Nevertheless, they could not stop the decision reached by the Haifa Municipality. Given the mayor’s support for this process, they had no choice. From this moment, with exemplary wisdom, full municipal support, and a clear agenda, the manager of the Department for Educational Empowerment, Mrs. Steinberg, began to lead the municipality factors, the community, the Ministry of Education, and the public to act to realize this objective.

Discussion and Conclusions

This research on the transformation of the educational system in Haifa into an inclusive and quality educational system addressed two main issues. The first issue addressed theories of quality of education anchored in this process, while the second issue clarified management strategies through which the process was motivated.

On the first issue, which discusses theories of quality of education, the process of change in the city is based primarily on theories of discourse on human rights and principles of social justice (Tikly 2010), from the desire to lead equality and equal opportunities for every person as such (Kalinov, 2008). On the second issue, which discusses strategies of management that motivated the process, the change entails the decision of comprehensive and systemic change in education in the city (Ganihar 2010; Razer et al. 2011; 2013). The decision was made following the identification of the problem of massive dropping out and the need to provide an education-treatment solution adjusted to the variety of populations in the city. The identification of the problem and the decision in the action led the education leaders to redefine the quality of education and standards according to which the education leaders in the city will operate.

It is not possible to ignore the central place of the municipality in the process. I can say that apparently without it such a process of change would not have occurred. For the most part, we look to the Ministry of Education and to the education workers in the field, expecting essential changes in education, and in my opinion, without the connection between the local government and the Ministry of Education it will be difficult to achieve such a profound change. The Ministry of Education cannot work alone. The strong organizations in the country must help it. The Haifa Municipality has courageously taken responsibility for all 'its children' and has committed to care for them equally, in a just and adjusted manner. The delineation of such a vision by the mayor does not leave another option for his subordinates or for workers in the city. Every local government constitutes the strongest organization in the city, and it is reasonable for the Ministry of Education representatives to connect to it. The financial investment in the process was not addressed here; apparently the financial investment is not small and yet I believe that it is possible to create relationships, partnerships, and uniform definitions among all the partners in education even with less of a budget.

Recommendations

This article presented only the actions of motivation of the multi-systemic work model created by the Department for Educational Empowerment in the City of Haifa to reduce the dropping out and to provide a solution for the variety of populations in the city. It is necessary to study in further depth the other stages of action and to understand what else helped in the leadership of the education systems in the city.

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Wysokiej jakości edukacja dzięki jednej decyzji opartej na wartościach: od pomiaru do zastosowania

Streszczenie

Badanie opisuje zmianę w edukacji realizowanej przez Urząd Miejski w Hajfie od roku 2004 do dnia dzisiejszego, wprowadzoną przez Wydział ds. Plenipotencji Edukacyjnych (ang. Department for Educational Empowerment) w tym mieście. Wydział ten specjalizuje się w opiece nad zagrożonymi dziećmi i młodzieżą. Poprzez unikalny model wielosystemowy udało się równocześnie ograniczyć przedwczesne kończenie nauki przez uczniów w szkołach publicznych w mieście z 30% do 1,5% i zwiększyć odsetek uprawnionych do immatrykulacji w szkołach wyższych z 63% do 75,36%. Zmiana ta wynika z opartej na wiedzy decyzji, która bazuje na teoriach sprawiedliwości społecznej i równości szans dla całej ludności miasta. Badanie ma charakter narracyjny i jest oparte na relacjach kobiet, które pracowały w Wydziale

ds. Plenipotencji Edukacyjnych, oraz przedstawia centralne miejsce urzędu miejskiego w przywództwie w realizacji wysokiej jakości edukacji dzieci i młodzieży, za których kształcenie urząd odpowiada.

Słowa kluczowe: jakość, jakość w edukacji, sprawiedliwość społeczna, odpowiedzialność, zaangażowanie, partnerstwo, równość szans, włączenie, różnice.

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