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SCHOOL-PARENTS RELATIONSHIP ON THE WAY TO PARTNERSHIP

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Abstract

Reading the literature and professional experience shows that the issue of reciprocal relations between school and the parents is a vague and conflictual subject therefore, it creates motivation for investigation. Researchers and different approaches offer models for forging healthy relationships between school staff and parents to serve school academic and social climate. Studies show that children whose parents are involved in school achieve higher academic achievement than others and that parental involvement has many positive aspects based on values such as respect, responsibility, and dialogue. The contribution of our article is by his optimistic approach in presenting the relationships between school and the parents and the observation that all schools are at any stage on the pyramid of reciprocal relations. Through a developmental process that includes learning of all partners, it is possible to move from stage to stage and reach a kind of relationship that can be defined as an optimal partnership between parents and educators. The article presents a four-step application model for optimal educational partnership, in hope that it can serve schools that see the interaction between the school and the parents as a primary goal itself. The model is built as a four-stage pyramid and the stages rely on principles, values and actions.

1. Introduction

The research literature and the reality on the ground show that the interaction between school and parents is a rather vague and conflictual issue, and therefore motivates investigation. Different researchers and approaches offer models for learning, for action on the ground and for establishing healthy relationships between school staff and parents in a way that will serve the learning / social climate in school and contribute to improving of pupils' achievements. This article is part of a doctoral research examined the relationship between educational partnerships and parents/teachers' attitudes toward teachers' status. Despite the great academic knowledge on the subject, the article's contribution is in its optimistic approach to presenting the relationships between the school and the parents and the recognition that all schools are at some stage on the reciprocal relations pyramid. A developmental process that includes learning on the part of all partners, makes is possible to move from one stage to another and reach a relationship that can be defined as an optimal parents and educators' partnership. The aim of the article is to present an applied model of stages in the interaction between school and parents in the journey towards optimal educational partnership, hoping that the model will serve different schools that regard the school-parents' relationship as an end in itself. The article includes a literature review that presents the concepts intervention, involvement, power relations between them according to conflict theory, a broad reference to the concept of educational partnership between teachers and parents, findings from a study that examined the relationship between educational partnerships and parents /teachers' attitudes toward teachers' status, and as mentioned, a model of constructing an optimal relationship between parents and teachers.

1.1. Theoretical foundation and related literature Involvement, Intervention and Power Relations in the Educational Arena

Despite the great variety in the definition of parental involvement, researchers are in agreement that there is a clear separation between parental involvement in the framework of educational activity at home and parental involvement in school (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler 1997, Anderson & Minke 2007, Galindo & Sheldon, 2012). Like other countries, in Israel it as also found that academic achievements of pupils whose parents are involved in school are higher than those of other children (Winkler, 1997, Fridman, 2007). Parental involvement is perceived as a phenomenon whereby parents are mobilized to contribute to the school, and school advances their involvement willingly. As such, parental involvement may improve school atmosphere, improve quality of performance of various educational projects, and ultimately, may decrease teachers' burnout. Balance between parents' needs and those of the school increases the chance of their working in harmony. Alongside the term 'involvement', the professional literature uses the term 'intervention' in its negative meaning of intruding without good intentions. Principals and teachers claim that parental involvement is actually intervention that threatens teachers' status. They believe parents show lack of understanding and consideration, and thus burden their educational work. In contrast, parents claim that teachers regard them as money collectors, but not as partners in the educational work. In other words, they are required to support the existing situation and not influence things that must be changed Gur & Zalmanson-Levy (2005 as cited in Friedman, 2011) argued that construction of the interaction between school and community around the concept of power and helplessness enables us to analyse what is happening between parents and teachers, where parents have no power and educators have all the power.

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When sense of helplessness increases among parents, a sense of frustration develops. Frustration can be expressed by indifference or aggression towards its cause, i.e. school staff, meaning teachers. In this context, school staff often regards parental involvement as intervention. Conflict theory opposed sheds light on a social arena in which individuals and groups compete with each other and fight each other in order to fulfil individual desires while expressing hostility (Gur & Zalmanson-Levy 2005, as cited in Friedman, 2011). Narcissist attitudes and thinking, teachers and parents seek to gain full recognition of their value, their status associated with their child regarding their importance of their knowledge and education, recognition of their legitimacy in controlling the child's future and well-being. When these needs are not fully and continuously satisfied, feelings of frustration, disappointment, despair, burnout and a teachers' wish to quit, and sometimes even resistance and hostility. In extreme cases, parents may act violently towards teachers (Kohut, 1977 as cited in Friedman and Fisher, 2003). The question is how parental involvement can be increased while making sure to define clear boundaries. Moreover, which institutional activities are required for constructing ways of communication that will lead to harmony between school and parents? According to Jewett (1992 as cited in Friedman and Fisher, 2003), a way to prevent aggression is by collaboration between parties. That is if school wishes to stop "aggression" on the part of parents, it must collaborate with them.

1.2. What defines the relationship between school and parents?

The literature review points to different teachers' perceptions regarding parents, which lead to different school-parents' interactions, over an open door - closed door continuum. Parents as a resource means that their power, talent and financial ability must be used; Parents as clients: it is important to meet their needs, listen to and consider their expectations; Parents as enemies: caution is required and therefore there is a need to separate school from the home and limit the relationship. There are studies that emphasized the element of partnership in the relationship between parents and teachers (Epstein, 1995; Epstein & Sheldon, 2002). The idea is to identify common interests and share responsibility, which will enable the school to accept the children and their families better, and for families to emphasize the importance of school and provide help in the learning experience. Gavrieli (1996), claimed that parents are both partners and customers of the educational staff. Teachers must meet the needs and wishes of parents and at the same time consider them partners for the purpose of promoting common goals. Perceiving parents as partners requires a change of perception among teachers, including such elements as mutual trust between parents and teachers, mutual responsibility and commitment to educational processes pertaining to children, joint thinking sessions and joint activities to improve communication and learning about the school. The professional literature indicates that parents are interested in taking part in their children's learning process, both on the personal and school levels. Progress in this area can be seen in the role of parents' committees, which has changed over the years from limited communication with the local authorities (Feitelson, 1968), to active involvement in organizational, financial and educational areas. The parents' committees also participate in the decision making regarding additional learning programs and their funding. Gaziel (2002), examined studies conducted in effective organizations, where both teachers and parents were involved in the decision-making process. Such organizations offer a working environment that encourages collaboration that causes teachers and parents' satisfaction with the educational work done at school, and

as such, they reaffirm the argument that parental participation in the decision-making process leads to deeper parental involvement and improved pupils' achievement in school. The Ministry of Education in Israel encourages parents to take part in school activities and be involved in their children's education in a variety of ways, in a mutually respectful relationship. Parents' ability to enrich the schools is greatly recognized and of great significance, but it should be remembered that the teachers and educational staff are professionals in the field of education, and as such, they are responsible for their students' academic, social and emotional advancement. To fulfil this complex task, their professional autonomy must be respected and they must be allowed to exercise their professional discretion. The argument is that there is no ideational limit to the help that a parent can lend to a teacher, and still, there is a limit that depends on a teacher's and the parent's personality, on previous experience, mutual motivation and the quality of the relationship created between them.

1.3. Teachers-Parents' Interaction as a System of Values

The professional literature indicates several collaboration principles, and only their right balance leads to success of the collaboration process.

- Principal's leadership – authority and role require principals to lead the partnership.
- Acknowledging the significance and contribution of educational partnership between school and parents; Parents' activities need to be meaningful to all parties, including pupils. If it is not, there is no partnership. Emotional involvement and investment are required, as they are of significance to those who invest as well.
- Establishing mutual trust and respect between teachers and parents;
- The ability to contribute and be contributed to – Partnership is only possible when the educational staff is certain of their educational actions. Opening school doors allows parents to see negative things and they respond aggressively and in disappointment.
- Communication channels and dialogue. School has to allow for institutional communication channels and to conduct a constant dialogue between school and parents. This dialogue refers to the knowledge of the parents as real knowledge and no less important than the professional knowledge of the teachers. . The goal of the dialogue is to bring together the conflicts and problems and to find ways of coping and solutions (Gur & Zalmanson-Levy, 2005).
- Non-judgmental Communication Teachers and parents should avoid judgment and neither the school nor the parent blames the other for what's not working but instead they claim responsibility for school success
- Sharing responsibility –All parties have to share responsibility for performance, success and failure. This is the most important condition for successful partnership.
- Collaboration-. Collaboration parents is an inevitable long term process, and since the parties often start from different perspectives, the road may be paved with conflict (Winkler, 1997,) therefore it requires learning and training.

     Mutuality -partnership requires balance of both sides.

1.4. Levels of Educational Partnership between Parents and Teachers

Friedman, (as cited in Friedman & Fisher, 2003) suggests a classification of parental involvement patterns:

1. Parents as observers – That is the most common pattern. All parents experience it at one point or another: reading pamphlets and leaflets, making payments and attending teacher-parents' meetings.

2. Parents that provide services that do not directly relate to the educational process (alleged involvement), for instance, decorating and making cakes (Goldberger, 1991 as cited in Friedman & Fisher, 2003).

3. Parents as learners (partial involvement) – parents who participate in enrichment programs at school.

4. Parents as partners in the educational process (full involvement) – these parents are interested in being partners in the overall educational process: choosing curricula, teaching methods, placing teachers and often choosing the school. This type of involvement is more desired than the previous ones as parents can have more influence. There are three types of partnership in determining goals and making decisions:

A: Alleged involvement – a pattern whereby parents participate in discussions and eventually agree with decisions made by school staff. B: Partial involvement – a pattern whereby parents participate in discussions, try to influence decisions but the final decision remains the school's. C: Full involvement – a pattern whereby parents participate in the discussions and constitute equal partners with staff in the decision-making process.

An additional classification: A: Effective counselling body – the school invites the parents and the community to propose an action plan, initiate programs and advice on different matters. B: Formal partnership – the school has a genuine partnership with parents and interested parties in the community in such defined fields as enrichment programs, collections from parents and volunteer activities. C: Decentralization of decision making – the community is allowed space for making decisions. Parents have a right to influence all types of decisions made at school such as decisions with regard to personnel, programs and budgets.

2. Problem Statement

Teachers' status in Israel has been in a decrease Since the 1970's due to many reasons. It has been found that it is important to raise teachers' status in the eyes of students, parents and the general public as a direct and significant factor in promoting achievements in the education system (McKinsey & Company, 2007). Research found that the achievements of pupils whose parents are involved in school are higher than those of children whose parents are not involved in school activities (Fridman, 2007). Still, staff perceives parental involvement as intervention that harms the educational autonomy and professional status of teachers (Idelstein, 1989 as cited in Friedman, 2011). The question is how parental involvement can be increased while making sure to define clear boundaries. Moreover, which institutional activities are required for constructing ways of communication that will lead to harmony between school and parents? According to Jewett (1992 as cited in Friedman & Fisher, 2003), a way to prevent aggression is by collaboration between parties. Educational researchers propose channelling parental involvement to the creation of educational partnership based on respect, trust, and significant relationships.

3. Research Questions

3.1. To examine the connection between educational partnerships and parents' attitudes towards teachers' status within *"new horizon"* reform in Israel.

3.2. To examine the connection between educational partnerships and teaches attitudes towards teachers' status within *"new horizon"* reform in Israel.

3.3. To develop a model of creating partnerships between parents and teachers with the aim to improve   the teachers' status within Israeli society.

4. Purpose of the Study

The research examine the connection between educational partnerships and parents' /teachers'/ attitudes towards teachers' status in Israel. I assume that parents'/ teachers' attitudes towards teachers' status will be influenced positively as a result of   educational partnerships. There for there is a need to develop a model of creating partnerships between parents and teachers with the aim to improve the teachers' status within Israeli society.

5. Research Methods

This article is part of a study that examines the relationship between an educational school-parents' partnership and parents' attitudes towards teachers' status. This mixed-methods research consists of two parts: a qualitative research part and a quantitative one. The research design consists of two parts: qualitative (interviews) and quantitative (Questionnaires). The research population included 50 teachers and 50 parents from schools in central Israel. The quantitative part included a closed questionnaire for parents and a different closed questionnaire for teachers. In addition to the closed questions, respondents were asked to answer four open-ended questions.

6. Findings

Table 01. First question – Teachers: Which feelings do you experience when talking about parents: Boredom, anger, affection, wonderment, indifference, nervous, fear, identification, warmth, and hatred?

Positive feelings			Negative feelings	Other
Partnership - 3	Identification - 17	Affection - 9	Anger - 5	Indifference - 1
Trust – 1	Concern - 1	Respect - 1	Tension - 1	Wonderment - 4
Caring – 1	Warmth - 2	Containing - 2	Nervous - 2	Curiosity - 1
Understanding – 3	Appreciation - 14		Fear - 1	Nothing special - 1
			Frustration – 1	

Table 02. Second Question: Which concept, in your opinion, defines the dynamic of the relationship between educators and parents: partnership? Pact? Service provider? Parallel? Other?

Concepts	Teachers	Parents
Partnership	32	31
Client/Service Provider	11	6
Parallel	4	3
Dependence	4	1
Pact	2	
Other: 'Punching bag'	1	
Other: Partial involvement		1
Professionals and parents interested in their children's well-being		1

Table 03. Third question: In which areas should there be an educational partnership between the parents' community and school?

	Teachers	Parents		Teachers	Parents
In all areas	10	4	Social domain / cohesion	6	24
Community area	6	2	Informal activities	1	1
Values area	5	5	Discipline and behavior	6	2
Enrichment	5	4	Academic area	5	8
Anything to do with one's own child	9	5	**Maintenance**	--	1
Whatever parents choose/interests	--	2	**Vision**	--	1

Table 04. Fourth question: Which areas are not a matter of an educational partnership between the parents' community and school?

Teachers' Findings		Parents Findings	
Curricula	15	Curricula	
Pedagogy/ Teaching Methods	14	Pedagogy/ Teaching Methods	15
School staff, Choosing and evaluating staff, professional development, personal matters	3	School staff, Choosing and evaluating staff, professional development, personal matters	7
Afternoon activities in the community/outside school	1	Afternoon activities outside school	1
Teachers' authority, grades, achievements, class management	5	Grades	1
School/class rules and regulations	6	School/class rules and regulations	1
All areas belong to the partnership	2	All areas belong to the partnership	5
All areas belong to the partnership depending on trust and 'dosage'	4	All areas belong to the partnership depending on trust and 'dosage'	4
		Unnecessary ceremonies	1
		Budget related decisions	2

7. Conclusion

The findings show that teachers' feelings towards parents are generally positive. These findings are encouraging because the prevailing opinion is that teachers are reluctant to have relationships with parents and feel threatened by them. Despite the tension between school staff and parents described in the

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professional literature, parents and teachers see themselves as partners in the educational process. This constitutes grounds for a partnership. The findings regarding areas that are worthy or not of an educational partnership are interesting. The literature review indicates parents' wish to be significant partners in the educational process, but in practice, parents (in state schools) do not want to be involved in pedagogical issues and prefer to be involved in the school's social activities. The teachers, on their part, are interested in maintaining their pedagogical autonomy and enjoying the parents' enrichment activities. In the 21st century, parental involvement is a reality that cannot be ignored. It had many advantages, which are ultimately expressed in improved school climate and academic achievements. Nevertheless, balance and boundaries must be clear must be clear and guided by the principal and staff. The keys to building meaningful relationships with partnerships are the same as building relationships in the classroom. Parents and teachers need to feel like they belong, being trust and to believe that they are valued. Building a partnership is a dynamic process that requires the parties to show sensitivity towards their partners, and learn to introspect. Declaration of commitment to partnership is but the first step in the process up the partnership ladder (Ben Joseph, 2008). On the basis of the literature, content analysis of the open questions, content analysis of the intervention program I built in my school, interviews with school principals, and my rich educational experience as an educator and an elementary school principal, I built a model for constructing a relationship between the school and parents. The model seeks to reach an optimal partnership between the school and parents. The model is built as a four-stage pyramid. The stages rely on principles, values and actions. To best structure the relationship, it is recommended that not to skip stages. The time dimension depends on the school's progress in the process.
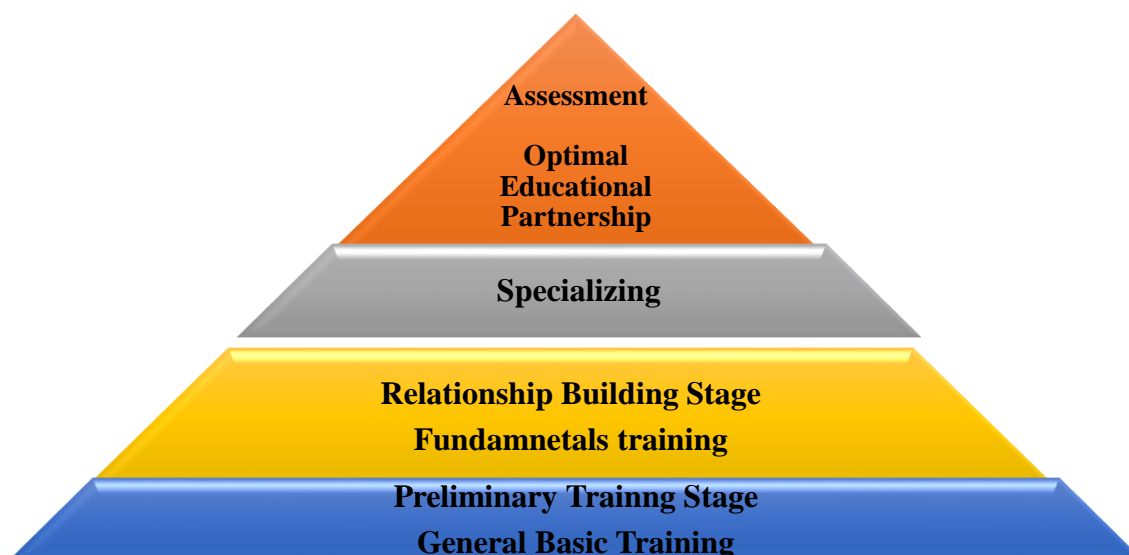

Figure 01. School-Parents Relationship on the way to Partnership -The Model

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