



The current issue and full text archive of this journal is available at
<http://www.emeraldinsight.com/0957-8234.htm>

The political power of school principals in Israel

A case study

Devorah Eden

Department of Education, Western Galilee College, Israel, and

Rachel Hertz-Lazarowitz

Faculty of Education, University of Haifa, Israel

Political power
of school
principals

211

Received July 2001

Accepted October 2001

Keywords *Teachers, Education, Politics, Israel*

Abstract *This case study explored the way principals in Israel organized a forum and assumed roles beyond their educational responsibility. This occurred as an unexpected result of a state-wide project that was initiated and operated by the Ministry of Education. The aim of the project was to strengthen local educational systems by developing local educational leaderships and by improving scholastic achievements. Participant observation, interviews, and reading of documents and newspapers revealed that the principals changed their role in a three-phase process. First, the project unintentionally raised principals' awareness of the social-political nature of their work. Second, principals organized into an interest group that cooperated with other community groups. Third, they sought to revitalize their respective communities, beyond their educational leadership. They extended their turf from school to community, and their role from school leadership to community avant-garde.*

Introduction

The purpose of this article is to explore the way principals assume power and a leadership role in the Israeli educational system. The system is undergoing decentralization, but it is still highly centralized (Inbar, 1990), with principals dependent on the system for financing and approval of their pedagogical initiatives. Yet the decentralization provides a potential for empowerment, because principals have the opportunity to bring about changes in school and to introduce changes into the community outside.

The case-study presented here describes the changing character of educational leadership as an unexpected result of a state-wide project. Since 1994 the Israeli Ministry of Education has operated the "36-community project" in order to strengthen local educational systems that had the potential for improvement (Gordon, 1996). A "holistic project" was initiated in Northville (pseudonym), and it triggered the empowerment of principals in that city. The article discusses the changing role of principals from organizational (school) leaders to community leaders of social change. This change was a result of external factors, such as the social-historical context in which the educational

The authors wish to thank Ms Nurit Ben-Shushan, public officials and school principals, and also Yahav – Management Consultant Co., which assisted in providing data.

A short version of this article was presented at the 6th International Conference on *Work Values and Behavior*, Istanbul, Turkey, July 1998.

The authors are listed in alphabetical order.



*Journal of Educational
Administration*,
Vol. 40 No. 3, 2002, pp. 211-229.
© MCB UP Limited, 0957-8234
DOI 10.1108/09578230210427154

system operates, and of internal factors, such as the unique characteristics of educational leadership.

Background

The city of Northville

Northville was one of two nationally mixed and multicultural cities chosen for this project. Northville is a small city in the north of Israel with a population of 50,000, of whom two thirds are Jews and one third are Arabs. The city has been impoverished in recent years because of demographic changes and the poor functioning of the municipality.

Demographically, the Jewish population consists of two groups. One is the old-established population, some of whom are educated and well off, and the other is that of newcomers (immigrants) from the Asian republics of the former Soviet Union and from Ethiopia. Members of the second group are mostly of low socio-economic status (SES) and have special needs that demand high financial allocations. The Arab population is mostly Muslim and partly Christian. It is generally of low SES and low educational achievement. In recent years the wealthier members of the Jewish population have been moving away from Northville. The composition of the population is also changing because the Arab population is expanding due to its natural increase, concurrently with the decrease in the number of Jews. The decrease of the Jewish population also caused competition among the Jewish principals to attract students, which has sparked mutual hostility and suspicion. This has deepened the existing segregation in the educational system (Elboim-Dror, 1981). Consequently, the educational system in Northville, which was considered a good one with the potential to improve, could not actualize this potential.

The policy of autonomy in education instituted by the Ministry of Education in the 1980s affected Northville too. It had positive and negative ramifications for Northville (and for other communities in Israel). The positive ramifications were that it resulted in renewal in school and the initiation of many new projects (one of which was implemented in Northville). The negative ramifications were the reduced flow of funds for education to local communities for their discretionary use (Inbar, 1990). This led communities to resort to private funding for education (State Comptroller's, 1992, N. 42, p. 395). Poor communities like Northville were in crisis because they could not find alternative funding sources. Some communities collapsed because of their inefficiency. In addition, in the early 1990s the government froze its funding to the city due to allegations of waste and corruption (*North 1*, 23 December 1994, p. 20) as well as in other communities (Maariv Hayom, 1994, p. 2a). As a result, the city was paralyzed; for example, the municipality could not pay debts (*North 1*, 11 November 1994, p. 8).

The collapse of the local communities (authorities) led to a "power vacuum" in some cases. This term, borrowed from international and national politics, means that "the influence of a [hegemon] is seen to recede . . . natural forces draw in a new hegemon to replace the old one" (Roy, 1995, p. 47). In our case,

the power vacuum was created by the inability of the local authority to function. In those circumstances the principals could resort to several measures. They could accept the situation or they could fill the vacuum. Thus, they could develop a sense of community and would cooperate with the community to solve problems (Hertz-Lazarowitz, 1999), as the principals in Northville did.

The holistic project in Northville

At the beginning of 1994, the Ministry of Education singled out 36 rural and urban Jewish and Arab communities with low SES populations but with good educational systems that had not exhausted their potential (Gordon, 1996). The goal was improvement of the system through tightening up the loose couplings (Weick, 1976) and creating a local educational leadership. This was in keeping with the autonomy and devolution policy in education.

Autonomy in education meant the shift of responsibility to local communities (Ball, 1993). This resulted from citizens' demand for free choice and a cut in funds. At the same time, the Ministry needed to maintain a centralized control over the educational system for historical reasons (Inbar, 1990). This was evident in the statement of the Director-General of the Ministry: "Pedagogical autonomy granted to schools will not minimize the ability of the Ministry of Education to use discretion in controlling the school" (*Circular of the Director-General of the Ministry of Education*, N. 1.3, 1976, cited in Inbar 1990, p. 63).

Autonomy operates on two levels, the pedagogical and the budgetary. Pedagogically it means that principals have a free choice of instructional methods and new teaching concepts (Fuchs, 1998; Globman and Iram, in press; Hertz-Lazarowitz and Zelniker, 1995; Paldi, 1997); budgetary autonomy means the transfer of money from the Ministry of Education to the local communities for their discretionary use. To maintain central control, the Ministry of Education required that autonomy be accompanied by principals working together in forums operating under the auspices of its superintendents. In terms of budget it meant that local communities were allotted funds from the Ministry of Education, and they had discretion in distributing them for educational purposes, thus strengthening the local communities.

The project ran in Northville for five years, from 1995 through 2000. The intervening body chosen by the Ministry was a private consultant company, in charge of the organizational aspect of the project, and a university professor (the second author of this article), in charge of the pedagogical aspect. The project sought to develop four areas of activity:

- (1) In-service professional training was given to educators at all levels to improve their performance. To learn new instructional methods, namely cooperative learning and literacy (Hertz-Lazarowitz and Calderon, 1994), teachers were trained as coordinators, trainers, and facilitators; and teachers and principals in all elementary schools worked together. The cooperative learning project had existed prior to the holistic project and was incorporated into it. Thus, pedagogical collaboration had existed,

and formed the conceptual and organizational basis for other forms of cooperation between principals, but it translated into organizational collaboration with the initiation of the holistic project.

- (2) Curricular sequences from kindergarten to high school were tightened, in order to prevent dropout and to improve educational achievements.
- (3) The city was empowered to increase its self-image and restore its attractiveness.
- (4) A city-wide educational leadership was constructed, consisting of several organizations, such as the principals' forum, Parents' Association, Ministry of Education supervisors, and Arab leaders. They acted as a steering committee (see Figure 1)

Of all the bodies participating in the project, the steering committee, in particular the principals' forum, and the in-service pedagogical activities were the most active and stable during the five years of the project (Hertz-Lazarowitz, 1999).

The principal's forum in Northville originated in the first meeting of all 21 school principals for the holistic project. In the first year of the project (school

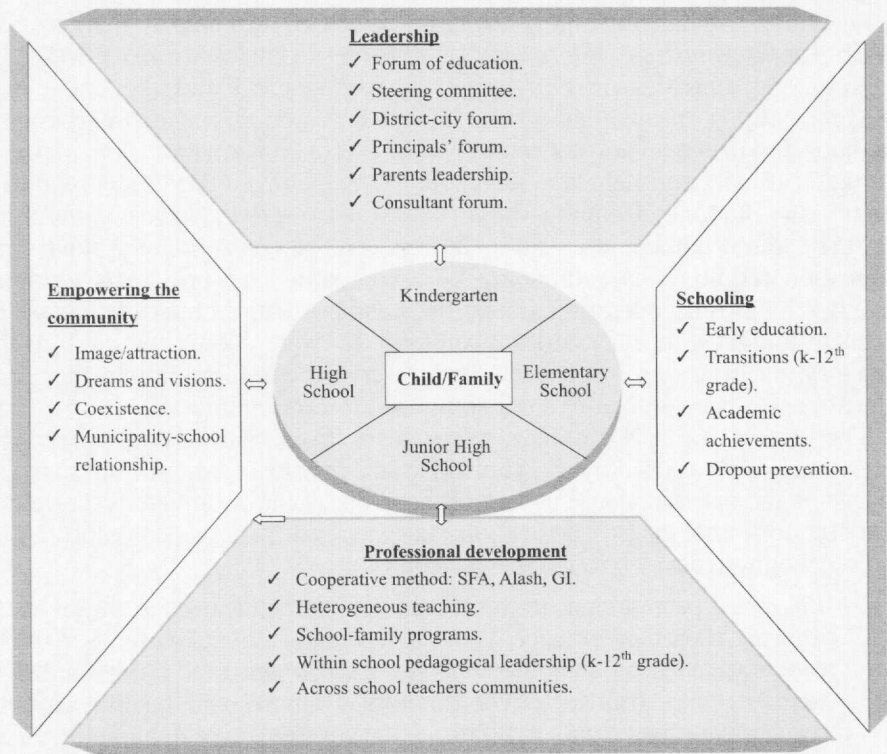


Figure 1.
The Investigation Task
Force (ITF): a
community approach

Source: Hertz-Lazarowitz 1998©

year 1994/1995), the management consultant assigned to the principals worked with the 21 principals individually because of the poor relations and communication among them, which came to light in the group dynamics workshops. The original plan of the project was to train them in management skills such as problem solving and time management. In the process of their learning together they started to work as a group. They organized as a forum at their own initiative, alongside their formal training but not as part of it, and elected a core forum of eight members and a chairperson. In the course of time they became involved in socio-political issues and adopted a holistic-systemic perception of their "turf".

The characteristics of the school principalship

To understand the phenomenon of school principals undertaking to organize as a militant group and to lead their community, it would be useful to view the role and scope of activities expected from them in Israel.

Israeli school principals have to obtain a certificate of administration. The training takes place in the universities and colleges, and it is sponsored by the Ministry of Education. It was initially theory-based, but then shifted to practice-based because as Shmueli, former Director-General of the Ministry of Education stated: "there is a need to base the training on the modern management sciences" (Shmueli, 1986, p. 108). It was also decided in the Ministry of Education that "there is a need to free ourselves from the conservative attitude that requires a school principal to be a teacher who had proved himself/herself pedagogically" (Shmueli, 1986), because there was no proof that a good teacher was a good principal (Inbar, 1986). The conclusion of the Ministry was that, "We have to see management as an independent branch in the variety of roles in school" (Shmuelli, 1986, p. 108).

This followed the shift in training of school principals in the USA. From the 1930s to the 1950s the school principals there were perceived as missionaries of social change so their training covered issues such as the social foundations of the educational process: "The idea of the principal-missionary was based on a world outlook that centered around a certain social philosophy, the principle of which was the expectations for a social change, increased democracy, increased equality, and more participation of all walks of society in the educational process and in the process of social mobility" (Cooper and Boyd, 1987, in Chen *et al.*, 1998, p. 9). In the 1960s the role of the principals was limited to a professional approach. They no longer were seen as "redeeming society, but rather as professionals who are in charge of an organization, who have to serve their clients in the best way and to respond to their clients' and workers' needs and expectations" (Cooper and Boyd, 1987, p. 9). This was also the outlook in Israel, following feedback from graduates of these courses (Friedman *et al.*, 1997).

A by-product of this change was a shift from a theory-based social approach to a practice-based management approach. The practical part has expanded while the theoretical part diminished. Furthermore, trainees were taught by

practitioners. But “the emphasis on the practical part may result in intellectual shallowness. In the lack of scientific challenge, the trainees will learn through experience to follow principals and superintendents [professionally appointed by the Ministry of Education] who are in charge of them” (Chen *et al.*, 1998, p. 11). Thus, the system preserves itself and its attitude to school management as a “neutral” profession.

In a rare case of crisis that resulted in a “power vacuum”, principals could conform to their expected role as organization leaders; they could also resort to a role different from the one they had been trained for and assume a function beyond their educational mandate. This has happened with the principals in Northville.

Methodology

This study was based on several sources of information: personal knowledge of the authors, interviews with forum members and people related to them, document reading, and newspapers (local and national). All this was compared with the relevant literature.

The first source of knowledge was the personal involvement of the two authors in the holistic project. The first author was involved with a forum established in 1998 to design curricular sequences from elementary school to high school. The second author served as the academic-pedagogical adviser of the entire project for four years. She was one of its planners, and was deeply involved in its implementation. This involvement provided us with intimate knowledge of the great enterprise being conducted in the city.

The second source of information was in-depth interviews conducted by the first author with the eight members of the core forum (a smaller forum of collective leadership, two members of the large (entire) forum who were less involved, a city official, and a consultant who worked with the forum. Relevant documents of forum meetings, correspondence between the forum and relevant bodies, and documents written by the consultants were also analyzed (Schonberg, 1997).

The interviewees were asked to describe the forum, its meaning for them, and their perception of the power of the forum compared with other bodies it interacted with. All interviews were taped and transcribed. Each interview and document was separately analyzed.

Analysis of the first two interviews yielded a central theme, that being an awareness of the development of the forum. This contained two main themes. The first was the process of empowerment of the forum, namely movement from a sense of helplessness before its establishment to a sense of power after it. The second theme was the emergence of a collective identity, namely the transition from a sense of isolation (which included categories of mutual hostility, suspicion, and competition) to a sense of togetherness. From the first interviews an additional theme emerged, that of the transformation of their “turf” from a narrow organizational domain (the school) to a wide systemic-community domain. Thus, the first interviewees defined their students’ parents

as their community whereas the later interviewees defined the whole city as their community. Accordingly, a question was added regarding the notion of community and regarding the interviewees' own place in the social change that occurred in Northville.

Because of the development in principals' perception during the period of interviews (May 1997-June 1998), we returned to the first five interviewees for additional interviews.

The third source of information was the local and national newspapers. This external source enabled the authors to make comparisons with information retrieved from the interviews, and to maintain objectivity. The constant comparison of the interviews, the personal knowledge and the documents with the literature yielded themes and categories which inductively formed a grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967).

Our initial intent in this article was to describe the development of educational leadership aimed at improving education and pedagogical cooperation. But during the analysis of all sources of information the focus shifted to the development of school principals towards political community leadership. The theme that emerged from the analysis was that of development of the principals from a group of individuals into an interest group trying to influence public policy, and then into a cohesive body of leaders that became part of the emerging city leadership trying to create a new policy. In this process the principals redefined their arena from organization (school) to community.

Findings

The evolving role of the principals from individuals to community avant-garde
The development of the principals' forum can be divided into three stages conceptually, although some of the events occurred simultaneously. They developed from individuals into an organized community avant-garde.

The principals were first organized for a certain purpose, but they used the project to solve actual problems other than those it was intended to solve. Different and unrelated streams converged to create social and political change under the holistic project. This can be explained by the "garbage can" decision-making model. The garbage can is defined as "decisions seeking problems . . . solutions seeking issues they can respond to, and decision makers seeking work" (Cohen *et al.*, 1972, p. 2). In a rare moment a window of opportunity is opened, combining the unrelated streams of the problems, the solutions, and the decision makers merge and are converted into policy design when an entrepreneur is there to seize the moment and to act (Kingdon, 1984).

The unrelated streams

The unrelated streams in Northville were problems of the educational system stemming from the economic and legitimation crises of the state, which caused the impoverishment and poor functioning of the city. The solution (the holistic project) provided the principals with experts (both pedagogical and

management consultants), and the principals, who applied their organizational skills and realized their transformative potential, acted as entrepreneurs by mobilizing the project (solution) for their needs.

The problems. These came from several sources, as follows:

- *Resource allocation.* Schools had three problems with the municipality. The first was shortage of money due to the city's economic situation. Second, money that the Ministry of Education transferred to schools through the municipality, as a practice of autonomy, "got stuck" in the municipality and did not reach them, because the municipality used it to pay debts (a practice common in some other places too). The Ministry likewise transferred money for immigrant students through the municipality, but none of the schools received it for three years. This was also the case with money for renovations and school maintenance. Third, the principals did not know how much money was at their disposal in the municipality because they were not informed of the cost of the (little) maintenance work carried out at their schools.

Principals would write to the municipality and try to settle matters independently with them, or with the District Superintendent of the Ministry of Education, but to no avail; they were ignored or not taken seriously.

- *Principals' isolation.* Principals worked in isolation in their schools, a condition that is as distressing as teacher isolation (Lorti, 1975): "it did not occur to us that we could work together". The reason was competition among the Jewish schools because of the decreasing number of students due to demographic changes, which elicited the feeling that "there was hostility, and we worked in splendid isolation". Isolation was viewed by the principals as resulting in a sense of helplessness; research also sees isolation as a factor causing stress and burnout (Allison, 1997).
- *Problems stemming from national policy.* Formerly, Northville had "development A" status, which was given to communities needing special material incentives. Such were communities with low SES, border communities that suffered material losses because of shelling from neighboring countries (especially on the Lebanese border), or communities in the occupied territories. "Development A" status entitled the communities to higher resource allocation from the government than regular communities. In 1996 the government revoked Northville's special status while maintaining the status for the more affluent neighboring cities. This, together with the departure of the well-to-do Jewish population and the entry of poor immigrants, combined with waste and inefficiency of the municipality, almost paralyzed the city financially.

The solution. In 1994 the holistic project was started in Northville as part of the "36-community project" (Gordon, 1996). It incorporated already existing pedagogical projects, such as cooperative learning, and it brought to the city

human resources, such as organizational and pedagogical experts, and funding to computerize the educational system. A private consulting company was hired by the Ministry of Education to administer the project, and the pedagogical experts from the University of Haifa, who had worked in the city, joined the project. The consultants were hired to train the principals in professional skills, but they responded favorably to the principals' request to train them in political activity, although they were aware that this exceeded the terms of their appointment. The consultants in fact redefined their job and trained the principals in political organization.

The entrepreneur. The principals themselves turned the project into a window of opportunity (Kingdon, 1984) by organizing. Their ability to organize was facilitated by two elements. One was the long tradition of meetings of elementary school principals. They had met with their superintendent periodically to deal with specific pedagogical problems; they had held meetings with the local representative of the national Teachers' Union to discuss matters of collective bargaining; they had also met through the existing in-service of the cooperative-learning project, which brought together teachers and principals of the elementary schools and introduced the notion of cross-school collaboration. An organization of principals of state elementary schools had existed previously.

The other facilitating element was their ability to find allies. The principals found two powerful allies in the city who shared the same interest. One was the Parents' Association (PA), which was militant and well organized. In fact, the PA was one of the initiators of the general strike of the residents of Northville, which included the closure of schools. Parents frequently close down schools (Elboim-Dror, 1985) because it is illegal for principals and teachers to do so. However, sometimes parents act on behalf of principals. In the course of the holistic project the PA became a powerful body, expressed in its ability to collect money to buy air conditioners for the classrooms, with a demand from the municipality for a matching sum.

The second ally was the director of education on the city council (a political appointee), who was highly committed to education. He sought to increase his political power by collaboration with the forum to get a larger budget. "I looked for strong support in my fight against the authorities", as he put it. He supported the forum throughout their struggle, and in his letter to the mayor, dated 1 April 1997 he wrote:

I regard with great severity the contempt and disrespect shown to the principals . . . if the funds are not transferred to them by Passover vacation, I will bring up the subject for discussion in the City Council and will act in every way possible. This will ultimately damage the image of the city, which I do not wish to do.

The evolution of the principals' forum

First stage: the establishment of the forum

In-service training. All the principals assembled for the first time to learn time management, skills to handle student violence, strategic thinking, and teamwork. In the course of the eight months, they came to realize that they did

not need this kind of training as most of them had been trained at the university. They also realized that suspicion and hostility decreased as they got to know each other and worked together: "We saw that we could make contact [with the Arabs and the state-religious schools] to establish a forum." They realized that:

... our problems of passage from kindergarten to school, and from elementary school to junior high are common, the curriculum is similar, students' required standards are the same.

Awareness. This happened during the first stage of the eight months of meetings. Through their discussions they realized that the system was oppressive to all of them, and "we realized that if we share the same problems, we need to take care of them together and thus assume power". Thus the gathering, which was intended to improve their rational-professional function as principals, was an opportunity for consciousness raising and it led to their awareness that their "professional" problems were actually problems of a system that made them feel helpless, hence the need they felt to change their reality (Fay, 1987). They also cooperated pedagogically and started to organize "model lessons" of the new teaching methods, to which they invited each other. This "open house" practice was rare at that stage, but the readiness to share information and to consult with each other grew in the course of the holistic project (Hertz-Lazarowitz and Shaedell, 1996).

Training by the consultant. The principals asked the consultant to train them in leading the forum and to help them get organized. They decided not to tackle the serious political and ideological problems of the city and to focus on issues of consensus (Schonberg, 1997), such as money allocation.

Establishment of the forum and the statement of the goals. "We saw that we could join [Jewish with Arab schools] to establish a forum." They created a large forum of all the 21 principals in the town. That forum appointed a smaller group or "core" forum, of eight members, to meet regularly and to lead, and then elected a chairperson. This was done to facilitate the decision-making process and to make work more efficient. One of the first suggestions was "to bypass the difficulty of the helplessness of the Director of Education [in the municipality, a professional appointment] in representing us" (minutes of forum meeting, 16 November 1994). They also decided on a course of action: "To check the issues that are on the agenda in the city council and to send representatives to be present when education-related issues are raised" (minutes of core forum meeting, 20 October 1996). Simultaneously they started to cooperate with the director of education on the city council [a political appointee] and with the Parents' Association.

Through their study meetings in the project, the principals coalesced as a group with its own identity (Deutsch, 1973). They became aware of their need to act as a lobby of the educational system and to deal with outside factors.

The forum still exists and meets regularly, with some principals more active than others. It discusses topics the principals raise, such as their pedagogical work at school and cross-school cooperation, student violence and discipline, security, and equipment for schools. The forum also deals with a wide range of

education-related activities, such as mediating in disputes between principals and their relations with other organizations in and outside the city.

In sum, the unrelated streams, such as the problems of the principals (and the entire city), the solution offered to them by the holistic project, their ability to act as entrepreneurs, that is, to think in holistic terms, their ability to organize and ally with other organizations – all converged into a window of opportunity for the principals.

Stage two: the forum as an interest group

After becoming a forum and gaining recognition as such, the principals saw the need to act as a public educational body like those which existed in other local communities but not in Northville. They formed a private interest group (PIG) in the second and third years of the project (1995/1997). The definition of interest groups is problematic; nevertheless, they are “organizations ... or groups of people ... separate from government ... who share a common interest, which attempt to influence public policy [and] provide the institutionalized linkage between government or the state and major sectors in society” (Wilson, 1990, p. 1). The principals formed as an interest group on the basis of a single issue, namely to influence the policy of unjust resource allocation. They started to work with the city-wide PA, which was powerful at that time, and even threatened the mayor: “If the matter [municipality’s debts to schools] is not resolved, the forum will convene with the Parents’ Association and will decide on taking appropriate measures” (minutes of forum meeting with the mayor, 31 December 1996).

They acquired recognition as a group from other organizations, as evinced in correspondence with the Ministry of Education. Letters concerning general matters of the city were addressed to the forum and not to individual principals (except for correspondence on specific issues regarding specific schools), phrased as “the forum requests” or “the forum demands” (letter from the superintendent of the northern district of the Ministry of Education to the forum chairperson, 26 December 1996).

The principals saw their greatest achievements as an interest group in:

- *Collecting debts.* Under pressure of the forum the municipality paid the arrears it owed the schools (especially to the elementary schools) that had accumulated over eight years.
- *Information.* Following the establishment of the forum, schools obtained information about their financial situation from the municipality for the first time. They could now plan maintenance and renovation work, and the municipality could not refuse their demands by saying that there was no money left.
- *Support of schools.* The forum backed individual schools with their unique problems. It supported the principal of the Arab high school in his strike (organized by parents). The forum also agreed to transfer a special budget to that school as an affirmative-action practice. In

another case, the municipality placed a caravan of an independent ultra-orthodox Jewish school in the yard of a public Jewish elementary school, thus establishing a school inside a school. The principals' forum publicly supported the principal of the public school in his lawsuit against the municipality, and a compromise was reached. The Ministry of Education also transferred money to some, but not all, schools for the extended school day project. The forum refused to implement the project until all schools received the same resources for it, and the Ministry complied.

- *Mediating between disputing principals.* One school principal published a severe criticism of another principal in the local newspaper. The critique had personal undertones, and the core forum decided in its meeting "to summon A to the forum, and she will publish an apology in the newspaper. If she does not, the forum will take the necessary measures" (minutes of core forum meeting, 16 November, 1996).
- *The big strike.* A strike of the entire city took place at the beginning of September 1997. It was organized and led by the city's Parents' Association and businessmen. The reason was the government's decision to revoke the city's "development A" status, while the status was maintained for wealthier communities nearby. The principals joined the strike privately, because they were not allowed to close their schools, but the PA consulted with them unofficially. The strike included blocking the roads leading to the city, demonstrations outside government offices and the Knesset in Jerusalem, and the closing down of schools by the parents. When the government finally restored Northville's "development A" status, the principals demanded that the municipality complete all maintenance work before they opened the schools, and the municipality complied.

The forum became a powerful group. This was manifest in the sense of empowerment it gave its members. Since the establishment of the forum as an interest group, when government officials, politicians, and businessmen came to Northville to discuss its development, the principals were invited too; sometimes they voiced their problems and criticized the mayor publicly.

In addition to the sense of cohesion and strength that the members had ("the municipality understood that a leadership of principals was formed which will not yield"), the forum also gave its Arab members a feeling of equality, as the principal of the Arab secondary school said:

I am proud to have true friends who understand my problems and address them. We did not have it before. Now everybody in town knows about the special problems of the Arab sector.

At that stage, education went onto the social agenda and public interest increased because of the publicity the forum got in the local newspapers when it achieved something. This power changed the principals' attitude to the municipality from one of helplessness, expressed in begging, to "we will bring

about the forfeiture of everything they have, their cars, their money – and they know it”.

The struggles of the forum made education the most important issue on the local political agenda. The overall principal of the (only) state-secular secondary school and the director of education on the city council were both candidates for mayor in the elections held in November 1998; the incumbent mayor did not run again. Both candidates declared that education would be their “baby”, and they would personally handle it instead of appointing someone else to the vacant post of director of education. The overall principal won the election and became the mayor. Some of the forum members were convinced that he had obtained his political training in the forum. He denied it, but he admitted that he decided to run following requests of the PA of his school. Considering that this is the only state-secular Jewish school in Northville and it has about 3,000 students, the PA accounts for a healthy share of the city’s voters. Whatever the reasons may be, it is significant that the sole candidates were both from the educational system. Today, the new mayor works in cooperation with the steering committee and the principals’ forum.

Political power
of school
principals

223

Stage three: a community avant-garde

This stage of the forum lasted from 1997 until the end of the project in 1999. The holistic project was limited in function in school year 1998/1999, but the forum remained strong and active. It survived a large-scale turnover of principals due to the retirement of several of them in the city and the entry of younger new ones (most of them were women).

At this stage the forum changed from a reactive group, namely reacting to reality by demanding that unjust practices be stopped, to a proactive group. With other groups, it sought to create a different reality by transforming the city. The forum belonged to the city steering committee together with Project Renewal (renewal of low-SES neighborhoods) and the city-wide Parents’ Association. Organizationally it was (and still is) a voluntary organization, and the level of participation and commitment varied among the members, but the active ones were aiming for a more formal organization which could impose sanctions on non-compliant principals.

The forum evolved from a single-issue interest group, demanding proper resource allocation in education, into a multiple-issue group that presented demands regarding several issues in education as well as in different aspects of life in Northville. In education this was evident in the forum’s interest in the project of curricular continuity from kindergarten to the end of high school, which was taking shape in 1998.

Another interest was to change from the current money allocation policy, which allocated money to each school separately, to the creation of a central pool from which money would be allocated to schools according to their needs from a systemic viewpoint, a method whereby principals would concede money for their own school in favor of another. The first step was taken when the principals agreed to transfer an additional sum to the Arab high school at the expense of their own schools to rectify the unjust allocation policy of previous

years; further steps have been taken since then towards the pooling of resources for additional activities. This meant changing the definition of the system from one of individual schools to a school-community, which included the entire educational system.

The principals also reflected on ways to revitalize the city. One idea in this direction was to establish a sense of community, or "local patriotism" and commitment to the place by establishing rituals, such as joint commemorative ceremonies and celebrations on Independence Day, Holocaust Memorial Day, the summer festival, and so on. There is also talk of establishing a city university by enlarging the local branch of an outside university, which operates in the city college. It is also believed that people will move to Northville if they are offered a piece of land on which they can build a house, which is the dream of the middle class Israeli (most Israelis live in condos). It is hoped that this will prevent the local youth from moving to affluent neighboring cities and will attract a wealthy population. The director of education on the city council (who since left office as a result of the elections) believed in the importance of the forum: "The forum should win the status of an independent body which will deal with the quality of life in the city and the development of non-formal systems. No issue should be beyond its reach."

So far, the forum has successfully acted in matters of consensus, and has started to touch controversial issues, such as the crucial ideological-political issue of Jewish-Arab cooperation, but it has not dealt with the need to close Jewish schools and hand them over to the Arabs. Some members explained this by the fact that they have not yet overcome their common "enemy" and therefore they cannot open another front. Others say that it is not up to the forum to solve problems of this scope. The fact is that this situation is an impediment to the creation of sense of community.

In sum, the principals changed from being heads of a fragmented system of individual schools, which operated separately and were hostile to each other, to leading a new system of a forum comprising all the schools. Then they became part of a larger and more powerful system, that of the steering committee. Together they acquired power and began to lead and revitalize the city; they replaced the old local political leadership, thus changing the power structure of the city and its social agenda.

The change in the principals' perception of their role can be explained in the nature of their work and the nature of their organization. As said earlier, they are trained to conform, but they can use their training and circumstances of work to redefine it, as will be elucidated in the discussion.

Discussion

The circumstances that led to the establishment and evolution of the principals' forum may be explained by the nature of their work and their training.

The organizational aspect

The ability of school principals to organize easily can be explained by mobilization theory. This theory concerns "the way people with little personal

power object collectively or challenge institutional and organized groups that have a vested interest in keeping the status quo" (Oberschall, 1973, p. 102). Oberschall suggests that mobilization of a protest movement arises from several sources. One is the degree of dependence of the group on the organization against which it acts. Groups that are dependent on the organization or that belong to it will encounter difficulty mobilizing leaders and activists because of the risks involved, such as losing jobs. School principals in Israel depend partly on the local community in which they operate and partly on the state (the Ministry of Education), so they will tend to mobilize for a struggle against their local authority.

A second source of ability to mobilize pertains to the education of the activists. Professionals will be more likely to initiate and act in a protest movement because of their training and the organizational skills they have received as part of their education. School principals necessarily possess organizational skills because of the very nature of their work.

In addition, outside assistance is essential, at least at the beginning. The success of the protest movement also depends on the location of the community. The farther it is from the center and the more ramified relations within the community are, the easier will it be for the opposition/protest movement to organize. The principals in Northville seized the opportunity of the outside assistance offered to them by the holistic project to get organized.

The morality aspect

School leaders are distinct from other organizational leaders in that they operate in an ideological system. The state presents educational problems, such as inequality, as rational-technical issues that can be solved professionally by educational technocrats (Habermas, 1975). Therefore school administration is perceived as an objective science (Greenfield, 1985); this is manifest in the practice-based and organization-oriented training that school principals receive. In certain circumstances, such as outside intervention or continuous crises, principals and teachers experience "liberating memories" (Giroux, 1988). A liberating memory is the "recognition of those instances of public and private suffering" (Giroux, 1998, p. xxxiv), and recognition of power as a positive force that can produce alternative solutions. Principals and teachers then understand that education is a social and political matter as it is part of the state legitimation apparatus. Once they realize this, they cease to be "professionals" and become "transformative leaders", that is, people "who can express emancipatory possibilities and work towards their realization" (Giroux and McLaren, 1986, p. 215).

As transformative intellectuals they assume the role of social leaders. They reveal that schools are aimed at perpetuating the social and political arrangements they are part of, which are built on power. Principals and teachers can act against injustice and oppression and transform these social relations. By doing so they empower and emancipate themselves and their community (Giroux, 1985).

In sum, crises of the state, manifested in its inability to provide adequate social services, cause the state to grant autonomy to local communities and to individual schools. This imposes additional roles and difficulties on principals (Eden, 1998), creates tensions and internal contradictions within the system, and brings about the collapse of some communities. This situation makes the principals helpless and frustrated. But the unique characteristics of school leadership might cause principals to assume new roles. These characteristics consist of principals' ability to organize into social movements, to reveal the political nature of the educational system, and to act against its injustice; the potential for empowerment lies here.

Conclusions

The holistic project was implemented in Northville for one purpose, namely professional growth. The principals saw it as an opportunity to become organized, to establish a forum, and to advance their own purposes, these being to achieve political power in order to generate social change in the city. In so doing, they changed from professional leaders with rational-technical skills to transformative avantgarde intellectuals for the community.

Several factors led to this direction. The first was the crises of the country that led to a government policy to promote autonomy in education. The autonomy was manifest in the devolution of responsibility and funds for social services to the local communities, while the budget for these services was cut, and it had two consequences. One was a crisis of the local communities and sometimes a power vacuum because of their dysfunction, mainly the poorer ones.

The second factor was internal contradiction, manifest in the need of the Ministry of Education to grant autonomy while at the same time keeping control. This caused the principals anger and frustration as dependence on the state was replaced by dependence on local community officials; it imposed additional duties on them, such as attracting students and initiating changes in a period of budget cuts.

The ability of principals to organize and become a cohesive group that acted as an interest group can be explained by mobilization theory. The principals could assume power and achieve their goals due to their skills and education and due to the political nature of their work, which they became aware of during their prolonged suffering. This was accompanied by an outside intervention, namely the holistic project, which aimed simultaneously at empowering the local educational system and restoring legitimacy of the citizens in the state (Owens, 1996), and at controlling the system. When the project was implemented, the principals acted as entrepreneurs, and opened a window of opportunity. The forum was the most active of all the bodies established in the city by the project because of the education of the principals, their leadership skills, and their partial dependence on the municipality against which they acted.

In the process, the members became aware of the political nature of their work, as a result of which each changed his or her view from "narrow egoism" of commitment to his or her own school, sometimes competing with each other and thus becoming weak, to a "wide [holistic] outlook" of commitment to the entire educational system. By cooperating for the first time they brought the whole system under their aegis, and thus accumulated power. For the first time they could act according to their belief that "if there is no progress in education, there is no progress and prosperity in the city". In this way they redefined their role and degree of commitment and loyalty.

The principals gathered to create a professional body with the intention of improving their function under state control. Dialectically, they turned this threat into a challenge, and evolved from a body aiming to improve its professional-objective performance to transformative intellectuals who understand that their work was not pedagogical only, but was dependent on a wider social context. Thus, it required their acting as a local political leadership aimed at improving the entire community. They showed that from a system in deep crisis and of low esteem, blamed for the ills of society and for the poor academic achievements of students, principals could come forward, assume leadership, and transform not only the educational system but the entire community, thus changing patterns of relations between bodies within the educational system and systems in society.

The principals in Northville showed that educators can free themselves from the technical-objective thinking that is conferred to them by the state in their training, and view education as a political matter related to the power structure of society. But their liberation is not complete. It will be so when the relationship achieves moves beyond functional cooperation and is transformed. In the new relationship all people should be emancipated from cultural and national boundaries that caused hostility among them, and should be treated as part of the community and not as "others" with whom the community is obliged to cooperate to save the city. Power is a requisite for social change, but emancipation means a different view of human relations, which the forum has yet to attain.

References

- Allison, D.G. (1997), "Assessing stress among public school principals in British Columbia", *Psychological Reports*, Vol. 80 (3pt.2), pp. 1103-14.
- Ball, S. (1993), "Culture, cost and control: self-management and entrepreneurial schooling in England and", in Smyth, J. (Ed.), *A Socially Critical View of the Self-Managing School*, The Falmer Press, London, pp. 50-63.
- Chen, M., Addi-Racah, A. and Inbar, N. (1998), "Academic degrees versus a professional certificate in educational administration: a comparative follow up", *Studies in Educational Administration*, Vol. 22, pp. 5-33 (Hebrew).
- Cohen, M.D., March, J.G. and Olsen, J.P. (1972), "A garbage can model of organizational choice", *Administrative Science Quarterly*, Vol. 17, pp. 1-25.
- Cooper, B.S. and Boyd, W.L. (1987), "The evolution of training for school administration", in Murphy, J. and Hallinger, P. (Eds), *Approaches to Administrative Training in Education*,

- State University of New York, Albany, NY, pp. 3-27. Cited in Chen, M., Addi-Raccach, A. and Inbar, N. (1998), "Academic degrees versus a professional certificate in educational administration. A comparative follow up", *Studies in Educational Administration*, Vol. 22, pp. 5-33 (Hebrew).
- Deutsch, M. (1973), *The Resolution of Conflict*, Yale University Press, New Haven, CT.
- Eden, D. (1998), "The paradox of school leadership", *Journal of Educational Administration*, Vol. 36 No. 3, pp. 249-61.
- Eden, D. (2001), "Who evaluates teachers work? Overt and covert control in schools", *Educational Management & Administration*, Vol. 29 No. 1, January, pp. 97-112.
- Elboim-Dror, R. (1981), "Conflict and consensus in educational policy making", *International Journal of Political Education*, Vol. 4, pp. 219-32.
- Elboim-Dror, R. (1985), "Educational policy making in Israel", in Ackerman, W. and Carmon, A. (Eds), *Education in an Evolving Society*, Hakibbutz Hameuhad, Tel Aviv, pp. 52-116 (Hebrew).
- Fay, B. (1987), *Critical Social Science*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, NY.
- Foster, W. (1986), *Paradigms and Promises: New Approaches to Educational Administration*, Prometheus Books, Buffalo, NY.
- Friedman, I., Meged, H. and Sadan, T. (1997), *The Training of School Principals. Survey Results*, The Szold Institute, Jerusalem (Hebrew).
- Fuchs, I. (1998), *Change – A Way of Life in Schools*, Cherikover, Tel Aviv (Hebrew).
- Giroux, H. (1985), "Teachers as transformative intellectuals", *Social Education*, Vol. 49 No. 5, May, pp. 376-9.
- Giroux, H. (1988), *Teachers as Intellectuals*, Bergin & Garvey, New York, NY.
- Giroux, H. and McLaren, P. (1986), "Teacher education and the politics of engagement: the case for democratic schooling", *Harvard Educational Review*, Vol. 5 No. 3, August, pp. 213-38.
- Glaser, B. and Strauss, A.L. (1967), *The Discovery of Grounded Theory*, Aldine, Chicago, IL.
- Globman, R. and Iram, I. (Eds) (in press), *The Development of Teaching in Israel*, Ramot – Tel Aviv University Press, Tel Aviv.
- Gordon, D. (1996), *Restructuring and Holism as Principles of Systemic Change: The Case of the 36-Community Project in Israel*, Ministry of Education, Culture and Sports, Jerusalem (Hebrew).
- Greenfield, T.B. (1985), "Theories of educational organization: a critical perspective", in Husen T. and Postlethwaite, T.N. (Eds), *International Encyclopedia of Education*, Vol. 9, pp. 5240-59.
- Habermas, J. (1975), *Legitimation Crisis*, Beacon Press, Boston, MA.
- Hertz-Lazarowitz, R. (1999), "Cooperative learning and group-investigation in Israel's Jewish-Arab schools: a community approach", *Theory Into Practice*, Vol. 38 No. 2, pp. 105-13.
- Hertz-Lazarowitz, R. and Calderon, E.M. (1994), "Implementing cooperative learning in the elementary schools: the facilitative voice for collaborative power", in Sharan, S. (Ed.), *Handbook of Cooperative Learning Methods*, Greenwood, New York, NY.
- Hertz-Lazarowitz, R. and Shaedell, B. (1996), "The impact of the 'literacy in cooperative learning' project on achievements in reading comprehension and writing", *Helkat Lashon*, Vol. 22, pp. 85-113 (Hebrew).
- Hertz-Lazarowitz, R. and Zelniker, T. (1995), "Cooperative learning in the Israeli context: historical, educational and cultural perspectives", *International Journal of Educational Research*, Vol. 23, pp. 267-85.
- Inbar, D. (1990), "Is autonomy possible in a centralized educational system?", in Friedman, Y. (Ed.), *Autonomy in Education*, Szold Institute, Jerusalem.

- Kingdon, J.W. (1984), *Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policies*, Little, Brown, Boston, MA.
- Lorti, D. (1975), *Schoolteacher*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, IL.
- Maariv Hayom* daily newspaper (1994), 21 March.
- North 1*, local weekly (1994), 11 November, 1 December, 23 December.
- Oberschall, A. (1973), *Social Conflict and Social Movements*, Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs, NJ.
- Owens, R.G. (1996), *Organizational Behavior in Education*, 5th ed., Allyn & Bacon, Boston, MA.
- Paldi, A. (Ed.) (1997), *Education in Israel Throughout the Years*, Teachers' Association for the Advancement of Teaching and Education, Tel Aviv & Ramot – Tel Aviv University Press, Tel Aviv (Hebrew).
- Roy, D. (1995), "Assessing the Asia Pacific 'power vacuum'", *Survival*, Vol. 37 No. 3, pp. 45-60.
- Schonberg, A. (1997), "What we are not talking about: some issues in the Principals' Forum in a mixed Arab-Jewish town", paper presented at the conference on *Holism in Education*, Mikveh Israel, 13 April.
- Shmuelli, E. (1986), "Introduction: the professional preparation of school principals", excerpts from a symposium held by the Center for Educational Administration and Evaluation, Winter, *Studies in Educational Administration*, Vol. 13, pp. 107-41 (Hebrew).
- State Comptroller (1992), *Annual Report, N. 42*, Office of the State Comptroller, Jerusalem (Hebrew).
- Weick, K. (1976), "Educational organizations as loosely coupled systems", *Administrative Science Quarterly*, Vol. 21, pp. 1-19.
- Wilson, G. (1990), *Interest Groups*, Basil Blackwell, Cambridge, MA.

Further reading

- Al-Haj, M. (1998), *Education Among the Arabs in Israel: Control and Change*, Magnes Press, Hebrew University and Floersheimer Institute for Policy Studies, Jerusalem.
- Al Hamishmar*, daily newspaper.
- Eden, D. and Hertz-Lazarowitz, R. (1998), *Models for Transitioning Students from Sixth Grade (Elementary) to Seventh Grade (Junior High) in [Northville]*, proposal submitted and discussed at the special workshop on schooling and transition, Acre.
- Inbar, D. (1986), "The training of school principals. The professional preparation of school principals", excerpts from a symposium held by the Center for Educational Administration and Evaluation, Winter, *Studies in Educational Administration*, Vol. 13, pp. 107-41 (Hebrew).
- Richardson, J.J. (1993), "Introduction", in Richardson, J.J. (Ed.), *Pressure Groups*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, pp. 1-19.