

# AUTONOMY IN SCHOOLS AND SELF-EFFICACY OF THEIR PRINCIPALS

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**Abstract:** *This research paper examines the impact of the decentralization of power in the Israeli education system on professional self-efficacy of school principals. A semi-structured interviews with five principals, has been used to gather information. The interviews consisted of two types of questions: theoretical and meaning. The study was conducted using a constructivist approach, which recognizes that people's knowledge of the world is shaped by their experiences. The goal of the research is to understand how increased autonomy has influenced the self-efficacy of school administrators and provide valuable insight into the broader effectiveness of the education reform in Israel. The findings of the study can inform future education reforms and promote a more responsive, effective, and personalized approach to education. Most of the respondents adopt a competitiveness-based management style and see themselves as pedagogical leaders. The organizational structure of the schools is hierarchical and the level of autonomy ranges from medium to high. The effect of self-management on the principals' personalities is mostly positive, increasing self-efficacy, professionalism, and accountability. The principals reported increased decision-making processes and budget management skills as a result of self-management. However, they do not feel external autonomy in relation to state organizations or as country-specific professionals.*

**Keywords:** *decentralization, professional self-efficacy, autonomy, education system, school managers, reform.*

The decentralization of power in the Israeli education system has brought about a profound change in the way schools are managed and operated. Before this reform, school administrators were confined by the Ministry of Education and district supervisors, limiting their autonomy and ability to make decisions. This resulted in a one-size-fits-all approach to education that failed to consider the unique needs of each school. With the delegation of

power, school administrators now have greater control over the day-to-day operations of their schools, including budgeting and decision-making, enabling them to better address the needs of their students, staff, and community. The recent increase in control and flexibility in education has resulted in a tailored and adjustable approach, leading to a more responsive and efficient educational experience<sup>1</sup>.

The concept of professional self-efficacy is critical in the role of a school principal<sup>2</sup>, as it reflects their belief in their own abilities to lead and manage their school effectively. A principal with high self-efficacy is more likely to be innovative, confident, and successful in their role, while a principal with low self-efficacy may struggle to effectively manage their school and may feel limited in their ability to make a positive impact<sup>3</sup>. The level of confidence and belief in one's own abilities as a school principal can be greatly influenced by the changes and decentralization of power brought about by education reform initiatives. This shift in decision-making power can have a profound impact on the sense of self-efficacy experienced by those leading educational institutions<sup>4</sup>.

This brief research paper will aim to examine the impact of the education reform on professional self-efficacy, providing valuable insight into how this reform has affected the operations of schools and the ability of principals to lead and manage their schools effectively. Understanding the impact of this reform on the self-efficacy of school administrators will provide important information for education policy makers and school leaders, enabling them to better understand the benefits and challenges of decentralizing power in the education system. Comprehending the ways in which increased autonomy has influenced this sense of self-efficacy will provide valuable insight into the broader effectiveness of the education reform in Israel.

Furthermore, the findings of this research can help to inform future education reforms and promote a more responsive, effective, and personalized approach to education. The transfer of power to school administrators is just one element of the comprehensive education reform underway in Israel, and many other factors also play a role in its success or failure. As someone who has held the position of principal during a period of centralized control by the educational district and Ministry, and then later in a time of increased independence and control over the financial resources, I have a personal understanding of how this shift can

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<sup>1</sup>Worgen, J. And Fieldman, a.(2009), Key Issues in the Israeli Education System, Research and Information Center, Knesset.

<sup>2</sup>Seberski S. (1990), Education in Israel - the district of the separate tracks, Brirot.

<sup>3</sup>Wollensky, A. (2004). International trends in education reforms - consequences and implications for Israel, according to the summary of a talk given at a seminar "Education Reform - the desire to change and chance to succeed," MOFET Institute

<sup>4</sup>Nir, A. (2001), The developmental aspects of self-managed schools. Hebrew University, Research Institute for Innovation in Education, Jerusalem

affect a principal's ability to successfully lead and oversee their school. The difference in decision-making power and control can have a significant impact on a principal's effectiveness in their role.

My current research endeavors to shed light on the impact of the self-management reform on the sense of self-efficacy among principals. The ability of a school leader to believe in their own competencies and capabilities is critical to driving positive change in the educational system.

I used a semi-structured interview as a research tool, for five principals in self-management schools, who agreed to be a part of the research. The interviews were conducted after a preliminary conversation with the participants in which the purpose and importance of the study was explained. The subjects expressed their consent to participate in the study. The interviews took place in the offices of the principals. Some of the questions were pre-defined and some developed flexibly during the interview. Each interview lasted between two and a half to three hours and before it began it was explained to the interviewees what its purpose was. It was emphasized that the interview is anonymous and is for research purposes only.

The interviews were recorded and rewritten afterwards. The interviewees who participated in the study agreed to conduct the interview and publish its findings and knew what they were being interviewed about.

The interview included questions of two types. 1- Theoretical questions: Targeted theories, in which the interviewees reconstruct the details in the context of a limited period or in the context of a specific experience or specific idea or opinion (for example: "Do you feel you are a pedagogical leader, enabling change, motivating staff, overcoming weakness and about failure? Or do these conditions make you feel more managerial than a leader? Can you interpret and give examples? ") Experience questions in which interviewees are asked to describe a past experience and contribute their personal experience (" How did self-management affect your personality? What can you say about your self-management at home? " Your book versus the world that preceded it? ") Questions that invite examples, which are questions that relate to a specific action or event and seek to expand through examples (for example: "Have you encountered problems due to your school entering self-management? Give examples. ").

2. Meaning questions: This type of question is based on descriptions that are asked to clarify or explain the meanings and logic behind the descriptions of the interviewees, (for example: "Do you think that self-management increases your professional ability? Can you

explain why? Do you think that "Self-management expands the school's connections with its external environment? Can it be explained how?"

The examination of the research questions was also done in the constructivist approach that belongs to the field of qualitative research according to which the construction of people's knowledge of the world is done according to the total experiences they have accumulated during their lives. According to the approach phenomena can only be understood by those who experience them, and therefore the interpretation given to social and practical cultural phenomena is subjective, context-dependent, and relative to the worldview in which it is constructed. As a researcher in this research tool, I have gathered the information in the natural environment that I research. The categories that construct the data analysis are thus constructed when collecting the data without the constraint of hypotheses and early insights.

According to the constructive approach stories are a significant component with the help of which people organize their perceptions, construct narrative structures that shape experience and produce interpretation, through which they understand the world. The stories that a person tells about his life serve not only as a tool to describe reality, but also as a means to change it. Life stories are an important and authentic research tool that allow quality researchers to open a window to the whole culture and through them the whole culture can be understood. In this way phenomena can be understood in the way they are experienced by those who have experienced them authentically and broadly <sup>5</sup>.

One of the important paradigms in qualitative research is phenomenology, which seeks to examine the essence of human experience by examining the phenomenon or event as they are experienced by the subject. Phenomenological research seeks to reduce the subjects' experience to essence, while focusing on understanding the meanings of the research objects by the participants themselves. According to the phenomenological approach the individual and his world are understood together and constitute one essence, and therefore the experience of the individual cannot be detached from the cultural context. As a researcher in qualitative research, I am interested in examining the phenomenological presence of the object of research as part of the cultural context and social environment. The reality of the subject of the study is therefore perceived only from the meaning of the experience of the sole director.

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<sup>5</sup>Shkedi, A. (2003). *Words That Try to Touch: Qualitative Research—Theory and Application*. Tel-Aviv: Ramot. (In Hebrew)

Table1: Summary of Interview Findings with Managers (N, H, O, M, A) Self-managed.

Item / Manager	Najib	Hala	Omar	Miriam	Aya
management style	Trust in the team Aimed at the task sometimes delegating linear gaze powers Emphasis on efficiency	Delegating authority and coaching on a team, mission-oriented, accuracy and partnership are the foundation of success.	sharing Trust in the team Emphasis on the rule	Incomplete delegation of powers Close supervision and control of officials Dedication of the task	Dispersal and delegation of powers Supervision of teamwork Mission-oriented
School vision	Fundamentals of the vision: meaningful, exploratory and technological learning, education for values and achievement excellence, inclusion, sharing, community involvement and contribution to the community.	The school emphasizes the pedagogical endeavor that leads the child to develop into an adult in society, who thinks independently, is interested and considerate of another and contributes to the community and environment in which he or she lives.	Cultivating the student's personality to be a happy and mature person for the life of the future, a thinking, sensitive, curious, tolerant, responsible person, loyal to his country and the values of his people, has contributed and contributes to his environment.	Fundamentals of the vision: addressing the special needs of students, strengthening and deepening the sense of belonging, imparting bodies of knowledge for self-learning, strengthening the connection and partnership with the community.	The school promotes pedagogy based on a green conception, in the pursuit of academic and value-social excellence in a playful and exploratory way in an extracurricular and e-learning environment. And assimilates optimal pedagogical discourse as a way of life.
Organizational Structure	Director → Vice → Leading teachers Professional coordinators → General teachers	Leading principal and staff at the same level and below them functionaries (vocational coordinators, educators and teachers).	A pyramid headed by the principal under a pedagogical coordinator and deputy and below them all the professional and educating coordinators.	Pyramid: The principal at the top of the pyramid is below the deputy, below it are coordinators, below them are educators and all the teachers.	Three adjacent circles: an upper circle contains a principal and deputy and a consultant, a circle on the right contains a pedagogical coordinator and an assessment coordinator and an ICT coordinator, and a circle on the left contains a leading team (subject coordinators).

Pedagogical leadership	Promoting educational, achievement goals. Full implementation of a work plan built according to the objectives of the Ministry of Education and the needs of the school.	Promoting social and educational and learning goals according to the needs of the school. Leading changes and motivating staff.	Promoting educational goals And competitive goals, promoting mental well-being as a condition for success Emphasis on the rule versus the individual. Leading change and motivating staff.	Sanctification of the value of knowledge and self-learning, promotion of achievement goals at the expense of the individual, binding in the directives of the Ministry of Education. Leading changes.	Sanctifying the value of belonging, emphasizing education over achievement, motivating staff, emphasizing value achievement and prioritizing it over academic achievement.
Perception of the role of the manager	Agent for change, (conservation, improvement and change), entrepreneurship, partnership.	Leading change, activating control processes, sharing responsibilities with partners.	Challenging role, life enterprise, requires seriousness and responsibility.	Adherence to goals, harnessing the team to achieve goals.	Making a difference, having partners in the job, values that precede achievement personal example.
The level of autonomy he felt at school compared to the pre-self-management era	High in decision making and financial resource management	High in decision making and financial resource management	Very high in financial resource management	Very high in financial resource management	Medium to high
The effect of self-management on personality	Focuses and teaches how to save and also choose quality things, makes me autonomous, authoritative and rigid.	Empowers, places the manager in the right place towards others, broadens horizons, contributes to the professional ability of the manager and increases responsibility.	Encourages, pushes, gives strength and professional ability to make decisions and promote things, focuses, grows, teaches financial management and increases the degree of freedom	Increases professional ability, teaches financial management, increases responsibility for achievements.	Encourages, teaches, strengthens, leads to daring in decision-making and execution, increases professional ability, expansion of authority leads to increased commitment to achievement.
The impact of self-management on the school	Opportunity for the introduction of quality pedagogical programs, increasing financial resources in the school, accurate calculation of each step before its implementation.	Allows for the employment of new staff, allows for long-term equipping, increases the school budget.	Opportunity to add resources and introduce projects that support and cultivate leadership among students and teachers through professional	Adds resources within the school and creates a supportive environment for self-learning.	A source of regular financial resources and leads to stability in building especially external programs, contributes to

			development		an optimal educational climate within the school
The impact of self-management on extracurricular relationships	Familiarity with various suppliers that contribute to the dynamics of the school	Provides an opportunity to be a leader outside of school, at the locality or area level.	Establishes new connections with academia, community, non-experts from the Ministry of Education. Long time utilization of external resources	Strengthening out-of-school relationships such as, municipality, community, and local parent committee.	Building a network of professionals is available and safe, building strong ties with the school community.
Challenges in self-management	Loads, increases the responsibility	Requires efforts for cultural change, stressful, time consuming and effort finding suppliers.	Burdensome for my work as a manager	Loads, increases the responsibility	Requires a new and unfamiliar organization, maintaining school autonomy in the face of supervision.

The interviews were analyzed to understand from the respondents' statements their position regarding the autonomy they experience as a result of self-management and its effect on their professional ability.

### **Summary of findings and discussion**

The findings show that:

1. Most of the respondents (four out of five) adopted a management style that emphasizes competitiveness and achievement when most of them were marked as task oriented. The management style communicates the term "leadership", which has many meanings and definitions. Some define a leader as one who connects group goals and is the focus of group processes<sup>6</sup>. From the personality aspect a leader is identified as consisting of a combination of certain character traits that allow him to get other people to perform different tasks. In the behavioral aspect, leadership is the total actions that the leader of the organization takes to bring about change in his group. Some scholars define leadership in terms of power relations between leaders and their subordinates. From this point of view leaders are the ones who use the power to bring about change in others. Other scholars see leadership as a process of change that causes subordinates to perform more than would normally be expected of them. In the talent aspect there are researchers who see leadership as

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<sup>6</sup>Guy, P. (2009) Leadership, Theory and Practice. Los Angeles: Sagepublishing.

a combination of skills that produces effective leadership. It can be said that the overall definition of leadership has four components: it is formed during a process, it involves influence over the other, it exists in a group and its interest is common goals <sup>7</sup>.

All principals see themselves as pedagogical leaders for various reasons: promoting academic, social, competitive and achievement goals and some even promoting value goals. They implement work programs related to the needs of the schools and related to the goals of the Ministry of Education. They feel that there is an ability to make changes and motivate teams and even activate control and evaluation mechanisms for various processes.

2. At least two of the five principals interviewed repeated the same elements in the school vision they had stated. The elements in the vision are emphasizing exploratory learning, sanctifying education for values, prioritizing education for excellence, pushing for achievement, inclusion, sharing, encouraging social involvement, assimilating a contribution to the community and nurturing an adult in his or her society. Some talked about the method of achieving the vision within the vision itself and some described the methods in their own story.

3. The organizational structure, is defined as the set of roles and units in the school and the network of pipelines in which communication takes place between them. The organizational structure of the school is based on five principles: division of labor, hierarchical structure, delegation of powers and responsibilities and a range of control and supervision over everything that is done.

All principals spoke of a hierarchical organizational structure, despite the differences between them in the levels of delegation of authority, areas of responsibility, and the ranges of control given within the schools and despite the degree of autonomy they felt within their organization.

4. According to Fullan, Leithwood & Riehl, schools and principals operate in a changing, unstable reality which leads to diversity and overload in the tasks assigned to the principal <sup>8</sup>. In the roles of principal one can mention for example organizational development of the school, Designing the future picture of the school and building a vision, managing decision-making processes, systematic and systematic planning, optimal climate design, managing a curriculum, building a system of hours, managing a professional development system of teaching staff, human resource management including teaching staff and

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<sup>7</sup>Guy, P. (2009) Leadership, Theory and Practice. Los Angeles: Sage publishing.

<sup>8</sup>Fullan, M.(2001), Leading in a culture of change. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass; Leithwood, K., & Riehl, C. (2003), What do we already know about successful school leadership? Report prepared for AERA.



administrative staff, management Relationships with the school community, management of the evaluation system for teacher and student performance and in the age of self-management the principal is responsible for managing various resources and finally improving students' achievements<sup>9</sup>.

The interviewed managers perceive their role according to the literature but described their perception in various descriptions that amounted to leading change and entrepreneurship, running control processes over all moves in their organizations, sticking to goals and making decisions to execute, express partnership and be part of the team while harnessing tasks. (Responsibility, seriousness, values, etc.) from being a personal example to his subordinates.

5. I examined among the interviewees the degree of autonomy they feel within their organizations as a result of self-management and in comparison, with the era that preceded it. It became clear that the level of autonomy relative to the previous era ranged from medium to very high. Some respondents indicated a non-uniform level of autonomy in all school components, for example: two out of five principals indicated an increased autonomy in financial resource management but reported low autonomy in personnel management, including administrative staff and teaching staff. In contrast, two managers reported increased autonomy in decision-making processes and financial resource management and at the same time ignored human resource management autonomy. One of the principals described the level of autonomy she felt at a moderate to high level in all the components that are part of her responsibility in running her school. She noted that with the advent of self-management she looked forward to the opportunity of managing the human resource along with managing the financial resource. Today it experiences increased autonomy in decision-making and moderate autonomy in financial resource management and zero in human resource management. Everything the principals said reinforces Berka's statement<sup>10</sup> that principals do not feel the external autonomy of their schools in relation to state organizations, nor do they feel their external autonomy as country-specific professionals, they only feel internal autonomy Partly within the schools they head.

6. The interviewees were asked what the effect of self-management is, which results in autonomy in school management, on their personality and they reported a lot of mostly positive effects. Four principals have reported increasing self-efficacy and professionalism and increasing accountability and commitment to achievement among themselves, as

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<sup>9</sup>Gaziel, I. (2008), Public educational system improvement by charter schools, research no. 8, Milken Institute; Adler, P.A., & Kwon, S. W. (2002), Social capital: Prospects for a new concept. *Academy of Management Review*, 27(1), pages:17-40

<sup>10</sup>Levačić, R. (2005), Decentralizing and centralizing: The tensions between school autonomy and central government education policy initiatives in England 1988-2004. *Education Finance and Decentralization*, World Bank Conference, Washington, pages: 13-14.

decentralization patterns in school management increase decision-making processes. This confirms Wolanski's <sup>11</sup> (2003) claim that pedagogical autonomy evolved from the fact that centralized patterns in school management slow down decision-making processes, two principals reported focusing on their actions following self-management, and two stated that self-management taught them ways to save and even budget management, two principals Talk about the audacity they have gained following self-management in making decisions regarding various moves and roles in schools in particular and in their lives in general, two principals have described self-management as a lever that encourages them and makes them continue on their path. Moreover, at least one manager reported empowerment, a sense of autonomy, a talent for choosing quality things, broadening horizons, pushing, accumulating power to advance issues, increasing the degrees of freedom, strengthening and providing value to the status of the manager. In light of what was collected from principals' reports on the question of the effect of self-management on principals' personalities, it can be found that the feeling of autonomy resulting from school self-management leads to assimilation of elements in principals' personalities leading to increased professional self-efficacy.

7. Regarding the examination of the effect of self-management in schools on the school itself and on the components within and outside it, the principals were identical in their words. They talked about the impact of self-management on teachers and its impact on students. On the other hand, all the principals agreed among themselves that self-management increases the financial resource in the school and thus it provides such a great opportunity for the introduction of quality pedagogical programs of all kinds. Two principals talked about pedagogical programs that foster leadership among students and teachers, moreover, one principal directed the financial resource to providing professional development designed for teachers and fostering leadership among them. From the principals' reports, their reference to self-management stood out as a resource that contributes to them in the development of the schools visually, physically, pedagogically and climatically (educational climate). The principals' words reinforce that giving autonomy and authority to the school that underlies the educational concept of self-management, expressed in the transfer of resources to them <sup>12</sup>, will contribute to improving educational achievement and climate, for a number of key reasons: the school will better identify local needs. ; Greater autonomy will increase the motivation of those involved; The pooling of resources and budgetary autonomy will enable

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<sup>11</sup>Wollensky, A. (2004), International trends in education reforms - consequences and implications for Israel, according to the summary of a talk given at a seminar "Education Reform - the desire to change and chance to succeed" MOFET Institute.

<sup>12</sup>Frank A. ve-ihieShalom, A. (2015), Leave us from reforms, want change, thoughts, ideas, recommendations, opinions on the education system for the incoming education minister

the optimization and allocation of resources in a more appropriate manner for the pedagogical purposes of the school; And the expansion of authority will enable commitment to results and responsibility for them<sup>13</sup>. In Caskey's (2010) study, teachers reported that autonomy is the source of their growth<sup>14</sup>.

Principals even talked about further contribution to their schools due to self-management that comes down to developing relationships with the outside community of schools, relationships with local parent committees, relationships with academia, relationships with various providers.

8. Principals enumerated various challenges experienced by them as a result of introducing self-management into their schools. They reported workload, increased responsibility for all moves in schools, enormous efforts invested in doing and organizing, lack of time resource and heaviness and stress at work. The challenges reported by principals were investigated by Greenstein and Gibton (2011), who showed that there are major problems in self-management schools that principals face. There is a problem of control and control of many agents such as teachers, parents, local authority and other factors. Inside and outside the school that include quite a few contrasts and there is a problem of lack of skill in budget management and personnel management<sup>15</sup>.

In conclusion, according to the interviewed principals the autonomy enjoyed by the principals as a result of the introduction of self-management increases their self-efficacy in their work as well as increases their commitment and responsibility towards the schools and their achievements. Despite this, they face various challenges such as maneuvering between roles: financial management versus pedagogical management, evaluation versus guidance, external relations management versus internal relations management, and how to maneuver between bodies with conflicting interests: Ministry of Education, local authorities, parents and teachers<sup>16</sup> and maintaining the fragile boundaries between the environments of these bodies

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<sup>13</sup>Ministry of Education, (2013), Division of Primary Education Responsibilities of the School Superintendent, Ministry of Education.

<sup>14</sup>Caskey, M. M. (2010), An Organizational Perspective of Distributed Leadership: A Portrait of a Middle School. Research in Middle Level Education. RMLE.

<sup>15</sup>Greenstein, I. & Gevaton D. (2011), Gaps between the authority and the responsibility and accountability system influence on the self-management model: point of view of managers in primary schools, FromL Katz, M. studies on administration and organization of education. Vol. 32, pages: 13-49.

<sup>16</sup>Oplatka, I. (2015), The essentials of educational administration, (Third extended edition). Haifa: Pardes; Greenstein, I. & Gevaton D. (2011), Gaps between the authority and the responsibility and accountability system influence on the self-management model: point of view of managers in primary schools, FromL Katz, M. studies on administration and organization of education. Vol. 32, pages: 13-49; Lev-Chaim, A. and Gaziel, H. (2005), Managers in self-management - role and burnout, In: Feldi, A. Education in the test of time. Israel Teachers Union - Association of the Advancement of Teaching and education, Reches- educational projects; Nir, A. E.

<sup>17</sup>. Another challenge facing managers is expecting them to make decisions as quickly and efficiently as possible while consulting and sharing, a process that involves the complexity of decision-making. In addition to the process of parental involvement in the educational endeavors of the school, the challenge is to maintain a balance between parental involvement and the community and to maintain professional autonomy in the school. Another challenge presents principals with two opposing systems: the school as an educational institution and the school as a business institution. The manager, for his part, makes every effort to withstand the heavy load that accompanies his job in the face of these challenges. As reported by principals, their work in self-managed schools is characterized by a high level of sense of responsibility, resulting from the thinking of education for students and their parents, from the impact of education on young people in society <sup>18</sup>.

One of the principals mentioned a strong challenge that presents her with a huge dilemma and that is maintaining the school autonomy she received and felt within the framework of self-management in the face of subordination to the traditional supervision system <sup>19</sup>. According to Levy and Amitai (2008) and Ackerman & Pat (2004), workload, job ambiguity and challenges that give rise to dilemmas and conflicts of all kinds are the source of pressure on self-managed school principals. Levels of stress can impair managers' emotional health, which is described as essential for their continued work as leaders <sup>20</sup>.

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(2000) The annual plans of school-based management schools operating in a centralized educational system: Planning for ambiguity, *Educational Planning*, 12(4), pages:19-38.

<sup>17</sup>Oplatka, I. (2015), *The essentials of educational administration*, (Third extended edition). Haifa: Pardes.

<sup>18</sup>Greenstein, I. & Gevaton D. (2011), Gaps between the authority and the responsibility and accountability system influence on the self-management model: point of view of managers in primary schools, From L. Katz, M. studies on administration and organization of education. Vol. 32, pages: 13-49.

<sup>19</sup>Lev-Chaim, A. and Gaziel, H. (2005), Managers in self-management - role and burnout, In: Feldi, A. Education in the test of time. Israel Teachers Union - Association of the Advancement of Teaching and education, Reches- educational projects.

<sup>20</sup>Levi, A and Amitai, A. (2008), Mentoring for new managers, in a report of a professional committee to formulate policy recommendations regarding the development and learning of school managers in Israel, First Edition, served in the Ministry of Education, Avney Rosha, prior to publication; Ackerman, R.& Pat, H. (2004), The wounded leader and emotional, learning in the schoolhouse, *The Emotional Dimensions of leadership*. Special Issue, *Journal of School Leadership and Management*, vol .24 number 3 August.

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