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### Authentic leadership strategies in support of mentoring processes

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## Authentic leadership strategies in support of mentoring processes

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The aim of the study was to determine whether teacher-mentees perceive their mentors as authentic leaders and if so, how these perceptions affected their leadership strategies. The sample included 60 Israeli teacher-mentees from different school levels and different sectors, who volunteered to participate in the study. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore participants' perceptions of mentoring processes that had influenced them professionally. Based on a confirmatory approach in qualitative analysis, using ATLAS.ti 5.0, we found that the influential mentors were perceived as authentic leaders who acted within four dimensions that were consistent with authentic leadership theory: *self-awareness*, *balanced processing*, *relational transparency* and *internalised moral perspective*. In addition, it was found that the influential mentors had contributed to the mentees' development of leadership strategies that included *envisioning*, *engaging*, *evaluating*, *reflecting* and *monitoring*. These findings may contribute to the development of preparatory programmes that can focus on development of authentic leaders among mentors, and may assist in developing middle-level leadership among their mentees. The present study indicated that mentoring characterised by authentic leadership could contribute to the broadening of leadership circles and to the construction of middle-level leadership through advancing mentees' leadership strategies within their educational spheres.

**Keywords:** authentic leadership; mentors; mentees; mentoring; leadership strategies; schools

### Introduction

A trend has developed in recent years of including not only principals and management teams in the school leadership, but also middle-level leaders, such as mentors (Bush 2009). Mentoring is an important resource for leadership and for implementing Ministry of Education policies (Hudson, Spooner-Lane, and Murray 2013). Given the value of mentoring, the main goal of this study was to explore mentees' perceptions regarding their mentors' authentic leadership, and how it might affect their leadership strategies. In this study, we focused on three main questions: (1) Whether authentic leadership dimensions can be identified among influential mentors, as perceived by their mentees; and if so, (2) what do these dimensions include? and (3) what is the effect of mentors' authentic leadership on their mentees' leadership strategies?

Below, we will examine the issues relevant to studying the subject of authentic leadership strategies in support of mentoring processes, by exploring areas such as the relationship between mentoring and leadership, focusing especially on authentic leadership, moral purpose and professional practices.

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### **Mentoring**

According to Douglas (1997), mentoring is an intense relationship wherein a senior person oversees the career and the psychosocial development of a less-experienced person. Mentors support the well-being of their mentees, providing counselling, protection, feedback and information that they would otherwise lack (Ehrich, Hansford, and Tennent 2004). The literature points to the importance of mentoring in implementing educational reform (Bouquillon, Sosik, and Lee 2005), and its essential role in supporting teachers at different stages of their professional development (Hudson, Spooner-Lane, and Murray 2013). Studies have indicated that mentoring makes an invaluable contribution not only in the first stages of the teaching career, but also later on as well (Fletcher, Strong, and Villar 2008) by helping experienced teachers cope with new challenges (Hagger and McIntyre 2006).

However, there are conditions that might hinder effective mentoring: potential incompatibility between mentor and mentee, the absence of a school environment supportive of mentoring, lack of preparation of mentors for the mentoring role and mentors' lack of sufficient attention to bridging the gap between theory and practice (Shapira-Lishchinsky 2012).

### **Mentoring from the international perspective**

Analysis of teacher mentoring programmes from Australia, Britain, Canada, France, Germany, Japan, New Zealand and the USA (Howe 2006) revealed common attributes such as that the most successful teacher mentoring programmes include opportunities for experts and novice teachers to learn together in a supportive environment, reflecting and acculturating into the teaching profession.

Through comparative analysis among USA, UK and Chinese mentor teachers, Wang (2001) found greater differences across, than within, programmes and countries. For example, it was found that US mentors shared beliefs of novices' learning that reflect the features of non-authoritative, inconsistent curriculum structure and a diversified student population. In their mentoring practice, they spent more time in supporting novices to develop and organise specific curriculum, units and lessons. On the other hand, the UK mentors' perceptions and behaviours reflected the features of a semi-centralised curriculum structure, an increasingly diversified student population in their classrooms and the unique arrangement of their mentoring programme. Their beliefs emphasised novices' commitment to the ways of doing things in the particular school department, and the need to understand the reality of diverse students. However, in their actual interaction with novices, they paid little attention to individual students due to their programme structure, while the patterns and other foci of their interactions with novices also reflected the influences of such instructional contexts.

The Chinese mentors shared beliefs and developed practices of mentoring that were clearly related to their instructional contexts. These contexts had an authoritatively and consistently prescribed curriculum and assessment structure, a less diversified and more controlled student population. They expected novices to study the centralised curriculum and develop a shared understanding and attitudes towards the teaching profession. In their mentoring practice, they helped novices learn to teach the required curriculum standards and content, and paid little attention to individual students or what novices needed.

Ehrich, Hansford, and Tennent (2004), based on a structured analysis of about 151 research-based articles on mentoring in education, most of them in Australia, UK, USA, Canada and Singapore, explored the nature and outcomes of mentoring: (1) support, empathy, counselling and friendship; (2) assistance with classroom teaching; (3) contact with others and discussion; and (4) feedback via positive reinforcement.

The declared aim of mentoring in the education system in *Israel* is to ensure high-quality teaching to enhance the students' achievements. Reforms in the Israeli education system are assimilated largely by mentors, who serve as a bridge between the policy-makers and the teaching staff who implement the policies (Shapira-Lishchinsky 2012). The frequent changes in the education system in Israel highlight the need for strong educational leadership that can head and implement the pedagogical reforms, while teacher mentoring is an important part of this leadership (Israeli Educational Management Circular 2004).

The Israeli Ministry of Education's policy is to locate the more experienced teachers in each area and to appoint them as district mentors, with an assigned responsibility to provide ongoing assistance and support to both 'novice teachers' as well as to experienced teachers on specific issues (Israeli State Comptroller 2009). Similar to many other countries (e.g., Australia, England, USA, The Netherlands), most Israeli teachers who mentor officially do so in addition to their regular teaching jobs (Shapira-Lishchinsky 2012; Gagen and Bowie 2005; Mertz 2004), working both individually and with teams (Jonson 2008). The mentor's mandate is to organise and conduct workshops, lead staff development programmes and develop and assimilate new school curricula (Hansford and Ehrich 2006).

In Israel, the mentors' preparation may include two options: (1) Academic programmes (MA) in educational leadership that focus mostly on theoretical courses in mentoring and leading teams and may occur before, during or after the mentors became mentors; (2) A practical preparation course (56 hours) by the department of professional development in the Ministry of Education, focusing on authentic problems in mentoring and acquiring mentoring skills. These preparatory programmes start after the Ministry of Education has identified the experienced and successful teachers, and before the mentors start their appointed mentoring, and continue during their work in the field. The Ministry of Education encourages this preparation even for MA graduates in educational leadership, since it focuses on practical skills and supports the mentors in the field.

### Leadership and mentors

Mentors have frequently been equated with leaders in the research literature (Clayton, Sanzo, and Myran 2013). The nature of the mentors' role is to act as leaders, who require leadership and guidance skills, as well as the potential to energise people to bring about change, while attributing meaning to their performance. Previous studies indicated that mentors take part in a range of tasks included in the definition of the education leaders' role: promoting the development of a school pedagogical vision, implementing changes in learning and participating in evaluating learning programmes and educational initiatives (e.g., Couse and Russo 2006; Pont, Nusche, and Moorman 2008).

Current educational literature distinguishes between high- and middle-level leaders in the education system (Busher 2005). Hence, educational policy leaders on different levels – Ministry of Education general manager, district managers and school principals serve as high-level leaders responsible for defining the education system's goals. Middle-level leaders may include school coordinators, form group teachers and mentors in schools.

Their role is to implement the educational policies outlined by the high-level leaders for operative improvement of school activities (Busher, Hammersley-Fletcher, and Turner 2007).

### **Moral purpose in leadership**

The National College of School Leadership (2006) describes moral purpose as a shared belief of a team that can achieve far more for their end users together than they can alone. Broad aspirations are not sufficient. There needs to be clarity and detail in the way the purpose is understood – and in particular about the values that underpin it. Moral purpose can only be shared if it becomes internalised by individuals (Andrews and Lewis 2004). It has been demonstrated that clear dialogue about values has a mutually reinforcing relationship with the emergence of a sense of shared leadership (Bezzina 2008).

The moral purpose is the fundamental purpose of the educative enterprise of the school (MacBeath 2005). The educators engage with challenge when they infuse academic learning with a dimension of leading (Starratt 2004). This authentic learning is more than acquiring new knowledge and skills for oneself. It is about giving of one's unique humanity to others and to the community (Hodgkinson 1991). An educator who contributes to practices that are not authentic is engaging in behaviour that is morally wrong (Duignan and Bezzina 2006).

Valuation processes involving the application of values and ethics have been identified (Stefkovich and Begley 2007) as relating to school leadership in three ways: as an influence on cognitive processes of individuals and groups; as a guide to action in the discernment processes of decision-making; and as a strategic tool that leaders can employ to build moral purpose by consensus among members of a group towards the achievement of shared organisational objectives.

Bezzina and Tuana (2012) apply the term to leadership, with leaders having to translate moral and ethical concerns and purposes into action. However, they also argue that individuals will only choose a particular moral action if they are both convinced of its importance and have a sense that they are capable of acting in this way.

### **Authentic leadership**

Recent research literature on mentoring has pointed to a new style of leadership, known as *authentic leadership*. Authentic leadership implies a genuine kind of leadership – an open-ended, visionary and creative response to social circumstances, as opposed to the more traditional dualistic portrayal of leadership practices characteristic of obsolete and superseded research literature on effective practices (Begley 2001).

Authentic leadership is a synergistic combination of self-awareness, sensitivity to the needs of the other, ingenuity, honesty and transparency regarding the self and others (Avolio, Walumbwa, and Weber 2009; Begley 2006; Duignan and Bhindi 1997; Taylor 1991). In this type of leadership, leaders are observed to have the moral ability to take responsibility for their own and for their followers' actions (Begley 2006; Walker and Riordan 2010).

Brown, Treviño, and Harrison (2005) focus on four main authentic leadership dimensions: *self-awareness*, which relates to understanding and creating meaning in the world, and influences leaders' long-term self-perception. This refers to how leaders understand their strong points and weak points as well as those of the people around

them, while being aware of their influence on others; *balanced processing* refers to leaders who objectively examine and analyse all the relevant data before reaching a decision. Leaders of this type are willing to accept opinions that contradict their own; *relational transparency* includes authentic presentation of the self to others rather than false selfhood. This type of behaviour builds trust through sharing information and openly expressing genuine thoughts and feelings; and *internalised moral perspective*, which is self-regulation directed by moral standards and autonomous motivation, rather than by pressure from the society. Self-regulation is expressed through behaviours in accordance with the leader's internal values.

One of the most important aspects of authentic leadership is professional practice relating to the knowledge and the general process capacities of leaders. It is a perspective that has been explored in recent years by Taylor (1991), Duignan and Bhindi (1997) and Starratt (2004). The innovation of this dimension is the adoption and application of a value and valuation process perspective to educational leadership to make the objectives of leadership more understandable and achievable (Begley 2006; Hodgkinson 1991). The skills of authentic leaders will help mentees, consciously or unconsciously, to employ values as guides in interpreting situations and suggesting appropriate action.

### **Authentic leadership in mentoring**

Mentors as authentic leaders guide mentoring processes directed at the mentees' confidence and well-being. Their goals are to listen to the mentees, share with them, set limits and to voice their honest opinion fearlessly (Ilies, Morgeson, and Nahrgang 2005). Mentoring that is based on identifying the mentees' needs and recognising their strengths and weaknesses, should position the mentors as authentic leaders who increase the mentees' motivation to implement and lead processes in their schools. Mentors who function as authentic leaders encourage constructive learning that is based on principles of dialogue, nurturing and inquiry. This type of mentoring may contribute to the development of authentic leadership strategies among the mentees.

### **Leadership strategies**

Leadership strategies are the driving force behind any plan being put into action, and they describe modes of operation for the near and more distant future. The leadership strategies include formulating a vision, recruiting people to realise this vision, setting goals and objectives and creating a detailed plan of action with measurable evaluation parameters (Day and Leithwood 2007). The leadership strategies model in the education system was developed by Eacott (2010) and includes four main dimensions:

- *Envisioning* is centred on the behaviour of education leaders regarding the creation of a desired future stance for the school. It demands a vision for the future, through exercising critical thinking and dialogue.
- *Engaging* focuses on the creation of participants' active involvement in discussions and decisions about the school's strategic direction.
- *Implementing* is a process dealing with translating the school's strategic direction into action, especially in relation to timing. Implementing is based on the previous dimensions and requires team members to understand and be committed to the school's objectives.

- *Monitoring* focuses on ongoing, systematic monitoring processes based on in-depth examination of actions that have been performed. This is an important condition that might influence advancement towards the desired results.

According to Eacott (2011) leadership strategies have a purpose and a meaning to connect the present with a desired situation in the future. The use of leadership strategies helps education leaders to create a work culture that is focused on all levels of the organisation: the classroom, the team and the school. Thus, the use of these strategies enables teacher-mentees to acquire leadership skills that will help them shape the educational environment in which they are working (Eacott 2011).

## **Method**

### ***Participants***

The teachers were chosen randomly from one of the Ministry of Education districts in the south of Israel. The sample included 60 teacher-mentees, each from a different school, who consented to participate in the study. Most of them had additional roles (such as pedagogical coordinators, subject coordinators and form group teachers). The teacher-mentees belonged to elementary, junior-high and high schools in the different sectors (religious and secular state schools). The teacher-mentees' ages ranged from 26 to 63. Of the 60 teacher-mentees interviewed, 48 were women and 12 were men, which reflects the gender distribution of the teaching population in the education system (Israel Central Bureau of Statistics 2013).

### ***Data collection***

The research was carried out according to psychologists' Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct (2002). First, we received approval for the study from the departmental Ethics Committee at the university. Then, we described our study goals and the need for mentees-volunteers to participate in this study by means of the school principals' network at the Ministry of Education in the south district. We asked the principals to spread our message among their teachers through the school's email system, and to encourage their teachers to participate in this study. Then the principals sent the list of teachers who volunteered to participate, and we contacted them. We met them and explained the research aims and methods.

We assured the participants that all identifying details would be excluded from the published study. In addition, the participants received a letter explaining the study aims, the commitment to preserve confidentiality and anonymity, and their right to leave the study at any time. They were also asked to sign an informed consent form to participate in the study, based on the letter of explanation. The data collection was based on 60 interviews (each interview was about 45 minutes long, with one interview for each participant) that were conducted during in 2013 by the authors. The interviews took place in the study participants' schools, either during free periods or at the end of the school day.



### **Research tools**

Using semi-structured interviews, we asked the following questions: Can you tell me about a significant mentor whom you encountered during your professional career? How did this mentor influence your professional development? Can you tell me about an event linked to this mentor that was significant for you? Tell me about any new learning or insights that you gained as a result of the mentoring?

### **Data analysis**

According to Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2007), a qualitative study cannot be assessed for validity; rather, validity is ‘relative to purposes and circumstances’. Moreover, assessing legitimization does not lead to a dichotomous outcome (i.e., valid vs. invalid), but rather represents an issue of level or degree. Although there is no method that is guaranteed to yield trustworthy conclusions, nevertheless, an assessment of the procedures used in qualitative studies is imperative for accepting or ruling out rival interpretations of data. In this study we used confirmatory data analyses, which may help to increase legitimization in qualitative studies. As outlined by Onwuegbuzie (2003), confirmatory thematic analyses can be conducted, in which replication qualitative studies are conducted to assess the replicability (i.e., external generalisability) of previous emergent themes or to test an extant theory, when appropriate. Such confirmatory techniques will help us to provide corroboration for previous findings and interpretations regarding authentic leadership and leadership strategies in a new mentoring context.

The interview analysis procedure began with an in-depth reading of each separate interview, while focusing on the study participant’s perceptions about the influential mentor. During this reading, we identified the main recurring phrases and ideas. The second stage included a process of inquiry, comparison and labelling, which was followed by a merging process of consolidating common themes. The third stage included linking the common themes to a shared categorical idea (Strauss and Corbin 1998).

For example, the phrases: ‘mentors are human’ and ‘taught me not to be afraid’ merged with the common theme *self-awareness*; the phrases: ‘analysed my needs’ and ‘translated the language for us’ merged with the common theme *balanced processing*; the phrases: ‘shared things with me’ and ‘always as equals’ merged with the common theme *relational transparency*; or the phrases: ‘believed in me and backed me up’ and ‘to be true to myself’ merged with the common theme *internalised moral perspective*. All of these common themes shared the first categorical idea of *influential mentors as authentic leaders*. The same analytic procedure was performed for the second categorical idea of *mentors as authentic leaders who promote leadership strategies*.

We used ATLAS.ti.5.0 software to analyse narratives from several documents simultaneously (Muhr 2004). In some documents, several themes emerged simultaneously from the same narrative. Therefore, for each document, only the most salient themes were considered for the purpose of clarity. We did not find a significant dominant theme of authentic leadership (e.g., self-awareness – 16 participants mentioned this dimension; balanced processing – 15 participants; relational transparency – 14 participants; and internal moral perspective – 15 participants). Most of the themes in the category *influential mentors as authentic leaders* focused on the informal aspects of

mentoring in addition to the professional subject of mentoring, even though the questions focused on the formal aspects.

Consider the category: *'mentors as authentic leaders who promote leadership strategies among their mentees'*: while considering the themes of leadership strategies, we found that in addition to the theme of envisioning (10 participants) and engaging (8 participants), the dominant aspects of leadership strategies were implementing (22 participants) and evaluating, reflecting and monitoring (20 participants), that focused on the practical aspects of mentoring.

In order to ensure the validity of the research we used member checking, a process in which the findings were returned to the study participants, enabling them to contribute to the interpretation (Lincoln and Guba 1985). Once data analysis had been completed by each of the researchers separately, we met to cross-check data and to characterise the central findings of the study (Boardman and Woodruff 2004).

### **Findings**

When describing an influential mentor, the study participants related to formal mentors, namely, those who had been officially appointed as mentors by the Ministry of Education, as well as those in other positions in the education system, who had not been officially appointed, but had served in mentoring roles in accordance with needs that had arisen in school. For example, one mentee, who was a form group teacher, told of a teaching colleague in school who noticed that he was distressed about coping with a challenging student. This colleague came to his aid, guided him stage by stage, finally enabling him to take independent responsibility as a form group teacher.

When I first started, I was almost in despair and was agitated because of a difficult problem with a certain student, who was difficult to deal with. He [the colleague] approached me and asked me what it was all about. We sat together and tried to solve the issue; how to work with that child and how to approach him ... his caring attitude helped me to feel that I wasn't alone. I learned from him how to take responsibility when dealing with similar cases. (Male, a form group teacher and subject coordinator in a state high school, with 7 years' seniority)

Below, we will now describe the authentic leadership dimensions that were found to be linked to the mentees' perceptions regarding the influential mentor, and further on, we will address the mentees' use of the leadership strategies following the mentoring.

### ***The influential mentors as authentic leaders***

The mentees' perceptions about the influential mentors point to an important insight according to which mentors succeeded in creating an impact on the personal and professional development of their mentees. In the present study, the mentors' authentic leadership was expressed in four main dimensions that present the influential leaders as having authentic leadership characteristics: self-awareness, balanced processing, relational transparency and internalised moral perspective. In the following section, the phrases in italics highlight these dimensions.

*Self-awareness*

The first dimension was *self-awareness*: The mentors' awareness of the self and of the mentees creates processes that assist in understanding and creating a broader meaning regarding the mentoring processes and their influence. This refers to mentors who know how to map strengths, motivations and values and to identify their own and their mentees' strong points and weak points. The following excerpt highlights this dimension by describing a mentoring process of an officially appointed mentor:

I remember a situation in one meeting, when one of the participants was hurt by the behaviour of one of the mentees. After attempting to repair the damage, the mentor started by saying that she took responsibility for what had happened and that she should have noticed the insult before it got worse, *and that mentors also sometimes make mistakes* and that is also OK. I remember this because I was very relieved to learn that mentors are human and that *they are also allowed to make mistakes* and that it doesn't necessarily make you a worse [mentor]. (Female, a chemistry coordinator in a state religious high school, with 10 years' seniority)

Self-awareness is reflected in the mentor's ability to bring the mentees' capabilities and uniqueness to the surface:

The Ministry of Education mentor knew how to *identify each teacher's uniqueness*. He analysed the lesson with me and always praised my creativity. He taught me not to be afraid to be creative, and he suggested that I be principal of a small school. He didn't pressure me. When I was with him, I didn't feel like a cog in the wheel of a large system, but as a significant part within the system. (Female, a first grade form group teacher in a secular state school, with 37 years' seniority)

*Balanced processing*

The second mentoring dimension, *balanced processing*, refers to mentors who objectively examine and analyse the relevant data before reaching a decision. Mentors of this type are willing to accept opinions that are different than their own. This dimension was reflected in the words of one of the mentees, who described an appointed mentor who had come to the school to assimilate the cooperative learning strategy in groups. During the mentoring sessions, the mentee opposed the change that the mentor wished to introduce. The mentor succeeded in analysing her reasons for opposing the idea, together with the mentee, and in jointly finding the appropriate solution to meet the needs that the mentee had presented during the mentoring sessions:

We had a lot of discussions about this, and the mentor understood me, although she had an agenda. After we analysed my needs and talked about the changes that she [the mentor] was bringing into the school, I saw that she understood me, contained me, and was willing to go with the flow. In my case, because of the nature of my class, *she respected my opinion* that it might not be a good idea to change to group seating in the classroom, even though all the other teachers in the school sat the students in groups. (Female, a teacher in a secular state elementary school with 26 years' seniority)

Another example is a mentee's description of how her school biology coordinator taught her to analyse a teaching situation and to reach decisions independently, that influenced her as a teacher:

In teacher preparing, we had to give a lesson in the laboratory. I chose to teach a class on biological pest control. Because of my lack of experience, today it makes me laugh; the plan was to do three really complex experiments. He helped me analyse the situation and to understand what had actually happened there. I learned an awful lot about teaching from his mentoring method, and about how to make decisions in school. You could say that he simply *translated for us the language* used in the teachers' room. (Female, a biology teacher in a religious state high school with 22 years' seniority)

### *Relational transparency*

The third dimension, *relational transparency* between mentors and mentees, is expressed in the descriptions of mentors who build trust through sharing information. The mentors told of person-to-person dialogues and equal mentor–mentee relationships, in which both sides were active participants and involved in clarifying issues, and stated opinions and viewpoints in an accepting and open atmosphere. In most cases, the influential mentors were described as behaving honestly and with transparency, sometimes informally. This is expressed in mentoring in the math field by the school math coordinator; for example:

My math coordinator gave me the confidence to think outside the box and to try new things. I knew that I could approach her with any idea ... *she shared things with me* and didn't conceal information ... she was not afraid of failure and taught me that, sometimes, it is better to try and to fail rather than not to try at all. (Male, a math teacher in a state secular elementary school, with 4 years' seniority)

The same transparency and informality is also expressed by a form group teacher who described his officially appointed mentor:

I had a professional dilemma as a beginning form group teacher and wondered whether I had acted correctly or not. It was important to me to hear specifically what he [the mentor] had to say about it, and found myself emailing him in the middle of the night, and analysing my indecision in the letter. The mentor wrote back after five minutes, and that meant a lot to me. I knew how busy he was, and yet he found the time to answer me. I was very impressed by his attitude toward me; *always as equals*. The fact is that it was so important to me to hear what he had to say because *he was very open* and professional, and shared things with me. (Female, a form group teacher in a secular state junior-high school, with one year's seniority)

### *Internalised moral perspective*

The fourth dimension, *internalised moral perspective*, is expressed in mentoring that includes high moral standards. The mentees described these mentors as not giving in to demands or convenience-based considerations, but as withstanding pressure exerted on them by school members, and choosing to act in a complex reality while drawing on moral and ethical ideals, and courageously taking steps consistent with their own beliefs and values. The next excerpt illustrates the internalised moral perspective of the officially appointed mentor of a junior-high schoolteacher who was suspected of not upholding integrity in examinations.

This story is related to a case in which, as part of preparing the eighth grade students for the internal standardised student assessment tests, I was suspected of leaking the questions to the students after the exams were checked. The mentor *believed in me* and backed me up before the principal and the superintendent and explained to them exactly how and why my

professional behaviour had been correct. *She just stood by me* and gave me professional backup, and she strengthened me. (Male, a math coordinator in a secular state junior-high school, with 6 years' seniority)

One study participant, a pedagogical coordinator, told of how the officially appointed mentor met determined opposition by the principal. The mentor convinced her to be true to herself and to view the situation as an opportunity to prove herself:

The main thing that I learned from the mentor was not to be afraid to go against the grain and not to give up ... his behaviour encouraged me to have the confidence *to be true to myself* and was able to contain me, with all the fears of a beginning coordinator ... he helped me to create order, to map the more urgent and less urgent subjects, allowed me to be in the uncertain place of indecision ... and he was a real place of refuge for me. (Female, a pedagogical coordinator in a state religious elementary school, with 14 years' seniority)

In conclusion, it seems that the influential mentors were characterised as authentic leaders, who accepted themselves and their mentees, knew how to contain different opinions, acted within transparent relationships and according to high ethical standards, thanks to which they won their mentees' trust.

### ***Mentors as authentic leader who promote leadership strategies among their mentees***

An overall analysis of the interviews revealed an additional category, according to which mentoring characterised by authentic leadership influenced the mentees and channelled them towards the development of the following leadership strategies: *envisioning, engaging, implementing, evaluating, reflecting and monitoring*. The following paragraphs provide examples of the relationships between mentors' authentic leadership and mentees' leadership strategies, and the phrases in italics highlight these dimensions.

#### *Envisioning*

The *self-awareness* dimension of authentic leadership in mentoring, that reflects creating meaning, strengthens the strategy of *visionary* thinking among the mentees, that leads to a sharpening of the vision behind the educational act, and as a result, the mentees know how to form the components of the vision, that outline their activities as educators. This can be seen in the following example, in which a Hebrew Language teacher describes how her Hebrew Language coordinator guided her in defining a professional vision and its derivative goals:

Her [the coordinator's] professional knowledge was vast. She didn't bypass the academic part, she didn't spoon-feed me, but, together with me, built tasks that required analysis, *understanding of ideas*, writing, evaluation and the raising of dilemmas and essential discussion. She didn't give up, and squeezed water from a stone ... and thanks to her, *I knew how to define my vision* and the objectives of the unique language program that I created. (Female, a Hebrew Language teacher in a state junior-high school, with 10 years' seniority)

Another example is described by a teacher who reflected the *balanced processing* dimension of authentic leadership. The officially appointed mentor helped her to analyse all the relevant data objectively that played a part in her daring to realise her *vision*. The mentee described her transition from a passive to an active stance, part of which included

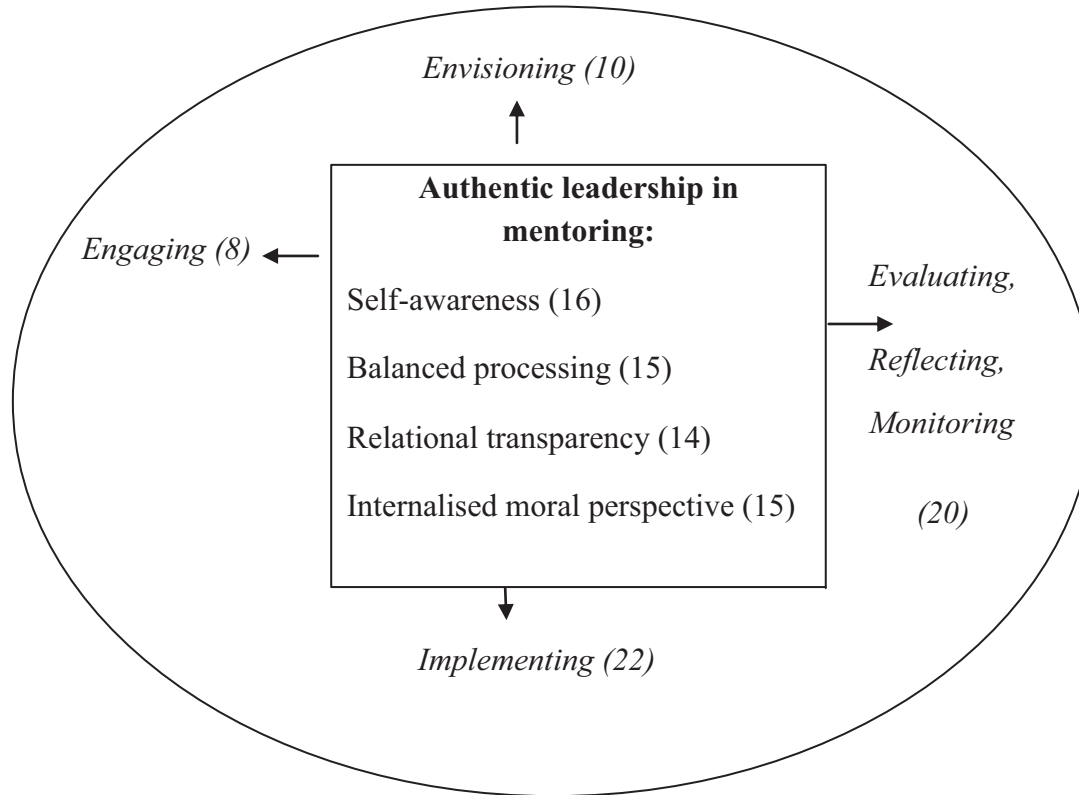


Figure 1. The study findings model.

Note: The numbers in parentheses – how many participants related to the dimension.

the fulfilment of a dream and the implementation of an educational initiative in her school:

Together, after *examining all the relevant information*, the mentor and I created a program that was disseminated to other schools and which gave me new thinking directions for different novel developments. ... As a result of the mentoring, I became more open to carrying out *my vision*. I was daring, I learned to try things out and not to be afraid. I realised an old dream and led a new initiative of building a school centre for functional mathematics. (Female, a teacher in a special education school, with 8 years' seniority)

### *Engaging*

In interviews in which the mentors were portrayed as authentic leaders who focused on *internalised moral perspective*, their mentees showed *active involvement* and initiative. During the dialogues about their willingness to assimilate changes in school, the mentees' mobilisation following mentoring processes characterised by leadership was very conspicuous. The mentees expressed their professionalism regarding the conditions that contributed to their enlistment to assimilate the mentoring processes. This is exemplified in the professional field by an English teacher's description of his English coordinator:

*She* [the mentor] *was faithful to her moral values* and knew how to ask the right questions ... I admire people like that mentor, who practice what they preach ... The mentor gave me the courage *to be involved* in school discussions and decision making as well as in my ability to do my work. She sent us a constant message of trust. I received new insights from the mentoring that made me take on assignments and initiate new things in teaching English. (Male, an English teacher in a secular state high school, with 7 years' seniority)

In addition, this strategy of active involvement occurred outside the formal teaching processes through the *relational transparency* dimension of authentic leadership. This was reflected by openly expressing thoughts and feelings, such as organising a Holocaust Day event:

I remember one day that was the pinnacle of learning about the Holocaust reflected in literature. During the event, the mentor knew how to express his thoughts and to give us *emotional support*. Dealing with Holocaust Day wasn't easy for me. I learned that it is important *to give guidance and to outline a direction*, while still listening to the members of staff, to create mutual inspiration, to give each member of the group a degree of autonomy and to enable growth and development. (Female, a teacher in a state secular elementary school and an alternative assessment coordinator, with 10 years' seniority)

### *Implementing*

The *self-awareness* dimension of authentic leadership in mentoring, that included understanding the mentees' weakness and strengths, established the mentors' status as authentic leaders who are open to opinions brought by the mentees from the practical field. In this context, it should be noted that during the interviews, the mentees emphasised how important it was for the mentoring to be conducted with support, and to be tailored to their needs. The mentoring dialogue contributed to the development of *implementation-focused strategies* in the classroom and school in general. For example,

the following pedagogical coordinator described her mentoring process by an officially appointed mentor for guiding staff teams:

[The mentor's] assistance provided the basis for my *self-confidence* when standing before the staff, for my ability to accumulate broad, professional knowledge. The mentor always supported me in places where difficulties were revealed, at thinking junctions. Now *I know how* to formulate a plan to guide the social staff, that attracts all the teachers. (Female, a pedagogical coordinator in a state religious high school, with 13 years' seniority)

Another mentee described how the Science coordinator's *self-awareness* helped him to *implement* and lead a new initiative independently in his specialised subject in school:

On his suggestion ... to reflect on *my success and points that needed improvement*, I allowed my teaching colleagues to observe my Science lessons and to suggest new ideas ... he [the mentor] gave me the confidence *to do this* ... A concept called 'encounters' was introduced into the school, structured, individual interviews with each student, while setting operative goals for the next quarter. (Male, a science teacher and junior-high coordinator in a state religious school, with 18 years' seniority)

#### *Evaluation, reflection and monitoring*

The mentors' *self-awareness* of authentic leadership was expressed through learning with their mentees about their successes and failures. The mentors were described as guides, who steered their mentees to criticise their actions and to take responsibility. The mentees told of how they learned to *examine themselves reflectively* after teaching scenarios, with the aim of enhancing their teaching. One of the mentees, a language coordinator, told of how the officially appointed mentor helped her identify her weak points, leading her to understand that she should act to reposition herself in the team. This shows deep understanding that assisted the mentee to shape her personal strategic plan of action vis-à-vis the staff and the principal:

She [the mentor] asked me to bring a practical example to each meeting, and we analysed it according to *what worked well and what should be improved*. She taught me how to look at and analyse each case *reflectively*, to know what to do the next time it happened. She simply made me understand that there is no single answer when solving problems; you always need to *evaluate* several possible solutions and to think creatively. (Female, a language coordinator in a state elementary school with 12 years' seniority)

A similar process of developing the ability to give feedback and develop critical thinking is described by the following mentee, a special education teacher, who described her coordinator as her mentor, while focusing on the *relational transparency* of authentic leadership:

The special education coordinator gave me ongoing feedback from every possible angle: personal, professional ... she was always there for me. I trust her ... She genuinely related to my difficulties *openly*. I made a critique of what I had done, and she taught me to implement everything we learned in teams in theory ... following the mentoring, I became the learning disabilities coordinator, and *I evaluated* a differentiated instruction method called 'growth' for all students in the mainstream classes. (Female, a special education teacher in religious state junior-high school, with 8 years' seniority)



### Additional findings

The study's narrative indicates that different dimensions of moral purpose emerge, such as a shared belief: 'to create mutual inspiration'; towards application of values: 'whether I had acted correctly or not'; by understanding: 'he simply translated the language for us', by human relationship: 'she was always there for me', or by enterprising: 'that made me take on assignments and initiate new things in teaching'. It was found that professional practice was very dominant and explicit from the data, as expressed in narratives such as: 'he helped me to create order'; 'together with me, built tasks'; 'the mentor and I created a program'; 'made me take on assignments'; or 'She [the mentor] asked me to bring a practical example'.

### Conclusions from findings

The present study offered new modes of observation and understanding regarding the influential mentor as authentic leader, through the study participants' interpretations. [Figure 1](#) illustrates the main study findings regarding relationships that were found between the different characteristics of the mentor as authentic leader and the different authentic leadership strategies that were developed among the mentees as a reflection of their mentors' authentic leadership.

### Discussion

In this study, we attempted to understand which authentic leadership characteristics in mentoring had an influence on the mentees' leadership strategies, through the mentees' perceptions. The study showed that meaningful mentoring, as portrayed by the mentees, positioned influential mentors as authentic leaders, who contributed to their mentees' development of authentic leadership strategies. The present study revealed that authentic leadership dimensions might lead to the mentees' adoption of leadership strategies characterised by authentic aspects, for example: *envisioning* by moral purpose, *engaging in school processes* through human relationships, *implementing* by professional practice through application of moral values and *monitoring of these processes* by understanding the mentees.

Similar to findings regarding authentic school principals (Shapiro and Stefkovich 2001), the study indicates that authentic mentors may lead educational processes in their teams through considering the complexity of learning and social and cultural situations. As a result, since the mentees varied in their preferred ethical postures, it seems that they appeared to be satisfied with their authentic mentors, while their mentors adopted a multi-ethical analysis of problems and situations.

The study demonstrated that all members of the educational staff encounter mentoring, including coordinators, form group teachers and specialised subjects teachers. All are exposed to educational changes, sometimes finding themselves in the role of mentor and sometimes in the role of mentee. The influential mentors described by the mentees came from different disciplines. They were not necessarily officially appointed, and had not always received the relevant preparation. Hence, it is clear that the official written appointment is not the essence of mentoring. Mentoring in the education field is often created informally in schools, whether because of novice teachers' natural need that cries out for a mentor as a guide, or because of the need for support and assistance in

assimilating reforms, that arises among experienced teachers. Thus, according to this study, mentoring is associated with experienced and inexperienced teachers, while working individually or in teams, and focuses on a synergistic combination of authentic leadership based on moral purpose and professional practice which may lead to development of authentic leadership strategies among the mentees.

From these, it emerged that the influential mentor has a tendency to function as an authentic leader, who focused especially on practical aspects. In this context, authentic leadership in mentoring was found to encourage cooperation and the nurturing of a professional learning community, while enabling situations for analysing information that is essential and relevant to the mentees' lives.

In the context of long-term influences of mentoring, whether by appointed or by informal mentors (such as a colleague), engraved in the mentees' minds were the mentoring processes that included consideration of their personal background. The mentees noted that they needed mentors who were attentive, honest, considerate and open. Mentors as authentic leaders broaden their mentees' theoretical and practical knowledge, while at the same time helping them to develop insights and leadership strategies. This seems necessary, based on the fact that teachers' preparation in Israeli universities and colleges is based mostly on theoretical aspects (Shapira-Lishchinsky 2014). Together with the current demand to develop leadership qualifications in different school roles (Fullan 2009) is the importance of the mentors' function as leaders. They serve as personal models, and influence the mentees to take responsibility for leadership by understanding that each person is a leader within the education system in which he or she operates. This means expanding school leadership by all parties responsible for assimilating pedagogical and organisational changes in the education system. Whereas in the past, the declared leadership role was placed exclusively on the shoulders of school principals, today leadership is required from every individual working in an educational organisation, including mentors and mentees alike. The present study reinforces the place of informal discourse in mentoring processes, whether with a Ministry of Education appointed mentor or with an informal mentor (such as an experienced colleague).

In sum, the findings may indicate that a school atmosphere characterised by moral purpose and implication of values encourages the development of mentors' authentic leadership. It seems that just characteristics of informal communication, openness and agreement to accept different opinions may encourage expressions such as: 'not to be afraid, to be creative'; or 'shared things with me'. It seems that mentors are charged with the responsibility of creating opportunities for developing future authentic leadership through their mentees. This may be a moral responsibility in the day-to-day pressure to adopt pragmatic approaches in order to foster assimilation of moral values among mentees.

## **Conclusions**

First, it seems that meaningful, influential mentoring is based on authentic leadership characteristics. Second, mentoring that includes authentic leadership aspects strengthens the mentees as authentic leaders and encourages them to adopt authentic leadership strategies. Mentees' use of authentic leadership strategies may contribute to developing mentees as educational leaders, who in turn may advance educational processes in the classroom and on the school organisational level. This provides a practical response to the

current need that calls for the establishment of a strong middle-level leadership in schools.

One of the main conclusions of the present study is that preparing of the next generation of mentors is taking place not only in defined and structured developing courses, but also in the context of the educational field in which the mentees are working. In addition, mentoring characterised by authentic leadership should contribute to the broadening of leadership circles and to constructing a middle-level leadership through advancing leadership strategies among mentees within their educational spheres.

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