

The Involvement of Non-Governmental Organizations in the Implementation of Educational Policy

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Ph.D. Thesis

Submitted to the Senate of Bar-Ilan University

Ramat-Gan, Israel

Mars, 2017

Abstract

During the past three decades, the involvement of NGOs (Non-Governmental Organizations) in the Israeli educational system has grown. NGOs from the third sector have become players with social and economic power which redefine education's characteristics. This growth was born out of social, economic and political changes, including the processes of globalization, the increased prevalence of the neo-liberal approach, cuts in government funding, decentralization and privatization. These processes created a vacuum and led to entry into various systems, including the educational system, of organizations which could be labeled as belonging to the "civil society" or the "third sector". This process is exhibited trends which exist in educational systems worldwide.

The issue of the involvement of external organizations in the Israeli is complex and multi-faceted. Most of the researchers who deal with this subject focused on the causes for the phenomenon, its scope, and the various types of the intervention and its characteristics (Avgar, 2014; Adgar & Wininger, 2016; Adan, 2010, Barlev & Cohen, 2008; Barak, 2009; Berkowitz, Bar Yehuda & Almog-Bareket, 2010; Greenblat-Kolodny, 2011; Vinhaber, Ben Nun & Shifman, 2008, Zeilr, 2006, Paz-Fox & Ben Sinchon-Peleg, 2014; Sagie, 2014; Yemini & Sagie, 2014; Eden, 2012; Berkowich & Foldes, 2015). Despite the scope of the phenomenon, no comprehensive research has yet been performed in Israel, which would analyze and estimate the effect on the educational and scholastic programs implemented by the NGOs viewpoints of all those involved in this phenomenon – the school inspectors, the CEOs of the NGOs, the school principals, the parents and the students.

This research was performed using the qualitative methodology of the constructivist - interpretive approach which relates to the reality obeying researched and focuses on the "participants in the research" and to those acting within that reality (Shkedi, 2014). This approach recognizes the existence of structured, fluid, subjective, flexible and dynamic realities, which receive various meanings and interpretations, and are shaped within political, cultural and social contexts (Tzabar Ben-Yehoshua, 2016). As part of the research, in depth interviews were held with three research groups in a manner which enables the extraction of qualitative data regarding the phenomenon being researched (Guest, Namey & Mitchel, 2012): 1) The designers of the educational

policy (Unit managers and supervisors in the Ministry of education); 2) The ones who apply the educational policy (CEOs of NGOs and school principals); 3) The objects of the educational policy (parents and students). Finding the interviewees was done by directly calling on some of those whom I already knew. The reliance on personal acquaintances made it easier for me to enter this field of research, and to create trust among the research subjects. After finding the initial interviewees, I used the "snowball effect" method (Blase & Blase, 2002, pp. 680-681) to find further interviewees, i.e. – one interviewee gives the researcher the name of another participant, who in her/his turn supplies the name of a further possible participant, and so forth.

The findings of the research raise several important insights into the involvement of the NGOs in the Israeli educational system. The first and central insight arising from the research is related to the stated educational policy of the Ministry of Education during the past four years, a policy based on cross sector partnership. This policy changes the "rules of the game" and significantly enables the participation of citizens in the educational process. This new policy combines the Bottom Up and Top Down approaches; it recognizes the bi-directional effects from the Ministry to the field and from the field back to the Ministry, and considers the partnership an organizational order which enables the achievement of common and mutually agreed upon goals, while proving beneficial to both sides. Accordingly, the Ministry of Education is proceeding towards the New Public Governance – NPG – which is expressed in innovation, entrepreneurship, and an intelligent utilization of the existing potential. The Ministry of Education is publicly leading a policy of cross sector partnership, and is enabling NGOs to participate in determining policy, in the process of policy development, in shaping it, in applying it, and in evaluating it. The process of determining the educational policy regarding the cross-sector partnership comprises four stages: The stage of initiative and creation of policy, the planning and design stage, the application, implementation and maintenance stage, and evaluation and renewal stage. The study of the process and its four stages has shown that the Ministry of Education and its policy makers (main office and regional supervisors) have, for more than a decade, had a hard time coping with the challenges which the involvement of the NGOs faced them with, and with the definition of a uniform enforceable educational policy. The change in the Ministry of Education's policy was revolutionary. From a policy of transmitting orders from the main office to the field in the hope of them being fulfilled, of limiting behaviors - critical or reactive to processes happening in the field,

the Ministry changed to management with an approach of partnership and cross sector relations, while developing a wide variety of tools and mechanisms which could help the ministry to find the "middle road" to orchestrate the processes which happen in the educational system as a result of the involvement of the NGOs. At the same time, the implementers of the policy (the management of the NGOs and the school principals) mainly expressed a wish for recognition of their function and activities, and for attentiveness to their needs. According to them, there still exists a gap between the statements and intent of the Ministry's staff regarding the partnership and the economic, social, political and especially the educational reality in which they function.

The second insight arising from this research deals with the public responsibility for education, and for the challenges faced by the educational system regarding the policy of cross sector partnership. This policy had raised the need for re-examining the domains in which the country is in position of responsibility and authority regarding the educational system. This examination has shown that the top down privatization resulting when the Ministry of Educations transfers over the operation of educational programs to NGOs using outsourcing and resource matching, is a system which threatens the cross sector partnership, as **it encourages independent and autonomous actions by the private sector**, which takes upon itself both the production and supply of educational services, while interpreting the cross sector partnership policy according to their understanding. The policy designers (main office and regional inspectors) perceive the top down privatization policy as an expression of a lack of trust in their abilities and their work. In their eyes, this policy means that the system admits to a lack of economic, pedagogical and organizational efficiency on their part. Despite that, they acknowledged that the responsibility for budgeting and funding of the programs is still mostly under the State's supervision. On the other hand, it has been found that those who implement the policy (CEOs of NGOs as well as school principals) initiate, of their own volition, educational programs in the educational field in order to advance complementary actions which will serve the social needs and solve problems in the educational system.

The third insight arising from the research relates to the advantage gained by partial privatization of the programs using resource matching by the Ministry of Education and the third sector. The cooperation in the educational programs in the secular grade schools gives "voice" to unique populations, and was found effective by **all the stake holders in the research**, contributing to the success and accomplishment

of the organizational goals and objectives of the school establishment. As well, they contributed to fundraising, to increasing the scope of the services, to customized local deployment, to betterment of scholastic and social achievements among the students, as well as to the establishment of the regulation of policy. The policy shapers (head office and regional inspectors) view the emerging policy as a success story, as well as an opportunity to "regulate" the system and to define each side's areas of responsibility within the partnership, as well as the gains and contribution towards establishment of the "significant learning" policy and the "new horizon" reform. The implementers of the policy (CEOs of the NGOs and the school principals) are of the opinion that the non-governmental involvement helps realize the vision, purposes and goals of education, as well as to implement them, in the secular grade schools participating in the research. The subjects of the policy (parents and children) view the involvement of NGOs positively, and noted the benefit to the scholastic programs, to the scholastic learning space, as well as to the human aspect. Furthermore, the additional funding flowing into the system as a result of the activation of the additional programs enables, on one hand, to promote and enhance the educational activity with all its variations and needs, and on the other hand to provide individualized and unique solutions for furthering the scholastic and social achievements among challenging students.

The fourth and last insight summarizing the research relates to the ever increasing and stronger role of the school principal as a local leader who is entrusted with leading the whole of the system of cooperation with the external organizations within his organizational sphere. Firstly, a stated model of program integration in the educational institution within the renewed cooperation policy offers a "stamp of approval" and recognition by the Ministry of Education to the principal's centrality and role as a "gate keeper" in the process of cooperation with external programming. Secondly, the decentralization and the delegation of authority of the Ministry of Education to the "field" levels enhance the local leadership. Therefore, today more than ever, the educational policy further establishes the principal's role in management of effective communication with the surrounding areas, which may help in furthering fundraising, as well as drive initiatives and innovation for the purpose of furthering the school's goals, and providing educational solutions which serve the school's attendees.

The conclusions of the research – in an era of postmodern processes, including the process of globalization and the prevalence of the Neo-Liberal ideology, the old orders which were common in the social, cultural (Ben Peretz, 2011) and educational

areas have changed. This reality requires the strengthening of the cooperation between the public sector, the private sector, and the third sector (Choi, Cheng, Kim & Edomiaty, 2005). This results in the **first conclusion** of the research – the Ministry of Education was correctly able to read the reality and to redefine its policy regarding the cross-sector cooperation. The new policy was meant to bridge between the built-in gap between the responsibility, role and authority of the state for education, and the need to responding to the citizens' wishes to participate in decisions which are relevant to them. This participation may contribute to innovation and entrepreneurship in the educational system. The change undergone by the Ministry of Education towards the new governance, within which the Ministry re-designs the position taken by the educational system, poses many challenges. The Ministry must continue to develop and provide ongoing maintenance until the cross-sector partnership in the educational field becomes routine and matter of fact. **The second conclusion** regards the responsibility of the Ministry of Education for the educational system. Despite the fact that the Ministry of Education privatized many pedagogical activities during the past few years using outsourcing and resource pooling, its responsibility is evident in the budgetary aspect. In fact, the Ministry of Education funds most of the programs run within the system by the NGOs, so that their activities both rely and are based on public funding and resources. In addition, it has been found that partial privatization of programs which pool resources gives a "voice" to unique populations within the system, and strengthens the cross-sector partnership and the responsibility of the Ministry of Education in both the funding and regulatory aspects of the programs. **The third conclusion** is that the Ministry of Education was able to understand that the power to implement policy is available right there in the educational field. In order to bridge the gap between policy and educational system processes, the Ministry is making a gradual change of allocating funds directly to the schools. This change is meant to empower the schools, make them more autonomous, and widen their responsibilities. In fact, school principals have lately been amassing more power and independence as to processes which involve the civil society. This power is a necessary condition for the improvement of achievements and for serving the educational needs according to the school's vision and the requirements of the community it serves.