Creating Leadership in Education

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*Educational Identity as a Main Factor in Developing Leadership Education*

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*Educational Leadership - Crucial Issue on the Agenda*

Leadership and development of leadership are issues that have been in the center of Israeli discussion for quite some time now, in various contexts and from various aspects.

The assumption (the sense) is that the issues and challenges, which we face and which occupy us as individuals and as a society, could all be properly and effectively solved by appropriate leadership.

The Recognition of the supreme importance of education, and the current dissatisfaction with the outcomes, the success and the relative achievements of education, also serve to position the issue of education leadership in the center of educational thinking, educational debate and the act of education itself. It is the cooperation of many professionals, academic scholars, public officials and philanthropists, that is responsible for making the issue of leadership into the engine that would generate the long awaited change in the field of education; seen as they all jointly invest their professional, spiritual and materialistic resources in achieving this goal.
The monograph written by Professor Mordechai Nissan raises the issue of leadership in education from the aspect of training in the development of educational leadership. The monograph was published by the Mendel Fund, which according to its founders, is aimed at development of educational leadership. The fund was established by Jack, Joseph and Morton Mendel from Cleveland, Ohio, in the United State; and its main fields of activity are: leadership, managing non-profit organizations, higher education, education of Jewish tradition and continuity, and neighborhood restoration.

The fund's approach to philanthropy is based on the realization that prominent leaders, professionals and volunteers; all have the power to change the face of the community and of society. Such leaders have the vision, the ideological commitment and the significant ability to define goals and come up with creative solutions for present challenges.

The big question is: How are leaders with "vision, ideological commitment and significant ability to define goals and come up with creative solutions for present challenges" be created and developed? And how can we nurture them?

**Basic Characteristics of an Education Leader**

In this monograph, Professor Nissan presents a clear, articulate, detailed and well established answer to this question, by presenting a model for the development of such educational leadership; while at the same time, presenting and examining the other perceptions of this issue, and the main dilemma of the discussion around it.

As a preview to the desired model of operation, the author presents both his own perception regarding the role of the leader, and the questions that the search for leadership raises. "Generally" he claims, "the role of the leader is to guide the organization towards the realization of its goals,
by taking the means and actions that would generate the cooperation and enthusiasm of those led by him". The search for ways of training leaders raises such questions as: What are the essential characteristics of effective leaders? How do these characteristics evolve, and how are they expressed? On which of the characteristics should we focus, and which of them can be nurtured among adult learners? And, which processes can be used to develop and promote these characteristics? Implementing these questions on educational leadership requires the author to define the term "education leadership"; and so he writes: "I will attribute the term 'leadership education' to people, who see themselves as educators that are committed to their work; whose views are guided by consolidated goals and values; and whose educational activities correspond with their abilities, positions and preferences. According to the author, despite the reservations he presents, "we can however point out some basic characteristics of a good leader". One characteristic that the author chose to focus on is an "educational identity", and he refers to that term when he presents the "identity approach to leadership development". "This approach is based on the assumption that the aim of leadership development is to provide the leadership candidates with meaningful and realistic opportunities to deal with questions of goals and values (p.8)…The identity approach to leadership development places questions regarding values and goals in our lives and our education in its center" (p.19).

To clarify the "identity approach to leadership development", and to realize its benefits and potential contribution, the author chooses to juxtapose this approach and another very popular approach to leadership development- "The training model". According to the training model, "the main task of leadership development is providing the intended leaders with tools that would serve them in their missions…" The training model focuses on providing means of achieving certain goals
or aims, rather than on the goals themselves...This approach is based on the assumption that we have the ability to detect the necessary tools for leaders in all leadership contexts; tools that define the content of leadership development".

As opposed to this approach, the "identity approach to leadership development" places in its center the questions regarding values and goals in our lives, and in the education that we conduct and provide. Educational identity, according to this approach, is an identity that is based on commitment to leadership; and it is an identity which embodies beliefs and values about the processes and goals of education that derive from the trust and core belief in what is good and proper for both the individual and society. Educational identity, according to this approach, is also necessarily connected to the individual's view of the educator's role. The normative approach to educational identity refers to the awareness of the eminent tension between vision and actuality; of the educator's commitment to go beyond his own personal sphere; and of the commitment to education in the broad sense of the word, i.e. promoting the development and welfare of students and of society as a whole. It reflects perceptions regarding the nature of the good individual, the good society, and the good life; all relying on personal and professional dignity, openness, attentiveness and respect of another's beliefs, values and tendencies. And as such, educational identity goes hand in hand with the term "vision". According to this approach, educational vision is part of the educational identity, and it comes through by the beliefs and the commitments that not only add grace to it, but also make it into a generating force in a person's life.

Educational vision is also perceived as the generating force of the educational leader's educational work. But there are two conditions to this: A. a sense of duty to the realization of the vision, B. being able to progress towards such a realization. This approach argues that we ought
to help those, who participate in training, to reach the clarity and the
depth of their values and goals; to develop awareness and understanding
of them; and to ponder the position they are fulfilling as part of their
educational work. This claim is based on the concept that a person's
belief in his own ability to commit, his skills and his knowledge, has a
substantial effect on his ability to progress towards the realization of his
vision.

The supporters of the identity approach to leadership development
claim that effective development of leadership must provide the leadership
development trainees enough opportunities to cope with the basic
questions surrounding the goals and values that are in the heart of their
activities. Coping with such basic questions constitutes the foundation
for the construction and formulation of an educational identity. And it is
that identity that actually provides a firm base for the act of education,
which includes: initiating and planning, making decisions, assessing, and
examining the organizational and educational environment.

Nonetheless, the educational identity approach does state the need
for a "flexible educational identity", which is characterized by two
elements of "flexibility"- cohesion and security. In a reality of constant
change, globalization, multiculturalism, and loss of ideology; cohesion
and security are the basis for a solid educational identity, which is able
to conduct a continuous examination of reality versus its guiding values,
and of the educational results versus the educational goals; and to adjust
itself accordingly.

**How to Train for Leadership?**

After clarifying what is an "educational identity" and what is the
"educational identity approach to leadership development", the author
raises with professional integrity the main education question of "How"-
mainly, what is the educational method and activity necessary for the
development of leaders with educational identities? The author doesn't
presume to present a complete operation plan, but only demonstrates his
perception with the help of two main components that a program such as
this is supposed to contain: field work and the personal project.

In the author's opinion, practical field work is an opportunity to learn
what is truly important to the leader, i.e. what are the things to which he
is truly willing to commit. It affords him a better understanding of his
inclinations, talents, abilities and strengths, as well as his limitations and
weaknesses. As for the personal project, its declared goal is to provide
an opportunity to combine, in actuality, cognitive and practical abilities
with the vision and values that guide it. And as such, a personal project
provides opportunities to further the insights related to education and the
educational vision, while also learn about these aspects.

**General Evaluation of the book**

This significant monograph, which was first published in 1997 and
recently revised for a second publication, requires critical reading in
order to examine the different possibilities and facets of using it.

The thesis presented in this monograph can be examined from many
angles. I personally chose to focus only on the two that seemed to be
incorporating in them some of the others as well, and which I believe
have the power to generate both thinking and discussion on issues of
developing education leadership.

One angle refers to an examination of the educational identity
approach as the main factor in leadership development on the basis of the
Role Theory (a role in the field of educational leadership). The other angle
derives from the perceptions, the theories, and the principals of adult
learning, seen as the training program for adults, who are designated to
become educational leaders, was constructed on the basis of attendance and participation in the training program.

The Role Theories state that each role is comprised of three realms of knowledge: A. Knowledge of the content and subject of the role; B. Mastering the necessary skills to fulfill the role, i.e. having the relevant "toolbox"; C. Functional identity- Knowing who I am in this role, and what is my self in the role I am fulfilling. It thus becomes evident that a training program, which is designated for only one presumably dominant realm of knowledge out of the three, is lacking something in its training. Training programs differ from each other by the amount of knowledge they contain from each of the realms; and yet, focusing on only one realm of knowledge might miss the whole point of training. Therefore, the subject of focusing and integrating between the three realms of knowledge requires further clarification and examination with regards to the training approach to educational identity.

Equally important is the examination of a training program from the view point of adult learning principals. The question here is who will set the curriculum (which is the training program)? And who knows which training program suits which learner? A basic principal in adult learning is that adults only learn what they perceive as relevant, but then who's to say what is relevant to the trainer himself? If I may exaggerate- one may say that having the trainee develop his own independent program is an example of a way of developing educational leadership, since it begins with the learner leading himself through the process of his own education and development. Furthermore, it is unclear how the principal of joint accountability (of both teacher and learner), which is a central principal in adult learning, is expressed in the training programs of the educational identity approach and the "tool box" approach to learning. Accountability and commitment are the bedrocks of educational leadership and adult learning, but are they expressed in the available training program?
A central argument regarding adult learning refers to the continued learning, i.e. lifelong learning; but is this element expressed by the training program, which Professor Nissan is referring to? Does the educational identity also include the identity of the continuous and the independent learner?

This and other questions arise from reading and examining the monograph. I am certain that a discussion and debate regarding these and other questions will contribute to the development of relevant, enriching and exciting training programs. The author, Professor Mordechai Nissan is credited for generating the discussion on the issue, as well as for his contribution to the status of educational identity as a main factor in the development of leadership education. This contribution is highly significant in the promotion and development of educational leadership in the sphere of Israeli education.