

The Illusion of Self-Management in Kindergartens in Unrecognized Arab Bedouin Villages in Israel

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Abstract: Upon the request of the Israeli Ministry of Education, kindergartens in unrecognized Bedouin villages in the south of Israel had to move to self-based management even though the teachers in these kindergartens were completely unaware of even the basics of the system. This study aims to explore kindergarten teachers' perception of self-management. More specifically, it attempts to ascertain how these kindergarten teachers/principals coped with the move to self-management. To this end, I interviewed eight kindergarten teachers from the villages who had transferred to self-management five years earlier and who had previously been affiliated administratively with the local schools. The study results revealed social difficulties facing women in management positions in a society that still does not accept women in administrative positions. The kindergarten teachers saw their success as administrators as a means to prove their abilities and considered it a step towards professional development and advancement in their societal status. The findings highlight difficulties in self-management within a particular cultural context and *vis-à-vis* the local authorities.

Key words: Arab, education, unrecognized village, Israel

1. Unrecognized Villages

In Israel, an “unrecognized” village or township is the common term for an Arab settlement whose existence is not recognized by the State authorities. Accordingly, it has no local council and is not a member of a regional council. Such villages have no physical juridical boundaries and their residents are not entitled to utility services such as running water, electricity or telephone lines. They are also not included in the planning of health services or road and public transportation networks, and on election day, no ballot booths are opened for them.

Despite all this, the civil rights of the village residents as individuals are not affected. They are registered in the population register and are entitled to receive services in nearby recognized villages. On election day, for instance, their names appear in the voter registry in nearby recognized villages where they can vote.

A 2007 count showed a total of 92 unrecognized villages in Israel, 59 of which were Bedouin villages in the Negev. Between 1994-2007 the State of Israel recognized 21 Arab villages that had been in a similar legal status till then. It is estimated today that of the total Bedouin population in the Negev (approximately 180,000) some 60% live in unrecognized villages.

However, data about unrecognized villages varies according to the assessment of different factors and

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according to the various definitions of the term “village”. In a similar manner, the State of Israel has gradually recognized an increasing number of villages so the number of unrecognized villages has been decreasing over the years.

Most of the villages that were recognized were settlements that existed prior to the establishment of the State, or were established by the State of Israel. At the same time, some of the Arab villages that existed prior to that time were not recognized (notably those that were deserted during the 1948 war but whose residents returned to them afterwards). Similarly, most of the villages that were established shortly after the War by Arab refugees, especially the refugees known in Israel as “absentee residents”, who remained in Israel but settled at a considerable distance from their previous places of residence were not recognized by the State. In addition, over the years, new villages were founded on land defined today as State lands despite the residents’ claiming ownership of them.

2. An Overview of the Educational System in Israel

The educational policy in Israel is set by the Ministry of Education. From its inception, the Israeli educational system has had a centralized administrative structure as this was deemed the most effective means of assuring an education of equal quality in all schools. All staff, including administrators, teachers as well as educational counselors, are employees of the Ministry of Education and are bound to a single salary scale, which is based on the level of education and years of experience.

A distinct feature of the Israeli educational system is the official segregation between schools for Jews and those for Arabs. There are, however, a few instances where Arabs who live in mixed urban areas attend Jewish schools, and there are now five Jewish-Arab elementary schools in the country. In the Jewish education system, there is a further sub-division into a state religious and a secular system. Additionally, there is a fairly large number of private schools in both the Arab and the Jewish populations which are recognized and receive funding from the government.

School budgets and teaching hours are not distributed equally among these parallel educational systems. It has been estimated that most Jewish elementary schools receive over 25% more resources than Arab schools; in secondary education, this disparity is even greater (Rabin, 2002). The student-teacher ratio in Arab elementary schools is higher than that in Jewish schools; the discrepancy becomes much greater in the junior and high school years. Furthermore, there are differences in the kinds of educational programmes offered. For example, 60% of Jewish high school students are enrolled in vocational/technological courses of study; this is true for only 20% of Arab students. Moreover, the vocational courses offered in Arab schools are generally of a lower level (i.e., not pre-college academic tracks) and do not lead to matriculation (Swirski & Huri, 1997; Rabin, 2002). Recently, the Israeli Ministry of Education has started to invest more resources (including funds) in the Arab education system, and some improvement in the national test scores and numbers of high school graduates achieving matriculation has been noted (Mizel, 2005, 2011).

2.1 School-based Management (SBM) in the Israeli School System

In Israel, the concept of self-management in education was first proposed in 1992, though not without some precursors. The idea emerged because of the long-term power struggle between the central government and the local authorities over the control of schools. Additionally, the increasing awareness of educational reforms worldwide brought the Ministry of Education to the recognition that it was in its interest to promote

self-governance in schools. This trend received increasing momentum as the result of two primary factors: first, there was a growing acknowledgement that the supervisory mechanisms were not succeeding in overseeing the educational processes undertaken by schools (Gaziel, 2003), and second, educators began to sense that centralized management was reducing the ability of schools to respond appropriately and in a timely manner to the ever-changing circumstances they were constantly facing (Vollansky & Ear-Eli, 1995).

Accordingly, in 1992, the Minister of Education appointed a steering committee to examine options for increasing school autonomy. The committee recommended implementing school-based management (SBM) in the Israeli school system but with some caveats. More specifically, each school would be required to determine clear goals, develop learning plans and appoint a board of directors. Government educational allotments would be transferred to SBM schools via the local authorities and these schools would also be entitled to raise funds from non-public sources through a non-profit association that would act in accordance with the standards and procedures set by the Ministry of Education. Donations thus acquired were to be used for educational programmes and activities for the benefit of all students, without discrimination or preference of any kind. It was also recommended that the tax-exemption limit be raised to encourage individuals and entities to make donations to schools.

While the goal of the transition to SBM was to increase school autonomy, ironically, schools were not given the freedom to decide whether they wished to take part in this process — the Ministry of Education alone had the authority to determine which schools were to be conducted according to SBM. Schools couldn't request to be included. And since the Ministry's initiative was in the form of a request, rather than a directive, it never happened that a school formally refused.

It is noteworthy that the Ministry of Education was not satisfied with the poor educational outcomes in the Arab-Bedouin sector and hoped that SBM would improve this situation and so it imposed the system on the schools within that sector, including kindergartens (Mizel, 2005, 2011).

The impact of SBM policy was investigated by Gaziel, Bogler and Nir (2005). They reviewed the implementation of self-governance in Israeli public schools representing a cross-section of the ethnic groups in the nation including secular Jewish schools in small communities, religious Jewish schools in small communities, Arab schools in a large city, Druze schools in small Druze communities and regional secular Jewish schools. Forty-four schools in the first year of being designated as SBM schools were compared with 109 schools that had been functioning as SBM schools for the past three years. The study concluded that teachers, in both newly SBM designated schools and older SBM schools, did not have a coherent understanding of the concept of SBM as an educational system in general, nor did they have a clear understanding of the implications of SBM as a tool for budgetary management. This research also determined, *de facto*, that the existing Israeli educational system would remain in place.

2.2 Self-management in Kindergartens

At the end of the 1990s, a group of kindergarten principals and teachers began to apply self-management in kindergartens. This movement attracted the interest of several researchers (e.g., Friedman, Barma, & Toren, 1998) resulting in a considerable body of information forming a good database for investigation. Most of the literature to date, however, has focused on the management aspect of early learning.

Within the traditional role of the kindergarten teacher (mainly those who work in independent kindergartens), the administrative role of the teacher/principal is well known; nevertheless, it has not attracted sufficient attention

from researchers over the years, except in regards to administrative compensation as a salary component (Friedman, Barma, & Toren, 1998).

Writing about kindergarten teachers in a learning environment, Bieger (2003) claims that in contrast with the school reality, the kindergarten teacher, in fact, fulfills the role of both principal and teacher simultaneously. The kindergarten teacher/principal deals with programming pedagogy and administration, organizes the roles of teachers, oversees the children, supervises the staff, represents them with external agents, coordinates, monitors experts, who might be working with the kindergarten, and keeps contact with the local community in which the kindergarten operates. All these responsibilities represent distinct management roles that as yet enjoy a suitable place neither in training nor in working in the system.

A survey ordered by the Pre-elementary Education Department of the Research International Institute, and designed to map attitudes and perceptions of kindergarten teachers of their jobs, clearly confirmed this claim (Bieger, 2003). The findings reflect a disparity between the kindergarten teacher's declaration as the manager of an institution and the support she receives for performing this particular aspect of her work.

2.3 Attributes of Management for Early Age Learners

Rodd (1998) investigated leadership in early age learning frameworks, and noted three characteristics of educational management at that age, stemming from the age attributes and the structure of the educational establishment:

(1) The kindergarten teacher/principal works directly and simultaneously with the parents, staff and children. This demands administrative and communication skills and the capacity for complex team work.

(2) The kindergarten teacher/principal is responsible for all the children throughout the day and in all areas of development and knowledge. Fulfilling this position necessitates administrative and organizational skills and a high level of expertise in many areas.

(3) The children's age range and diverse stages of development are very broad and demand state-of-the-art professional knowledge.

In this context, Friedman et al. (1998) concluded that self-management in both school and kindergartens open the door for the teacher to take initiative and make some achievement. Furthermore, the teacher knows the real needs of her kindergarten, especially regarding budget. Research in this area **indicates that self-management is** more effective for kindergartens, as it enables the kindergarten teacher to decide what is good for the kindergarten, to allocate the budget she receives from the local authority according to the kindergarten's needs, and according to proper management determined by the Ministry of Education (Friedman, 1998).

2.4 Budgetary Principles According to the Ministry of Education

Budgeting principles are set by the steering committee of self-management schools in accordance with the self-managing kindergarten (Nir, 2007) as follows:

(1) The kindergarten's basic budgetary framework depends on the number of students.

(2) The kindergarten will be administered as a closed financial unit, with a budgetary framework, which the kindergarten teacher participates in preparing.

(3) The Ministry of Education and the local authority will transfer most of the financial resources intended for the students, the kindergarten and the teachers.

(4) The kindergarten will benefit from an overall budget for daily activities in order to improve and advance the children's achievements in kindergarten, according the Ministry of Education.

(5) The local authority will transfer to the kindergarten the money to which it is entitled, apart from money transferred directly by the Ministry of Education. These monies shall be invested in developing curricula, and acquiring equipment for the home and for kindergarten, intended to help children to develop mentally and cognitively.

(6) The local authority has the responsibility to refurbish and maintain the building according to the kindergarten teacher's requirements.

These budgetary principles help the teacher to run the kindergarten independently, with special emphasis on the standards set by the Ministry of Education on one hand, and on the other hand, allow her to determine the allocation of the budget according to the kindergarten's needs. This means she can earmark money for any programme which she believes is good for the children, affording her greater financial freedom of activity, and meeting the parents' wishes (Nir, 2007).

2.5 The Arab-Bedouin Cultural Context

Before embarking on the research question of the present study, it is imperative to present an overview of the Israeli Arab-Bedouin society as its schools operate within a cultural context with which Western society is largely unfamiliar. The Bedouin society is a closed, patriarchal system, which is based on tribal affiliation and in which each tribe is headed by a leader called *sheikh*. The sheikh, who is usually charismatic, is vested with unlimited power. He is obeyed by all members of the tribe, who show him the utmost respect. The sheikh makes decisions on all matters that concern the tribe including the private lives of tribal members (Al-Krenawi, 2000) and it is he who determines the rules governing the tribe and instructs members how to behave in every aspect of daily life.

The sheikh is considered the spiritual father and leader of the entire tribe, and he alone is authorized to represent the tribe with the outside world. The individual tribesman has no status other than being a part of a collective comprising his extended family and the larger tribal community. A personal or family problem encountered by a member of the tribe becomes the problem of the collective, which then assumes the responsibility for solving it. Thus, in the Arab-Bedouin society, individuals never have to struggle independently with decision-making or cope alone with crises or major problems, because the tribe will always provide support and instruction as to the necessary course of action. The individual does not need to search for solutions to problems, because they are formulated by the community and issued as directives by the sheikh (Al-Krenawi, 2000). In this society, personal responsibility is almost unknown: only collective responsibility is recognized.

Although the tribal sheikh does not play any formal role in the state education system, his status grants him immense power over everything that transpires within the schools. He exerts great influence in the appointment of the principal and teachers, especially if the school is located on land traditionally owned by the tribe, thus granting it *de facto* status as a tribal school (Al-Krenawi, 2000). The sheikh is concerned with the behavior and social norms within the schools, such as the segregation of male and female students, adherence to the dress norms (particularly among female teachers and students). However, he has no influence on the curriculum or on pedagogical matters.

The principals of Arab-Bedouin schools are all members of the local tribes — in most cases, of the same tribe as their staff and students. While the appointment of a principal requires the formal approval of the Ministry of Education, in this society approval by the sheikh, though unofficial, is a mandatory requirement. Without the sheikh's implicit "seal of approval", an individual has virtually no chance of becoming a school principal, regardless of his/her professional qualifications. Because Arab-Bedouin schools are typically located on tribal

lands, the specific tribe involved has a sense of ownership of the school and sees it as a tribal property, with the sheikh as its director, rather than as an institution for learning and growth of the entire society (Ali, 1990).

In accordance with the policy of the Israeli Ministry of Education, the Arab education system (including the Bedouin system) is totally separate from the Jewish one (Al-Haj, 1988). Despite this, on the national, ministerial level, the policy-makers for the Arab school system are almost all Jewish. Even Arab-Bedouin superintendents scarcely participate in any policy-making decisions, nor do they have any input into this process (Hazaan, 2001). Israeli Arab-Bedouin schools are fully co-educational, with mixed-gender student bodies and teaching staff. The Israeli Ministry of Education policy in this regard arouses considerable opposition among the Bedouins, who argue that the integration of males and females is explicitly against their tradition. Although they have repeatedly requested separation of the genders in their schools, the Ministry has categorically refused to accede to this demand. As a result, girls are often not allowed by their families to attend school at all (Abu-Rabi'a, 2001).

3. Methods

3.1 Type of Research

This study adopts the case-study research method. The case study in social sciences is a research method that is anchored in the world view of the qualitative paradigm. In this method observations of human activity are conducted at a particular time and place. In contrast with statistical studies, which rely on many examples, cases, or instances, a case study deals with an isolated case (an individual or a group) which is studied in depth and over time. This method has been used in the study of many areas of the social sciences, particularly in education (Shleski & Alpert, 2007).

Case studies, nevertheless, are considered by many researchers as a research approach or strategy more than strictly a research method. Viewing a case study as a research approach leads to a broader view of the concept and involves many research methods such as interviews, observations, document analysis, and even gathering quantitative data (Zabar Ben Yehoshua, 1999).

Stake (1994, cited in Zabar Ben Yehoshua, 1999) developed a typology of two kinds of case study:

- (1) The instrumental case study: a case study not conducted itself but in order to attain additional insights regarding a particular subject.
- (2) The collective case study: a study of a group of specific cases from which general insights are obtained, through similarity or contrast.

Using the tools of the interpretive approach to explore the present case, which is unique in Israel, I have tried to investigate how kindergarten teachers managed to survive, and how they ran the kindergartens by themselves from the outset.

The use of the unstructured interview as a research tool enables the social scientist to reach a deeper understanding of phenomena, positions and opinions than would the use of a quantitative tool alone (Merriam, 1988; Patton, 1990). It can also be a decisive research tool, as it either reinforces or weakens the quantitative findings (Glesne & Peshkin, 1991; Carspecken, 1996). In a semi-structured interview, respondents are given the opportunity to expand on their answers; their detailed replies enable the researcher to reach a fuller understanding of relevant issues beyond the specific parameters of the directly asked questions (Measor, 1985).

The overall goal of the semi-structured interviews in this study was to assess how the respondents perceive the decentralization process and the delegation of decision-making at the kindergarten level. The questions used in

the interview were based on the latest literature on SBM, and the researcher's observations.

3.2 Participants

Eight Female kindergarten teachers from three different kindergartens in unrecognized Arab-Bedouin villages were selected for the purpose of the present study. They range in age from 28-48 years and have had a working experience from 4-18 years. All participant teachers hold a BA in Early Childhood-Kindergarten Teacher and work as kindergarten principals.

3.3 Data Collection

The data in this study were collected using semi-structured interviews. Some of the questions were prepared in advance while others were improvised on the spot. Since there was no way of controlling the interviewee's answers, the researcher used follow-up questions in response to the interviewee's answers. The semi-structured interview assures methodical completeness of the information, whereas topics that are not covered during the interview can be identified. This method is also sensitive to the individual and to the situation (Patton, 1987).

3.4 Data Analysis

In addition to aspects relating to SBM, the interview data revealed several other aspects: social, personal, and political, and so were analyzed accordingly.

3.5 Procedure and Selection of Participants

The present research is an interpretive study that aims to explain Arab-Bedouin kindergarten teachers' attitudes towards self-management, as manifested during semi-structured interviews. Based on my acquaintance with kindergarten teachers in the unrecognized Arab-Bedouin villages, I prepared a list of those teachers who I thought had the ability to express themselves well and who would give much information and be willing to share their experiences, feelings and thoughts with all honesty and openness. Then I met with each of them individually, and explained the objectives of my research and the interviews I was planning to conduct with them. I unambiguously emphasized the issue of confidentiality and clearly stated that the data collected would be used for research purposes only and that names would not be kept confidential. It should be noted that some of them said did not care if everyone knew what they thought, but I explained that breaching unanimity was contrary to research ethics.

Despite the kindergarten teachers' preliminary enthusiasm, I encountered difficulties setting dates for the interviews as most had very little free time! All of them had small children and had to rush back home as soon as they got off work.

During the individual interviews, I re-emphasized the issue of confidentiality. I also asked them to be honest and feel free to tell me everything they were thinking. The interviews were conducted in Arabic. The researcher took notes during the interviews and later translated them into Hebrew. No audio or video recordings were used for fear of compromising confidentiality and openness.

3.6 The Research Questions

- (1) How do the participant kindergarten teachers perceive their administrative role?
- (2) What changes occurred in their work methods and knowledge in their field of work and behavior following the transfer to self-management?
- (3) What methods did the teachers use that enabled them to succeed in managing the kindergarten?

The use of the interview was considered especially crucial to this study, as it was anticipated that any data

collected in this fashion would contribute critical information, since it is a cultural norm among Arab-Bedouins to answer questions at great length. For the purpose of illustration, a question that would generally be answered with a simple “yes” or “no” in the Western culture would typically be answered in great detail by an Arab-Bedouin (of course involving much repetition). This communication style is known in Arabic as “musayara”, which literally translates as “accommodating and going along with”. Thus, the researcher was able to gather information about the interviewees’ opinions, ideas, perceptions, etc. regarding SBM and teamwork in their schools well beyond the scope of the questions asked (For a comprehensive description of the Musayara in the traditional Arab culture, see Katniel’s, 1999).

The present researcher is an Arab who is not only fluent in the local Bedouin dialects of Arabic but is also closely familiar with the cultural codes and communication styles of the Arab-Bedouins. It is, therefore, reasonable to assume that his style of communication inspired confidence among the interviewees, both because of his Arab ethnicity and more importantly because of the fact that he was not affiliated with the Israeli establishment. It should be noted that although the researcher was male, the fact that the interaction during the interviews was purely professional and due to his previous acquaintance with the teachers and their husbands (being their ex-professor at college) greatly mitigated the problem of gender.

The interviewer explained the purpose of this research in a positive way in order to encourage and motivate the teachers to cooperate in an effort to collect data that could be used to influence policy-makers and promote positive change. In accordance with the style of Musayara, he allowed the respondents to speak freely and without interruption until they felt that they had said everything that they wanted. Because so many respondents gave similar answers to the formal questions and furthermore supplied similar examples when provided with the option of adding additional information that they perceived as important and relevant, it could be safely assumed that they were telling the truth.

The social, personal, and political aspects that transpired from the interviews afforded the research findings that interpret the kindergarten teachers’ perception of self-management and the difficulties they encountered due to external factors not directly involving them, but which prevented them from functioning properly for some of the time.

4. Study Findings

4.1 The Social Connection

The traditional society in the south of Israel still believes that a woman’s place is in the home even though there are some members of this society who actually support working women their and acknowledge their contribution to the society and family, particularly in the field of education. Yet still this society refuses to have women in administrative positions. In this regard, one of the kindergarten teachers said, “Society still does not accept women in key positions, i.e., managers or administrators or being in charge of kindergarten finances. I often receive comments from the local authority that I do not understand anything about budgets, and that financial matters should be left to people who understand them — meaning men”.

Another kindergarten teacher reiterated this position, “Society is not yet ready to accept women as [school] principals. I frequently encounter people who belittle my ability indirectly ... I am always asked to prove my capabilities ... Many parents often ask why there isn’t a male principal ... and why they don’t unite all kindergartens and appoint one male principal for all of them.”

Such a stand shows that society does still not accept women in key positions, but one kindergarten teacher said, “Perhaps it is having children and working... it is only natural for a woman to be able to be a kindergarten teacher. This makes it easier for a large part of society to accept us in management positions ... This reality still exists though. In the beginning, we were disturbed when we were asked to be managers, and we did not receive help from the school principal.”

A participant kindergarten teacher alluded to a different aspect: “The fact that I am a head teacher requires me to be in the company of men... The people I deal with are mostly men and this creates problems for me at home, because my husband doesn’t like the situation.”

The same view was expressed by another interviewee, “In my opinion, being women is a good reason for the principal not to help us. Being in administration requires me to be always with men, mainly from the local authority. My husband does not like this and has asked me several times to send my assistant.”

The last two comments clearly show that the opposition of the Arab-Bedouin society against women holding administrative positions is due to the fact their job responsibilities require them to be in the company of men (e.g., in the local authority), which is not allowed (or at least frowned upon) by traditions. This explains the kindergarten teachers’ difficulties in managing the kindergarten, and their preference to work under the authority of a school principal.

A somewhat related comment from a teacher whose husband works with the local authority, “My husband works for the local authority and I prefer to work with him ... He always warns me about them”. Such a comment lends further support to the statements regarding the social and cultural difficulties and problems kindergarten teachers face.

It can be suggested that the lack of freedom of action for women as dictated by traditions prevents them from undertaking other endeavors, such as studying. According to one of the participant teachers, “Society still makes it difficult to accept women as administrators though more is always demanded of them than males — so a woman must always prove herself.”

4.2 Personal Challenge

Any administrative job usually entails a lot of responsibility and great effort. The participant kindergarten teachers saw it as a personal challenge not only having to manage both the administrative and the financial aspects, but also having to assume the role of the educator responsible for preparing the children for school. In each case, it wasn’t merely a complex administrative challenge to the individual teacher, but also a social challenge as they had to prove to the society that they had the capacity to carry out all these responsibilities.

The following excerpt illustrates this complex situation, “What does a kindergarten teacher do as a kindergarten manager? She takes and brings several stamps of approval from the local authority and from the Ministry of Education herself, without the help of the school secretary ... I believe the toughest part is dealing with the parents. In the past they used to contact the principal for any requests or complaints, and he knew how to deal with them, even if not in the most educational or correct manner. He often solved problems as is customary in our society through friends and so on. But now we must face dissatisfied parents and deal with them by ourselves. This is something new and it is not easy for us, and sometimes we act like the principal, and often get help from the family to find solutions.”

Surprisingly, a different viewpoint was expressed by one of the participant teachers, “In my opinion, all this talk about management and school and the heavy new responsibility is a bit exaggerated. To be truthful, we

managed the kindergartens by ourselves in the past too, and did most of the work, only without receiving management compensation! I think all this pressure is only psychological.” This comment illustrates the social challenge that the kindergarten teachers face whereby they have to prove that they are capable of assuming serious responsibilities in a society that belittles women’s capabilities.

Several kindergarten teachers claimed that they survive in their administrative positions simply because they adopt the Arab “Musayara” communication strategy.

The participating teachers’ comments show the extent of the challenge they face in their society as regards self-management. Even though they honestly want to succeed, the parents, who represent the attitudes of the society at large, are sometimes dissatisfied with their work. In many cases the kindergarten teachers often have to resort to school teachers or to family members to help them solve the problems they encounter.

This is illustrated by a particular incident recounted by one teacher, “I decided to have a birthday party for the kids, which some of the parents didn’t approve, so I asked the local council, which is responsible for kindergartens, for help. I also asked my supervisor to help me persuade the parents to approve the party and to take part in it.”

The situation described here and which was mentioned in all the interviews, supports the teachers’ contention that they face an emotional challenge to prove their abilities as successful administrators in a society that yet has to recognize that women are in fact capable of performing such work. This position cannot be isolated from the social reality in general. In the Bedouin society many doors are still closed to women, and the education system is probably the only exception in which they can advance.

In this regard, one teacher said, “Bedouin women do not find places where they can advance — except in the education system, and so women are always ignored”.

The restrictions on women’s opportunities of employment is often the topic of discussion among the kindergarten teachers, who cannot be isolated from the general social context, where even educated men can rarely advance outside the education system or the local authority. It should be noted that although there is an increasing number of male and female Bedouin students in higher education institutions (university and college), they still constitute a relatively small percentage of the Bedouin population and of the student body as a whole. This fact supports the participants’ view that assuming an administrative position is a personal challenge to prove to the society and the parents that they can run a kindergarten effectively.

4.3 Difficulties Stemming from the Practice of Management

The new management responsibilities demand much emotional and physical strength from the kindergarten teachers in terms of the balance between their work and family duties, particularly as they are all married and have children. More importantly, most of them lacked the knowledge and expertise needed for kindergarten management. This position was expressed by one of the participant teachers, “I find myself more as a kindergarten teacher. This is a job I understand; it is what I studied, and it is also the area in which I have experience. I love my work as a kindergarten teacher and think it is closest to my nature. I love children. As a principal I sometimes face impatient and impolite officials; arguing with them is not a pleasure!”

A rather different view that sheds doubt about the kindergarten teachers’ administrative role was expressed by one of the participant teachers, “It’s not really administration; it’s an illusion — as if we are administrators. We teach more than we administer.”

The difficulties facing the participant teachers highlight the problems in managing the kindergartens. The

causes may vary; some depend on the deficient cooperation between the kindergarten teachers and the local authority; others stem from the feelings of dissatisfaction among the parents. More importantly, most of the kindergarten teachers have not been trained for kindergarten management. Some of them thought that self-management would enable them to take decisions independently of the supervisory department as expressed by the following comment by one of the teachers, “The kindergarten teachers decided on a peak day [a day with special emphasis on a specific theme] without informing the supervisor or getting her approval. She heard about our plan indirectly, cancelled that day and reprimanded the kindergarten teachers.” This exemplifies the difficulties faced by the kindergarten teachers, many of whom are unaware of how to run a kindergarten and what self-management is.

The lack of knowledge regarding management principles is also a source of difficulty for kindergarten teachers. One teacher said, “When I worked under the school principal, I had to follow his instructions, even though they sometimes did not agree what I had learned and what I knew to be good and suitable for the children... Now we work according to our own plans. True, there are instructors and a supervisor, but they come from our field, and do as we do, and know what is good for the children... I prepare a plan for myself at the beginning of the year and work according to it; it takes into consideration the stages of child development and the differences in the children’s abilities. I know what the children want and buy equipment and supplies accordingly...”

These comments indicate that the teachers’ attitudes towards self-management are not uniform: while some prefer to work under the supervision of the school principal, others see working independently as a serious challenge. One can safely conclude that self-management was difficult in the beginning, but after acquiring some experience, the teachers began to sense the change they had experienced, and saw self-management as a personal challenge and a prestigious status that many of them desired and aspired for. One kindergarten teacher said, “*My friend said I receive a management compensation of 1800 NIS and I become my own boss.*” Such a statement reinforces the findings that despite the pressure, self-management was preferred by most of the participant teachers.

4.4 Professional Development

One kindergarten teacher said: “If I compare myself now with what I was three years ago, I now feel that I have more experience and ability....” Such a statement illustrates the impact of the transition to self-management. Here the teacher is referring specifically to her management skills, although her teaching skills may have also improved in the process. Another teacher said, “After the transition to self-management I participated in many in-service training courses... We received instruction from the Supervisory Department ... They sent us an instructor in the second year... All this helped us... Now the kindergarten teachers are independent, and know what management is ... Now I can cope with the problems that I may face. If I compare myself now with the first year, I can say it was torture. Had I not received the instruction and assistance, I would not have continued with my work.”

This statement seems to summarize the perception of self-management by the majority of the participant teachers in the study. At the beginning, they became aware of the difficulties of management, but their anxiety decreased after receiving help from the right people, and the in-service training courses and workshops in this field. They began to focus on two levels — the administrative (particularly in regard to the financial matters) and the pedagogic *as it relates to* preparing the child for the first grade according to the regulations of the Ministry of Education.

This finding further points to the importance of professional training and preparation prior to embarking on actual management. The teachers also need support in their role as managers though they prefer to focus on their pedagogical role in preparing the kindergarten children for school. The following excerpt illustrates this clearly, “I studied to be a kindergarten teacher, not a principal. Administration does not take much of my time but in the first year I did not know what to do... in retrospect, if I had had the help of a [trained] kindergarten teacher, I would have got through that year more easily.”

As noted before, this finding supports the claim that the kindergarten teachers need support in all the regulations relating to SBM. Moreover, the Ministry of Education should not demand or expect almost completely inexperienced staff to assume self-management responsibilities successfully.

4.5 Political

Six teachers indicated that they faced difficulty in managing the kindergarten due to certain political rather than social reasons. In one case, according to one of the participant teachers, the supervisor, who is Jewish, informed kindergarten teachers that events which celebrate or commemorate political or national occasions are not allowed to be held in kindergartens. Any activity with a political theme was allowed only after obtaining the approval of the supervisor. This is clear evidence that the Arab teacher lacked real authority to make-decisions. In another incident, a teacher with 10 years of teaching experience said they were asked not to commemorate land-day (30 March) and to have regular classes on this national occasion. Another teacher stated that she wanted to organize an activity about house demolitions in the Negev, but the supervisor did not approve the activity and simply stopped her from going ahead with the idea.

A third teacher said that during a workshop on self-management they had attended, they were told that teachers could prepare their own short educational materials. She continues, “But when I wanted to prepare a small booklet about the rights of Bedouins in Israel, the whole idea was rejected.” She commented, “The decision was purely political and did not take the students’ interest into consideration.”

The interviews show that some kindergarten teachers’ failure in self-management was due to certain political rather than social factors. According to them, among the decision-makers in Ministry of Education who are responsible for self-management there are certain individuals who fear that if the Arabs are now granted the right to self-management in education, they will later demand national self-management. Obviously, this is against the Israeli national policy or agenda. In addition to this, there is the Ministry of Education’s apprehension that the Arabs will use books with a national content, particularly taking into consideration that most residents of the unrecognized villages in the Negev have relatives in the West Bank and Gaza. This, it is feared, will have a deep effect on the educational system in the Negev.

5. Discussion and Conclusions

The decision to decentralize kindergartens in southern Israel emerges from following motives (Inbar, 1994):

- (1) Economic: the belief that decentralization leads to greater financial efficiency.
- (2) Administrative: the belief that the shift of power from the central authority will improve services.
- (3) Pedagogical: the expansion of the school authority will lead to improvement in academic achievement.

This study showed that different factors contributed to the efficiency of the new administrative model (i.e., SBM) implemented in kindergartens in unrecognized Arab villages in the Negev.

5.1 The Ministry of Education's Policies towards Minorities (Including Bedouins)

The Ministry of Education's original plan was to encourage SBM in the Arab Bedouin community in Israel and did in fact grant the schools in this study the right to manage their own affairs. However, at the same time, the Ministry refrained from implementing a full-fledged SBM in these schools because it was afraid that a full-scale SBM could be exploited to promote Arab nationalist and separatist sentiments. However, the opposite result emerged: SBM schools in the Arab Bedouin community found themselves under a stricter inspection regime than had been in place before the introduction of SBM. Some researchers even go as far as to actually claim that the Ministry intended all along to remove all nationalist elements and all authentic content from the Arab school curriculum and that, for the purpose of achieving that goal, it decided to use the Arab-Bedouin school system as an instrument for maintaining tight control on and monitoring of the Arab-Bedouin population (Al-Haj 1996; Hazaan, 2003; Haaretz, 2004). These researchers further argue that, in order to prevent the development of any nationalist awareness in the Arab community in Israel, the Ministry tried to delegitimize Arab nationalism and to utilize the Arab school system as a vehicle for legitimizing the Ministry's official ideology and for imparting to the students vague universalistic values (Al-Haj, 1998; Hazaan, 2003).

Since Israel became an independent state in 1948, the Israeli authorities have adopted a policy of controlled segregation of the Arab school system. Although a separate Arab education department was set up, it was always headed by a Jewish official until 1987; consequently, the Arabs had minimal influence on its decision-making process and resource allocation. Despite the existence of a separate school system, Israeli Arabs have never enjoyed cultural autonomy (Al-Haj, 1996) as the Israeli authorities have systematically controlled the Arab school system through the tight monitoring of curricula. In fact, this was among the very first measures that the Israeli authorities took immediately after declaring statehood: the Ministry of Education cancelled the curriculum that had been in existence before 1948 and banned textbooks with Arab nationalist content. The new curriculum was carefully planned to enable the authorities to maintain politico-social control of the younger generation (Al-Haj, 1996).

The findings of the present research and the field literature (for example, Al-Haj, 1996; Abu Saad, 1998) demonstrate that the educational policies for the Arab and Bedouin communities do not represent an unbiased system. The decision-making process, the contents that are chosen in this process, the curriculum and the access to power centers in the Arab/Bedouin school system are strongly influenced by the existing balance of power in the Israeli society and in the official state agencies. The state plays a central role in channeling the national school system's inputs and outcomes and assigns political priority to inputs and outcomes that, in many cases, are incongruous with the ambitions and desires of the Arab/Bedouin community.

As suggested by the responses in this study, the perceptions of both the kindergarten teachers/principals in the Bedouin schools are that the basic message that the Ministry of Education conveys to the Bedouin society/community is a total lack of trust in the community and its schools. This message creates an atmosphere of mutual distrust between the Ministry and the Bedouin community. The Ministry fears that granting excessive freedom to the Arab/Bedouin schools could be interpreted as cultural autonomy, which could lead to political autonomy, which is precisely what various Arab political parties want (Abu Isba, 2004) and which the state is totally opposed to. Apparently, the Ministry's fear is the reason for the tight supervision and monitoring of the Arab/Bedouin schools, especially those in which SBM has been introduced. It could be legitimately asked whether the Ministry could not have foreseen such a situation. The answer might be inferred from the confusion

and self-contradictions that have characterized the implementation of SBM in Israel. Perhaps the Ministry wanted to examine the extent to which the Arab/Bedouin community was prepared for the introduction of SBM.

The present study has shown that SBM is perceived by the Bedouin community, the teachers and the policy-makers as a strategy adopted by the central government to maintain close supervision and monitoring of Bedouin schools.

The stories of the kindergarten teachers in the Bedouin tribes reflect the difficulties they experienced in management. Most of the findings indicate that these difficulties are connected to their own society. The Bedouin society in southern Israel still finds it hard to accept women in administrative positions that confer on them a high social position and offer them economic independence, and afford them greater freedom.

A topic for further research is a comparison between the teachers in southern Bedouin society and their Arab counterparts in the north of the country, given the quite significant societal differences. More interesting would be a comparison between the Arab Bedouin teachers and their Jewish counterparts, both modern and traditional.

As a specialist in culture and self-management, it is hard for me to detach myself from the kindergarten teachers' stories. This makes it hard for them and sometimes prevents them from working, leaving them busy most of the time managing the kindergarten. Friedman et al. (1998) relates to this point and states that American schools appoint an administrative manager to only deal with administrative issues and with finances, knowing that involvement in financial issues takes time. Looking very closely at the studies on which Friedman et al. base their finding and the results of this study, indicates that adequate training and help can enable the kindergarten teachers to work both as administrators and teachers.

The present research findings ascertain the status of Bedouin women who try to make a way for themselves through education. This process is usually difficult and is riddled with obstacles that prevent women from being active in the society, but nevertheless they try and succeed. The successes of Bedouin women are quite prominent in the stories of the kindergarten teachers, many of whom saw self-management as a personal challenge, having to succeed in a traditional society, much of which still sees the place of women in the home.

The reality in which the kindergarten teachers exist suggests that some of the men believe that women are still unable to be administrators and are not likely to succeed. This attitude was quite common; kindergarten teachers saw it as a challenge, hoping to prove first to themselves and second to the society that they not only have the ability to succeed but that several have actually achieved success. The Bedouin social structure and traditions are a burden borne by the women, who rarely take a single step without first examining it against their social context. They also saw their success as a small step towards change in their social status even though it requires a lot of hard work.

The kindergarten teachers experienced harsh tribulations during their first year, and saw self-management as a heavy task for them, but they really wanted to succeed and pushed themselves hard despite all odds. During the interviews they stressed the need for help particularly for beginning kindergarten teachers. It was clear for me, as a field researcher, that successful self-management was a real challenge. However, after receiving many signals from the field, the Ministry of Education informed them that the self-management experiment had not succeeded and as a result they would be back under the auspices of the elementary school the following year.

This situation forces the kindergarten teachers to keep trying and to demand assistance from the proper sources. In fact, the authorities realized that such assistance was needed, and provided instructors as well as in-service training. All this shows beyond doubt the teachers' desire to succeed and to prove to the Bedouin society that women could do this line of work.

As regards the transition to self-management, much help is required; in fact, it is not easy for new inexperienced administrators/managers to survive without appropriate support and guidance. At the same time, the kindergarten teachers/principles in the present study saw the great advantages of self-management to their kindergartens. They were aware of their actual needs were therefore able to channel the money accordingly. During the interviews, most teachers spoke about the improvement at the kindergarten level, and in their administrative ability and actual work there. However, several stressed that they thought the policy was an attempt to cause them to fail during the first year, but after three years of experience, they changed their minds and saw it as an essential element for the success of kindergartens.

In conclusion, self-management can afford kindergarten teachers a vital opportunity to improve their kindergartens even though the social, political, cultural context in which they operate is tough, and does not facilitate the empowerment of women. There are considerable sections in the Bedouin society that oppose women's assuming positions that involve decision-making and leadership. So, the kindergarten teachers recognized this sensitivity and attempted to avoid conflict with the male-dominated population. In this manner, they are introducing change quietly, adopting Musayara style of administration, which is non-existent in the Western society.

The Musayara style is a form of communication that takes great care not to offend or challenge the other. It is never confrontational, is often loquacious, and always indirect. Paradoxically, to the Western mind, Musayara can be perceived as underhand, manipulative and/or extensively rambling and tedious. Therefore, because of the stark contrasts between communication styles in Arab and Western culture, it is imperative that Western educational management philosophy develops an understanding of the Musayara paradigm if Western educational reforms are to be implemented within an Arab cultural context.

The use of Musayara helped the teachers to solve conflicts, to recruit resources, to manage and to maintain what exists. This style is, however, less helpful when it comes to leading, initiating and so on. The eventual result is a perception of progress among women who are filling school-based or kindergarten-based management positions. Assuming a particular administrative or managerial position may not be more than an illusion. Real change occurs when societal attitudes change. As noted earlier, there are probably some early stirrings of such a change, particularly with the increasing number of Bedouin students in higher education, and their subsequent entry into the work force and society. But it is still a very long way to go.

Effecting leading change often involves looking backward to look forward. In order to convert this slogan to something practical, one must make sure that prior to any reform, the social-cultural context must be considered; one must assure that teachers' training colleges teach kindergarten teachers 'dialogue teaching' and leadership, and encourage society to strive to empower women.

5.2 Tribal Structure and Autocracy of the Sheikh

Another issue that was raised by the participant teachers in this study was the unchallenged authority of the sheikh on school management. The Arab Bedouin culture is highly tribal and power is centralized in the Sheikh's hands, who is seen as the ultimate authority on all matters, big or small, public or private. In fact, many participants noted the central role of the sheikh on their work.

In this regard, Ali (1990) reports that all Arab organizations are characterized by a high level of centralization. Among the Arab Bedouins who live in small villages, temporary settlements, there is no flexibility that would allow women to assume administrative roles. This might constitute an obstacle for them to become kindergarten principals.

6. Conclusion

The decision of the Israeli Ministry of Education to implement SBM policy in the schools and kindergartens in the Arab-Bedouin society in the Negev without consulting the school and kindergarten principals and teachers or the decision makers of the society was quite misguided. In fact, it has led to the failure of the project. It is quite clear, for instance, that the control and censorship of the Ministry of Education for fear that the Arab teachers might introduce teaching materials with contents that are against the Ministry's official policy is greatly detrimental to the success of an important project such as SBM, a project which is supposed to give almost full freedom to the schools.

Added to this is the Ministry's ignorance of the social and tribal structure of the traditional Bedouin society, which is completely centralized and wherein power is entrusted to men and wherein supreme authority is in the hands of the sheikh. In such a society, delegation of authority is quite improbable, if not almost impossible.

The participant teachers who succeeded in self-management could not have succeeded without the support of men (husband or father). Otherwise, they would have failed.

It is strongly recommended that, before embarking on a project of great magnitude and importance as SBM, the Ministry of Education should consult with the local society/community to avoid possible cultural and social taboos.

It is also recommended that the Ministry should minimize its control and censorship of Arab schools. The researcher recommends that the Ministry hire experts in all steps of the implementation of such a project.

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