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CONSERVATIVE PERCEPTIONS FOR A CHANGING REALITY. A CRITICAL LOOK AT THE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF SCHOOL PRINCIPALS IN ISRAEL

ABSTRACT. Nets Mali, *Conservative Perceptions for a Changing Reality. A Critical Look at the Professional Development of School Principals in Israel* [Konserwatywna percepcja zmieniającej się rzeczywistości. Krytyczne spojrzenie na rozwój zawodowy dyrektorów szkół w Izraelu]. Studia Edukacyjne nr 42, 2016, Poznań 2016, pp. 517-533. Adam Mickiewicz University Press. ISSN 1233-6688. DOI: 10.14746/se.2016.42.29

As a part of the worldwide trend, in Israel the issues of accountability in management, the school improvement, and the learners' achievements are topics on the public agenda. In the attempt to address these challenges, Israel implemented a reform in the professional development of the principals, which was applied to the system with the establishment of the School Leadership Institute, Avnei Rosha (2007). The theoretical model of the professional development is based on the career stages approach,[1] which originated in the research studies on the career circles of teachers[2] and principals. These models examined characteristics of different stages in the professional life track of the teacher[3] as well as the mental aspect of the principals' perception of management throughout the career.[4] The Israeli model adopted these theories as the basis for the professional development of principals and formed a comprehensive program of learning from the stage of the entry into the role to the stage of the retirement.[5] The article will propose a critical look at the professional develop-

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[1] I. Oplatka, *The School Principal in Late Career: An Explorative Inquiry into Career Issues and Experiences in the Pre-Retirement Working Years*, Leadership and Policy in Schools, 2007, 6(4), p. 345-369.

[2] C. Day, A. Bakioglu, *Development and Disenchantment in the Professional Lives of Headteachers*, Teachers Professional Lives, 1996, p. 205-227.

[3] F.F. Fuller, O.H. Brown, *Becoming a Teacher*, [in:] *Teacher Education (The 74th Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education, Part 2)*, Ed. K. Ryan, Chicago 1975.

[4] L. Kremer-Hayon, R. Fessler, *The Inner World of School Principals: Reflections on Career Life Stages*, International Review of Education, 1992, 38(1), p. 35-45.

[5] Avnei Rosha Institute, *Development and Learning in the Role: Report of the Professional Committee for the Formation of Recommendations for Policy on the Topic of Development and Learning of School Principals in the State of Israel*, 2008.

ment program of the school principals from the third year in the role and onwards, on the background of the new challenges with which the Israeli educational system copes. The article will focus on the theoretical and practical aspects of the question of the professional development of principals, will review the influences of recent reforms on the professional development of principals from the third year in the position, will present the immanent gaps of the Israeli program applied to these principals, and will suggest issues for future thought.

Key words: School principals in Israel, career stages, professional development of school principals, effective learning

Why Should School Principals Learn?

Constant learning is the foundation in the personal development of the individual beyond his concrete professional role. It allows him to reinforce the self-image and increases his professional efficacy. This is relevant to the school principals, and even more so when they lead staffs.[6] The professional development of principals is therefore both a moral and ethical value[7] and a necessity of reality required by the definition of their role. As modeling for teachers, they must learn by themselves and engage consistently and persistently in learning that promotes leadership.[8] The learning of principals is therefore essential since the leaders in the school must be capable of developing others and excelling in the development of themselves.[9] In addition, they are frequently required to have the ability to analyze situations effectively and to show that they can adjust their approaches to the given context.[10] This need is further enhanced in light of the nature of the role assigned today to the school principal. The principal's professional coping occurs in many arenas,[11] and it requires the implementation of abilities and skills in many diverse areas of responsibility. This environment is characterized by a high level of uncertainty and instability, by the constant engagement in thousands of individual events that sometimes are characterized by

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[6] I. Matibe, *The Professional Development of School Principals*, South African Journal of Education, 2007, 27(3), p. 523-540.

[7] L. Stoll et al., *Professional Learning Communities: A Review of the Literature*, Journal of Educational Change, 2006, 7(4).

[8] K. Leithwood et al., *Seven Strong Claims about Successful School Leadership*, Nottingham 2006.

[9] M. West et al., *Learning through Leadership, Leadership through Learning*, [in:] *Leadership for Learning*, Eds. K. Riley, K. Seashore Louis, San Francisco 2000.

[10] E. Drago-Severson, *Leading Adult Learning: Supporting Adult Development in Our Schools*, Thousand Oaks, CA 2009.

[11] T.J. Sergiovanni, *The Principalship: A Reflective Practice Perspective*, Needham Heights, MA 1995.

value-based contradictions,[12] by nonlinear management, by the multiplicity of goals that sometimes are conflicting, and by results that cannot be easily measured. To succeed in the position, they need accurate, relevant, and useful data, with which to identify strengths and weaknesses in their school, to determine priorities, and to work with teachers and other staff members with the goal of meeting the study needs of each and every student[13]. These abilities require constant learning.

What Is the Optimal Professional Development of School Principals?

The prevalent models for effective learning of school principals are based on constructivist learning and emphasize experiential learning alongside theoretical learning.[14] Thus, for example, Hammerness et al.[15] propose a holistic model that combines learning about the roles of management in three dimensions: the pre-role stage, the learning of management itself in the position, and the ongoing and constant learning of the management discipline as an throughout the entire position. This model presents the life-long learning approach in an up-to-date and innovative learning environment.
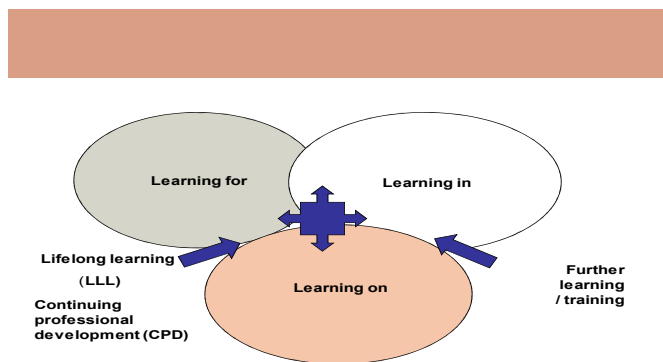

Fig. 1. The Lifelong Learning Approach

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[12] I. Oplatka, *Learning the Principal's Future, Internal Career Experiences: An Assessment of a Unique Principal Preparation Programme in Israel*, International Journal of Educational Management, 2009, 23(2), p. 129-144.

[13] Y. Harpaz, *Teaching and Learning in a Community of Thinking: The Third* Model, Springer Science & Business Media, 2013.

[14] E. Goldring, P. Sims, *Modeling Creative and Courageous School Leadership through District-Community-University Partnerships*, Educational Policy, 2005, 19(1), p. 223-249.

[15] K. Hammerness et al., *How Teachers Learn and Develop*, Preparing Teachers for a Changing World: What Teachers Should Learn and Be Able to Do, 2005, 1, p. 358-389.

It is important to remember that the perception of the professional development of school principals is directly influenced by the perception of management and leadership,[16] although it has experienced changes in the past decades. The prevailing trend today in the Western world emphasizes the need for a pragmatic principal[17] who succeeds in managing a complex, dynamic, and changing environment.[18] This approach is different from the perception of heroic leadership of the principal as a 'superhero',[19] whose abilities are inherent and are not acquired through learning. Thus, for instance, Elmore[20] maintains that it is necessary to de-romanticize the school leadership that emphasizes personal traits and to shift to a competence learning approach. This approach emphasizes the constellation of skills, knowledge, and behaviors required of the leader in the context in which he operates, as well as the ability to do the right thing over time.[21] This approach supports inquiry and, experiential and reflective learning of the emotional and mental aspects of the task,[22] alongside the professional learning peer collaboration and in an innovative environment.[23]

Therefore, the understanding is that the effective learning of principals is a constellation of knowledge: experiential knowledge – to know why it is important, declarative knowledge – to know what to do, procedural knowledge – to know how to do this, and contextual knowledge – to know when to do this.[24]

The Professional Development of School Principals in Israel – The Vision of the Instructional Leadership

Decisive importance was attributed to the school principals as leaders of the educational system in the field for the development of effective educa-

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[16] P. Lewis, R. Murphy, *New Directions in School Leadership*, School Leadership and Management, 2008, 28(2), p. 127-146.

[17] K. Leithwood, A. Harris, D. Hopkins, *Seven Strong Claims about Successful School Leadership*, School Leadership and Management, 2008, 28(1), p. 27-42.

[18] J.B. Ciulla, *The Ethics of Leadership*, Belmont, CA 2003.

[19] T. Waters, R.J. Marzano, B. McNulty, *Balanced Leadership: What 30 Years of Research Tells Us about the Effect of Leadership on Student Achievement*, A Working Paper, 2003.

[20] R.F. Elmore, *Building a New Structure for School Leadership*, Washington DC 2000.

[21] S. Voreg, Y. Barzon, *Instructional Leadership in Israel – Evaluation and Prediction of Student Achievements*, Jerusalem 2013.

[22] J.P. Spillane, R. Halverson, J.B. Diamond, *Investigating School Leadership Practice: A Distributed Perspective*, Educational Researcher, 2001, 30(3).

[23] L. Stoll et al., *Professional Learning Communities: A Review of the Literature*, Journal of Educational Change, 2006, 7(4).

[24] T. Waters, R.J. Marzano, B. McNulty, *Balanced Leadership*.

tional leadership, out of the belief that school principals are the first and foremost key factor in the promotion of the educational objectives of the State. A historical perspective can shed light on changes in perceptions of school leadership in Israel over the years and the manner in which school principals should develop professionally (See fig. 2).
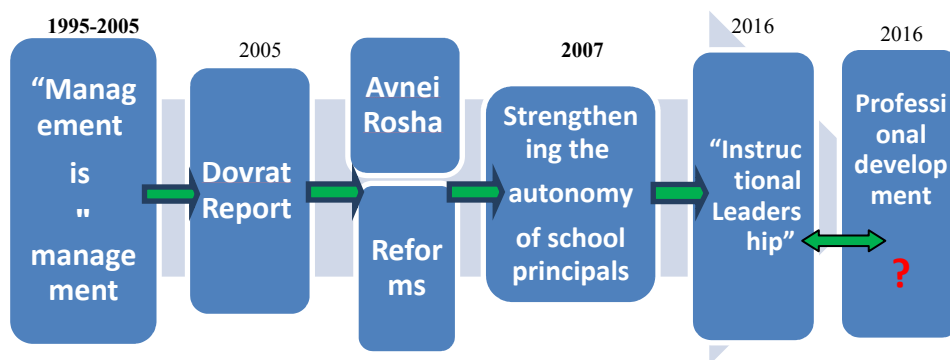

Fig. 2. Changes in Israel – A Historical Perspective

For many years the process of training and professional development of principals in the State of Israel was in the hands of the 'school for teaching workers', an inner-office organization that operated courses and in-service training courses for the entire public of teaching workers in Israel. "Management is management is management", a saying that characterized the Israeli spirit, led to the educational system introducing many organizational counselors who worked with teams of principals using generic management tools that were imported from other disciplines. In parallel, it was possible to see more and more school principals who came to management from the economic and military systems in Israel.

A most significant milestone for radical change arose following the Dovrat Report (2005). The report[25] emphasized the great gaps of the Israeli educational system.

In 2007, with the establishment of the Israeli Institute for School Leadership, Avnei Rosha, a significant change occurred in the perception of the training and learning of the school principals in the State of Israel. For the

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[25] Dovrat Commission, National Task Force for the Advancement of Education in Israel, National Education Program, 2005.

eighth year a comprehensive nationwide process of the training of principals has been held, based on the vision of instructional leadership. According to
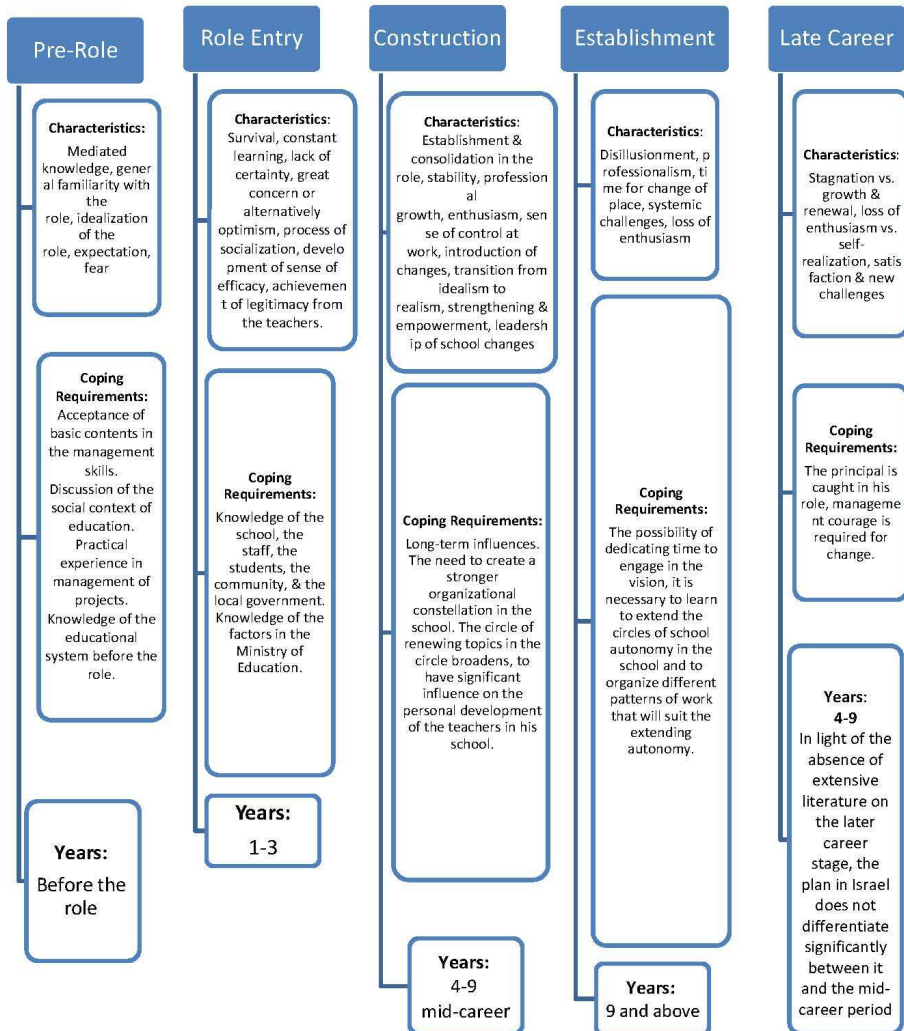

Fig. 3. The Career Stages Approach:
Development and Learning of Principals in Israel, 2008-2016

the fundamental document that addresses the perception of the school principal's role,[26] the vision is based on the recognition of the decisive contribution of principals to the learning and teaching in the school and on the fact

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[26] Avnei Rosha Institute, *Perception of the Role of the School Principal in the State of Israel*, 2008.

that the school principal in many aspects should be an expert in pedagogy. The institute allocates considerable resources to the professional development of principals over the continuum of their career, ranging from the initial processes of classification to the pre-service training courses, through the special courses for principals at the beginning of their career in their first and second year in the position, to processes of professional development for all the experienced principals throughout the career. These processes obligate the principals of the State of Israel.

The vision of instructional leadership is translated, therefore, to the outline of the professional development program for school principals in Israel[27] in the career stages approach (See fig. 3).

The significant turning point, therefore, of the definition of the principals as 'instructional leaders' whose core of professional activity is teaching and learning[28] inspired in the educational system an expectation of empowerment and improvement of the field of the management of schools in Israel for the purpose of the improvement of the system achievements. This expectation led to structural and organizational changes that have been implemented in recent years in the Ministry of Education in Israel. Concurrently with the implementation of the new training program, the Ministry of Education introduced reforms such as 'New Horizon', 'Courage to Change', 'Self-Management', 'Pedagogical Flexibility', and the last dramatic reform led by the former Minister of Education, 'Significant Learning', which more than the others emphasizes the expectations of the system from the school principals.

The reforms are all characterized by an orientation that extends the principal's autonomy[29] and active involvement in the management of the school pedagogy. The process of the decrease of the regulation on the school principals and the extension of his authorities reinforces the need to establish instructional leadership that concentrates under it the core of the school pedagogical activity. In accomplishing these purposes, the Israeli professional development program for principals introduces a number of guiding principles.[30]

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[27] Avnei Rosha Institute, *Development and Learning in the Role: Report of the Professional Committee for the Formation of Recommendation for Policy on the Topic of the Development and Learning of School Principals in the State of Israel*, 2008.

[28] The Pedagogical Administration, Department A for Elementary School Education, The Four Ms, Jerusalem, 2014, Number 32, p. 14.

[29] Y. Friedman, *Self-Management for the Increase of the Level of Achievements of the School: Self-Direction, Effectiveness, and Accountability*, Position Paper submitted to the General Administration of the Ministry of Education, 2010.

[30] Avnei Rosha Institute, *Development and Learning in the Role*.

1. The school principal is an instructional leader. Hence the main training will focus on the development of the principal's professional authority in the areas of teaching and learning.

2. Principals develop in the stages of the career. The learning will be adjusted in the contents and methodologies to the different stages as a developing axis.

3. Less is more. The principal will learn a little that is focused.

4. Personal reflection as method and content. The learning will be accompanied by practical experience.

Professional Development on the Career Continuum – A Supportive Learning Environment?

While the professional development program of the new school principals is based on strict and uniform syllabus highlighting the skills and knowledge necessary for principals at this stage, there is an eclectic approach to learning from the third year.

The process of professional development for principals on the career continuum has a more flexible nature and enables focus on additional contents alongside the 'pedagogical core', which are defined as 'contents in the spirit of the time'. In this, engagement in the value-oriented aspects of the principal's work, in the organization of knowledge, in the management of resources, and in the variable contents based on the outside requirements of reforms and trends in education is possible. The learning in these groups is primarily geographic, revolving around groups of the 'forum of the supervisors and his principals'. These sessions engage in the general and concrete contents for the specific supervision region. Here it is possible to see that there is no focused reference and adjustment of contents to principals in the stages of the career. The supply of courses and the professional development for the principals from the third year in the position is more generic and does not focus on the potential of each stage in the career continuum of the principals. Therefore, the focus of learning pedagogical core of teaching and learning is not compulsory but optional.

This approach does not support the learning needs of school principals in this developmental stage in their position.[31] In this stage, which is defined as the stage of Construction,[32] the management is characterized, by the in-

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[31] Ibidem.

[32] I. Oplatka, *Learning the Principal's Future*, p. 129-144.

crease of the control and involvement of the school principal in the life of the school and in its core processes. Concurrently there is a process of the increase of the depth and breadth of the partners of the role and dialogue of the principal inside and outside of the school. This is a stage in which the principal feels ready and strong enough to effect long-term changes, to recruit partners, and to create constructive communication with many interfaces.[33] In this stage the principal establishes supporting mechanisms and a stable management structure that is harnessed and ready for work. This stage challenges the principal in his comfort zone. He needs to recruit the abilities and skills that he acquired and established in the stages of the entry into the role. This stage is generally where principals with influence and inspiration are found. These are principals who are beginning to influence the personal and professional development of teachers. The question is whether this structure of learning meets these needs and enables optimal professional development.

Vision vs. Reality
– Immanent Gaps in the Professional Development Program for School Principals in Israel

What can we tell on the realization of the vision of instructional leadership? At the end of a period of more than eight years of the assimilation of the professional development program for principals in Israel, in January 2016 a survey[34] conducted on a representative national sample of 150 principals from the third year in the job was published. A total of 138 principals responded to the questionnaire. The survey examined:

1. The percentage of participants in the learning processes.

2. The distribution of the time dedicated by the principals to different management practices.

3. The perceptions and attitudes of principals on the importance of the engagement in select contents.

4. The contributions of the learning of courses to the core actions of principals in the field.

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[33] Avnei Rosha Institute, *The Training of Principals in Israel: Report of the Professional Committee,* 2009.

[34] RAMA, Survey of School Principals, PA Measurement and Evaluation of Schools in Israel, January 2016.

What Can Be Learned from the Survey?

As shown in the data below, the survey[35] indicates that a critical mass of principals, 93% of the new principals in the first two years in the role and 88% of all principals, participate regularly in the learning processes.

The Percentage of Participants in the Learning Processes

Leadership Development	4%
Coexistence	6%
System leadership	11%
Changing content	15%
Mentors for new principals	21%
Master Classes	38%
Learning with the school superintendent and colleagues	88%
New school principals	93%

Despite the impressive participation of the principals in the learning processes, the survey indicates the gap that exists between investments of the system for results in many parameters. For example, it is possible to see that the vision of instructional leadership that emphasized the principal's direct engagement in the teaching and learning processes does not meet the test of reality. It is possible to see that only 22% of the responding principals' time is dedicated to this topic, while greater time is dedicated to administrative procedures inside and outside of the school (See table 2).

The Distribution of the Time Dedicated by the Principals
to Different Management Practices

Procedures	24%
Professional development of teachers on issues of teaching, learning, and assessment	22%
Contact with students	21%
Contact with parents	16%
Answering the demands of officials out of office	16%

Moderate percentages were measured in the reporting of management practices that promote instructional leadership.[36] Thus, for example, only 38% of the principals reported that they allot time for sharing knowledge,

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[35] Ibidem.

[36] Ibidem.

which is one of the main elements in organizational leadership and the professional promotion of teachers. Another datum indicates that only two-thirds of the principals participate in the promotion of teaching and learning processes (See table 3).

Table 3

The Percentage of School Principals Who Are Promoting Aspects of Instructional Leadership

Examination of Vision and Goals	57%
Sharing decision-making	63%
Monitoring professional development of teachers	68%
Sharing knowledge	38%
Promoting the teaching-learning process	64%

It is more interesting to examine the data for the lack of adequacy and the significant gap between the importance of school principals attributed to learning of certain subjects and the contribution of learning to the strengthening of their competence in these areas. Here we can see that there is a gap of almost 30% in the contribution of learning to the Instructional leadership practices . As well as an even larger gap of almost 40% in the contribution of learning to dealing with complex situations (See table 4).

Table 4

The Perceptions and Attitudes of Principals on the Importance of the Engagement in Select Contents and the Contributions of the Learning

Select Contents for Learning	The Importance of the Engagement in Select Contents	The Contributions of the Learning	The Gap
School assessment	79%	63%	16%
Leadership, management, and professional development of the staff	84%	62%	22%
Learning climate	78%	60%	18%
Instructional leadership	83%	54%	29%
Focus on the individual	71%	53%	18%
Vision and management of the change	68%	42%	26%
Dealing with complex situations	84%	36%	48%
Relations with the Ministry of Education and the community	59%	36%	23%

What Are the Factors that Reduce the Effectiveness of Learning?

A possible explanation of these data can be attributed to the built-in gap that exists in the professional development program in Israel, a gap between the declared perceptions and the reality in light of the reforms and the existing learning frameworks. It is important to understand that the only framework proposed to the principals today is conservative learning in the framework of courses. Thus, for example, the average principal who is required to meet reforms learns an average of 4-5 courses of the scope of 160-200 annual hours (See fig. 4). This is, in essence, the sole framework in which he develops professionally. In light of large quantity of courses that the principals must take every year, it is important to re-examine the effectiveness of the courses and the way in which they contribute to the increase of the competencies of the principals as instructional leaders.
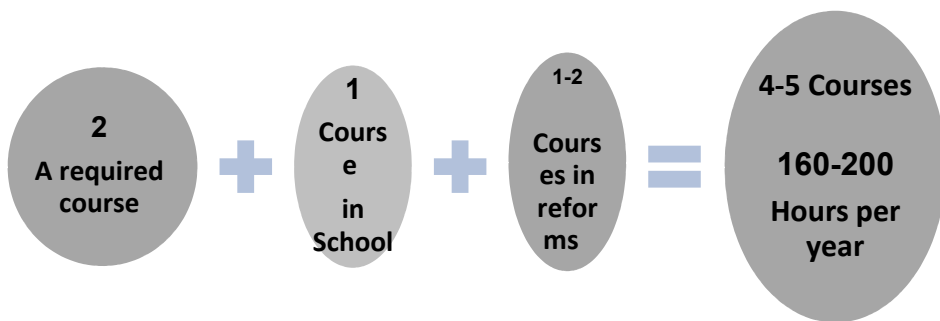

Fig. 4. Courses throug

As can be seen, the professional development program of school principals faces a number of difficulties. The review of these data indicates that the program proposed today for the principals in Israel is not commensurate with the guiding principles upon which it is based[37] (See table 5).

Table 5

Immanent Gaps

Guiding Principles	The Prevailing Practice
Training will focus on the development of the principal's professional authority in the areas of **teaching and learning**.	Low regulation of content. Learning themes change regularly. Focusing on the leadership of teaching and learning is optional and not mandatory.
The learning will be adjusted in the	There is no specific reference to the develop-

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[37] Avnei Rosha Institute, *Development and Learning in the Role*.

Guiding Principles	The Prevailing Practice
contents and methodologies to the **different stages** as a developing axis.	mental stage of school principals from the third year onwards. Content and methods of the same courses are offered for school principals at various stages.
Less is more. The principal will learn a little that is focused.	The mass of hours creates a considerable burden[38] and lack of availability for meaningful learning. The load of the commitment of school principals in many tasks simultaneously, creating difficulty to mobilize learning outside of school. The school principal feels that he is leaving the school and cannot deal with its main tasks in school.
The learning will be accompanied by **practical experience**.	Little correlation between the structure and content of learning- These courses are held far from the field of management at distant periods of time under 'laboratory conditions'. This does not allow what is learned to be implemented in the field or follow up after the learning and its results. The interaction of principals with colleagues occurs far from the arena of management activity. This limits the learning and does not support the principals in mentoring and support for the assimilation of the material learned in the field. Moreover, this does not allow interactive learning in the organic environment of the principal with his staff.

What Is the Optimal Mix for Effective Learning?

The significant question is the question of balance. This review of the Israeli curriculum and its limitations does not completely negate the advantages of learning outside of the school. Studies during work are significant but may be limiting and conservative. Sometimes they lack focus on changes and alternative ways of action, since they continue and preserve existing roles.[39] Outside studies may overcome these limitations and provide an opportunity to learn from others and with others who fill the same role: an

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[38] C. Schechter, 'Let Us Lead': School Principals at the Forefront of Reforms, Tel Aviv University, 2015.

[39] J.P. Smith, *Workplace Learning and Flexible Delivery*, Review of Educational Research, 2003, 7(1), p. 53-88.

opportunity for social learning in the learning group with peers, an opportunity to create relationships with peers, time for reflection, and new ways or more open ways to think about leadership, as well as learning from successes as a method that promotes inner observation of principals.[40] Leadership needs to be learned not only through doing but also by the ability to collect insight during the action. The breakthrough in the personal development is not the outcome of doing alone but of thinking about it.

However, it is apparent that the traditional structure of the courses prevalent in Israel does not enable examination of the learning applications in the field. The distancing of the learning arena to outside the organic environment of the management may enable limited results of the learning[41]. It is important to remember the advantages of trial and error,[42] as well as the personal experiences that create opportunities to know topics that it is difficult to learn about in theoretical learning.[43] It is important that managers have the opportunity to accept responsibility for leading a true management process in the field.[44] For this purpose, the workplace must become a workshop for the learning of leadership.[45]

Summary

The article reviewed in short the main challenges of the professional development program for school principals from the third year onwards. The main question that was discussed was the effectiveness and contribution of this program. This is an important question to ask because of the ethical and the professional commitment to results and achievements of learning in light of the tremendous investment of the State in the professional development of the principals. It is very important to examine at this time the way in which the principals perceive their place as instructional leaders and the

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[40] M. Fullan, *Turnaround Leadership*, San Francisco, CA 2006.

[41] P. Lewis, R. Murphy, *Review of the Landscape: Leadership and Leadership Development*, Nottingham, England 2008.

[42] T. Wasagona, J.F. Murphy, *Learning from Tacit Knowledge: The Impact of the Internship*, The International Journal of Educational Management, 2006, 20(2), p. 226-287.

[43] Edmensons, Effective Internship for Effective New Administrators, Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Council of Professors of Educational Administration, Burlington, VT 2002.

[44] R. Williamson, M. Hudson, *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly: Internships in Principal Preparation*, Paper Presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Council of Professors of Educational Administration, Houston, TX 2001.

[45] E. Drago-Severson, *Learning for Leadership: Developmental Strategies for Building Capacity in Our Schools*, 2013.

extent to which they feel the managerial and professional efficacy to fill this requirement successfully. Two main critical questions still need answers:

– How is the gap between the perception of professional development and the practical structure of the learning reduced?

– What is the mix suited for optimal professional development between internal and external learning, inside and outside of the school setting?

An answer to both of these questions can be found today in the first attempts in Israel to structure flexible school professional development in episodic events of school learning communities and 'instructional rounds'[46] based on "medical rounds". These first attempts shift the center of gravity of learning to the school and thus enable the principal to manage his learning and that of the teaching staffs in his school.

However, this is not enough. Further in-depth thinking will be necessary to extend and to open the spectrum of learning environments to suit different needs of principals and schools and to increase the efficacy of principals.

These are questions of commitment and accountability directed to decision makers. The people engaging in this field must dedicate more attention to the change of the traditional learning paradigm to conditions that enable learning of 'instructional leadership' in an authentic environment. They must dedicate more attention to conditions that enable learning of 'instructional leadership' in learning practices that prevent the storage of knowledge[47] without benefit and that promote learning that combines content with problem solving[48] in the principal's authentic and organic environment, which places him simultaneously in the position of the learner and the teacher.[49] The main emphasis then, is to enable school principals to investigate their **own practices** rather than learning the **best practices of** others.

Further research is needed to increase the depth of the understanding of the career continuum of principals in the issue of the instructional leadership and to better understand the elements of professional development and adjustment to the stage of construction.[50]

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[46] E.A. City et al., *Instructional Rounds in Education: A Network Approach to Improving Teaching and Learning*, Cambridge, MA 2009.

[47] Edmensons, Effective Internship for Effective New Administrators.

[48] E. Drago-Severson, *Learning for Leadership*.

[49] E. Drago-Severson, *Reach the Highest Standard in Professional Learning: Learning Designs, A Joint Publication with Learning Forward*, 2015.

[50] I. Oplatka, *Learning the Principal's Future*, p. 129-144.

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