THE MANAGEMENT OF TUTORING PROGRAMS FOR INTEGRATING STUDENTS WITH LEARNING DISORDERS IN REGULAR ARABIC SCHOOLS

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Abstract: *The current study examined the impact of a school's principal's involvement in a tutoring program on the outcomes of tutees with learning disorders and special needs and their achievements. The purpose of the program was to integrate these students in regular classes in their transition from the elementary school to the regional secondary school. The theoretical basis of the current study is the interconnection between the involvement of the school's principal in the tutoring process (represented in the principal's management's practices) and its outcomes reflected in the tutees' achievements and their acceptance by their tutors expressed in more positive attitudes towards their integration in the regular secondary school.*

The main purpose of the study below was to examine differences in the school principal's performance based on the reports of members of the school staff regarding the management of the tutoring program and its effect on achieving the program objectives.

The intervention in the current study consisted of tutors that were students in the regional secondary school. These students tutored students with learning disorders or special needs from the elementary school in their transition to the secondary school. The objectives of the tutoring program were to facilitate the integration in the regular school and prevent them dropping out from school or ending up in the special education classes.

To examine the effectiveness of the managing practices exercised by the school principal regarding the tutoring program, and the attitudes of the tutors towards the integration of the students with special needs into regular school, we examined these issues before and after the intervention. In addition, differences in the tutees' level of anxiety during the transition period and their self-esteem were also examined before and after the program. The intervention focused on the significance of the school principal's active involvement in managing the tutoring program for integrating and empowering students with special needs. As expected, the results showed a statistically significant difference in administrative practices and forms of involvement of the school's principal in the tutoring process before and after the intervention with a positive effect on the tutoring program's achievements.

Based on increasing demands for accountability in schools regarding the multi-resources for supporting students with difficulties and disabilities, school administrators are seeking resources for improving performance of students and preventing their ending up in special education schools or classes. Although the Israeli Ministry of Education is investing many resources for supporting students with difficulties, there is no significant decrease in the number of special education classes as well as an increase in the classes and schools for students with learning disabilities in the Arabic sector. Based on the findings, there is a need for evaluating and examining the effectiveness of those resources including tutoring programs using standardized testing assessment tools by the responsible administrative factors.

Mainstreaming and inclusion of students with special educational needs become a matter of priority in many countries around the world. The school's principal should have the commitment to educate and support all students without discrimination. In Israel, the Special Education Act (1988) declared regarding the inclusion: "*when the school professional committee decides to integrate a child with disability, the preference should be for the regular mainstream school… such school will be financially supported by the ministry of education, professional therapeutic team and individualized instruction*".

The school principal has to recruit all the resources and professional staff for supporting these children to prevent their placement in special education classes or schools. Based on the Israeli special education law, these students have the right to be placed in mainstreaming education and integrated with their peers in the regular educational frames. Professional cooperation, teamwork and collaboration between the various systems involved in the process of inclusion of children with special needs, is an important factor for the success of the inclusion; it includes the principal, the teachers, the therapeutic staff members, the parents and the relevant departments in the local municipality [2].

The role of the school's principal includes various responsibilities and it changes overtime seeking for more effective management practices. These responsibilities include planning, organizing, leading, and controlling the school: Planning means setting goals and objectives for the school and developing blueprints and strategies for implementing them; organizing means bringing together the necessary human, financial, and physical resources to accomplish goals efficiently; leading has to do with guiding and supervising subordinates; and controlling refers to the principal's evaluation responsibilities and includes reviewing and regulating performance, providing feedback, and otherwise tending to standards of goal attainment [17].

Thus, the role of the principal in improving the level of education and promoting the students' achievements is very important [20]. Since the school principal is considered to be a leader, school leaders play an important role in strengthening the ties between school personnel and the communities that surround them [8]. Hence, the principal's responsibilities should include ensuring that an effective collaboration takes place. The school principal should also acknowledge that collaboration is worthwhile, and it can work. However, it will not work if the leaders of the school do not put a great deal of work, planning, and trust into it. The collaborative process should begin with reviewing data and getting input from teachers, curriculum staff and consultants to outline or modify the action plan of the school. In addition, the school principal is responsible for the evaluation and the feedback processes of the schoolwork plan and the effectiveness of the various projects and the educational interventions. The feedback process and evaluation of the schoolwork plan contribute to school strengthening as an organization. The process of assessing enables the educational staff to examine their work and accomplishments. This process might strengthen the school members as individuals as well as the school itself as an organization. Also, the school principal should be qualified for being an effective instructional leader, and his most significant role is to determine the educational vision of the school and its expected outcomes [10].

Since the middle of the 20th century, the objective of schools focused on the success of students and their education, learning and achievements (Elmore, 2004). Therefore, the main role of the school is to bring about the students' growth, and to empower their learning and achievements, thus principals should focus on these objectives and serve as instructional leaders, directing toward instruction and learning changes. In addition to his functions as an instructional leader, the school principal should operate to improve the level of education and to make learning efficient optimizing the students' achievements, as well as to improve teachers' level of teaching and their efficiency. Hence, the principal has to spend his time resources and educational capabilities in tutoring and counseling teachers and take in instructional important discussions.

The purpose of curriculum management is to ensure that all students will get the most out of their education. However, the most comprehensive function of curriculum management is for students to use all the knowledge and skills they have learned to contribute to society in a meaningful and beneficial way. All stakeholders in any given school district contribute in ways that help to see that curriculum management is carried out as best as possible. The principal's roles include various areas such as leadership, teacher evaluation, student discipline and several others. However, being an effective principal involves hard work and time consuming. In this context, a successful principal operates based on a balance of all his roles and works hard to ensure that his educational vision is carried out for the best of all parts involved .

Many studies examined the effectiveness of various tutoring programs in terms of the achievements of students with various difficulties such as special needs or academic needs. Most of the programs were delivered by volunteers and often in an after school activity [14]. However, only a few studies examined the impact of the school principal's active involvement on the achievements of tutoring programs for students with special needs in regular schools, and there are no studies that examined managing tutorial programs for integrating students with special needs in Arabic regular school in Israel in their transition from elementary to regional secondary school.

Western psychology research focused on learning disabilities but had difficulties defining the emotional and social problems of these students, such as a lack of confidence, low self-esteem and social isolation. It was found that those students with learning disabilities, also experience social emotional problems including low self-esteem, isolation, unsatisfactory relationships with friends and academic failure [4], and a greater risk of experiencing anxiety and high levels of stress. Those students are not aware that anxiety is normal and adaptive and that everyone experiences anxiety at specific times. For example, it is normal to feel anxious before an exam. Therefore, most students do not recognize their anxiety for what it is and think there is something "wrong" with them.

Difficulties in social skills among adults with learning disability are caused by low self-esteem, social alienation derived from exclusion and cognitive deficits. Self-esteem is the evaluative aspect of the self-concept that corresponds with an overall view of the self as worthy or unworthy [3]. The term reflects the overall emotional evaluation of an individual of his or hers own worth and it is a judgment of oneself as well as an attitude toward the

self, encompassing the individual's beliefs about himself [11]. People with low self-esteem are believed to be psychologically distressed and perhaps even depressed [19]. Therefore, developing and improving positive self-esteem is vital and important for affecting the individual's functioning in the various fields of life. Educators should try to instill students with high self-esteem, especially those who are known generally to be at risk, and empower them for preventing several societal and educational problems in the present and in the future. In that context, educators should assist students with special needs who experience low self esteem to be integrated with their peers in the general educational system. During the recent decade, we can notice that the number of special education schools and special classes for students with learning disability in the Arabic sector in Israel is raising, despite the increased resources for supporting students in general schools.

In the United States, the No Child Left behind Act (NCLB) was legislated in 2001 to create an educational policy for students with difficulties and disorders. A similar initiative was launched in Israel through New Horizon program. The program bases on principles that are designated to ensure all students will improve their skills in literacy and mathematics, maximizing their integration in regular education institutions.

The school principal has to work in collaboration with the professional relevant key people and use all resources for students educational benefit, considering their needs and general conditions. The after-school tutoring programs (ASTP) might be a precious resource that will contribute to the benefit of students with various difficulties or disorders and help them to receive the support they need with respect to the educational, social and economic situation of their families and the available resources at school.

In the current study, the ASTP (After School Tutoring Program) was carried out by tutors who are students from the regional secondary school, and it based on the reasoning of the potential benefit both to the tutees and the tutors. The tutors are two years older than the tutees, thus they can share their feelings and thoughts as well as the experiences they went through in the same stage of the transition from the elementary to the secondary school. Furthermore, the age gap between the tutees and the tutors requires the latter to take responsibility towards their tutees [1].

Cross-age peer tutoring is an educational model based on peer support and tutoring to assist younger tutees to enhance social relationships, develop cognitive skills and promote positive identity development. The *peer mentoring dyad* is defined as an interpersonal relationship between two students of a different age that reflects a greater degree of hierarchical power imbalance than in typical friendship, and in which the goal is for the older youth to promote one or more aspects of the younger's development.

In the current study, the intervention in the experimental group focused on active guidance, control, involvement and responsibility of the school principal in managing the tutoring program with the main professionals at school and other relevant professionals in order to achieve maximum realization of the tutoring goals for optimal educational integration of students with special needs in regular schools. The other relevant professionals in the schools included the educational counselor and the coordinator of the tutoring program. In

addition, a further purpose of the intervention was to promote self-esteem of the tutees, and reduce their anxiety in their transition to the secondary school. Simultaneously, we conducted activities for making a positive effect on the tutor's attitudes towards the integration of students with special needs in the regular school. The activities were chosen from various known resources such as books, sites, international values and unique values of the Arab society, which were based on universal and religious values for instilling values that advocate respect to others who are different and realize their special needs.

The study's intervention focused on 3 modules. First, the involvement of the school principal and his responsibilities regarding the tutoring program: blueprinting the objectives of the touring program to the educational staff at school, defining the role of all the participants in the program including the tutors'; allocating the needed resources; managing official relationship; defining the requested outcomes and assessment tools. Secondly, to activate the tutoring program activities in accordance with the tutees' needs. Finally, the third module included activities, instructions, information, and relevant literature. Each module is composed of subunits which contain essential activities, motivation, and information by various kinds of media, resources and modeling, strategies for increasing mutual trust, and creating an open positive atmosphere between tutors and tutees. As mentioned before, the purpose was to help students feel valued, giving them frequent and positive feedback. Additionally, the program was based on modeling positive behavior for both the tutors and the tutees by the instructor and the professional participants. The instructor has to show the tutors how and where to obtain the information or any kind of support they may need. Furthermore, tutors shared with their tutees their experiences in similar difficulties in their transition stage at the same age, talking about solutions and available supportive factors and resources in the new school.

The main technique was the transfer of knowledge and values in a structured program with active managing involvement of the school principal sharing the main professional staff members at school and the tutors. Moreover, the special education Israeli law was presented and explained to the tutees and the tutors emphasizing the rights of students with special needs. Each participant in the program received an official letter that detailed the arrangements recommended by special needs. The educational counselor was asked by the principal to present information for raising the awareness of the school academic staff, of tutors, and of all other students in both schools (the current elementary school and the futuristic secondary school) regarding the difficulties of the students with learning disabilities and expanding knowledge about the phenomenon. The objectives of the program focused on the development and promotion of raising awareness of the environment, building partnerships and advocating the rights and services of students with special needs. Furthermore, it was designated to empower the tutees and to facilitate their integration in the regular educational system. As mentioned before, the program was based on an active involvement of the school principal in managing a structured tutoring program together with the main professional staff and the tutors, cooperating with the secondary managerial staff in which the tutees will study the following year. Secondary objectives aimed to reduce the level of anxiety among the tutees and improve their self-esteem, as

well as change the tutors' attitudes positively towards the integration of students with special needs in regular school and in general. To achieve these objectives, the school principals prepared for the meetings of the tutors and the tutees a structured tutoring program that included social activities based on educational theories. Before their meetings with the tutees, the tutors experienced these activities led by the educational counsellor or the tutoring coordinator once a week for an hour after school. The tutors reported their experiences to the tutoring coordinator and to the educational school counselor orally or in a written report. Both principals gave the young tutors their approval for an open door for questions or any support they needed, and gave them a feedback regarding their experiences in the program. The tutees reported also to their class educator. Additionally, the tutors and the tutees filled in questionnaires before and after the intervention.

The program was based on four Stages: defining the final product of the program with the participants; organization (confronting ideas, choosing strategies, identifying and planning actions, meetings, literature, activities, assessments tools); achieving objectives (studying documents, information, studying thoroughly a problem, social and inter-personal activities etc.); and assessing the final achievements of the intervention (presentation and evaluation), getting general feedback from the participants and conclusions. The results of the current study indicate that the practices of involvement in managing the tutoring program exercised by the school principal have a significant effect on the effectiveness and achievements of the tutoring program.

As a result, after the intervention improvement was noticed in the three domains compared to the results before. However, regarding the managerial practices of the school principals, it was found that teachers and other professionals at school reported more changes than the tutors. Regarding the second domain that refers to the effectiveness and the achievements of the tutoring program, the results were almost similar in all the groups who filled in the questionnaire, and showed that there was a positive correlation between the school principal's practices and the requested achievements of the tutoring program. As to the team work and professional cooperation, we found more change among the professionals at school than among the tutors. In addition, an explicit improvement was found within the tutees' self-esteem after the intervention in comparison to the pre-implementation stage. Regarding anxiety reduction, although the sample was small, a support for post anxiety reduction in two aspects was found among the tutees: lower fear from possible separation; and reduction in social anxiety. Hence, after the intervention the tutees reported that they were not afraid of the transition since they were more aware of their rights, and knew who to turn to at the new school when any kind of support was needed. In addition, they expressed how happy they were because they already made new friends who can understand and respect them.

The findings revealed that tutoring achieved positive changes including attaining new friendships, empathy for feelings others and acceptance of others, thus it is significant for a safe future for the tutees and the tutors [22]. Furthermore, positive attitudes constitute a significant element for integrating students with special needs because negative attitudes

may be just as obstructive as physical barriers, limiting those with disabilities from participating fully in schools and communities [18]. In addition, the tutors' attitudes towards the integration of students with special needs in regular schools became more positive after the intervention, and that finding might also be of significance. Using students who volunteer in peer cross-aging tutoring programs to facilitate the transition of the students with special needs in regular high-schools is not very expensive and might benefit and help them in achieving better results if the process is managed and controlled well by the school principal along with relevant professionals that might contribute positively to the tutoring process. Young volunteer tutors in the current study reported that the professional guidance, support and encouragement by the principals from the two schools and the program coordinator were important during the program and helped them to accomplish what was expected of them.

Based on the findings, we might argue that there is a positive correlation between the success of the tutoring programs and the school principal's active involvements and management practices such as planning, defining responsibilities of the participants, setting objectives and defining requested results for the participants with appropriate assessments tools. The school principals as well as the tutors reported that explanation, knowledge of disabilities and meetings during the program showed positive effect on their attitudes. Moreover, the study proved that for a more effective, successful tutoring program designated for integrating students with special needs and preventing their dropping out of school, collaboration is needed not only between the school principal and its professional staff, but also with the other school principal, as well as its professionals. Hence, it is the principal's responsibility to ensure that an efficient collaboration takes place.

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