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## From hierarchical leadership to a mark of distributed leadership by whole school inquiry in partnership with Higher Education Institutions: comparing the Arab education in Israel with the education system in England

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### ABSTRACT

This paper presents a comparative analysis of two high schools, one in the Arab Education system in Israel and the other in the English Education system in Europe. The comparative analysis focuses on two principals' perspectives of how they led their schools, in partnership with the authors from Higher Education Institutions, by implementing a distinctive mark of distributed leadership by an whole school inquiry led inter-cultural change. The change facilitated knowledge exchange, mobilisation, and dissemination activities that empowered staff and young people to become societal innovators for equity and renewal which raised student outcomes between – 17% and 27%. The research reveals that shared aims, themes and methods through a distinctive mark of distributed leadership by whole school inquiry develops new inter-cultural understandings and builds respect, trust, and local research priorities and practices in communities of diverse race, ethnicity, cultural, religious, and citizen or refugee status. Members of diverse communities were able to hold each other to account, and became more autonomous in their plans for the future in a context of gaps in status in both contexts.

### Introduction

There is inequity in education governance systems that is challenging to address because principals are distracted by continuous and rapid reforms to education policy. The constant changes are imposed on them hierarchically with little opportunity to challenge or contribute to the development of the reforms with a deep understanding of their underpinning conceptual framework. The hierarchical implementation of school reforms silence the voices of the professional educational leaders, and they copy this pattern of hierarchical leadership by telling their professional teachers, and the communities they serve what to do. Our interest in this research is to describe and understand the extent to which hierarchical leadership can be transformed to distributed leadership to share the focus on improving school effectiveness and student outcomes.

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The objectives of the study are to document and compare the perspectives of a principal of an Arab high school in Israel (AHSI) and a principal of an English high school in Europe (EHS) on: first, their partnership with the academy to introduce a mark of distributed leadership by whole school inquiry to optimise learning how to learn and raise student outcomes; second, the impact of the state-of-the-art evidence-informed inter-cultural change strategies that promote trust and student attainment, achievement, and autonomy that emerged from the implementation of a mark of distributed leadership by whole school inquiry using the same action research method of inquiry.

The two cases were conducted under unequal regional conditions and expectations both in terms of centralized vs. decentralised education systems in different political and cultural contexts. Both systems experience marginalisation and segregation. The Israeli society has a number of divisions, one of which is the national and ethnic division between Jews and Arabs. The indigenous Arab minority numbers 1.7 million, or 20.2% of Israel's population (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2017) and includes those of refugee status. This population lives in communities segregated from Jewish communities, apart from a few towns with mixed ethnic inhabitants. The majority of the population lives in rural areas and suffers from economic deprivation. All the groups that compose the Arab minority (82.1% Muslims, 9.4% Christians and 8.4% Druze) share many social norms and cultural values (e.g. the centrality of the extended family, an Islamic way of life) with neighbouring Arab countries and use the same Arabic language. Arab and Jewish educational systems are segregated, marginalised, and unequal in means and outputs (Arar & Haj-Yehia, 2016). Comparatively, the English education policy as text, in a European context, is inclusionary and welcomes all faiths and none (Taysum & Gunter, 2008). In reality a steady creep of the commodification of education has resulted in wealthier groups having sufficient economic capital to buy houses in the catchment areas with high performing schools (Ball, 2004). The lack of equitable access to high performing schools based on socio-economic status has led to segregation and marginalisation based on socio-economic status (Ball, 2004).

To deliver on the objectives we ask three questions. First, what does a comparative analysis of the perspectives of a principal in an Arab Israeli High School (AIHS) and a principal in an English High School (EHS) reveal about developing partnerships with the academy to distribute leadership through whole school inquiry? Second, what does the comparative analysis of the two principals' perspectives reveal about the impact of moving from hierarchical leadership to distributed leadership through whole school inquiry to optimise students' learning, and learning outcomes?

## Literature review

### *Shifting from hierarchical leadership to distributed leadership*

Top-down hierarchical leadership ignores community members' voices and prevents young people developing the tools for methods of inquiry for political liberalism in the school education system (Bolden, 2011; Gronn, 2009). Top-down hierarchical processes and practices do not induct young people into methods of inquiry, critical thinking and educated debate. Being told what to do does not empower leaders to empower teachers to empower young people to problem solve as independent autonomous young people

(Wagner, 2010). Using the Context, Input, Process, and Product (CIPP) approach to evaluation from Stufflebeam (1983) if decisions are made based on the data that is numeric, the decisions are not informed by engaging in dialogue with diverse community members. Such school evaluations, based on numbers, will not share different worldviews of community members, including those who may be members of marginalised groups with different language or dialects, or with intersectionalities of discrimination. Hierarchical leadership that is top down and does not consider conflicting conceptualisations of worldviews, cannot engage with moral methods of inquiry into the ethical rules, and perpetuates the evaluation of the marginalised and finds them wanting (Pring, 2007), which reduces the chance to develop whole school conceptualisations of what is good, and how to live a good life (Lewin, 1946).

Under these conditions, of paramount import is finding ways and means to engage in deep dialogue so that different groups can represent their different interests. Dewey (1916) identifies that full and free participation in decision making is important to enable people to make decisions that affect both the personal and the social spheres of life characterised by equity and justice. The theory of participation connects with Rawls (2005) political liberalism which is a distributed power share for all free and equal citizens where no culture or religion is favoured for, of, or by people of a free state. He argues that to achieve a working definition of political liberalism all citizens will need to have a comprehensive conception of a socially just society, and can identify and address intersectionalities of discrimination (Arar, 2015). The important distinguishing element of Rawls political pluralism is that it is conceptualised by all citizens before they know which position they will take in the system once it is created, thus assuring equity for all, because no one wishes to be disadvantaged.

To be able to realise Dewey and Rawls theories of participation in practice, methods of inquiry are required to identify intersectionalities of discrimination to enable members of diverse communities to develop cultural awareness to arrive at provisional consensus on key principles together through flatter pedagogical relationships. Flatter pedagogical relationships release talent such that principals can trust and depend upon autonomous professional educationals to empower their students and optimise learning in their shared ability to organise public schools (Donaldson, Marnik, Mackenzie, & Ackerman, 2009; Devos, Tuyents and Hulpa, 2014). Timperley (2005) on the other hand argues an heroic hierarchical leadership model is limited in effectiveness because it does not promote relationships to release talent, and therefore is not sustainable.

### **The impact of distributed leadership as a process of empowerment**

Distributed leadership realised through participatory processes and practices requires people to know themselves, as Socrates argued (Brown, 2009). Knowing the self can lead to a sense of security in the self-hood, or identity, to enable the self to deeply listen to the narratives of others. Being self-aware and having self-control and being able to regulate the self, based on self-evaluation, are important characteristics for a quiet ego for establishing and attaining realistic goals (Kesebir, 2014). Kesebir continues those who were not self-focused and had realistic expectations understood the self on a deep level in relation to the other, and were more likely to share control with others through distributed leadership. Those keen to distribute leadership and empower others sought

to reach a mutual understanding with others to develop intercultural awareness, and cultural alignment (Harris, 2012; Taysum, 2016). Angelle (2010) suggests that relationships are not only important to the practice of distributed leadership, but can also influence organizational culture, including self-efficacy, increased trust, enhanced job satisfaction, and teacher intent to stay. Organizational culture could be improved if relationships were respected within the practice of distributed leadership (Hallinger & Heck, 2010; Klar, Huggins & Hammonds, 2016; Misfud, 2017; Woods, Bennett, & Harvey, 2004). Mascall, Leithwood, Strauss, and Sacks (2008) said for distributed leadership to be effective, there must be relational trust.

Nappi (2014) stated that the overall culture of a campus, including aspects of principal, teacher, and student success, are more likely to improve with the dedicated practice of distributed leadership. Nappi suggests that when professional educators share leadership with their principal and other formal leaders, social capital is increased amongst all involved parties. Copland (2003) stated that distributed leadership could not be successful unless there is a campus culture that embodies collaboration, trust, professional learning, and reciprocal accountability. Distributed leadership variables such as leadership of formal leaders, teacher leaders, the cooperation of leadership teams, and participative decision-making help improve the relational climate within a school culture as well as the principal's and professional educators' commitment to the school (Devos, Tuytens, & Hulpia, 2014). Shifting a school culture needs to be delicately engage with cultural differences in diverse communities and needs to consider world views. Rubin and Peplau (1975) suggest worldviews are constructed in three ways:

- (1) by education systems that transmit scientific knowledge which might be empirical or logical and may or may not have a moral compass that assures the prevalence of an ethical framework;
- (2) through the metaphysical;
- (3) by religions and intersectionalities of generation, race, ethnicity, gender, and class.

Thus inquiry into classroom and whole school processes and practices needs to engage with all these three constructs to recognise the different worldviews of community members to assure that education systems offer pathways to all, particularly to those who need to raise themselves up out of poverty (Stanton-Salazar, 2010; Carter, 2008).

The notion of distributed leadership might be used as a mask by policy producers and government officials to ease in their agenda as a normalizing discourse in schools. Hall, Gunter and Forrester (2008) recognize distributed leadership as the 'officially sanctioned model of good practice' (p. 32) advocated by government departments. They continue this sanctioned model of distributed leadership reflects normative narratives that are part of the English government's rhetoric that power and autonomy are being shared with schools, when the reality points to centralisation, managerialism, and reform of public services (Hartley, 2007). Gunter and Forrester (2008) argue distributed leadership, in practice, becomes delegated leadership. Some critics of distributed leadership inquire whether it offers a genuine alternative to other forms of leadership or whether it serves as 'the emperor's new clothes' (Bolden, 2011, p. 254) or a pragmatic response to society's demand for equity and purpose. Gronn (2009) noted

how the term ‘distributed can inadvertently mislabel a situation in which the influence of a number of individuals continues to be significant’ (p. 285).

Jackson and Marriott (2012) indicated that poorly performing urban schools and struggling free school-lunch-eligible students are often associated with leadership that fails to either understand or implement distributed leadership from an organizational perspective. Brooks, Jean-Marie, Normore, and Hodgins (2007) found that the practice of distributed leadership by formal and informal leaders, especially as it pertains to context-specific and situationally bound issues, has the potential to improve student outcomes within minority-majority schools, and improve social mobility for social justice.

Woods and Roberts (2016) stated that socially just leadership could only be actualised in communities of practice with humility which connects with Kesebir’s (2014) quiet ego. Thus distributed leadership is particularly important as a strategy to include marginalised groups and move ‘the other’ from being a stranger, or an enemy to being part of the community (Kakos & Palaiologou, 2014). Hallinger and Heck (2010) used the terms collaborative, shared and distributed interchangeably to describe such distributed ‘leadership that is exercised by the principal along with other key staff’.

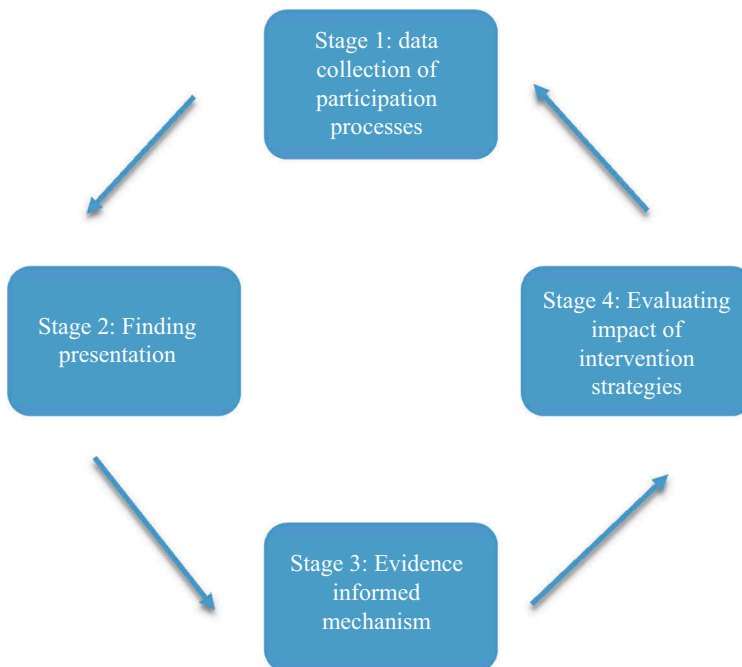
In addition to the work of Klar, Huggins, Hammonds, and Buskey (2016), other researchers have examined the role that principals can play in fostering the capacities of other leaders. It has been suggested by Leithwood, Harris, and Hopkins (2008) and MacBeath (2005) that leadership distribution is a developmental process. Based on a study of distributed leadership in 11 English schools, MacBeath (2005) described how distributed leadership can also allow succession planning as different members of the school can take on increasingly more difficult activities supported by the principal. The conceptualisation of distributed leadership theoretically is challenging, and it has been used to describe, and theorise different forms of leadership in practice. Thus our critical review of the literature identifies that there is no ‘pure’ distributed leadership in theory or in practice.

### Comparative methodology

This study adopts a comparative research approach. In contrast to the usual comparison between nations, we compare cross-cultural and national differences (Cheong, 2000; Dimmock, 2009). We draw on Dale’s approach to emphasise the practical application of comparative education that seeks to inform education systems’ policy and practice (Dale, 2014). We examined principals’ reflections on a three-year action research project that had been implemented in their schools in partnership with each of the authors from Higher Educational Institutions (professional academic researchers), and school leaders, teachers, and students. The research focused on both principals’ understanding of a shift from hierarchical relationships to more participatory processes and practices (Harrison, Taysum, McNamara, & O’Hara, 2016). The semi-structured interview questions focused on asking about: 1. the school partnership with the academy, 2. the implementation of the whole school inquiry action research approach to empower the educational professionals and the students to engage with participatory school improvement strategies, and 3. the impact of the whole school inquiry. The study followed a model that facilitated describing and understanding the culturally

relevant local and particular processes and practices. Both research projects were part of a boundary-crossing international survey of 14 nation states using the same whole school inquiry by action research design.

The action research was collaborative within each school taking teacher research as a position that both builds capacity for school improvement within the school, and enhances the teaching profession (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). The four stages of the action research followed Lewin (1946), who developed action research to develop inter-group relationships. The purpose of the first stage was to gather baseline data focusing on how the teachers and students of the educational institutions described and understood the way they participated and/or were consulted on the processes and practices of the educational institution. The second stage gathered impact data from presenting the findings of each of the case studies to the leadership team of each respective educational institution. The third stage documented the development, and implementation of the evidence informed change strategies by the principal, leadership team, staff, and students. The change strategies focused on improving the ways in which teachers and students participated in and/or contributed to processes and practices within the institution. The fourth stage gathered and reported the impact of the intervention strategies drawing on the views of the teachers and students, and educational outcomes.



**Diagram 1.** Action Research Cycle Drawing from Lewin (1946).

Our position in this research is that we recognise the acts of educational leaders are affected by, and affect the social context in which they operate (Berkovich, 2014). We are mindful of the characteristics of Palestinian Arab, and English societal structures and educational governance systems.

## Participants and research procedures

The first author accompanied the Arab Israeli school principal and interviewed him, and the second author accompanied the English school principal and interviewed him. Both principals were invited in writing to be interviewed and both principals chose to be interviewed in their schools. The authors used the same semi-structured interview schedules that lasted about two hours. The focus was on each principal's reflection on the partnership project implementation.

### *The Arab school principal*

Yousif in his mid of 50s with 21 years' experience in education and 8 years in principalship, holds an MA in educational administration, and was individually interviewed for about two hours in the school's offices in two rounds. The interviews were conducted in the participant's offices in Arabic language and their transcriptions were translated into English for analysis.

### *The English school principal*

Luke is in his 50s, married with 3 children. He began his teaching career in 1987 before progressing into Headship in 2002. He holds an MA in Educational Leadership and started a Doctoral studies researching Education Leadership. His research interests include Distributed System Leadership and Social Justice Leadership in schools. Luke was interviewed individually for approximately 2 hours in his own school.

## Tools and analysis

Each principal received a copy of his transcript, and was asked to validate the transcripts by confirming the accuracy of what had been recorded. The data underwent four stages of analysis suggested by Marshall and Rossman (2012): 'organising the data', 'generating categories, themes and patterns', 'testing any emergent hypothesis' and 'searching for alternative explanations'. We employed this analysis to organise the data and identify recurrent perceptions which we categorised (Cowen & Kazamias, 2010). These units of information were then collected into central themes that addressed the research questions. The analysis was conducted by each author, and then each author cross-checked and critiqued the analysis of the other, reinforcing the analytical structure at the different stages of analysis (Marshall & Rossman, 2012).

There are obvious limitations in applying the findings to other social and educational arenas, even when considering the wider research project of 14 case studies with large data sets. The reader is invited to connect the evidence here presented with their individual experience of the issues the paper, policy makers, and professional educationals are grappling with (Taysum & Gunter, 2008; Stuart Wells (2018).

Respondents were guaranteed anonymity, confidentiality and allocated pseudonyms, and had the right to withdraw from the research at any time. Respondents completed and signed informed consent forms with these guarantees in their first language.

We now detail the findings as they emerged from the narrative interviews with the principals.

## Findings

The principals' reflections are on a three-year action research project in each of their schools that sought to empower staff and students through co-constructed evidence informed strategies of change to increase participation. The comparative education approach revealed that the two principals had different experiences of leading the full three-year action research project resulting in a shift from hierarchical structures to distributed leadership. Yet three main categories around which the central themes of the study were consolidated in line with the research questions and level of analysis:

- (1) Developing partnerships in communities of practice was important in delivering school improvement;
- (2) Distributing leadership through whole school inquiry by Action Research to implement intervention strategies underpinned school improvement and increased student outcomes;

## Partnership and communities of practice

The principals of both the English High School in Europe (EHS) and Arab High School in Israeli (AHSI) valued the partnerships that were developed between the professional academic researchers and the school. They also valued the partnerships between community members that were facilitated by the whole school approach of inquiry through the action research. The EHS principal Luke, identified that building partnerships between the school and scholarly research led to capacity building by inquiry through action research. The impact was increased participation in whole school processes and practices facilitated by the partnership inquiry through action research. The impact of the increased participation was improved pedagogical relationships underpinned by trust and a shift in power from hierarchical top-down relationships to more distributed leadership as autonomous professional educationals shared the leadership of inquiry by action research to optimise learning. The distributed leadership by inquiry facilitated a shift in power from top-down descriptive curriculum knowledge, to co-created, contextual, and culturally aware knowledge, facilitated by the evidence informed change strategies. Luke stated:

We do our own research, so we were not doing what we are doing now. The way we give other people 'power' reflects a lack of ego in the School Leadership Team. My doctoral reading enabled me to dig into (Stephen) Ball talking about Foucault and elements of power, and the work of many managers, and Philip Woods' work on leadership that is distributed. We look to intellectual scholarly research that is evidence informed leadership.... Many of the staff conduct their own research through postgraduate research studies supported by Higher Education Institutions. Therefore, different researches influence each other to build capacity where strategies work.

The principal's views affirm that the school-academy partnership facilitated evidence informed leadership and decision-making, and pedagogical partnerships driven by a

whole school approach to inquiry which was empowering. The impact on the school community was to build capacity where strategies worked (Author, 2012). Luke valued how building partnerships facilitated distributed leadership to empower staff and students to explore different forms of knowledge and develop critical thinking skills (Taysum, 2012; Harris, 2007; Woods et al., 2004). In addition, he identified that the school was very interested in participation in processes and practices, and giving voice to teachers and students. Luke stated:

We were interested in how autonomy might be distributed through leadership. People having a voice led us to be more confident and we had an appetite for that. The feedback is that the appetite is there, and we needed to develop a structure and ways of working that allow the contribution to what we are.

Luke identified that teachers and students were empowered through the distributed leadership by inquiry, and had enough confidence in the education system to participate in dialogues that respected their contribution.

In contrast, a different level of academy school partnership has been found in the AHSI and Yousif, the school principal states:

Generally speaking, academics approach us like inspectors when it comes to them doing research in school. This raises the school's fear of role conflict, as they think researchers are loyal to the system more than to the school. Furthermore, these are Jewish researchers strange to our culture.

The principal fears those coming into his school, which confirms Ishii, Klopff, and Cooke (2007) that there is a lack of pedagogical relationships between the Arab-Israeli principal, and inspectors and researchers coming into the school. Yusef's perception of the authoritarian approach of the inspectors prevents the chance to explore the collision of different worldviews of different community members through inquiry that stimulates dialogue (Dewey, 1909). Rather there is no discussion and Yusef identified the inspector/researcher external to the school had hierarchical control. The fear Yusef experienced in these hierarchical top-down relationships was disempowering.

The AHSI principal, Yousif, continued that he was empowered by the partnership with the University and by the research. He identified the partnership put the principal, his staff, and students in control of the inquiry through action research, the development and implementation of the intervention strategies, and their response to the impact findings. Yousif identified that being empowered in the research built trust between himself and the researcher, and stated:

I find myself in favour of this research as it starts in the school and ends in the school. It has been started in a grassroots search for pupils' and teachers' participation, followed by discussion, which aims to influence the participation of different stakeholders and widen engagement with different participatory processes in the school. The involvement of an education researcher in the school's daily work, which is especially important in a school serving disadvantaged students, has enabled the school to attain high quality and excellence, even when located in the periphery of Israel. Partnerships between the school/college the academy and policy makers have the potential to make important links between research, policy and practice. These links are not sufficiently exploited for the benefit of school practice.

Yousif's position demonstrates that he feels understood on a deep level in relation to the other, a professional researcher from the academy and the first author, which

underpins what Harris (2007) calls mutual understanding that has led to Yousif feeling empowered by the first author. As he added in his interview:

Our very discussion about teachers and students' participation following the action research cycles, and my awareness of the power of a professional community encourages me as a principal to constantly think about how I can increase involvement, caring and responsibility for school students and teachers as a supportive professional community of students learning and being in the school arena and in society at general.

The empowerment has been experienced at all levels with a focus on the disadvantaged students' optimisation of learning and learning outcomes, while trying to build both professional community of teachers who support the students learning and participation.

Despite the socio-cultural difference between the launching point of the intervention in the two schools, both principals identify that the research has been empowering (Woods et al., 2004), and has enabled them to develop partnerships between the HEI researcher and the school to underpin the development of participatory professional communities of practice (Harris, 2007; Author, 2012). The two researchers started from two different points in bridging common discourse, aims and trust in their institutions, and their perceptions of the role of researcher to inform school's dynamics. These differences stem from different cultural and socio-political backgrounds and contexts (Ball, 1994). Both school communities are developing more confidence as communities of practice as a result of the research partnership between the schools and the academies. The research partnerships empowered community members to control their participation in the action research, which underpinned their co-creation of evidence-informed context-specific knowledge that informed their change strategies (Dewey, 1897). Their co-created knowledge was further distributed through the community if successful, rather than being controlled by others in hierarchical standardised structures, or research that became a book (Lewin, 1946; Misfud, 2017). As stressed by Yousif: 'Nowadays and following this process I tend to adopt an experimental approach of understanding, collaborating and then seeking change and dissemination'. This therefore invites us to explore the source of distribution strategies and the way they are expressed in their schools.

### **Distribution of leadership enacted through the implementation of the intervention**

Both principals identified that implementing the intervention strategies of the inquiry by action research process required distributed collaborative leadership within the education system. Luke acknowledged that a person wanting to implement distributed leadership needed to have spent time getting to know the self and working through their own personal issues and insecurities with power (Socrates, in Brown, 2009). Luke stated:

With regard to ego, you learn to move from proving to improving learning, to being more confident and it is about the achievement of others and not the self. This is about servant leadership and empowering us and how we cope. It is hard to do some of what you are doing when you could lose your job, and it is important not to be financially dependent on keeping your job. You need security to counter the insecurity and fear that is promoted

within the system. So, it is about being liberated from it that enables you to pick up on and let others achieve.

The principal identifies a concern about being self-aware in relation to his ego, and not focusing on the self, which connects with Kesebir's (2014) quiet ego. The principal identifies that he reflects on the ego in relationship to his own job security, his fear that he believes is built into the system, and being a servant who empowers others (Stenhouse, 1975). Luke has developed his worldview that seeks to empower others, but identifies that some leaders are self-focused and form hierarchical leadership structures to control others, and by doing so, control their own fear:

Systems leadership and effective systems' leaders are not in every school and Hopkins talks about some leaders building an empire. Collaborative leaders prove through relationships that collaborative ways enable collaborative systems.

Similarly to Luke, Yousif the Arab Principal stated:

I do work to mobilise school culture and organize routines for institutional participation, especially in the light of the fact that this is a minority society that must look after itself. Working in partnership strengthens collective commitments towards our students and future generations. This experience enriched my understanding of the power of a professional community while being fully involved and committed to the school's processes and practices.

Both principals identify that the participatory inquiry by action research has contributed to a shift from hierarchical leadership to distributed leadership (Gunter & Forrester, 2008). The distributed leadership in the school empowered community members to share their worldviews which connects with Rubin and Peplau (1975). Both leaders identify that community participants have operated within hierarchical structures led by those who consider they are entitled to more than others (Kesebir, 2014). The principals identify the accountability regimes do not support the schools' organisational effectiveness, improvement and transformation and inspectors are loyal to a system rather than to the schools, the staff, the students, and the community.

The principals identify the community members have experienced hierarchical leaders controlling them and trying to think for them to such an extent that this behaviour has become normalised. In both cases the disempowerment principals experience within the system is reaffirmed by the system's constant policy reforms (Taysum and Arar, 2018) that distract school leaders from implementing an evidence informed and robust strategic plan for school improvement, effectiveness and transformation. In partnership with the Higher Education Institutions the principals have been able to mobilise the community through the implementation of this distinctive mark of distributed leadership by whole school inquiry. The distinctive mark of distributed leadership includes the development of authentic intercultural awareness, which has allowed the principals to focus on evidence informed and participatory change strategies. The participatory change strategies have improved student outcomes by 17% – 27% leading to social mobility

Both principals identify that encouraging communities to move out of their comfort zone to share power, and to be empowered through this distinctive mark of distributed

leadership by whole school inquiry was met with resistance. Initially communities were fearful that the principals were weak (Kesebir, 2014). The English principal stated:

Where the problems lie is where leaders tell others to collaborate but do not collaborate themselves. I am an extravert and I can play the pompous Alpha Male and at times people want you to be that way, for example in a meeting about a student not getting it, you need to teach them a lesson for their own good because if I don't, the judge will. There is also contingent leadership and part of the leadership expectation can be too caught up in that. Phenomenally the powerful can forget to be humble, and it is humbleness that is important to facilitate others' development and to be reflective of the ego.

Luke finds that communities want hierarchical leadership and want others to tell them what to do, but this is their programming, or grammar of thinking, and what they need is to be empowered to think for themselves. Luke identifies that the education system appears reluctant to policise this. Dealing with political marginality and hierarchical social structures, the Arab principal is also mindful of these same internal contradictions between Arab culture and school context, Yousif stated:

In our culture, hierarchy still controls the tone, which means that the school as an organization is expected to be run hierarchically with an amount of distance between different levels of authorities. The hierarchy starts from the school principals towards inferior people in the school including pupils. These are the cultural norms and expectations. Opening these (education system) structures to some levels of discussion sometimes badly affects the teachers' perceptions of their role, and their commitments because they perceive the Senior Leadership Team seeking to share power as weak, both inside the school and outside it.

When asked about his stance, and how he was expected to act, he explained:

I believe in freedom as a strong frame or structure. However, present practices, shaped largely by traditional Arab culture with its hierarchical structures, along with the hierarchical control of the system's structure, means that inviting them to be active participants challenges their expectations.

It seems that the identified significant sociocultural differences between the two principals' contexts and schools widen the gap between levels of distribution in the school community due to basic cultural and structural differences (Author, 2015) especially when dealing with the mechanism of centralized control in the case of Arab education in Israel (Arar & Haj-Yehia, 2016). At the same time, both principals see that staff and pupils can expect leaders to be hierarchical, and can view sharing power or empowerment as a sign of weak education system leadership (Hallinger & Heck, 2010). Hierarchical traditions stand as a large barrier that obstructs cultural change for more collaborative communities to implement a distinctive mark of distributed leadership by whole school inquiry. The distinctive mark of distributed leadership by whole school inquiry needs to include developing inter-cultural awareness of the intersectionalities of cultures and the politics of marginalisation by culture. The development of intercultural awareness of intersectionalities of different cultures, and their political narratives starts with thick descriptions within the communities. As community members begin to trust the inquiry process, and the sharing of leadership, they begin to critically analyse the descriptions and co-create contextualised knowledge that offers the chance to share worldviews.

Documenting this shift from hierarchical to distributed leadership and the associated development of a grammar of thinking these principals experienced over the three year project has revealed how a distinctive mark of distributed leadership by whole school inquiry has facilitated community cohesion. Such a position moves close to political pluralism (Rawls, 2005). The principals' courageous commitment to a distinctive mark of distributed leadership by whole school inquiry has empowered citizens and created a cultural awareness where community members move closer to the conditions of a political free state (Author, 2015; Rawls, 2005).

### **Impact of distributed leadership by whole school inquiry to empower young societal innovators for equity and renewal**

The findings reveal that both principals are committed to empowering young people and educational professionals to be part of a community and have the chance to explore where different worldviews collide, and to become more autonomous. Luke, the English principal stated that trust has made:

people confident to discuss the issues and the ideas and engage in a robust discourse where voices are equal in discussions and they gain credibility and respect.

The Arab principal stated that trust must be developed to improve pupils' participation in school processes and practices (Copland, 2003; Mascal, Leithwood, Straus, & Sacks, 2008), and stated:

In my view, first we have to take care of the values dimension, which can be developed by building a culture of trust in the school as an institution. The Arab minority perceive institutions as an entity that marginalizes and suppresses them. Developing a culture of trust that would support democratic expression of opinions and enable the voices of both pupils and teachers to be actively heard, and the development of skills for meaningful reciprocal discourse, where this can be started is with teachers' care and students tutoring programs.

The English principal identified the kinds of abuse of power that shut down constructive inter-cultural discussions and building care and trust when he said:

What irritates me is when people pull rank in a discussion because that disrespects the person, and they are unable to engage in an argument and it becomes personal. The virtuous learning organisation is to develop confident people who are honest and open and are able to say what they think and explore their ideas without unfair judgement – which is a Socratic approach. Wrapped up in that, is being respectful and thinking about new structures (through whole school inquiry) and mechanisms for a voice to be a conscience, to be virtuous and why we try to talk to all staff; teachers and support staff about that. So that anyone can hold the school to account for something that matters like democracy; so that in the school everyone knows 'you as a voice in the organisation matter'. It is not about diminishing hierarchy because there are functions. Schools need to be orderly places where young people feel safe in an orderly organisation where young people can learn social responsibility. It is a mistake to describe being virtuous as anti-structural. Everyone has a right to be heard, but with that comes the responsibility of having a voice and of being part of the social: rights, responsibility and respect – restorative justice to modification of behaviour. We bring different cultures and faiths together and arrive at a right and wrong moral code. We are flexible with expectations when there are transgressions. There is a paradox because every community has human behaviour and I believe it is post-modernism that has allowed that to be illuminated.

Luke identifies that it is important to have a moral code or moral compass. Moral inquiry into the ethical rules (Pring, 2007) is important to assure the prevalence of an ethical framework. Such inquiry is important when seeking to align different cultures within an overarching system of rights and responsibilities. Cultural alignment has been facilitated by a distinctive mark of distributed leadership by whole school inquiry into evolving intercultural awareness moving towards equity and renewal.

Yousif agreed with Luke regarding the importance of values and engagement with the moral fabric of society that assures moral inquiry into an ethical framework. He also agrees with the importance of developing an intercultural awareness in a process of evolving a shared inclusionary and participatory worldview. Yousif particularly identified the role of the school in preparing young children for the future as the only social agent system in Arab society in a context of cultural discrimination and disadvantage:

I think that it is crucial to motivate and increase pupils' willingness to be involved in giving, and charitable projects in their community, and to support pupils in other schools who need their support. Thus, I see our role as discussing different values of commitment to the other and social participation, and to group students with various skills to support and help others. The most important value is the feeling of belonging to my school. This value motivates me to become involved even beyond my function's responsibilities.

Despite the two systems' differences, the evidence reveals that both school principals believe their role is to empower community members to participate in decision-making opportunities at the classroom and whole school levels (Kozleski et al. 2012). The findings connect with Arthur, Harrison, Taylor-Collins, and Moller (2017) who identify that young people engaging with social action such as charitable projects by the age of 10 years old, are twice as likely to sustain social action activities as a habit for life, as those who start social action a between the ages of 16–18. What is distinctive about this research is this has been operationalised by a distinctive mark of distributed leadership by whole school inquiry in partnership with Higher Education Institutions that connects individuals with their communities and builds habits of service beyond the school.

The mark of distributed leadership by whole school inquiry developed opportunities for different groups in the community to come together and discuss values, behaviours, and the social (Rawls, 2005) and balance this with evolving inter-cultural awareness of the specificity of the Arab context and the English context. Thus, a shift from hierarchical structures to a mark of distributed leadership by whole school inquiry empowers community members and moves them closer to political pluralism where they develop intercultural awareness, and shared worldviews (Helve, 1991). Community members develop shared worldviews by provisionally agreeing on what is morally right, and what is morally wrong, albeit within a wider national context of inequity. A mark of distributed leadership by whole community inquiry may empower and connect community members to: live and work together; respect, or tolerate different groups with different interests, languages and dialects, different knowledge bases, metaphysical knowledge, and different or no religions (Wong and Glass, 2009; Taysum et al., 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, Forthcoming); develop provisional agreement that creates a sense of belonging and solidarity. Both principals' statements on this theme show how developing a participative culture can structure empowerment patterns at school on a personal and collective social level, and

can contribute to the school's and the community's social, and cultural and associations.

Partnership values and circles of support and empowerment help the school community to overcome hinderances such as centralized and standardized hierarchical school systems. We now elaborate concluding remarks reached from both the empirical research findings and in the light of previous research and theory, and come to several conclusions.

## Concluding remarks

Both principals identified that the whole school inquiry approach through action research, in partnership with Higher Education Institutions improved participation in communities of practice, moved community members closer to inter-cultural awareness, and improved both student outcomes by circa 17%- 27% and student achievement. The background of rapid school reforms can distract leaders from implementing their evidence informed strategic plan for school improvement, effectiveness, and transformation. Higher Education Institutions provided support as critical friends who provided evaluative milestones and gave structure to the implementation of a distinctive mark of distributed leadership by whole school inquiry for intercultural awareness, and improved student outcomes. We recognise there is a plethora of research that identifies participatory communities of practice work, and they enable diverse groups to share their knowledge of 'what is' and bridge between different 'tribes'. The new contribution to knowledge this research offers is how these theories of participatory communities of practice have been realised in these two cases through a distinctive mark of distributed leadership by whole school inquiry. All members were able to document the steps of this approach to hold each other to account, and to provide evidence to external accountability regimes on developed codes of behaviour of right acts, and improved student outcomes.

The authors in Higher Education Institutions worked in partnership with the principals and we co-created a larger boundary crossing international network of 14 nation states that developed intercultural shared worldviews that informed all steps of the three year project. The network provided consistent professional support informed by intercultural evidence informed knowledge generation and exchange that we shared at the European Conference for Educational Research, The American Educational Research Association Annual Conference and the British Educational Leadership, Management, and Administrative Society Annual Conferences over the three year period of the project. The international network, made possible through these international conferences optimised the professional researchers' support of the principals by providing: intercultural professional learning; opportunities for reciprocal accountability regarding the warrants for the claims made; structures for quality assurance (Oancea & Furlong, 2007).

The principals recognised that they needed to be humble if they were to empower others, and they had to be secure in their desire to serve others, and not fear losing their jobs. Both principals identified that external inspection regimes were loyal to the system and not to their school, their staff, their communities, or their innovative participatory change strategies.

At the same time the principals recognised that empowering others was challenging because initially community members wanted to be told what to do and considered sharing leadership was a sign of weakness. Principals reported that by focusing on the whole school inquiry community members began to value their participation in school processes and practices, and felt confident that their faith, or no faith, and their metaphysical worldviews would be recognised and respected. The community members also appreciated the improved educational outcomes with the English School moving from 56% average A\* to C GCSE to achieving the best outcomes to date moving to 83% of pupils achieving an A\*-C GCSE grade in English and 74% of pupils achieving A\*-C in the mathematics GCSE. The Arab-Israeli high school increased its achievement in matriculation exams from average success of 56 % to 73% success of all graduates.

Three practical social contributions of knowledge to action that make a new contribution to knowledge emerge from this case study.

- (1) The study reveals the positive impact of partnerships and collaboration in change processes between academia and schools, where the University became a hub of national networks that created an international network. The international network built capacity through knowledge generation and knowledge exchange between all partners using the same whole school inquiry action research design.
- (2) The study shows that distributed leadership has been understood in different ways in the literature, but a mark of distributed leadership by whole school inquiry that evolved in this study through action research facilitates knowledge exchange, mobilisation, and dissemination activities that empower staff and young people to become societal innovators for equity and renewal which improved student outcomes.
- (3) The research reveals that shared aims, themes and methods through a mark of distributed leadership by whole school inquiry develops new understandings builds respect, trust, and local research priorities and practices where members of the community of praxis can hold each other to account.

Our research demonstrates that developing inter-cultural awareness in diverse communities through a distinctive mark of distributed leadership by whole school inquiry raised student outcomes and student achievement and addressed status gaps through education by collectively empowering school communities for equity, and renewal. Further research and capacity building for this distinctive mark of distributed leadership by whole school inquiry for evolving intercultural awareness is recommended.

### Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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