

Article

Research–Practice Partnership in a Professional Development Program: Promoting Youth at Risk

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Abstract: Research–Practice Partnerships (RPPs) embody enduring collaborations between practitioners and researchers that systematically address practical challenges to enhance education. This study describes research conducted within the framework of an RPP in which researchers were united with an educational association tasked with leading a professional development program (PDP) for teachers serving youth at risk. This study focuses on demonstrating a model for evaluating the implementation of the program’s educational philosophy among PDP participants. This comprehensive model comprises three interlinked components: cultivating awareness of the educational philosophy, fostering a profound comprehension of its principles, and facilitating the application of practices aligned with this philosophy. To investigate these dimensions, we drew upon data gathered through a survey administered to 140 educators and through in-depth interviews with 22 members of the educational staff. By examining these three pivotal components, we not only dissect the implementation process but also identify strengths and weaknesses, paving the way for a tailored intervention strategy. Beyond the immediate implications for program improvement, this research underscores the program’s reciprocal benefits for both researchers and practitioners. It holds the potential to influence the professional development of those involved, concurrently enriching the broader research community with invaluable insights gained from real-world educational contexts.

Keywords: Research–Practice Partnership (RPP); youth at risk; evaluation model; educational change; educational community



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1. Introduction

University–community partnerships serve as the foundation for a range of collaborative initiatives, encompassing community-based research projects, service-learning endeavors, joint programs between universities and communities, and community-based training programs [1,2]. In the realm of research, policymakers, funders, and researchers are increasingly devising innovative mechanisms to bolster the impact of research on community development. The focus is shifting towards addressing real-world challenges and forging novel modes of collaboration between researchers and practitioners [1,3–6].

A noteworthy development within this context is the emergence of Research–Practice Partnerships (RPPs). RPPs represent enduring partnerships between practitioners and researchers designed to delve into practical issues and craft solutions for enhancement. These collaborations are characterized by an enduring commitment shared by researchers and community leaders to foster ongoing collaboration across multiple projects. The process is supported by the application of scientific theories and the wealth of experience garnered by practitioners. RPPs employ intentional strategies aimed at nurturing these partnerships. These involve careful formulation of rules, delineation of roles, establishment of routines, and development of protocols that structure interactions and build capacity [4,7–12]. Such a concerted effort ensures that RPPs are effective in their pursuit of practical solutions and community improvement.

This unique intersection between representatives of academia and the community is a multifaceted endeavor, necessitating the cultivation of fresh perspectives and behaviors among partners to realize mutual benefits [13–16]. Within RPPs, research serves various functions, both as a knowledge-generation tool and as a means of accessing existing evidence. Practitioners within these partnerships can play the role of research “clients” or research facilitators, or they can even assume both roles simultaneously [17].

Researchers [18] have proposed five key principles underlying the definition of RPPs: (a) long-term design—RPPs are deliberately structured for sustained and enduring collaboration; (b) systemic educational improvement—their overarching aim is to drive systemic educational enhancement or promote equity in education; (c) central role of research—research forms a core activity within these partnerships; (d) diverse expertise integration—RPPs seek to harness a variety of expertise types; and (e) empowerment of all participants—strategies are in place to recalibrate power dynamics within the research process, ensuring equitable participation for all stakeholders.

Three distinct categories are typical of RPPs: Research Alliances (RAs) formed between a school district and an independent research organization; Design Research Partnerships (DRPs) geared towards development, testing, and reconfiguration of new policies and programs; and Networked Improvement Communities (NICs) comprising networks of school districts that seek to leverage practitioners’ diverse experiences across multiple contexts to advance our understanding about the effectiveness of educational practices in various circumstances [19].

The current study describes an RA RPP between academic researchers and the Yemin Orde organization. Founded in 2006, Yemin Orde seeks to create educational communities that provide emotional strength and educational environments for youth at risk. The term “at risk” encompasses a diverse group of adolescents, ranging from juvenile offenders to school dropouts, all of whom face physical, mental, or emotional challenges [20]. This classification often includes students coping with attendance issues and academic underachievement [21]. Most of these adolescents have suffered trauma in their young lives in the form of loss, neglect, abandonment, poverty, and more. The literature, e.g., [22,23], points toward a link between family characteristics and the adjustment of at-risk youth in personal, social, and academic domains. The Yemin Orde organization aims to empower the individual while building and influencing society as a whole. To this end, the organization promotes an educational philosophy called the Village Way (the name Village Way is derived from the African proverb, “It takes a village to raise a child”), which works to create an educational environment that guides at-risk youth towards personal growth and development to enable them to become contributing citizens in society. The Village Way philosophy posits that behind every teenager, stands a resilient and cohesive educational community that acts as a whole village comprised of educators, leading teams, parents, and the family as a whole—even if its function is suboptimal. This community uses a mutual language, agreed-upon values, and rules. Each student is paired with a significant adult who believes in him/her and assists him/her in believing in himself/herself. Four major viewpoints form the basis of this philosophy: minimizing the institution (deliberately reducing reliance on traditional systems in favor of more personalized, community-based approaches), implementing parental authority, building a community, and creating a qualitative and effective dialogue in which the individual sees himself/herself in the other.

1.1. The Professional Development Program

The professional development program (PDP) at Yemin Orde takes 3 years and is directed at two focal points: (1) providing an educational community capable of shaping a quality educational environment while coping with existing pitfalls in order to establish “a meaningful community” and (2) promoting educator awareness and behavior on a daily basis to create meaningful educator–student encounters. Each stage includes consciousness-emotional aspects implemented through learning and dialogue sessions, as well as practical aspects achieved by writing budgeted work plans and incorporating

a variety of educational programs and procedures into the community tradition. The expected result is the creation of a community that empowers its graduates to advance and function as “heads of households who will contribute to society” (for further information about the educational philosophy of the Village Way Educational Institute, see <https://www.impact-israel.org/the-village-way/> (accessed on 11 October 2023)).

The Village Way PDP for in-service educators of youth at risk was designed to enhance the spiritual well-being, character development, and leadership potential of youth at risk who come from poverty-stricken families and broken homes in order to help them live secure and productive lives. The goal of the PDP is to infuse educators with educational methodologies that will enable them to provide youth at risk with tools to overcome their troubled pasts and reach their potential. The Village Way educational philosophy includes 10 core components, which serve as an outline for implementing the educational concept in the training process (see Appendix A).

The PDP is characterized by five main design features: (a) meetings with content experts and inspirational figures; (b) integrating theory and practice by connecting consciousness and emotion with application, including learning sessions and workshops to teach the entire educational team to translate policy into action, examine positions, formulate working principles, and offer guidelines to help local management with monitoring and control; (c) discussing case studies in line with the Beit Midrash (Jewish study hall) tradition and heritage, in which the leading team runs learning sessions to explore attitudes and emotions regarding educational issues and examine the gap between aspirations and reality; (d) mentoring each educator by one of the training program staff members; and (e) running an educators’ forum where educators can share their experiences and problems, engage in brainstorming, and participate in experiential training days to achieve a systemic understanding of the concept of education, thus consolidating and enriching the team.

1.2. The Case of RPP

In accordance with the three distinct categories of RPPs [19], the current RPP case is described as follows: The Yemin Orde organization approached several academic institutions, and the authors of the current manuscript were selected to collaborate. The organization sought assistance from scientific tools to evaluate its educational activities and to support the implementation of the Village Way educational philosophy. The partnership involved facilitators from the training program, the organization’s pedagogical coordinator, organizational managers, and the research team (including the authors of this manuscript and other researchers) representing academia. The first step in the partnership entailed developing working mechanisms, including meetings at the beginning of the year at which the partners defined the central problem relevant to the investigation and set specific objectives. The next step involved dialogue to develop research tools to reflect the relative advantages of each party in the partnership (the researchers’ scientific-methodological knowledge and the educators’ practical educational knowledge). The research team collaboratively collects the data and is responsible for analyzing and editing the reports. The team then discusses the findings in a small collaborative forum and makes decisions about how to present these findings to all the educational personnel in the learning organization for the purpose of assimilation and continuous improvement. The goals for the next year of activity are continuously refined so as to empower all the partners.

The partnership between the researchers and the leading teams at Yemin Orde is ongoing. Each year, the partners jointly select specific research focuses for organizational learning to achieve educational improvement. The practical experience of the leading teams and the scientific and methodological knowledge of the researchers are combined to develop appropriate research tools. After participating in the PDP, partners then define key success factors for implementation: At the end of the first year, the community staff should understand the Village Way philosophy and use its language correctly. By the end of the second year, the community staff should be able to participate in shaping and implementing the Village Way programs and routines. By the end of the third year, the

community staff should be able to take the lead in shaping and implementing the Village Way in the community. By the end of the fourth year, community staff members who graduated from the program should be able to shape, conserve, and introduce innovations to the Village Way within the community.

Implementing a novel educational philosophy in an educational organization involves a complex process of change that must be considered by all stakeholders instituting the change [24–26]. The academic literature, e.g., [27,28], provides a comprehensive review of the theoretical aspects of understanding processes of change in educational systems and investigating measures to assess their success. Despite the scant knowledge available, external professional organizations charged with overseeing the implementation of educational change must answer questions regarding the potential of their professional training programs [29].

This study describes research conducted based on the RPP framework to evaluate the implementation of this educational philosophy following participation in a PDP. The evaluation model comprises three main elements: constructing awareness of the educational philosophy, including recognizing its value and its relevance to educators; understanding the educational philosophy; and implementing its practices optimally. Each of these three main components must find expression in widening circles of implementation within the organization, beginning with the inner leading team and expanding to encompass all members of the educational community (Figure 1).

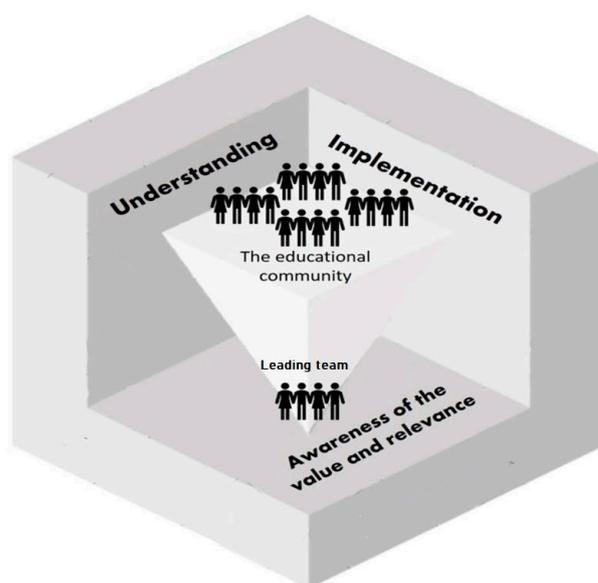


Figure 1. Model for implementing educational philosophy.

In this paper, we describe two components of this model (building awareness of the educational philosophy, including recognizing its value and its relevance to educators, and implementing the practices that correspond to the educational philosophy). The third component—understanding the educational philosophy—is described in [30]. The main research goal of this study was to evaluate how the first two components of the model found expression in widening circles of implementation within the organization. Evaluating how change processes are implemented requires paying more attention to unique challenges, including relating to participants’ interactions and opinions. Such evaluation should include examining participants’ attitudes regarding the relevance and importance of the educational change they experience, examining their knowledge and/or understanding of the importance of the change and the implementation of the change in daily educational activity [31,32]. The current research examines the following research questions: What are the attitudes of the educational staff regarding the PDP? How is the

educational philosophy relevant to their communities and educational practices? How do they perceive the PDP's contribution to the educational philosophy?

1.3. Theoretical Background

Professional Development, Implementation, and Evaluation Processes in Education

An effective PDP should incorporate the understanding that teaching is a demanding profession. It should involve the development of the teachers' competencies and attitudes to enable them to improve their teaching and their students' learning [30,33]. Teachers should also be allowed to continue to develop as individuals and as a community [3,34]. According to [35], effective PDP also involves helping teachers cope with uncertainties. These researchers define several characteristics of PDP (p. 82):

- It must be collaborative, involving a sharing of knowledge among educators, and focus on teachers' communities of practice rather than on individual teachers.
- It must be connected to and derived from teachers' work with their students.
- It must be sustained, ongoing, intensive, and supported by modeling, coaching, and collective solving of specific practical problems.
- It must be connected to other aspects of school change.

Even if teachers do participate in a PDP, this does not guarantee a sustainable change in their educational practice [36]. Ref. [37] noted that numerous PDPs fail because they do not consider what motivates teachers to participate and, in particular, the unique characteristics of a change process. Another reason for failure may be that, at the end of the PDP, the teachers are left on their own and usually do not have continuous support. In the current research, we focus on the implementation of a novel educational philosophy in an educational organization that involves a continuous change process.

The success of change in an educational system requires continuous effort on the part of all members of the organization, who share the goal of attaining improvement in educational practices and not merely a structural change in accountability [38–40]. Support for the educational staff during the change process helps to implement the new ideas [41,42]. In addition, evidence-based research gathered by external and internal bodies makes a significant contribution to the design of an ongoing program for change [43,44] and can, therefore, contribute to sustainable change [45].

The model in this study is based on the three stages described in [27]: Initiation, Implementation, and Institutionalization. *Initiation* entails planning all the elements of the change, including an appropriate organizational framework and a sound strategy. To achieve *Implementation*, the educational organization must establish the change and overcome any obstacles that may arise. Implementation in education incorporates the ability to advance and foster learning among all professionals in the school community with the collective aim of improving learning processes [46,47]. Implementing educational processes in an educational framework on the local and regional levels is a complex challenge involving organizational change. According to [48], members of the organization who adopt the educational change go through five formative stages: development of awareness, creation of interest, evaluation, experimentation, and adoption. The literature underscores the central importance of fitting the model to the organizational culture for effective implementation [27,49]. Among the main factors affecting the spread of change in the educational system, there are the level of interpersonal communication, the level of knowledge transfer among the members of the organization, and the leader's influence on the characteristics of the educational framework, including size, learners' ages, and geographical location (center/periphery) and type of locality (urban/rural). In addition, it is important to distinguish between internal and external factors that affect the implementation. Internal factors are those directly connected to the educational framework, while external factors are linked to determinants such as entrepreneurs and training institutions [27]. The third stage, *Institutionalization*, entails taking steps to make the change an integral part of the educational organization.

There are three main reasons for evaluating professional development programs: (1) to determine how to improve future programs, (2) to decide whether a program should be continued or discontinued, and (3) to justify the existence of the training program and its budget [50]. Researchers, e.g., [51], have suggested that the evaluation should occur at every phase of program implementation and should include various data collected through observations, interviews, and documentation. The three-stage evaluation framework recommended by [51] begins with collecting information before the process begins and clarifying the needs, goals, and vision of the program. This stage is followed by collecting data during the implementation itself and examining the program structure, content, staff, timing, learning, and location. The third stage is conducted after the program is in progress and includes assessing whether the program is still relevant and whether adjustments are needed.

2. Method

2.1. Sample

The Yemin Orde organization implemented an identical PDP in several at-risk youth communities. Of these, nine communities (schools for youth at risk, youth villages) at various assimilation stages and from three school districts (rural and urban) were selected as representative cases.

The organization aimed to assess how the change process was implemented. Two of the representative communities were in their second year, two were in their third year, and two communities had already completed the PDP. Educators within the communities were from informal and formal education settings, and all were trained and qualified to work with at-risk youth. Table 1 displays the characteristics of the communities, numbered from 1 to 9.

Table 1. Characteristics of the communities.

| | Student Population | Number of Educators | Age Range of the Youth |
|-------------|--------------------|---------------------|------------------------|
| Community 1 | 91 | 20 | 13–18 |
| Community 2 | 117 | 23 | 14–18 |
| Community 3 | 238 | 60 | 13–18 |
| Community 4 | 211 | 38 | 14–18 |
| Community 5 | 141 | 14 | 14–18 |
| Community 6 | 222 | 26 | 14–18 |
| Community 7 | 60 | 16 | 14–18 |
| Community 8 | 350 | 80 | 14–18 |
| Community 9 | 120 | 70 | 14–18 |

2.2. Data Collection and Analysis

The mixed-method research approach was chosen [52]. Data collection included a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews, as described below.

2.3. Questionnaire

An attitudes questionnaire was developed and adapted to the various implementation circles within the organization. The questionnaire was distributed among 103 educators and 37 members of the leading teams. The average seniority of the respondents was 7.97 years (median 5 years, standard deviation 7.47). Seniority in the education community ranged from 1 to 35 years. Participants filled a variety of roles in the educational communities. Participants were asked to rate their level of agreement with each statement on a five-point Likert scale.

The questionnaire's first section investigated the attitudes of all educational staff members regarding their work with the Village Way philosophy. This section included four categories, as illustrated in Table 2.

Table 2. Attitudes questionnaire categories—Part 1.

| Category | Item (Example) | Cronbach α |
|--|--|-------------------|
| General recognition of the value and relevance of the educational philosophy | I obtain tools to enrich my role as an educator The educational philosophy is useful in my everyday professional work | 0.893 |
| Implementation of the educational philosophy | The educational philosophy enables me to use educational language that is clear to everyone in the educational community | 0.920 |
| A sense of personal connection to the educational philosophy | I feel that I have learned how to adapt the educational philosophy to the unique characteristics of my educational community | 0.816 |
| A sense of effectiveness in relation to implementation of the educational philosophy | | 0.889 |
| Cronbach α of the first section of the questionnaire | | 0.949 |

The second part of the questionnaire was administered only to members of the leading team and included the categories shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Attitudes questionnaire categories—Part 2.

| Category | Item (Example) | Cronbach α |
|--|--|-------------------|
| Quality of guidance | The facilitator from the PDP's leading staff helps in dealing with the dilemmas connected with daily activities The facilitator from the PDP's leading staff provides support for dealing with uncertainty regarding the educational activity | 0.803 |
| Circles of assimilation | Knowledge about the educational philosophy is transmitted successfully to the other members of the team Knowledge about the educational philosophy is implemented successfully by the other members of the team | 0.893 |
| Cronbach α of the second section of the questionnaire | | 0.831 |

2.4. Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 22 educators from the third- and fourth-year communities ($N = 14$, $N = 8$ respectively) and lasted from 60 to 90 min. The interviews were scheduled in advance and took place in a location convenient for the respondents. The interviews focused on understanding the participants' perception of the Village Way philosophy, how this perception is reflected in the existing work plan at the institution, whether there have been changes among members of staff, and how the perception is transmitted from the leading team to other staff members. The interviews with educators from the fourth-year community focused on the ongoing application of the philosophy in the community and included the following questions: To what extent, in your opinion, is activity in the spirit of the educational philosophy being continued? How is the implementation of the educational philosophy being continued in the educational community? Which components of the educational philosophy have remained? Which of the components entail innovation and creativity? Which components have not remained? Why?

The data were analyzed inductively, and the categories underwent thematic coding [53]. The following categories were identified regarding the contribution of the educational philosophy: personal and team development; control and guidance of an external organization; expanding knowledge and developing thinking; implementation and responsibility; organizational conduct of the institution; working as an involved community with obligations; and social vision, including considerations of multiculturalism. The interviews with the fourth-year community educators revealed the following categories: use of the

terminology and application of the philosophy in the various programs, continuous assimilation of the philosophy among members of staff, involvement of the entire staff of the school, and ongoing assimilation and implementation in the future. In order to establish credibility, two researchers independently coded the categories and compared findings. After each researcher analyzed the data, mutual agreement between the researchers was obtained. Each quotation taken from the interviews was labeled by the number of the interviewee and the number of the community (i.e., 7.1 designates that the statement was made by interviewee number 1 from community number 7).

The study was approved by the Office of the Chief Scientist of the Ministry of Education. In addition, the study complied with requisite standards of ethical conduct in research, especially with respect to obtaining the respondents’ informed consent and upholding basic codes of ethics (maintaining bidirectional communication, obtaining the researchers’ extended commitment, and maintaining the full confidentiality of the participants and the schools) [54].

3. Findings

ANOVA analysis was conducted to compare the attitudes of the respondents based on the number of years they had participated in the program (first, second, and third years of participation and communities that had graduated from the program) (Table 4).

Table 4. Implementation of the educational philosophy: first- to third-year communities.

| Category | First Year N = 57 | Second Year N = 40 | Third Year N = 43 | ANOVA | Scheffe |
|---|----------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|-------------------------------|--|
| General recognition of the value and relevance of the educational philosophy | 3.14 (0.97) | 3.51 (1.00) | 3.69 (0.63) | F = 4.887, p = 0.009, df = 2 | significance: third year higher than first year. n.s: second-year and third-year |
| Implementation of the educational philosophy | 2.97 (0.79) | 3.47 (1.00) | 3.59 (0.66) | F = 6.585, p = 0.002, df = 2 | significance: second and third years are higher than first year |
| A sense of personal connection to the educational philosophy | 2.91 (1.04) | 3.50 (1.05) | 3.62 (0.58) | F = 7.986, p = 0.001, df = 2 | significance: second and third years are higher than first year |
| A sense of effectiveness relative to implementation of the educational philosophy | 3.14 (1.00) | 3.52 (1.04) | 3.58 (0.71) | F = 3.316, p = 0.0039, df = 2 | n.s |
| Overall | 3.07 (0.92) | 3.49 (0.97) | 3.61 (0.60) | F = 5.504, p = 0.005, df = 2 | significance: third year higher than the first year. n.s: second year—third year |

The table points to a trend towards improvement in attitudes among the respondents as the length of their involvement in the training program increased. Third-year viewpoints were found to be significantly more positive than those of first-year communities with respect to general attitudes, relevance of the educational philosophy, implementation of the educational philosophy, and sense of personal connection to the educational philosophy. Sense of effectiveness in relation to the implementation of the educational philosophy exhibited a slightly increasing trend, but Scheffe’s test found no statistically significant differences between the communities in the first, second, and third years despite significant differences being found by the ANOVA test.

The next step of the analysis entailed comparing the attitudes of educators who were on leading teams and those who were not leading-team participants. Table 5 shows the results of this comparison.

Table 5. Attitudes of leading team and non-leading team members.

| Category | Mean (S.D.) | | T Test | Cohen’s D |
|--|--------------------------------------|---------------------|-------------------------|-----------|
| | Educators (Non-Leading Team) N = 103 | Leading Team N = 37 | | |
| General recognition of value and relevance of educational philosophy | 3.31 (0.93) | 3.70 (0.82) | t = 2.389, p = 0.02 | 0.458 |
| Implementation of educational philosophy | 3.19 (0.93) | 3.60 (0.90) | t = 2.373, p = 0.01 | 0.455 |
| Sense of personal connection to educational philosophy | 3.13 (1.00) | 3.76 (0.84) | t = 3.724, p = 0.000 | 0.727 |
| Sense of effectiveness in relation to assimilation of educational philosophy | 3.26 (0.94) | 3.72 (0.91) | t = 2.586, p = 0.01 | 0.496 |
| Overall | 3.24 (0.88) | 3.69 (0.80) | t = 2.844, p = 0.006 | 0.545 |

The findings reveal statistically significant differences between the attitudes of the leading team members and those of educators who were not on these teams, with higher attitudes among educators on the leading teams. The effect size values according to Cohen’s formula are medium, and therefore, the differences are relatively significant.

The next step entailed analyzing the attitudes of leading team members in relation to several aspects: quality of the institution’s facilitation, implementation circles in the communities, feelings regarding the level of implementation, and feelings about continuing the process. Relatively positive attitudes were found with respect to all aspects (See Figure 2).

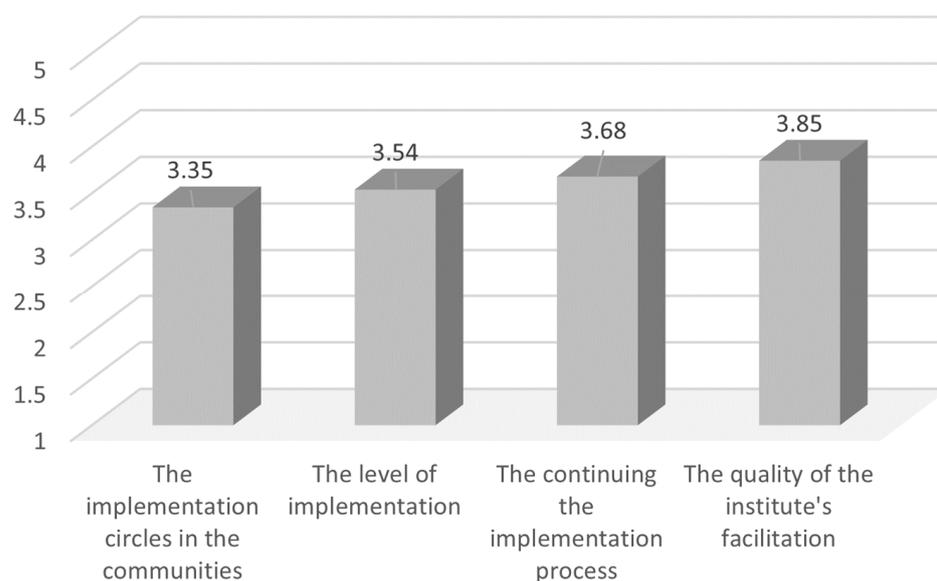


Figure 2. Attitudes of leading team members.

As mentioned in the Method section, the interviews were conducted with educators in third- and fourth-year communities. Analysis of the interviews of third-year community educators revealed several contributions of the various activities run by the Village Way Institute: a. personal and team development; b. control and guidance of an external organization; c. expanding knowledge and developing thinking; d. implementation and responsibility; e. organizational conduct of the institution; f. working as an involved community with obligation; and g. social vision and relating to multiculturalism.

3.1. Personal and Team Development

Most of the interviewees noted that they worked as a team, developed as individuals, and obtained tools to work according to the educational philosophy, as can be seen in the following comments:

The work was more organized and systematic this year. We shared tasks; we were more active as a team. I felt that we are working according to the educational philosophy (7.6).

The objective of the activity was to assess whether there were invisible students at school. The entire team met to discuss it. We mapped the students, and we saw which teacher is best suited to approach and connect with each student. We worked according to this, and it helped me organize what I want to do in my mind. The entire team and I became more aware (8.3).

The interviewees noted that this year, the work was more organized than in the previous year. This had a positive influence on understanding things from the perspectives of both the individual and the staff.

We had more meetings this year than we did last year. The work on the steering committee was more organized and systematic this year. We divided tasks, we took components upon ourselves to present, and we were more active. This year, I felt that we had begun to associate the things that we had worked on during the last two years with the components of the philosophy (7.10).

The interviewees described their work as a group and noted that they had to present a certain component of the Village Way philosophy in a creative manner.

During the team meetings with the advisor, she would propose a topic for discussion, and everyone gave his or her opinion, and all of us discussed a certain topic. We would divide into groups, and each group worked on a certain component of the philosophy. There was a positive competition between the groups as to who would give the most creative presentation (7.7).

3.2. Control and Guidance of an External Organization

One of the advantages of working with the Village Way Institute that the interviewees described was that it provided ongoing guidance, support, and control. In addition, it was evident that the necessary adaptations were made for the staff. In this way, the Village Way philosophy became more relevant for them, as shown in the following comments:

Since the entrance of the Village Way (as an external organization), its framework has been very clear to the school. It was the mentor's perception that guided us (8.1).

The cooperation became more relevant and interesting. I remember that the first year was very difficult for me. I didn't connect, and it didn't suit me very much. The discussion was more theoretical, and, at first, I didn't connect. I think that it was hard for the entire staff and not just for me. However, the adaptation was made quickly, and our mentor understood us and adapted things to us. Since then, things have become a lot more interesting, relevant, empowering, and directional. I think it was our mentor who adapted things and brought the Village Way to us in a manner that was much more relevant (8.2).

The interviewees also noted that they were interested in continuing the program and wanted the Village Way Institute to remain and support them and offer consultation, as expressed in the following comment:

I think the Village Way needs to stay with us, even if it meets with us only periodically. True, the philosophy is already established in the school, but it's important for them to remain a supporting body that we can return to and consult with (7.10).

3.3. Expanding Knowledge and Developing Thinking

An additional contribution of the Village Way Institute's activities pertains to its influence on how participants thought about various issues, including how to improve visits to students' homes and what to emphasize during these visits. Another issue that

must be dealt with is that some students do not receive attention from teachers: “The mentor told me to attend a seminar that focuses on home visits! He always showed us the way, how we can improve and develop!” (8.3).

The mentor once asked us who were the invisible students. Suddenly, you realize that there are invisible students. He alerted us to many things that we had not been aware of. I said to myself: ‘Who are these invisible students who I am not paying attention to?’ I had to assume responsibility for this in a positive way (8.4).

In addition, it was evident that the philosophy offered the educators additional knowledge and strategies for action, both within the staff itself and in relating to parents and students. It also enabled them to be creative, as illustrated by the following comments:

The philosophy gave me additional knowledge and strategies for relating to the philosophy, relating to teachers as a group, and behaving with parents and students. The Village Way is a discipline that gives you a lot of strength to work with children in a school like ours. After several years since its assimilation, the philosophy now serves as a source of strength (7.9).

I think it expanded the teachers’ horizons as individuals and those of the entire staff. It made me become more creative in activities and in my daily dialogues with students. It helped me make the school a safer place for students through the clubs and dialogues by strengthening the students’ past, future, and inner world (7.11).

3.4. Implementation and Responsibility

The interviewees referred to the fact that there was mutual responsibility among members of the staff and that, in practice, all of them were responsible for bestowing values to students, even those who did not hold specific jobs pertaining to that area: “I think that the most important sentence is: ‘We need a whole village to raise a child’! We are responsible for the values we teach the students. We are all part of this philosophy!” (8.7).

It was evident that the interviewees are implementing the Village Way philosophy wisely, as expressed by the following: “If I plan a tour, I will connect it to their (students) past or their future (part of the educational perception)” (8.1).

3.5. Organizational Conduct of the Institution

The Village Way activities clearly had a positive impact on the organizational conduct of the educational institution. The interviewees claimed that they now have a systematic way of building topics and working methods. They also noted that the frequent guidance of the Village Way Institute enables them to conduct themselves properly from an organizational standpoint and to integrate the philosophy more effectively:

Things are now orderly. Today, everyone knows how to categorize and do things in a systematic, more logical way and to strive towards the objective. We know why we do things and where we are going (7.12).

There was a reason why we met with the mentor more frequently. We then bring what we learn to the staff meetings. If we decide to implement a certain program in the school this year, it fits into the components of the Village Way and that helps us understand it better and assimilate it. If I am leading a certain topic at the daily meetings, I use the Village Way terminology (7.10).

3.6. Working as an Involved Community with Obligations

The participants indicated that a main added value of working with the Village Way Institute was the understanding that they are talking about a community that serves as a model. The entire staff is involved in and obligated to the process, and all share the common goal of leading the students to “the right path,” as illustrated by the following comments:

I think that as an educational staff, we have actually become a model. Teachers watch and see how you behave towards the children and how you solve problems (8.1).

I think that all of us are involved. . .perhaps at different levels. . . All of us are obligated to attend a meeting with N. every two weeks, and she meets with the principal and with the steering committee (7.10).

There are regular staff meetings in which the entire staff participates so that all of us will be involved in leading the students to the right path (8.3).

3.7. Social Vision and Relating to Multiculturalism

The interviewees noted that the various activities with the staff of the Village Way helped expand their social vision—particularly from a multicultural perspective:

Today, I can say that I know more before I meet with teachers and students. For example, when I meet with parents of Ethiopian students, I clarify things and learn about them so that I'll also know a bit about their culture and traditions before I arrive for a home visit or meeting (8.3).

Our project promotes living together, fostering connections between students from different sectors. We aren't just looking in, but looking out towards our entire multicultural society (7.11).

In addition, the research also examined the perceptions of the fourth-year community regarding the relevance of the Village Way Institute and its practical implementation. The interviews revealed that the Village Way educational philosophy is relevant and assimilated and has led to developing a vision of the future. The next sections outline the main points raised by the fourth-year interviewees.

3.8. Use of the Terminology and Applying the Philosophy in the Various Programs

The fourth-year interviewees noted that their conceptual world had changed. This found expression in conversations with students and also, in practice, in the programs they developed based on the Village Way educational philosophy, as illustrated in the following examples:

Our logo has changed. The entire place looks different from the outside. We talk in terms of different concepts. When we talk to students, we talk about correction, not about punishment (9.5).

We still implement programs that we built here, so yes. We are retaining and preserving things such as the "Country" and "With you all along the way" projects—our program for guiding our graduates. We have taken care to raise awareness and emphasize various multicultural aspects of our community, such as celebrating the Ethiopian Sif Festival and Novy God, the Russian New Year (9.5).

When we build the annual program, we build it according to the "Way of the World" philosophy. If I'm talking about myself as coordinator for social education, then my program is built around anchors from the past, on national identity, on ethnic and social belonging. Even when planning a trip, we always visit a place with a certain heritage to bring them closer to their world or to a subject they are studying. We don't just talk about things. We actually do them (9.2).

3.9. Continuous Assimilation of the Philosophy among Staff Members

The examples provided by the interviewees in the fourth-year community testify to the assimilation of the Village Way educational philosophy among the various staff members and reveal high motivation to continue to develop it.

There are many ways in which we expose people to the Village Way and assimilate it to the steering committee, the management, and finally, to the teachers and educators and the rest of the staff (9.1).

Ten of the twenty staff members lead projects. Two teachers have completed the training to be leaders, and another teacher is interested in attending the course to be a project leader as well. The staff understands that we are continuing the work of the parents: inclusion, love, and giving. We can't replace parents, but we can continue their work of assertiveness, imposing boundaries, and caring. The concept of "repairing the heart" needs to be perfected and improved (9.3).

3.10. *Involvement of the Entire School Staff*

The interviewees noted that the main idea of the educational philosophy of the Village Way—"It takes an entire village to raise a child"—is completely implemented in practice when the entire school staff is involved:

The main idea of this educational philosophy is that it takes an entire village to raise a child. I can tell you without exaggerating that the entire school is involved. All the adults are involved, and they care. They talk to the students and hold discussions with them. For example, the entire staff, even the guard, helped the students collect donations to purchase food packages for needy families. The cleaning staff took initiative and was involved as well. Many of the staff members are in charge of projects this year. There is no outsourcing, and all projects are directed by members of the staff (9.5).

Last year, we held an *Iftar* meal to mark the end of the month-long Ramadan fast. We invited the imam (Muslim religious leader), the mayor, the local rabbi, and the priest. There was a strong message of living together. The entire school helped (9.2).

3.11. *Continuing Implementation in the Future*

The interviews revealed that the educational communities working with the Village Way philosophy are in the process of institutionalizing it and have instituted programs for doing so in the future, as illustrated by the following comments:

We are continuing with the program. We will be participating in the "landmark" program, and they always offer their help. I have told them what I would like from them next year (8.3).

I want to continue with the "Repair of the heart" component and to improve and assimilate it even more and to examine where the vision is (9.2).

4. Discussion

The purpose of the current research was to examine the attitudes of the educational staff regarding the PDP and the relevance of its educational philosophy to their communities. In addition, we characterized their perceptions regarding the contribution of the educational philosophy. The findings point to an extensive recognition of the value of the educational philosophy and its relevance to educators in various communities. An analysis of the questionnaire reveals a positive correlation between the following components: recognition of value and relevance, a sense of personal connection to the educational philosophy, and the seniority of the community implementing the process. The longer the educational community has been involved in the implementation process, the more positive the findings of the educators' attitude questionnaires. Indeed, the educators appeared to change their perceptions after they realized which aspects of the educational philosophy were successfully implemented and which were not. They provided evidence of improvements on the micro level (e.g., their students' learning, their function as educators) and the macro level (i.e., the organization's function). This is in line with [37,51], who noted that a successful change occurs when all parties in an organization are involved and the implementation is both at the individual and the organizational level.

The findings also indicate positive attitudes among the leading team members. It seems that the leading team was committed to the change process, worked purposefully, and promoted a fundamental transformation in the educational organization. This was also evident with respect to their attitudes regarding the quality of the institute's facilitation, the implementation circles in the communities, the level of implementation, and their feelings about continuing the process. This indicates that when educators lead an educational change or are part of it, the outcomes can be both positive and empowering [55,56]. It is evident that working with the Village Way educational institute contributes to organization and order at work, which in turn has a positive effect on understanding the educational processes on a personal and team level and on the satisfaction of the educators in the education community. The interviewees noted that one of the advantages of working with the Village Way Institute was that it provides guidance, support, and control along the way. In addition, they noted that the institute's facilitators make the adjustments necessary for the staff, such that the Village Way philosophy becomes more relevant for them.

It is apparent that the philosophy added to the educators' knowledge and strategies for action, both among the staff itself and in relation to the parents and the students. Indeed, the philosophy strengthened the family- and community-centered strategy. The literature, e.g., [57], has also indicated the importance of implementing changes in an educational organization, including school staff, parents, and students, to generate a commitment to the success of the endeavor. The interviewees recognized a shared responsibility among staff members, noting that, in practice, everyone is responsible for imparting values to students. The Village Way activities appeared to have a positive effect on the organizational conduct of the educational institution. According to the interviewees, issues and courses of action are now systematically developed.

Similar findings can be found in studies, e.g., [58,59], pointing to positive perceptions among school members regarding the organizational condition of schools after participating in a PDP. These studies are based on the School-wide Positive Behavior Support approach, aimed at enhancing behavioral outcomes for students by addressing the school's organizational and social culture. Like the Village Way PDP, this approach involves instituting a planning team, defining school-wide behavioral expectations, developing procedures for acknowledging appropriate behaviors and discouraging inappropriate behaviors, and monitoring and evaluating the entire process.

The findings indicate that the implementation of the Village Way philosophy has indeed expanded from a small leading team to all members of the educational community. This strengthens the claim that when community members are actively involved in the change process, and the change is connected to their local needs and challenges, sustainable change can be achieved [29,38,42].

The findings also show that the Village Way philosophy is indeed relevant to the fourth-year community and that the philosophy has been institutionalized both at the team level and at the level of the various plans and activities. In addition, participants are clearly thinking about developing additional programs in the future and strengthening specific aspects of the philosophy, and they desire to continue using the program. It appears that the educational change has been institutionalized and is now taken for granted as a feature of everyday practice [27,60].

The evaluation model described in this study demonstrates that investigating the educational staff during various stages of implementation facilitates an in-depth examination of their progress and the assessment of the potential impact of the PDP over time. A constructive and continuous evaluation research design can yield the most information about the change process [38,51] and can help professional bodies and the leading team lead the implementation of educational processes. This evaluation model will facilitate ongoing methodical activity, making it possible to conduct critical discussions based on data with regard to the progress and results of the educational process. Our model adds to existing models based on an organizational procedure connected to implementation (e.g., 'island of innovations' [61]; 'a comprehensive innovation' [62]) and can be implemented in

various organizations with different educational philosophies. The current research may help in designing other PD programs and in making informed decisions regarding whether continuing to invest resources in these programs is worthwhile.

Our research has several limitations. PDP takes place in real-world settings that include many intervening variables that preclude simple causal interpretation. Therefore, isolating the effects of a single program under such conditions is usually impossible [63]. The focus on assessing educators' attitudes in the present study did not allow us to address additional aspects recommended by [64], such as student outcomes. Further studies are needed to examine this aspect. Note that the current study, which focused on educators' attitudes on assimilating the educational philosophy after the PDP, is part of a broader study that also used performance tests to examine educators' near and far transfer skills [30]. Both studies offer a comprehensive view of how the Village Way philosophy was assimilated.

Despite the acknowledged limitations, this study holds the potential to make significant methodological and practical contributions. The evidence it gathered is poised to serve as an ongoing catalyst for enhancing PDP. As highlighted, this research is an integral part of an RPP—a collaboration designed to yield benefits for all stakeholders engaged in the educational process. This partnership carries the potential to exert a major impact on the professional development of those involved while concurrently advancing the theoretical and methodological fields of the research community. At their core, these partnerships are driven by the shared objective of fostering novel forms of mutual learning, enriching both researchers and practitioners alike. The focus extends beyond short-term gains, emphasizing the sustainability of the partnership's efforts and its potential for scalability to create a widespread impact.

Within this collaborative framework, researchers can gain invaluable insights into the authentic challenges that beset the field of education, allowing them to tailor practical, field-tested solutions. Moreover, these partnerships serve as conduits for the assimilation of pedagogical innovations and the cultivation of values adapted to the demands of 21st-century learning.

Moreover, research rooted in such partnerships can help craft a bridge between theory and practice, thus effectively fostering a shared language that facilitates a seamless interaction between all involved parties. The symbiotic relationships forged between researchers and practitioners create a reciprocal dynamic, enabling ongoing support, guidance, and mutual assistance, thereby nurturing a thriving ecosystem of educational improvement.

The current research, conducted in collaboration with researchers and practitioners, focused on evaluating an educational activity. The RPP between researchers and community agency professionals can contribute to the development of evidence-based practice that may enhance the educational community's ability to provide effective services [65]. Further research should also seek to characterize the partnership, as in [66,67].

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Appendix A

Table A1. Ten core components in the Village Way educational philosophy.

| |
|---|
| Anchors in the Past: Recognizing and strengthening positive personal narratives, empowering communal history, and honoring cultural traditions |
| Anchors in the Future: Designing a plan for the future and encouraging youth to change present actions accordingly, teaching valuable life skills, providing support for graduates, and letting youth know that the community will serve as their safety net |
| Earth (the physical environment): Creating an esthetically pleasing, home-like atmosphere, using the physical environment to convey lessons and communal values |
| Sky (the spiritual environment): Reinforcing communal values and national belonging, finding meaning in tradition and holidays, and promoting moral judgment |
| Tikkun Halev (repairing the heart): Providing diverse opportunities for success in academic and extracurricular activities, providing programs for emotional healing, and using setbacks and crises as an opportunity for growth and learning |
| Tikkun Olam (repairing the world): Participating in community service to empower youth through helping others and serving a valued role in the wider community, promoting a sense of responsibility to service, and opening up the wider world to the child |
| Reliable Representations of Parental Wholeness: Placing every educator in the role of a meaningful adult in children's lives, involving parents in the community, and empowering parents in the eyes of their children and the children in the eyes of their parents |
| Community of Meaning: Crafting a sense of belonging to and pride in a supportive community with common values and spreading values beyond the community's borders |
| Dialogue: Opening up understanding, respectful dialogue between adults and youth aimed at promoting the youth's progress without blurring the role of the responsible adult |
| Minimizing institutional characteristics: Building a living community that goes beyond the bureaucratic aspects of institutional life on the physical and interpersonal levels |

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