

The School Principal's Motivating Discourse and Its Implications: Some Insights into Leader-Followers Relations

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Abstract	Article Info
The current study sought to identify the characteristics of "motivational language" and the roles of this language used by successful school principals, and its effect on teachers' organizational commitment. The research was based on semi-structured interviews, observations, and document analysis in ten elementary school principals (the "cases"). Participants were selected through "Purposeful sampling in which a large amount of rich data was collected on a single case, which helped in understanding the phenomenon being studied revealed unique characteristics and roles of the motivational discourse: Characteristics such as listening, the principal's expression of respect and gratitude to his teachers, an emphasis on partnership and dialogue, and a personal example. In addition, roles were revealed that are not mentioned in the research literature on the motivational discourse of school principals with their teachers: visible roles (such as training, guidance, documentation, and feedback) and hidden roles (e.g., empowerment, interest in teachers, understanding, inclusion-as a respectful, non-demeaning discourse). That is, this motivational discourse has consequences that helped educational work, such as eliminating objections and spreading positive	Article History: Received: December 27, 2024 Accepted: September 7, 2025 Keywords: Leadership, motivating language, discourse, and principalship communication.

feelings and a relaxed atmosphere to promote the educational work. On the applied level, research insights may contribute to the primary education system, to school principals, to institutions for training school principals, and to the supervision and professional development system of the Ministry of Education. Also, they can expand and deepen the definition of the role of the school director, as well as the training and guidance required for this complex leadership management position.

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Introduction

Motivation is perceived as one of the most important factors in human behavior since it provides an answer to the question of why people act the way that they do (Back, 2000). The word, 'Motivation', is a derivative of the Latin word, 'Motivus', which means "a driving force", and is described as "the overall forces that influence a person – from within and without – and clarify, to a certain extent, the redistribution of effort for achieving certain goals" (Middlemist & Hitt, 1988, p. 144). Motivation, in its organizational context, is described as "the processes in a person which cause a behavior and redirect it to the benefit of the organization" (Miner, 1988, p. 158), while motivation at work is described as the readiness to put in a lot of effort for the purpose of achieving organizational goals, which is conditioned by the employee's ability to satisfy a certain need (Mahmoud et. Al., 2020).

This paper focuses on the functions and effects of one of the strategies that school principals use to motivate their teachers: "A Motivating Language", which is a principal's discourse that motivates employees to increase effectiveness and productivity at work (Mayfield et. Al., 2021). Mayfield and Kopf (1998), who coined the term "Motivating Language", argued that its significance comes from the fact that much of the principal's work is in having a discourse, and that this discourse needs to be academically addressed. The reason why communication with managers is important for motivating employees is that 66%-77% of a manager's time is spent on discourse (Geddes, 1995) that we tend to ignore.

The assumption underlying the study was that the school constitutes an organizational arena with unique characteristics and that the unique professional context in which school principals operate can lead to the identification of factors and methods of motivational discourse that differ from those that have emerged in the research literature on employee motivational discourse in organizations. This is because this context combines several essential components that create the difference: Unlike business organizations where the work, goals, objectives, and connections between the manager and employees are clear, the school organization is characterized by loose connections (Weick, 1976): Multiple, and sometimes even contradictory, goals, a loose connection between the actions teachers take in the classroom and the results, a lack of interaction between teachers, both due to their individual work behind closed doors and due to division into different age groups, etc. (Humphreys & Rigg, 2020). This difference between the school and other organizations emphasizes the need to explore a motivational dialogue between the principal and his teachers distinctly.

Unfortunately, there has been little reference to this specific kind of Motivating Language in studies of emotions among school principals. To fill this gap, the paper explores the uniqueness of the use of Motivating Language among elementary school principals for the purpose of motivating teachers to perform their duties more efficiently, and the role of discourse and its implications. Specifically, this paper poses three questions: (1) How do principals, their staff, and teachers perceive the nature of the Motivating Language in the school's unique context? (2) What is the purpose of Motivating Language in the eyes of the principals, administrative staff, and teachers? (3) What are the implications of using Motivating Language, among school principals, on the pedagogical organization, according to the perception of principals, administrative staff, and teachers?

While the extent of research in the field of discourse between principals and teachers is relatively limited, the amount of evidence concerning the importance of such discourse in organizations is growing (Mayfield et al., 2021). This study contributes to the literature about principal-teacher relations and teacher motivation since, according to the study's findings, one can more efficiently redefine the component of the principal's discourse and teacher motivation as an inseparable part of the principal's job and the implications of such discourse (Gaziel, 1995; Holmes, 2012).

Literature Review

"Discourse" is not just about the transfer of information; it has many functions and interactions, such as values, stances, beliefs, and emotions that merge with functions that are not linguistic (Arvaja & Hämäläinen, 2021). Regarding Motivating Language, the one who is responsible, in most cases, for the course of discourse, its many interactions, orientation, and final wording, is the principal. Studies

from the field of business organizations refer to this linguistic element (Alev, 2024). These studies see communication as the center of the principal's work, and that leadership and discourse are intertwined. Meaning, the ability to achieve organizational goals through discourse is regarded as one of the most important skills (Mayfield & Mayfield, 2017). This is because the strategic use of discourse as motivating, by leaders, increases employees' satisfaction and significantly improves behavior and performance (Bogotch & Roy, 1997).

The literature that deals with administration and business administration coined, as previously mentioned, the term "Motivating Language" to a discourse that helps work motivation among principals who spend most of their time at work discussing with their employees. This is a discourse that increases efficiency, output, and work productivity, as a discourse that grants both personal and professional confidence (Alev, 2024).

The Characteristics of Motivating Language and Its Functions

The researchers: Mayfield, Mayfield and Kopf (1998), coined the term "Motivating Language" for a discourse that helps managers achieve their goals, and this discourse includes several styles of discourse:

Empathic discourse and its functions: First, an empathic discourse that motivates due to the strong emotional bonds that are formed between the principals and their employees is required (Mayfield & Mayfield, 2017). This is helpful and reliable communication that acknowledges the value of others, and this is because the professional and social interaction between the people of the organization stirs emotional responses and requires acknowledgment and coping (Crawford, 2009). For example, principals can address their employees and say: "I know what you are going through because I went through

something similar" (Mayfield & Mayfield, 2017). That is, the role of such communication is to grant a humane aspect to the organization (Berkovich & Eyal, 2015).

Clear discourse and its functions: Beyond empathy, discourse researchers emphasize the importance of a clear discourse (Mayfield & Mayfield, 2017) that is expressed in the giving of simple and complete information to comprehend the work: instructions that clarify roles, values and expectations, information during changes, explanations for problem solving, priorities, goals and rewards (Mayfield et al., 2021). This clear discourse has several functions, such as: "qualifying in modern knowledge, and granting a pedagogical meaning, reducing the employee's uncertainty, lack of confidence, and mistakes, and helping in proper decision making (Alev, 2024).

Meaningful discourse (vision) and its functions: Motivating Language has another component: a significant discourse (vision), as an ethical discourse for conducting the organization's activities (Holmes, 2016), and as an inspiring discourse that outlines the way for carrying out the job (Holmes et. al., 2024; Mayfield & Mayfield, 2017). That is, the purpose of the vision is to formulate the values and principles that will guide the organizational goals, purposes, and activities for the creation of an ideal future reality.

Transparency of discourse and its functions: This is communication that informs, shares, and consults processes that occur in the organization, and is of crucial importance to the sense of belonging to the organization. Transparency of discourse is expressed in honest communication that is open to discussion and criticism by brainstorming and sharing (Mayfield & Mayfield, 2017). The employees feel that they constitute a significant part of what happens within the organization, such as the setting of goals and purposes, and

decision-making. That is how transparency allows employees to make decisions for the betterment of their performance. Likewise, the purpose of transparency is to reduce ambiguity and to stimulate discussion that helps to improve and leverage organizational growth (Baltzley & Lawrence, 2016). The employees are part of the process and understand the larger picture of the organization's activity, which allows a mobilization of an upward-downward communication without the apprehension of reporting mistakes (Oulasvirta et. al., 2014).

Framing events: Discourse researchers highlight the importance of framing an occurrence in a different and inspiring way. Framing is like the work of a photographer who points his camera to highlight whatever he wants to be seen. This way, the act of framing provides an ethical interpretation of the job that helps employees overcome daily challenges (Holmes, 2016; Holmes et. al., 2024; Holmes & Parker, 2020). For example, Steve Jobs indicated that the business is a journey when he tried to defend a strategic decision he made (Heracleous & Klaering, 2014). That is, he used a metaphor to explain the decision to make changes, and for his "journey," he even used a "road map" (Ibid.).

Actions that overlap with discourse: Action-overlapping discourse is also required. This is communication in which there is a match between the leader's statements and his actions. The reason for this is that employees interpret the leader's words in a behavioral context. If the leader does not act accordingly, employees tend to rely on his actions and ignore his words. Therefore, demonstrating ethics and integrity through the leader's actions increases employee trust in the leader. Likely, leaders who do what they say and practice what they preach will be seen as more genuine and authentic by their employees (Mayfield & Mayfield, 2017).

Holistic discourse: The researchers emphasize that all the elements of this Motivating Language are intertwined and inseparable, which creates a holistic discourse (Holmes et. al., 2024; Mayfield et. al., 2015). Humes, a language and leadership professor at the University of South Colorado and the speechwriter of four presidents, calls this communicative discourse "art" (Madalina, 2016). According to him, the leader's discourse is the art of communication.

The Implications of Motivating Language

The holistic Motivating Language of the principal toward his teachers has motivating implications, because each component of this language has the potential to motivate employees to carry out their jobs more efficiently. This element is essential to employee motivation, especially in the 21st century, due to psychological gaps between employees and their employers and the employees' expectations to meet their demands (Vardi & Weitz, 2016): The empathy expressed in this kind of language leads the employee feel appreciated and, in turn, increases his or her sense of support, trust, loyalty, satisfaction, commitment to job and improvement of performance (Hills, 2015). This is because it strengthens relations between the manager and the employee to promote future success.

The language's clarity also motivates, and that is because employees realize what they need to do very clearly, and, therefore, a positive work environment that focuses on tasks is formed (Mayfield et al., 2021). The vision expressed in the employer's discourse also has a positive aspect, as it motivates the employees towards a significant future ideal and the acquisition of a strong collective duty (Mayfield et al., 2015). This, alongside the transparency of the employer's discourse

with his employees, causes employees to realize that they are being included, trusted, and informed, and are part of the decision-making, and here lies the motivation for the optimal execution of their duties (Mayfield & Mayfield, 2017).

Furthermore, the reframing of emotions or perspectives in the discourse improves organizational outcomes since discourse's original and inspiring emphasized values help to overcome challenges and translate them into actions (Gatti, 2021). Finally, the leader's expression of ethics through actions creates trust, commitment, and motivation among employees (Nkemdili, 2019).

Study of Motivating Language in School

Despite Motivating Language's popularity in business organization studies, the subject has rarely been explored in the educational field, and these studies are mostly quantitative, which have examined the relationship between motivational language and the increase in motivation and pedagogical successes of teachers in educational institutions (Alev, 2024). Therefore, this study relies, in part, on research and theories of Motivating Language that were conducted in organizations that are not part of the education system. Yet, this study relies, in part, on research and theories of Motivating Language that were conducted in organizations that are not part of the education system. In fact, a large degree of school management is achieved through discourse: discourse in meetings, in random meetings in the school corridor, on the phone, in the media, and more. Therefore, the ability of managers to influence and manage depends on their ability to communicate in a variety of ways with different people on any given day, and with the schoolteachers responsible for the educational work.

In fact, from reviewing these scarce studies about Motivating Language in educational organizations (Holmes, 2020; Yakut & Maya, 2022), it is indicated that the core of the principal's work is verbal communication. However, unlike business organizations, a school principal has reciprocal relations with many different groups: teachers, students, parents, the community, and authorities. In addition, it is highlighted that in the characteristics of the principal's Motivating Language as holistic, the characteristics mentioned above, are also intertwined in an organization like a school which include, for example: empathy, clarity in instructions and expectations, informative and process-consulting transparency, meaningful vision, and "action-matching discourse" - with the principal being true to his words (Ozeren et. al., 2020).

In the professional context of the school principal, his unique roles are emphasized, such as: promoting teaching and educational programs that help students, developing the school culture, maintaining relationships with teachers, students, parents, authorities and the Ministry of Education - all of these are related to an optimal dialogue with the teachers: principal's Motivating Language (Alev, 2024). This context includes several essential components that create the difference between the characteristics of the principal's language and its functions and the language's characteristics of the organization managers. It was assumed that this unique context may lead to the recognition of the various characteristics and functions of the principal's Motivating Language than those that were indicated in studies about employees' Motivating Language in organizations.

In addition, the school is an organizational arena with unique characteristics. The organization of the school is characterized by loose connections (Oplatka, 2024), for example, multiple goals, and

sometimes even contradicting each other, a loose connection between the activities that the teachers implement in the classroom, and the products, and limited cooperation between the teachers (Humphreys & Rigg, 2020; Weick, 1976).

In this article, we will uniquely reveal the characteristics of the school principal's unique motivational discourse with his teachers and his roles, as emerged from the research.

Finally, studies on the discourse of the school principal with his teachers (e.g., Alev, 2024; Yakut & Maya, 2022) are quantitative and few, and are mostly based on the "Motivating Language" model from the business world. Our research as a "case study" uniquely revealed specific characteristics of this school discourse and its roles in the educational field. The present study has a twofold contribution: at the theoretical level, the present study contributes to the research field in the fields of organizational behavior and educational administration to expand the conceptualization of ways to motivate employees in general, and in the school arena as an educational organization in particular, through the principal's discourse.

In the field of educational administration, the study sheds additional light on the elementary school as an organization and the role of the principal's dialogue with his teachers from angles that have not yet been explored, and supports the claim that management and leadership are equally necessary for the organization.

Methodology

The manager's motivational discourse contains several relevant variables that interact with each other, without an adequate conceptual framework to describe the characteristics and functions that influence these variables in the manager's motivational language. This situation

has prompted the need to study the motivational language of school principals using the tools of "multiple case studies" (Yin, 2013) to produce versatile information about this phenomenon, defined as a "case": the principal's motivation for school language for teacher motivation. Below are the reasons for adapting the qualitative paradigm and the multiple case study to the present study, the method of selecting the cases (school principals and staff), the research tools (interviews, non-participant observation, and documents, the research process, and the researcher's place in the study and validity issues, The reliability and ethics relevant to the present study.

Sample and Participants

To produce rich data about the characteristics of principals' Motivating Language and its functions as motivating, ten elementary schools, from the State Education System, were chosen for this study, according to a "targeted sample" (Stake, 2013) as a homogeneous group. Note, however, that the case under investigation is the school principal rather than the school itself. While the schools selected in this study provide the context in which the study was conducted, the primary focus of this study is the principals' motivating language.

The selection of schools was done in accordance with the "criterion sampling" (Cohen et. al., 2018). The researchers had to locate the subjects through informed selection in order to strengthen the validity of the findings and prevent coincidences as much as possible. Therefore, participants were selected according to a "purposive sample," and this research method collected a large amount of rich data on a single case, which helped in understanding the phenomenon being studied: the school principal's discourse. Case studies do not represent the world in its broadest sense, but rather the case itself, so that it is both a unit of analysis and a final product (Stake, 2013). Yet,

one can try to shed light on it and find evidence more broadly and comprehensively.

Based on the literature about Motivating Language in organizations, we assumed that this kind of language is likely to be found among principals who have constructed good relations with teachers, students, and parents. Consistent with snowball sampling (Parker et al., 2019), we selected the principals using informants (e.g., school supervisors and colleagues) and asked them to recommend potential schools based on four criteria: (1) the principals' seniority (5 years and more of running a school), (2) good relations (e.g., principals who is sitting with their teachers at the teacher lounge, having conversations, celebrating successes, encouraging social bonds and more). (3) Principals who are personal models (e.g., having respectable discourses, personal talks, participating in meetings and trips, and providing support when needed). (4) Principals who aspire to enthusiasm in the school (e.g., including the principal in talks about study subjects, empowering strengths, and having conversations about students). When a certain principal met these criteria in the view of our informants, we contacted him or her. A staff member or teacher was then contacted at the principal's recommendation, using the snowball method, as suggested by Parker et al. (2019).

During the research, 30 semi-structured interviews were conducted with three staff members in every school: the school principal, an administration member, and a teacher.

This way, the school's staff member group that was chosen included eight female principals and 2 male principals, ages 40-55, with a seniority of 5-14 years. Nine of them have M.A.s and one has a PhD, and they come from various districts of the Ministry of Education in Israel: North, Central, Tel Aviv, and South. Alongside them,

administration staff members with a combined experience of 2-18 years, and teachers with a combined experience of 2-12 years were interviewed. Five of the schools serve a middle-upper-class population, three of them serve a lower-class population, and the rest serve a middle-class population.

All ten principals are from elementary schools that belong to the formal state education system in Israel and include unique teaching methods: two schools that deal with communication (optimal discourse: listening, receiving, and speaking or speaking, influencing, and listening), three anthroposophical schools, and four schools. Those that emphasize respect and empathy: a school that emphasizes 'mutual respect' (won the Education Award), a 'Heart Center' school (won a national competition in education), a green school that focuses on a respectable atmosphere, a school that 'grows personal social leadership', which emphasizes mutual respect, and a school that adopted the 40 model; 40; 20, learning in courses to cultivate an independent learner (focusing on the learning process, products and diverse teaching styles), as a change process led by the manager in a motivating discourse. The criteria for choosing the ten schools are criteria for schools that will give a broad picture regarding the characteristics of the discourse as a motive, the causes and consequences as an 'ideal', and not a complete picture.

In order to preserve the ethical aspects of this qualitative study, the interviewer explained the study goals to the interviewees and guaranteed them and their school full anonymity: classification of the school's name; every interviewee received a fake name, and all their identifications were taken off the interview printout. Moreover, the interviewer abstained from criticizing the interviewee's words or harming them in any way.

Data Collection and Analysis

Studying this case is contributory due to its being comprehensive and reliant on an abundance of data from various and versatile sources to reflect the totality of this language (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015) through semi-structured interviews. This strategy, of choosing a semi-structured interview, is derived from the unique characteristics of such an interview, which is characterized by an open discourse about the principal's Motivating Language and by offering the interviewee a broad range of references to the subject at hand, which allows them to express freely (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The interviewer could ask for explanations about the topics that were brought up and, in this way, receive information about things that are not directly predictable, while also tracing the characteristics of the principal's language as motivating and its other uses (Stake, 2013).

The strategy to analyze the language's characteristics, its roles and implications through interviews followed the four steps described by Marshall and Rossman (2014): "organizing data", "category, theme and pattern creation", "examination of every hypothesis brought up", and "looking for alternative explanations". The goal of this kind of analysis was to detect major themes in the data, to search for experiences, feelings, and repetitive stances to be able to code, narrow down, and fuse together different categories of major themes. The coding process was based on the principles of "comparative analysis" (Strauss & Corbin, 2008), which includes comparing every coded element of categories and sub-categories created during the process. To increase the level of reliability and credibility of the research, the analysis was clarified using structured analysis and peer reviews (Marshall & Rossman, 2014). This was done to create common categories and unique criteria (Stake, 2013) to describe the principals' Motivating

Language and advancement of pedagogical outcomes with their teachers, alongside the discretion the principals use with such language.

Finally, a comparison was made between the themes that came up from the interviews and the literature that was reviewed, to build a new theoretical concept that was based on findings and theory. The findings of this analysis will be presented further along.

Findings

The findings section focuses on the role of the manager's Motivating Language and its consequences. We will briefly present the characteristics of the "motivating discourse of the school principal", according to the interpretation of the interviewees, such as listening, guiding, trusting, documenting, providing written and oral feedback, expressing respect, and the positive consequences of this discourse.

The Characteristics of the Principal's Motivating Discourse

The interviewees revealed six major intertwined characteristics: listening, thanks, respect, dialogue, support, and personal example. This part will deal only with the first characteristic as a unique finding of the research: Discourse is not only words, but also the first listening.

Most of the interviewees emphasized that one of the significant elements of the "motivational discourse" is that beyond the principal's ability to express himself in discourse, his ability to listen to his teachers is seen as important, such as: the principal's availability to his teachers, sometimes despite the workload, out of interest in what the teachers say, detailed answers to questions and support in work processes. Listening was also revealed in observations of teachers' meetings. For example, the answers of two teachers from different

schools to the question "what characterizes the principal's discourse with the teachers":

Listening. She has a million things on her mind, but always listens... when I want something, things that pop up. I could call in the evening and she is with you, and she explains, and she listens... and you will see that she is with you, smiling, this is art. (school 7, teacher)

I tell the manager everything... including personal things... he is always attentive, always gives good advice. He is always inclusive... amazing, absolutely amazing... this week I had a segment... I called him, I talked to him, and he listens, he listens, he understands the situation, he understands the complexity... he is an inclusive person, and I think that many of them feel this way. (school 2, teacher)

This listening is expressed by the manager's explicit statement: "I am attentive to you" or by the manager's promise to check the things that were raised, examine, accompany, or follow up. As we can see from the following quote:

Interviewer: What are the characteristics of your conversation with your teacher?

Principal: *I am very, very attentive to every voice: The voice of a student... the voice of the teachers, the voice of the parents. The attitudes, preferences, feelings, values... I can also say things like: "I listen to you", "I will check", "I will get back to you", "Let me accompany it", "We will follow these things". (school 8, principal)*

The principal listens to the teachers' voices and even encourages them to speak, as was observed in a teachers' assembly. The principal, through dialogue with the teachers, motivates them to express their



feelings in a challenging period, such as: asking his teachers to refer to a picture showing an exciting situation related to a problem, to develop a fruitful dialogue about a frustrating situation related to educational work, as can be seen in the following quote and in Attachment 1.

Manager: Today we will dedicate the plenary session to... A post that went up about 20 hours ago (Attache 1) touches our tender stomachs...

Teacher: When we return to routine we will forget: "What is this".

Manager: "What is what", what will we forget?

The teacher: What does it mean to hug and get close?... (Watching a meeting of teachers with the principal of school 10).

Table 1.

Listening: The principal listens to his teachers



Be available - The principal's ability to listen despite being busy shows an interest in what the teachers have to say.



An explicit statement: "I am attentive to you, and promise to examine, accompany or follow".



Detailed answers to questions.



Support in the educational work process.



Encouraging teachers to express feelings about educational situations and difficulties and to listen to them.

The Functions of Motivating Language. In addition to the characteristic of listening and other characteristics of Motivational Discourse, the interviewees emphasized the apparent functions of the principal's Motivating Language that deal with instructing teachers, guiding them, documenting school activities and the hidden functions of such language as forming respect and positive emotions.

The functions: the three functions that are related to instruction, guidance and documentation were revealed. In addition, the way it is carried out was brought up using examples from daily life, which is open for interpretation by the interviewees, principals, administration staff and teachers.

Instruction: in a compatible manner to the academic literature that was described in the introduction, it is revealed, through interviewees' interpretation, that the role of the principal's Motivating Language is to instruct in a way that forms a vision and promotes pedagogical subjects. In fact, it was highlighted that the vision creates a consensus that instructs teachers about norms, values, and theories to motivate work, which is based on futuristic, detailed description that is then made real by carrying it out. In fact, it is the responsibility of the principal to reveal the vision and make it real, and since a "language"



is also a dialogue – it is more reasonable to extract it from the teachers and form it into a unanimous vision. As is indicated by the next quote:

Interviewer: how do teachers and other employees know what is expected of them?

Principal: *I let teachers form a vision. It needs to have three components: educational, emotional and spiritual... I didn't tell them: "guys, from now on the vision is this and that... but that they are an integral part of it"... afterwards, we did a brainstorming with the whole team and got to a vision... they feel that they are a part of it... it hangs in the teachers' lounge, written in large letters.* (school 2, Principal)

Moreover, the interviewees perceived that the role of the principal is also to instruct teachers in pedagogical matters to provide them with clear information. As one teacher detailed in one of the interviews when they were asked, "How do teachers know what is expected of them?":

The instructions are very clear... There are personal talks, regular talks, and teachers' lounge talks... they are never misunderstood... There are preparation days, there are meetings on Mondays, and there are e-mails... they even tell you what refreshments will be served... and we have many indicators: wall indicator, what should be in every class, the national anthem, birthdays, and the meanings of the months. (school 1, teacher)

Table 2.

Instruction in discourse - how?



Instructions for teachers to formulate their own vision of school norms, values, and theories. When the teachers formulate the vision, this is part of them.



Teacher training on pedagogical issues - providing clear information

Guiding: From the interviews, it emerged that the role of the discourse is to guide the teachers at the beginning of their journey as part of a "support basket package": guiding the new teachers in professional ways (watching lessons, following conversations and instructions). This, along with instructions regarding orientation at school (how to solve a problem, who to contact, etc.). We learn about this guiding role, for example, from the following quote, as an answer to the question of how teachers and teachers with positions in the school know what is expected of them:

New young teachers receive "pedagogical guidance" with observations in the lesson and conversations afterwards, and instructions... they know what is expected of them in this respect. They can help, ask, and observe themselves in other classes... and there is also "internal support", i.e., "how do I solve this problem", "who do I turn to with this problem"... personal things and orientation. (school 3, teacher).

However, the role of the principal's discourse as a guide is related not only to beginning teachers but to all teachers. For example, the director cultivates educational activity with a guiding discourse and clear

instructions through conversations, regular meetings, presentations, indicators, and clarifying expectations, even in training regarding healthy refreshments at meetings. In response to the question "How do the teachers know what is expected of them?", the following teacher explained in the interview as follows:

The instructions are very clear... there are personal conversations, there are continuous conversations, and there are conversations in the teachers' room, she says... there is no way we won't understand her... first of all, there are preparation days, and there are meetings on Mondays, and there are emails... for example, instead of a parents' meeting, she decided that each child would present his personal work to all the parents, and she would send us a presentation to guide us. There are preparation days on Monday, Friday, and meetings - she explains what level the refreshments will be, it will be healthy refreshments, no cakes. (school 1, teacher)

Moreover, the role of the principal's discourse is, beyond pedagogical guidance, to also guide the behavior of the teachers in various situations in the school. For example, teacher training on the subject of "parent teachers" communication, as the following director answered in response to the question of how teachers and officials know what is expected of them:

On the subject of "parental communication," I invest very, very, very much in the guidance of the teachers... I always tell the teachers, "Don't rush to answer". If a parent writes a WhatsApp like this... thirty, forty lines, and describes in detail what happened, do not rush to answer, send me this WhatsApp, we will read it together... I tell the teacher: "I recognize that she's really, really angry", "get back to her"... each case individually, but we try to solve it together... in terms of the parents' communication. (school 2, principal)

Table 3.

Guidance in discourse



A discourse that guides the teachers to get to know the school space and directs an appreciative spotlight to the unique work of the teachers as examples that aim at desirable work and aim at full partnership at work.



Training new teachers in pedagogical issues, along with familiarization with the way the school is run.



Clear instructions for all teachers regarding events at the school by conversations, meetings, presentations, and metrics sent to email, and clarification of expectations. Includes clear guidance on how to behave in different school situations.

Written and verbal documentation and feedback: the third apparent function of the principal's Motivating Language is attributed to written and verbal documentation and feedback as a repeating motif that comes up from the analysis of the interviews.

Written documentation and feedback: interviewed principals, administrative staff, and teachers, all emphasized the documentation of school activities in e-mail, WhatsApp, and social networks as an expression of the principal's appreciation of teachers' work, their enrichment, and even as a motivation to do things, such as from "envious rivalry among scholars". In their perception, teachers need

appreciation as part of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, as highlighted in the next interview that refers to the principal's Motivating Language as documenting in writing, and as publicly grateful to the pedagogical work:

In an e-mail, I review everything that has been done this week. That is how the appraisal, empowerment, and encouragement thing was born: "team D has made a ceremony... They had an interesting activity". It was something that has elevated the school's reputation and, therefore, deserves to be on the weekly e-mail... people had started to anticipate it... as part of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, what a person needs are: appreciation, visibility, to be seen... This is "envious rivalry among scholars"; it feeds itself and enriches. (school 4, principal)

Another function of the documented and written discourse was tied to interviews of procedure memorization, through the refreshing of known procedures for the purpose of clarifying work routine due to abnormal situations that have occurred. As can be deduced from the quote below, as an answer to the question 'how do teachers know what is expected of them?':

I, as a principal, always refresh procedures...: a kid has fallen, and the other kids have carried him while the teacher did not pay attention... thus... (in WhatsApp) ... I demand to refresh the safety procedures in the yard: "teachers on duty need to... do their duty effectively. Please watch and circle the corners". (school 2, principal)

Verbal documentation and feedback: the interviews indicate that the function of the principal's Motivating Language is to also provide feedback about work that will mirror school reality. For example, principals escort their teachers and evaluate them in an "open door"

policy. To do so, principals regularly have personal talks with their teachers. For instance, at the beginning of a year, a month after school has started with new employees, as well as in the middle and end of a school year, personal talks with old tutors alongside new ones are taking place, where the past half school year is being discussed. Dedicating such time is valuable to the teachers: they are being heard and seen, as the next part indicates:

Interviewer: how do teachers and other employees know what is expected of them?

Principal: *personal talks – to the point that it is being scheduled. A month into the new school year, all the new teachers, assistants, and people... already know to tell you about the difficulties, arrangements, what was witnessed, what is new, what I can do to assist... Again, it comes from the place of being heard and seen. In the middle of the school year, I meet up with all the tutors, old or new... where I listen about what's happening in the classroom... where the teachers can spill their hearts out... and we discuss the first half of the school year that has passed. Personally, me and them.* (school 9, principal)

Table 4.

Written and verbal documentation and feedback



Documenting the school activity by email, WhatsApp and social networks as an expression of the principal's appreciation for the teachers' work, empowerment, encouragement, educational enrichment and even motivation to do things.



Refreshing known procedures for the purpose of mentioning the work routine through reporting on WhatsApp about unusual situations that occurred during the day - and what is the procedure for preventing this unusual situation.



Feedback on work that reflects school reality through personal conversations with their teachers in an orderly manner throughout the year. Such dedication of time is valuable to teachers: they are heard and seen.

Hidden discourse functions: despite all of this, the interviewees emphasized that the functions which were mentioned so far cannot exist without referring to the notion that the Motivating Language has additional hidden functions. Thus, many of the principals stated how the function of the Motivating Language is to interweave respect for the teacher with positive emotions and promotion of work. For example, using the words for understanding and acceptance: "I understand", "I see you". For instance, putting together a "school dictionary" with respectful words and sentences written by the principal, and about which he spoke in an interview:

Interviewer: How do you express empathy?

Principal: *this is really a language that we have created... we created a school ABC... which is part of our language: "I understand" ... "I'm there", "I see" ... about forty students came to visit us for the principal course... and I said: "let's do this list so we can convey it". These are words of 15 years, and every time we add more... like a password: ... That everyone is loved, needed, can – which is "me" in Hebrew: Loved, needed, able: A.N.Y ... (Including a sign posted at the entrance to the school, Attached 2, O.G) (school 1, principal)*

The second hidden function, according to the interviewees, principals, administration staff, and teachers one is related to the Motivating Language as inducing a relaxed atmosphere. Meaning, the Motivating Language is to instruct the teacher to do proper work using a positive and non-offensive language, out of sensitivity, even when there's

criticism for the teacher's work. For instance, it should be done in the principal's office and not in the teachers' lounge or hallway, and not in front of the students to avoid shaming. As can be learned by the next segment, which depicts a principal's reply to the question "what things would you avoid telling teachers?":

There were times when I had to call a teacher. Inside my office... I can say things very harshly... unambiguously. But, not in the teachers' lounge, not in the hallway, not in the classroom, not in front of the students... these people have feelings, and just like I would not want to be offended... I know that teachers... appreciate the fact that it is done inside the office... it is me and you, and from here we try to see how we solve issues. (school 3, principal)

A third hidden function, a recurrent finding in the interview according to most principals, is that the language is supposed to set an example for teachers who are using it as an educational model for students. The principals instruct their teachers to have a respectful conversation while avoiding the use of disrespectful phrases. As stated in the next segment that refers to the question mentioned above:

I retain a completely clean language... I ask the same to be applied with students, parents, and among themselves... as saying to a student: "shut up" is, in my eyes, unacceptable... we set an example... Even if teachers really irritate me bad... I cannot tell them something that would hurt them. (school 1, principal)



Table 5.

Hidden discourse functions



The motivating discourse contains respect for the teacher and positive feelings for the advancement of the work. For example, using words for understanding and acceptance: "I understand", "I see you".



The motivating discourse creates a relaxed atmosphere. Using positive and non-offensive language, out of sensitivity, even when there is criticism of the teacher's work.



The principal's discourse as an example for teachers and as an educational model for students, as a respectful and positive discourse, and avoiding the use of disrespectful expressions.

Finally, the role of the discourse is Document and summarize the work at school, and the work that must be done in writing (in emails, in the school WhatsApp group, on social networks, in certificates and letters of thanks) and orally (in meetings, in personal conversations or in front of external parties), and all this to optimize the educational work.

Discourse implications: Motivating Language's implications, according to the interviewees, were found to be motivating teachers to work. The main implications that were mentioned are linked to the removal of any opposition, which, in a "domino effect", creates a positive atmosphere and, thus, motivates pedagogical work: the teachers are not forced to work. They want to.

Removal of opposition – to motivate for work: in a unique manner to the study, according to the interviewees, it was revealed that the Motivating Language affects the removal of teachers' opposition, in advance, and even when it is about to occur.

Preventing opposition in the first place: to remove opposition, principals allow their teachers, in small quantities and at times when everything is calm and not during crises, to say whatever is on their minds to find a solution to problems, as an education to a language that seeks solutions. As indicated in the interview, for instance, by the vice principal, as an answer to a question that dealt with the implications of the Motivating Language:

We promote respectful language... If there is a need for one, we schedule an appointment... we hear the complaints and try to fix... in the teachers' lounge, we always talk about it, so there would not be any talk behind people's backs or congregations. "If you have an issue, come. Tell me about it". And we use this strategy in times when things are good. Not necessarily during crises. (school 1, vice-principal)

In addition, principals try to get insights from the language, to which they try to aspire. Meaning, when these insights "are born", the result is the removal of any opposition: the teachers do not oppose – they are

part of these insights. As is described in the following quote, as an answer to the question mentioned above:

When there is a seminar about an "ethical code", for example... There is a role play... afterward, we got out to work in groups... thus, it is "born" from them... therefore, if this is the case, I cannot oppose. I am (the teacher, O.G.) part of this thing. (school 9, principal)

Moreover, the principal's language affects and reduces teachers' opposition, even in the case of assimilating a new program. The principal ensures that the teachers will hear about the change in a calming language that accompanies the move, to remove any opposition that might pop up due to a fear of the process. As is highlighted in the following quote, which is an answer to the question: "What are the implications of the Motivating Language?":

If there is something new ... I would rather they hear it directly from the principal... There was one case when a teacher... was very frustrated...: "It's very demanding"... I could ignore it and say: "... These are the demands"... I decided to gather the teachers: ... "I get that there are doubts. It makes sense. And everything is all right... it is like taking a pin and blowing up a balloon. They thanked me...: "thank you. It calmed us down". (school 7 principal).

Calming down opposition: to remove oppositions that already "arise" about controversial subjects, according to the interviewees, the principal can recognize those who would oppose and knows how to "soften" them with a private conversation, in the perception that every teacher has a life story. This realization increases the chance of removing the teacher's opposition. As is indirectly indicated by the implications of the Motivating Language, from the following quote

about which words principals use when teachers oppose their requests:

Wherever there are people, there's also opposition. But they have this ability... to recognize and know where opposition might come from... they learned to recognize the individuals as well... and how to soften them: ... private meeting, to better listen and understand those who tend to object. They succeed... in reducing opposition... You know: a teacher has a life beyond school. Once you understand ... You can harness them. (school 6, teacher)

From positive emotions to recruiting teachers for motivation of pedagogical work: alongside the hidden function of the language as interweaving positive emotions, the interviewees revealed that, according to their perception, this function becomes an apparent projection: the distribution of positive emotions, like loyalty and the will to assist, for the motivation of work.

The Motivating Language affects their emotional loyalty and, therefore, their ability to give for the school. That is, this emotional loyalty forms a will to assist principals in things like participating in school social activities and "not letting them down." As can be attested by the following segment, as an answer to a question: "Can you state the implications of the Motivating Language, according to you?":

I, and most of the teachers that are close to me... really adore her... she is inspiring... I really want to please her and not let her down. So that she would be happy... and be able to work in peace. (school 1, teacher)

That is, the implications that were mentioned so far lead, in fact, to the main and significant implication of the Motivating Language: recruiting teachers to efficiently do their job. When there is no time



wasted on conflicts, and the language leads to a good feeling among the teachers, the workplace prospers, teachers are not forced to work, and they see it with a sense of purpose. As mentioned in the following segment, which is an answer to the question that dealt with the implications of the Motivating Language:

She harnesses everyone that way... when you understand someone, they want to come and help you... That is what this language brings. Really. It causes the team to go hand in hand with the principals. If there is any problem... I will give you an example: ... During Covid... there were more yard duties than usual, but teachers understood that. In a different time, and perhaps with another principal, it would have created a catastrophe. (school 7, deputy principal)

Table 6.

Discourse implications



Motivational discourse - creates a positive atmosphere and motivates teachers to work - when it is good for the teachers, it is good for the educational work.



Preventing resistance in the first place.



Implementation of a new educational program easily by a soothing discourse that accompanies the process.



Calming objections on controversial topics in advance - by knowing how to "soften" the teachers who object in a private conversation.



Awakening positive emotions, such as loyalty and a desire to help the manager, motivates the work and meet his expectations.

Meaning, a respectful language of the principal, on all its characteristics, recruits the teacher for pedagogical work. The teacher is willing to do whatever it takes to meet the principal's expectations.

Discussion

When examining the voices of interviewees, principals, and teachers alike, it is indicated that the Motivating Language interaction has unique characteristics and functions for the promotion of pedagogical programs, school culture, teacher, parent, and student relations, and is, therefore, different from the characteristics and functions of the Motivating Language in other organizations (Yakut & Maya, 2022). This context leads school principals to use a special language with their teachers that is adjusted to the administrative complexity, and the findings indicate several major intertwined insights:

The first one relates to the Motivating Language as a way for interpersonal and professional bonding. This is similar to studies about Motivating Language at school (Alev, 2024, for instance), which present Motivating Language as empathic and clear for personal and emotional bonding – as a language that grants raises for the staff's efforts, forms a significant vision for their job, grants a "personal example" and contributes a humane aspect to the school, as well as forming satisfaction and commitment. Interpersonal and professional connection is primarily created by listening to teachers, because any expression of authentic empathy requires listening, which paves the way for teacher guidance. Listening as a mandatory element in this process is a unique characteristic that stood out in the current qualitative research and had not been indicated in the past research on

the motivating language in organizations (e.g., Holmes, 2020; Mayfield et al., 2021).

The second insight, unique to the study - which is not emphasized in the literature on Motivating Language (Holmes & Parker, 2020; Mayfield et al., 2021) that based on interpersonal and professional bonding, mentioned above, it is fitting that, according to the findings, the Motivating Language will consider the inclusion of teachers in the planning and implementation processes as a dialogic discourse that emphasizes inclusion, as a central strategy to motivate teachers. And this is because teachers experience inclusion as a recognition of their professionalism (Onuma, 2016), like including teachers in the pedagogical discourse of school decisions, by inviting them to express their opinions, as one principal asked in a meeting: "come and share a little. Each one from their own perspective..." or an inclusion which documents schoolwork in e-mail, WhatsApp or social networks as feedback on their work and as an inclusive, emotional power that expresses the principal's appreciation for the teachers' work, its improvement, and even for motivation, as "envious rivalry among scholars". In fact, from this study, it is possible to create a new conceptualization: "a motivating, feedback-providing, and emotionally inclusive language". The attention, feedback, and inclusion of the Motivating Language improve teaching skills and grant teachers an influence over school activity. As one principal said: "For almost everything that happens in school, a team is created... they are the spokespersons".

The third insight, also unique to the study - which is not emphasized in the literature on Motivating Language (Holmes et al., 2024; Mayfield & Mayfield, 2017) which stems from the two additional insights mentioned above, due to the school being an educational institution

that teaches values and modesty, the principals themselves express modesty to motivate the teachers at the school, as a unique organization. To motivate teachers at school, as a unique organization, principals use a language in which inclusive leadership aspects are highlighted in the characteristics and functions, such as expressing mutualism for the purpose of achieving goals attained by equally redistributing the authority between administration and staff, and by hiding administrative authority. This goes alongside emphasizing emotional leadership aspects, which integrates emotional aspects within the organization and strives for the achievement of closer interpersonal relations (Ashkanasy & Dorris, 2017). Such leadership styles nurture positive feelings as part of the positive implications of the Motivating Language, since teachers perceive this language as showing faith and appreciation for their professionalism. By doing that, their commitment to their job intensifies, any opposition subsides, and the most important thing: it motivates teachers to do their job the best they can.

Finally, we assume that these insights about the Motivating Language, in one way or another, are accepted by most people who engage in education. These are aspects which contribute to the betterment of the job, not less than the principals' commitment to the instructions of the Ministry of Education, teachers' advanced studies, or diversification of teaching methods, which cannot harness teachers who are not emotionally available for their job. If it is so, how come some of the interviewees (teachers) reported their former principals who used to shout their instructions? Is it possible to imagine that the principal is not required to use an inclusive, emotional, Motivating Language in a "practice what you preach" sense?



Practical and research implications

When dealing with further research, it is best to conduct a similar study among high school principals to create a more expansive knowledge foundation about Motivating Language, and a quantitative survey research that examines the connection between the principal's use of Motivating Language and the level of pedagogical achievements of the school. A quantitative study will allow the research of the phenomenon in larger samples and will allow us to point out the unique requirements for the training and professional development of principals' Motivating Language for the enhancement of teachers' commitment to performing their pedagogical jobs more effectively.

When dealing with practical recommendations, there is room for the consideration of a more intelligent use of principals whose language expresses an "emotional, inclusive, feedback-providing, and Motivating Language" as instructors – to assist new principals; Since these principals have many more insights about language as a tool for running the school – and as an ability to contribute to new principals – and as a result, they can benefit the educational system and its administration. It is suggested that to the teaching experience component (Practicum), a built-in division (practical and theoretical) will be added, which will focus on these aspects and include reference to the Motivating Language as part of the leadership and teachers' motivation.

Limitations of the study

Although the study relies on observations and documents, it is primarily based on semi-structured interviews that present the subjective perceptions of interviewees, focused on school teams from elementary schools, rather than on any objective reality, as well as on

a small sample focused on examining the phenomenon of the principal's discourse with teachers as a motivator. Moreover, the study concentrated on a homogeneous group and does not include comparisons or examinations of other schools characterized by poorer labor relations and productivity, which could provide a broader knowledge base regarding the principal's discourse as a motivator. Furthermore, the selection criteria for the ten schools aimed to provide a broad picture of discourse as a motivator, rather than a circular one. For these reasons, the ability to generalize our findings to other cultural, social, and organizational contexts is limited. Therefore, it is advisable that further research investigates the validity of generalizing these findings among additional populations and sectors within the education system, thereby creating a broader knowledge base concerning the principal's discourse as a motivator.

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Appendix

Attachment 1: Opening a Zoom meeting that encourages emotional dialogue and the principal's listening to his teachers (School 10)





Gamerman & Oplatka (2025). The school principal's motivating discourse and its implications:
Some insights into leader-followers relations.

Attachment 2: A vision on a road sign.

Initial letters in Hebrew: Loved, Needed and Able (School 1)

