Abstract

This study asks how adolescents who drop out of formal studies perceive the future and whether they have an orientation toward their own future, particularly one associated with occupational aspirations. Also investigated are the psychological and sociological elements that influence future orientation and occupational aspirations. The goal of the study is to create a conceptual framework that will facilitate deep understanding of the phenomenon and create a foundation for policies and programs that will enable these young people to advance. Although quite a few studies on adolescents’ future orientation have been carried out in Israel, none of them focused on dropout youth. The research was performed within the setting of the Youth Advancement Units, official bodies that care for youngsters aged 14–18 who dropped out of school or are on the verge of doing so.

To conduct the study, qualitative research using grounded-theory methodology was chosen. Three research tools were used, starting with semi-structured in-depth interviews with sixteen young people. The interviews took place in several rounds, each followed by analysis and rephrasing of the questions ahead of the next round. When the interviews were completed, a focus group among facilitators of Youth Advancement Units was held for reflective processing of the findings. Finally, documents relating to two programs, offered by the Units, that prepare young people for the world of work were analyzed.

The findings show that dropout youth have a future orientation and occupational aspirations, even if this orientation maintains a dialectic relationship between existence and nonexistence. The participants’ occupational aspirations were diverse, most focusing on three main vocational fields—computers, sports, and psychology-related professions. The factors that influenced future orientation and occupational aspirations were relations with parents, parents’ employment, role models whom the participants encountered, various kinds of experience (chiefly occupational), and a process of change that they had undergone. The most dominant source of influence, however, was the attitude of the school before the participant dropped out and the dropping-out experience itself, which the participants perceived as difficult and painful.

It was also found that the perceptions expressed by the focus group reflected little faith in their clients’ ability to think about and plan out their future—a tendency indicative of the conventional wisdom among the professional teams that staff the Units. The main conclusion of the study is that the matter of future orientation should be given stronger priority in the policy of the Youth Advancement Department of the Ministry of Education, and that this should be manifested in offering structured programs and assimilating the importance of the topic among the teams that steward these young people.

Keywords: future orientation, occupational aspiration, dropout youth, Youth Advancement Units, twenty-first-century world of work

Acknowledgments

I dedicate this dissertation to the memory of my beloved mother, Esther Arkin (1937–2018), a woman of immense knowledge and wisdom who taught me to ask questions, be skeptical, and investigate—a role model and inspiration for my life.

I wish to thank Professor Stefan \_\_\_\_ [**סטפן קוז'וקרו** ] for believing in me and in my research.

I wish to thank my parents—my father, Yisrael Haim Arkin, for encouraging me to set out on this journey and supporting me all the way—and the rest of my dear family.

I am grateful to my beloved son, Gur, who was an inseparable companion on the journey and gave me the time that I needed for it, lovingly accepting all my lengthy absences from my role as a mother.

I express my appreciation to all my friends who gave support, expressed interest, and asked questions, particularly Eppie, a sister in heart and soul, and Iris—for what you are for me.

I am indebted to the Youth Advancement Department of the Ministry of Education and its head, Ms Yifat Kalmero; to Tsah Salor, for his patient and accommodating approach; and to the directors of the Youth Advancement Units, who agreed to have this study performed in their units and recruited young people for the task.

I thank all the young people who took part in the study for sharing their thoughts and opening their hearts.

I am indebted to Pazit and Ariella, partners in and meaningful parts of the journey.

Finally—Dani and Avishai of A.D. Atid for their devoted stewardship, and dear Yehudit for her guidance, counsel, and assistance.