Official Policies and Teachers' Tendency to Act: Exploring the Discrepancies in Teachers' Perceptions

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Abstract: The aim of the study is to investigate whether there are discrepancies between teachers' perceptions of the 'official policies' and their 'tendency to act,' based on their ethical decision-making. A qualitative analysis of 60 Israeli teachers' questionnaires consisting of critical ethical incidents revealed multifaceted ethical dilemmas nested in categories of 'discrepancies between official policies and teachers' tendency to act: 'Harm (to people, property),' 'parental involvement/ interference' and 'academic process.' The discrepancies noted between official policy and teachers' tendency to act may encourage educational policy to design teachers' training and professional development programs that include dealing with critical ethical incidents, through team-based simulations and formulating ethical guidelines based on their ethical decision-making process.
Keywords: critical ethical incidents; morality of care; morality of justice; official policy; teachers' professional development programs

Las Políticas Oficiales y la Tendencia a Actuar de los Docentes: Explorando las Discrepancias de las Percepciones Docentes
Resumen: El objetivo de este estudio es investigar si existen discrepancias entre las percepciones de los docentes sobre "políticas oficiales" y su "tendencia a actuar," en función de la toma de decisiones éticas. Un análisis cualitativo de 60 cuestionarios tomados a profesores

israelíes que presentaban incidentes éticos críticos reveló dilemas éticos multifacéticos anidados en las categorías de "discrepancias entre las políticas oficiales" y "tendencia a actuar" de los docentes: Daño (a personas, propiedades), 'participación de docentes/interferencia, y procesos académicos. Las discrepancias observadas entre las políticas oficiales y la tendencia a actuar pueden estimular el diseño de políticas educativas de programas de formación y desarrollo profesional que incluyen incidentes éticos fundamentales, a través de simulaciones en equipo y la formulación de directrices éticas sobre la base de procesos de toma de decisiones éticos.
Palabras clave: incidentes éticos fundamentales; moralidad de la atención; moralidad de la justicia; política oficial; programas de desarrollo profesional de docentes

As Políticas do Governo ea Tendência de Agir de Professores: Explorar as Diferenças das Percepções dos Professores
Resumo: O objetivo deste estudo é investigar se existem discrepâncias entre as percepções dos professores sobre "política oficial" e "tendência para agir", de acordo com a tomada de decisão ética. A análise qualitativa dos 60 questionários tomadas para professores israelenses que tiveram incidentes críticos éticos revelou dilemas éticos multifacetadas aninhadas nas categorias de "discrepâncias entre as políticas oficiais" e "tendência para agir" de professores: danos (para pessoas, bens), ' participação de professores / interferência e processos acadêmicos. As discrepâncias observadas entre as políticas oficiais e para a tendência de agir pode estimular a formulação de políticas educacionais de formação e desenvolvimento profissional, incluindo incidentes éticos fundamentais, através da equipe de simulação eo desenvolvimento de diretrizes éticas com base em processos tomada de decisão ética.
Palavras-chave: incidentes éticos fundamentais; moralidade de cuidados; moralidade da justiça; política oficial; programas de desenvolvimento profissional para professores

Introduction

Many teachers often find themselves struggling with critical ethical incidents at school. However, despite their experience, teachers often express uncertainty about the proper response to these critical ethical incidents (O'Neill & Bourke, 2010). This phenomenon of uncertainty becomes even more crucial if we consider that different countries have *official policies*, comprised of laws and educational management circulars, which are intended to aid teachers in the event of critical ethical incidents. Therefore, the goal of this study is to explore teachers' perceptions of the 'official policies' and their tendency to act based on the critical ethical incidents, which they personally experienced, in order to learn the reasons given by teachers for their uncertainty about how to respond.

Theoretical Background

Critical Ethical Incidents

A critical ethical incident in the educational system is an undesirable situation experienced by a teacher, and includes ethical dilemmas (e.g., Tirri & Koro-Ljungberg, 2002; Wolf & Zuzelo, 2006). Critical ethical incidents need not be exceptional events; they may be incidents that commonly occur in every school. Being classified as a critical ethical incident is contingent on the meaning that teachers attribute to them (Angelides, 2001). Reflecting on teachers' critical ethical incidents can help them to deal with ethical dilemmas in their practice (Nilsson, 2009).

Ethical Dilemmas and Ethical Decision-Making in Education

Ethical dilemmas may happen in any situation where different values come into conflict, where there is no clear-cut 'right' answer and we must choose between different options (Cuban,

1992). Among the ethical problems in education, one commonly mentioned in the literature is the dilemma arising from a clash between the *school's standards* and *the pupil's family educational agenda.* This type of dilemma appears when a teacher considers the child's best interests in light of the parents' actions (Duignan, 2007). Another type of ethical problem described in the literature is the tension between *caring (for pupils, teachers)* and *obeying state law.* Such dilemmas may arise when a teacher is uncertain about the best way to protect a pupil or a colleague (Rabin & Smith, 2013). Additional ethical dilemmas may arise around the question of *teachers' autonomy* to promote school ethics in the school. Teachers interpret 'ethics' differently, which inevitably leads to questions of which viewpoint to adopt (Baete, 2011; Schechter, 2010).

Ethical decision-making in education is required when teachers identify ethical dilemmas, and the outcome is determined by the interaction between individual and situational components. For the teacher, the personal process of deciding what is right and wrong in a situation stems from his own cognitive moral development (Christensen & Kohls, 2003). Situational variables such as context, school culture, and obedience to authority all influence teachers' ethical decision making process when weighing between morality of care and morality of justice (Abdolmohammadi, Read, & Scarbrough, 2003)

Morality of Justice vs. Morality of Care

The concept *'Morality of justice'* is based on attempting to follow universal rules and societal rules (Kohlberg, 1986). In this study, *'Morality of justice'* will refer to official policy reflected by the law. In case no law is relevant to the incident, official policy will include Israeli educational management circulars. The concept *'morality of care'* reflects a less formal approach, by focusing on different aspects of kindness that are distinct from 'morality of justice,' in that it does not attempt to follow universal rules. It focuses on responsiveness to another's needs (Gilligan & Attanucci 1988). In this study, we will refer to 'morality of care' by focusing on teachers' tendency to act in a caring way. Based on the tension between *'morality of justice'* and *'morality of care'*, it seems that ethical guidelines developed by teachers based on their practice may help them in their ethical decision-making in different contexts and situations.

Ethical Guidelines in Education

In order to offer support to teachers in ethical decision-making, different countries (e.g., the US, Canada, New Zealand) have formulated official policies by means of state laws and circulars published by educational authorities (O'Neill & Bourke, 2010). However, although the law relates to general topics such as 'human dignity' and 'right to freedom,' it is often difficult for teachers to decide how to respond to specific critical ethical incidents in practice. Moreover, school life is composed of many facets that neither the law nor educational management circulars have taken into account. Therefore, it seems that teachers could be helped in their day-to-day ethical decision-making by ethical guidelines spelling out desirable behavior based on their experience.

Method

Participants

The study included 60 Jewish teachers (30 women and 30 men) in 60 Jewish schools in the north of Israel (30 teachers from non- religious schools, 12 teachers from religious schools and 15 teachers from ultra-Orthodox schools. 48 of all these schools were considered public, while the other were considered private). After receiving from our university ethics committee approval for the study, we described our study goals and the need for teacher-volunteers to participate in this study, which we publicized through the school principals' website in the Ministry of Education's North district (there are seven districts boundary by Israeli Ministry of Education).

We also asked the principals to spread our message among their school teachers through the school email system, and to encourage their teachers to participate in this study. Then the principals sent us lists of teachers who volunteered to participate, and we randomly have chosen teachers from the lists and contacted them. Participants came from different disciplines (e.g., Mathematics, History, Biology, Bible Studies) and different school levels (elementary, junior high school, high school), reflecting a cross-section of religious and non-religious, as well as public and private schools in Israel (Israel Central Bureau of Statistics, 2013).

The average age of the teachers was 30.2 years (SD = 4.5) and their average teaching seniority was 12.4 years (SD = 5.3). 77.6% of the participants were tenured; the others were employed by means of temporary contracts. 63.2% of the participants worked at full-time jobs, and the rest worked less than full-time. All of the participants had a bachelor's degree. These figures are approximately representative of the population of teachers in Israel's educational systems in general (Ben-David, 2013).

Data Collection

First, in group meetings, research assistants informed teachers that they would be asked to report anonymously, in writing, about one significant ethical case that he or she had experienced or witnessed. *Second,* the teachers described in writing critical ethical incidents based on real ethical cases, which were most relevant to their world. *Third,* we collected the critical ethical incidents reported by teachers and randomly chose 20 critical ethical cases in order not to bias the data. *Fourth,* we developed a quantitative questionnaire based on these 20 critical ethical cases with the following columns: the critical ethical case, the ethical dilemma/s, how do you think the official policy would recommend acting, and how would you behave. *Fifth,* each teacher received this questionnaire consisting of 20 ethical critical incidents, and was asked to report on how they perceived that official policy (e.g., laws, management circulars) would expect them to act in each case, and their decision-making about how they would tend to act in these 20 selected ethical cases.

Ethical Consideration

Ethical considerations regarding study procedures were made according to our University's departmental requirements, on the basis of guidelines taken from the Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct (2002). Permission to conduct the study was obtained from the Israeli Ministry of Education. All the participating teachers took part in the study voluntarily, completing the questionnaire at home. They all received assurance that their statements in the qualitative questionnaires could not be traced back to them upon publication of the findings. The teachers were given a code number to identify themselves, and they also received a formal letter describing the goals of the study, a pledge to preserve anonymity, and their right to withdraw from the study at any stage.

Data Analysis

The study analysis was based on the teachers' qualitative questionnaires and involved a three-step process: open coding, axial coding and selective coding, as outlined by Strauss and Corbin (1998). The three steps are explained as follows:

Open Coding

Open coding involves the examination, comparison, conceptualization, and categorization of data. In the open coding stage of data analysis for the current study, preliminary categories were identified by examining similarities in responses. Initial examination of the data revealed a considerable number of ethical dilemmas, and derived responses to them. Categories were derived for only those responses where there was an obvious similarity in quotes

(e.g., "the parents can't make the school exclude a student" and "The teacher is obligated to report to both parents" were coded as "Parental Involvement/ Interference").

Axial Coding

In the axial coding stage, data were put together by making relationships between categories and subcategories. The process of relating categories to their subcategories is called "axial" because coding occurs around the axis of a category by asking questions such as when, how, and with what consequences. For example, in the current study we found two subcategories ("The pupil's well-being vs. obeying regulations" and "Educational agenda vs. parental agenda," which both answer the question "with what consequences") for the category "Parental Involvement/ Interference."

Selective Coding

Selective coding involves selecting the core categories and organizing them around a central explanatory concept. In this study the central category found was "Discrepancies between official policies and teachers' tendency to act," with three core categories of critical ethical incidents related to it (Harm, Parental Involvement/ Interference, Academic Process) with two to four subcategories.

Below, using the systematic method of analyzing described above, we found examples which appear to describe the relationship between official policies and teachers' tendency to act, by content analysis: drawing up a list of coded categories and "cutting and pasting" each segment of transcribed quotes into one of these categories (Greenhalgh & Taylor, 1997). The statements made by all the participants on a particular incident appearing in each questionnaire can then be compared with one another. In this way we compared and contrasted different parts of data, to evolve more sophisticated understandings as more data is gathered and reviewed iteratively (Fossey, Harvey, McDermott, & Davidson, 2002).

Findings

A qualitative analysis of the 60 critical ethical incident reports revealed subcategories of ethical dilemmas, which were all included under categories of ' Discrepancies between official policies and teachers' tendency to act ' (Figure 1). The categories of 'harm,' 'parental involvement/ interference' and 'academic process' included a variety of ethical dilemmas. Following are examples of the categories of ' Discrepancies between official policies and teachers' intent to act ' ('harm, parental involvement/ interference, academic process), and the subcategories (ethical dilemmas), which generated the multifaceted model in this study.
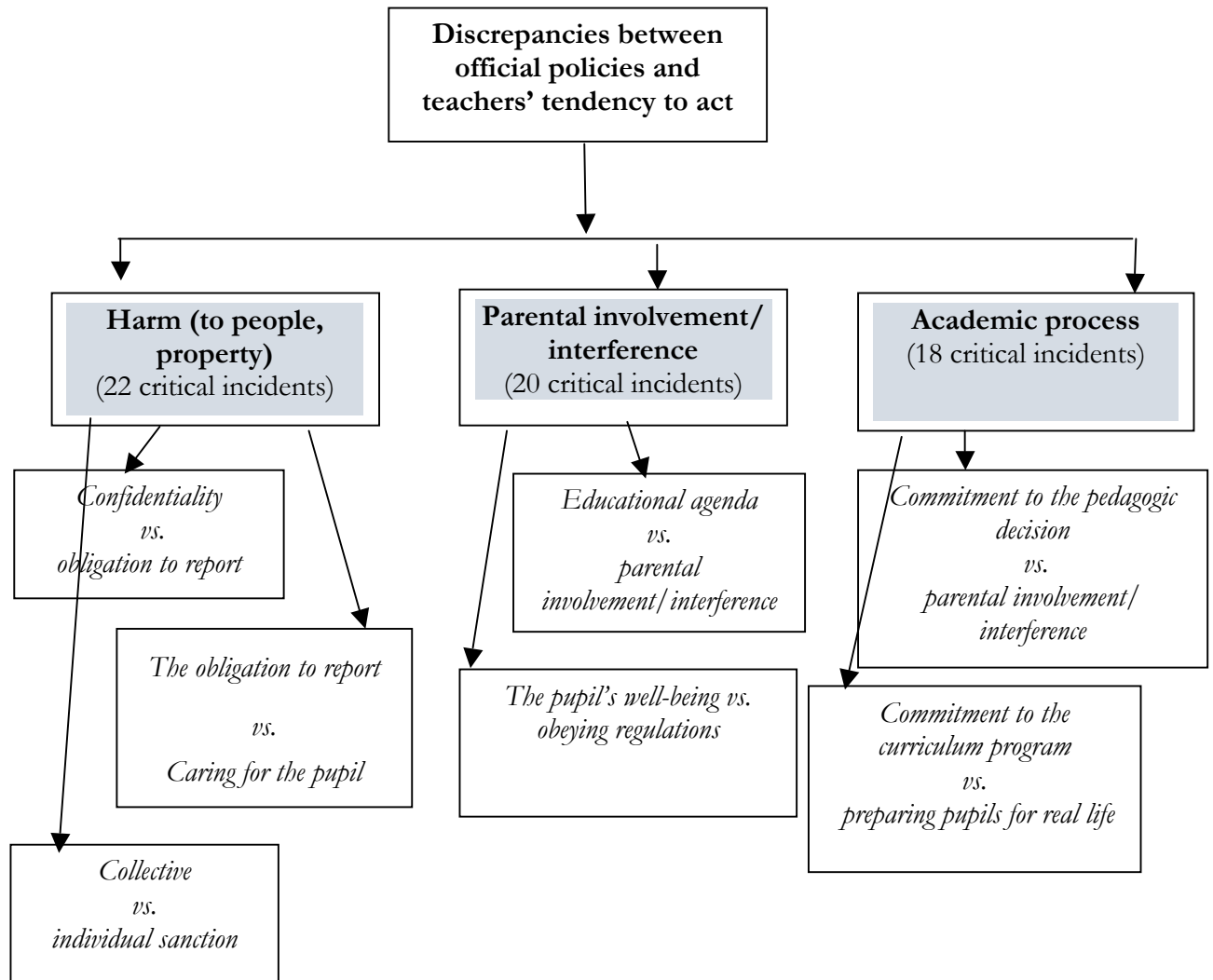
Figure 1. The study findings

Harm (People, Property; 22 critical incidents)

Incident 1. One of your high school pupils calls you, crying, from the mall. Her mother beat her, she says, leaving marks on her arms. She asks you to come see her at the mall but not to tell anybody about it.

The spirit of the official educational policy. Teachers are not professionals equipped to deal with the above complex incident, because they did not train to deal with such incidents, and are therefore not aware of this situation's complexity. Possible examples of harm that could occur include using teachers' authority outside the school context in an uninformed way, and as a result harming a student because teachers are not trained to be aware of potential risks, e.g., the actual circumstances are not exactly as described by the students, or that the teacher's unprofessional 'detective work' might actually contaminate an investigation that should have been conducted by the proper authorities. Therefore, in order to protect the student, the teacher has no investigative authority.

In this case, since the pupil's tears and accusations suggest that there certainly might be a 'legitimate reason' to suspect that 'physical abuse' was committed by the mother, the teacher cannot simply absolve him- or herself of responsibility by simply claiming 'not to believe the girl's story.' If the girl was abandoned at the mall, it would be proper for the teacher to help, but beyond that, it would be more appropriate to allow professionals to deal with the case.

The official educational policy. Based on the spirit of the official educational policy above, we found that the law disapproves of scheduling meetings with students outside of school after school hours, even for school purposes, and certainly not for non-school related purposes. Beyond the obligation to arrange for a visit by the social welfare officer, the teacher must be careful not to guide the girl nor interfere in her decisions.

More specifically, the teacher is obliged to report the incident to a social welfare officer or the police, both of whom are authorized to investigate complaints relating to the abuse of minors.

Section 368d(b) says:

> An educator, principal, or staff member at a shelter or institution in which a minor
> or invalid is found – who, in the course of duty, have legitimate reason to suspect
> that a crime has been committed against the minor or invalid by their legal guardian
> – must report with all due haste to a social welfare officer (Israeli Penal Code, 1977).

The ethical dilemmas. In our analysis, the following dilemmas appeared: (1) *Caring for the girl vs. following official policy*, namely, discouraging teachers from meeting students outside of school hours and premises except for learning purposes and, (2) *The obligation of reporting such incidents to the proper authorities vs. the girl's request to maintain confidentiality.*

Action conforming to the perceived official policy. Our findings indicated that only a small number of teachers were aware of the fact that official policy discourages meeting with the girl outside of the school setting. For example, one teacher replied: "I would not go to the mall. I would ask the pupil to talk with the counselor or report to the police, and report to the principal," which conforms to the teacher's perception of official policy: "reporting to the school principal, informing the relevant authorities at the municipal level and the Ministry of Education" (male, biology teacher, with a BA degree, working fulltime, eight years of experience).

Action opposed to the perceived official policy. While most teachers did know that they must involve professional authorities, like a social welfare officer and the school counselor, they still chose to first help the pupil and afterward to notify the proper authorities: "…I would come and take care of her. At the same time, I would call the school counselor to support and help her," vs. the teacher's perception of official policy: "It is an obligation to inform the police and welfare

agency" (male, teacher of chemistry education, with an MA, tenured, working fulltime, 13 years of experience).

It seems that for most teachers, the value of caring for the pupil (morality of care) was most important, even when the teachers were aware that they were expected to act differently according to the official policy (morality of justice). It should be noted, however, that only a few knew that after-hour contact with pupils outside of school is not encouraged, no matter whether it concerns a school-related or a non-school-related subject.

Incident 2. Several junior high school pupils came to school in the evening, and wrote graffiti on their classroom walls. The other pupils did not want to report who wrote the graffiti, although they knew who wrote it.

The spirit of the official educational policy. The 'obligation to report' mandated by the 1990 amendment to the Penal Code deals only with 'harm to minors,' meaning that only violent physical or emotional conduct towards minors must be reported. Since it is clear in this incident that the destructive activities were not directed against minors, there is no obligation to report them. Even if the incident were reported, the police would be reluctant to prosecute the pupils, since the policy of the juvenile court is to avoid arraigning pupils involved in vandalism or any onetime incident because they cannot deal with the large numbers of vandalism incidents.

The official educational policy. Based on the spirit of the official educational policy above, Israeli official policy does not obligate teachers to file a police report in such a case. The appropriate response can be given within the framework of the school's corrective measures. Further examination of the Israeli educational management circular (2009) reveals an implied tension between a long-standing policy of not encouraging pupils to inform on their friends and the urgent need to combat violence, which has become widespread in schools. According to the obligatory actions (7-1):

(1) A critical incident regime must be declared at school – 'breaking the routine'. An intra-school committee must be appointed to determine the appropriate way to deal with the incident, according to regulations.

(2) The principal and staff should design a personal program for the offending pupils, including regular meetings between the pupils' parents and the school staff.

The ethical dilemmas. The incident led the teachers to reflect on the following dilemmas: *the obligation to report vs. caring for pupils.* On the one hand, teachers might feel the obligation to report to the police that vandalism has been committed at the school, while on the other, they might want to show concern for the pupils, since contacting the police could cause long-term harm to pupils who would be brought to court. Another ethical dilemma that arises here: *collective vs. individual sanction.* Here the question is whether the teacher should punish all the pupils for protecting their guilty classmates, since the teacher does not want to enter into a confrontation with the pupils; or whether the teacher should make an effort to discover the culprits and punish them alone.

Action conforming to the perceived official policy. In some of the incidents, there are similarities between the response chosen by the teachers (tendency to act) and the conduct perceived as required by official policy, such as in the following example: "….if we don't find out who wrote the graffiti, all the pupils will be punished," was what one teacher wrote in answer to how he would deal this incident. In the column asking what official policy required him to do, he responded: "….all the pupils should be punished if the teachers do not find out who wrote the graffiti" *(*male, history coordinator, with an MA, tenured, 12 years of experience).

Action opposed to the perceived official policy. In other cases, a gap exists between how teachers tend to act and what the policy requires of them, when they are aware that they are acting contrary to official policy. For example: "If the pupils are unwilling to report the student who wrote

the graffiti, then all of them should pay for painting the walls," vs. the teacher's perception of the official requirements: "…we have no way to force them to pay" (female, Bible studies teacher, with a BA, tenured, working full time, eight years of experience).

Among other participants, a discrepancy can be seen between how the teachers would act according to their natural tendency to be more caring and the stricter response they believe is required by official policy. For example: "I'd try again to convince the pupils to tell who wrote the graffiti" vs. the official perceived policy: "I would report the incident to the police" (male, math coordinator, with an MA, tenured, working full time, 15 years of experience).

Unfamiliarity with the official policy. In other cases the teachers were not even aware of the existence of relevant regulations. For example, when asked about the official policy, teachers replied, "I don't know.", " I don't know exactly", or "I need to ask my school principal."

Other modes of conduct, which were suggested clash with the official policy. For example, the need to identify the guilty party; this is against the spirit of educational policy, because teachers lack any authority to conduct an investigation, and are not required to report certain incidents that are not required by official policy to the authorities.

Parental Involvement/ Interference (20 critical incidents)

Incident 1. You are the principal at a private elementary school. The parents do not want a child with special needs to attend the school, even though the Ministry of Education agrees to appoint him an aide. The parents argue that this is a private school and that the other children are frightened by him.

The spirit of the official educational policy. In light of the Basic Law: Human Dignity and Liberty (1992), no institution, and especially a school that is funded partially by the Ministry of Education (the situation of most Israeli private schools) may discriminate against a person with special needs on the grounds that his presence is 'frightening,' that his appearance is repulsive or simply because of special needs.

The official educational policy. Only a student who is violent or interferes with others' learning can be legitimately excluded.

The ethical dilemma. This incident presents the ethical dilemma between *the principal's educational agenda* to integrate a child with special needs into the regular school and *parents' agenda* in order to give their children an exclusive learning environment.

Action conforming to the perceived official policy. One teacher argued: '…I'd do my best so that the disabled child can stay in the school' conforms to the teacher's perception of official policy: 'the parents can't make the school exclude a student, and so the parents' request should not be considered' (male, 9th grade coordinator, with a BA, working fulltime, 10 years of experience).

Action opposed to the perceived official policy. I'd tell the parents that it's important for their children to know and accept the 'others' in our society. I'd explain to them the advantages for their child of exposure to a different child in class' vs. the teacher's perception of official policy: 'since it's a private school, the parents have the authority to decide who is admitted' (female, homeroom and science teacher, with an MA, tenured, working more than fulltime, 19 years of experience).

Incident 2. A junior high school pupil asks you not to inform his mother about his academic achievements, since he is afraid of her reaction (his parents are divorced). The pupil's father supports his request.

The spirit of the official educational policy. In case of divorce, both parents should be involved in their child's life and therefore be informed about their child's performance, unless there is a reasonable suspicion that harm will be caused by one of the parents if reported.

The official educational policy. In our research into the law, we found that an amendment to the Israeli Legal Capacity and Guardianship Law (2010) requires the educational system to report to both parents. It has the following to say about our subject:

> In cases in which one parent opposes the school's relations with the other parent, the homeroom teacher should emphasize his or her commitment to maintaining relations with both parents, unless an explicit verdict by the court, restricting relations with one of the parents, is presented to the principal of the school or to the professional in charge of the pupil at the school.

Therefore, in light of the instructions stipulated by law, it seems clear that the pupil's request should not be honored.

The ethical dilemma. This incident involves the following ethical dilemma, *the pupil's well-being, vs. the duty according to regulations to inform both parents.*

Action conforming to the perceived official policy. One way of dealing with this situation is simply to obey the law (morality of justice): 'I'm neutral. Since there's no question involving an abusive mother or court decision, I would inform both parents' conforms to the teacher's perception of official policy: 'I will inform both the father and mother' (female, grade coordinator, with an M.A., working full time, 20 years of experience).

Action conforming to the perceived official policy. Analysis of the teachers' answers reveals that they were all aware of the duty to report to each parent. In a few cases, participants wrote that they would accede to the pupil's request (morality of care), in spite of their obligation to report to both parents. For example: 'I will meet and report to the father alone' vs. the teacher's perception of official policy: 'The teacher is obligated to report to both parents' (female, history coordinator, with a B.A, in a fulltime position, 10 years of experience).

In this critical ethical case, the teachers chose to care for the pupil and to speak with the father, in the hope that there would be an improvement in the pupil's achievements before they have to fulfil their duty to report to his mother.

Academic Process (18 critical incidents)

Incident 1. You are a high school principal. The English teacher is unable to raise the pupils' achievements on the matriculation exam to the desired level. The parents complain that the teacher's style is too creative; the pupils love her classes, but she is not preparing them adequately for the matriculation exam.

The spirit of the official educational policy. Every subject, including English studies, has a national syllabus prescribed by the Israeli Ministry of Education, and the teacher must teach the material necessary to prepare the pupils for the matriculation exam.

The official educational policy. According to the law, this is primarily a work-related dilemma: on what grounds and by which procedures is a school allowed to fire a teacher whom the parents consider to be ineffective. In terms of the principal, a teacher who diverges from the official educational curriculum should be referred to the school superintendent. According to the School Supervision Law of 1969, firing a teacher means that a teacher will probably not be rehired by any other school:

> (a) A teacher should not be hired, unless he or she has a written statement from the Superintendent General stating that the superintendent has no objection to him or her being hired as a teacher.

The ethical dilemma. In our analysis, we found that the ethical dilemma is between *the commitment to the educational curriculum and the teacher's desire to prepare pupils for real life.*

In this incident, most teachers chose to respond more leniently than required by official policy. For example: 'I'd help her by getting help from the English coordinator' vs. the teacher's perception of official policy: 'I will ask the school superintendent to observe her lessons in the classroom' (male, math teacher, with a BA, tenured, working more than fulltime, 10 years of experience).

It seems that in this critical ethical incident, the teachers realized that the English teacher is required to teach according to the syllabus, but most of them were not aware that the high school principal could warn the teacher that she might be dismissed, even though in this case, according to union agreements, she would still receive a salary.

Incident 2. You are a science teacher at a junior high school. The mother of one of your pupils calls to complain about your teaching method and to ask you to use a different textbook.

The spirit of the official educational policy. The underlying premise for much of the Israeli educational system's extensive legislation is that every educational program must be under the supervision of the Israeli Ministry of Education. The public schools, by definition, are subject to educational programs introduced by the Education Ministry.

The official educational policy. According to section 4 of the state Educational Law (1953), the minister will determine the educational syllabus for every official institution of education. Nonetheless, there is certain flexibility in the programs provided by 'complementary programs': Complementary program refers to a part of the educational program set or ratified by the minister, which will comprise no more than 25% of the teaching hours at an official educational institution. The official policy makes it clear that even the Minister of Education is subject to restrictions in changing educational programs. It is all the more obvious, then, that parents cannot impose changes in the educational curriculum without the subject supervisor's approval. The Ministry of Education has the prerogative to dismiss any educational programs not deemed worthy by Ministry experts. It is noteworthy that it is possible to create special educational programs for junior high and high schools; however, such a program must pass rigorous examination by the subdivision that approves special learning programs.

The ethical dilemma. This incident reflects an ethical dilemma between *commitment to the staff's pedagogic decision* to use the present book, which was supported by school supervisors, *and parental involvement/intervention* (depending on the teacher's perception).

Action conforming to the perceived required policy. We found that most of the teachers were aware of procedures and viewed the incident as unwarranted interference by the parent. They made efforts to prevent this interference, sometimes by explaining procedures to the parent: '….I will thank her for her suggestion, but parents can't determine teaching methods…the educational programs used by the teacher are set by the subject supervisor' conforms to the teacher's perception of official policy: 'A parent cannot determine the educational program' (female, teacher of computers, with a BA, with tenure, working fulltime, two years of experience).

Unfamiliarity with the official policy. Others were unsure of the exact procedures. For example:

> '…If the parent doesn't like the program, and wants to change it, he should see the supervisor' vs. 'I don't know exactly' (male, homeroom, with a BA, tenured, working fulltime, eight years of experience).

Discussion

This study shows that despite the existence of formal policy (morality of justice) for handling ethical dilemmas, in several cases the teachers did not know how they were expected to act. It appears that teachers showed a tendency to react with empathy and caring (morality of care), even if they were aware that stricter measures were mandated by either the law, or in case the law did not

refer to the incident, the Israeli educational management circular. A possible explanation for this might be that teachers often find it hard to square their tendency towards caring for their pupils with some of the state laws required of them. Thus, for example, only a few teachers said they would refuse to go to the girl at the mall who was beaten by her mother. The findings can also be explained by the fact that many teachers suggested using educational modes of behavior, which were not mentioned in the ministry circular, e.g., personal conversations with pupils and positive reinforcements.

Our study's findings suggest that while teachers are generally expected to care about their educational system, in practice teachers see themselves as highly committed to caring for their pupils (morality of care), and it is not uncommon for loyalty to the pupil to outweigh loyalty to the system. In this study, the tendency to act may diverge from the official policy (morality of justice), which is seen as overly strict and impersonal. Thus, teachers prefer to explore alternative case- and student-sensitive approaches first (morality of care).

In addition, this study brings to light multiple ethical dilemmas nested in three main categories of ' Discrepancies between official policies and teachers' tendency to act: harm, parental involvement/interference, and academic process. In order to understand why the teachers focused specifically on these main features, we may relate to the Israeli context. Regarding the dimension of *'harm'* exemplified by the graffiti incident in this study, Israeli national surveys show that school harm is considered a major concern for schools. Teachers are frequently confronted with harm to pupils and discipline problems. This may be a result of large class sizes (up to 40 children in a class), giving rise to an increase in the number of ethical dilemmas, which involve incidents of harm to students and equipment damage. The density of students in classes makes it difficult for teachers to teach due to class noise. Students who find it difficult to study in noisy classes are bored, and as a result look for activities other than learning, most of which are negative behaviors such as fighting or causing damage to school property.

The second dimension of *'parental involvement/interference'* was reflected in this study by the incidents of parents who complained about the curriculum/teacher, and parents who objected to accepting a special-needs student in their school. This may be explained by previous studies indicating that teachers are aware of the benefits for pupils that parental involvement can have (e.g., Adi-Raccah & Ainhoren, 2009). However, the teachers' positive attitudes seem to relate to their involvement only in specific aspects of the school, such as financial and administrative issues (Dor & Rucker-Naidu, 2012). Teachers were less open to discussing curricular issues with parents, perhaps because this might appear to undermine the authority of the teachers. Teachers expressed misgivings about possible consequences of parental involvement, including disrespect, mistrust, and over-protective parents. Fisher (2009) found that Israeli teachers tend to have a more negative attitude toward parental involvement than American teachers, with reference to the tensions and challenges that such involvement carries with it. The decline in the status of the Israeli teacher, accompanied by parents' dissatisfaction with the educational system, are possible reasons for the sensitive relations between teachers and parents in Israel.

The features of *'academic process'* may be explained by another fact characterizing the Israeli context, namely, that recent educational policy in Israel has been more focused on high academic achievements. Nevertheless, the academic achievements of Israeli students remain only average in international assessments such as TIMMS (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2013). One possible explanation for mediocre achievement may be the severe underfunding of Israeli education. Expenditure for education per student in Israel, as measured by purchasing power parity (PPP), is lower than the OECD mean, leading to large classes and teachers whose salaries are lower than the OECD average (OECD, 2013). These last factors may explain why

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Israeli teachers often complain about their difficulty in maintaining an effective and orderly learning environment. Classes in Israeli schools are typically very large and noisy, while the disciplinary sanctions that teachers are allowed to exercise are limited by regulations (Almog, 2004). Disciplinary problems correlate significantly and negatively to student achievements, as recent studies in Israeli schools have shown (e.g., Shavit & Blank, 2012).

Conclusions: Towards Promoting Teachers' Ethical Decision Making

The discrepancies we noted between teachers' tendency to act and official policy may encourage educational policy to empower the teachers and promote their autonomy to deal with ethical incidents by developing their ethical decision-making process. In this way, teachers will learn how to manage their ethical decision-making while balancing between their caring for students and acting according to official policy in a way that will not cause harm to the pupils or to the educational system. This may be achieved, for example, by team-based-simulations, through role modeling the incidents, then investigating the simulations, and finally discussing how to combine legal requirements with teachers' initial tendency to act according to their caring.

In addition, it is insufficient to formulate official policies (e.g., laws, educational management circular, school rules, or codes of ethics) alone, if our aim is to empower teachers to act in real-life ethical situations. Therefore, educational policy led by superintendents and school principals should encourage teachers to develop ethical guidelines during teachers' professional development programs that may help them in making future ethical decisions. Although ethical guidelines cannot be formulated to suit every potential ethical dilemma, teachers may be instructed in how to identify instances of conflicting values and how to manage the situation, while considering the culture, people, and particular context (Ben-Peretz, 2001). Since the ethical dilemmas described here were found to be similar to ethical dilemmas reported in studies on schools and teachers conducted in other countries, future studies should explore whether we can generalize these findings to other educational systems.

Finally, despite the desire of many school administrations to create uniform policies and a common language within their school, there are still discrepancies in the ethical perceptions of the teaching faculty. By encouraging teachers to take part in simulations and developing ethical guidelines during their teachers' development programs, we can promote a unified ethical language in schools.

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