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Towards professionalism: ethical perspectives of Israeli teachers

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This study attempted to gain a better understanding of teachers' perceptions about their ethical dilemmas and roles. Qualitative data were collected by interviewing 32 teachers in seven schools. Interviewees were asked to provide detailed descriptions of ethical dilemmas they had encountered. The coding process focused on critical incidents involving ethical considerations identified as conflictive. Results indicate a large number of dilemmas that can be sorted into five main categories. These include tensions between caring and adhering to formal codes; fair process and fair outcome; school and family agenda; autonomy and educational policy; own religious convictions and that of a colleague. The study may enhance our understanding of teachers' roles and perceptions regarding these ethical dilemmas. Such understanding may help in the design of teacher education programmes focusing on ethics. More successful dealing with day-to-day ethical dilemmas may also help raise the status of the profession.

Keywords: teachers; ethical dilemmas; professionalism

Introduction

The word ethics is expansive in its meaning. Ethics define normative social ideals which are grounded, usually, in the cultural experience of particular societies and which are employed as guides to individuals in decision-making (Campbell 2000; Colnerud 1997). Teachers' ethical dilemmas are inner conversations concerning two or more ethical courses of action, each with specific drawbacks, making it difficult to decide upon an appropriate course of action (Berlak and Berlak 1981).

The aim of the study is to provide a better understanding of the ethical dilemmas involved in teachers' everyday pedagogical practices by mapping tensions between relevant values as described by Israeli teachers. Such understanding may promote the creation of educational programmes to strengthen teacher competence when dealing with ethical dilemmas. Success in these programmes would also improve the professional status of teaching.

Background

Ethics and ethical dilemmas in teaching

Teacher ethics have been discussed in the research literature since the mid-1980s. The studies suggest that teachers are not sufficiently aware of the ethical impact of their actions (Husu and Tirri 2001; Jackson, Boostrom, and Hansen 1993; Thornberg 2008). Consequently, educational philosophers, concerned with the ethical dilemmas

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involved in the teaching profession, argue that teachers should be made aware of their actual teaching practices when faced with these dilemmas (Colnerud 2006).

There is an abundance of literature exploring the nature of ethical dilemmas in teaching (see Campbell 2000; Colnerud 1997; Husu and Tirri 2007). One of the most common dilemmas is tension between caring for others (pupils, colleagues) and adhering to formal codes (school rules, professional standards). This can occur, for instance, when a teacher is faced with the need to act in a pupil's best interest while remaining supportive of a colleague whom he judges to have behaved unprofessionally. Concern for equity, i.e., that all pupils have the right to learn and should be viewed as capable of learning (Gore and Morrison 2001) poses another dilemma. Constraint is imposed by the recognition of the different needs of pupils, and the diversity of ways in which these needs may be met (Carr 2005). Another recurrent dilemma is the tension between the school's educational agenda and that of the pupil's family. Teachers have to decide whether or not to support the parents' educational agenda in light of the ultimate needs of the child (Campbell 2000).

Most of the studies indicate that teachers perceive themselves as powerless, and without adequate tools for decision-making in these matters (Block 2008; Campbell 2006; Carr 2005; Colnerud 2006; Gore and Morrison 2001; Husu and Tirri 2007). The present study aims to tackle this issue.

The nature of professionalism and teacher ability to deal with ethical dilemmas

While a high standard of ethics has long been considered a characteristic of professionalism, it is also a necessity in the acquisition of a high status of professionalism (Campbell 2006; Colnerud 1997). However, teaching cannot be compared with other professions without taking into account the specific ethical characteristics that distinguish it from other professions and its status as compared with other professions.

It terms of ethics, when attempting to draw parallels between the teaching profession and other professions, three criteria must always be examined: (a) mystification of knowledge; (b) social distance; and (c) reciprocity of effort (Fenstermacher 1990). *Mystification of knowledge* refers to the teachers' obligation to pass on knowledge to their pupils. Other professionals do not necessarily see themselves obligated to pass on knowledge to their clients (e.g., physicians). *Social distance* refers to the close relationships teachers must build with pupils in order to understand their living circumstances. In many other professions, building close relationships is not an essential requirement and social distance can be maintained (e.g. attorneys). *Reciprocity of effort* refers to the fact that in teaching, it is essential that both sides (pupil and teacher) make an effort in order to achieve results. In most other professions, results may also be achieved when one side (e.g., client) does not make an effort (Colnerud 2006).

In terms of status, teachers have long been struggling to raise their professional status (ACDE 1998; Bessett 1996; Preston and Symes 1992; Schneider 1987). Teachers have always suffered from a problematic professional status in comparison with highly esteemed professions such as medicine and law. One specific issue that demonstrates the problematic status of teaching has been the fact that teacher education is seen as a poorly esteemed profession. In addition, teaching has been an underpaid and overworked occupation, making it difficult for universities to recruit good students for teacher education (Gore and Morrison 2001). As a consequence, the teaching profession

continues to lose prestige, leading to more and more competent teachers leaving the profession after only a few years in the school setting (Block 2008; Pinar 2004).

There is substantial agreement that professions are characterised by certain general dimensions: (1) mastery of a body of knowledge and skills applied in the profession; (2) an orientation towards communal service; (3) the existence of a distinct professional ethics that finds expression in a code of practice, justifying the privilege of self-regulation; (4) an implicit comparison with other occupations that highlights the autonomy and prestige of the specific profession (Carr 1999; Larson 1977).

In a multitude of countries, such as the US (Higgins-D'Alessandro and Power 2005), Australia (Gore and Morrison 2001), Canada (Campbell 2006), Sweden (Colnerud 2006), the UK (Carr 2006), Germany (Lind 2008) and Israel (Shapira-Lishchinsky 2009), teaching has not been characterised by a majority of these dimensions. In all these countries, the body of knowledge acquired in teacher education, for example, has not been seen as sufficiently esoteric. Furthermore, state control has not permitted sufficient self-regulation. Finally, the relative autonomy and prestige in education have not matched that found in other established professions (e.g., medicine and law).

Teachers face complex situations for which neither their status, facilities nor knowledge provide sufficient support (Carr 2005, Stronach et al. 2002). Strengthening teacher competency, in addition to providing required knowledge and skills, may also promote, on the teacher's part, a commitment to higher professional and ethical standards (ACDE 1998; Gore and Morrison 2001).

Promotion of professional status through ethical knowledge

Based on Ajzen and Fishbein's (1980) theory, perceptions lead to behaviors. Studies show that people who deal differently with ethical dilemmas also differ predictably in their perceptions (Felton and Sims 2005; Peppas 2002; Swanson 2005). Applying this theory to our study model, we can expect that ethical knowledge will enlarge and deepen teachers' ethical perceptions (Kohlberg 1981). This may lead to more effective resolution of ethical dilemmas.

More specifically, ethical knowledge enables teachers to make conceptual and practical links between core values such as fairness, respect for others and the nuances of their own daily choices and actions. It may move teachers beyond the technical and the disciplinary and lead them to appreciate the potential ethical impact their practice has on their pupils, both formally and informally (Campbell 2006).

The ability to discuss ethical perceptions may help teachers better understand their professional duties and the limits of their responsibilities. Developing educational programmes, which will focus on dealing with ethical implications of daily interactions, may increase teachers' ability to deal with ethical dilemmas. That, in turn, may raise their professional status in their own eyes and in the eyes of the community as well (Buzzelli and Johnston 2002). Figure 1 demonstrates this process.

Method[1]

The research goal was to reflect the ethical tensions involved in managing ethical dilemmas in teaching, in order to gain a better understanding of the teacher's function and status.
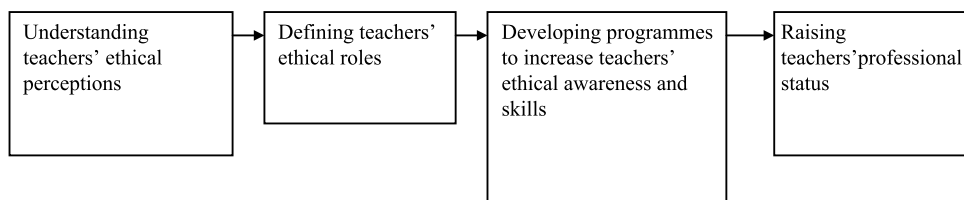
| Understanding teachers' ethical perceptions | → | Defining teachers' ethical roles | → | Developing programmes to increase teachers' ethical awareness and skills | → | Raising teachers'professional status |

Figure 1. From ethical perspectives towards professionalism.

Research context and participants

The data were collected during the academic year of 2006–2007. Thirty-two teachers (24 women, eight men) from seven schools (primary school, middle school and high school) were interviewed. The schools and participants were selected on the basis of their willingness to take part in the study. The schools varied in size and type (state school/religious state school), representing a cross-section of practising teachers in Israeli schools. The ratio of women to men in the study was representative of the general composition of Israeli teaching personnel (Israel Central Bureau of Statistics 2005). The participants were from different disciplinary backgrounds (e.g., English, Hebrew, mathematics and science) and their average age was 40.2 (SD = 5.3) years.

Data collection

The principals of the schools involved in the study were advised as to the goals of the study. Research assistants were then hired after interviews with the principal researcher. They met the teachers at staff meetings where they informed the teachers that they were collecting data about the characteristics of Israeli teachers' ethical dilemmas. They also informed the teachers that the interviews would focus on critical incidents in teaching that revolved around ethical dilemmas and that, specifically, participants would be asked to provide detailed verbal narratives describing difficult ethical situations that they had encountered in teaching. To ensure maximum freedom for the participants, a critical incident was defined at the staff meetings in most general terms, i.e., any selection and interpretation of an ethical event of particular significance to their professional lives as teachers (Tripp 1993).

Participants were assured of complete confidentiality. They also received a formal letter describing the study goals and the researcher's obligation to preserve anonymity according to the Helsinki Treaty. This was a contributing factor in attaining teacher willingness to volunteer for participation in the study. An informed consent form was signed by the participants, including specific consent to the tape-recording of the interviews. Since the interviews covered sensitive ethical issues, research assistants were specifically instructed by the author as to how and which questions should be asked. The interviews lasted 40–45 minutes each and were tape-recorded. In order to adhere to ethical standards of research, the tapes were destroyed upon completion of the transcription, a year and a half after completing the data collection.

The following are a few sample questions:

- Can you share with me one or more ethical dilemmas that arose in your school?
- Who was involved in these ethical dilemmas?

- Can you describe one or more of your roles, as well as the implications of your choices in these dilemmas?

The interviewees were encouraged to share ethical dilemmas that they had experienced at any time during their teaching careers. On the basis of previous studies (Tripp 1993; Kelchtermans and Vandenberghe 1994), we assumed that the participants' recollection of memorable relevant incidents constituted an important aspect in understanding how these ethical dilemmas were faced.

Data analysis

Participants were identified by a code number, and information linking code numbers to individuals was destroyed upon completion of the data analysis. All participants' names were changed. The interviews were transcribed verbatim and processed as text. A member check was then performed (Lather 1986a), in which the participants read their stories and made changes or additions as they saw fit. Lather (1986b) suggests that participants be given the opportunity to respond to the data that have been collected. This will enable them to 'understand and change their situations' (Lather 1986b, 263). The concept of reflecting upon a formerly reported incident is important to our study which deals with ethical dilemmas and ways to resolve them.

The analysis of the data followed a three-step process, conducted by the principal researcher and his research assistants, as outlined by Patton (1990) and Strauss and Corbin (1998) as described below:

- The *first step* entailed several holistic readings of each interview, to obtain an overall understanding of the kinds of ethical dilemmas reported.
- The *second step* included clustering similar experiences and coding them into subcategories. The report on tension between a pupil's well-being and school rules, for example, was based on nine reported experiences.
- In the *third step*, the content of the common subcategories was condensed and clustered into broader categories. For example, in this study, the subcategories of 'tension between pupil well-being and school rules' and 'tension between advancing universal values and following the school curriculum' were grouped into the category of 'tensions between caring for others and adhering to formal codes', as both subcategories reflect the tension addressed in this category.

More specifically, research assistants analysed the data independently and then collaboratively reflected on the tentative subcategories and categories. The principal researcher analysed the entire data set independently. Then, the principal researcher and research assistants met to reflect on the emerging subcategories and categories, searching the data for disconfirming and confirming evidence to support the findings. In doing so, data analysis reflects teachers' perceptions regarding their ethical dilemmas.

The nature of ethical dilemmas in teaching

From a total of 52 ethical dilemma narratives identified by teachers, we formed five main categories (Figure 2), as follows:
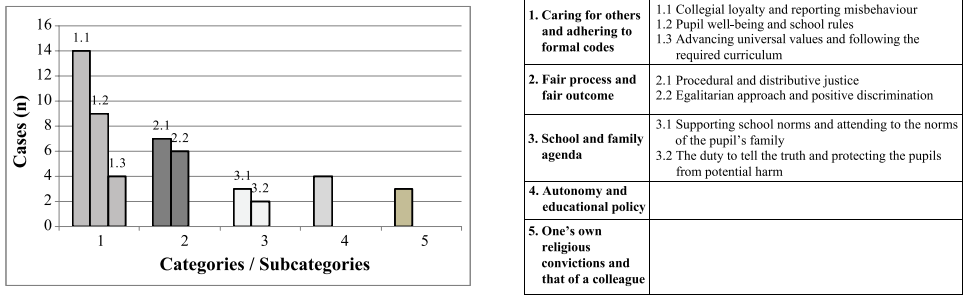
1. Caring for others and adhering to formal codes	1.1 Collegial loyalty and reporting misbehaviour 1.2 Pupil well-being and school rules 1.3 Advancing universal values and following the required curriculum
2. Fair process and fair outcome	2.1 Procedural and distributive justice 2.2 Egalitarian approach and positive discrimination
3. School and family agenda	3.1 Supporting school norms and attending to the norms of the pupil's family 3.2 The duty to tell the truth and protecting the pupils from potential harm
4. Autonomy and educational policy	
5. One's own religious convictions and that of a colleague	

Figure 2. Distribution of the ethical dilemmas identified by teachers.

(1) Tensions between caring for others and adhering to formal codes (27 cases).
(2) Tensions between fair process and fair outcome (13 cases).
(3) Tensions between school and family agenda (five cases).
(4) Tensions between autonomy and educational policy (four cases).
(5) Tensions between own and colleague's religious convictions (three cases).

We found that each interview (all except three) included two or three ethical situations (cases), which emphasised the multifaceted nature of ethics within these narratives. Figure 2 describes the distribution of the categories and subcategories. The most frequently discussed categories related to 'tensions between caring for others and adhering to formal codes', followed by 'tensions between fair process and fair outcome', while cases related to 'tensions between school and family agenda', 'tensions between autonomy and educational policy' and 'tension between one's own religious convictions and that of a colleague' were found in a smaller number of critical narratives.

Results

Tension between caring for others and adhering to formal codes

Our first category includes three subcategories dealing with the tension between caring for the other (pupil/colleague) and following school rules and/or norms. Each subcategory deals with a different aspect of this tension.

Tension between collegial loyalty and reporting misbehaviour (14 cases)

We will report here on one narrative regarding each subcategory. The first subcategory refers to situations in which a teacher perceives a colleague's behaviour as contrary to school rules and standards. When teachers perceive their collegial loyalty as obstructing them from reporting misbehaviour, a dilemma arises:

> As a coordinator in school, I'm a member of the senior administration team. One of the English teachers reported to our school secretary that she had taken a day off, because of illness. On the same day, I met her with her husband at a party. My dilemma was whether to tell the school administration about the unjustified excuse for her absence… or whether to say nothing, as we have been working together for many years. I had to teach two classes together that day and it was a mess. What did I do in the end? I didn't say a word, and kept it to myself. (Daniella, female, high school coordinator)

Daniella's narrative conveys a strong tension between remaining loyal to a colleague and the need to report behaviour that is inconsistent with school standards and principles. A teacher's absence may decrease pupils' motivation to attend school (Shapira-Lishchinsky and Rosenblatt 2010), reduce their achievements and can easily translate into extra costs for school management (Shapira-Lishchinsky and Rosenblatt 2008). Unjustified absence is, therefore, essentially unethical. Daniella feels that the right thing to do is report the incident. Her strong sense of caring for a colleague, however, based on a long-term friendship, led her not to report the misbehaviour.

Tension between pupil well-being and school rules (nine cases)

The second subcategory entails the tension that arises when care for one's charges clashes with the need to respect school rules and standards:

> Most of the pupils who don't attend school regularly are trying to combine study and work because of a complex family socioeconomic situation… we are currently facing a dilemma that is not at all simple. What should we do about their 12-year general certificate of education? On the one hand, they are often absent from school, and don't deserve the certificate. On the other hand, many doors will be closed to them without the certificate… not a simple dilemma at all. (Moshe, male, pedagogical coordinator in high school)

Moshe's concern for his pupils and their future, conflicts with his obligation to obey school rules. These rules require that pupils attend school regularly for final certification. Faced with problematic pupils, however, Moshe is undecided as to whether or not it is more important to obey the rules, thus denying the pupils opportunities for advancement, or to give them a chance at new opportunities, although this would involve breaking school rules.

Tension between advancing universal values and following the required curriculum (four cases)

This subcategory reflects the dilemma between devoting time to advance universal values of benefit to the pupils' future and time required to cover the required curriculum:

> As their class teacher, I talk about mutual respect… bonding in the classroom. When I receive a new class, it's for the next three years. I turn them into an army regiment, a military company with shared values… such as helping each other… mutual respect, cooperation, mutual tolerance. Sometimes during afternoon activities, and sometimes instead of one of the required lessons… even if it means skipping material from the curriculum… I feel badly about it, but there are no other hours. (Maya, female, middle school educator)

Maya's dilemma is whether or not to carry out what teachers perceive to be their formal mandate, i.e., 'to teach the curriculum', or to spend some of those same hours developing the pupils' personalities by exploring issues that touch upon universal values. Although she eventually makes a decision, she is left with a feeling of uneasiness.

In summation, the category of tension between 'caring for others and adhering to formal codes' included the following subcategories which reflect tensions between: 'collegial loyalty and reporting misbehaviour', 'pupil well-being and school rules' and

'advancing universal values and following the required curriculum'. All these subcategories reflect tensions which emphasise the fact that teachers do not know exactly how to deal with the ethical situations they present. Moreover, they reflect a lack of tools to deal with these ethical dilemmas.

Tension between fair process and fair outcome

This second category deals with teachers' perceptions of tension between different dimensions of justice: fair process (procedural justice) and fair distribution of rewards (distributive justice). This category has two subcategories: 'tension between procedural and distributive justice' and 'tension between an egalitarian approach and the discrimination implied by "a favourite" approach'.

Tension between procedural and distributive justice (seven cases)

Procedural justice calls for teacher reflection and participation in decision-making. When the teacher views the process as unrewarding, tension is created:

> How can I tell a teacher that she is not entitled to remuneration, because… the school has a class that is not included in the budget, so even though she works the hours, we don't have remuneration to give for those hours… whom should I tell and whom shouldn't I tell? (Meir, male, coordinator in secondary school)

Meir believes that the school lacks a fair justice process, creating an unjust outcome. The teacher performs extra work, which deserves extra rewards. She doesn't, however, receive it, because of the school's insufficient resources. In addition, Meir does not know how to divide the limited extra hours between all the deserving teachers who perform additional work. Based on this, the conflict arises.

Tension between an egalitarian approach and positive discrimination (six cases)

The second subcategory reflects the tension between an egalitarian and a positive discrimination approach:

> Should we move ahead with the material in class, leaving behind those with difficulties, or should we go at a slower pace, to allow those with difficulties to catch up with the rest of the class? Although the slower pupils will achieve something, the *other* pupils will be held back… unfortunately, we're still deliberating what to do about it. (Rina, female, high school teacher)

In this narrative, Rina has doubts whether to choose a fixed tempo in teaching the curriculum, or a tempo that is more considerate of the pupils' special needs. While the latter choice would be beneficial to the special needs pupils, it may harm the interests of the other pupils. They will be held back by other pupils' problems, and not fulfil their own potential. Rina's ethical dilemma becomes stronger when interpreted in light of Israel's educational policy. The Ministry of Education allocates an equal budget to each school according to its number of pupils. Such policy, however, does not take into consideration any kind of differentiation as to the number of pupils with special needs in each school (who might require a larger budget). This raises an ethical dilemma for Rina as a teacher. The Ministry's educational policy is equal distribution

of resources, while Rina believes that the Ministry should take into account pupils with special needs when deciding on the allotted budget to each school.

In summation, this category emphasises the importance of treating everybody, teachers and pupils equally alike. Meir and Rina, however, raise the question: How do you behave fairly when the resources, time or money are limited? Should the resources be divided equally? Or should another distributive mechanism be used? These unanswered questions reflect teachers' uncertainty when dealing with these ethical dilemmas.

Tension between school and family agenda

The third category of ethical dilemmas (with a total of five cases) deals with the tension between school policy and parental perceptions of the proper way for children to act. This has two subcategories: 'tensions between supporting school norms and attending to family norms' and 'tensions between the duty to tell the truth and protect the pupils from potential harm', which translates into the tension between an egalitarian approach and discrimination.

Tensions between supporting school norms and attending to family norms (three cases)

The tension between school norms and those in the pupil's home is one source of ethical dilemmas for teachers:

> We have a constant dilemma regarding how to relate to pupils who don't come to lessons… should we adhere to school rules and suspend these pupils from school, or should we honour the parents' request not to suspend the child, as it's not so serious, it's not a place of work, it's just school. (Shay, male, educator in high school)

In this narrative, the school has its own declared attendance rules for pupils and expects the pupil's family to respect them since, in the school's view, obeying these rules will help the children (e.g., obtaining better achievements, becoming better citizens). The family, however, sometimes has other, clashing norms, such as being attentive to their children's needs and authorising their absence from school in circumstances they perceive justifiable. Shay thus faces a dilemma: Is it acceptable to bend the rules to cater to family norms?

The duty to tell the truth and protecting the pupils from potential harm (two cases)

According to the school educational agenda, teachers are supposed to inform parents about a pupil's bad behaviour. They hesitate, however, to tell the whole truth when they suspect that the parents will be aggressive towards their child as a result:

> Some of the children come from very violent and difficult homes. Parents often respond violently to the pupil's violent behaviour… Sometimes we have to summon parents because their child has been violent…and then the question is whether to tell…how much to tell… when to go into detail. (Dalya, female, educator at a primary school for special education)

In Dalya's narrative, the tension between the need to tell the truth and to protect the pupils from potential harm is expressed by the teacher's perception of school

standards, which reflect that the whole truth should be told to the parents involved. At the same time, the teachers are plagued by a bad conscience about not telling the truth, since they wish to protect the child.

In both subcategories, the teachers seem to be crying out for a clear policy of what to say and how to say it. In both cases, the question is whether the teachers have clear rules as to how to act.

Tension between autonomy and educational policy

This category (with four cases) deals with the tension between a desire to make independent decisions, and loyalty to the educational policy and its behavioural standards, with which teachers do not always agree:

> The learning material can raise ethical problems… for example in civics… Can I condemn a political statement that appears in the text book? … are the pupils likely to be swept along by my authority and be influenced by me… is that ethical? (Ron, male, secondary school teacher)

Ron's narrative expresses tension between the autonomous desire to express and act as he believes, and the expectation to act according to the official educational policy. Ron is also aware that as a teacher, his point of view may influence his pupils. This may cause an additional ethical dilemma.

Tension between one's own religious convictions and that of a colleague

This final category (with three cases) deals with the tension resulting from conflicting religious convictions amongst the staff:

> We are a national-religious state school. Within this system, there are many educators with different and sometimes even extreme worldviews… which leads to a great variety of attitudes towards education. For example, not long ago, I heard an argument between two teachers in the staff room. The religious teacher claimed that the pupils should not be allowed to bring mobile phones to school because… in his opinion, they expose the pupils to inappropriate music and video films. The more liberal teacher claimed that mobile phones have become an essential part of the modern world and are certain pupils' sole means of communication… as well as an invaluable source of knowledge through access to the Internet. (Rafi, male, high school coordinator)

Rafi defines this case as an ethical dilemma, when the religious values of the various teachers in his school do not match. The encounter between different values creates an ethical dilemma. On which values should the school base its policies?

To summarise, our findings regarding reported tensions between values reveal a wide scope of uncertainty among teachers as to how to handle ethical dilemmas. Currently, Israeli teachers clearly lack satisfactory tools for dealing with such dilemmas as they arise in schools.

Discussion

The study findings emphasise that teachers' self-perception as being powerless while dealing with ethical dilemmas demonstrates their need for a clearer definition of their

ethical roles, in order to deal more successfully with ethical dilemmas. This sense of powerlessness is derived from a lack of tools for dealing with ethical dilemmas and could be partially attributed to inadequate resources and professional status issues.

Each ethical dilemma was conceptualised in terms of tension between values. The nature of the ethical dilemmas that emerges from these encounters and the relationships among the values shed light on the complexity of a teacher's work. This complexity may explain the findings that the majority of the narratives were presented through the plural pronoun 'we' instead of 'I': teachers feel discomfort when faced with complex ethical events, and thus prefer to link their ethical dilemmas to their team as a whole (use of the pronoun 'we') rather than link it to themselves on a personal basis (use of the pronoun 'I') (Vardi 2001).

Similar to other studies, our findings indicate that caring for others (e.g., pupils, colleagues) is one of the most important values that must be weighed in decision-making by teachers when dealing with ethical dilemmas (e.g., Campbell 2000; Higgins 1995; Husu and Tirri 2001). Like Colnerud (2006), this study argues that ethical relationships with other people are based on care and respect for the other person. Just distribution is a manifestation of respect for the other person. Thus, we may regard the ethics of justice and the ethics of care as complementary rather than conflicting. These complementary values constitute a dynamic dialogue, leading sometimes to incorporating both values of justice and care when dealing with some dilemmas.

Although at first glance, rules might seem to prevent teachers from voicing certain ethical dilemmas, the findings of this study suggest that some rules seem to be fundamental in preserving basic ethical standards in schools. When faced with a dilemma, such standards and rules may provide limits and tools. Furthermore, rules can help a teacher deal with the tendency towards partiality which might distort judgment.

The study indicates that teachers' ethical dilemmas are integral to curricular activity and are immersed in their instructional practice. Value education, however, dwells mostly in the hidden curriculum sphere. The problem with such an important aspect of educational life residing in the hidden curriculum is that it does not grant teachers acknowledged or legitimate time – or mandate – to address issues beyond the formal curriculum. This is despite the fact that both ethics and values are essential to being effective teachers (Klaassen 2002).

Many of the revealed dilemmas appear to be universal and cross-cultural, such as tensions between caring and formality (Barone 2004; Colnerud, 1997; Higgins 1995; Tirri 1999), and are often rooted in collegial relations. Organisations often encourage friendships among workers in order to develop a positive climate which may increase organisational effectiveness (Coleman, Mikkelson, and LaRocque 1991). However, this study indicates that professional obligations sometimes remain unmet because teachers do not wish to harm their colleagues.

Some of the revealed dilemmas can be better explained by the specific Israeli context of the current study, an example of which would be the tension between fair process and fair outcome. The Israeli education system is characterised by limited resources and rewards. For example, a recent publication, *Education at a glance* (OECD 2006) evidences that a comparison of the average expenditure per pupil in fixed international prices (in terms of purchasing power parities) shows that in Israel, the average expenditure per pupil, at all levels of education, is lower than the average in member countries of the OECD (e.g., in secondary education, the expenditure on education per pupil in Israel amounted to $5959, which was low compared to the

average of \$6936 in the OECD countries). Thus, the limited resources of the Israeli education system create a situation in which teachers are more sensitive to issues of justice and just division of resources for themselves and their pupils.

Also typical of Israeli teachers is the tension between the school's agenda and that of the pupils and their families. Demographic data indicate that Israel is considered more familial than Western (e.g., the UK, Sweden, the Netherlands, Switzerland) and Eastern Europe (e.g., Slovenia, Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria), owing to higher birth rates and lower divorce rates (Feldman, Shafiq, and Nadam 2001; Roseneil and Budgeon 2004). Researchers have suggested such things as the intimacy of Israeli society, which amplifies the individual's attachment to his/her family, and the high economic dependence of young families on origin families as an explanation of this high familial level (Halpern 2001; Sharlin 1996). Studies indicate that the Israeli family is being pulled in opposite directions by two main forces: one that moves the family toward greater modernisation, while the other acts to strengthen traditional values, thus maintaining a vast diversity of family patterns (Lavee and Katz 2003). We may see this as a source of some of the ethical dilemmas that teachers face in relation to their pupils' families.

The study results indicate that teachers note difficulty in discussing pupils' misbehaviour with parents, as well as a lack of teacher–parent communication. Parents and teachers use different frames of reference in their consideration of what is important for their children. Parents are emotionally involved with their own children, while the teachers' point of reference is the functioning of the class. As Klaassen (2002) suggests, therefore, instead of engaging in confrontation, parents and teachers should make their visions known to each other.

Also specific to the Israeli context is the tension between religious convictions among the education staff. A large section of the Israeli population holds traditional orientations (The Israel Central Bureau of Statistics 2006). The central status of religion and tradition in Israel is manifest at the institutional level, where religious schools exist alongside state schools (Ammerman 2006). Thus, Israeli policy of promoting modern democratic values sometimes conflicts with traditional values.

In summation, the narratives point to a large extent of uncertainty among teachers as to how to handle ethical dilemmas that arise in their work. Enhancing teachers' ethical knowledge through specially designed educational programmes may improve teachers' competence when dealing with ethical dilemmas, and in turn, may also promote their professional status.

Limitations of the study

This study was based on critical incidents containing ethical dilemmas. As this study focuses on teachers' perspectives and how they characterise ethical dilemmas, some categories numbered fewer cases than others. Nevertheless, the findings indicate that categories with few cases reflected the same perception of powerlessness and lack of competence as categories with a large number of cases.

Face-to-face interviews may also convey non-verbal signals. In this study, we used only tape recorders. Preliminary meetings disallowed the use of video-cameras which appeared to have threatened the teachers. The teachers only agreed to the use of tape recorders.

The study findings were based on teachers' post-hoc perceptions of their ethical dilemmas and their roles, with all the concomitant problems of such a retrospective

approach. Nevertheless, this study turns out to be quite informative with respect to potential sources of professional development and is therefore a worthy starting point for further research.

Conclusions and implications: towards ethical education for teachers

The study findings contribute to existing work on ethical dilemmas. From a theoretical perspective, the analysis of each dilemma in terms of the tension between values involved sheds light on teachers' values, perceptions and attitudes concerning ethical issues. This may enhance the understanding of teachers' roles and their professional status. From a practical perspective, the results may guide Israeli teachers and their leaders in developing ethical knowledge through appropriate educational programmes, as they can relate to the issues that emerged in the narratives.

Currently, teacher collaborations on defining the ethical problems of practice are considered 'luxuries' rather than essential components of their work. Participants' high motivation and willingness to voice their dilemmas suggests the need to create teacher education programmes as part of the school ethos. Such spaces need to be defined and acknowledged as an integral part of the professional landscape of teachers' work (Clandinin and Connelly 1995; Craig 2002). Discussing and analysing cases of ethical dilemmas in teaching, drawn from teachers' own experience and perspectives, is a valuable resource.

Teacher education programmes need to offer insights for teachers into the dilemmas of teaching associated with rights and fairness, school and state regulations, contracts and pupil responsibilities and learning relationships with pupils (Lyons 1990). Regularly scheduled open forum discussions, peer coaching and school ethics committees, in which teachers form internal communicative networks to discuss professional ethical matters and dilemmas as they arise, may provide avenues for cultivating ethical knowledge that may increase teachers' capacity to deal successfully with ethical dilemmas.

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Note

1. The present study is part of a larger research project on employees' ethical dilemmas and organisational ethics in Israel.

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