Mentors’ ethical perceptions: implications for practice

Orly Shapira-Lishchinsky
Department of Educational Administration, Leadership and Policy, Bar-Ilan University, Ramat-Gan, Israel

Abstract

Purpose – This study attempts to describe mentors’ perceptions of their ethical dilemmas, the derived mentor roles, and the ethical guidelines suggested by mentors, with reference to previous studies exploring the mentors’ multifaceted roles.

Design/methodology/approach – A total of 60 mentors participated in a two-phase study: the mentors were asked to submit descriptions of their ethical dilemmas to the study web site, and submissions were then discussed in focus groups. A four-stage coding process derived from grounded theory was utilized.

Findings – The findings were grouped by means of the ATLAS.ti 5.0 into five main categories: discretion, caring, accountability, autonomy, and distributive justice. The findings raise three important issues: first, mentors perceive their role mainly as empowering their mentees and perceive their powerlessness as being due to lack of tools for dealing with ethical dilemmas. Second, most mentors’ ethical dilemmas involved conflicts with school principals. Third, a large number of mentor roles and several of the derived ethical guidelines are unique to the mentoring situation.

Practical implications – The findings may promote the design of an educational program for mentors that will relate to the ethical aspects of mentoring. Such programs call for the participation of school principals in program development and meetings to help mentors deal with their ethical dilemmas.

Originality/value – While previous studies in mentoring focused on defining mentoring, describing mentors’ roles, and suggesting how to build effective mentoring, no study focused on the ethical aspects of mentoring. This study describes mentors’ ethical dilemmas, and the unique ethical guidelines that emerged.

Keywords Mentoring, Mentors, Ethics, Ethical dilemmas, Teachers, Schools

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Mentoring is traditionally used by educational systems as a form of assistance to less experienced employees, and as a means of keeping talented teachers in the profession and improving the quality of teaching (Gordon and Patterson, 2006; Jonson, 2008). According to the Israeli State Comptroller report (Israeli State Comptroller, 2009), the policy of the Israeli Ministry of Education is to locate the better teachers in each field and to appoint them as district mentors. Their task is to coach and provide continuous support to both “novices” and experienced teachers in specific matters of teaching. As in many other countries (e.g. Australia, England, USA, The Netherlands), most Israeli teachers who mentor officially do so in addition to their regular teaching jobs (Gagen and Bowie, 2005; Orland-Barak, 2002; Mertz, 2004), working individually and also with teams (Daresh, 2003; Jonson, 2008). The mentor’s mandate is to organize and conduct workshops, lead staff development programs, and develop and assimilate new school curricula (Hansford and Ehrich, 2006; Hansford et al., 2003; Orland-Barak and Yinon,
Typically, mentors’ roles are not clearly defined (Ehrich et al., 2004; Gagen and Bowie, 2005; Mertz, 2004), nor is their training standardized. When training does take place, it neither includes ethical guidelines (Barnett, 1995; Douglas, 1997; Orland-Barak, 2003; Warren, 2005; Welfel, 2002) nor does it address ethical dilemmas (Daresh, 2004; Warren, 2005).

The situation in Israel can be used to illustrate these problems: the only tool that Israeli mentors have at their disposal is a draft of the general code of ethics written for kindergarten and school teachers, school principals and inspectors, without attending to the specific needs of any one of these professional groups (Executive Committee of the Association of Israeli Teachers, 2002). Furthermore, no concerted effort has been made to publicize these guidelines, so that most professionals who would have a need for them are oblivious to their existence.

Consequently, mentors in Israel exhibit uncertainty in their practice, and this, in turn, weakens their already tenuous professional status, which is reflected in the following issues:

- Most Israeli mentors receive a one-year temporary contract till the end of the academic year. In many cases, this temporary contract is renewed only after the new academic year has already started; thus, mentors start to work before they have a signed contract, based on the promise of their superior that it will be renewed.

- While other professionals in education such as principals and inspectors can be granted tenure, there is no option for tenure in mentoring.

- Because in many cases the allocation of the “mentoring days” comes after the beginning of the year, the good teachers who should become mentors have already arranged their schedule, so they are limited as to their free days. As a result, the inspectors take the teachers who are free, not always necessarily the best teachers, and this may lead to a lower academic level of mentors (Israeli State Comptroller, 2009).

Some countries are now attempting to develop specific ethical guidelines for educational personnel (e.g. teaching, school administration, school counseling, special education); however, only a few relate to mentoring (e.g. State of Alabama Department of Education, 2003; NAESP/NSU National Principals Mentor Certification Program, 2009). Research has indicated that one reason for the problematic status of some professionals is that these employees feel that they are insufficiently equipped to cope with ethical dilemmas (Campbell, 2006; Carr, 2006; Colnerud, 1997; Stronach et al., 2002).

The present study seeks to explore an area not previously addressed – the ethical aspects of school mentoring by answering the following research questions:

- What are the mentors’ perceptions of their ethical dilemmas?

- What are the mentors’ perceptions of their role definition in relation to their ethical dilemmas?

- Do mentors perceive a need for unique ethical guidelines which will help them deal better with their ethical dilemmas? If the answer is yes, this study will try to describe these ethical guidelines.
Mentoring in schools
Of the many definitions of mentoring, the most popular are those that focus on the individual level, a process in which a more experienced person (mentor) provides a less experienced person (mentee) with guidance, support, knowledge, and suggestions for professional development (Chao et al., 1992; Gaskill, 1991). On the organizational level we may define mentoring as a strategy to be used in efforts to improve organizational practice. Schools with mentoring programs tend to be considerably more effective when they are able to receive ongoing support from experienced mentors (Daresh, 2004; Ehrich et al., 2004).

Defining mentoring is made more complicated by the confusing, often contradictory, roles associated with mentoring: teaching, encouraging, counseling, and role modeling (Hansford and Ehrich, 2006; Hansford et al., 2003; Tillman, 2005). These many roles, combined with the absence of clear boundaries for distinguishing mentoring roles from other professions, make mentoring difficult to research (Mertz, 2004).

There is a considerable body of literature that describes the benefits of mentoring. For the mentees, the benefits may include networking, sharing ideas and knowledge with colleagues, emotional support, access to challenging work, and professional development. (Bush and Coleman, 1995; Ehrich et al., 2004). For the mentors the benefits may include extrinsic rewards (e.g. higher salaries) and intrinsic benefits (e.g. personal satisfaction), because mentoring gives them opportunities for personal career advancement (Daresh, 2003; Warren, 2005). Benefits to the organization include increased productivity, enhancement of services offered to the teachers, and a heightened positive climate in schools (Daresh, 2004; Ehrich et al., 2004).

However, despite documentation of the merits of mentoring for all parties (Daresh, 2003; Jonson, 2008), some researchers have noted the disadvantages of mentoring as a developmental process. Mentoring can be detrimental to growth if those being mentored develop too great a reliance on mentors. In such cases, the mentee’s growth is frequently stifled (Ganser, 2002; Turner, 1993). Other drawbacks include the lack of time for mentoring and the unsuccessful matching of mentors and mentees, which can be detrimental to the process (Bush and Coleman, 1995; Daresh, 2004; Hansford and Ehrich, 2006). The most frequently problematic outcome cited by mentees related to mentors who were critical, out of touch, defensive, or untrusting (Ehrich et al., 2004).

Other studies also highlight the obstacles related to the lack of clarification of mentor’s roles, which leads to uncertainty about what the mentor is accountable for (Daresh, 2004). All these are added to the fact that resources allocated for mentoring are insufficient, this at the same time that short-cuts are being introduced in teacher training programs to fill essential teaching positions. The teachers from these fast-track programs need more mentoring support than those from the more traditional programs, as the shorter programs included less “practice” time (Gagen and Bowie, 2005); however, some of these teachers may not want the assistance of a mentor (Jonson, 2008).

Another major obstacle relates to lack of support from school principals, for example, when a principal asks the mentor to “make gray the line”, i.e. to act against his or her own educational agenda (Jonson, 2008). In addition, in instances where the mentoring program is not respected by the principal as a legitimate method for developing teachers, the mentoring will not be effective because the principals may demonstrate resistance to the changes that arise during the mentoring programs, and
in the future they will not continue to encourage the changes that have been developed (Daresh, 2004; Hobson, 2003).

Another obstacle to mentoring includes inadequate preparation of training for mentoring. For example, little has been said about which teachers can be designated as mentors. In effect, no minimal qualifications other than previous experience in teaching have been identified. The result has often been selection based on availability rather than quality (Daresh, 2004).

Previous studies indicate that the mentors’ main concern in mentoring programs were their perceptions about the lack of support provided for their role. Thus, beginning and experienced mentors alike need well thought-out training as well as ongoing support to develop new skills and understandings that will enable them to become effective mentors (Jonson, 2008). Effective mentoring requires that all mentoring partners (e.g. mentor, mentees, principal) be ready to engage in the mentoring process. If such an attitude is not cultivated, it is not likely that mentoring will have any effect (Daresh, 2003).

Today’s schools present many new challenges: schedules are tight, standardized testing is much more stringent, and teachers are trying to keep up with new content and new technology, while dealing with increasingly growing problems of classroom management (Gagen and Bowie, 2005). All these challenges may raise new ethical confrontations for teaching. Mentors who are effectively trained and have experience in schools can help teachers with these ethical confrontations by applying theoretical knowledge, developing high-stake assessment, and remaining sensitive to ethical issues (Virginia Department of Education, 2000).

**Mentoring in Israel**

According to the Israeli Educational Management Circular (2009), mentors should teach at least two days a week at school (approximately eight hours a week); thus, Israeli mentors commonly function also as teachers. The Israeli Ministry of Education employed 2,372 mentors on 5,141 mentoring days, at a cost of $25,000,000, a considerable expense, indicating the importance that the Israeli Ministry of Education ascribes to mentoring as a tool to improve the quality of education. The Israeli State Comptroller Report (Israeli State Comptroller, 2009) describes the mentoring goal: improving the quality of education, developing teachers’ professionalism, and improving student achievements. The mentor is supposed to improve teachers’ educational skills and performance, thus mentors can contribute from their experience to the schools.

According to the guidelines of the District Mentoring Division (2006, p. 21) of the Israeli Ministry of Education, because mentoring roles are so complex and varied, the role could be defined in different ways. Therefore, the final definition should be based on a dialogue between the inspector, the principal, and the mentor, tailoring it to the needs of the schools and educational working teams in each subject. In any case, the school mentor roles should be based on the definitions outlined here:

- Mentoring is a framework for accompanying, leading, training, and supporting educators, both individually and in small groups, based on professional development and not on critical inspection (p. 18).
- Mentoring programs should be built through a dialogue between the principal, the educational teams, and the inspector.
Mentoring in school should recognize teachers’ educational talents and empower them in coordination with the principal.

Mentoring should introduce and encourage educational programs among educational teams, coordinators, and the principal.

Mentoring should support teaching abilities including socio-psychological support, so that the mentees develop both their personality and their professionalism.

Thus, in Israel, mentees can be not only “novice” teachers, but also experienced teachers, including professional coordinators which the educational system encourages to empower in order to achieve its educational goals. However, although declaratively the main role of the mentor is to support and develop professional educational capabilities, in practice, there are implicit dimensions of the inspector role also included in the mentor role. That is because, according to the Israeli Educational Management Circular (2009), the mentors are expected to report about their outcomes and their difficulties in order to help the Ministry of Education optimally plan the allocation of mentoring days. Accordingly, the Israeli mentors report about their meetings (individually, in teams) to their inspectors, and leave a copy of their reports in the mentoring filing cabinet in school. The report includes: participant/s; what has been done during the meeting; whether the meeting’s goals have been achieved; and recommendations for the next meeting. In this case, although the mentors are told to be supportive and discreet concerning their mentees, the reports will indicate (both to the inspector and to the principal, by means of the school’s copy) whether there is a problem with the mentees, and this may lead to ethical dilemmas.

Ethical dilemmas in mentoring

Ethical dilemmas may emerge during the mentoring process. An ethical dilemma is perceived as an inner conversation with the self, concerning two or more propositions that may be adopted (Berlak and Berlak, 1981). The difficulty in choosing between competing values is that there is never one absolute, right outcome (Cuban, 1992). The literature explores several sources of ethical dilemmas emerging from the competing demands and conflicting pedagogical ideals which are experienced by mentors, as they simultaneously attempt to maintain close partnerships with schools (Sumsion, 2000).

Consider the Israeli context; one of the expected mentor roles is to support mentees in socio-psychological aspects (District Mentoring Division, 2006), which may give rise to two sources of ethical dilemmas: discretion and caring. Regarding the discretion that exists in the mentor-mentee relationship (Johnson and Nelson, 1999), mentors are called on to constantly maintain a sense of confidentiality (Anzul, 2000). Teachers need a place to vent, to discuss unpleasant situations that may arise as part of classroom management. Mentors can provide these opportunities in a risk-free setting. Yet, an ethical dilemma may arise when the mentee shares information with the mentor and asks that it not be reported to the person in charge. Since mentors do not have clear ethical guidelines, their actions might be based on their personal perceptions and thus it may be difficult to evaluate if they acted properly.

The Israeli definition of the mentor role with its expectation that mentees be given socio-psychological support (District Mentoring Division, 2006) may emerge the second source of ethical dilemmas related to mentor caring. Previous studies define mentoring
as the establishment of a personal relationship for the purpose of professional guidance through building solid relationships where mutual trust and respect develop. The mentor must be people-oriented, and respectful, warm, caring, and supportive (Ashburn et al., 1987; Barnett, 1995; Warren, 2005). Mentors should provide care and be sensitive to teachers’ needs as their mentees deal with the spectrum of ethical dilemmas arising in different fields, such as classroom management or relationships with students, while remaining aware of their professional commitment and of school policies that apply to the particular issues at stake (Gibb and Welch, 1998).

The close relationship between mentor and mentee could lead to friendship, offering the mentees a unique opportunity for the positive translation of values (Warren, 2005), but it may also blur the mentor’s role. Both mentor and mentee may begin to relate on an inappropriately personal, rather than professional level, which in turn, can create ethical dilemmas (Clark et al., 2000). As Noddings (1984, p. 18) explains, caring can create conflicts when, for example, “what the cared-for wants is not what we think would be best for him” and resultant guilt, when for example, “we bring about outcomes that we ourselves did not intend to bring about”. Thus, conflict and guilt are inevitable risks of caring (Summison, 2000).

The confusion over the definitions of mentor’s roles often conveys conflicting messages for the mentor in terms of what functions he or she is expected to perform (Orland-Barak, 2002) which may raise the issue of mentors’ accountability (Spillane and Thompson, 1997). For example, in the USA, national educational policies have increased mentors’ accountability for student learning by demanding an emphasis on both academic content standards and teacher quality (Mangin, 2009). In turn, states increasingly impose sanctions on schools that fail to meet the federal requirement for annual progress on standardized academic outcome measures (Quality Counts, 2007). As a result, mentors are pressured to find effective ways to reform and improve instruction. In this case, ethical dilemmas may arise when the mentor is torn between the requirement to accomplish pedagogical goals and the wish to be sensitive to mentees’ needs (e.g. teachers resisting reforms due to insufficient reward).

The Israeli mentor role to develop a mentoring program suited to the school’s agenda through a dialogue between the principal, educational team, and the inspector (District Mentoring Division, 2006) may raise the issue of the autonomy of individuals to pursue their goals in the school. Different people in the school system (e.g. principal, mentor, inspector) may have differing ideas about what is “good”, leading to questions of whose viewpoint should be accepted. This ethical dilemma is difficult, as people must be persuaded to sacrifice some of their freedom, goals, and self-interest, for the sake of the “common good” (Elsbernd, 2005). In this case, mentors may find themselves forced to make decisions against their conscience, with the attending moral consequences in their dealing with multiple and sometimes contradictory demands by different people in school (Kelchtermans, 1996).

The demand on the Israeli mentor to lead the school to maximal outcomes and evaluate the mentoring effectiveness according to goals and standards that were defined in a pre-dialogue with the other partners, i.e. principal, inspector, coordinator (District Mentoring Division, 2006) may raise the issue of distributive justice. Questions may arise such as “Is the principal’s decision fair and just to my mentees?”, when the mentor evaluates the distributive justice in school, for example, the way the principal distributes rewards for the teachers’ investment in the school, especially
when we consider the lack of resources within schools (Ncube and Wasburn, 2006). Cohen-Charash and Spector’s (2001) meta-analysis of organizational justice research finds that perception of distributive justice is strongly related to mentor satisfaction and mentees’ trust in mentor. Therefore, distributive justice is another concept that may explain the quality of mentor-mentee relationships.

In summary, mentors work within a multifaceted structure of indeterminate roles and competing values. The difficulties they face in their ethical decision-making process calls for a balanced value approach (Starratt, 1994). This study is aimed at promoting a balanced attitude through investigating different mentors’ perceptions regarding their ethical dilemmas and their various suggestions for ethical guidelines, which in the future may promote ethical decision-making by exploring alternative courses of action, determining which courses of action are ethically right, and finally, preserving and implementing the preferred alternative (Hitt, 1990).

**Ethical guidelines and mentoring**

Ethical guidelines are standards of behavior in ambiguous situations. In all professions there are times when it is not clear what is right and what is wrong (Hosmer, 1991; Murphy, 2007). Thus, each profession may need its own ethical guidelines because situations unique to a given field can neither be predicted nor responded to uniformly by all members of the relevant professional community (Shapiro and Stefkovich, 2005). Ethical guidelines are most often needed when a conflict arises between two or more possible legitimate actions. Because all the alternatives are acceptable, ethical guidelines may help solve conflicts of interest, guide behaviors, and set boundaries for what is accepted behavior (Hazzan and Lapidot, 2006).

According to Carr (2006), for ethical guidelines to be valid, members of the profession must take an active part in developing these guidelines and then adhere to them (Schwartz, 2002). Ethical guidelines have been shown to improve employees’ ethical performance (Adams et al., 2001; Valentine and Fleischman, 2002), and employees in organizations without ethical guidelines were more inclined to select an unethical course of action than those who were employed in organizations with guidelines (Singhapakdi and Vitell, 1990).

However, although mentoring requires difficult ethical choices because competing values cannot be fully satisfied (Sumsion, 2000), relatively few studies explicitly spell out the need for ethical guidelines in mentoring. Therefore, in this study we will try to describe:

- the characteristics of mentors’ ethical dilemmas;
- mentors’ perception of whether they have the ability to deal with their ethical dilemmas; and
- mentors’ perception of the ethical guidelines that should be developed.

**Method**

**Participants**
The data were collected in one academic year (2008-2009). The research included 60 Israeli mentors, 42 women and 18 men. The ratio of women to men is representative of the general composition of Israeli education personnel (Israel Central Bureau of Statistics, 2008). The average age of the participants was 45.30 (SD = 6.75), their
average school seniority was 19.20 ($SD = 4.70$), and their average mentoring seniority was 5.30 ($SD = 3.90$). The mentors, who also worked as teachers, participated voluntarily in this study. All mentors belonged to one of the largest Ministry of Education districts in Israel. The mentors came from different disciplinary backgrounds (biology, mathematics, history, Bible studies, and physics) and taught at different high schools. The schools they came from varied in size and type (state-school/religious state-school), representing a cross-section of Israeli schools.

Data collection

After receiving approval from the Ministry of Education, the principal researcher approached inspectors from different disciplinary backgrounds in high schools in the selected district and explained the goals of the study. The inspectors were asked to allow mentors from their district to participate in the study, and all consented. The principal researcher then interviewed and hired research assistants, who were asked to randomly approach one potential mentor from each school list (working with code numbers and no identifying details). In the case of refusal, another potential mentor was randomly chosen. Of the mentors approached, 75 percent agreed to participate in the study.

Next, the research assistants met each participating mentor at school and explained the goals of the study in more detail. All mentors received a formal letter describing the goals of the study. They were informed that the current study aimed to collect data about their perceptions regarding their role as mentors, the ethical dilemmas they encounter, and whether or not they perceived that mentors needed discipline-specific ethical guidelines. The letter described the study goals and the two-phase design of the study – the first phase consisted of submitting cases involving ethical dilemmas to the study website; the second phase was the convening of focus groups. The letter also described the researcher’s obligation to preserve confidentiality according to the Helsinki Treaty. This was a contributing factor in attaining willingness to participate.

An informed consent form was signed by the mentors, including specific consent to video-record the focus group sessions. Mentors were assured confidentiality regarding all ethical events that would be discussed in the focus groups. As the study dealt with sensitive ethical issues, the research assistants conducting the focus groups were specifically instructed as to how to ask questions and which questions to ask.

Data collection was performed via a two-phase design:

1. Data were collected from cases that mentors sent to the study website. The case descriptions included the mentors’ ethical dilemmas based on questions asked online (Appendix). In order to ensure the mentors’ confidentiality, only the research assistants could read the ethical cases submitted on the web but not the other mentors. In order to increase the assurance of respondent confidentiality, each mentor was assigned a code and only the research assistants had a list linking the code with the specific mentor.

2. The second phase, aimed at providing contextual information and depth, was based on the focus group meetings. The mentors were divided randomly into 12 focus groups (five mentors per group), each group led by a research assistant experienced in facilitating focus groups. Through a sharing and comparing process, participants reflected on their own interpretations of the ethical cases.
which were sent to the study web site, the derived mentor roles, and their perceptions regarding ethical guidelines, which enabled in-depth analysis and elaboration on the initially gathered data (Morgan, 1998). The Appendix shows the list of questions asked in the focus groups.

Data analysis
Participants were identified by code numbers; all participants’ names were changed to assure confidentiality. The research assistants conducting the meetings identified the participants in their focus groups through the video-recordings and linked them to their code numbers. This research combined the mentors’ self-reports and the verbatim transcription of the focus group meetings. The advantage of using two data sources is in ensuring that data are trustworthy and sound and less prone to bias (Guba and Lincoln, 1989).

The cases that were submitted online and the discussions in the focus groups were transcribed verbatim and processed as text. We selected grounded theory (GT) as our methodology because it emphasizes the emergence of ideas and themes from raw data (Taylor and Bogdan, 1998). Data analysis followed a four-step process, as outlined by Strauss and Corbin (1998) and illustrated in Table I.

(1) **Open coding.** Open coding involves the comparison, conceptualization, and categorization of data. Raw data are examined for similarities and differences, and initial conceptual categories are identified. In the open coding stage of data analysis for the current study, similar mentor roles were clustered into categories, for example, “reporting on pedagogical activity” was based on several cases where the mentors had to report on meetings and projects they had led.

(2) **Axial coding.** The process is termed “axial” because coding occurs along the axis of a category. For example, in the current study, we found that the category “tension between guarding mentee’s confidentiality and the duty to report” was based on two central roles: “reporting on pedagogical activity” and “respecting the mentee’s confidentiality”.

(3) **Selective coding.** This stage involves selecting the core categories and organizing them around a central explanatory concept. In this stage, tensions were grouped into categories of “related matter”, so as to find the most common issues with which mentors may have to cope. For example, the category “matters related to mentors’ discretion” was based on narratives related to the tension of “guarding mentee’s confidentiality versus the duty or desire to report”. The central category was “mentors’ ethical perceptions” and five core categories of “matters related to” were found related to this central category (discretion, caring, accountability, autonomy, and distributive justice).

(4) Mentors’ ethical guidelines and clarifications regarding step three were added. For example, “The mentor should respect the mentee’s confidentiality as long as no serious harm is caused to the educational process” was added to the category “matters related to mentors’ discretion”.

Table I summarizes the four-step process, shows a multifaceted model of mentors’ roles, tensions between values, and ethical guidelines related to the mentors’ roles.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Core categories (Selective coding stage)</th>
<th>Mentor discretion</th>
<th>Mentor caring</th>
<th>Mentor accountability</th>
<th>Mentor autonomy</th>
<th>Distributive justice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mentors’ roles (Open coding stage)</td>
<td>Reporting pedagogical activity</td>
<td>Observing lessons in the classroom</td>
<td>Mapping schools’ and mentees’ needs</td>
<td>Initiating new educational process</td>
<td>Advising the people in charge how to distribute the educational resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Respecting the mentee’s confidentiality</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Promoting educational process vs limited resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tension between values (Axial coding stage)</td>
<td>Guarding confidentiality vs the desire or duty to report</td>
<td>Caring for collegians vs professional commitment</td>
<td>Mentor’s accountability to the pedagogical process vs mentee misbehavior</td>
<td>Mentor autonomy vs the duty to obey the people in charge</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentors’ ethical guidelines (Step 4)</td>
<td>The mentor should respect the mentee’s confidentiality, as long as no serious harm is caused to the professional process</td>
<td>The mentor will enter the classroom only on receiving mentee’s permission</td>
<td>Leading the mentoring process by finding the proper balance among the relevant factors</td>
<td>In cases where people in charge make contradictory demands, mentors should share their uncertainties with those authorities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The mentor’s reports should reflect the pedagogical activities</td>
<td>The mentor and mentee should draw up a work contract</td>
<td></td>
<td>In a case of limited resources, the mentor will advise the principal how to find the proper balance among all concerned</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Throughout the analyzing process, the research assistants first analyzed the data independently and then collaboratively reflected on suitable categories and suggestions for ethical guidelines. The principal researcher also analyzed the entire data set independently. Then, the principal researcher and the research assistants used a cross-checking procedure of independently coding data. They met to reflect on the emerging categories and to search the data for disconfirming cases. Following Boardman and Woodruff (2004), the number of agreements over disagreements was calculated against the principal researcher’s response codes, yielding 92 percent reliability scores. In order to ensure accuracy of the analysis, data were coded and analyzed using the ATLAS.ti 5.0 – a software package that allows qualitative analysis of textual data (Muhr, 2004). The software helps to methodically organize and document themes within data and allows the user to collect text passages from one or more text documents (Crego et al., 2008).

Findings
Based on the mentors’ self-reports and their transcribed meetings, five main categories of ethical dilemmas were formed, as follows:

1. matters related to mentor discretion (24 cases);
2. matters related to mentor caring (22 cases);
3. matters related to mentor accountability (18 cases);
4. matters related to mentor autonomy (10 cases); and
5. matters related to distributive justice (6 cases).

In the following sections, an example of each of the five main categories is presented. Although some of the categories were found at a higher frequency than others, we will present below only one typical quote per category for illustration.

“Matters related to mentors’ discretion” was the largest category of ethical dilemmas, with 24 identified cases. This category includes situations where tension exists between guarding mentee’s confidentiality and the desire or duty to report. Shira, a female high-school mathematics mentor, expressed this tension when she wrote on the study web site:

As we were talking, the coordinator started to cry, and said that the principal had accused her of laziness and of shirking responsibility. The coordinator told me that she couldn’t work under these conditions. I am convinced that besides her work as an educator, she is also a good coordinator. The dilemma here was whether or not I should go and talk to the principal. The coordinator did not want the principal to know that she had confided in me, as the principal was very particular about keeping unpleasant school-related situations within the school.

Shira was reflecting on the tension between the desire to defend the coordinator by praising her professional conduct to the principal and the coordinator’s demand not to disclose the information, as the principal’s policy was to avoid publicizing internal school tensions outside the school.

“Matters related to mentors’ caring” was another important category of ethical dilemmas, with 22 cases. It reflected the tension between caring for colleagues and professional commitment. This is illustrated in the following case reported on the study web site by Moshe, a male mentor, who was assigned as a mentor in several
schools including the school where he teaches, because his mentoring includes a unique field (reducing the use of alcohol and drugs among teenagers) where he was the only person in his district responsible for this field:

I am a ninth-grade coordinator and a Ministry of Education mentor at the same school. At one of the meetings in which the principal and all the educators participated, we planned our annual conference. Only the social education coordinator was absent. Just before the opening of the conference, the principal asked me “as a good parting gesture” to let the social education coordinator lead the conference, as the latter was due to retire. I didn’t understand how he would be able to lead the conference when he was not familiar with the program and had shown no interest in it.

Moshe was reflecting on his dilemma. On the one hand, the principal asked him to demonstrate caring and respect for a colleague on the verge of retirement. On the other hand, Moshe’s sense of professional commitment prevented him from doing so, as the social education coordinator did not know the material and had not been involved in the preparations for the conference.

“The dilemmas in the accountability category” dealt with the problem associated with mentors’ accountability to the pedagogical process. A total of 18 cases were classified in this category. This category reflected the tension between the mentor’s accountability to the pedagogical process and misbehavior among mentoring partners. It was illustrated in a posting on the web site by Shachar, a male science and technology mentor:

I am a mentor at several schools. I asked my mentees to prepare lesson plans for a one-month period in order to discuss them at our meeting. I was very disappointed that not even one mentee had prepared lesson plan summaries in advance of the lesson. We re-discussed the importance of the subject. To my amazement, they all brought the required materials to the next meeting, but after thorough checking, I was disappointed for several reasons: I realized that some mentees had written their lesson plans retroactively. Other lesson plans bore no resemblance to the Ministry of Education curriculum.

Shachar was in a dilemma. On the one hand, he was accountable to a pedagogical process – finding effective ways to improve instruction by discussing lesson plans with the team. On the other hand, Shachar found that the teachers under his mentorship had taken shortcuts and had not followed the required process. Even after giving the teachers a second chance, the teachers chose to act in an inappropriate way: writing their lesson plans retroactively instead of planning them for the future, and not following the prescribed curricula.

“The mentors’ autonomy category” included ten cases, and dealt with the tension between mentor autonomy and the duty to obey the people in charge. This tension was illustrated in a posting on the study web site by Ada, a female high-school mathematics mentor:

In accordance with goals set by the Ministry of Education, I have been developing a six-year math curriculum to inform junior high school teachers of what will be expected of their students in high school so that they will plan their teaching accordingly....It is important to note that in spite of the fact that the junior high and high schools are considered one entity, the teachers at each school work separately. When I submitted the proposal for a six-year curriculum to the principal, he was very angry and would not accept the fact that there was lack of continuity between junior high and high school, saying, “We are the same school”. The
The principal asked us to change the plan. What should we do now? After all, the plan is definitely useful for the math teaching staff.

Ada reflected on the ethical dilemma between her autonomy to lead an educational process and the principal’s autonomy to determine the school’s list of priorities. Ada’s professional sense of autonomy prompted her to build a six-year math curriculum. However, this pedagogical activity demonstrated the unprofessionalism of the school in its lack of continuity between the junior high school and the high school. Ada’s dilemma stemmed from the conflict of priorities: Ada’s priority was improving the educational process while the principal’s priority was school’s ranking. Because the principal’s school was in competition with other schools in the area, and success was expressed by the number of students enrolled, the principal did not want other people to know about the lack of continuity between junior high and high school. In this case, Ada reflected her frustration since she did not know how to proceed. She would have to work in compliance with the principal and not against him.

“Distributive justice” was the final category that was found in this study which dealt with tension between promoting the educational process and limited resources. It included six cases in which principals asked teachers to work with the mentor during their free time, without monetary compensation, because school hours were limited. The narrative of a female high-school history mentor, Hana, which appeared on the study web site, serves as an example:

The background to this dilemma was the educational team’s decision to build a model for observing lessons “for collegial learning” purposes. We formulated the observation criteria, and then the coordinator took the new idea to the principal to determine times and places for observing the lessons. The principal’s response was that she had no money for substitute teachers to fill in for the teachers who would do the observations and asked that the teachers do observations during their off-hours. The coordinator commented that they had developed wonderful ideas, but had no way to apply them.

Hana perceived that one of her roles as a mentor was to empower the team coordinator and her team through developing new pedagogical processes. Hana described a situation in which she had led the coordinator and her team to create a model for collegial learning purposes. However, they had difficulty in implementing it due to limited resources, and the principal asked the teachers to do the work in their free time—without monetary compensation. In this case, Hana perceived that the principal did not make enough effort to find ways to fund the program. She was torn between the desire to advance the program which she believed was pedagogically important and the understanding that it was not fair to ask her mentees to put in extra hours without compensation.

Table II shows other presenting types of issues that arose for each ethical dilemma. These types of issues illustrated several versions of the same ethical dilemmas, reflecting that most conflicts emerge from relationships between mentor, principals, and mentees while the mentors reflect powerlessness to deal with these ethical dilemmas.

In the focus groups: implication for practice
In the focus group, “guarding confidentiality vs the desire or duty to report” brought up the issue of one of the mentor roles, according to the recommendation of the Israeli
The ethical dilemma

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Matters related to mentor discretion</th>
<th>Issues</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Guarding confidentiality vs the desire or duty to report” (24 cases)</td>
<td>The desire to defend the coordinator by praising her professional conduct to the principal and the coordinator’s demand not to disclose the information (for more details, please see p. 19)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The mentee told the mentor that the principal conspired against him because he wants to hire another teacher instead of him, but asked the mentor not to discuss it with his principal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The mentor revealed that one of his mentees was not functioning properly. The mentee asked him not to tell, that he was undergoing a difficult divorce process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The mentor knows that another mentor reports about school meetings that do not take place because he wants to be paid a full salary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The mentor was assigned to a school where he had been previously teaching, and he does not know whether to tell the people in charge everything he knows (including negative aspects) about this school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Following the national test in mathematics, the principal asked the mentor, why the grades in a certain teacher’s class are so low, saying that there are many successful mathematics teachers available. The mentor believes that this novice teacher has potential to improve with her support, but does not want to mention “potential” because the mentor sees that the principal wants immediate results and might fire the novice teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Although the school was granted a budget for a new project which means that two Hebrew teachers team-teach, the tenured teacher tried to prevent the novice teacher from participating, by giving her other duties outside the classroom (e.g. photocopying). The novice teacher told the mentor all about it, and the mentor does not know whether to tell the principal or whether to talk with the tenured teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>After the mentor observed an unsuccessful lesson, the mentees told the mentor that although the mentoring program was structured for two teachers in the same lesson, the principal usually takes one of the teachers to substitute for absent teachers. The mentees asked the mentor not to say anything to the principal because it will harm them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The mentor does not know whether to tell his inspector that although he has a regular day for mentoring, the mentee sometimes does not meet him because the principal takes him for substituting. The mentor does not want to damage his relationship with the principal if the latter discovers that he has reported this behavior</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table II.
Examples of issues that arose for each ethical dilemma

(continued)
Mentors’ ethical perceptions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The ethical dilemma</th>
<th>Issues</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Matters related to mentor caring “Caring for colleagues vs professional commitment” (22 cases) | The principal asked the mentor who was acting also as a coordinator in the same school to let his colleague, a social education coordinator who was not familiar with the program, lead the educational program (for more details, please see p. 20)  
The mentee refused to have the mentor observe his classroom lesson because he feels uncomfortable with it. The mentor cares about him and does not want to embarrass him  
The mentee refused to have the mentor do “modeling” through teaching his students because he does not want his students to be taught by anyone else in the same field. Because of their collegial relationship, the mentor does not want to embarrass him in front of his students  
The mentor works with an educational team where several years before, one of the participants was a teacher in the same school as the mentor. This mentee takes advantage of the situation and tends to be absent from the teamwork meeting. The mentor cares about him, trying to avoid talking about his behavior  
The mentor observed a lesson where the mentee taught mistakes. The mentor did not know whether to ask the mentee’s permission to do modeling to her class, whether to discuss the mistakes alone with the teacher, or whether to discuss the mistake in front of the entire team, because these mistakes might be shared by other team members. He was afraid to embarrass the teacher  
The school where the mentor has been teaching for a long time was included in the list of schools that he was assigned to mentor. The principal took advantage of the close relationship that had developed between them, and did not allow continuous mentoring as he had promised (Mentoring time was not included in the school schedule)  
The mentor does not know how to deal with a dedicated coordinator who functions well and does not know why he needs the mentor. The mentor wants to update him regarding an innovative approach in his discipline  
Two mentors are working with the same school. They agreed on the responsibilities of each one. However, during the year while collaborating, one of the mentors criticized the other’s activity, causing professional damage to the other mentor  
At the end of the year, one of the mentees brought the mentor an expensive present. The mentor, according to his professional standards, does not want to accept it; however, he does not want to insult the mentee |

Table II. (continued)
The ethical dilemma

Matters related to mentor accountability “Mentor’s accountability to the pedagogical process vs misbehavior among mentoring partners” (18 cases)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The ethical dilemma</th>
<th>Issues</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mentor was accountable to a pedagogical process. However, he found that his mentees chose to act in an inappropriate way (for more details, please see p. 21)</td>
<td>The mentor wanted to introduce a new curriculum to the educational team, but the teachers resisted because it meant that they would have to change everything they had already prepared in previous years, and they did not want to make the effort, even though it was considered necessary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One of the mentees developed a professional curriculum, but his coordinator did not credit him, and wrote his own name on it instead of the mentee’s name</td>
<td>The school was given a budget to buy computers in order to integrate the new Science and Technology curriculum. However, the Science and Technology mentor discovered that they were being used for computer lessons and not as officially stated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The mentor wanted to introduce a new curriculum to the educational team, but the teachers resisted because it meant that they would have to change everything they had already prepared in previous years, and they did not want to make the effort, even though it was considered necessary</td>
<td>The principal promised the mentor that he would participate in the work of the educational team. However, he was frequently absent, and when he came, he worked on his papers and talked on the phone during the meeting. The mentees took his behavior as a model and also started to talk on the phone during meetings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The mentor wanted to introduce a new curriculum to the educational team, but the teachers resisted because it meant that they would have to change everything they had already prepared in previous years, and they did not want to make the effort, even though it was considered necessary</td>
<td>One of the mentees in the team does not cooperate with the other mentees. The mentee argues that he does not want to teach technology, he was trained to teach art. Because of his tenure, the Ministry of Education cannot fire him and force him to teach technology. Meanwhile, the students are not being prepared adequately by him for the national tests</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The mentor wanted to introduce a new curriculum to the educational team, but the teachers resisted because it meant that they would have to change everything they had already prepared in previous years, and they did not want to make the effort, even though it was considered necessary</td>
<td>The mentees do not want to make an effort to plan class projects. They asked the mentor to do this. The mentor perceives that his job is to empower the mentees professionally, to help them do their work but not to do it for them</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Matters related to mentor autonomy “Mentor autonomy vs the duty to obey the people in charge” (10 cases)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The ethical dilemma</th>
<th>Issues</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mentor’s autonomy in leading an educational process conflicts with the principal’s autonomy in determining the school’s ranking (for more details, please see p. 22)</td>
<td>The mentor’s autonomy in leading an educational process conflicts with the principal’s autonomy in determining the school’s ranking (for more details, please see p. 22)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Although the mentor perceives that the school needs mentoring, the principal refused to allow a mentoring program because he does not like to have people other than his teachers in his school</td>
<td>Although the mentor perceives that the school needs mentoring, the principal refused to allow a mentoring program because he does not like to have people other than his teachers in his school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The mentor has several people in charge of him; some of them have contradictory demands, including scheduling meetings at the same time, so the mentor does not know what to do</td>
<td>The mentor has several people in charge of him; some of them have contradictory demands, including scheduling meetings at the same time, so the mentor does not know what to do</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The principal asked the mentor to build a working program for his school, although it is not included in the mentor’s duties. The mentor does not know what to do</td>
<td>The principal asked the mentor to build a working program for his school, although it is not included in the mentor’s duties. The mentor does not know what to do</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(continued)
State Comptroller Report (Israeli State Comptroller, 2009), which is to report on pedagogical activity. Regarding this role the mentors suggested the following derived ethical guidelines and clarifications:

- The mentor’s reports should reflect only pedagogical activities and should respect the mentee’s privacy, as long as no serious harm is caused to the professional process. What constitutes serious harm will be left to the mentor’s discretion.

- The mentor should submit reports about the pedagogical activities to all concerned at reasonably frequent intervals.

“Caring for colleagues vs professional commitment” brought up the issue of the mentor’s role of observing mentee’ lessons in the classroom. In Israel, observation of lessons is used by mentors to develop and empower the teacher and not in order to decide whether to continue the teacher’s employment (District Mentoring Division, 2006). However, in some cases, the mentees refuse to have the mentor observe their lessons. In this case the mentor is concerned about the teacher, because if his superior (the inspector, the principal) knows that the teacher refused to be observed, he will conclude that this person is not a truly professional teacher, evinced by his fear of being observed.

The mentor’s obligation to fulfill his role as observer resulted in the following derived ethical guidelines:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The ethical dilemma</th>
<th>Issues</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Matters related to distributive justice</td>
<td>The mentoring program started after the school schedule was already arranged, so there could not be teamwork between all the teachers. Therefore, the mentor agreed to the principal’s suggestion, abandoning the teamwork. At the end of the year the mentor had to report whether the goals had been achieved. Because the mentoring structure was changed, most of the goals were not achieved. The mentor does not know whether to report this to his inspector. The principal asked the mentor to recommend whether to continue employing one of the mentees because the parents are complaining and the national test grades are low. The mentor knows that is not her role. Her observations in class are aimed at empowering the mentees.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Promoting educational process vs limited resources” (6 cases)</td>
<td>The mentor desired to promote an educational program; the principal asked him to promote this educational program without providing compensation for the mentees (for more details, please see p. 23). The mentor perceives that several schools under his mentoring need more than one meeting a month, however, the limited budget of the mentoring program and the insurance do not allow him to do it. The mentor has many different mentoring duties which may damage his ability to devote time and effort to his students. The mentor perceives that his investment in one job comes at the expense of his investment in the other.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table II.
The mentor will enter the classroom only with the mentee’s permission.

The mentor’s aim in entering the classroom will be based solely on the desire to empower the teacher.

In cases where the mentee does not agree to have the mentor in the classroom, the mentor will attempt to lessen the mentee’s resistance or search for alternative ways of mentoring.

The mentor and mentee should draw up a work contract, based on the following issues: general work (form of communication, schedules, location), issues to be evaluated during the mentor’s observation of the mentee, and ways of empowering the mentee.

The tension between the mentor’s accountability to the pedagogical process and partners’ misbehavior in the mentoring process brought up the issue of the mentor’s role of mapping schools’ and mentees’ needs in order to be accountable for the mentoring program. The derived ethical guideline called for leading the mentoring process by finding the proper balance among the relevant factors (mentor, mentees, principal, inspector, curricular demands).

The tension between mentor autonomy and the duty to obey the people in charge revealed one of the mentor’s roles – initiating new educational processes. This resulted in the derived ethical guideline: In cases where people in charge make contradictory demands regarding educational initiatives, mentors should share their uncertainties with the people in charge. Finally, the tension between promoting the educational process and limited resources addressed the mentor’s role of advising the principal on how to distribute educational resources. The discussion led to the following derived ethical guideline: In a case of limited resources, the mentor will advise the principal on how to find the proper balance between all concerned.

Discussion

The present study explored the mentors’ ethical dilemmas, the derived roles, and the required guidelines identified by mentors (Please see summary in Table I), thus adding to previous studies which have not focused on the ethical aspects of mentoring. Based on the narratives of the mentors in this study, five main categories of ethical dilemmas were identified: discretion, caring, accountability, autonomy, and distributive justice. The results support previous findings that ethics is an integral part of mentors’ work (Clark et al., 2000; Johnson and Nelson, 1999; Warren, 2005). The unique value of this study, however, is in raising three important issues. First, the findings indicate that mentors perceive their role mainly as empowering their mentee and guiding the mentoring process towards finding a suitable equilibrium between all the relevant factors. Second, the mentors perceive themselves as powerless because they lack satisfactory tools for dealing with ethical dilemmas in school. Third, mentoring shares ethical dilemmas (e.g. confidentiality vs reporting, caring for colleagues vs professional commitment) with other professions in education (Bodenhorn, 2006; Colnerud, 2006) and other non-education professionals, such as medicine, nursing, law, and social work (Csikai, 2004; Kiselica and Robinson, 2001; Kopala and Burkhart, 2005; McGrath and Holewa, 2006). However, most of the mentors’ roles (e.g. reporting pedagogical activity, observing lessons in the classroom) and several of the derived ethical guidelines that mentors have suggested (e.g. submitting pedagogical reports at reasonably frequent...
intervals, entering classroom only with the mentee’s agreement) are unique to mentoring. The perception of the mentor role as combining empowerment and guidance with a sense of powerlessness, together with the unique demands made of mentors, all point to the need for ethical guidelines that are tailored to the mentoring process.

While our findings emphasize the difficulty in coping with multifaceted ethical dilemmas in mentoring, we prefer to adopt Shapiro and Stefkovich’s (2005) approach whereby this multifaceted structure is regarded as a complementary rather than conflicting structure. A complementary approach promotes a dynamic dialogue which may ultimately lead to a resolution of dilemmas rather than a clash between values, especially when we consider the mentoring literature, which suggests that mentoring should be understood as a combination of all the proposed mentor’s roles: teacher, coach, trainer, and positive role model (Galvez-Hjornevik, 1986).

The mentors’ suggestions for different ethical guidelines (Table I presents a list of ethical guidelines suggested by the mentors) may present the mentors’ need to have ethical guidelines that will help them choose a course of action when they are faced with a dilemma. Ethical guidelines may provide tools for mentors to prevent partiality which may distort judgment. We propose that ethical guidelines – rather than rules – be established. A code of ethics seems to have only limited ability to predict the moral sloppiness of multifarious obligations (Sumsion, 2000). In addition, rules demand full compliance while guidelines allow critical thinking and creativity which are needed in solving the multifaceted ethical dilemmas that mentors encounter. Critical thinking will help mentors develop more complex interconnections and the depth of thinking characteristic of expert thinkers which, with appropriate practice, render mentors more autonomous in their dealing with ethical dilemmas (Barnett, 1995). In addition, mentors with the ability of critical thinking may become the catalyst for developing expertise in reflecting thinking among their mentees (Short and Rinehart, 1993). As Daresh and Playko (1991) argue, the image of a successful mentor is that of someone who not only encourages mentees to become more professional, but who also is deeply committed to providing expertise in critical thinking to his mentees.

It may be said that the study findings support a four-partite frame, based on studies by Starratt (1994, 2003) and Shapiro and Stefkovich (2001). The tri-partite frame developed by Starratt (1994) includes three “ethics” underlying ethical practice: the ethic of justice – fairness or equal treatment, the equitable distribution of resources; the ethic of critique – examining barriers to fairness (e.g. policies, practices); the ethic of care – responsibility to be caring in one-to one relationships; and the fourth ethical dimension of Shapiro and Stefkovich (2001): the ethic of profession – consideration of moral aspects unique to the profession which may shaped by professional ethical guidelines. However, it seems that the present study has expanded this four-partite frame by adding more ethical dimensions such as the ethic of discretion, the ethic of autonomy, and the ethic of accountability. These ethical dimensions may complement each other, promoting the ethical decision-making process to a higher standard among mentors.

As mentioned above, the five broad categories of ethical dilemmas (Table I describes the five categories) are not unique to mentoring. Nevertheless, several aspects in each category are better understood within the framework of mentoring. In the category of caring, dilemmas are often rooted in collegial relations.
organizations often encourage friendship among workers so as to develop a positive climate which may increase organizational effectiveness (Coleman et al., 1991), our findings suggest that at times, collegial relationships between mentors and mentees may actually reduce school effectiveness. Professional commitment is sometimes compromised because mentors do not wish to harm their colleagues.

Because of the relatively limited resources of the Israeli educational system (Ofek Hadash Reform, 2009), specific issues appear in the distributive justice category. A recent publication, Education at a Glance (OECD, 2006), provides evidence that the annual expenditure in high schools for all services per student (US dollars converted using PPP of GDP) is lower in Israel (5,959) than in Australia (7,788), Germany (7,173), Italy (7,938), Korea (6,410), The Netherlands (6,996), Sweden (7,662), the UK (7,290) and the USA (9,590). The lower allocation of resources by the Israeli educational system may explain why mentors are especially sensitive to cases related to the just division of resources for their mentees.

The study findings indicate that the mentors desire to develop a sense of their own autonomy while they lead the educational process. Mentor and mentee relate to each other as peers, and we may expect, therefore, that when mentors act to achieve greater autonomy, their actions will also enhance their mentees’ autonomy. In addition, mentors’ accountability may improve mentee quality due to the fact that the mentor will be committed to work so the mentee reaches higher achievements.

In general, mentors value their role, because it is usually an acknowledgement that they are regarded as excellent teachers. However, their sense of uncertainty as to how to handle dilemmas as they arise presents a challenge. Although a single study cannot clearly establish the necessity of developing ethical guidelines unique to the field of mentoring, the results of this study do suggest that such ethical guidelines would help facilitate the decision-making process among mentors.

Limitations of the study
This study used a limited data set of 60 Israeli mentors in one Ministry of Education district in Israel. Hence, this study does not presume to establish the unequivocal need for national or international ethical guidelines for mentors. It does, however, show that mentors’ complex ethical role justifies a development of ethical guidelines that will help them deal with ethical dilemmas unique to their practice. The study findings were based on mentors’ post hoc perceptions of their experiences, with all the concomitant problems of such a retrospective approach. Nevertheless, the data that were gathered regarding mentors’ ethical dilemmas and their opinions about formulating ethical guidelines are weighty issues that should be explored in further research.

Toward developing ethical programs for mentors
While governments all over the world invest much effort and resources in improving their educational systems, only few programs provide any organized training for mentors (Gagen and Bowie, 2005). In fact, most mentors have never seen a formal job description of their roles and have little idea what those duties might be (Wright and Smith, 2000). In addition, many districts in the USA provide no training for mentors because they assume that mentors’ experience will suffice. However, the study findings indicate that even though mentors may be very experienced teachers, they still require training in a variety of skills. For example, they must know how to deal with difficult
ethical issues about the quality of instruction and to encourage reflective teaching skills that will help mentees’ professional growth (Rowley, 1999).

Based on the study findings, which demonstrate that most of the mentors’ dilemmas involved conflicts with principals, the development of training programs for mentors should involve principals. The principals should become part of the process (e.g. being invited to meetings) which may reduce principals’ resistance to changes. The training programs should offer insights into the dilemmas associated with issues such as discretion, caring, accountability, autonomy, and justice in mentoring. Through these programs, ethical guidelines will be developed which can assist mentors in clarifying their roles and managing their dilemmas, with the support of the school principals.

Directions for future studies
In conclusion, below are some possible directions for future studies in order to extend our understanding of the nature of mentors’ ethical dilemmas and how to minimize them. First, research on mentoring should extend its focus beyond the acquisition of skills, to how the ethical context within which mentors work shapes the character of their work, the skills that they develop, and their internal dissonance regarding their two jobs: teaching and mentoring.

Second, an interesting finding was that most of the mentors’ ethical dilemmas reported in the findings illustrated conflicts with school principals. Thus, future studies (both from a qualitative and a quantitative perspective) should seek more insight into the mentor-principal relationship. Third, future study should investigate whether mentors perceive improvement in their ethical decision-making after participating in workshops (which are considered a safe environment) based on case studies and simulations in ethical context. Finally, longitudinal research should consider the effectiveness of these mentors’ ethical workshops from the point-of-view of the mentors, their superiors, and school principals. Ultimately, one of the main goals of the mentoring program is to improve school climate and school achievements.

References


Hitt, W.D. (1990), *Ethics and Leadership: Putting Theory into Practice*, Battelle Press, Columbus, OH.


Ofek Hadash Reform (2009), Israel Teachers Union, Jerusalem (in Hebrew).


**Further reading**


**Appendix**

Questions asked online:

Please describe an ethical dilemma that arose in the course of your mentoring, according to the following issues:

- What was the context (e.g. meeting with the mentee/principal/supervisor/educational team)?
- Who was involved in these ethical dilemmas (e.g. other mentor/coordinator/principal/mentees)?
- Can you describe the scenario?
- What were the perceptions of each of the participants?
- What happened in the end?
Questions asked in the focus groups:

- Can you share with us one or more ethical dilemmas that arose in the course of your mentoring and was submitted online?
- Who was involved in these ethical dilemmas?
- Can you describe one or more mentors’ roles which related to this ethical dilemma?
- Do you perceive a need for ethical guidelines? Can you explain?
- If you do perceive a need for ethical guidelines, could you suggest some?

The mentors who spoke voluntarily in the focus group had to repeat their ethical dilemma because in order to preserve confidentiality among participants, the other mentors could not read their cases on the web. Only the research assistants had access to their cases.

About the author
Orly Shapira-Lishchinsky is a Faculty Member at the Department of Educational Administration, Leadership and Policy at Bar-Ilan University, Israel. Her research areas include evaluation of school effectiveness, organizational ethics, and withdrawal behaviors. Her recent publications include articles in *European Journal of Teacher Education, International Journal of Educational Management* and *Oxford Review of Education*. Orly Shapira-Lishchinsky can be contacted at: Shapiro4@mail.biu.ac.il