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Orly Shapira-Lishchinsky, Jeffrey Glanz & Anat Shaer

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TEAM-BASED SIMULATION: TOWARD DEVELOPING ETHICAL GUIDELINES AMONG AMERICAN AND ISRAELI TEACHERS IN JEWISH SCHOOLS

Orly Shapira-Lishchinsky
School of Education, Bar-Ilan University, Ramat-Gan, Israel

Jeffrey Glanz
Azrieli Graduate School of Jewish Education and Administration/Michlalah Jerusalem College, Yeshiva University, New York, New York, USA

Anat Shaer
School of Education, Bar-Ilan University, Ramat-Gan, Israel

Abstract

This study attempts to explore Israeli and American teachers' perceptions based on their ethical dilemmas in Jewish schools. A cross-national study was undertaken in Jewish schools, examining fifty teachers from Israel and fifty-one teachers from the United States. Designed with team-based simulations, this study revealed strong similarities between teachers' ethical dilemmas in both Israel and the United States. Several differences were found in the ethical guidelines participants created, based on contextual, school-related factors. This study suggests that ethical guidelines should be developed by teachers and that the use of team-based simulations is warranted to assist teachers in ethical decision making.

This study aims to gain an in-depth understanding of teachers’ perceptions regarding their ethical dilemmas in Jewish schools in both Israel and the United States. We examined the role ethical guidelines play in negotiating ways teachers in Jewish schools in both countries grapple with various constant ethical challenges. We decided to focus on Jewish schools because ethics, as a discipline, is an integral part of Jewish school curricula (Novick and Glanz 2011). We studied teachers in Jewish schools in Israel and the United States because more than 80% of the world’s Jews live in Israel and the United States (Pew Research Center 2013) and because research indicates that U.S. influence on Israeli society is significant (Rebhun and Levy 2006).
At present, only a draft version of a code of ethics exists for teachers in Israel. In the United States, codes of ethics for educators have been developed in the public sector (e.g., Association of American Educators 2010), but have still not been fully instituted in most Jewish schools (Mawdsley 2006). There is often little input within the schools from teachers who are expected to implement these ethical guidelines (Slattery and Rapp 2003). Moreover, teachers who are aware of these codes find them particularly difficult to apply to an actual ethical event they encounter (Shapira-Lishchinsky 2013).

This study examines context (e.g., different schools within each country) as related to the development of teachers’ attitudes in Jewish schools toward school-related ethical incidents. We will discuss the role that ethical guidelines may play in assisting teachers in both countries, and analyze the benefit of using team-based simulations (TBS) for developing ethical guidelines for teachers in Jewish schools in both the United States and Israel. Toward this discussion, we begin by briefly describing the religious and educational contexts of these schools in their respective countries.

JEWS IN THE UNITED STATES VERSUS IN ISRAEL

According to Pew Research Center (2013) Israel’s Jewish population is roughly the same size as the U.S. Jewish population (in the United States 5.7 million and in Israel 5.6), accounting for about 41% of the world’s Jewish population. Thus, more than 80% of the world’s Jews live in Israel and the United States. While Jews make up about 2% of the U.S. population, Israel is the only country in the world where a majority of the population is Jewish (75.6%).

The Pew Research Center (2013) illuminates many different ways in which Americans and Israelis self-identify as Jewish. One categorization is by religion. In traditional Judaism (Orthodox as well as in some other denominations such as Conservatives) any person whose mother was a Jew is considered Jewish. Thus, for this group matrilineal descent determines one’s Jewish status. In the United States 4.2 out of 5.7 million Jews identify themselves in this manner. Another way of categorizing individuals as Jews is in a secular or cultural sense. This grouping includes any person who was raised as Jewish or had a Jewish parent. They consider themselves Jewish, regardless of religious affiliation.

In Israel particularly, the definition of “who is a Jew” has become an important political issue, due to the involvement of religious parties
in the government. Generally, according to Israel’s “Law of Return” (1970) that is based on Orthodox Judaism, a person is considered Jewish only if s/he was born to a Jewish mother.

For the most part, Jews in the United States (based on the above categories) view their cultural and ethnic identities in harmony with their status as full citizens. Still, many American Jews identify strongly in terms of an ethnic-religious community. They have developed local, national, and international institutions. The majority of Jews are committed to Israel and the continuity of the Jewish people, but they consider their “home” to be the United States (Bekerman and Rosenfeld 2011).

The changes and developments transpiring in Western societies, particularly in the United States, influence the cultural preferences of the Israeli population. Yet given the Jewish majority of Israel’s society, there is a strong relationship between state and religion (Rebhun and Levy 2006).

The political nature of religion in Israel precludes serious communication between religious leaders of different Jewish sects or denominations, since neither Conservative nor Reform rabbis are officially recognized as they are in the United States. In America, religious pluralism is normative and American Jews are committed to the view that the multiple expressions of Judaism are legitimate (Goldscheider 2010).

“Orthodox” refers to Jews who adhere strictly to Jewish religious tradition, primarily through observance of “mitzvoth” (religious commandments), while there is a strong similarity between the behaviors of American Orthodox Jews and Orthodox Israelis. Reform or Conservative Jews, on the other hand, sought to make pronounced changes in religious tradition and observance in response to modern Western culture, as well as desiring to assimilate.

In terms of types and frequency of religious practices, there are also many similarities between Conservative Jews in the United States and Israelis who are marginally affiliated with a synagogue. These Israelis accentuate traditional Jewish practices, rather than ascribing a religious meaning to them.

Marked differences are found between the least religiously observant American Jews (Reform) and secular Israeli Jews. For Reform Jews, given the lack of a public Jewish environment, it is important to maintain contacts with communal institutions and organized Jewish activities, as well as some modified Jewish ritual. Secular Israelis, on the other hand, may often reject any religious ritual, as their everyday
public life is strongly imbued with Israeli-Jewish non-religious content (Rebhun and Levy 2006).

THE JEWISH EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM:
THE UNITED STATES VERSUS ISRAEL

The United States

Modern American Jewish educational institutions include private Jewish day schools. This private network of autonomous schools is primarily governed and funded through local initiatives in hundreds of Jewish communities throughout the United States. There is no single board that dictates education policy for these U.S. schools, unlike Israeli schools. The high tuition fees parents must pay for this private educational system can create a financial burden for the parents (Schick 2009).

Israel

The Israeli Jewish educational system reflects the divisions of different population groups and is divided into public schools, religious public schools and ultra-Orthodox independent schools. In Israel, The Ministry of Education is responsible for school curricula and educational standards. Public schools receive funding from the Ministry of Education according to the size of the student population. In contrast to their American counterparts, Israel school tuitions are significantly less (Wolff and Breit 2012).

The United States versus Israel

According to the OECD (2011) Education at a Glance, the Israeli annual expenditure per student on education in schools, as measured by the purchasing power parity (PPP), is low (average of 5,871.5 USD) compared to the United States (average of 11,039.5 USD). In addition, we should consider that most Jewish schools in Israel are public, while in the United States Jewish schools are private, leading to more resources in Jewish schools in the United States. We found that class size in Jewish schools in the United States is significantly lower than in most Israeli schools. The larger class size in Israel is a major factor that contributes to higher levels of student misbehavior. Moreover, in
Israel, disciplinary sanctions that teachers can employ are limited by law (e.g., Almog 2004).

**Critical Ethical Incidents in Education**

A critical incident is usually defined as an undesirable situation that marked a significant turning-point in a teacher’s life. In education, critical incidents are not necessarily sensational events. Their classification as “critical incidents” is based on the meaning that teachers attribute to them (Shapira-Lishchinsky 2011). Griffin (2003) demonstrated that reflecting on critical incidents increased the orientation towards growth and inquiry. Thus, by encouraging teachers to reflect on critical incidents, it is anticipated that they will know how to deal better with ethical dilemmas.

**Ethical Dilemmas in Teaching and Ethical Guidelines**

An ethical dilemma is defined as a choice between two or more courses of action with moral obstacles on each side, making it difficult to decide the proper course to pursue (Campbell 2006). The difficulty is enhanced by the fact that quite often there are no clear guidelines offered by existing school policies. The absence of these ethical guidelines, or where they do exist, the failure to employ them, may heighten confusion.

The complex nature of the educational system invites numerous situations in which ethical dilemmas might arise. Hence, ethical guidelines might help to promote ethical decision-making processes. One way to encourage teachers to be ethical is the development of ethical guidelines (O’Neill and Bourke 2010). In this study we will present the development of ethical guidelines through team TBS.

**Team-Based Simulation**

TBS is defined as an exercise involving participants functioning safely in a risk-free environment. It is a training and feedback method in which participants practice tasks in lifelike circumstances with feedback from peers, after having been video-recorded. Such activities assist participants to improve their ability to cope and resolve intractable ethical dilemmas they face. TBS may be a valuable tool in mitigating ethical tensions in education because simulation can offer a safe and “mistake-forgiving” method (Thavikulwat 2009).
In sum, based on the above theoretical background, the study goals were:

1. To explore Israeli and American teachers’ ethical perceptions based on ethical dilemmas they face in Jewish schools.
2. To compare and analyze Israeli and American teachers’ suggestions for ethical guidelines based on their simulated experiences.

**METHOD**

**Participants**

The study comprised 51 (35 women and 15 men) Jewish teachers from the United States and 50 Jewish teachers from Israel (40 women and 10 men). The participants in each country came from different disciplines and from different levels of teaching, representing a cross-section of Jewish schools both in Israel and the United States. More specifically, in the United States the teachers came from religious modern Orthodox schools (15 women and 5 men), non-religiously observant community schools (11 women and 7 men) and private Conservative schools (9 women and 3 men). In Israel all the teachers worked in the two main types of public schools—state religious (22 women and 4 men) and state non-religious (18 women and 6 men).

The average age of the Israeli participants was 32.70 ($SD = 3.65$), and the average age of the American participants was 30.50 ($SD = 2.45$). All participants held at least a B.A. degree and some also held an M.A. These characteristics roughly represent the composition of teachers in U.S. and Israeli Jewish educational institutions (Bachholf 2011; Israel Central Bureau of Statistics 2013).

**Study Procedure and Ethical Considerations**

Having received permission to conduct the study from the respective institutional review boards of each university, principals were contacted and informed about the purposes of the study. Principals were asked by the researchers to inform teachers about the study. The teachers who volunteered contacted us and we organized group information meetings at our universities in Israel and the United States. Participants were informed of the study goals, the pledge to preserve anonymity and confidentiality, and their right to withdraw from the
study at any time. Participants who volunteered for the study signed an informed consent form.

**Data Collection**

The research was performed via a three-stage design:

1. **Generating a pool of critical incidents posing ethical dilemmas for team simulations.** Each participant was asked to describe one critical ethical incident that had occurred in their school. The participants emailed these cases to the research coordinator, who formulated them to fit the structure of role-play for team-based simulations.

2. **Simulating these ethical events.** The participants were divided randomly into groups. The mentor randomly chose which event/s the participants would simulate in each session and who would participate in the role-playing. The simulations were videotaped.

3. **Investigating the emerging ethical dilemmas (post-simulation discussion).** As soon as the simulation was completed, the video technician in each country uploaded the videotaped simulations to the classroom computer. The segments chosen by the mentors and the participants were the ones that included the focal points highlighting the ethical dilemmas. Inasmuch as the simulations covered sensitive ethical issues, the discussions began with a set of specific questions, like: “Can you share with us one or more ethical dilemmas that arose in the team simulation?”

A total of 32 simulations were developed by participants in Israel and the United States (16 simulations in each country). Each session lasted 45 minutes (10 minutes of role-playing and 35 minutes of discussion), and included 2–3 simulation sessions per meeting.

**Data Analysis**

The transcripts from the study conducted in Israel and in the United States were transferred to the investigators from each country for continuing analysis. The coding process focused on establishing semantic clusters of critical ethical incidents as they emerged from the analysis (Strauss and Corbin 1998). The data were analyzed using a stepwise method: *First*, each scenario was read through several
times to convey the general idea and to identify the ethical dilemmas involved. Second, similar experiences of ethical dilemmas were clustered and classified as categories. Finally, the content of similar subcategories of ethical guidelines was combined into the ethical dilemma categories.

**FINDINGS**

Every simulation evidenced a number of ethical dilemmas. A qualitative analysis of the 32 simulations of critical ethical incidents revealed the following categories of ethical dilemmas: *Caring Climate vs. Formal Climate* (six cases from Israel and four cases from the United States); *Distributive Justice vs. Procedural Justice* (four cases from Israel and three cases from the United States); *Confidentiality vs. School Rules* (two cases from Israel and five cases from the United States); *Loyalty to Colleagues vs. School Norms* (three cases from Israel and three cases from the United States); *Educational Agenda vs. School Standards* (three cases from Israel and three cases from the United States); and *The Right to Freedom vs. Human Dignity* (two cases from Israel and one case from the United States).

These categories of ethical dilemmas generated different subcategories of ethical guidelines (Figure 1), such as: “Acting as role models,” “Behaving according to school standards,” and “Dividing school resources fairly.”

**Categories, Sub-Categories, and Examples That Emerged from the Analysis of the Simulations**

Following are details of the variety of categories and subcategories in this study, as they were handled and processed during the research.

*Caring Climate versus Formal Climate.* The category that emerged reflected the tension between caring for the other (students, teachers) and maintaining formality (school rules, professional standards) and is based on the following two different situations, in Israel and in the United States.

In Israel, the participants were role-playing a situation in which the school principal and the homeroom teacher discussed vandalism that occurred in the school bathroom:
But in addition to the rules, the school must be concerned about the children’s welfare and consider the situation in a humane way. We are dealing with children. (Female participant, 32 years old, State religious school, acting as a homeroom teacher in high school)

In the United States the participants role-played a situation in which they had to deal with an emotionally traumatized student who was hurting other students: “Schools as a whole are based on rules, but there has to be some sort of care for the student as well” (Male participant, 28 years old, private Conservative school, acting as a school principal in a high school).
In both cases, the participants, when considering whether their strategy should be caring or formal, preferred the caring dimension. However, it was found, especially in Israel, that in specific contexts there was also a desire for adherence to school mandates for appropriate behavior (formal climate). For example, there was a member of the student council who posted messages on Facebook using the name of a student in her class. The student in these posts was cursed and then inappropriate messages were sent to the rest of the class:

We are looking at the essence of the offense. No matter who did it, the norms, rules and regulations of the school were violated. We are required to safeguard our school’s reputation. (Female participant, 25 years old, state non-religious school, during the post-simulation discussion)

After the role-playing scenarios, the participants in each country developed ethical guidelines based on the particular dilemma, in this case caring versus formal climate. A subtle difference between the two countries emerged. In generating the ethical guidelines, the Israeli cohort voiced interest in acting based on a caring perspective but felt that, since they were role-models for students, they had to adhere to the school’s formal structural requirements. As reported by a representative participant: “We’re educators who are role modeling—therefore we should behave according to school standards” (from the Israeli scenario about vandalism in the school bathroom). By contrast, teachers from Jewish schools in the United States did not feel the need to develop ethical guidelines that relied primarily on formal climate, so they more readily stressed the caring framework. One representative participant stated: “We would find some sort of compromise in the middle while dealing with ethical decision making. You can’t just punish. You just can’t follow rules blindly” (from the American scenario about the emotionally traumatized student).

_Distributive Justice versus Procedural Justice._ An analysis of the scenarios derived from the simulations revealed a category that reflects the tension between distributive justice (i.e., how to allocate resources fairly), versus procedural justice (i.e., how to conduct a fair process). For example, this dilemma arose in the following two representative scenarios. In these scenarios, the participants discussed a situation in which two children came from very different social and economic
situations. In the Israeli scenario, one child came from an “underprivileged” neighborhood and wished to be accepted to a school with high standards:

According to the file, she is definitely a good student, but we need to think what will happen after we accept her . . . a result of this might be that other parents from the neighborhood will want their children to be accepted to the school. We know exactly what happens in this neighborhood, so I’m very afraid to accept her. Every student here needs a lot of school financial investment, more than students from good neighborhoods. (Female participant, 26 years old, a State non-religious school, acting as a high school principal, during the role-playing)

In analyzing discussions among study participants regarding this situation, it was evident that there was a struggle between those who advocated for the “disadvantaged” child and those who raised issues of the effect that admitting such a student would have on the school. Yet as the discussion continued, consensus was achieved that equitable treatment of all students is axiomatic.

In the U.S. scenario, the two students came from different socioeconomic backgrounds. They both had been caught breaking school rules; however, only the low social status student was reprimanded and punished:

“Why did the other child not get punished? Because I don’t have money to give the school, my child gets treated differently?” (Female participant, 28 years old, a non-religiously observant community school, acting as a mother in an elementary school during the simulation role-playing).

In analyzing discussions of study participants, it appeared that some participants were concerned about the presumed unfair treatment of the “low” status child; however, during the group simulation, others denied that the treatment was unjust and indicated that the student from the lower socioeconomic group behaved “much more aggressively” and therefore “deserved” differential treatment.

Yet the American participants, as well as their Israeli counterparts, overwhelmingly raised issues of equity for all students as the “just thing to do.”

Regarding the development of an ethical code, Israeli participants focused on distributive justice. For instance, “We believe that we should divide the resources we have fairly while maintaining educational principles.” U.S. participants were concerned with procedural
justice. For instance, “We should base our decision making on equitable treatment of every student.”

In sum, in the scenarios as well as the discussions that followed, participants from both countries sought and relied on a social justice framework. Providing students from different backgrounds with equitable resources and opportunities seemed to be axiomatic, and they sought ways to achieve equity in consonance with the school educational process.

Confidentiality versus School Rules

This category reflects the tension between the desire to maintain student confidentiality and the obligation to adhere to school rules. For example, in the U.S. scenario a student had been caught smoking in the school yard:

He is only a 9th grader. . . . However, school policy dictated a zero tolerance policy in cases of smoking and drugs. In any case, it would be a lot easier for teachers if they knew that there is someone to talk about it... after all, I would like to help this student. (A male participant, 27 years old, a non-religiously observant community school, during the post-simulation discussion)

In a related situation, an Israeli girl saw her teacher as “a friend” and felt comfortable sharing a new experience with her—using marijuana:

The girl actually came to me, that obviously means she wanted to listen to what I have to say, so I knew I had a chance to work with her before going to the authorities. (A female participant, 32 years old, a State non-religious school, acting as a high school art teacher during role playing)

Both the Israeli and the U.S. participants agreed that they needed to maintain limits and enforce school sanctions.

Following are some sample excerpts from ethical guidelines that the participants formulated:

We should share information with the educational team... in the long run it will be in the best interests of the student. (from the American scenario- a student who has been caught smoking in the school yard)

We believe that in any case of concern about potential harm to the student, it is necessary to involve external professional bodies. (from the Israeli scenario- sharing a new experience)
Loyalty to Colleagues versus School Norms

In this category, the most problematic aspect centers on the perception that a colleague must protect a colleague. In the Israeli simulation, the teacher stormed into the school principal’s office and reported that one of the girls had written derogatory comments about her in Facebook. Incensed, the teacher explained to the principal the ramifications of such a blatant violation of school norms:

... We have to do something that will be serious enough to shake up these children. ... Things they do in their own home are difficult to control, but here she derided me on Facebook. ... Something happened that is unforgiveable. (A female participant, 45 years old, a State non-religious school, acting as a secondary school homeroom teacher during role-playing)

The school principal did not concur with the teacher’s distress. Consequently, the principal took no immediate action against the student, thereby not supporting the teacher, at least in the teacher’s view. The principal argued as follows: “... Because of a little foolish thing that a 14-year-old girl did, you are going to ruin her life?” (A female participant, 27 years old, a State religious school, acting as a secondary school principal, during a role-playing simulation).

In the latter case, the teacher was frustrated by the “lack of loyalty” displayed by the principal. On the other hand, the principal thought that the teacher had overreacted. The principal failed to appreciate the teacher’s distress over the matter. Moreover, the principal did not see the situation as a conflict over professional loyalty to colleagues.

Another simulation emerged in the United States context dealing with a teacher who was asked by his school principal for a positive letter of reference to be given to the school superintendent: “I don’t know what I’m going to do. He’s entirely incompetent, unprofessional, but he’s my boss ...” (A male participant, 29 years old, acting as an educational coordinator in a private Conservative school, during a role-playing simulation).

In this situation, the teacher was greatly conflicted. On the one hand, he felt compelled to support his principal, simply because he was his principal. However, it seemed unethical to him to agree to write a reference for a person he did not respect.

Participants in the study formulated the following ethical guidelines that they thought would be quite useful in grappling with the aforementioned tensions: “We believe that we must act to preserve
respect for the teacher while exercising discretion” (for the Israeli scenario), and: “We believe that a subordinate is never allowed to give a recommendation” (for the U.S. scenario).

**Educational Agenda versus School’s Standards**

The next theme that emerged from the simulations deals with the conflict between the educational agenda (teacher/parent) and school’s standards. Parents often have their own personal agenda or value system that may, at times, come into conflict with school norms and standards.

In the first scenario from an Israeli participant, the teacher’s desire (i.e., educational agenda) was to encourage creativity in student learning by structuring a lesson aimed to motivate her students. The teacher allowed her students to turn the classroom into a “Knesset” (elected government legislature). However, it created chaos because the students, given pretty much free reign, took a “big flowerpot from the corridor into the classroom causing dirt to be spilled all over.” The principal happened to enter the classroom at that precise moment and appeared shocked at the “apparent chaos.” He stormed out of the room. Later he summoned the teacher to his office and expressed dissatisfaction at the situation. Disregarding the teacher’s explanations, the principal reprimanded her. Consequently, the school principal, with his educational agenda; that is, his responsibility is to make sure that the students as well as the teacher adhere to school rules, argued that:

> We as educators have to make sure that our students will know the line between right and wrong. And we can’t always support their ideas, especially if they result in chaos. (A male participant, 37 years old, a public-religious school, acting as a high school principal during the role playing segment)

In another scenario in the United States, we found that conflict arose in a situation in which a parent (representing the stance of bringing a personal educational agenda) did not send her child to school because, as a divorced parent, she wanted to spend time with her child. This occurred several times with increasing frequency as the semester progressed. The teacher (representing school standards) attempted to explain that such absences were educationally detrimental to the child. The parent at first defended her actions, but later lied,
saying, “My child has a medical condition that prevents her from attending.” In the simulation, the teacher reacts “When schools have very strict attendance policies, we cannot have parents acting unethically by lying saying, ‘my child is sick, etc.’” (A female participant, 33 years old, a non-religiously observant community school, during the post-simulation discussion).

The ethical guideline for the Israeli scenario gives the teacher legitimacy for the educational agenda: “We believe that a teacher has the right to select teaching strategies that s/he feels are most appropriate to motivate student learning.”

The ethical guidelines for the U.S. scenario regarding a parent’s willful act not to send a child to school was: “We believe that a teacher must enforce school attendance policies, thus upholding a commitment to the curriculum and procedures for maintaining school rules and ensuring high student achievement for all.”

The Right to Freedom versus Human Dignity

Sometimes the combination of “the right to freedom” and “the right to human dignity” raises conflicts and dilemmas at both the individual and societal levels. The first U.S. scenario, mentioned earlier, described the situation of a teacher who wanted to submit a complaint against a student who opened a Facebook page against her. The conflict is between the student’s free speech (“right to freedom”) and the damage to the teacher’s professional reputation (“human dignity”): “The students can’t write whatever they want. . . . I have my self-dignity. They should know that I’m not their friend. I’m their teacher . . . ” (A female participant, 24 years old, acting as a science teacher in a private Conservative school, during a role-playing episode).

A scenario in Israel involved a situation in which the municipal education department decided to convene all the high schools in the city for a Memorial Day ceremony. The conflict centered on the “right to freedom” (there were both religious and secular high schools, each one with its own ideology) and the offer made by the municipality—a financial grant to the schools that participate, which might impinge on human dignity if they act according to Orthodox religious regulations. This dilemma is reflected in the following statement:

Our school spirit is guided by religion, and as you know there is a very big problem if our boys would have to dance with girls. We sincerely wish to take part in the ceremony but we must address those points. (A male participant,
29 years old, a State religious school, acting as a school principal during role-playing)

The ethical guidelines that emerged both in the United States and Israel were similar in their themes: “We believe that we must find a middle ground between conflicting values” (Israel) and “A balanced solution should be found between the parties involved” (U.S.). In other words, teachers must seek a compromise that seeks a win–win resolution for all parties.

**DISCUSSION**

This study presents a new approach to developing ethical guidelines for teachers in Jewish schools, both in the United States and in Israel. We surmised that there might be parallels between the ethical perceptions among the participants in the United States and Israel, since the ties between the two countries are significant.

We found that similar ethical dilemmas and ethical guidelines emerged both in Israel and in the United States, even though American Jewish teachers operate as a minority group within a majority society. It seems that commonalities, mostly cultural and religious, centered on universal values and irrespective of geographic differences, played an important role in terms of study participants’ perceptions of their ethical dilemmas. Similar ethical dilemmas may also be explained by common problems and issues faced by teachers in both countries.

The findings indicated that Jewish teachers’ perceptions (all the participants were Jewish) in both locations (United States and Israel) are greatly affected by contextual, school-related factors. For example, we found that with few exceptions, participants from each country focused on different ethical guidelines. For example, considering the common tension between the caring ethical climate and formal ethical climate, we found that the Israeli “naughtiness” mind-set (a phrase coined by several Israeli participants) led to a perception that rules and regulatory policies are necessary in order to control student and even teacher behavior within schools. Thus, the formulation of ethical guidelines that encouraged compliance with school standards was widely advocated by participants in their simulations. In contrast, the U.S. “disciplined” mind-set (as it was referred to by several American participants) contributed to a need for compromise.
We believe an explanation for this difference may center on context. We found that the Israeli “naughtiness” mind-set may be influenced by large classes (40 students in a class is not unusual), as well as the heterogeneous nature of public schools (socioeconomic differences and a tremendous influx of new immigrants). Consequently, this may have led to participants selecting a large number of ethical dilemmas concerning students’ misbehavior. The U.S. “disciplined” mind-set makes sense given the predominance of Jewish private schools. In these schools, the average class size is comparatively small (about 20 students) and is more homogeneous, comprised overwhelmingly of the high socioeconomic group in the Jewish community.

Moreover, we found that parents both in the United States and Israel have generally become much more involved in their children’s school life. Israeli parents, however, tend to intervene by supporting their children against school policies. For instance, Israeli parents would readily support their child who wanted to smoke cigarettes in the school yard, while parents in the United States were found to respect school policies and teachers themselves to a greater extent. We may explain the Israeli parents’ attitude based on previous studies indicating that Israeli parents distrust the system because of the proliferation of misbehavior and low academic achievement levels (Dor and Rucker-Naidu 2012).

Contextually, we believe the extent to which Israeli and U.S. participants viewed their respective dilemmas reflects the degree of their tolerance regarding student behavior. In the Israeli Facebook case, the head of the student council, a teenage girl, negatively affected another student. Here, the teacher responsible for the student council fought to keep the offending girl in her position, because it happened outside the school, and the school is generally not involved in those kinds of after-school issues. In the U.S. case, a girl and a teacher were involved, and the girl sought to damage the teacher’s reputation. In this case, there was an outcry for the school to respond in the teacher’s favor. Thus, the context of tolerance or intolerance demonstrated in specific cases in each country again reveals important differences.

Additionally, we found that while most of the ethical dilemmas represent universal values that the Jewish religion inherently promotes (such as a caring climate, procedural or distributive justice), we found only one case where Jewish (in this case Orthodox) regulations had an influence on teachers’ ethical dilemmas and, as a result, on the ethical guidelines. For example, the case of the Israeli Memorial Day patriotic ceremony was the only example that demonstrated the
role religious regulations may have on the manner in which participants approached resolving ethical dilemmas. This particular scenario demonstrated the conflict of Orthodox teachers regarding their place in a democratic society. On the one hand, they wanted to participate in the public ceremony but, on the other hand, they still wanted to preserve the mandate not to allow boys to dance with girls publicly (which, according to Orthodox Jewish regulations, is forbidden).

Study participants repeatedly reported that their work in schools is not guided by a firmly established set of ethical guidelines, codes, or policies. We are not surprised by this finding, since we reported earlier in this study that there are no universal ethical guidelines available to teachers in Jewish schools in the United States or Israel (the latter, however, does have a draft version). Without an ethical code to guide their decision making, participants relied on personal experiences and values to guide their work. In the few instances that participants attested to a school code, they reported that they were never involved in creating the codes.

A review of existing codes developed in the United States (e.g., by teacher unions or national education associations) and Israel (e.g., by the Ministry of Education) indicates a top-down approach with little, if any, teacher involvement. The present findings may indicate that TBS activities that engage teachers in designing their own ethical guidelines are a potentially fruitful way to encourage teacher involvement in the development of ethical codes. Our study indicates that TBS activities are warranted to assist teachers in ethical decision making.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on previous studies, we think that the cases and examples reported by our participants may also reflect some of the ethical dilemmas encountered by non-Jewish teachers in non-Jewish schools. Therefore, future studies should examine whether part of our findings might be generalized to other school settings, religions and cultures.

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

We suggest that TBS may be valuable in the professional development of teachers. By including teachers who are already working in education and encouraging them to deal with critical ethical incidents and to take part in developing ethical guidelines, we can give teachers
more experience and a deeper understanding of the implications of their actions.

Orly Shapira-Lishchinsky is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Educational Administration, Leadership and Policy, School of Education, at Bar-Ilan University, Ramat-Gan, Israel. Jeffrey Glanz is a Professor of Education at the Azrieli Graduate School of Yeshiva University, New York, and in the Department of Educational Management at Michlalah Jerusalem College. Anat Shaer is a PhD student in the Department of Educational Administration, Leadership and Policy, School of Education, at Bar-Ilan University, Ramat-Gan, Israel. E-mail: Shapiro4@biu.ac.il, glanz@yu.edu, and afroach@zahav.net.il

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