

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Conformity and Compliance as Moral Acts: The Case of Teachers in Jewish Religious State Schools in Israel

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The Israeli society is composed of a highly diverse amalgamation of different national, ethnic and religious groups that live side by side. The current study relates to the characteristics of the educational and ethical policies upheld by teachers who work in religious state schools in Israel. In particular, the study examined these teachers' morally courageous behavior in the context of the religious state school system and their attitudes towards this concept. The findings of this study are compared with those of a previous study that analyzed the attitudes of teachers affiliated with the secular state school system towards the same behavior.

A narrative analysis of interviews conducted with 14 teachers in religious state schools in Israel found that in their responses, teachers expressed a profound understanding of the concept of moral courage. Nevertheless, the teachers attributed their moral behavior (including inculcating moral values in their students) not to their moral courage, but rather to their conformity to the values and norms of the religious state school system.

Keywords: moral courage, religious state school, teachers' moral action, Israeli teachers, conformism

תקציר

במסגרת הניסיון להציב את הדיון בנושא אומץ מוסרי מורי בשיח החינוכי בישראל, זאת בהמשך למחקר קודם (ברץ, ריינגולד ואבוהצירה, 2011), מבקש המאמר הנוכחי להתייחס באופן פריטקולארי למאפייני ההתנהלות החינוכית מוסרית של מורים בחינוך הממ"ד בישראל. זאת, על רקע ההבנה כי בחברה הישראלית מרובת התרבויות, קונפליקטים, מתחים והפרדה מבוססים לא רק על שוני לאומי ואתני, אלא אף על בסיס של שוני באמונה דתית או היעדר אמונה דתית. לראייה החינוך היהודי בישראל מתחלק לשלוש מערכות נפרדות, על רק אמונה דתית.

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ניתוח נרטיבי של ראיונות מורים במסגרות החינוכיות הממ"ד, אשר בחן את הממדים על פיהם מתאפיין המושג אומץ מוסרי לאור התשתית המובילה להמשגתו, הצביע על מתווה של התנהלות חינוכית התלויה בתכתיבים המוגדרים במסגרת ההיררכיה המערכתית והמותאמת אליהם. בכך מוצגת תמונה המצביעה על נטייה להתנהלות פאסיבית של מורים בחינוך הממ"ד, המבטאת בהימנעות טוטאלית מביצוע שינוי במערך המוסכמות הקבוע והיעדר תעוזה, הנחוצה לאפיונם של מורים כאמיצים מוסרית.

Introduction

The huge corpus of research on multicultural education and intercultural education emphasizes ethnic, national, and gender differences. Notwithstanding, in the past decade, the subject of religious differences (including the difference between religious affiliation and the absence of religious affiliation) has come into focus also among European researchers and practitioners of intercultural education (Jackson, 2007). Religion has become a central issue in the struggle for dialogue, as part of the increasing tensions between multiculturalism and intercultural learning (Mercer and Roebben, 2007).

Israeli society is demographically very multicultural. It is composed of a highly diverse amalgamation of national, ethnic, and religious groups, which live side by side. Intercultural conflicts do not stem solely from differences in national or ethnic affiliation, but also from different religious beliefs that exist within the Jewish population (Baratz & Reingold, 2010).

In this context, the state-funded Jewish religious education system constitutes a particularly interesting case, due to the fact that it is situated at a crossroads between the government that funds it and the religion that inspires it. In the current study, the concept of "moral courage" was used to examine the attitudes of teachers in the religious state schools towards educational and ethical policies of the religious education system in which they work. Findings are then compared with those obtained in a previous study, which analyzed the attitudes of teachers in Israel's secular state schools towards this concept (Baratz, Reingold & Abuatzira, 2013).

The many changes that have occurred in Europe over the last several years concerning religious education and its relationship to the state serve to illustrate the role of religion in the postmodern era (Alberts, 2007; Schreiner, Kraft & Wright, 2007). These changes reflect various approaches to religious education in Europe. The majority of approaches to teaching religion support teaching it *within* a religious framework, teaching *about* religion, and teaching *from* a religious perspective. These approaches are implemented in accordance with the role religion plays in each country, thereby highlighting the differences between countries that support the integration of religious education and those that promote separation of church and state.

Religious education is generally available in all of the state school systems in Europe, with the exception of France, where there is a well-established principle of secularism in education (Willaime, 2007). However, countries vary in the emphasis and the significance they attribute to religious education; hence, the status of religious education in Europe covers a wide gamut: from compulsory (Austria, Cyprus, Greece),

or quasi-compulsory (a special procedure to opt out is needed, for example, in England), through optional yet standard (where students have to opt out, e.g., Malta, Belgium, Netherlands, Bulgaria, Poland, Portugal, Scotland) to personal choice (where students have to request to opt in, e.g., Estonia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Latvia, and Lithuania). Countries also differ in the extent to which they require schools to provide religious education in the pupil's specific faith, when it is not covered by the curriculum.

Several attempts have been made to provide a schematic overview of pan-European religious education in terms of its relation to the state as well as to confessionals (Kuyk, Jenssen, Lankshear, Lonn Manna & Schreiner 2007; Schreiner, 2005). Two basic approaches were found to describe the current status of religious education in Europe: one caters to a religiously or denominationally mixed population while combining religious and secular studies (with weak state intervention), and the other offers a uniform solution (with strong state intervention). Each approach is comprised of three subgroups, according to the predominance of religious education in each country in Europe. The mixed approach includes three types of religious education systems: (i) a mixed system with mostly denominational schools and religious education (e.g., Ireland, Northern Ireland, Netherlands, and Belgium); (ii) a mixed system with a large number of denominational schools and religious education (Wales, Scotland, and England); and (iii) a secular system with denominational contributions to religious education (including Germany, Austria, Finland, Romania, Hungary and Poland). In the uniform solution group, the three subgroups are as follows (i) a denominational religious education system for all (as is the case in Turkey, Greece, Italy, and Spain); (ii) religious education presented as a non-denominational subject studied by all (as in Sweden, Iceland, Norway, and Denmark); and (iii) no religious education in school (Albania, France, and Slovenia).

It is clear that religious education varies across the different countries, as do the opinions regarding religion's role in society. Kozyrev and Fedorov (2007) explained that in the Russian Federation "the issues of religious education have strong political connotations and divide society" (p. 155), whereas in Germany "the traditional organizational divide between Roman-Catholic and Protestant confessional religious education in public schools raises again the question of the role and outlook of a postmodern confessional religious education" (Mercer & Roebben, 2007, p. 445-446).

In the context of the variety of streams implemented in Europe today, it is interesting to examine the unique situation in Israel. Since the foundation of Israel in 1948, the Ministry of Education has had complete and centralized control in determining educational policy and activities for all schools in the country (Baratz & Reingold, 2010), with the exception of schools serving the Jewish ultra-Orthodox sector, which operates an independent education system. The Ministry controls the schools' curriculum, the matriculation examination, the teachers' initial training and education, the procedures for authorizing teachers, and teachers' advanced professional development. Thus, throughout the years of the existence of the State of Israel, the Ministry has been able to encourage conformist behavior among teachers, in alignment with the state's educational policies (Yogev, 1980).

Israel's 1953 law of "The National Education Act" led to a situation in which the pre-academic education system in Israel is comprised of four separate sectors: state-

funded secular education for the Jewish sector; state-funded religious education for the Jewish sector; state-funded education for the Arab sector; and an independent, - although state-funded - education system for the Jewish ultra-Orthodox sector. Formally and declaratively, that law, which was passed in the Knesset (Israeli parliament) 5 years after the establishment of the State of Israel, clearly distinguished between religious and "other" state-funded education, thus granting a dominant status to these two major educational approaches, while successfully catering to the majority population of secular Jews as well as to the particular sector of ultra-Orthodox Jewish population. Hence, the educational activities of the Jewish ultra-Orthodox sector are grounded in a law that defines its autonomous organizational structure (HaDani, 2006).

The legislation from 1953 was intended to end a heated debate in Israeli society between the secular and religious sectors, in which each sector accused the other of coercion - religious or secular. In the state secular schools, in which the emphasis - at least allegedly - is on a curriculum containing a humanistic orientation that expresses a pluralistic worldview; in contrast, the state religious schools, given their organizational and ideological autonomy, strive to inculcate mostly religious content, in order to mold the identity of the students in an educational environment that conforms to the religious tenets of the religious sector (Gross, 2003). Nevertheless, an in-depth examination of the curricula of all four separate sectors of the Israeli pre-academic education system reveals that religious education exists in all of them. In the state-funded Jewish religious education system and in the Jewish ultra-Orthodox independent education system, religion is taught from a religious perspective and within a religious framework; however, in the state-funded Jewish secular education system, teaching about religion serves an ethnocentric nationalist ideology (Resh & Benavot, 2009). As a result, teachers in the religious sector are allowed to teach in the state-funded Jewish secular education system, whereas secular teachers are prevented from teaching in the state-funded Jewish religious education system.

In the fourth sector, the separate but state-funded Arabic education system, the situation is even more complex. There is a required component of the curriculum that focuses on the subject of Jewish religion and Jewish culture and history, in addition to a more marginal curriculum on the subject of Islam (Benavot & Resh, 2003). However, this issue is beyond the scope of the current study, which focuses on teachers in the state-funded Jewish religious education system.

It is important to emphasize that the law that provides for state-funded religious education for the Jewish sector refers to an education system in which the institutions of study are religious by virtue of their way of life, as well as their curriculum, teachers, and inspectors.

The current study examined the circumstances and the boundaries of moral courage among teachers affiliated with the state's religious education system, in the context of the obedience to authority and conformity with the moral conventions that are ingrained in the schools that operate as part of this education system.

Theoretical Background

In the framework of the religious sector in Israel, religious education is based on the teaching of subject matter which reflects religious attitudes and ideals, for the purpose of applying the practice of religious doctrines in daily life. The role of the teachers is to

create a bond between the subject matter and the learners, thereby serving not only as educators but also as role models for their pupils. In the same religious framework, modern education is based on the integration of secular subjects into the school curriculum of the religious institutions. In addition, the Zionist ideology is expressed in the religious education system as an effort to interact and collaborate with the Israeli (secular) mainstream on all aspects of Israeli society, in an effort to play an active role in the creation of social and political mechanisms in Israeli society (Schwartz, 1999).

The nature of the Zionist Religious Movement, which strives to combine Zionist and religious elements, led to the development of models for coping with the challenges of the postmodern age. One such challenge is the need to develop a new terminology, grounded in the spiritual world and congruent with religious commandments, in order to help the religious sector remain true to its worldview as it contends with the challenges of present-day life. The impetus for the development of new concepts parallels that described by Liebman and Don-Yehiya (1983); namely, it is the religious sector's reaction to modernity and secularization. One of the strategies described is the effort to expand religious activities to encompass a changing world. The expansion of the scope of religion came from the need to resolve the conflict between the desire to conserve religion in its "old-fashioned" form and to embrace new developments: creating an ideology provided a solution to the conflict that threatened the survival of the religious framework (Geertz, 1973). This innovative approach also penetrated the state's religious institutions, and became an integral part of the general framework of Zionist religious education. However, at the same time, despite the efforts to engage in progressive dialogue in an era known for redefining the boundaries of knowledge, the state-operated religious education system in the Israeli Jewish sector is founded upon the premise that the Jewish religion and the practice of its commandments is the only path to absolute truth (Kehat, 2007).

The educational-ideological policy implemented in the state-funded religious education system is based on the acculturation model of pedagogy, which advocates the transfer of values and subject matter in the teaching process (Lamm, 2001), for the purpose of leading a movement of social assimilation, based on clear guidelines. Accordingly, teaching secular subjects is permitted in the religious school system, as long as the dictates of religion are still meticulously met. This approach reflects the commonly accepted perspective of the Jewish Zionist state, in general, and of the educators in the religious state schools, in particular. Furthermore, this approach validates the central role of religion as the foundation for the educational and ideological conduct of teachers and their students (Schwartz, 1999).

The state-funded religious education system, as its name implies, is situated at a crossroads between religion (i.e., church) and state. Presumably, this duality could place the teachers in the religious state schools in a sensitive position, as they must navigate between the two narratives (Gross, 2003). However, the ever-expanding range of religious discussion permeates all subjects taught in the religious state schools, regardless of whether there is any common ground between religion and the subject matter. This religious discourse, which constitutes a structural and intentional process in the construction of identity, is congruent with the religious principles that represent the ideology of the schools. Furthermore, this discourse serves as a strategy in the learning process: the teachers, who must find a way to combine the fields of national and

religious education into a single entity, can do so by endowing all subject matter with religious meaning. We wanted to investigate whether such a setting allows teachers to engage in morally courageous acts.

Conformity and moral courage

Miller (2000) defines moral courage as “a willingness to take a stand in defense of principles or convictions even when others do not. People who exhibit moral courage are often subject to a number of risks associated with taking a stand, including inconvenience, unpopularity, ostracism, disapproval, derision, and even harm to themselves or their kin” (p. 36). Moral courage is the ability of the individual to overcome fear and stand up for his or her principles, values, and ethical commitments (Lachman, 2007). In the words of Kidder: “moral courage is the courage to be moral” (Kidder, 2005, p. 10). Moral courage is the area that intersects between the following three elements: danger, principles, and endurance (Kidder, 2005).

According to Tillich (1952), the “ability to be a part of something” creates a mutual influence that expands the circle of courage from one person to another. A part of the “ability to be a part of something” is associated with the concept of conformity and its derivatives.

Conformity occurs when individuals choose to align their behaviors and opinions with existing social norms. Conformist behavior can be based on conscientious conviction, or it can be motivated by the individual’s desire to gain a feeling of social belonging. Some claim that conformity maintains the social order, by defining expectations, organizing interactions between individuals, maintaining the cohesion of the group, and preventing social dissolution (Durkheim, 1983). Through the process of conformity, individuals change their attitudes, opinions or behaviors in order to adapt to group norms. For our purposes, avoidance of moral courage may stem from conformity, since, by definition, taking a stand or acting with moral courage is based on the decision to act despite the awareness that society may not condone this action.

At the same time, a display of moral courage is not inherently an act of counter-conformity; since counter-conformity is usually a deliberate act intended to protest against conformity. Moral courage is, therefore, consistent with non-conformism.

Moral courage in the context of teaching

In the context of teaching, moral courage means the willingness to protect social values. Teachers must have the desire and the ability to discuss ethical issues, in order to raise their students' awareness (Klaassen, 2007). They should not be content with merely teaching compulsory materials or even with promoting thinking skills (Klaassen & Maslovaty, 2010). Moral courage among teachers typically involves a conceptual challenge. Individuals who demonstrate moral courage could be placing their reputation, emotional world, integrity, or self-image at risk (Kidder, 2005; Klaassen & Maslovaty, 2010). Some teachers maintain that moral education is a central element in their role as educators, and they view themselves as agents of critical education who show great moral courage (Kidder, 2005). Thus, the teachers’ comprehension of moral education as a fundamental aspect of their work is in itself an expression of moral courage (Klaassen & Maslovaty, 2010).

When examining the question of teachers' moral courage in the framework of state-funded religious education, authority must be considered an integral part of conformist behavior. According to Schreimer (2006), authority is the force that motivates obedience to conform. Acceptance of religious norms of behavior derives from the acknowledgement of the authority of the religious leader as the sole entity that determines these norms. Given that religious educational institutions are an integral part of religious society, it is natural that the same "authority" would also dominate in the educational context.

The research findings of Gaziel and Maslovaty (2006) on the role of values in the education of students from the religious sector are pertinent to the current study. In that study, the researchers conducted a survey among teachers in the religious sector concerning the importance of teaching values in the educational framework and found that the religious teachers attributed a great deal of importance to teaching values, especially those values that relate to the religious way of life. This approach to the subject of values, as practiced in religious state schools, demonstrates that values are given a special place on the personal and institutional levels.

Methodology

This study examines the content fields of the concept of "moral courage" among teachers in the state-run religious education system. Fourteen teachers working in a publically-funded Jewish religious school and 17 teachers working in a publically-funded Jewish secular school were interviewed for this study. The researchers recruited teacher participants based on their own professional acquaintance with the teachers or through colleagues' recommendations. All participants were perceived as making a significant educational contribution in their schools and were identified by the researchers as being in a position to contribute to the understanding of the concept of teachers' moral courage.

Incorporating Bamberg's (2006) "small stories", i.e., stories told in daily interactions, a concept that is applied in identity research, this qualitative study used the narrative method, as the interviewees told the story of a predefined aspect of their life. First, the participants were asked whether they agreed to be interviewed on the subject of moral courage for research purposes. Next, they were asked to relate to the issue of moral courage in their schools and to describe a situation which they considered a demonstration of "moral courage".

The responses were recorded, to ensure that the data, namely, the participants' words and utterances, would be reported verbatim. The participants determined where the interview would be held, in order to create a comfortable setting free from distractions.

Our previous study, which was based on data obtained from the same interviews as those referred to in the current study, analyzed the teachers' perceptions of the content fields of the concept "teachers' moral courage", in order to identify the properties that characterize behaviors informed by moral courage. The findings revealed that the 31 interviewees expressed a profound understanding of the concept of moral courage and that all the teachers were able to define the content domains of morally courageous behavior in the context of education.

In the present study, we reanalyzed the content of the interviewee's responses, in order to discover whether there were differences between the teachers in the religious and secular frameworks, in terms of their willingness to act in a morally courageous manner. After identifying several general characteristics, we classified the data into sub-categories, according to the principle of the salience of the contents (Blumenfeld, 1995). This yielded a chain of narratives which we examined using Kidder's principles (2005).

Findings

Analysis of the responses revealed three realms of moral courage: the institution, subject matter, and personal perceptions. In the religious educational framework, all realms aligned with the dictates of the institution and of the authority on religious issues, reflecting norms of the religious community pertinent to matters of daily living.

The Institution

In their description of a morally courageous teacher, teachers from the secular state schools perceived the courageous teacher's relationship with the institution as defiant, in the sense of "the morally courageous teacher **versus** the institution," while in the religious state schools, the teachers described their norms of behavior as **merging with** those of the institution.

Teachers in religious state schools: Merging with the institution

1. "Because I teach in a religious institution, I do not feel at all that I have to think twice before teaching the subject matter, since most of the subject matter is consistent with my worldview..."
2. "The religious setting dictates a certain kind of behavior to which we adhere, and this is something I take into consideration as a teacher..."
3. "As teachers, we are restricted, since the nature of the school is religious and we cannot teach what we want to..."
4. "I teach only what the school curriculum dictates. I take care to educate according to the spirit of the school. Hence, I have never faced a dilemma regarding the material taught. I would teach political content **only** if it were included in the curriculum. My personal deliberations are of no significance; I must abide by the dictates of the educational framework."
5. "When teaching in the classroom, I am guided, for the most part, by the religious framework. If there are content areas that contradict the religious tenets, I do not teach them. The guiding principle is 'educate according to the dictates of the framework'."

Teachers in secular state schools: The teacher versus the institution

1. "I promised a pupil that if he would improve in his studies, I would give him a reward. The headmistress did not like the connection and said 'no' ... but I persisted..."

2. "I knew that you need moral courage to cancel a day of studies that I did not identify with. I confronted the headmistress about it and the teachers told me that it was not a smart thing to do..."
3. "Honest behavior in front of the students, even if it goes against the institution's expectations..."
4. "I choose to teach content if I feel it is morally right; and if there is a conflict between the content matter and my personal morals, I do not teach it..."
5. "If there are teaching materials that include principles which I perceive as immoral, I choose not to teach them. And by 'moral,' I mean principles that I deem as accepted by the entire society"
6. "A teacher should protest against the inclusion of certain materials when these materials are not compatible with the values which the teacher upholds and wants to teach the students. A teacher has a defined role and defined goals. A good teacher, for me, would not agree to teach materials that are not compatible with the goals one poses for oneself"

Subject Matter

The teachers in the secular state schools tended to express a positive attitude regarding the inclusion of controversial issues in their lessons, despite the fact that there is a fixed curriculum intended for encouraging analytic and critical thought. Teachers in the religious state schools, in contrast, tended to adhere to the curriculum.

In the religious state schools: Subject matter adjusted to religious principles and institutional dictates

1. "I choose to teach material that I feel is morally right, that is to say 'moral' in the religious sense..."
2. "If there are principles in the teaching materials which I personally believe are immoral and which contradict the religious tenets, I choose not to teach them..."
3. "I teach what the curriculum dictates, so I did not face a situation of feeling conflicted regarding the teaching material..."
4. "... What guides me is mainly the religious way of life, the religious behavioral norms..."
5. "I think that as teachers in a religious framework, we face dilemmas regarding our actions and behaviors on a daily basis, and finally, our choices are guided by the religious moral principles.
Teaching is a type of mission that has clear objectives: to educate students to follow a moral path in accordance with the values that [the Jewish] religion teaches us... that is the **essence** of the teaching profession, as I see it."
6. "The teacher should protest against the inclusion of materials in the curriculum which contradict the values that our religion promotes. The teacher's role and goal are clearly defined. In my opinion, a good teacher should refuse to teach materials which are not in line with moral and religious principles."

In the secular state schools: Controversial subject matter

1. "In the classroom, it means coming every day and struggling with a dissonance that creates resistance..."
2. "The lesson did not progress as planned and moved towards a discussion of racism and acceptance of the other, while addressing those issues..."
3. "It is not in the curriculum. I felt it was important to show another aspect ..."
4. "I present topics in my lessons that present a moral dilemma "

Personal Perception of Moral Courage

The teachers were asked to address the term "teachers' moral courage" and to formulate a personal definition of the term. A morally courageous act, according to the teachers in the secular schools, is measured by the ability to go against the commonly accepted views which one perceives as false and to struggle systematically in favor of those personal worldviews that one defines as "true." In contrast, according to the teachers in the religious schools, a morally courageous act is measured by the ability to strive consistently for the integration of principles that are consistent with the institutional climate of the students.

In the religious state schools: Insistence on moral principles which have a personal as well as a normative value

1. "You insist upon your principles and follow them..."
2. "To follow your own personal morality..."
3. "To defend others, or values that I consider sacred..."
4. "To direct my physical and mental powers towards an ideological element – educating children, love for one's country..."
5. "A teacher should set an example for the students and behave in a way that sanctifies moral values..."

In the secular state schools: Personal "truth" versus normative "lies"

1. "In my opinion, that was moral courage. Standing up for your truth, for your principles..."
2. "Confronting your inner truth..."
3. "Defending the truth..."
4. "To introduce one's ideological credo... I introduce my truth..."
5. "I introduce my truth in the clearest way..."

Moral Courage in the textual Context

The concept "moral courage" was defined by the teachers of the religious sector as part of **normative religious behavior**. This finding, which is different from the definition found among the secular teachers, can be understood through the contextual setting characteristic of each of the sectors, which in turn influences the way teachers from each sector perceive the concept.

1. Repeated usage of words from the semantic field indicating *enforcement*, such as "forbidden," "refrain," "afraid," underscored a dominant motif among the responses of the teachers in the religious sector. Obedience to authority was seen as proper educational behavior and appeared in the conceptualization of the term "moral courage". The following is an example of one teacher's response to the question regarding the inclusion of politically sensitive materials when teaching in the classroom: "I usually do not express a political stance, since teachers are *forbidden* from expressing their personal political views in class." This is the response one teacher gave to the question of whether he or she includes politically sensitive materials in a lesson:
2. "Very little. One can say that I quite *refrain* from doing it."
Or "As a teacher, I adjust myself to the *educational institution* and to the nature of the *setting* in which I teach, mainly due to political and religious reasons."
3. "As teachers, we are *restricted*, since the nature of the *school* is religious and, therefore, we cannot teach what we want ..."
4. "I am also dependent on the *school's* dictates and if the *educational setting* *forbids* me to do it, I will not do it."
5. "There were situations in which I felt conflicted, especially due to the fact that I am an educator in a *religious setting*. I do check if the material I teach is consistent with the religious view that the *school* stands for and this is a part of my set of considerations."

Discussion

Given that every state is composed of several religious groups, as well as secular groups and individuals (such as atheists or agnostics), and in most states this reality influences the educational systems, the current study has relevance to the international discourse about intercultural education. It does not describe an intercultural dialogue between groups which are different in regard to their religious beliefs, but presents an insider's view of the education system that caters to a conservative religious population in a demographically multicultural society. Hence, it can provide significant data for those who attempt to promote intercultural dialogue.

The current study focuses on the differences between the ways in which the term "moral courage in teaching" is perceived by teachers from the Jewish religious and the Jewish secular state-schools in Israel, with a focus on the former. Our previous research, which examined the elements of the moral conduct of teachers in the above-mentioned education sectors, found no intrinsic difference between the moral views of teachers from the two sectors on the subject of cheating on tests (Reingold & Baratz, 2011). Notwithstanding, we wished to pursue the issue of moral courage in teaching, in order to investigate and compare the behavior patterns of teachers affiliated with the different sectors. The responses of the interviewees in both educational settings presented a general and clear narrative, suggesting that teachers could express morally courageous behavior in three realms: that of the institution, the curriculum, and one's personal interpretation of the term "moral courage." The narrative identified as describing the behavior of teachers in the secular state schools was referred to as *oppositional*, whereas the narrative identified as describing the behavior of teachers in the religious state schools was referred to as **merging**. In the religious schools, the

narrative revealed teachers' conformist behavior in the educational arena, stemming from dependence upon the authority figure.

The starting point of the analysis of the findings of the present paper was based on the circles of Kidder (2005). We understood from the interviews that teachers' behavior concerning moral courage in educational practice parallels the principles that Kidder applies to elements of teaching. Accordingly, for our purposes, the circles are depicted as follows:

Figure 1: Moral courage or moral action without courage

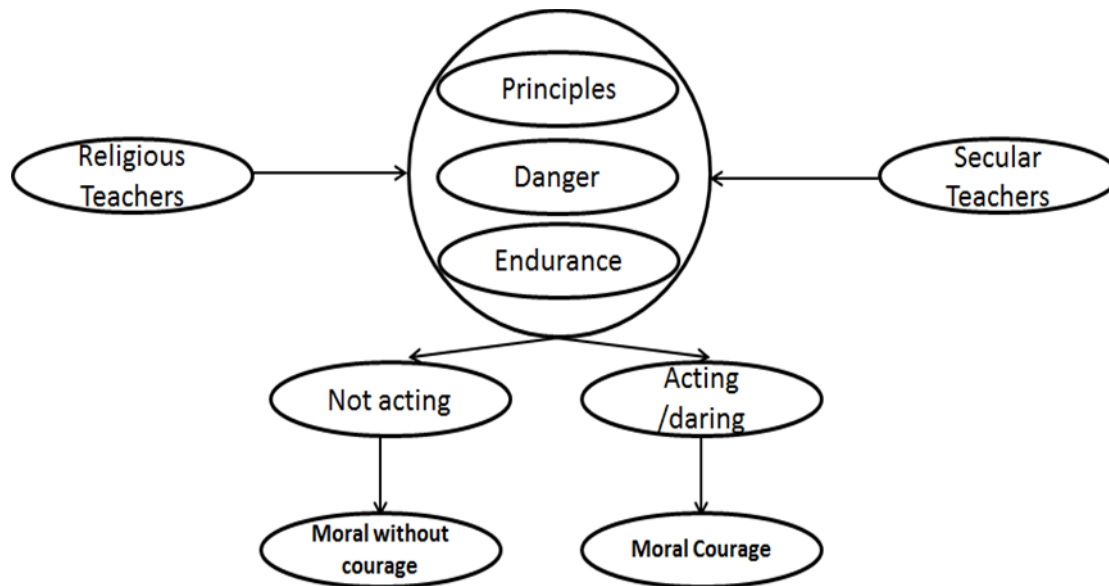


Figure 1 represents the behavior of religious and secular teachers regarding educational activity that can be considered morally courageous. The three characteristics guiding this behavior are: principles, dangers, and endurance. These characteristics underlie morally courageous acts as represented in gradual stages, indicating "endurance" as the crucial element that ultimately determines whether a teacher is considered morally courageous.

From the findings that emerged from the interviews conducted with teachers in religious and secular state schools, and according to the principles of Kidder (2005), we suggest that teachers in both systems uphold educational beliefs that guide them in their work. However, in situations that involve a "danger" that threatens their status and places them in a situation in which they must choose either to act on their personal principles or to yield to the dictates of the institution, it can be concluded that the choices of teachers in the religious schools were different from the choices of teachers in the secular schools. According to the findings, teachers from the religious sector tended to take action that aligned with the principles maintained by the school system. Thus, for example, they meticulously adjusted their teaching materials to complement the nature of the curriculum and did not tend to challenge it. This tendency can be seen as moral, but not as "courageous", because there is no defiance of an accepted practice.

The attempt to understand the source of the phenomenon, from the perspective of the teachers, leads inevitably to the connection between the narratives of the religious world and the concept of "moral courage." Opposing the school's dictates would mean challenging the deeply rooted norms practiced by the religious sector, in which a central authority on religion (and its derivatives) plays a dominant role and is at the heart of conformist social conduct. Therefore, in the semantics of the religious world, to challenge the boundaries means to turn away from the foundations of the religious ideology that constitutes an integral part of the educational act in the religious schools.

Based on these findings, the claim of this study is that a change is required in the nature of teacher education in religious teacher education institutions, so as to reconsider the dominant status of religion as the sole factor that sustains the identity of the religious state schools. Such a claim is in agreement with current internal discourses among key educators in the religious educational establishment, who have noted the need to reform the curriculum in the Jewish religious schools (Gross, 2003). Bringing about a change in religious schools requires the development of a model that can be applied within the framework of initial teacher education programs in religious institutions. Such a model should encourage a critical perspective and the reexamination of the curriculum, while maintaining a connection to religion in a way that does not challenge it. In addition, the internal discourse mentioned above reveals that rather than using religion as an interpretative prism that encompasses the entire educational endeavor and the way of life in the schools, the impact of religion on the schools should be limited to specific aspects in the educational setting, specifically, those which serve to differentiate it from secular educational institutions.

Such a change could lead to a breakthrough, in which the religious narrative that sustains the educational infrastructure of Jewish religious state schools would include openness and an attitude that promotes critical and pluralist thought. Such a development would ultimately create a change in the conformist behavior of teachers. It could also lead those teachers and their schools, and even more importantly, their students, to be more open to participate in intercultural dialogues with peers and colleagues from the state's Jewish secular education system. Ultimately, the proposed change could help reduce the tensions between learning about religion and learning from religion, and between theology, and critical thinking (Mercer & Roebben, 2007).

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