

Are civics teachers different from teachers of other disciplines in their handling of controversial issues?

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Abstract

Conducting discussions on controversial political issues is an important vehicle to promote students' democratic values and critical thinking in schools. This schoolwide task cuts across all disciplines and different subject matter. Israeli civics and social studies teachers are often required to touch upon such issues and manage the situations that follow. This study examined whether civics and social studies teachers are different from teachers of other disciplines in their attitudes toward controversial political issues and in their reported behaviors. Civics and social studies teachers scored higher in all the variables related to discussions of controversial political issue and reported more relevant behaviors. In examining the variables that predict teachers' self-efficacy to conduct controversial political issue discussions, variables that related to professional identity were the strongest predictors alongside pluralistic attitudes. We concluded that teacher training should emphasize the importance of discussions of controversial political issue and develop teachers' ability to conduct such discussions as part of their professional role.

Keywords

citizenship education, civics, controversial issues, Israel, social studies

In the past few years, several civics and social studies teachers found themselves judged and criticized on social media and on social networks for expressing their opinions on controversial issues in class. In December 2016, a Canadian teacher was fired by a private high school after a female student complained that he had expressed his opposition to abortion in a law class (Blatchford, 2016). The teacher reported that he had brought up his own view of abortion to illustrate the gap that often exists between private morality and the law. In a similar fashion, in January 2014, an Israeli student complained that her teacher, Adam Verta, expressed radical left-wing opinions during his classes (Grave-Lazi, 2014). In a letter to the Minister of Education, she wrote that the teacher's attitudes were treasonous. The teacher was summoned to a hearing before dismissal,

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where he was required to give his side of the story. The letter was also published by an Israeli parliament member on social network and gave rise to a heated debate in the national media. The teacher was criticized publicly and personally, received death threats and filed a complaint for slander, threats, and incitement. The media debate revolved, among other things, around teachers' role and the limits to their freedom of speech.

In this article, we examined whether civics and social studies teachers were different from teachers of other disciplines in their attitudes toward the controversial topic of Israeli–Arab relations. We examined teachers' attitudes toward pluralism in general and specifically in education. Teachers were examined with regard to their feelings of self-efficacy in conducting discussions on controversial topics, their knowledge of the Israeli Ministry of Education guidelines regarding the limits of freedom of expression, and whether they had undergone professional development in multiculturalism during the past 5 years. We investigated the way teachers perceived their role in shaping civil identity. Finally, we examined teachers' reports of conducting such discussions in their classrooms. We attempted to better understand the differences between teachers whose subject matter frequently summons controversial debates (civics and social studies) and teachers who can circumvent these topics more easily (teachers of other disciplines).

The gap between civic education and political reality

Students learn about civics education through formal and informal channels. The primary formal channel is through direct learning from civics teachers and from teachers who teach similar disciplines like social studies. Informal channels include the school and cultural climates, informal conversations in class and in other school activities, youth movements, and the attitudes exhibited at home (Galston, 2001; Zvulun and Harel, 2017).

Zvulun and Harel (2017) argue that a significant gap exists between what is discussed in class (the ideal situation) and the actual political reality. Two interlocking factors contribute to this gap. First, the civics curriculum traditionally emphasizes the democratic process and the formal aspect of democracy as a form of government. Students are often exposed to the organizational and legal aspects in relation to government authorities rather than the actual political reality. Second, teachers tend to avoid the actual political reality as part of their difficulty in dealing with controversial topics in the classroom (Parker, 2012; Tannebaum, 2013).

Teacher training in civics and social studies

Teacher training institutions are defined as institutions whose primary purpose is to provide teacher trainees with pedagogical knowledge that emphasizes a high level of professionalism and responsibility for learners' achievements. Frogel (2014) suggested that most teacher training, other than civics and social studies, did not prepare students for dealing with political questions. Hess (2004) claimed that teachers in general, and civics teachers are no exception, avoid political discussions (Avery et al., 2013). Current teacher training frameworks hardly address political education despite the fact that educators are involved in the shaping of students' social reality (Michaeli, 2014). Even if teachers wish to adopt a neutral position, they are key activists in the social arena, although they are not aware of it or deny it (Michaeli, 2014; Oulton et al., 2004).

There is consensus about the importance of discussing politics as part of formal education as long as it is done as part of a holistic process of fostering citizenship in a democracy (Hess, 2009; Lam, 2002). Teachers should provide students with opportunities to discuss contemporary issues while displaying a range of political opinions and creating a climate that allows for forming an independent position (Avery et al., 2013). Michaeli (2014) argued that a conscientious and active

political education would enhance significant development of a democratic platform. Subsequently, Naveh (2014) called for the rehabilitation of political education and political consciousness in schools. He claimed that a generation devoid of any political orientation was developing. These young people were exposed to the shallow negative sides of the political culture and therefore, often deterred by it.

In Israel, there are two teacher training tracks for secondary school teachers. The first includes a bachelor's degree followed by a 1-year teaching program. The second is a combined 3- to 4-year track that includes pedagogy and education studies alongside considerable studies of the teaching disciplines (e.g., geography, civics). It should be noted that not all teacher training institutions include courses on multiculturalism in their pedagogy and education studies, nor are teachers explicitly trained in handling controversial issues in the classroom. This may cause a situation whereby a student graduates without experiencing a controversial discussion and without seeing one of his professors conducting such a discussion.

Teachers' sense of self-efficacy and cultural competence

The modern classroom is culturally heterogeneous, while at the same time, teachers come from a relatively homogenous background, and the gap is widening (Denslow, 2000). Diversity comes in many different forms, but the essential issues teachers face are similar in many countries (Voas and Williamson, 2001). Teachers require skills, knowledge, and motivation to cope with the challenges that multicultural classrooms pose. Unfortunately, research suggests that most teachers are ill-equipped (Horenczyk and Tatar, 2003). Such training begins with teachers' recognition of their own biases and prejudices and capacity to communicate with people from different backgrounds (Chang et al., 2011). Cultural competence improves with experience, as individuals encounter more people from various backgrounds and acquire knowledge about the history and culture of different minority groups.

The reality of teacher training is that, in many cases, students are not sufficiently exposed to people from various backgrounds and cultures, nor are they trained in the course of their studies to work in a multicultural environment (Paul-Binyamin and Reingold, 2014). Although we may be witnessing a shift in this realm, there are still many teachers without adequate cultural competence. Hess (2009) claimed that teacher training should emphasize the importance of discussing controversial issues and not be confined only to promoting discussion skills.

Handling controversial issues in the classroom

In the context of the classroom, a sensitive or controversial issue is one that relates to phenomena on which social opinions are divided, and different groups in society offer distinct interpretations and solutions (Lieb, 1998). Controversial political issues (CPIs) are essential to democracy, promoting tolerance and nurturing knowledge and a broader understanding of complex issues (Hess, 2009). Furthermore, the classroom is the most appropriate arena to hold such discussions, and it benefits both students and teachers, in that political education promotes students' responsibility and sense of belonging in addition to teachers' self-efficacy (Yariv-Mishal, 2013). Paul-Binyamin (2017) suggests that sporadic efforts by committed teachers are important but insufficient and calls for a systemic effort that includes teacher training on the topic.

Hess (2009) indicates that parent resistance is a major obstacle to discussions of CPIs in the classroom. Her research indicates that parents prefer teachers to indoctrinate to a certain attitude rather than present a multifaceted picture. Students' wish to maintain the same attitudes they came to school with is another obstacle to discussing CPIs (King, 2009). In addition, the more current

the topic, the more difficult teachers find it to conduct a discussion. Teachers reported difficulty anticipating the outcomes of such a discussion and reluctance to cope with the various interpretations and prejudices students may come up with (Cohen, 2016).

Teachers are confronted with a host of complications when introducing controversial topics in the classroom. Oulton et al. (2004) suggested that teachers felt unprepared to present controversial topics in the classroom and that the pedagogy of controversial topics was in itself controversial. Research has shown that teachers have qualms about discussing controversial topics and that such discussions are seldom held (Hess, 2009; Moore, 2012; Nystrand et al., 2003; Rossi, 2006). Teachers' status within the sociopolitical context has also been noted as contributing to teachers' reluctance to discuss controversial topics (Bekerman, 2016). In many European countries, teachers have a new role in preventing radicalism, which further complicates their situation (Bryan, 2017).

Cohen (2017) found a lack of coherence in the Israeli civics curriculum and that consequently teachers made their own interpretations of the *good citizenship* they wished to promote. Furthermore, he found an absence of debate on the topic of the Israeli–Arab conflict and its implications to Arab–Israeli citizens. The reluctance to engage in controversial discussions has been found to be greater among Arab–Israeli teachers (Gindi and Erlich-Ron, 2018; Jabareen and Agbaria, 2014; Watad-Huri, 2008). Watad-Huri (2008) found a general tendency in Arab schools to avoid discussing the Arab–Israeli conflict with students and that Arab teachers avoided expressing their opinions on the matter.

Role perception

Professional identity is defined as a sense of belonging and identification with one's profession. Teachers' professional identity is determined not only by their own perceptions but also by the way others perceive the profession (Tickle, 1999). Both pre-service and in-service teachers' role perceptions undergo shifts and changes in the course of their professional development (Kozminsky and Klavir, 2010). Teachers' professional beliefs and worldviews are pivotal to their role perception and have a major effect on the scope of their professional work. The frequent educational reforms and policy changes in last decades create instability and incoherence in educators' role perception. These fluctuations influence teachers' self-efficacy, self-concept and demand that they redefine their roles constantly (Ungar, 2016).

This flux of changes in teachers' role perceptions has led many researchers to conclude that role perception should be studied as a complex construct, comprised of a variety of personal puzzle pieces (Bates et al., 2014). In our context, we examined whether teachers viewed promoting political awareness as part of their role. Research on teachers' role perception is scarce in general and nonexistent when it comes to promoting political awareness.

While we argue that this example has implications to the challenges teachers face in any country, this study examines teachers' handling of controversial issues within the specific context of Israeli society and the Israeli–Arab conflict. In this study, we explored high school teachers' attitudes about conducting class discussions on the relationships between Jews and Arabs in Israel, as it is a highly controversial topic in Israel. While there is a plethora of work on the importance of civics and discussions of CPI for democracy, there is a dearth of research regarding the way civics and social studies teachers differ from teachers of other disciplines in their handling of CPI.

Our main research question was whether there were differences between civics and social studies teachers and teachers of other disciplines in the factors that are associated with teachers' willingness to engage in discussions of CPI and in their reports on conducting such discussions. This comparison is important because the onus for promoting students' ability to conduct dialogue, active citizenship, and tolerance rests solely on civics and social studies teachers. We compared

teachers on the following independent variables: Jewish–Arab pluralism, pluralism in education, feeling supported, self-efficacy, and teacher’s role, as well as on the dependent variables: reported number of discussions and reported class practices. Finally, we sought to find the variables that predicted teachers’ sense of self-efficacy in conducting discussions about CPI. This study may afford an opportunity to examine the Israeli context and draw general conclusions regarding teacher training and practices.

Method

Participants

Approval was obtained from the Institutional Review Board; a questionnaire was posted online, and teachers were approached using teachers’ email distribution lists including approximately 60,000 secondary school teachers. The number of usable questionnaires received was 1625 yielding a return rate of 2.7%. The mean age of respondents was 45.1 (standard deviation [*SD*] = 10.6), and they had 16.4 years of experience on average (*SD* = 11.5). It is important to note that in most Israeli teacher training institutions, high school teachers are required to study two disciplines. Thus, it was impossible to divide teachers to the different disciplines without overlap (e.g., a math teacher may also teach Hebrew). For this reason, we divided our sample to teachers who teach civics or social studies as one of their subjects and teachers who do not. Other respondents’ characteristics are displayed in Table 1.

Research tools

The main research instrument was a questionnaire designed to investigate the research variables and to answer the main research question and its derivative questions. The questionnaire was influenced by existing questionnaires, in particular, Smooha’s (2010) Index of Arab–Jewish Relations in Israel and Horenczyk and Tatar’s (2003) teachers’ attitudes toward multiculturalism questionnaire. The questionnaire involved a multiple choice knowledge question about the Ministry of Education guidelines with five options, only one of which was correct. The questionnaire was based on an exploratory study that was conducted using 70 participants (Erlich-Ron and Gindi, 2017). The questionnaire contained 12 items relating to demographic characteristics and 32 questions relating to the questionnaire’s different domains. Reliability coefficients for the domains are presented in Table 2.

Results

As Table 3 shows, civics and social studies teachers had significantly higher scores on all scales. Effect sizes were calculated using Cohen’s *d* (Cohen, 1988) and reveal small effect sizes for pluralism in general, pluralism in education, and feeling supported. Effect sizes for self-efficacy to conduct discussions and for civic education as part of the teacher’s role were moderate.

With regard to Ministry guidelines, a significant difference was found between civics and social studies teachers and teachers of other disciplines ($\chi^2(1, 1630) = 49.33, p < .001$). Civics and social studies teachers were significantly more likely to know the Ministry of Education guidelines (47.7% vs 26.2%).

Teachers were asked whether they had undergone professional development in multiculturalism within the past 5 years. A comparison between civics and social studies teachers and teachers of other disciplines revealed a significant gap in favor of the civics teachers ($\chi^2(2, 1631) = 29.97$,

Table 1. Sample characteristics.

Characteristic	N (%)
Gender (N = 1612)	
Men	589 (36.5)
Women	1023 (63.5)
Education (N = 1614)	
High school	6 (0.4)
BA	625 (38.7)
MA	934 (57.9)
PhD	49 (3.0)
First language (N = 1624)	
Hebrew	1330 (81.9)
Arabic	163 (10.0)
Other	131 (8.1)
Homeroom teacher (N = 1625)	
Yes	685 (43.7)
No	883 (56.3)
District (N = 1625)	
Central	381 (24.2)
Tel Aviv	259 (16.4)
Jerusalem	249 (15.8)
Northern	282 (17.9)
Southern	208 (13.2)
Haifa	197 (12.5)
Educational tracks (N = 1588)	
State-secular	984 (62.0)
State-religious	248 (15.6)
Arab	132 (8.3)
Rural	176 (11.1)
Druze	9 (0.6)
Independent (ultra-orthodox)	29 (1.8)
Other	10 (0.6)
Professional development in multiculturalism in the past 5 years (N = 1625)	
Yes	268 (16.9)
No	1315 (83.1)
School managerial responsibilities (N = 1625)	
Yes	833 (51.3)
No	792 (48.7)
Discipline taught	
Civic education and social sciences	266 (16.4)
Other	1359 (83.6)

$p < .001$). Among the civics and social studies teachers, 28.6% answered positively as opposed to 17.3% of the other teachers.

We examined the differences between civics teachers and teachers of other disciplines on their willingness to engage in discussions on controversial issues. On the reported class practices variable, civics and social studies teachers had a mean score of 4.05 ($SD = 0.47$), while teachers of other disciplines had a mean score of 3.82 ($SD = 0.52$). The difference was shown to be significant

Table 2. Questionnaire domains and reliability.

Domain	Number of items	Reliability (Cronbach's alpha)	Sample item
Pluralistic attitudes toward Arab–Jewish relations	6	0.84	The equality of rights of the Arab population in Israel must be protected
Attitudes toward Arab–Jewish pluralism in education	6	0.85	It is important that Arab teachers teach in Jewish schools
Role perception	7	0.83	Part of the teacher's role is to educate for political consciousness
Feeling supported	3	0.78	I have faith in the support of students' parents in case there is a complaint against me about holding a political/ social discussion in class
Self-efficacy to conduct discussions	6	0.78	I have the tools and skills to manage a classroom discussion about Jews and Arabs in Israel
Reported classroom discussions	4	0.76	When a debate on relations between Jews and Arabs in Israel comes up in class, I allow students to express their feelings

All scales were measured using six items on a 6-point Likert-type scale.

Table 3. Comparisons between civics teachers and teachers of other disciplines on the variables associated with conducting discussions (scale 1–6).

Scale	Civics (N = 266)		Other (N = 1359)		T	Cohen's <i>d</i>
	M	SD	M	SD		
Jewish–Arab pluralism	4.21	0.62	4.01	0.74	3.98***	.29
Pluralism in education	4.82	1.08	4.57	1.21	3.14**	.22
Feeling supported	3.34	1.08	3.17	1.19	2.19*	.15
Self-efficacy	4.22	0.61	3.94	0.68	6.20***	.43
Civic education as part of the teacher's role	5.37	0.85	4.81	1.02	8.34***	.60

M: mean; SD: standard deviation.

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

in an independent sample *t*-test ($t = 6.79, p < .001$). The effect size according to Cohen's *d* (Cohen, 1988) was moderate (Cohen's $d = .46$).

We examined the differences between civics and social sciences teachers and teachers of other disciplines on the second dependent variable, that is, the number of discussions held in the past month. Chi-square test results yielded a significant difference between the groups ($\chi^2(4) = 151.96, p < .001$). As can be seen in Table 4, civics and social studies teachers generally reported holding more discussions. Specifically, while almost 50% of other teachers did not hold any discussions in the past month, only 18% of civic education teachers did not hold political discussions in the past month. Table 4 presents the cell means and percentages.

We asked teachers whether the public upheaval that surrounded the case of Adam Verta in Israel (see above) influenced their willingness to conduct discussions on controversial topics. Overall,

Table 4. Number of discussions within the past month reported by civics teachers and teachers of other disciplines.

Group	Number of discussions					N
	0	1–2	3–5	6–8	9+	
Civic education	49 (18.4%)	110 (41.4%)	68 (25.6%)	24 (9.0%)	15 (5.6%)	266 (100%)
Other disciplines	633 (46.4%)	568 (41.6%)	118 (8.6%)	28 (2.1%)	18 (1.3%)	1365 (100%)

teachers' response pattern did not indicate that the case had affected them ($\bar{X} = 3.03$, $SD = 1.55$). We examined whether civics and social studies teachers ($\bar{X} = 3.07$, $SD = 1.56$) were different from others ($\bar{X} = 3.02$, $SD = 1.55$). On this question, we found no difference. A comparison between teachers with management duties ($\bar{X} = 3.01$, $SD = 1.53$) and teachers without such duties ($\bar{X} = 3.05$, $SD = 1.58$) yielded no significant differences either. A significant difference was found between Arab and Jewish teachers ($\chi^2(5, 1624) = 35.15$, $p < .001$). Arab teachers indicated that Adam Verta's case had influenced them more than it did the Jewish teachers.

A one way analysis of variance (ANOVA) with repeated measures revealed a significant difference between civics and social studies teachers and teachers of other disciplines on the scores they gave each of the teacher roles ($F(4, 743) = 108.63$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = 0.46$). It is important to note that the role perception items were analyzed in order to examine the hierarchy of roles and where items related to promoting political consciousness were located and for this reason an RM-ANOVA was used. Table 5 provides the cell means and SD s. Civics and social studies teachers valued the three statements regarding promoting political consciousness significantly higher than teachers of other disciplines did. Teachers of other disciplines rated setting boundaries and educating for consensual values significantly higher than civics and social studies teachers did.

Our last research question examined which variables predicted teachers' self-efficacy to conduct discussions on CPI. While the univariate analyses indicated relationships between self-efficacy and several teacher characteristics, the multiple regression analysis pointed to civic education as part of the teacher's role rate as the only salient predictor. Another attempt was made to clarify whether or not the other variables had any relevance to self-efficacy. Accordingly, linear predictive discriminant function analysis was conducted to assess whether teacher variables could discriminate between high and low rated self-efficacy. For this purpose, two categories of self-efficacy were created. The first category included those who were rated in the highest quartile, and the second category was comprised of those who were found in the lowest quartile. The discriminant function was significant, $\lambda = .768$, $\chi^2_{(8)} = 171.444$, $p < .001$, and accounted for 23.2% of the variance in category affiliation. The overall hit rate was 71.8% (68.8% correct prediction of low rated self-efficacy and 70.4% correct prediction of high rated self-efficacy). Table 6 presents the structure of the discriminant function. As expected, civic education as part of the teacher's role was the most dominant variable in the discriminant function. However, discipline (whether a civics and social studies teacher or other), pluralism, pluralism in education, and gender had a moderate discriminating ability between high and low rated self-efficacy. Feeling supported and professional development both had a low discriminating ability.

Discussion

This study compared civics and social studies teachers with teachers of other disciplines on the issue of handling controversial topics in class. We found that civics and social studies teachers had

Table 5. Civics and other teachers' *M*s and *SD*s for different teacher roles.

Scale	Civics (<i>N</i> = 266)		Other disciplines (<i>N</i> = 1359)		<i>F</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	
It is not my role to lead classroom discussions on political, social issues that can arouse controversy (reverse item)	5.52	0.99	4.87	1.36	53.56***
Part of the teacher's role is to encourage active citizenship and critical thinking	5.47	1.09	5.15	1.06	19.80***
Part of the teacher's role is to encourage political consciousness	5.12	1.28	4.42	1.43	56.50***
Part of the teacher's role is to set boundaries and foster self-discipline	5.32	1.04	5.48	0.85	7.15**
Part of the teacher's role is to help students regulate their emotions	5.23	1.04	5.30	0.93	1.13
Part of the teacher's role is to encourage academic excellence and achievement	5.00	1.13	5.12	1.03	3.11
Part of the teacher's role is to educate for consensual values	5.02	1.21	5.20	1.06	6.14*

M: mean; *SD*: standard deviation.

p* < .05; *p* < .01; ****p* < .001.

Table 6. Structure of the discriminant function.

Variable	Structure <i>r</i>
Civic education as part of the teacher's role	.790
Discipline (civics and social studies or other)	.460
Pluralism	.424
Gender	-.395
Pluralism in education	.351
Feeling supported	.272
Professional development	.212

higher scores in all variables. These findings are thought-provoking with regard to the way teachers' subject matter and training influence both their professional and personal identity. This can be seen in the finding that civics and social studies teachers did not only rate themselves as more proficient but also exhibited more pluralism in education and in general. Teachers' ability to nurture these qualities among students is an asset for a democratic society as recommended by many (Cohen, 2016; Hess, 2009; Moore, 2012; Paul-Binyamin, 2017; Rossi, 2006). On a narrower scale, this means that civic education teachers are better prepared to handle controversial topics in class. This was also supported by the findings that civics and social studies teachers reported conducting more discussions of controversial topics.

Teachers other than civics and social studies teachers refrain from holding discussions on controversial issues. Some of the gaps are dramatic. For example, while 46.4% of 'other' teachers reported holding no discussions in the past month, only 18.4% of civics and social studies teachers reported no discussions. This finding is congruent with a plethora of studies that

indicate teachers avoid discussions on controversial topics (Moore, 2012; Nystrand et al., 1998; Rossi, 2006).

There are two additional findings that may shed more light on the significant differences between the two teacher populations. First, the findings indicate that civics and social studies teachers were significantly more likely to know the Ministry of Education guidelines regarding the limits of freedom of expression. Second, civics and social studies teachers participated in professional development in multiculturalism significantly more than teachers of other disciplines.

Teachers need a sense of self-efficacy in order to comfortably conduct discussions of CPI. The most important variables in predicting teachers' self-efficacy in conducting discussions on CPI were related to teachers' professional identity. Interestingly, the strongest predictor was their internalized professional identity, namely, viewing civic education as part of their role, while their formal identity, their professional discipline, was the second strongest. Examining the variables that predict teachers' self-efficacy reveals that teachers who are more pluralistic (both in general pluralism and specifically in education) are better equipped to enter these discussions. One can assume that teachers who are more tolerant of differences in society are more tolerant of different viewpoints in class.

The finding that the Adam Verta case did not affect teachers' willingness to engage in discussions was surprising considering the public turmoil that surrounded the student's complaints against this teacher. Furthermore, this finding is in contrast to the finding that teachers avoid discussions. This contradiction begs for a different explanation. It may be that this finding does not genuinely reflect the influence of cases like that of Adam Verta. One possible explanation is that teachers fear/fail to admit to themselves that the case affected them. An alternative explanation may hinge on this sample's many years of experience ($\bar{X} = 16.4$). Adam Verta was a relatively new teacher, and these teachers may not have seen him as a relevant model.

There was a difference between Arab and Jewish teachers regarding the influence of Adam Verta's case. Arab teachers showed more influence on their willingness to engage in controversial discussions. This coincides with the research showing that Israeli–Arab teachers avoid discussing the Arab–Israeli conflict with students and avoid expressing their opinions (Jabareen and Agbaria, 2014; Watad-Huri, 2008). Analysis of the question about Verta is relevant to educational systems around the world, given the similar cases worldwide we noted in our introduction.

In an examination of teachers' role perception, we found that civics and social studies teachers rated roles that pertained to active citizenship and critical thinking, encouraging political consciousness and political discussions, higher than teachers of other disciplines did. Teachers of other disciplines rated roles that pertained to boundaries and self-discipline and educating for consensual values higher. The hierarchy that teachers constructed is indicative of teachers' implicit beliefs and priorities. Teachers' implicit beliefs convey a message of neutrality to students that shapes and inhibits students' active citizenship along with critical thinking. Civics and social studies teachers, however, demonstrate a clear and strong standpoint on promoting political consciousness and citizenship that has been prominent and consistent throughout our findings.

The findings indicate that civics and social studies teacher engage in discussions of CPI significantly more than teachers of others disciplines do. While this is encouraging for civics and social science teachers, it indicates a need for systemic improvement. Promoting critical thinking, democracy, and values is a central educational task that school staff should be involved in across the board. It is imperative that teacher training institutions emphasize the critical role of all teachers in promoting CPI. The onus is on curriculum developers to link the curriculum in all disciplines to address political consciousness whether it is algebra, science, arts, or literature. Teachers of all disciplines require professional development in multiculturalism and discussing CPI, and teacher training should promote these skills in all disciplines (Hess, 2009).

These findings support the association between teacher training and role perception. Civic education is a fundamental and secure arena for students to experience democracy, multiculturalism, and critical thinking through discussions of controversial issues. Students do not only learn the democratic procedures but the skills to conduct a democratic dialogue despite differences of opinions (Hess, 2009; McAvoy and Hess, 2013). Students' gains translate to society's gains and thus, point to the importance of emphasizing the handling of controversial issues in all disciplines.

This research was limited in separating teachers into core subjects due to the nature of teacher training in Israel. Further, research is needed to examine differences between teachers of different disciplines. Perhaps math and science teachers engage even less in discussions of controversial issues, and perhaps this prejudice is mistaken. Furthermore, research into differences between Arab and Jewish teachers may also be important. Additionally, the return rate in this study was particularly low and future studies that can attract more teachers may shed additional light on the topic of handling CPI if the return rate is higher.

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