Teachers' capital and relations with parents: A comparison between Israeli Jewish and Arab teachers

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HIGHLIGHTS

- Teachers simultaneously have collaborative and conflicting relations with parents.
- Jewish and Arab teachers cultivate different relations with parents.
- Different teachers' capitals are related to different relations with parents.
- In their relations with parents Arab teachers count on their social capital.
- Jewish count on their social, cultural and feminine capitals.

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ABSTRACT

Under neo-liberal policies, parents gain influence in schools. Following Bourdieu's notion of field, we examined teachers' views toward parents and their possession of feminine, social, and cultural capital in Jewish and Arab schools in Israel. Teachers (n = 959) from 51 randomly selected schools filled out a questionnaire. Findings revealed that Jewish and Arab teachers maintain differing relations with parents that include disengagement, threat and collaboration. Jewish teachers' perceptions of parents relate to their possession of divers types of capital, whereas Arab teachers count on their social capital. The findings fit the dimensions of individualism-collectivism and teachers' social position.

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1. Introduction

In recent decades, neo-liberal policies and decentralization of educational services have increased parents' influence in schools. In fact, some of these changes are based in part on the premise that parental involvement in school is significant for improving students' achievement and well-being (Epstein, 1995, 2001; Hill & Tyson, 2009; Jeynes, 2012; Kalin & Peček* Čuk, 2012; Sheldon, Epstein, & Galindo, 2010; Thijs & Eilbracht, 2012). Furthermore, parental involvement is also viewed as advantageous in facing global competition (Edwards & Kutaka, 2015). As such, some countries have incorporated within their national-level school reform a call to engage parents in schoolwork (e.g., the No Child Left Behind [NCLB] Act (2001) in the US and The Children's Plan (2007)

in the UK). However, as several researchers have noted, teachers are still not well prepared to work with parents (e.g. through their teaching programs) and have not internalized that collaborating with parents must comprise part of their professional responsibilities and ethos (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). Indeed, any change in the 'zone of acceptance' between parents and teachers and any trespassing of their respective role boundaries raise concerns about teachers' professional role and social position (Addi-Raccah & Elyashiv-Arviv, 2008; Driscoll, 1998; Lewis & Forman, 2002; Mawhinney, 1998). Thus, teachers' relations with parents may vary to include both inclusive and exclusive approaches (Lewis & Forman, 2002), that still need to be examined.

Based on Bourdieu's notion of the various forms of capital, we argue that the extent to which teachers may collaborate with parents or in contrast interact with parents in a limited and reserved manner depends on the relevant forms of capital they activate at school. Furthermore, as differing amounts and types of capital are

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relevant in different fields or social contexts, the interplay between teachers' relations with parents and capital may also differ across social settings. The present study aims to examine: (1) Teachers' views of their interactions with parents and: (2) The relations between teachers' capital and their interactions with parents in Jewish compared to Arab educational streams in Israel, which constitute two distinct systems.

2. Theoretical background

2.1. Parent-teacher relations

Waller's seminal work published in 1932 initially revealed that teachers' relations with parents are complex and diverse and opened a line of further research in this regard. Such relations range from a clear division of labor, whereby parents and teachers are considered to hold completely separate roles with distinct responsibilities as asserted by Durkheim (1956, 1961), to situations of greater collaboration between these respective caregivers, including parents' active engagement in their children's education at school (see, e.g., Epstein, 2001; Gillies, 2012). Under the latter model, the distinction between parents' and teachers' roles may be blurred. In practice, while teachers acknowledge the benefit of parents' involvement in schools, many still seek to uphold the traditional view that parents and schools remain distinct in their roles and responsibilities; as Baquedano-López, Alexander, and Hernandez (2013) concluded, "while policies and practices of parent involvement may even change in response to educational and community movements that seek a better integration among stakeholders in education, schools and teachers remain largely the uncontested bearers of privileged knowledge" (p. 156). What might partially explain this state of affairs is that the rising parental involvement introduces uncertainty into teachers' work, undermines and threatens their professional discretion, and lowers their social standing (Blasé, 1987; De-Caravalho, 2001; Ogawa, 1998; Todd & Higgins, 1998). As such, teachers —who view themselves as experts in education — assume that they deserve more power in school than parents (Todd & Higgins, 1998) and thus may resist parents' involvement so as to preserve their social position as professionals (De-Caravalho, 2001). Furthermore, teachers may display an unwillingness to cooperate with parents due to professional burnout and lack of self-confidence, knowledge, skills, and training (see for review Antonopoulou, Koutrouba, & Babalis, 2011). Therefore, some teachers express discomfort with parents' participation in schools and resist their intervention for maintaining their professional position (Addi-Raccah & Elyasiv-Arviv, 2008). This attitude, found in many developed countries (e.g. Bæck, 2010; Baum & McMurray-Schwarz, 2004; Dor & Rucker-Naidu, 2012; Dusi, 2012), reflects teachers' apprehension about professional jurisdiction and boundaries, as well as an acknowledgment of the impact of increased parental involvement in school. Hence, while there is awareness for the benefits drawn from effective parent-teacher relations that include cooperation and collaboration, evidence exists that parent-teacher relations are also a source of conflict (Lewis & Forman, 2002, regarding the USA; Addi-Raccah & Elyashiv-Arviv, 2008; Addi-Raccah & Ainhoren, 2009, regarding Israel), turning schools into an arena of struggle over power and influence. As such, we investigate teachers' positions vis-à-vis parents by applying Bourdieu's forms of capital to this context, as reflecting different sources of power that underline teachers' interactions with parents.

2.2. Theoretical approach

Bourdieu's approach affords a view of the school as an arena in

which 'players' hold different positions of influence depending on their possession of legitimate capital (Bourdieu, 1986; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). The capital refers to the valued resources underlying actors' interactions and social relations. The legitimate forms of capital are thus defined through social relations between agents that comprise the social order within a given society (Schneidhofer, Latzke, & Mayrhofer, 2015). The legitimate capital represents power or capacity to act within a particular field (Moore, 2008) and a stake in the struggle between groups in the field (Swartz, 2013). Within school, actors struggle over the distribution and the control of particular relevant resources in order to gain a positional good and have influence over school processes (Swartz, 2013). Individuals possessing more relevant capital have greater power to maintain and enhance their position in the field and to determine the type of relations they cultivate with others. As the "Construction and reproduction of social institutions depend on various power sources" (Schneidhofer et al., 2015, p. 22), actors of a specific occupation (e.g., nurses, managers, and teachers) may influence the type of relevant capital in the field and the way it is activated in that specific field (Bourdieu, 1986). Within schools, scholars have addressed different types of capital that can determine individuals' positions in schools (e.g., Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990; Ciabattari, 2010; Lareau, 2003; Spillane, Hallett, & Diamond, 2003). Yet, only few studies have focused on the different forms of teachers' capital (see, e.g., Caldwell, 2010; De-Caravalho, 2001; Forbs, 2006) and the activation of these capitals while interacting with parents. Following Bourdieu, working in a particular field defines the relevant and significant capital to be used for social interactions (Lareau & Horvat, 1999). Further, the relevance of each type of capital in constituting an individual's social position depends on the field in which one is situated. Schneidhofer et al. (2015) note, "[t]he power relations of the field are crucial in determining which and how various forms of capital count, creating status and prestige within a field" (p. 27). Therefore, the social context in which teachers are situated can affect their interactions with parents (Edwards & Kutaka, 2015; Witte, 2015) and the capital they activate while interacting with them. Namely, teachers may regard parents differently and activate different resources while interacting with parents depending on the parents' ethnic, cultural, or socio-economic background (see, for example, Bicer, Capraro, & Capraro, 2013; Hill, 2010).

In the present study, we address cultural and social capital that may be relevant to school settings (Bourdieu, 1986; Bæck, 2010; Lareau, 2000). We also address feminine capital as potentially prevalent in female-dominated occupations (Huppatz, 2012) such as teaching. These three forms of capital may enable teachers to act in the field, interact, and negotiate with parents. In brief, *cultural capital* reflects the way of doing and being that is acquired through an ongoing process of socialization (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). It relates to "the accumulated result of educational and cultural effort, undertaken either by the agent or by his/her ancestors" (Mayrhofer et al., 2002, p. 14). Cultural capital is expressed through academic degrees and qualifications, indicating cultural competence that yields social value for those with such certification; ownership of cultural goods and material objects; or in individual social interaction, style, knowledge, values, and cultural tastes. According to Bourdieu and other scholars (e.g. Becker, 1956) teachers are considered to possess cultural capital that characterizes the middle class and dominant group. As such, teachers' possession of cultural capital defines their position in school as a distinct professional group. Teachers may struggle to maintain their status as experts in education and prevent external interventions in their professional and moral judgments (Becker, 1956). The importance of cultural capital was presented by Spillane et al. (2003), who considered this type of capital as necessary in constructing influential school