Educational Planning: The Ethics of Compromise

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ABSTRACT

This manuscript focuses on ethics in educational policy planning. Specifically, it raises the question of how policy plan analysis may indicate for planners' ethics in considering that educational planners operate in an environment characterized by a variety of contradicting interests making compromises essential. The manuscript, which offers criteria that may be employed to assess and classify compromises, argues that different types of compromises may serve as proxies for planners' ethics. However, although the evaluation of compromises may produce valuable information, it is important to acknowledge that plans do not reflect the unique circumstances which existed while planning processes were performed. In this sense, an external assessment of planners' ethical conduct is limited. Therefore, it is concluded that much depends on planners' ethical and professional judgment and ability to maintain a conscientious balance between various considerations and expectations so that the compromises made will be less likely to produce paradoxical plans limiting educational development and progression.

INTRODUCTION

Professional ethics and ethical behaviors have become topics of renewed interest over the last decade following research stressing their effect on the behavior and performance of professionals (Elango, Paul, Kundu & Paudel, 2010; GopalaKrishnan, Mangaliso & Butterfield, 2008; Higgs-Kleyn & Kapelianis, 1999; O`Fallon & Butterfield, 2005; Trevino, Weaver & Reynolds, 2006).

In light of their complex knowledge and highly technical skills, professionals represent an authoritative symbol of social responsibility (Raelin, 1991), making their morality an imperative (Higgs-Kleyn & Kapelianis, 1999). Therefore, when lapses in ethical behavior occur, the credibility of the entire profession is endangered (Kerr & Smith, 1995).

Although ethical conduct is considered highly significant for individuals and organizations (Hill & Rapp, 2014), one can find a wide array of conceptualizations attempting to tackle this illusive concept. In general, professional ethics is a set of agreed expectations, setting the boundaries for professional conduct and a desirable course of action in a particular profession or organization. When these expectations are formalized, they become codes of behavior which all professionals sharing a particular occupation are expected to follow. Ethical codes are conventions enabling professionals as well as the entire society to differentiate among wrongs and rights when referring to professional conduct and to attribute accountability and responsibility to individuals. Moreover, ethical codes help managers to avoid hazards associated with immoral actions (Rosthorn, 2000) and to set guidelines that may be used to reward employees (Garcia-Marza, 2005).

The following paper focuses on educational planners' ethics. Assessing planners' ethics creates a unique challenge since the educational realm lacks agreed-upon criteria and expectations which set clear boundaries for planners' professional conduct and for assessing their ethical conduct. Rather, educational planners operate in a highly complicated context, involving a variety of contradicting interests and values. Such circumstances often require compromise, blurring ethical considerations even more. In addition, assessing educational planners' ethics by analyzing educational plans is a difficult task since educational plans do not tell the entire story nor do they reflect the circumstances which lead educational planners to articulate a particular policy plan.

Hence, assessing educational planners' ethical conduct requires the articulation of an analytic perspective, enabling analysis of the quality of compromises characterizing a particular plan. This is the main goal and focus of this manuscript.

ETHICS IN PLANNING

A wide array of criteria associated with the ethical conduct of planners may be found in the literature. One prominent example may be found in the American Planning Association Code of Ethics (AICP, 2005). Among the principles emphasized are consciousness to the rights of others, concern with long-range consequences, commitment to provide timely, adequate, clear and accurate information, the tendency to advance social justice and fairness in dealing with all participants in the planning process (for the complete list of criteria - https://www.planning.org/ethics/ethicscode.htm). Planners are expected to operate in line with these principles and produce plans allowing maximal benefits for individuals, organizations and the society.

While acting ethically seems to be the preferred mode of operation, it is important to acknowledge that the planning process which attempts to rationally bridge between present and future events (Faludi, 1973, p. 1; Inbar, 1985; Scholnick & Friedman, 1993) is often conducted in circumstances that are complex, dynamic and shadowed

by uncertainty and planners are often exposed to contradictory values and expectations. In this sense, planners constantly need to juggle between constraints, expectations and opportunities and, therefore, tend to articulate plans that all or at least most stakeholders may regard as feasible and acceptable. This implies that planners operate under stressful circumstances, often encouraged to compromise and develop satisfying plans which meet some acceptable threshold (Simon, 1978) rather than optimal solutions.

Since planning attempts to achieve some future goal in a particular context, every plan is an expression of three main dimensions: the content, which includes the theoretical and practical knowledge in a specific discipline or area of expertise; the context, representing the unique circumstances in which planning is performed and plans are supposed to be implemented, and finally, planner's knowledge skills and ethics, shaping professional considerations and the quality of professional conduct. This is also the case in educational planning:

Dimensions of the educational planning process
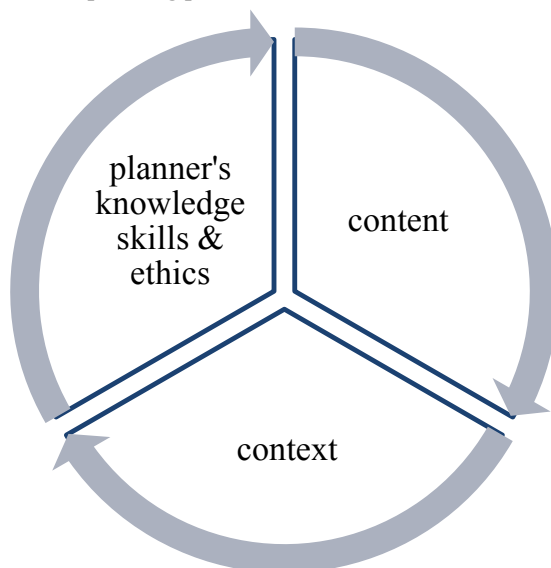
The constraints and limitations often characterizing the planning process and the need to effectively bridge between these three dimensions of the planning process are acknowledged and stated in the American Planning Association Code of Ethics (AICP, 2005):

> "….As the basic values of society can come into competition with each other, so can the aspirational principles we espouse under this Code. An ethical judgment often requires a conscientious balancing, based on the facts and context of a particular situation and on the precepts of the entire Code."

Acknowledging the complexity of the planning process, planners are expected to exercise their ethical judgment when articulating plans (AICP, 2005). This obviously grants planners significant degrees of freedom to choose the preferred mode of operation, values and the goals a plan is expected to attain. At the same time, however, it exposes them to problems and complexities which usually do not have simple or straightforward solutions.

PUBLIC EDUCATION AS PLANNING CONTEXT

Generally speaking, planning is a highly complicated task since planners always experience a discrepancy between what they know and the unknown. Their rationality is bounded (Simon, 1991) by the amount and accuracy of the information that may be used in a given time and place, by their cognitive limitations, and by pressures and the amount of time granted for the planning process. Therefore, uncertainty is an inherent feature of the planning process. This last statement is true in particular when planning is conducted in a social context subjected to the instability characterizing individual behavior and social interactions.

In addition to the constraints and uncertainty which typically face planners, the educational planning process is also affected by the unique circumstances in which planning is conducted. In this sense, any attempt to understand

the unique challenge facing educational planners and to assess their ethical conduct requires mapping the basic features characterizing public education.

Generally speaking, public education features complexity inherent to public schools' daily activities and processes, to the variety of interests and values involved and to the turbulent environment in which schools operate.

Educational issues are mostly "wicked": they are ill-defined; there is no ultimate test for their solutions; they are unique and are often symptoms of other issues (Rittel & Webber, 1973). Educators are held liable for any consequences that follow their actions, since the social tolerance for undesired outcomes and mistakes is low when educational issues are involved. The relation between ends and means tends to be vague (Rose, 1984) and the measures for attaining educational goals are inherently unreliable (Hogwood & Peters, 1985; Pressman & Wildavsky, 1984). Therefore, it is often hard to measure and evaluate outcomes and establish clear causality between processes and outcomes. Since least structured problems are more difficult to solve, educational problems are considered frightening and stressful (Leithwood & Stager, 1989), demanding a high level of proficiency (Leithwood & Stager, 1986) from educators and educational planners.

This inherent complexity which follows the variety of inconsistent and contradictory interests facing public schools sets the grounds for a range of dilemmas creating a professional and ethical challenge for educational planners. These dilemmas vary in scope: some are broader and yet fundamental to the very nature of public education (Bradley & Taylor, 2002). Others are specific to particular areas within the educational realm (Shapiro & Stefkovitch, 2000). Both kinds of dilemmas, however, are intertwined and are highly influential in terms of the uncertainty, complexity and challenge they bring to educational planners' daily experiences.

CHALLENGES IN EDUCATIONAL PLANNING: A FEW EXAMPLES

Although a wide array of challenges may be found in the theoretical and empirical literature discussing the educational realm, five are of particular significance for educational planners:

No one best way: Public education lacks shared agreement regarding best practices. Rather, what characterizes it is a variety of theoretical and practical perspectives, each offering a different mixture of benefits and limitations. This may be evident in various aspects of the educational process. For example, the variability among children found in every classroom suggests there is not, and can never be, one best way to foster and develop reading and writing (Allington & Cunningham, 2007, p. 66). Moreover, discussions on inclusion policies share the notion that different children have different needs which may be best met in different environments (Clegg, Murphy, Almack & Harvey, 2008). Hence, the appropriateness of different practices is heavily determined by the circumstances and professional considerations as there exists no single best practice that may be applicable to all educational issues, children or situations.

Multiple interests and contradictory expectations: The schooling context is characterized by multiple and contradictory interests that schools are expected to satisfy (Nir, 2000a). The increasing awareness of the public to schooling, the public debate on educational issues, the reports in the media on education and the increased number of educational interest groups which follow the development of a civic society (Rosen, 2001) all contribute to the various expectations schools face. This variety of interests and values produces little agreement regarding desirable ends schools are expected to attain. Hence, it seems obvious that a variety of contradicting interests have the potential to produce conflict and stress for educational planners striving to articulate plans that meet as many needs and expectations as possible.

Equity vs. Excellence: Another major challenge facing educational planners is related to the limited amount of resources often characterizing the public schooling realm (Betts, Rueben & Danenberg, 2000; Bradley & Taylor, 2002). Generally speaking, public education is offered to, and sometimes even forced upon, everyone and is therefore expected to reflect equal investment in every child. Yet, articulating the meaning of equity is rather complicated and may be conceived through different lenses. Equity may imply everyone receives the same amount of resources regardless of individual needs (Paquette, 1998). Equity may also imply each child receives educational services that correspond with his/her particular needs, and, therefore, that some children may receive more resources than others (Jencks, 1988). Choosing between these two perspectives often depends on the way public educational systems view their mission: ensuring that the academic level of all children meets a certain criteria, or ensuring excellence mainly through supporting those who are capable of attaining the highest achievements possible. Typically, public educational systems find it hard to take a clear stand on this matter, therefore allowing differential levels of studies and examinations in a given discipline.

Local, national or global: As the world gradually moves towards globalization, educational planners need to set the balance between the local characteristics of their culture and exposing children to global ideas and perceptions that promote a common denominator among people of different societies and cultures (Astiz, Wiseman & Baker, 2002). However, various global trends, such as international testing, undermine the fragile balance between the national and the global, strengthening the latter, thus creating constant pressure on national educational systems to adopt international curriculum categories and indicators (Priestley, 2002). As a result, national educational planners may often face difficulties to maintain a local perspective more sensitive to students' particular needs and to the national agenda. This may be evident in civic and history education (Law, 2004; Tormey, 2006) and may also be reflected in the way national systems integrate issues of identity and construct their hidden agenda (Gordon, 1984) within the national curriculum. Since the choice between the local and the global inevitably involves political considerations, educational planners may encounter difficulty in creating a defensible balance between the two perspectives when setting a national policy plan.

Political (short-term) vs. professional (long-term) considerations: It is well known that public education is framed according to political ideologies and agendas (Berkson, 1968; Blanco & Grier, 2009; Green, 1997; Lawton, 1992). Educational policies and plans are developed based on contemporary political thought and on governments' interests (McKenzie, 1993; Popkewitz, 2000). Since educational planners at the national level are expected to produce educational plans while operating in a political context, they typically operate at the crossroad between political and professional considerations. When professional considerations dominate, the planning process will be mostly influenced by scientific knowledge and past experiences gathered by professionals (Foster, Placier & Walker, 2002). Such conduct is based primarily on the inherent truths as to what should be accomplished, how, by whom, when and why, being shared by professionals in a particular area of expertise (ibid.). However, when political considerations dominate, educational plans are expected to allow politicians to exhibit some prominent accomplishments within a rather short time frame to serve their desire to get re-elected. These different considerations expose educational planners to a dilemma when assigning for example time perspectives to educational plans. Political agendas are limited by calendars, public interest and the attention of policy-makers and, therefore, tend to change over time (O'Toole, 1989). A variety of empirical works have shown that educational considerations play a major role in the political arena, especially before election time (Monchar, 1981; OECD, 2004; Paul, 1991; Popkewitz, 2000; Stevenson & Baker, 1991; World Bank, 2004). The relatively short life span of political interests implies that any attempt to present some educational achievement is likely to be characterized by a sense of urgency, encouraging planners to assign short time perspectives even when complicated educational issues are involved. However, in considering the complexity of educational issues, such conduct may limit the production of substantial solutions for complicated educational issues (Das, 1991). In this sense, educational planners experience stress which follows the disparity between their tendency to meet political expectations through articulating short-term processes and their professional inclination to set long time perspectives considered essential when attempting to initiate substantial pedagogical and didactical processes (Foster, Placier & Walker, 2002). The urgency associated with educational issues may encourage educational planners to adopt quick rather than comprehensive solutions for complicated educational problems "to maximize the scores on indicators of today's performance" (Kanter & Summers, 1994, p. 224). Such conduct may lead to simplification (Nir, 2000a) evident in the tendency to favor tactical and short-term solutions for "hot" and complex educational issues. Hence, finding the right balance between political and professional considerations creates an ethical challenge for educational planners if plans are likely to offer solutions for highly complicated educational issues and, at the same time, serve the political ambitions of politicians wishing to get re-elected.

Although the challenges described are merely examples, they testify to the unique assignment facing educational planners: setting policy plans in a context characterized by conflicting interests and values while lacking agreed criteria that clearly differentiate right from wrong. These conditions set an unstable basis for decision making and accountability and limit the ability to assess educational planners' ethical considerations and conduct. Moreover, the final product – educational plans – offers only a crude proxy for the various values, considerations and contextual features considered by educational planners while articulating plans. Hence, assessing planners' ethical conduct becomes a rather complicated challenge in considering the lack of objective criteria that may be employed.

EDUCATIONAL PLANNING: THE ART OF COMPROMISE

Educational planning, typically taking place in a context characterized by dilemmas and multiple conflicting interests, is obviously not a simple task. In this sense, educational planning may be considered a Multi-Criteria Decision Analysis (MCDA) (Belton & Stewart, 2002) process since there is no single optimal solution for educational problems. Therefore, educational planners must use their personal preferences and ethical judgment while striving to produce plans aiming to satisfy multiple and often conflicting expectations.

It is therefore not a surprise that educational planning involves stress for planners knowing that any plan they produce is likely to satisfy the expectations of some stakeholders and, at the same time, disappoint others. Therefore, educational planners may often be encouraged to compromise in an attempt to reduce their stress and create plans that allow contradicting expectations to converge.

While compromise "is what keeps society from falling apart" (Ricœur, 1991) and therefore may be considered a sensible and pragmatic mode of operation when educational plans intend to meet contradictory agendas and expectations, this strategy is not free of limitations which may undermine ethical clarity.

Initially, compromise is an ambivalent and a boundary concept as it combines opposing notions: a positive notion signalling a willingness for cooperation coupled with a negative notion signalling betrayal of ideal principles and agendas (Margalit, 2010, p. 6).

Secondly, getting along with others and engaging in collective sacrifice through compromises is considered highly valuable for social life and a major social competency. On this basis, it may be morally justified as part of the human survival process. Nevertheless, some compromises may be at the same time lethal for moral life (Margalit, 2010, p. 7), especially if they encourage planners to create plans that meet the lowest common denominator that ultimately harm those engaged in their implementation. It is important to acknowledge that compromises we eventually settle on are our second-best choices, and often not even that (Margalit, 2010, p. 5). Yet, they tell us more about our moral standing than an account of our first priority does (Lipsey & Lancater, 1956).

In realizing that public education is a meeting point for various and at times contradictory interests, educational planners are typically challenged to produce policy plans that would facilitate attaining worthwhile goals rather than provoke resistance likely to undermine plan implementation. However, searching for the right balance between extreme points of view promotes the tendency to compromise, and compromises always represent a deviation from some ideal. In this sense, assessing the ethical conduct of educational planners will always be tricky since there is no single set of interests or values that may be employed as a reference point when the quality of plans is evaluated.

PLANNERS' COMPROMISES: THE THREE PS

The process of educational planning makes compromises inevitable in light of the many contradictory interests that educational policy plans are expected to satisfy. Since plans that are based on compromises always reflect discrepancies from some ideologies, ideals and interests, the ability to assess the quality of compromises becomes crucial in order to evaluate planners' ethical conduct.

Acknowledging that compromises may take various shapes and forms, their qualities may serve as proxy for the different ethical considerations. Specifically, compromises in educational planning may be categorized to three main types, each representing different meaning and implications:

Type A compromise - Progression: A plan based on a type A compromise will reflect a discrepancy from some ideal goals or agendas. However, it will still enable the introduction of radical changes and the advancement of professional goals to an extent considered substantial and beneficial by all stakeholders. Such compromise will enable advancement of individuals, schools and the educational system as a whole and produce in the long run a significant change and worthwhile outcomes. In essence, a policy plan based on such a compromise pushes the educational system forward through the various innovations and improvements it introduces that altogether allow the educational system to perform better.

Type B compromise - Preservation: A policy plan based on this type of compromise mainly reflects the tendency to maintain stability by avoiding potential conflicts. A type B compromise produces a framework that reduces the variance in the processes and actions conducted within the educational system. One immediate expression for this mode of operation may be evident in the conservative nature of the articulated plan. A plan that is based on such compromises puts forward ideas which create the impression that the plan will lead to the best possible outcome considering the numerous contradictory interests and limitations involved. However, this notion is misleading since such plans offer only moderate changes and improvements and are more likely to maintain stagnation rather

than allow educational systems or schools to develop. Such a compromise will promote more of the same strategy and it may therefore make an educational plan dysfunctional in the long run, especially if schools operate in a turbulent and ever changing environment.

Type C compromise – Paradoxical: This type of compromise is likely to follow high pressure resulting of extreme contradictory expectations and sets of values that do not have a point of convergence and, therefore, cannot be easily bridged. Such compromises are self-contradicting and are usually based on false propositions. Therefore, plans that are based on paradoxical compromises will articulate solutions likely to regress the educational system rather than enable its development. In this sense, paradoxical compromises are often destructive. A better explanation is that paradoxical compromises often follow a Golden Mean Fallacy asserting that extreme points of view must be wrong or less relevant and that a middle point between these extremes is always better and truer. Although this may allow the tension educational planners experience to dissolve, setting educational plans based on some average between two or more extreme positions may produce a misleading combination.

Consider for example the attempts to introduce school autonomy policies in centralized structures. If planners need to cope with two contradictory agendas - one fostering the empowerment of schools and another arguing for the need to maintain a strong, centralized control over schools, their tendency to compromise and articulate a policy plan based on some average between these extreme perspectives is more likely to end with paradoxical autonomy: strong deceleration in favor of school autonomy along with strong measures employed by central government to maintain its control (Nir, 2009a). While such plans are likely to have limited effects on schools' autonomy, they are more likely to undermine school-level educators' trust in central initiatives and policy plans (Nir, 2000a; Nir & Eyal, 2003) and, hence, damage rather than promote the qualities of educational systems.

DETERMINING THE QUALITY OF COMPROMISES

Educational policy plans are usually a meeting point for various expectations and, consequently, may follow different types of compromises. Compromises are the result of ethical considerations and, therefore, their assessment may serve as proxy for planners' ethical perspective. However, the question remains: How can the analysis of policy plans indicate the type of comparisons employed and, planners' ethical considerations? What means and criteria may be employed for this purpose? This is a rather complicated challenge since policy plans are an end product providing little information regarding the exact circumstances educational planners faced at the time planning processes were conducted.

Nevertheless, six major aspects may be used to evaluate the type of compromises employed by educational planners:

Time frame: One key issue is the time frame designated for implementation processes. In many cases, pressures encourage planners to articulate short time perspectives for complicated educational processes. As argued earlier, the urgency attributed to an issue or problem may have a critical influence on the solutions planners are likely to offer: the greater the urgency attributed to a specific issue, the lower the chances educational planners will adequately address its complexity by articulating plans that offer satisfactory and long lasting solutions. This conduct leads to simplification since planners artificially diminish the time frame attributed for implementation processes, just in order to satisfy interests and expectations for quick though partial solutions and have their own pressures temporarily reduced (Nir, 2000b).

Resources: Although it seems obvious that educational plans cannot be implemented unless sufficient resources are allocated, planners often face incongruity between the goals a plan is expected to attain and the resources granted for this purpose. In many instances, large scale change is not accompanied by substantial financial commitment to schools by governments which often expect schools and educational systems to improve through better use of the existing resources rather than provide additional ones (Levin, 1998). Hence, planners may be tempted, or at times forced, to compromise and articulate policy plans while realizing that existing resources may hardly be sufficient. This conduct often follows a misleading notion that after implementation has begun additional resources may be allocated by the government to allow for completion. However, it is obvious that the greater the discrepancy between existing and required resources, the more likely a policy plan will produce a paradoxical solution.

Knowledge skills and qualifications: Since the transition from intentions to outcomes involves implementation processes, a significant aspect that planners should take into account involves the knowledge skills and qualifications of district and school level educators in charge of the implementation. If implementation processes require certain proficiencies that educators lack and/or training processes that are long, complicated and difficult, policy plans are less likely to meet their articulated goals. Such discrepancies decrease the likelihood a policy plan will enable an educational system to progress. Rather, they reflect a paradoxical compromise since the chances of plans meeting their articulated goals are low.

Contextual considerations: Policy planning in education takes place in a political, social, economic and cultural context. Although unique contextual features are often ignored when educational reforms are considered, the significance of the context for organizational behavior constantly gains recognition. Through establishing a frame of reference for individuals who share a given culture (Wentworth, 1980, p. 84), the context creates what may be termed as the "relevancy zone," articulating an arena for human interpretation and behavior (Nir, 2009b). The context presents an agreed-upon version of reality created through individuals' interactions in their social environment and, therefore, serves as a facilitator for human interaction. Hence, the context may be viewed as a membrane that absorbs changes and maintains meaning (ibid.). Its significance is high not only in determining the appropriate qualities for a particular culture and social setting, but also in influencing and adjusting everything that goes through it (Goffman, 1961, p. 33). In this sense, policy planners should look at the extent to which the articulated plans correspond to the features of the context in which they are supposed to be implemented. The degree of discrepancy between the plan qualities and the cultural and social qualities of the context in which it is supposed to be implemented may testify to the type of compromise planners adopted. A large discrepancy will indicate a paradoxical compromise since the chances such a plan will produce substantial results and change are rather low.

The goals-processes relation: An often conducted compromise in planning processes may be found in the discrepancy between the articulated goals and scope of the processes intended to meet them. As indicated earlier, educational goals and objectives tend to be rather complicated. Therefore, attaining them depends on the quality and scope of educational processes. Since educational planners often operate in circumstances characterized by conflicting interests, urgency and pressures, they may be tempted to compromise and assign processes that are weak in terms of their potential to produce substantial outcomes that meet the articulated goals. A compromise leading to a large discrepancy between the quality of processes and the goals these processes are expected to satisfy is misleading since it is not likely to allow for the attainment of goals to an extent that would be considered significant.

Values: Values are the building blocks of policy plans and, therefore, highly influential for the quality and essence of plans. However, educational planners operate in an environment characterized by different and at times contradictory moral and ideological perspectives and, as a result, often lack a solid and agreed upon set of values they can use as reference while planning. In many instances, they need to juggle in search of a compromise that would allow bridging between different value systems. This challenge fosters the need to compromise between professional and political values as well as between values held by various stakeholders striving to restructure the educational system. Educational planners, for this reason, may be tempted to produce policy plans that embody contradictory sets of values. Such conduct makes implementation impossible, paradoxical and misleading and may lead the implementation processes to a dead end.

THE ISRAELI NATIONAL TASK FORCE FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF EDUCATION AND SCHOOL AUTONOMY: AN EXAMPLE

The usefulness of compromise analysis may be demonstrated by looking at the policy plan articulated by the Israeli National Task Force for the Advancement of Education. The National Task Force for the Advancement of Education in Israel was appointed by Limor Livnat, Minister of Education, Culture and Sports, with the support of Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and Finance Minister Binyamin Netanyahu. It began its work in October 2003. The Task Force was charged with conducting a comprehensive examination of the Israeli educational system and recommending an inclusive plan for change – pedagogical, structural and organizational – as well as outlining a means of implementing it. Educators from academia and the schools, economic and legal experts, corporate executives, and public figures comprised the Task Force. The Task Force formed 12 professional committees made up of more than 100 professionals, each of which addressed a different major topic. After 15 months of work, the committees submitted their recommendations to the Task Force which compiled an intermediate report. A final

report was published a few months later. The final report presents an analysis of the Israeli educational system, a proposed vision, and a detailed description of the national policy plan with an outline for its implementation (State of Israel, 2005).

The appointment of the National Task Force took place approximately six years after the Ministry of Education began the implementation of a School-Based Management (SBM) policy. This initiative followed past unsuccessful efforts to decentralize the Israeli educational system and increase school autonomy. It is worth mentioning that previous initiatives had little effect on the centralized nature of the Israeli educational system mainly because of the *centralization trap* (Nir, 2006) evident in the contradicting tendencies to delegate authority to schools and, at the same time, to maintain substantial central control in schools (Nir, 2003a; 2003b). The Task Force, even so, decided to embrace the SBM policy along with its guiding assumptions in recognizing the benefits embedded in school empowerment for students, local communities and the educational system as a whole.

Nevertheless, an analysis of the Task Force recommendations concerning school autonomy reveals a number of compromises that follow the inclination to reconcile between these contradicting tendencies. These compromises raise some doubts regarding this policy plan's potential to promote school autonomy and may therefore serve as a proxy for planners' ethical considerations.

First example: The glass ceiling for school empowerment

A basic assumption in the proposed reform is that the status of schools and the national schooling system must be strengthened:

"...Strengthening the status and autonomy of school - **Maximum** *pedagogical, administrative and budgetary autonomy* **for the schools***, led by principals as the leaders of the educational activity, will enable the schools to realize their commitment to high-quality educational activity* (Intermediate Report, p. 9).

"....We highly value significant improvements in the nature and performance of schools and kindergartens and the **significant empowerment** *of those who are at the center of the educational activity* (Final Report, p. 14).

".... **Maximum** *pedagogical, administrative, and budgetary* **autonomy** *for the schools, led by the principals as the leaders of the educational activity, will enable the schools to realize their commitment to high-quality educational activity....the school shall select its employees* (Final Report, p. 15).

Can we conclude based on these statements that policy makers responsible for the articulation of the national reform actually intend to promote school empowerment and hand school level educators full authority for the various processes conducted in their schools? Other messages in the report suggest differently.

One example may be evident in the limited degrees of freedom teachers and school principals are likely to have and their limited ability to shape school goals according to their educational agenda and needs of the local community they serve:

"....The Ministry of Education will set measurable indicators for the entire system and will update them every three years (Intermediate Report, p. 12).

"...The Ministry of Education will determine, with the approval of the National Council for Education, measurable objectives for the entire educational system. These objectives will reflect the priorities and policy of the Ministry of Education. These objectives will be set for a period of five years and will be updated every year. They will serve as the annual objectives for the educational system (Final Report, p. 165).

"...under the new organization, the Ministry of Education will become a body which sets policies, finances, sets standards and ensures that they are carried out (Final Report, p. 28).

Hence, along with the messages emphasizing the significance of school autonomy, other messages stress the central role of the Ministry of Education as the body that determines goals priorities and performance standards.

Other messages reflect the restrictions on school principals' authority:

"...teachers' work conditions and salaries will be set according to **collective agreements***. Setting special contracts will be allowed only in special cases..."* (Intermediate Report, p. 11; Final Report, p. 23).

"...School will be granted full flexibility in running its budget **provided its conduct meets the obligatory policy** *and assignments set to the school..."* (Intermediate Report, p. 55).

"...School will have autonomy in using its budget **in the frame of the obligatory policy** *set by the Ministry of Education and the regional educational administration..."* (Final Report, p. 78).

*"...***most** *of the authority in the areas of pedagogy, budgets and personnel will be transferred to schools..."* (Intermediate Report, p. 10).

"...Schools and kindergartens are at the center of the educational activity and they are the ones who are responsible for the education in the state. As an expression of trust in their ability and as means for their improvement, **most** *of the authority and resources should be transferred to school principals and to school and kindergarten teachers..."* (Final Report, pp. 23; 78).

It is evident that the commitment to transfer **full** authority to the school level stated in the committee's Intermediate Report is moderated. The final report states that **most** authorities will be transferred to schools which will be subjected to various requirements set by the Ministry of Education and the regional educational administration.

Second example: The boundaries of flexibility

Another principle emphasized in the report that is central to school empowerment involves the proximity between decision makers and local circumstances as means to increase the relevancy of decisions to local expectations and needs. This principle is clearly stated in both - the intermediate and the final report:

"...schools need to be empowered....based on evidence coming from many studies showing that granting schools wide authorities allow decision making processes to take into account students' particular needs and promote educational achievements" (Intermediate Report, p. 32; Final Report, p. 53).

Did policy makers involved in the articulation of the final report ensure that school principals are left with sufficient authority, allowing them to design their school's pedagogy based on their professional judgment and local needs? A deeper look at messages that appear both in the intermediate and the final report suggests that this principle is only partially maintained:

*"....the school administration has the autonomy to determine the organization of studies and to set the educational and pedagogical modes of operation in accordance with students' needs **as long as the obligatory policy is kept**, both the national and the local one…."* (Intermediate Report, p. 53).

*"....the educational institution is responsible **to meet the objectives set for it** and for the achievements of its students"* (Final Report, pp. 40; 70).

Schools' ability to make decisions that are mostly influenced by students' needs is rather limited since schools are obliged to follow a core curriculum as a means for obtaining their budgets: *"...the school curriculum will be based on the comprehensive national curriculum which includes a core curriculum and other programs allowing deepening and expansion in particular areas that may be selected by schools…."* (Final Report, p. 83).

Moreover, schools may encounter difficulties conducting differential programs inspired by local needs since they are forced to conduct pedagogical and didactical activities that are based on obligatory national standards: *"...**one obligatory standard for all** derived from the core curriculum: what every student should know, understand and be able to perform..."* (Intermediate Report, p. 48)....*"**standards for achievements and expected students' skills will be defined** according to the core curriculum and according to the entire curriculum for all educational stages...."* (Final Report, p. 22)....*"we are not hesitant **to set clear objectives for achievements and accomplishments** of the educational system that will be anchored by public standards and used to test the entire educational system and each of its components...."* (Final Report, p. 58).

In fact, the Task Force policy plan grants school principals the freedom to conduct unique educational processes only after they meet the demands set by the obligatory national curriculum: *"...the school principal as the pedagogical leader of his school is responsible together with the entire administrative staff to decide, in collaboration with the school management and pedagogical council, what complementary educational programs will be taught in school in addition to the core curriculum…"* (Final Report, p. 116)....*"Based on the core curriculum the standards and the high demands for achievements, every educational institution should be granted full autonomy to determine its pedagogical and educational perspective…"* (Intermediate Report, p. 36).

It appears that the obligatory curriculum and standards leave school principals the freedom to choose generally the teaching methods, provided that students' achievements are in line with the standards set and determined by the centralized Ministry of Education:...*"it is possible to force the school to follow the educational policy and meet the obligatory standards but it is important to limit intervention as much as possible and allow schools to decide how these objective will be met…"* (Final Report, p. 111).

Although the report stresses the significance of flexibility and schools' ability to make decisions based on local needs, the requirement to act in accordance with an obligatory core curriculum and meet central standards significantly narrows schools' degrees of freedom. Schools are left with a rather limited authority to determine how processes intended to meet these centrally determined objectives will be designed and conducted.

Third example: Unifying the different

One of the main arguments in favor of decentralization and the empowerment of schools is that decentralized systems are better able to address variance and meet the different needs of students and the various expectations of members of the community they serve.

This issue was not overlooked by members of the National Task Force who emphasized the importance to conduct diverse educational processes in a democratic society such as the Israeli one, which continuously absorbs

immigrants and is comprised of groups of different social and cultural backgrounds*:"....Nationalism and pluralism: being a democratic country, the Israeli educational system should give expression to the variety of cultures, ethnic groups and streams comprising the Israeli society…*" (Intermediate Report, p. 34; Final Report, p. 56).

The report further stresses that the educational system is expected to assist in *"...closing the gaps among different parts of the society, lowering the walls between different social groups and promoting solidarity and social cohesiveness among all Israeli citizens… all this should be accomplished without discrimination or obliteration of unique views and perspectives…"* (Intermediate Report, p. 35; Final Report, p. 56).

Yet, along with the messages stressing the importance to maintain the uniqueness of the different social groups comprising the Israeli society, the report also brings other messages which are quite different, raising doubt regarding the ability of public schooling to give expression to the unique and the different:

*"...in the entire world, the blessing embedded in liberalism and in educational approaches that are less strict **has its price which is not a simple one**…"* (Intermediate Report, p. 26; Final Report, p. 47*)....*"Israel is a heterogenic society...we estimate that the large number of sectors and streams in education **is a central problem** for the educational system, being a divisive factor in the social-cultural tissue; it causes the loss of solidarity and partnership in the Israeli society and is a source for a large waste of resources"* (Intermediate Report, p. 28; Final Report, p. 49).

To avoid paying this "not simple" price and the "large waste of resources," the report suggests having a core curriculum: *"...we recommend expanding the core curriculum by adding clear definitions of contents based on educational objectives…"* (Intermediate Report, p. 47*)....*"the core curriculum is a consolidating basis for all the different streams in the country and it creates a common denominator for all students both in the conceptions, contents and values and in their thinking and learning skills"* (Final Report, p. 86*)....*"clearer definitions of contents that are based on the educational objectives which determine what each graduate of the Israeli educational system must know and understand will be added [to the core curriculum]"* (Final Report, p. 87).

These statements show that paradoxically, in spite of the need to serve students coming from different social and cultural backgrounds, the Task Force articulated a policy plan fostering a core curriculum and unified standards that pays little attention to the unique and the specific.

SUMMARY

In terms of the previously presented criteria, the policy plan set by the National Task Force articulates a set of paradoxical compromises which attempt to find a midpoint between the tendency to promote school level autonomy and, at the same time, to maintain central control over schools. Specifically, it is evident that these compromises attempt to bridge between different value systems, between the tendency to enforce central objectives and the tendency to allow locally initiated processes, and between contextual features of which the centralized nature of the Israeli governing bodies is the most dominant one. However, the tendency to walk between the drops and search for some mid-range mode of operation as a means to avoid potential conflicts seemed to encourage the National Task Force members to articulate a policy plan comprised of a gentle fabric of contradictions and compromises which typically limit development, progression and the realization of the plan's objectives. Consequently, it appears that the committee members' great devotion to their mission on the one hand and their awareness of the issues' complexity on the other hand encouraged them to articulate a set of compromises that unintentionally seem to undermine their initial intentions and ethical considerations. An analysis of the compromises made on each of the six parameters described – time frame, resources, knowledge skills and qualifications, contextual considerations, the goals-processes relation and value system, is useful although not sufficient when attempting to assess planners' ethical conduct.

In realizing that a policy plan is a conglomerate of various considerations and compromises, it is important to acknowledge that each particular compromise may not make a plan counterproductive or dysfunctional. Rather, it is the combination of compromises that may eventually result in a paradoxical and dysfunctional policy plan. Since it is the sum total of compromises that determines the extent to which a plan is paradoxical and dysfunctional, the evaluation of compromises must move from the inductive to the deductive level so that the entire set of compromises can be evaluated simultaneously.

Moreover, in considering that educational planning is often conducted in a context characterized by various and contradictory interests, it is important to acknowledge that the analysis of plans will always be at best a proxy for educational planners' considerations and ethics. This may be better understood in considering that plans offer little information, if any, regarding the circumstances that existed at the time educational planning processes took place. Although an analysis of policy plans does allow assessing the types of compromises performed to some extent, it is impossible to reconstruct the complete scope of circumstances planners faced while planning. Therefore, assessing

the degree to which the compromises made were intended to facilitate the planning process or to enable to best serve the various interests involved is in fact limited. Much depends on planners' idiosyncratic perceptions and professional judgment.

Since educational planning is the art of compromising, the ability to assess externally planners' ethical conduct through the evaluation of compromises is rather limited. In this sense, educational planners' ethical judgment and their ability to maintain a conscious balance among various considerations and expectations while compromising is what makes their professional conduct ethical. Therefore, the professional training of educational planners should not focus solely on professional knowledge and practical skills which planning processes require. Rather, much emphasis needs to be placed on ethical judgment and on individual capacity to cope with pressures. These will allow planners to better cope with circumstances characterized by multiple contradictory interests and pressures, will increase their awareness of the negative implications that follow paradoxical compromises and will increase the chances that articulated plans will be based mainly on progressive compromises rather than on paradoxical ones.

As argued earlier, it is the combination of compromises that may eventually lead to a paradoxical and a dysfunctional policy plan. It is therefore not surprising that more than a decade after this policy plan was official declared, the Israeli educational system still maintains its centralized nature and school autonomy remains relatively limited in spite of the strong governmental support and the intensive coverage this policy plan received from the media.

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