



# Do Teachers Need to be Leaders? Perceptions of Educational Leadership and Management in the Israeli Secondary Educational System

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## Abstract

*Secondary education in Israel differs from Elementary education not only in the students' age, but mainly in how the teachers' job is perceived. In secondary education teachers teach one discipline in which they obtained a B.A/B.Sc or M.A/M.Sc diploma and a teaching certificate. This has created a dichotomy over the years between the practice of subject teachers who are expected to impart expert knowledge in one discipline, and homeroom teachers who are expected to develop a much more holistic view of the student and serve as his/her 'case manager' in and out of school.*

## Literature Review

### Historical overview

The relationship between educational leadership and management has been controversial over more than 30 years, because on one hand both are perceived as equally pertaining to effective education, yet they are also perceived as distinct entities (Timor, 2003). The significance of educational leadership is stressed in the literature as a core element that provides a sense of direction, while management alone exposes the educational system to a danger of 'managerialism', which is 'a stress on procedures at the expense of educational purpose and values' (Bush, 1999:240).

Some researchers maintain that leadership and management are overlapping. Others drew a distinction between the two concepts. For example, Cuban (1988) linked leadership with change while management was seen as a maintenance activity. Another view is hierarchical and relegates management to a secondary position. This view implies that leaders set the course and managers follow it, or alternatively that '*leaders do the right thing*' whereas '*managers do things right*' (Bennis, 1984: 66).

### Teacher Leadership

The concept of teacher leadership has been discussed for more than two decades mostly dwelling on the impact of involvement of teachers in the decision-making process in schools, which is considered an important element of teacher leadership (Donghai & Jianping, 2015; Emira, 2010). An overview of the literature yields a number of concepts that are related to teacher leadership: classroom level versus school level, formal versus informal roles, and individual level versus collective level (Donghai & Jianping, 2013; Angelle and DeHart, 2011). Teacher leadership can be divided into practical aspects (Lieberman and Walker, 2007) and *spiritual aspects* (Day and Harris, 2003) Dongjai & Jianping (2013) found that secondary school teachers perceived they had a higher level of leadership in curriculum and instruction-related area than elementary school teachers.

### Goals of Study

The study explored the perceptions of student-teachers of educational leadership and management with regard to the role of homeroom teachers and subject teachers in secondary schools. No previous study has explored the dichotomy between homeroom teachers and subject teachers in the context of educational leadership and management, so in this sense this study is a pilot study in the area. The study dwells on the literature of leadership and management, aiming at an in-depth discussion of the two teaching roles.

### Research questions

1. Is there a dichotomy in the respondents' perception that homeroom teachers must be leaders, while subject teachers must be class managers?
2. What are the main arguments that supported the answers?
3. Which models of educational leadership are reflected in the student-teachers' responses?

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## Methods

### Research population

The 79 participants are students in a Teacher Education Program in the biggest College of Education in Israel, where they obtain a Master degree in Teaching & Education and a Teaching certificate for secondary schools in a variety of subjects. The study was conducted in the framework of an academic course taught by the author, entitled 'Classroom Leadership and Management in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century'.

### Research design and analysis

The students participated in an online forum designated for the course and responded to the following question: 'Is it correct to assume that homeroom teachers are related to educational leadership, whereas subject teachers are related to classroom management?' The richness of the data provided the basis to the formation of the three research questions. The study comprised three phases:

In Phase 1 the posts were categorized according to those who supported/denied a dichotomy in their perception of the roles of homeroom teachers and subject teachers on the practical level ('what actually happens in schools') and the level of ideology ('the way it should be'). The answers were categorized separately for each level. In Phase 2 the main arguments that supported or rejected a dichotomous perception of the two roles were clustered into themes. A dichotomous stance would mean that the two roles are perceived as separate entities with clear-cut differences between them, bearing a different focus (leadership or management), whereas a non-dichotomous stance would mean that any teacher needs both management and leadership skills, no matter which role s/he holds. In Phase 3 the focus was placed on leadership styles. The answers were categorized according to the types that are known in the literature with an eye open to the emergence of new types.

Due to the interpretive nature of the study, the qualitative paradigm was chosen. The quantitative method was conducted on research questions 1 and the qualitative content analysis on the students' posts was conducted on research questions 2 and 3.

## Findings

**Research question 1:** Is there a dichotomy in the respondents' perception that homeroom teachers must be leaders, while subject teachers must be class managers?

Table 1: The students' perceptions of homeroom teachers and subject teachers

The Level of ideology								Practical Level							
Homeroom teacher				Subject teacher				Homeroom teacher				Subject teacher			
manager	leader	both	no res	manager	leader	both	no res	manager	leader	both	No Res.	manager	leader	both	no res
3	9	65	2	7	6	65	1	5	19	10	45	21	7	9	42

The level of **ideology** indicates a consensus among 65 respondents (82%) that the teacher's role requires both leadership and management skills, regardless whether the teacher is a homeroom teacher or a subject teacher. This indicates that the respondents did not perceive a dichotomy between the role of homeroom and subject teachers. However, the findings regarding the practical level yielded a perceived dichotomy between the two roles: whereas the homeroom teacher is perceived much more as the class leader than as the class manager, the subject teacher was perceived much more as the class manager than as the class leader. Large percentages did not respond to the practical level regarding homeroom teacher and subject teacher's role (57% and 53% respectively).

**Research question 2:** What are the main arguments that supported the answers?

**Themes with arguments that support the dichotomy:** *a different status, hierarchy between leadership and management, role expectations and scope of responsibility:*

**Themes that represent arguments that deny a dichotomy:** *excellence in teaching; constraints of reality and contingency; teacher's personality, teachers as educators, humanistic-holistic approach to teaching:*

**Research question 3:** Which models of educational leadership characterize the student-teachers' responses?

Table 2 illustrates the leadership types that were elicited from the respondents' answers.

Leadership type	Transformational leadership	Instructional leadership	Moral leadership	Pedagogical /social leadership	Post-modern leadership	Empathetic leadership
Number of mentions	52	28	17	10	7	18

Most of the respondents described leadership as transformational (52 mentions) and the rest of the mentions divide between 4 types of leadership. A new type emerged from the posts, namely *Empathetic leadership* (18 mentions). This type of leadership is characterized by an emotional involvement on the part of the teachers, e.g. the teacher shows care to the student's personal experiences; lends him/herself to personal contact; disregards hierarchy.

## Discussion

The findings of research question 1 were surprising because of the distinction that emerged between the theoretical level ('the way it should be') and the practical level ('what actually happens in schools'). This distinction indicates a 'cultural shock' that new teachers experience in their first year of practice teaching, because the picture they have in mind (theoretical level) about teaching roles is different from what they see in schools (practical level). The findings yielded that 82% think that ideally a teacher, any teacher, needs leadership and management skills for different teaching circumstances. This indicates that novice teachers' perceptions of teachers' responsibilities upon entering school is holistic and multi-faceted. On the other hand, the findings of the practical level seem to reflect the existing system: homeroom teaching is perceived as requiring leadership skills more than subject teaching (6%) and vice versa. This finding is congruent with the literature that teacher leadership is conceivable in theory while it is inconceivable in practice (Day & Harris, 2003).

The fact that most of the respondents did not relate to the practical level in their posts regarding homeroom teacher and subject teacher's role may be attributed to lack of knowledge as the respondents are students in their first year in a teacher training program, or to an inability to apply the concepts taught in the course to school practice at this point.

Regarding research question 2, the division into themes that advocate and reject a dichotomy between the role of homeroom teachers and subject teachers reflects two approaches towards teachers' responsibilities: The approach which was observed on the practical level assumes a clear dichotomy between the vast array of responsibilities of homeroom teachers as opposed to subject teachers whose main responsibility is to teach. The approach which was observed on the level of ideology is more up-to-date because it dwells on the humanistic approach to teaching, emphasizes moral values and holistic responsibilities as part of any teachers' job, and is definitely not restricted to teaching. This approach corresponds with teacher preparation stance, whereas in practice, schools still bear a more traditional approach to teaching, hence the 'cultural shock' of novice teachers.

The above-mentioned analysis is supported by the findings of research question 3. The new type of leadership that emerged in the study, *Empathetic leadership*, reflects, too, the second/new approach to teaching that has been adopted recently in teacher education. By this approach, emotions and empathy play an important role, individual needs are met, and humanistic values are embedded in teaching practices.

## Conclusions

The study indicated a gap between the practical level in student-teachers' perceptions which reflects a dichotomy in schools between the role of homeroom teachers (leaders) and subject teachers (managers), and the level of ideology by which the role of teachers is viewed as leadership combined with management skills. Further research should focus on exploring other aspects of the gaps between school reality and teacher education programs. This is particularly important for policy makers who should try to narrow down these gaps in order to facilitate the induction phase for novice teachers.



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