

TO BE OR NOT TO BE: ACCOUNTABILITY - THE CONGRUENCE BETWEEN PUBLIC'S DEMAND AND TEACHERS' CONCEPT

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Abstract

The study is dealing with teachers' concept of accountability. It is based on a survey carried out among 50 elementary school teachers from Israel's Central District. The study covered three different domains – the academic domain, the behavioral domain, and the ethical domain. All in all, the study encompassed eleven different categories: Four in the first domain, three in the second domain, and another four in the third domain. The study's point of departure was the high complexity of Israeli society and the high pressures to which it is subjected. Bearing this in mind, the research question was to what extent would Israeli teachers embrace accountability in the three domains; to what extent would they be committed to instilling the values included in the eleven categories. The main research finding is the congruence between society's expectations and teachers' accountability and commitment.

Key words: *human capital, performance indicators, teacher-student relationships, teachers' accountability, teachers' performance, teachers' responsibility.*

Introduction

The topic of accountability is one of the most significant issues currently facing the educational system. Those dealing with issues involving educational philosophy, as well as educational sociology, find themselves preoccupied with this topic as well.

The significance of accountability stems from the premise that educational systems are organizations charged with serving *customers*: i.e., educational systems are social units responsible for providing a service (Bidwell, 1989, 414). Society perceives this service as consisting of teaching students various skills, as well as practicing ethical orientations required in order to fulfill adult roles.

At the very least, according to the functionalist paradigm espoused by quite a number of sociologists, schooling is also an instrument of economic and social advancement. The educational system is a primary mechanism for social mobility and placement. Therefore, reaching a certain level of schooling is essential for determining one's social status (Eisenstadt, 1965; Buchmann & Hannum, 2001; Kingston et al., 2003). This is also the basis of the theory of human capital, which regards education as a worthwhile investment from an individual perspective, as schooling eventually translates into higher wages. Going to school helps one find higher-paying and prestigious occupations (Haran, 1990, 46; Doyle, 2003).

However, the theory of human capital is relevant not only for individuals but also for society as a whole, since schooling and growth of human capital help increase society's overall output and result in economic growth in the long run (Lepak & Snell, 1999; Galor & Tsiddon, 1997; Harbison & Myers, 1964).

Thus, this theory attests to the prominent significance of accountability, based both on teachers' commitment to individuals and to society.

All the more so when we consider that the role structure of the educational system includes

a division between student roles and faculty roles, where student roles are what sociology calls an inductive role, while faculty roles are achievement oriented (Bidwell, 1989, 414).

Emergence of the Movement for Teacher Accountability

Students must enter the educational system whether they want to or not, they are required by law to go to school. In contrast, faculty members assume their roles willingly and freely. The system offers those who fulfill teaching roles incentives such as salaries in return for their professional capabilities. Thus, it is an exchange relationship manifested in a special contractual relationship between the educational system and the teaching faculty. Since their role is based on a contractual relationship they can be held accountable for its proper fulfillment. This is even truer in the case of Israel, where the educational system is perceived to begin with as a main tool for overcoming social gaps stemming from different ethnic origins, periods of immigration, and class-based disparities (Aviv, 1990, 84). According to this basic concept, schools should strive to equitably develop their students' skills. It is precisely when children come from problematic backgrounds consisting of a different language, different culture, poverty, and a dysfunctional family setting, that the educational system is expected to correct these basic conditions and give these students an opportunity to advance and become similar to all other students. In short, the education system is supposed to enhance equity.

As stated by Kashti and Yosifun (1986, 92), since the 1960s schools in Israel have been perceived as a social organization initiating human processes: an organization with the goal of "improving people", and mainly those from disadvantaged groups. Thus, schools are perceived as a major agent for improving students' social and economic chances, while integrating them in a normative course stemming from the school's ethical orientation. Such normative conduct was perceived as an essential condition for providing the needs of modern human beings. This is the school's effect on individuals. On the other hand, the various schools are also considered an economic catalyst, as they provide skilled manpower for the economic system, which must constantly develop and change as well. Such is schools' contribution to society. Schools – and obviously also teachers – are perceived as agents of change and a means of advancing both individuals and society, in accordance with the theory of human capital. Thus, this concept as well recognizes the major significance of teacher accountability, stemming from teachers' dual commitment both to children and to society. Accordingly, the educational system provides services to two customers – society and the individual.

In regard to the individual, the educational system cannot choose its customers, as in modern society education is provided on a universal basis, as stated above, i.e. its services are neither selective nor voluntary, they must be provided to all customers entitled to them by law. However, the educational system is committed to providing a uniform product of a certain quality. Thus, the system must devise consistent methods for evaluating students' achievements at different stages of their studies, establish consistent procedures for student socialization according to these evaluations, and set standards for teachers' responsibility for their product. This is also the basis of models developed under the title of "differentiated staffing", with the aim of finding a way of defining the obligations and rights of outstanding teachers, and giving them the opportunity to influence as many students as possible (Goldstein, 1979, 82).

A main element of one of the first models in this field is that high ranked faculty members are not tenured. They must prove their abilities time and again. These abilities are the manifestation of their responsibility towards the students (Allen, 1969).

A common image often utilized to describe the teacher-student relationship is one taken from the economic world (Sessions, 1995). According to this concept, students are "consumers" while teachers are "manufacturers" or "vendors". In this case, education is the "product". Teacher-student relationships are alternately defined as tour guide-tourist relationships or employer-employee relationships, where the basic principle is one of economic exchange.

This model too requires teacher responsibility for the product. As a result of budgetary constraints, dissatisfaction among the population and the desire for changes in the educational sphere, teacher responsibility towards the students is gaining increasingly more attention at teacher training institutions as well. In this context, new tools are constantly being developed in order to enable teachers to examine the effectiveness of their responsibility towards the students (Cross, 1995).

The issue of teacher responsibility towards students and society received intensive treatment in the US in the 1980s when the question of the effectiveness of public educational institutions became a major topic in election campaigns and debates in legislative bodies following a series of studies on the functioning of elementary and secondary schools (Twentieth Century Fund National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983; National Governors' Association, 1986; Gardner Education Commission of the State, 1986). On the one hand, many resources were devoted at the time to improving the educational system, but the topic of the school's accountability to its students was also increasingly stressed (Jennings, 1989, 438; Valli & Buese, 2007; Reeves, 2004).

In response to the demand for accountability, various US states and school districts began operating a series of techniques aimed at evaluating teacher performance on a continuous multi-branch basis (including classroom observations by principals and supervisors, student feedback, measuring student achievements through tests, etc.) (Nevo, 1994, 114; Jacob & Lefgren, 2007).

The emphasis on educational accountability showed that public institutions are not only a symbol of society's aspirations: they also serve as instruments for realizing public goals. And as those charged with realizing these goals, they are naturally held accountable for their actions (Nevo, 445). In addition, the demand that teachers be held accountable also derived from the recognition that this would contribute to improving their achievements (Wiggins, 1996). All this is now taken for granted in most developed countries, and thus the significant attention focused on developing performance indicators on the one hand and the atmosphere of self-review among teachers on the other (Davis & White, 2001; OECD, 1995).

Britain has taken a particularly strict approach on this issue, initiating compulsory publication of school-based exam scores, and seriously considering the option of linking teachers' salaries to their performance. Intensive efforts were invested in developing complex performance indicators in Britain (Helsby & Saunders, 1993, 57-58).

The Object of Educational Accountability

Mere recognition of teacher accountability – which, as stated, is now widely acknowledged – is not enough to categorically define the object of responsibility and the essence of the product for which teachers must be accountable. Although the previous section referred to teachers' responsibility for the product, performance indicators and self-review, this issue emerged gradually and erratically; moreover, there is no consensus regarding the basic essence of teaching.

For example, Prof. Lamm (1973) charted the cognitive dimension of teaching, with the intention of revealing teacher approaches to their work. As a result, three different perceptions of teaching became evident:

1. Perceiving teaching first and foremost as a process of imparting knowledge through imitation;
2. Perceiving teaching as a process of shaping the personality through knowledge contents;
3. Perceiving teaching as a process aimed mainly at supporting development of the individual and promoting one's ability to continue learning.

The first two perceptions focus mainly on the study material, while the third perception focuses on development of students' potential.

Naturally, this cognitive chart serves as the basis of strategies intended to realize the goals of teaching (Lamm, 1973, 251-260). Each of the perceptions stresses a different product essence, and therefore each requires the teacher to demonstrate a different type of responsibility.

Nonetheless, the basic essence of the responsibility required of teachers is identical in all perceptions, and in this matter Avinon (1995, 127), in his concise formulation, was right to say that as far as the teacher's responsibility is concerned, teachers must first and foremost make sure that their objective is compatible with students' skills and needs. Secondly, they must translate the objective into concrete practical goals. And thirdly, they must reexamine their objective from time to time in light of changing conditions and circumstances, in order to perform necessary modifications.

In other words, the teacher's responsibility to others is manifested first and foremost in constantly holding oneself accountable.

The subject of a typology of personal responsibility was discussed in detail by McIntyre (1977) as early as the 1970s. He discerned three different levels of responsibility, ranging unsubstantial to grave, from individual to collective:

1. Responsibility for teachers' activities in the classroom;
2. Responsibility for students' manifest activities in the classroom;
3. Responsibility for students' mental activities and experiences in the classroom;
4. Responsibility for students' acquired skills, i.e. for realizing the cognitive, social, and psychometric objectives of teaching;
5. Responsibility for students' future qualities – their way of thinking, approach to work, intelligent utilization of criteria learned to make rational decisions.

These levels of responsibility are hierarchical in essence, each higher level encompassing those below it. However a glance at the five levels indicates something else – in the first three levels teachers are held accountable for their actions: in the last two levels they are held accountable for the results of their actions. Thus, there is an essential difference in the responsibility required! Today, as stated, teachers are customarily held responsible for the results of their actions, but this was not so clear to begin with.

In her analysis of the problematic aspects of accountability as demanded by the authorities, Linda Darling-Hammond (1989) explained how responsibility is sometimes transferred from the teachers to Ministry of Education mechanisms. This derives from the concept whereby schools ultimately serve as agents of the government system, and therefore can be managed and operated through a hierarchical process of decision making. Educational policies are determined at the pinnacle of the educational administration, from whence they are delegated to Ministry of Education officials who translate them into rules and procedures, from which they produce study programs, textbooks, student assignments, etc. (Darling-Hammond, 1989, 62).

This approach, which transfers fundamental responsibility from the teachers to the Ministry of Education's clerical administration, is based on a series of premises: First, it assumes that students will respond to rules and procedures determined by policy designers in a uniform manner. Second, it assumes that the knowledge base of the Ministry of Education is sufficient in order to adequately outline educational techniques and adapt them to society's wide range of circumstances. Third, it assumes that once the systemic process is functioning properly it will lead to necessary outcomes. And fourth, it assumes that unsatisfactory final results indicate that the instructions conveyed through the system's channels were insufficiently detailed or improperly implemented. Thus, solution of educational problems depends not on teachers but on a more precise definition of management processes (Darling-Hammond, 1989, 63).

This bureaucratic model, described by Darling-Hammond, sees the teacher as a functionary and as one who executes instructions, rather than as a skilled professional. Study

programs are outlined by Ministry of Education officials, and teachers merely apply them. Teachers' work is supervised by hierarchical supervisors whose role is to oversee proper implementation of programs. Thus, teachers' responsibility is limited to fulfilling standard operative processes. According to this model, they are not required to meet students' unique needs. In essence, a bureaucratic model cannot provide adequate education to students who are not a-priori compatible with the model from which the requirements were derived (Darling-Hammond, 1989, 63-64).

This approach serves as the point of departure of other scholars of education as well, who contend that the demand for accountability for the product should be linked to wider and deeper inclusion of teachers in the educational process. They should be included in the decision making process, whether regarding decisions on teaching per se, school development, or the school's goals and values (Lieberman, 1988; McMillan, 2001).

Nonetheless, a questionnaire administered to 950 teachers in the Israeli secondary educational system as early as the 1970s (Goldstein, 1979), indicated that teachers themselves apparently have no doubts as to their professional responsibility. When respondents were required to rank criteria for evaluating teachers' work, they ranked student achievements right after education and teaching initiatives. Mayors surveyed in this study were also of the opinion that students' achievements, and mainly their success in matriculation exams, are a major criterion for teacher evaluation (Goldstein, 1979, 88).

Teachers and Their Perception of Accountability

The views stated above show that there is a wide consensus concerning student achievements. Teachers, educators, and other professionals all agree that imparting knowledge and skills is a major role of teachers and thus they should have a deep sense of commitment in this area. Teachers' effectiveness is evident from examination of study outcomes, as manifested in tests of student achievements in the various disciplines (Raskin, 1990, 20). Moreover, teacher evaluation is considered essential as one stage in the process of examining whether study goals are being achieved and in constructing teachers' responsibility and commitment towards the students, their parents, the educational system, and society as a whole (Nevo, 1994; Darling-Hammond, 2000; Tucker & Stronge, 2005).

However, society also requires schools to oversee students' general development and help formulate their sound personality (Biber, 1964, 157). Moreover, schools are perceived as institutions that shape members of the specific culture in which they operate. Education is defined as an intentional process of transmitting adult culture to the younger generation (Eisenstadt, 1989, 157; Hurn, 1990, 5; Shipman, 1978, 3-7).

A separate issue is ethics education, which some see as an integral part of the school's basic roles, while others contend that the school should have nothing to do with it (Soen, 1996; Soen, 1995). The root of the problem is, first of all, that no modern society is culturally homogeneous. All modern societies are diverse, to different degrees. Imparting culture involves conflicts between different beliefs, different world views, and competing values regarding the nature of the ideal society (Hurn, 1990, 7). This is the root of the view whereby "*any approach that subjects one to some preplanned idea, lofty as it may be, without requesting one's consent, without providing tools for examining the idea's validity and perceiving its different aspects, and without the freedom to question – is not education, rather it is the end of education, and it is simply an attempt at ideological coercion and obstruction of free thought*" (Smilansky, 1996).

Israel is a special case in this respect. It is an ideologically-culturally conflicted society, a society dominated by multi-dimensional polarization - political (hawks-doves), ethnic (European-American origins – Asian-African origins), religious (ultra-Orthodox, religious, secular), cultural (traditional versus modern). No wonder the issue of ethics education is

therefore even more controversial (Lamm, 1993).

Thus, society generally agrees that teachers should be held accountable to students, their parents, and society. This consensus is shared, as stated above, by teachers as well. The educational responsibility assumed by teachers is part of their role. Nonetheless, the essence of educational responsibility and its ethical contents remains to be determined.

Methodology of Research

Following all that has been said above, the research set out to tackle teachers' commitment and accountability to their students. It was conducted as a case study, and embraced 50 teachers working at a state elementary school in the coastal belt of Israel, comprising about 90% of the teaching staff of the institution. The project was carried out by students at the Kibbutzim School of education as part of a seminar. The survey attempted to examine teachers' perceived role, exploring their attitude to 11 values or educational categories examined some thirty years earlier by Shanan and Sharon (1971). The values were divided into three domains, as follows:

A. The academic domain:

1. Knowledge
2. Work habits
3. Hobbies
4. Intellectual development

B. The behavioral domain:

1. Discipline and manners
2. Social skills
3. Sensitivity

C. The ethical domain:

1. Ethics and morals
2. Attitude to property and money
3. Civic awareness
4. Religion

The main research question posed was to what extent teachers should hold themselves accountable to their students in these three domains. A secondary research question was: is there a difference in the teachers' commitment and accountability in the different domains?

Results of Research

Respondents were requested to state the degree of responsibility and personal commitment expected in each of eleven categories included in the survey. Their responses were ranked on a five-level scale, according to the degree of responsibility and commitment perceived by each respondent towards the category examined. The questions were posed in a very simple straightforward way. For example: *"To what extent should teachers commit themselves to enhancing their students' intellectual development?"*; *"To what extent should teachers hold themselves accountable to inculcating civic awareness to their students?"* etc. Teachers received a score of 5 if they assumed high responsibility and commitment, and a score of 1 if they refused to assume any responsibility or commitment.

Statistical analysis of the respondents' answers indicated four basic conclusions – first of all, teachers demonstrate differential commitment within the different domains. The differences in their sense of personal responsibility towards the eleven categories and values may be very large at times (Table 1). Secondly, among the three domains, the academic domain turns out to be of paramount importance (table 2). Thirdly, imparting ethics and values to the students ranks 4th place (Table 1), immediately after nurturing civic awareness and before the care for

intellectual development. Fourthly, two significantly instrumental areas were found to head the scale of teachers' personal responsibility and commitment (Table 1) – *instilling work habits* (mean score 4.28), and *imparting knowledge* (mean score 4.24).

All in all, the teachers' commitment to the three domains is medium-high (Table 2).

Table 1. Teachers' perceived responsibility and commitment towards 11 categories and values, as manifested in their mean score (N=50).

The category		\bar{x}	SD
1.	Work Habits	4.28	1.02
2.	Imparting knowledge	4.24	0.89
3.	Nurturing civic awareness	4.12	0.87
4.	Imparting ethics and values	3.92	0.90
5.	Care for intellectual development	3.72	0.78
6.	Maintaining discipline and manners	3.58	1.01
7.	Proper treatment of property and money	3.08	1.20
8.	Sensitivity	2.92	0.69
9.	Socialization skills	2.84	1.11
10.	Promoting hobbies	1.92	0.71
11.	Awareness of religion	1.66	0.89

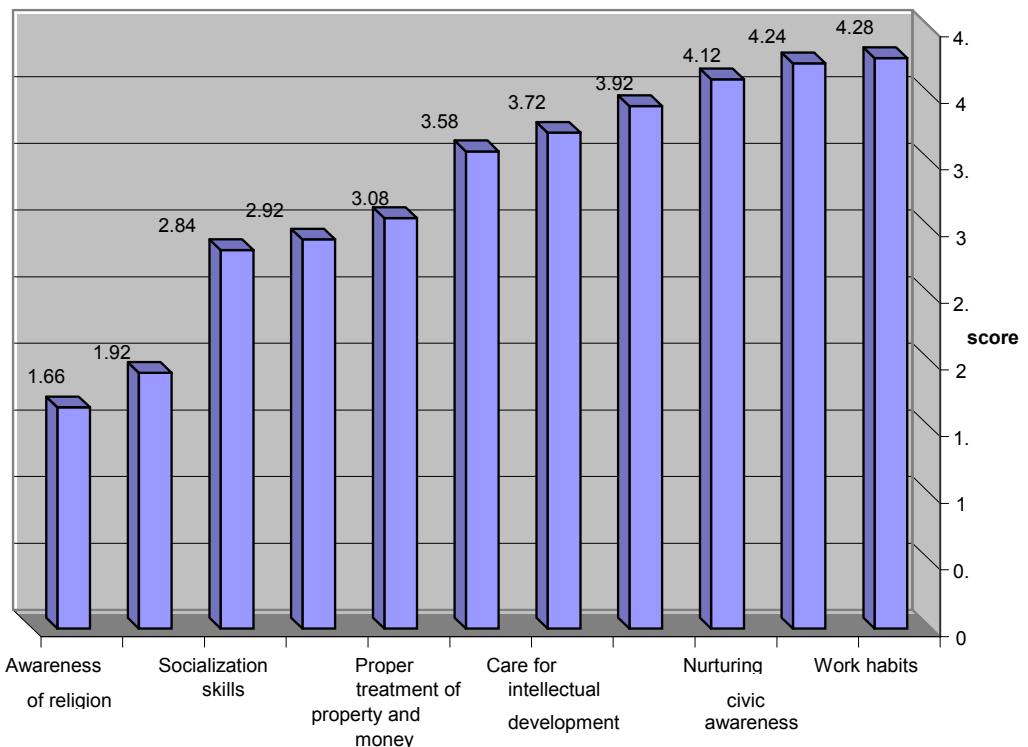


Figure 1: Teachers perceived responsibility and commitment to 11 categories and values (mean scores).

Problematic attitude towards transmitting values was notably missing from teachers' responses to the survey except for two categories – enhancing awareness of religion (a 1.66 score) and promoting hobbies (a 1.92 score). Their commitment to ethical issues was ranked fourth, higher even than commitment to intellectual development.

Up to this stage, the state of affairs emerging from the study seems to be quite clear. The problem is that when the 11 categories are clustered in three domains as mentioned above – academic, behavioral, and ethical domains - the picture becomes somewhat vaguer.

Table 2. Mean scores of teachers in regard to their perceived accountability in the different educational domains (N=50).

	The domain	\bar{x}	Cronbach Alpha	SD
1.	The academic domain	3.54	0.8423	0.874
2.	The ethical domain	3.19	0.7814	0.789
3.	The behavioral domain	3.14	0.7215	0.701

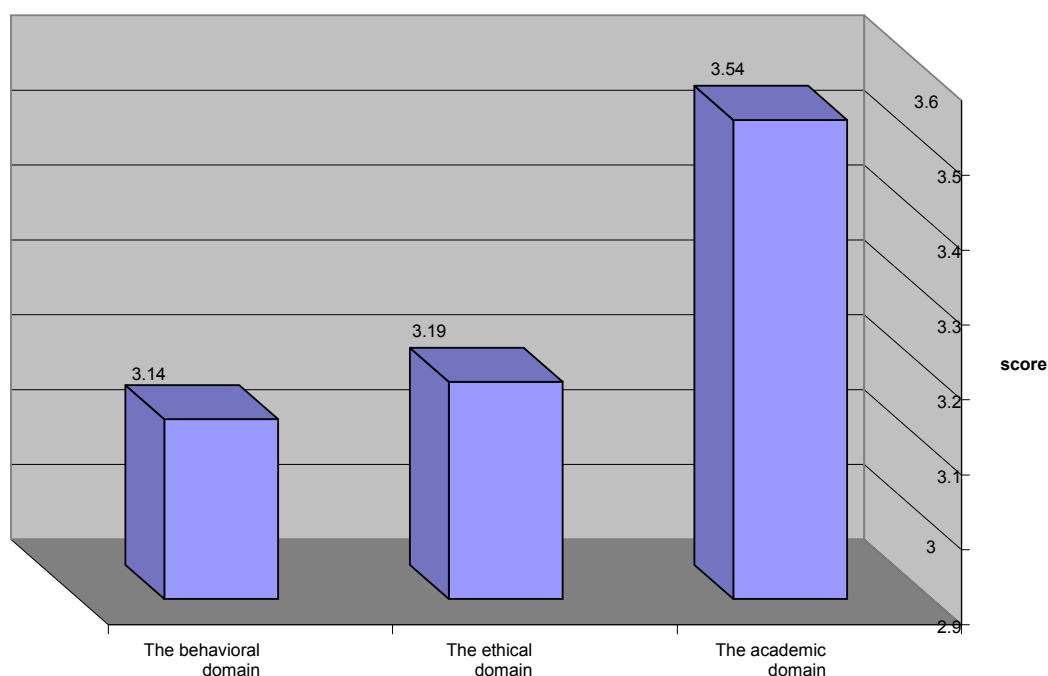


Figure 2: Mean scores of teachers in regard to their perceived accountability in the different educational domains.

The comparative vagueness is a result of the fact that each domain consists of values for which teachers have radically different degrees of commitment. For example, teachers demonstrate very high commitment in the *academic domain* to imparting work habits (4.28) and imparting knowledge (4.24). However, their commitment to encouraging hobbies at school (1.99) seems to be cursory. Likewise, in the *ethical domain*, nurturing civic awareness ranks high (4.12) while awareness of religion ranks the lowest (1.66).

The difference between teachers' commitment to the academic domain and their commitment to the behavioral domain is statistically significant ($P < 0.5$), unlike the difference between their accountability in the academic domain and in the ethical domain.

Discussion

The results of the study indicate that teaching work habits and imparting knowledge scored the highest in the teachers' commitments. This finding is compatible with indications of three previous studies carried out in Israel. One is a study based on a questionnaire administered in the 1970s to 950 teachers, which showed that most respondents think that the major criterion for teacher evaluation should be student achievements (Goldstein, 1979, 88). The second is a study perceiving teaching first and foremost as a process of imparting knowledge (Lamm, 1973). The third is a study carried out in the early 1980s and encompassing five junior high schools (Ben Peretz & Kramer, 1982). It too pointed out that enhancing student's diligence (work habits) and achievement (imparting knowledge) are among the most important teacher's responsibilities. Needless to say, the findings of these separate studies corroborate the different levels of teachers' personal responsibilities discussed by McIntyre (1977) and mentioned above.

One category that scored relatively low in our study is the category of social skills (score – 2.84), which falls under the behavioral domain. This category could be expected to be compatible with the perception of teaching as a major means of socialization, meant to facilitate assimilation of society's normative system, such that it will become an integral part of one's consciousness and worldview (Abercombie, Hill, & Turner, 1994, 394). Somehow, it falls short.

All in all, the high score accorded to the *academic domain* is compatible with the fact that society holds the educational system responsible for imparting basic skills to students and for helping increase the economy's overall production. Therefore the recognition formed in the last generation whereby the public is entitled to hold teachers accountable for providing "quality products" is only logical.

Moreover, according to the theory of human capital adequate education improves one's chances of attaining a desirable position in the stratified system, and therefore both students and their parents – all "consumers" of the educational system – are entitled to hold teachers accountable for the quality of their teaching.

The general consensus recently formed on these topics has crossed geographical borders and is currently widespread in many countries, sometimes even to the point of stipulating that teachers' promotion and allocation of financial resources to schools should depend on performance criteria indicating good teaching in the overall sense.

This general consensus is indeed not enough in order to categorically define the object of responsibility and the essence of the product for which teachers are accountable. On this issue there is quite a lot of controversy. Some link the demand for teacher accountability to their inclusion in decision making processes within the educational system. Others contend that one way or another, merely holding teachers responsible is enough to increase their effectiveness (Wiggins, 1996; Wiggins & McTighe, 2005) and thus their benefit to society, students, parents, and teachers themselves.

In any case, the categories in which society requires teachers to demonstrate accountability correspond to those for which teachers see themselves as responsible. Namely, *teachers' perceived role corresponds to the definition of their role by society*. The study shows that the teachers internalized this concept; they see eye to eye with it.

Conclusions

The basic conclusion of our study is that holding teachers responsible for the quality of their product – foremost in regard to imparting basic skills and work habits – is not expected to encounter any special difficulties (at least theoretically). As it turns out, teachers' perceived role corresponds to the definition of their role by society.

The teachers' perceived responsibility in the three studied domains is differential. Their highest commitment is to the academic domain (s. 3.54); second comes the ethical domain (s. 3.19); third comes the behavioral domain (s. 3.14).

Teachers' commitment to the different components *within* each domain is also differential. Thus, within the academic domain, their commitment to imparting knowledge (s. 4.24) and teaching work habits (s. 4.28) is high; their commitment to enhancing intellectual development is medium high (s. 3.72); their commitment to fostering hobbies is low (s. 1.92).

Within the behavioral domain, their commitment to inculcating discipline and manners is medium high (s. 3.58); their commitment to foster sensitivity (s. 2.92) and inculcate social skills (s. 2.84) is medium.

Finally, within the ethical domain, their commitment to imbuing civic awareness (s. 4.12) and ethics and morals (s. 3.92) is high; their commitment to enhance awareness of proper attitude to property and money (s. 3.08) is medium, and their commitment to religion (s. 1.66) is low.

To sum up, the teachers themselves demonstrate strong commitment to the very educational domains for which they are currently increasingly being held accountable. Thus one might safely say that there is congruence between the public demand and the teachers' concept in this respect.

Note

Accountability implying teachers' responsibility for the outcomes of their educational work to themselves, their students, and the organizational system in charge.

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