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Who wants a political classroom? Attitudes toward teaching controversial political issues in school

Shahar Gindi
Beit Berl College

Itzhak Gilat
Levinsky College

Rachel Sagee
Levinsky College

Keywords: controversial political issues; attitudes; civil education; democracy

- The study examined teachers', parents' and students' attitudes toward controversial political issues (CPI).
- A Random stratified sample of 501 adults and 201 high school students completed questionnaires.
- Respondents had little confidence in teachers' ability to conduct CPI discussions in classrooms.
- Students reported low incidents of CPI discussions in classrooms.
- Support for CPI discussions differed according to specific topics.

Purpose: Many argue for the benefits of controversial political issues (CPI) discussions but little is known about teachers', parents', and students' attitudes toward CPI. The present study explored these attitudes, as well as attitudes towards specific controversial topics, and how they relate to socio-demographic variables.

Design/methodology/approach: Quantitative cross-sectional methodology was employed using questionnaires to collect data. Random stratified sampling was used to obtain a representative sample of 501 Jewish Israeli adults, including 70 teachers, and 201 Jewish Israeli 10th-12th grade students.

Findings: Respondents, including the teachers themselves, had little confidence in teachers' ability to conduct CPI discussions in classrooms. Students reported low incidents of CPI discussions in classrooms, and that they are mostly held by homeroom and civics teachers. Students supported CPI discussions more than adults (including teachers) and wanted teachers to disclose their opinions much more than adults did. Support for CPI discussions differed according to specific topics. Linear regression revealed that the less religious individuals are, the more left-wing, older and more educated, the more they will support CPI teaching.


Corresponding Author:

Shahar Gindi, Faculty of Education, Beit Berl Academic College, Kfar Sava, Israel, POB 1514, Even Yehuda 4052911, Israel, Mobile: 972-54-743-468, Shaharg@beitberl.ac.il

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1 WHO WANTS POLITICAL EDUCATION?

Education researchers, theoreticians and practitioners have varied opinions about the place of political education (Crick & Heater, 2012; Gimpel et al., 2003; Quintelier, 2015). Teachers also differ in the extent they are interested in or willing to go in order to make education political (Davies & Hogarth, 2004). On the one hand, schools are meant to produce involved and conscientious citizens, and promote civic involvement, while, on the other hand, the neoliberal agenda wants to keep political involvement to a minimum (Yogev & Michaeli, 2010). In Israel, this ambivalence should be understood against the backdrop of a longstanding split between the professional ministry high-ranking officeholders and the politically elected minister. While documents produced by the professionals support political education, the minister traditionally tries to set one political agenda for student consumption (Netzer, 2020). In recent years the depoliticization of education is seen as a problem, especially as this creates adults who are politically apathetic and lacking political knowledge (e.g., Dahl et al. 2018).

1.1 Who wants a political classroom?

Controversial political issues (CPI) have been investigated from several angles. Many studies have shown the educational benefits of conducting CPI discussions for the students (Brookfield & Preskill, 2005; Hess & McAvoy, 2014; Bekerman & Cohen, 2017). Many other studies concentrated on the benefits of CPI discussions for society (Hess, 2009; Lemish, 2003; Lin, Lawrence, Snow & Taylor, 2016). Another body of research focused on teacher's reluctance to engage in CPI discussions and the motivation for their willingness or lack thereof (Barton & McCully, 2007; King, 2009; Cohen, 2016; Gindi & Erlich Ron, 2019). Professional teachers have targeted the kind of skills that teachers require in order to engage in CPI discussions (Kerr & Huddleston, 2016; Versfeld, 2005). From a philosophical point of view, the ethics of engaging in CPI has been the focus of a book by Nel Noddings and Laurie Brooks (2017).

The research that has documented teachers' reluctance to engage in CPI finds many external reasons (i.e., parents, Ministry of Education, knowledge) for this reluctance, but evades the basic question whether teachers want to discuss CPI. The question of whether students or parents want teachers to address these topics is also ignored. Thus, this study investigates who is interested in political education. Do students want to engage in discussions of CPI? What do their parents think about political education? What do the teachers themselves think about engaging in CPI discussions? For this purpose, we surveyed 501 adults among which were 70 teachers and 201 students about their attitudes towards political education, controversial public issues and the way it should be taught within an educational framework if at all. We use the definition of attitudes as evaluations of individual objects, persons, or situations (Thurstone, 1931). The study was conducted within the unique context of a highly divided society in Israel. The study also

examines attitudes towards specific controversial topics and how they relate to individual differences.

1.2 Controversial Political Issues

CPI refers to issues on which no simple solution is accepted by most members of society, and different factions in society propose different interpretations and points of view (Leib, 1998). This definition is anchored within the educational field and its dialectics with other social fields (Tillson, 2017). For the purpose of this study, we are not interested in defining controversial issues according to their relation to the “truth” (Hand, 2008), or the percentage of people who adhere to one or the other side of a controversy. Our focus is on issues that teachers have to deal with in their everyday work. Thus, we expand the notion of controversial issues to issues that may be considered taboo or politically incorrect. We argue that in a realistic democracy, these issues are grist for the mill in education.

CPI discussions are intended to encourage students’ active participation, to promote their citizenship roles in a democracy, help them internalize democratic values and assist them in turning democratic values into worthwhile activities (Versfeld, 2005; Hess, 2002). Moreover, it is intended to help promote many student skills unrelated to democracy. CPI has been associated with students’ interpersonal communication, debate, critical thinking, decision-making, research and problem-solving skills (Hess & McAvoy, 2014).

There is ample research supporting the advantages of discussions of CPI in the classroom and yet teachers avoid such discussions and students report to rarely engage in them (Gindi & Erlich Ron, 2018; Hawley, Crowe, & Mooney, 2016; Hess & McAvoy, 2014; Tannebaum, 2020). Oulton, Day, Dillon, and Grace (2004) found that 36% of teachers reported they were not well prepared for handling CPI discussions in the classroom, while only 12% reported they were very well prepared. Studying CPI in the context of teaching history in elementary schools in Greece, Zembylas and Kambani (2012) found teachers often hesitant to discuss CPI with their students due to inadequate teaching skills and instructional materials, emotional unease (both teachers’ and students’) and societal norms. Misco & Tseng (2018) found that Taiwanese social studies teachers are hesitant to initiate CPI discussions unless they are part of the curriculum.

Findings suggest that although novice teachers view controversial issues as an essential element of good teaching, they do not include CPI discussions in their teaching without explicit prompts to do so. One study showed teachers to stipulate different conditions before they could discuss CPI including only if they feel comfortable with the class first, if teachers and students are from the same community, if it is a relatively progressive environment, only with experience and if they feel supported by parents, teachers and administration (Tannebaum, 2020).

Teacher reluctance is intermixed with lack of knowledge about the kind of political education that meets established standards and lack of knowledge of governmental policies regarding discussions of CPI. Thus, for example, Gindi and Erlich Ron (2018) found that only a 1/3 of Israeli teachers knew the Ministry of Education policy regarding discussions of CPI in class.

Beyond the declared policy and teachers' reluctance to engage in CPI discussions due to professional issues, there is a highly political aspect to teachers' reluctance that in Israel also needs to be understood within a historical context. The establishment of the Israeli education system involved a depoliticizing process that emphasized the common and unifying, and teachers were called upon to avoid expressing personal opinions and avoid discussions of CPI (Ichilov, 2003). Along a similar vein, Clause 19 in the National Education Law states that teachers are prohibited from participating in political demonstrations (Ungar & Vurgan, 2010). At the same time, the Ministry of Education's Director-General's Code of Bylaws allowed teachers to moderately express a political opinion, as long as this is done in the framework of a controlled class discussion of CPI (Gutel, 2015).

While the declared policy maybe that of promoting CPI, there are many implicit ways in which teachers are discouraged from engaging in CPI discussions. There are many examples of teachers around the world who have been dismissed from their jobs due to voicing their opinions, and specifically in Israel, the case of Adam verta¹ is well remembered by teachers as a deterrent to CPI discussions. In January 2020, a senior civics teacher was dismissed from his teaching position due to stirring up political discussions in class and a municipality worker was quoted as saying: "he will not work in any school in the city" (Tal, 2020). In the wake of the coronavirus pandemic, students were exempted from some of the materials in the civics matriculation examination, and conveniently it was decided that on the issue of Israel as a democratic and Jewish state, students will be examined only on the Jewish aspect and not the democratic one. It is not surprising then that previous research has shown that teachers do not feel they will be supported in case a complaint will be filed against them for engaging in at discussion of controversial topic in classroom, especially not by the Ministry of Education (Gindi & Erlich Ron, 2018).

1.3 Challenges in teaching CPI

Teachers' knowledge about how to practice CPI is often found lacking (Tannebaum, 2020; Oulton et al., 2004). It is well established, for example, that indoctrination is ill-advised and yet a study of civic studies teachers in Turkey found that 5% tried to persuade in a particular point of view (indoctrination), 9% did not bring CPI discussions into the classroom at all, 34% held a discussion but did not disclose their position, 27% encouraged a discussion including stating their opinion and 25% did not endorse any specific position on CPI (Kus & Öztürk, 2019). The issue of disclosure is a much more

delicate one. Many countries' policy including Israel state that teachers can share their personal opinion with students. On the one hand students are often very eager to know their teacher's opinions and serious arguments have been raised in favor of teacher disclosure (Journell, 2016). On the other hand, teachers' disclosure of their personal opinions can inhibit class discussion and there is a constant fear that it will lead to the slippery slope of indoctrination (Hess, 2009; Journell, 2016).

1.4 Whose responsibility is it?

Some argue that it is the social studies teachers' responsibility to teach controversial issues (Kus & Öztürk, 2019), while others see it as every teacher's responsibility (Hess, 2009). Some research has also shown that social sciences and civics teachers have greater self-efficacy at conducting CPI discussions in class and report conducting more such discussions than teachers of other subjects (Erlich Ron & Gindi, 2018). In similar fashion, novice teachers associate CPI with citizenship education rather than promoting awareness of social justice and often teachers note that CPI are best suited for the social studies (Tannebaum, 2020). In Israel, great emphasis is placed on homeroom teachers, who are also called in Israel "educators", suggesting that they are not only responsible to teach students but also to educate them. These teachers are expected to conduct meaningful discussions with their students about social relationships, love, societal issues, moral etc.

1.5 CPI in the Israeli context

Israel sits at a crossroad between three different continents (Europe, Asia and Africa) and is important to three monotheistic religions (Judaism, Christianity and Islam). In like manner to its geographical location, Israel is also at a crossroad of many controversies and its population is crisscrossed in many different ways. Three divisions in Israel are at the midst of spirited controversies. First, the Jewish Arab conflict with its implications for both the Arab citizens of Israel and the relationship between Israel, the Palestinian Authority and the Gaza Strip. The second division is between secular and religious and the unique features of church and state in Israel which is by its definition a Jewish and Democratic state (Smootha, 2002). Thus, the relationship between the state and Orthodox Jews has been the issue of much controversy throughout its existence. In the context of religiosity, it is also noteworthy that the degree of Jewish religiosity is an important determinant of many attitudes in Israeli society including political affiliation and attitudes towards minorities (Gindi & Erlich Ron, 2020; Pew Research Center, 2015).

In addition to the Jewish Arab conflict and the religious rift, there are many civil issues that preoccupy the Israeli discourse as it does in many other countries around the world such as same-sex marriage (Beck, 2013), equal pay for equal jobs, etc. The third unique issue is the tension between Jews who immigrated from "eastern" *Mizrahi* communities and Jews who came from European *Ashkenazi* communities. There have

been social economic discrepancies between these populations from Israel's establishment to this day and the *Mizrachi* culture has been suppressed for many years (Cohen, Lewin-Epstein & Lazarus, 2019). There are many other controversial issues but another one that we will focus on in this work is the issue of the separation of powers, where special emphasis is placed on the status of the judicial authority in Israel (Roznai, 2019).

2 METHOD

2.1 Participants

This quantitative cross-sectional study used questionnaires collected as data. The sample included a representative sample of 501 Jewish Israeli adults, including 70 teachers and 201 Jewish Israeli students grades 10-12. Samples were collected using a random stratified sampling technique to ensure that each layer of the research population was represented (Troost, 1986). Palestinian respondents were excluded from the sample as the segregated nature of the Israeli society and the Israeli education streams demand that such questionnaires be culturally modified in order to be relevant.

2.2 Research tools

The data used for this study was part of an online survey conducted in 2019 about political education. 27 items from the student questionnaire were used for the present study: five demographic questions regarding gender, degree of religiosity (secular, traditional, religious, orthodox), political affiliation (right, left, center and undecided), grade / education (students/ adults), occupation (adults). 22 items related to attitudes toward discussions of CPI in the classroom. Respondent were asked whether 13 controversial topics should be discussed in schools and if yes to choose the manner it should be discussed from 3 options including: 1. Discussed without teacher disclosure of personal opinion, 2. Discussed with disclosure of opinion but without persuasion or 3. Discussed with persuasion. The sample characteristics are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Sample characteristics (N = 701)

| Characteristic | Full sample [N=701] | Students [N=201] | Adults* [N=501] | Teachers [N=70] |
|-----------------------|------------------------|---------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| Gender | | | | |
| Men | 351 (50.0) | 100 (49.8) | 251 (50.1) | 31 (44.3) |
| Women | 351 (50.0) | 101 (50.2) | 250 (49.9) | 39 (55.7) |
| Religiosity | | | | |
| Secular | 328(46.7) | 98 (48.8) | 230 (45.9) | 26 (37.1) |
| Traditional | 206(29.3) | 46 (22.9) | 160(31.9) | 22 (31.4) |
| Religious | 104(14.8) | 38 (18.9) | 66(13.2) | 15 (21.4) |
| Orthodox | 64(9.1) | 19(9.5) | 45(9.0) | 7 (10.0) |
| Political affiliation | | | | |
| Right | 338(48.1) | 100(49.8) | 36 (51.4) | 36 (51.4) |
| Left | 265 (37.7) | 48 (23.9) | 27(38.6) | 27 (38.6) |
| Center | 65 (9.3) | 19(9.5) | 7 (10.0) | 7 (10.0) |
| Undecided | 34 (4.8) | 34 (16.9) | 0 (0.0) | 0 (0.0) |
| Education | | | | |
| Elementary | 7 (1.4) | --- | 7 (1.4) | 1 (1.4) |
| Secondary | 155 (30.9) | --- | 155 (30.9) | 25 (35.7) |
| High school diploma | 158 (31.5) | --- | 158 (31.5) | 13 (18.6) |
| Academic | 181 (36.1) | --- | 181 (36.1) | 31 (44.3) |
| | Mean (SD) | Mean (SD) | Mean (SD) | Mean (SD) |
| Age | 39.93 (17.43) | 16.59 (0.89) | 42.28 (15.44) | (14.42) |

*Including teachers

3 RESULTS

3.1 Student specific reports and attitudes

Students were asked if in the past year they were involved in CPI discussions in class. 70.1% of the students responded in the positive and 29.9% responded in the negative. Of the students who experienced CPI discussions, in 106 cases (39.8%), the homeroom² teacher conducted the discussion, 96 (36.1%) involved the civics teacher, 42 (15.7%) a subject teacher, and 22 (8.2%) an outside lecturer. Students were also asked to what extent they would like their parents to be part of their CPI discussions in school. Students' average score on this question was 1.73 (SD=0.96) on a 5-point Likert scale indicating that overall, they do not want their parents to be part of such discussions.

The participants were asked directly: “If you define political education as "developing critical thinking of students on controversial issues," who do you think should engage in political education at school?”. Table 2 presents the distribution of respondents’ answers in the full sample and in the different subgroups.

Table 2

Who should engage in CPI in school according to the full sample, adults, students and teachers?

| | Full sample (N=702) | Adults (N=501) | Students (N=201) | Teachers (N=70) |
|--|------------------------|-------------------|---------------------|--------------------|
| Political discussions should not be held | 149 (21.2%) | 131 (26.1%) | 18 (9.0%) | 17 (24.3%) |
| External experts | 140 (19.9%) | 96 (19.2%) | 44 (21.9%) | 19 (27.1%) |
| School staff | 126 (17.9%) | 83 (16.6%) | 43 (21.4%) | 11 (15.7%) |
| External experts and school staff | 287 (40.9%) | 191 (38.1%) | 96 (47.8%) | 23 (32.9%) |

The participants were also asked to what extent they trust teachers to handle discussions of CPI competently (Table 3). There is fair support for teachers’ ability to handle CPI discussions in class. Figure 1 exhibits the different groups’ mean ratings for teachers’ ability to engage in discussions of CPI on a 1-5 Likert scale. Interestingly, adults trust teacher’ ability more than students (χ^2 (4, N=553) = 18.653, p =.001), and non-teacher adults more than teachers themselves (χ^2 (4, N=370) = 11.494, p <.005). It is notable that students are much more in favor of CPI discussions than adults χ^2 (3, N=702) = 25.633, p <.001), and also when compared to the subgroup of teachers χ^2 (3, N=271) = 13.531, p <.005).

Figure 1 Means and standard deviations of trust in teachers’ ability to engage in discussions of CPI on a 1-5 Likert scale

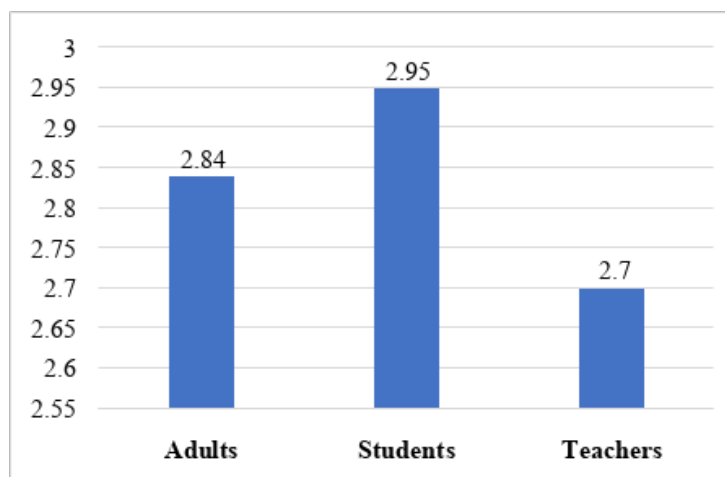


Table 3

To what extent do you trust teachers to be able to engage in discussions of CPI appropriately?

| | Full sample (N=702) | Adults (N=501) | Students (N=201) | Teachers (N=70) |
|------------------------|------------------------|-------------------|---------------------|--------------------|
| Not at all | 41 (7.4%) | 23 (6.2%) | 18 (9.8%) | 6 (11.3%) |
| To some extent | 130 (23.5%) | 92 (24.9%) | 38 (20.8%) | 16 (30.2%) |
| To a moderate extent | 262 (47.4%) | 191 (51.6%) | 71 (38.8%) | 22 (41.5%) |
| To a great extent | 105 (19.0%) | 58 (15.7%) | 47 (25.7%) | 6 (11.3%) |
| To a very great extent | 15 (2.7%) | 6 (1.6%) | 9 (4.9%) | 3 (5.7%) |

The respondents were also asked about their attitudes towards holding class discussions on 13 controversial topics in Israeli society (presented in Table 4). In this analysis, the response ratios to the two responses that indicated agreeing to a CPI discussion (with or without disclosure) were accumulated as the percentage of 'willingness to discuss' each of the 13 topics. In addition, the mean agreement to hold discussions on all 13 topics was calculated and overall, the percentage of willingness to discuss was 81.97% (SD=23.76). Among students the percentage of willingness to discuss was 81.21% (SD=21.65), among adults 82.8% (SD=24.57) and among teachers 79.12% (SD=27.07)

The three issues that evoked the highest objection to be discussed in the classroom were: same-sex marriage, equal opportunity for Arabs, and the morality of IDF actions in the occupied territories. Interestingly, these topics receive the lowest proportions of support both among adults and students. The issues that evoked the highest willingness to be discussed were: the right of the Jewish people to the Land of Israel, the status of the judicial system in the state, and equal pay for men and women. In order to examine if there is a difference in the willingness to engage according to the general topic of the CPI discussion, the topics were arranged in four domains: civil issues (4 items, Cronbach's $\alpha=0.74$), Arab-Israeli conflict (4 items $\alpha=0.67$), church and state (3 items $\alpha=0.64$) and two items that did not fit any category: strengthening *Mizrachi* culture, and the status of the judicial system in Israel. One-way repeated measures ANOVA was employed to examine differences between the domains. The results showed significant differences among the four domain areas, $F(3.35, 2344.98) 12.886, p < .001$. Bonferroni post hoc tests indicated that the status of the judicial system scored significantly higher (87.9% support for discussions) than all other topics and civil topics scored significantly lower (79.3% support for discussions) than all other topics.

Table 5 presents the manner in which the respondents who endorsed the discussion of a topic, thought it most appropriate for the discussions to be held. Respondents could choose one of three options: “holding the discussion without teachers disclosing their personal views” (henceforth “neutral”), “holding the discussion with teacher disclosure but without persuasion” (henceforth “disclosure”) and “holding the discussion with persuasion” (henceforth “indoctrination”).

Table 4

Willingness to discuss different controversial topics among full sample, adults, students and teachers

| | | Full sample (N=702) | Adults (N=501) | Students (N=201) | Teachers (N=70) |
|---|---------|------------------------|-------------------|---------------------|--------------------|
| Ultra-Orthodox recruitment for the Army | Avoid | 118 (16.8%) | 78 (15.6%) | 40 (19.9%) | 15 (21.4%) |
| | Discuss | 584 (83.2%) | 423 (84.4%) | 161 (80.1%) | 55 (78.6%) |
| Gender separated academic studies | Avoid | 147 (20.9%) | 115 (23.0%) | 32 (15.9%) | 19 (27.1%) |
| | Discuss | 555 (79.1%) | 386 (77.0%) | 169 (84.1%) | 51 (72.9%) |
| Deportation of asylum seekers from Israel | Avoid | 132 (18.8%) | 89 (17.8%) | 43 (21.4%) | 14 (20.0%) |
| | Discuss | 570 (81.2%) | 412 (82.2%) | 158 (78.6%) | 56 (80.0%) |
| Resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict | Avoid | 126 (17.9%) | 88 (17.6%) | 38 (18.9%) | 14 (20.0%) |
| | Discuss | 576 (82.1%) | 413 (82.4%) | 163 (81.1%) | 56 (80.0%) |
| The right of the Jewish people on the Land of Israel | Avoid | 50 (7.1%) | 40 (8.0%) | 10 (5.0%) | 5 (7.1%) |
| | Discuss | 652 (92.9%) | 461 (92.0%) | 191 (95.0%) | 65 (92.9%) |
| The expansion of the settlements in Judea and Samaria | Avoid | 154 (21.9%) | 110 (22.0%) | 44 (21.9%) | 21 (30.0%) |
| | Discuss | 548 (78.1%) | 391 (78.0%) | 157 (78.1%) | 49 (70.0%) |
| Public transportation on Shabbat | Avoid | 107 (15.2%) | 75 (15.0%) | 32 (15.9%) | 13 (18.6%) |
| | Discuss | 595 (84.8%) | 426 (85.0%) | 169 (84.1%) | 57 (81.4%) |
| The morality of IDF actions in the occupied territories | Avoid | 162 (23.1%) | 122 (24.4%) | 40 (19.9%)↓ | 16 (22.9%) |

| | | Full sample (N=702) | Adults (N=501) | Students (N=201) | Teachers (N=70) |
|--|---------|---------------------------|-------------------|---------------------|--------------------|
| Strengthening Mizrachi culture | Discuss | 540 (76.9%) | 379 (75.8%) | 161 (80.1%) | 54 (77.1%) |
| | Avoid | 115 (16.4%) | 70 (14.0%) | 45 (22.4%) | 12 (17.1%) |
| Equal pay for equal jobs | Discuss | 587 (83.6%) | 431 (86.0%) | 156 (77.6%) | 358 (82.9%) |
| | Avoid | 77 (11.0%) | 50 (10.0%) | 27 (13.4%) | 11 (15.7%) |
| The status of the judicial system in Israel | Discuss | 625 (89.0%) | 451 (90.0%) | 174 (86.6%) | 59 (84.3%) |
| | Avoid | 85 (12.1%) | 51 (10.2%) | 34 (16.9%) | 9 (12.9%) |
| Same-sex marriage | Discuss | 617 (87.9%) | 450 (89.8%) | 167 (83.1%) | 61 (87.1%) |
| | Avoid | 187 (26.6%) | 141 (28.1%) | 46 (22.9%) | 20 (28.6%) |
| Equality of opportunity for Arabs in Israel | Discuss | 515 (73.4%) | 360 (71.9%) | 155 (77.1%) | 50 (71.4%) |
| | Avoid | 185 (26.4%) | 125 (25.0%) | 60 (29.9%) | 21 (30.0%) |
| | Discuss | 517 (73.6%) | 376 (75.0%) | 141 (70.1%) | 49 (70.0%) |

It is notable that students were much more in favor indoctrination than adults on all topics. For example, there was a significant difference between adults and students on the topic of the army recruitment of the ultra- Orthodox ($\chi^2 (1, N=584) = 15.392, p <.001$). Some topics produced especially interesting results in this respect. Respondents were especially supportive of indoctrination when it came to the issue of “The right of the Jewish people on the Land of Israel”. More than fifth of the sample wanted teachers to discuss this topic including disclosing their personal opinion and persuading students, and among students almost 30% supported indoctrination ($\chi^2 (1, N=702) = 11.507, p =.001$). On this topic, significant discrepancies were also found regarding the proportion supporting neutrality in each group with only around 30% of students supporting neutrality compared with 50.1% of the adults ($\chi^2 (1, N=702) = 25.661, p <.001$). On the other hand, when it came to same-sex marriage, teachers were quite reluctant to persuade (4.0%) compared with around 20% of the students who wanted teachers to be direct on this topic ($\chi^2 (1, N=702) = 13.800, p <.001$).

Table 5

Way of teaching CPI among full sample, adults, students and teachers

| | | Full sample | Adults | Students | Teachers |
|---|----------------|----------------|----------------|---------------|---------------|
| Ultra-Orthodox recruitment for the Army | Neutral | 309 (52.9%) | 244 (57.7%) | 65 (40.4%) | 27 (49.1%) |
| | Disclosure | 207 (35.4%) | 131 (31.0%) | 76 (47.2%) | 20 (36.4%) |
| | Indoctrination | 68 (11.6%) | 48 (11.3%) | 20 (12.4%) | 8 (14.5%) |
| Gender separated academic studies | Neutral | 307 (55.3%) | 227 (58.8%) | 80 (47.3%) | 30 (58.8%) |
| | Disclosure | 188 (33.9%) | 122 (31.6%) | 66 (39.1%) | 16 (31.4%) |
| | Indoctrination | 60 (10.8%) | 37 (9.6%) | 23 (13.6%) | 5 (9.8%) |
| Deportation of asylum seekers from Israel | Neutral | 334 (58.6%) | 264 (64.1%) | 70 (44.3%) | 29 (51.8%) |
| | Disclosure | 168 (29.5%) | 105 (25.5%) | 63 (39.9%) | 20 (35.7%) |
| | Indoctrination | 68 (11.9%) | 43 (10.4%) | 25 (15.8%) | 7 (12.5%) |
| Resolving the Israeli- Palestinian conflict | Neutral | 354 (61.5%) | 285 (69.0%) | 69 (42.3%) | 35 (62.5%) |
| | Disclosure | 176 (30.6%) | 101 (24.5%) | 75 (46.0%) | 13 (23.2%) |
| | Indoctrination | 46 (8.0%) | 27 (6.5%) | 19 (11.7%) | 8 (14.3%) |
| The right of the Jewish people on the Land of Israel | Neutral | 282 (43.3%) | 231 (50.1%) | 51 (26.7%) | 24 (36.9%) |
| | Disclosure | 227 (34.8%) | 143 (31.0%) | 84 (44.0%) | 26 (40.0%) |
| | Indoctrination | 143 (21.9%) | 87 (18.9%) | 56 (29.3%) | 15 (23.1%) |
| The expansion of the settlements in Judea and Samaria | Neutral | 342 (62.4%) | 271 (69.3%) | 71 (45.2%) | 30 (61.2%) |
| | Disclosure | 150 (27.4%) | 88 (22.5%) | 62 (39.5%) | 12 (24.5%) |
| | Indoctrination | 56 (10.2%) | 32 (8.2%) | 24 (15.3%) | 7 (14.3%) |
| Public transportation on Shabbat | Neutral | 291 (48.9%) | 242 (56.8%) | 49 (29.0%) | 29 (50.9%) |
| | Disclosure | 215 (36.1%) | 141 (33.1%) | 74 (43.8%) | 17 (29.8%) |

| | | Full sample | Adults | Students | Teachers |
|--|----------------|----------------|----------------|---------------|---------------|
| The morality of IDF actions in the occupied territories | Indoctrination | 89 (15.0%) | 43 (10.1%) | 46 (27.2%) | 11 (19.3%) |
| | Neutral | 301 (55.7%) | 238 (62.8%) | 63 (39.1%) | 28 (51.9%) |
| | Disclosure | 161 (29.8%) | 94 (24.8%) | 67 (41.6%) | 13 (24.1%) |
| Strengthening Mizrachi culture | Indoctrination | 78 (14.4%) | 47 (12.4%) | 31 (19.3%) | 13 (24.1%) |
| | Neutral | 285 (48.6%) | 237 (55.0%) | 48 (30.8%) | 28 (48.3%) |
| | Disclosure | 232 (39.5%) | 151 (35.0%) | 81 (51.9%) | 23 (39.7%) |
| Equal pay for equal jobs | Indoctrination | 70 (11.9%) | 43 (10.0%) | 27 (17.3%) | 7 (12.1%) |
| | Neutral | 244 (39.0%) | 200 (44.3%) | 44 (25.3%) | 20 (33.9%) |
| | Disclosure | 252 (40.3%) | 172 (38.1%) | 80 (46.0%) | 25 (42.4%) |
| The status of the judicial system in Israel | Indoctrination | 129 (20.6%) | 79 (17.5%) | 50 (28.7%) | 14 (23.7%) |
| | Neutral | 316 (51.2%) | 253 (56.2%) | 63 (37.7%) | 34 (55.7%) |
| | Disclosure | 231 (37.4%) | 154 (34.2%) | 77 (46.1%) | 20 (32.8%) |
| Same-sex marriage | Indoctrination | 70 (11.3%) | 43 (9.6%) | 27 (16.2%) | 7 (11.5%) |
| | Neutral | 280 (54.4%) | 225 (62.5%) | 55 (35.5%) | 27 (54.0%) |
| | Disclosure | 177 (34.4%) | 107 (29.7%) | 70 (45.2%) | 21 (42.0%) |
| Equality of opportunity for Arabs in Israel | Indoctrination | 58 (11.3%) | 28 (7.8%) | 30 (19.4%) | 2 (4.0%) |
| | Neutral | 296 (57.3%) | 232 (61.7%) | 64 (45.4%) | 28 (57.1%) |
| | Disclosure | 173 (33.5%) | 117 (31.1%) | 56 (39.7%) | 17 (34.7%) |
| | Indoctrination | 48 (9.3%) | 27 (7.2%) | 21 (14.9%) | 4 (8.2%) |

3.2 What predicts attitudes toward CPI discussion in schools?

The relationship between attitudes toward CPI discussions in schools and socio-demographic characteristics was examined regarding gender, age, religion and political affiliation. Table 6 presents the intercorrelations among the variables used in the linear regression. Multiple linear regression was then calculated to predict general attitude toward CPI discussions (the mean willingness to discuss the 13 different topics) as a function of degree of religiosity (secular, traditional, religious, orthodox), political affiliation (right, center, left), age, and level of education. The results are presented in Table 7. Preliminary analyses were performed to ensure there was no violation of the assumptions of normality, multicollinearity and homoscedasticity. Durbin–Watson coefficients to indicate independence of residuals were satisfactory (2.11). A multiple linear regression to predict participants' general attitude toward CPI teaching using the step-wise method yielded a multiple R of .364, $p < .005$. The following four variables contributed significantly to the prediction: degree of religiosity, followed by political affiliation, age, and education. However, since the Beta values for age and education were low, they were not interpreted and only degree of religiosity and political affiliation were considered meaningful predictors. Thus, religiosity was found to be the strongest predictor in determining CPI attitudes, ($\beta = -.24$, $p < .001$), followed by political affiliation ($\beta = .13$, $p < .01$). This means that, in general, the less religious individuals are, the more left-wing, older and more educated, the more they support CPI teaching.

Table 6

Intercorrelations between variables used in the regression

| Variable | Attitude toward CPI | Age | Religiosity | Gender | Political affiliation |
|-----------------------|---------------------|-------|-------------|--------|-----------------------|
| Age | .13* | -- | | | |
| Religiosity | -.36** | -.12* | -- | | |
| Gender | .02 | -.01 | -.02 | -- | |
| Political affiliation | .21** | -.002 | -.31** | -.04 | -- |
| Level of education | .14* | .09* | -.09* | -.05 | .13* |

Note: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Given that CPI attitudes have been found to differ largely based on the CPI domain, separate regression analyses were conducted for the different domains: civil issues, Arab-Israeli conflict, and church and state. As Table 7 demonstrates, the willingness to discuss civil issues was the one best predicted with a cumulative R of .42 while willingness to discuss Arab Israeli conflict was least predicted with a cumulative R of .24. The main predictor for willingness to discuss civil issues was religiosity ($\beta = -.29$, $p <$

.001), followed by political affiliation ($\beta = .18, p < .01$) and level of education ($\beta = .11, p < .01$). Conversely, religiosity did not play a part in predicting willingness to discuss the Arab-Israeli conflict where political affiliation was the best predictor ($\beta = .36, p < .001$), followed by age ($\beta = .13, p < .01$). This means that the more religious people are, the less willing they are to discuss civil issues, while the more left-wing you are, the more willing you are to discuss the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Table 7

Stepwise linear regression to predict participants' general attitude toward boundary-crossing teaching

| Step | Variable | B | Beta | t | Cumulative R |
|------|-----------------------|------|------|-----------|--------------|
| 1 | Religiosity | -.61 | -.24 | -7.182*** | .306 |
| 2 | Political affiliation | .49 | .13 | 2.87** | .340 |
| 3 | Age | .01 | -.01 | 2.13* | .353 |
| 4 | Level of education | .03 | .01 | 2.09* | .364 |

Note: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

4 DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal that general population adults as well as 10-12 grade students have little confidence in teachers' ability to conduct CPI discussions in classrooms. This should not be surprising as the study confirms previous research findings regarding teachers' lack of confidence in their own abilities to engage in CPI (Oulton et al., 2004; Hawley et al., 2016; Tannebaum, 2020). The study provides further evidence of teachers' reluctance to engage in CPI From both the teacher and the student perspective. Teachers were asked in several different ways whether they should engaged in CPI discussions in classrooms and approximately 20% of them responded consistently that such discussions should not be held, much higher than the figures surveyed in Turkey where teacher reluctance was less than 10% (Kus & Öztürk, 2019). Student reluctance however was much lower with less than 10% of students showing resistance to CPI discussions.

Nevertheless, the students did provide further evidence of teachers' reluctance to engage in CPI, as only 70% of students reported that they had engaged in CPI discussion in the last year. The students reported that as expected, it is mainly the homeroom teachers followed by civics teachers who conduct such discussions. This is in line with previous findings regarding civics teachers' self reports that are higher than the reports of teachers from other disciplines (Gindi & Erlich Ron, 2018) as well as with some

professional approaches to CPI that see CPI as civics teachers' task (e.g., Kus & Öztürk, 2019)

Teachers and adults in general showed similar attitudes toward engaging in CPI while the two groups differed significantly from students. Students were much more inclined toward political education in schools and want teachers to disclose their opinions much more than adults, while it seems that teachers reflect the general attitude in the adult sample that is more cautious about such discourse. Teachers were also similar to the general adult sample and the student sample in their confidence (or lack thereof) that they would be able to do a good job in handling CPI discussions in classrooms. When asked who should engage in CPI discussions in schools, teachers were actually the group that referred most to external experts as the best professionals to do so (27.1% compared with an average of about 20% in adults in general and in students).

This research is the first of its kind in examining the relationship between the willingness to engage in CPI discussion and the different topics the class could engage in. The topic of discussion was found to be highly significant in attitudes towards CPI discussion. In general, the findings indicate that civil issues such as same-sex marriage and equal pay for equal jobs were the least supported as appropriate topics for deep CPI discussions in classrooms. On the other hand, the support for discussing other CPI topics was not general but content specific. Thus, for example the morality of IDF actions in the occupied territories and equality of opportunity for Arabs in Israel were among the least supported, while the right of the Jewish people on the land of Israel was the most supportive overall. It may well be that in the contemporary political climate the right of the Jewish people on the land of Israel is not considered to be a controversial topic at all and so more than 90% of the sample wanted teachers to engage in such a discussion.

Regression analyses demonstrated that degree of religiosity was the most significant predictor of individuals' willingness to engage in CPI overall. However, while it was the most significant predictor of engaging in civil issues, it did not play a part in predicting willingness to discuss the Arab-Israeli conflict, where political affiliation was the best predictor. It seems likely that the more orthodox one is, the less willing one is to discuss same-sex marriage, whereas discussing the Arab-Israeli conflict is not as clear cut as the degree of religiosity increases.

The question of disclosing teachers' personal opinion is a difficult one. Respondents that did not negate the idea of CPI were predominantly in favor of a neutral position. The percentage of respondents who subscribed to indoctrination (that teachers disclose their opinion and persuade the students as well) ranged from 5-20 percent depending on the topic and the population. For example, 20% of the respondents wanted teachers to persuade students in their opinions about the topic of the Jewish people's right to the land of Israel when they discuss it in class. In contrast, only 8% wanted teachers to indoctrinate students about the resolution of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Thus, the topic of discussion proved to be highly significant in respondents' attitudes toward teacher disclosure and persuasion. More importantly, though, is the finding that this was

the decisive factor for teachers as well. Namely, even teachers' attitudes regarding issues of disclosure and persuasion were based more on the specific topic at hand than on general principles of education.

What is it about the topic that makes it more prone to disclosure or persuasion? It would seem that the more individuals have a clear idea about teachers' opinion regarding the topic, the more they would support disclosure and persuasion. Namely, it may be that in the current nationalistic *zeitgeist* in Israel, respondents are assured that teachers would support the Jewish people's right to the land of Israel and therefore support disclosure and persuasion. This hypothesis is further reinforced by the analysis of the factors predicting support of CPI discussions. The most important factors in predicting resistance to the CPI were being religious and being right wing while being left-wing was associated with supporting CPI discussions.

Overall, the findings point to a worrying picture when it comes to CPI discussions. We see that CPI discussions are infrequently held, and the teachers feel ill equipped to handle these discussions. The confidence that students and other adults place in them also leaves much to be desired. When it comes to professional decisions regarding teaching methods such as disclosure or persuasion, we see the teachers, just like students and other adults, base decisions on the specific topic at hand and not on professional guidelines. The findings point to a notable gap that teacher training institutions would do well to address both in raising awareness of the importance of CPI discussions and in teaching the skills required to handle such discussions. A specific training gap that this study highlights is in teachers' attitudes toward disclosure and persuasion. We argue that teachers should graduate equipped with a conceptual understanding of the issue of disclosure with its pros and cons, rather than waver on the way they handle these topics according to the topic at hand.

The limitations of this research should be acknowledged, and most importantly, the study would have done well to examine parents' attitudes separately from adults in general. Hopefully, future research will examine the differences among parents, non-parent teachers, and other adults. In future research, it would be interesting to see if there are parallel lines in teacher willingness to avoid or discuss CPI topics in different cultures and contexts. Such research may assist in detecting the sources of teacher resistance to CPI discussions, considering such variables as the political climate of that period and the intensity of controversy around the topic. Comparisons between countries may raise the question what aspects of teaching CPI are global and what aspects are local. Finally, the limitations of a survey as a tool should be acknowledged. Future research involving in-depth interviews and focus groups can contribute much to help us understand why the politicization of education is so frightening to both students and teachers.

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AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES

Dr. Shahar Gindi is a lecturer and a researcher at Beit Berl College as well as a clinical and school psychologist. He has published in different areas relating to psychology, education and program evaluation. Recent publications include tensions between authority and autonomy in a religious education, gender in gifted programs and intervention for Combat Stress Reaction (CR) in a military setting. shaharg@beitberl.ac.il

Prof. Yitzhak Gilat, a psychologist by profession, lectures on psychology and research methods at Levinsky College of Education and serves as head of Research, Evaluation and Development Authority at Levinsky College. His research deals with the mental well-being of adolescents and teachers, the professional development of teachers and educators for teaching and evaluation of educational programs. itzik.gilat@levinsky.ac.il

Dr. Rachel Sagee, a senior researcher in the Research, Evaluation and Development Authority at Levinsky College and an educational consultant in her profession. Her research examines shared living, adolescent and teacher mental well-being, and professional development of teachers and teacher-educators. She has published two prose books. r_sagee@netvision.net.il

ENDNOTES

¹ Adam Verta was a teacher that in 2014 was publicly criticized for engaging in political discussions in class, see Erlich Ron & Gindi, 2018 for more details.

² In Israel, a homeroom teacher is the central teacher for the students' class (homeroom), even when they move to other rooms to learn other subjects with other teachers. The homeroom teacher is responsible for educational and organizational aspects of the class as a whole, and the child as an individual (Fisherman, 2015).