

Classroom Diversity and Teachers' Perspectives of Their Workplace¹

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The diverse and heterogeneous classroom is considered one of the best vehicles for providing both effective education and equal opportunity to students of diverse socio-cultural backgrounds and academic abilities. This study explores the impact of the social and academic diversity of the class on teachers' perspectives about their schools as a workplace. Data gathered from an anonymous questionnaire administered to all secondary-school teachers in a medium-size industrial city in Israel indicate that classroom diversity is correlated negatively with the average academic ability of the classroom, and positively with class size and frequent disciplinary problems. Findings also show that less experienced teachers are more likely to be assigned to diverse classrooms. The study suggests that the effects of classroom diversity on teachers' perspectives of their workplaces are strong and significant.

INTRODUCTION

Demands on public school systems across nations are often unique because of the specific cultural context of that nation. Certain common demands, however, seem to exist. One of these is the provision of shared schooling of high quality for children of diverse cultural and economic backgrounds. In the United States, national reports calling for school restructuring claim that schools must be better prepared to serve students who are economically, racially, and linguistically different (Banks and Banks, 1989). In other countries, national reform efforts specifically aim at meeting the needs of diverse student populations.

As the demographic patterns of society change and equity emerges as an integral part of national reform agendas, increased diversity represents a fact of life. Teachers face classrooms of students with varied ethnic backgrounds, learning abilities, family structures, and linguistic traditions. This diversity creates new and unique complexities for teachers.

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Contreras (1988) argues that "teacher educators assume that most of the schools will continue to be mono-cultural and mono-social" (p. 14). Although trained to teach a group of "average" students, classroom teachers now work with students with broadly diverse needs. "The teacher in the multicultural classroom must communicate with the children across tremendous differences in assumptions, values, perceptions, and even the very stuff that makes communication possible" (McDermott & Goldmann, 1983, p. 149).

Multicultural education or classroom diversity aims to revise the public assignment of status by "including" those who have heretofore been left out, or whose "contributions" have been undervalued in higher tracks of study. "Inclusion" in the proper track or curriculum is intended to represent and recognize the equal capacities, values, and status of diverse groups.

This goal creates a paradox in that the terms of inclusion may vary. In its simplest form, inclusion means representing individuals from diverse groups in landmark activities or events. In an advanced model, inclusion requires not only the reorganization of all social roles but the contribution of all social groups in the process of schooling (Olneck, 1990). The diverse, heterogeneous classroom is considered one of the best means of providing both effective and equal education to students of diverse sociocultural backgrounds and academic abilities (Gamoran, 1992). However, the implications of diversity in the classroom for teachers' perspectives about their work remains unclear. Some studies indicate positive outcomes of diversity on teachers' attitudes. For instance, Louis (1990) maintains that school systems with a diverse student body may be more open to innovative teaching strategies and ideas and may be more willing to provide rewards for teachers who try new ideas. Johnson (1990) reports, "Teachers were well aware that they could not apply the same set of expectations and teaching practices to all students and expect common outcomes. In fact, they found the notion laughable" (p. 116).

In contrast, Paine (1988), using questionnaires and interviews, concluded that novice teachers' orientations toward diversity were often superficial. Their ability to talk about student differences in comprehensive ways was often limited; they were often unsure about how to take into account differences among students as they arrange and plan their academic work.

Chen and Addi (1990) report that diverse classrooms lead to friction for many teachers. They found among high school teachers a high and positive correlation between attitudes which strongly support the efficacy of a policy of ethnic desegregation in schools and a repeated practical demand to strictly classify students into homogeneous classrooms according to abilities and interests. The inconsistency between the teachers' attitudes and their own educational and instructional behaviors suggests an unsolved role conflict.

The purpose of this study is to explore the relationships between classroom diversity and teachers' perspectives on their work and their schools as work-

places. Are teachers faced with conflicting role expectations that connote ethnic and cultural diversity in the classroom important for students and society at large, while their own professional experiences suggest that it creates numerous difficulties for teaching and learning processes? The examination of these issues coincides with other studies which explore the impact of the context of teaching on teachers' work (McLaughlin, Talbert, and Bascia, 1990). Following Rosenholtz's (1989) approach, we strive to identify the nature and implications of classroom diversity in the context of the teacher workplace, and within the range of desirable teaching conditions as presented by the school organization.

The setting of this study is Israel. The Israeli educational system offers a unique opportunity to study the impact of classroom diversity on teachers' perspectives on their workplace because Israel has a highly centralized educational system and has declared ethnic and social integration through multicultural classrooms as a national educational goal (Goldring, 1992). This goal concerns the promotion of a common culture, understanding, and cohesiveness of a highly heterogeneous population (Kashti, Arieli, and Shapira, 1991).

The heterogeneity of Israeli society is the result of widespread immigration to Israel. Immigration produced large gaps between the upper-SES Western Jews (from European and Anglo-Saxon countries) and their low-SES counterparts from the Islamic Middle East and North Africa. The Jews of Asian and African origin usually have less education and more children and are less familiar with the prevailing cultural norms and work habits of the mainstream of the Israeli school system than are those from Europe and America (Adler, 1986).

In order to both inculcate all members of society with a common, uniform culture and deal with the widening educational gaps between these two major ethnic groups, the main concern of the educational system is to provide common and equal education to all children, especially those from African-Asian backgrounds. In short, rather than attempt to promote differentiation and uniqueness in the educational system which corresponds to the diversity of the student body, the State of Israel keeps the system uniform and centralized, assuming that it ensures that all children will receive similar educational inputs.

In 1968 the Israeli Parliament (the Knesset) adopted a school reform program. One of the major aspects of the national reform effort was the rezoning of school districts to create socially integrated schools (Chen, 1980; Ministry of Education and Culture, 1970). Furthermore, the school system moved from a neighborhood eight-year elementary school and a specialized (academic and technological) four-year high school, to a 6-3-3 structure. Students are assigned to new comprehensive junior high schools according to the new zoning. Diverse classrooms are composed of students of Asian and North African origin, the minority group, and students of European or American (Western) backgrounds (Amir and Sharan, 1984).

The underlying assumption behind the educational reform which created socially diverse classrooms is that the transferring of both Asian-African and European-American students from their respective segregated schools would affect educational attainments. Thus it was expected that the new, diverse classrooms would help raise the scholastic achievements of the minority ethnic group and not hinder the achievements of the majority group (Daar and Resh, 1988). Furthermore, it was hoped that the diverse classrooms would bring about more contact between the children from two distinct cultural origins.

The reform of 1968 totally occupied the educational community for the next two decades, as it required new curricula, teaching methods for heterogeneous classes, and teacher training for a diverse student body. As is the case with most educational reforms, however, implementation is not uniform across all schools. Thus, some schools and classrooms are more diverse than others. In addition, as in the United States, classroom diversity is largely dependent on the geographic location of a school in relation to neighborhoods and busing patterns. In addition, the extent to which schools implement tracking and ability grouping is not part of a national policy; schools have discretion in this area.

The issues facing teachers in Israel as they engage with diverse student bodies are similar to those facing teachers in the United States. Banks and Banks (1989), for example, suggest that teachers need to be "reeducated" for the successful implementation of multicultural education. In addition, they assert that "multicultural education . . . advocates total school reform to make the school reflect diversity" (p. 54). The total school environment, including interrelations among school staff, curriculum, and policies, must be changed.

THE AMBIGUITY OF CLASSROOM DIVERSITY FOR TEACHERS

Classroom diversity and its meanings create numerous ambiguities for teachers. The diversity of the student body is frequently regarded by teachers as a severe constraint on effective work. For example, in Israel, classroom diversity was stated as the third most frequent complaint of Israeli teachers about their working conditions. The first is the lack of supplies and equipment; the second, class size. It appears that teachers regard diversity as a source of major instructional difficulties (Chen and Addi, 1990).

What do teachers mean when they refer to diversity in the classroom? The interaction of classroom diversity with familiar instructional conditions makes the term *diversity* difficult to define and understand. While large class size, a shortage of educational supplies and equipment (e.g., textbooks, computers), a high percentage of "special" pupils, a heavy and fragmented teaching load, and time-consuming or disappointing parental involvement prove to be well-defined instructional constraints, classroom diversity is more difficult to describe and explain. When teachers claim that their classrooms are much larger than the average class size, or that they are half a standard deviation below the average

achievement level of the whole school on standardized tests, they can be easily understood. Indeed, such claims may serve as a basis for negotiating additional equipment or supplies for the classroom, personal compensation, or a shift to a more satisfactory or convenient classroom (Shedd and Bacharach, 1991).

The concept of classroom diversity does not serve as an operational description of the working conditions because it seems to interact and overlap with other well-established definitions of the workplace, such as class size, average academic performance, and grade level. Teachers frequently declare, "With 35 students in my classroom it must be very diverse," or "My classroom is very heterogeneous; therefore its average achievements are much below the school average."

As other teaching conditions are easily measured and used, classroom diversity is much less amenable to an accurate definition. For example, the mean academic achievement of a classroom is regularly measured, clearly understood, and frequently discussed by all relevant clients: teachers, students, parents, and administrators. The standard deviation of the mean of a classroom on standardized achievement tests, which is one possible indication of classroom diversity, hardly serves as a term of reference in describing the educational reality of the classroom.

Such ambiguity regarding the concept and definition of classroom diversity may affect the ways in which teachers react to their work in diverse classrooms. Some teachers may be reluctant to express professional opinions about some students for fear of being labeled as having low expectations or as being prejudiced. Teaching in diverse settings implies open attitudes and broad-minded interests on the part of the teacher. Evaluative comments that serve to contradict this perception may be self-censored by the teacher to protect his or her own self-concepts. Such censorship reasoning may not necessarily represent a valid assessment of others' attitudes but may, nevertheless, create self-conflict for the teacher.

CLASSROOM DIVERSITY AND ROLE CONFLICT

It is generally accepted by many teachers that classroom diversity is "good," while their own professional experience suggests that it creates difficulties in teaching and learning. The incongruence between beliefs about diversity and the reality of the diverse classroom may present teachers with significant personal conflict. As a result, teachers who teach in classrooms with diverse student bodies may sense a high level of role conflict. Teachers may enthusiastically recommend classroom diversity as a means for meeting the needs of all students and may also advocate its opposite, namely, strict ability grouping, which tends to differentiate between students of different ethnic groups and different social classes, thus interfering with social integration. In addition, traditional value systems may imply that in working with socially and aca-

demically diverse classrooms, teachers may accomplish a crucial educational mission: providing both quality education and equality of educational opportunity, particularly for minority and at-risk students. Such role conflict may lead to a relative sense of job dissatisfaction and other negative work orientations.

Teachers' responses to their placement in a diverse classroom may depend on their social and professional status in the workplace as well. Although the diverse classroom requires the experience and knowledge of the best trained and most experienced members of the faculty, quite often other kinds of teachers are assigned to these classes. As teaching in such classrooms demands a heavy work load and extra efforts, it is likely that this duty will be assigned to less qualified members of the faculty more frequently than to teachers with years of experience and of educational and professional training (Gamoran, 1992). We believe such "mixed messages" about their roles and qualifications have a significant impact on the self-perceptions of teachers of diverse classrooms.

DIVERSE CLASSROOMS

The combination of conflicting messages derived from teachers' perceptions about their work and their workplace leads to the general examination of the relationships between classroom diversity and teachers' attitudes. The present exploratory field study attempts to clarify the following questions:

1. What is the relationship between classroom diversity and other contextual variables of the classroom?
2. What are the background characteristics of teachers of diverse classrooms?
3. How does teaching in a diverse classroom relate to teachers' perspectives of their work and their workplace?

METHODOLOGY

Data were gathered from an anonymous questionnaire administered to all secondary-school teachers in a medium-size industrial city in Israel ($N = 883$). Three hundred and seventy teachers (41.9%) responded to the entire questionnaire.² The sample consisted of 83% female and 17% male teachers. They taught in nine junior high schools, and in four academic and five technological senior high schools.³ The student body consisted of about 12,000 in 400 classrooms.

The Israeli classroom is a steady organizational unit. It is located in a specific room where the students study together in stable groups most of the time, with teachers changing locations to go to the students. Only teachers of laboratories, workshops, and technological and resource centers are in their own classrooms, and then the students come to them. In describing classroom diver-

sity, the average academic performance, and other characteristics of their classrooms, the teachers referred to their stable class. In describing their working conditions, they referred to their schools as their workplace in general.

The teachers responded to three sets of variables on the questionnaire as described in Table 1. The questionnaire was developed after initial visits to some of the schools, talking to focus groups of teachers, and observing teacher-administrator interactions. The questionnaire was pilot-tested among a group of teachers in a similar town at Israel's center. The final scales were developed based on the results of factor analysis and reliability analysis. Those items with high intercorrelations on the subscales and high item-total correlations are included.

The first set of variables pertained to the characteristics of the teachers' classrooms: perceived level of social and academic diversity, perceived average academic level, and grade level. Four items measured the degree of social and academic diversity of the classroom: the extent to which (1) the socioeconomic background of the students was diverse; (2) the cultural and ethnic background of the students was heterogeneous; (3) the social popularity of the students was highly differentiated; and (4) the ability gaps among the students were considerable ($\alpha = .60$). Four items also estimated teachers' perceptions of the average academic ability level of the classroom. For example, "There are many capable students in my classroom" ($\alpha = .67$). The teachers also reported the grade level of the class they taught.

The second set of variables measured two background characteristics: teachers' seniority and gender.

The third set of variables pertained to teachers' perspectives about their workplace. To give measures of the following variables, teachers responded on a 7-point scale about the extent to which they agreed with each of the following statements:

1. Instructional difficulties (e.g., "The supplies and instructional materials are not adequate for my students").
2. Involvement with the school leaders (e.g., "The school administration encourages teachers to participate in making school policy").
3. Job satisfaction (e.g., "If I had to start over, I would choose again to be a teacher").
4. Attitudes toward social integration in school (e.g., "The main goal of schooling should be social integration").
5. Attitudes toward ability grouping (e.g., "Students with learning problems should be placed in special classrooms").

The statistics on the research variables are detailed in Table 1.

Other school context variables measured included class size, levels of parental involvement and support, and discipline problems reported by teachers.

The relationships between the context of the teachers' classrooms and their

TABLE 1.
The Statistics of the Research Variables

Main Variables	No. of Items	Range	Mean	Standard Deviation	Cronbach's Alpha
A. Characteristics of the teacher's classroom					
1. Social diversity	4	1-7	4.13	1.46	.60
2. Average academic level	4	1-7	4.98	1.20	.67
3. Grade level (1 = 7th; 6 = 12th)	1	1-6	3.96	1.48	—
B. Teacher's background					
1. Gender (M = 0; F = 1)	1	0-1	.85	.35	—
2. Seniority	1	1-35	13.69	8.67	—
C. Teacher's perspectives					
1. Instructional difficulties	7	1-7	3.46	1.54	.74
2. Involvement with school leaders	6	1-7	5.40	1.24	.85
3. Job satisfaction	4	1-7	4.08	1.54	.71
4. Attitudes toward social integration in school	3	1-7	4.18	1.33	.62
5. Attitudes in favor of ability grouping	3	1-7	5.73	1.24	.65

perspectives on their workplaces were analyzed by means of correlational analysis and ordinary least-squares multiple-regression procedures. The statistical procedures were chosen to identify the significance of the relationships between classroom contexts and teachers' perspectives of their workplace.

FINDINGS

Diversity and Other Classroom Contexts

The first research question asks: What is the relationship between classroom diversity, the average academic level, and other contextual variables? We assumed that the level of classroom diversity is a very important aspect of the workplace for teachers, and that it would correlate significantly with other classroom and school variables.

Table 2 presents the correlations of classroom diversity and academic level with school context variables. The correlations suggest that the two main constructs of the study—classroom diversity and academic level—are negatively correlated ($r = -.306$). Teachers who indicated that they taught in diverse

TABLE 2.
Pearson Correlations of Classroom Diversity, Academic Level Scales, and
Other School Context Variables ($N = 370$)

Name of Variable	Diversity	Academic Level
Diversity	—	—
Academic level	—	—
Parental involvement ^a	— .117*	— .040
Parental support	— .290*	— .324*
Classroom size ^a	.217*	.061
Disciplinary problems ^a	.247*	— .475*

^aThese variables are not included in the regression analysis.

* $p < .05$

classrooms were likely to report a lower academic level for their students. In addition, the diversity scale correlated significantly with other variables. Teachers of more diverse classrooms reported more frequently a lack of parental support, lack of parental involvement, large class sizes, and more disciplinary problems.

The average academic level of the class correlated significantly with fewer school variables than the diversity scale, and in a predicted direction. For instance, teachers who perceived that they taught students with high academic levels indicated that they had parental support and few disciplinary problems. The high negative correlation with disciplinary problems and high positive correlation with parental support suggest that average academic level was a valid predictor of “positive” classroom contexts.

Hence, the data suggest, thus far, that teachers’ reports about their school contexts and their classrooms seem to fit with the typical, expected direction. Teachers working in classrooms which were described as highly diverse were more likely to indicate difficult working conditions than were teachers teaching students with high academic achievements.

Diversity and Teacher Characteristics

Pearson correlations among the variables in the regression analyses are displayed in Table 3, and Table 4 reports the findings of the multiple-regression analyses that examined the relationships between the teachers’ background characteristics and classroom diversity.

The first multiple regression, presented in Table 4, indicates that female teachers with relatively short teaching experience at lower grade levels were assigned to more diverse classrooms than experienced male teachers at higher grade levels. It seems that teaching in socially diverse classrooms is a tempo-

TABLE 3.
Correlation Coefficient of Variables Used in the Analysis

	Seniority Level	Grade Level	Classroom Academic Level	Classroom Diversity	Instructional Difficulties	Involvement with Leaders	Job Satisfaction	Attitudes toward Social Integration	Attitudes toward Ability Grouping
Seniority	1.000	.192**	-.042	-.113*	.009	.010	.001	.071	-.154**
Grade Level	1.000	1.000	-.224**	-.172**	.037	-.279**	-.092	-.232**	-.036
Classroom Academic Level			1.000	-.306**	-.065	.243**	.070	.169**	-.113*
Classroom Diversity				1.000	.290**	-.114*	-.138**	.101*	.093
Instructional Difficulties					1.000	-.301**	-.308**	.033	-.081
Involvement with Leaders						1.000	.387**	.233**	.014
Job Satisfaction							1.000	.197**	-.079
Attitudes toward Social Integration								1.000	-.056
Attitudes toward Ability Grouping									1.000

* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$

TABLE 4.
Multiple-Regression Analysis: B Coefficients, Standardized BETA Coefficients,
and Standard Errors of Classroom Diversity on Teachers' Characteristics
($N = 370$)

Independent Variables		Classroom Diversity
Gender	<i>b</i>	-.494*
	<i>BETA</i>	-.120*
	<i>SE</i>	(.224)
Seniority	<i>b</i>	-.018*
	<i>BETA</i>	-.105*
	<i>SE</i>	(.009)
Grade level	<i>b</i>	-.187*
	<i>BETA</i>	-.190*
	<i>SE</i>	(.053)
Constant		5.79* (.366)
R^2		.062*

* $p < .05$

rary testing period in the teacher's professional development. After successfully "surviving" it, the teacher is entitled to be advanced to a more intrinsically motivating and easily managed classroom.

Classroom Diversity and Teachers' Perspectives

The next set of multiple-regression analyses examined the relationships between teaching in diverse classrooms and teachers' perspectives on their workplace, after controlling for teacher background characteristics and the average academic level of the class (see Table 5).

The analyses indicate that the constants (the weighted means) of the five dependent variables were very different from one another. Teachers reported very few instructional difficulties (con. = 1.24 on a 7-point scale). They reported high job satisfaction (con. = 5.03) and even higher levels of involvement with school management (con. = 5.72). Their support for social integration as a school policy was moderate (con. = 3.31), but they enthusiastically supported the opposite practice of ability grouping (con. = 6.01). The simul-

TABLE 5.
Multiple-Regression Analysis: B Coefficients, Standardized Coefficients (BETA),
and Standard Errors of Teachers' Perspectives on Teacher and
Classroom Characteristics (N = 370)

Dependent Variable	Independent Variables						R^2
	Seniority	Grade Level	Classroom Academic Level	Classroom Diversity	Constant		
Instructional difficulties	<i>b</i>	.006	.117*	.048	.334*	1.24*	.107*
	<i>BETA</i>	.039	.119*	.039	.339*	—	
	<i>(SE)</i>	(.008)	(.053)	(.064)	(.053)	(.56)	
Involvement with management	<i>b</i>	.005	-.215*	.183*	-.093*	5.72*	.132*
	<i>BETA</i>	.038	-.266*	.183*	-.111*	—	
	<i>(SE)</i>	(.007)	(.043)	(.052)	(.043)	(.46)	
Job satisfaction	<i>b</i>	-.001	-.098	.024	-.149*	5.03*	.027*
	<i>BETA</i>	-.009	-.097	.019	-.144*	—	
	<i>(SE)</i>	(.004)	(.056)	(.069)	(.057)	(.60)	
Attitudes toward school integration	<i>b</i>	.014	-.157*	.170*	.117*	3.31*	.078*
	<i>BETA</i>	.091	-.174*	.152*	.126*	—	
	<i>(SE)</i>	(.008)	(.049)	(.060)	(.050)	(.53)	
Attitudes favoring ability grouping	<i>b</i>	-.018*	-.179*	-.089	.092*	6.01*	.031*
	<i>BETA</i>	-.123*	-.089*	-.087*	.099*	—	
	<i>(SE)</i>	(.008)	(.084)	(.043)	(.046)	(.43)	

* $p < .05$

taneous support of contradictory practices of very diverse classrooms, as required by social integration, and of strict ability grouping seems to suggest a professional role conflict.

In all cases, classroom diversity had a significant net effect on teachers' perspectives. Teachers of diverse classrooms reported more instructional difficulties ($b = .334$). They also reported less involvement with school management ($b = -.093$) and were less satisfied with their job ($b = -.149$). Paradoxically, teachers of diverse classrooms were simultaneously more supportive of school integration ($b = .117$) and ability grouping ($b = .092$). It should be noted that the total explained variances of the five dependent variables are low, ranging from $R^2 = .027$ to $R^2 = .132$. Although all of the regression equations are statistically significant, the results must be viewed as exploratory and tentative.

The regression analyses also indicate that classroom diversity was more closely associated with teachers' perspectives on their workplace than with the average academic level of the class. While diversity was related to all aspects of the workplace, the academic level of the classroom was related in a different direction to involvement with school leaders and to attitudes toward ability grouping. While teachers in classrooms with a diverse student body reported that they were involved less with school leadership, teachers reporting high average academic levels of their students indicated they were more likely to be involved with school leaders ($b = .183$). Furthermore, teachers reporting high academic levels of their students were more likely to indicate negative attitudes towards ability grouping ($b = -.089$). In addition, teachers with less experience ($b = -.018$), who taught lower grade levels ($b = -.179$), and who taught students of lower average academic ability ($b = -.089$), firmly advocated ability grouping.

In summary, the results suggest that classroom diversity is significantly negatively related to teachers' perspectives on their workplace.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study suggest associations between teachers' perceptions about their classroom diversity and other aspects of their workplace. Teachers' perceptions of the academic and social diversity of the student body correlate negatively with the average academic level of the classroom, and positively with other aspects of the classroom like large size, frequent disciplinary problems, and low levels of parental support and involvement.

Classroom diversity, more than average academic level, is associated with other indicators about the workplace. Its correlations with teachers' background were very consistent. The findings indicate that the assignment of teachers by school principals to diverse classrooms was frequently imposed on less experi-

enced female teachers, who teach low grade levels. It could be speculated that teaching in the more diverse classroom is a period of transition during which beginning teachers must struggle with demanding challenges. Afterward, they may be advanced to more easygoing classrooms. An alternative to this type of teacher assignment would be to rotate teachers. This approach would serve two purposes: Students would have the opportunity to be exposed to different teachers, including the most effective, and teachers would have the chance to teach in different types of classrooms, avoiding a loss of morale (Gamoran, 1992). This pattern of teacher assignment has not been practiced in Israel.

The study indicates that classroom diversity is associated with teachers' perspectives on their workplace in a negative direction. The greater the classroom diversity, the more teachers indicated that they were dissatisfied, less involved in school management, and faced with more instructional problems. Similar findings have been reported by American researchers (Oakes, 1985).

Despite the growing familiarity of teachers, administrators, and policy analysts with the complex set of issues facing teachers as they work with diverse student bodies, little attention is being paid to how diversity affects their lives in the workplace, beyond the classroom. The findings seem to suggest that although multicultural education is a national goal of the State of Israel, there was little evidence of true commitment to this goal by the teachers in this study, nor did it seem that these schools were engaging in processes that would facilitate this commitment.

Indeed, little attention was paid to the role conflict which affected devoted teachers in diverse classrooms. Teachers reported comparatively negative perspectives on their experiences in diverse classrooms, as indicated by lower levels of involvement with school leaders, lower levels of job satisfaction, and more instructional difficulties, but they also reported a strong commitment to social integration as a school policy. A possible answer to this self-contradictory approach is that these teachers tended to balance the deficiencies of their working conditions with ideological rewards, stemming from the official value system of society. This value system may also have been used as an excuse for a subjective sense of instructional ineffectiveness.

Fostering this sense of shared commitment to a common educational mission may be especially difficult in schools with diverse student groups. Fuller and Izu (1986) report that teachers in schools with heterogeneous student groups agree less among themselves about certain educational philosophies and goals.

Research in the United States provides some possible explanations for the findings in the Israeli system. This research reports that schools that effectively work with heterogeneous classrooms seem to promote many activities that are precisely those that many of the teachers in this study reported were missing from their schools. Central to these are teachers' involvement in developing a shared dedication to multicultural education in diverse classrooms and an array

of strategies to promote it (Wheelock, 1992). Professional development tied to these goals is crucial as well: "The elimination of grouping must be accompanied by staff development opportunities for teachers to learn strategies for enhancing the learning of all students in classes that are more diverse than those to which they are accustomed" (Gamoran, 1992, p. 15).

Teachers and school leaders need to discuss the meaning that they attribute to diversity in the classroom and the impact of this meaning on their professional lives in schools. Central to these processes is the development of common norms and beliefs which can help socialize teachers and encourage shared commitment: "Unlike regulatory controls placed on teachers, cultural beliefs reflect unobtrusive socialization of the teacher and internalization of implicit organizational norms" (Fuller and Izu, 1986, p. 504).

This paper also raises questions about measuring, defining, and formally operationalizing the levels of diversity in a classroom, from both the quantitative and the qualitative perspectives. Often, diversity is referred to as an objective, school-level variable, such as the ratio of white students to minority students in the school (Fuller and Izu, 1986). Such a definition may be important for certain purposes, but an understanding of teachers' assessments of their own class diversity is essential to assist teachers who are capable and ready to face the challenges of the diverse classroom.

It seems that less attention is specifically given to classroom diversity in some of the basic educational research and policy analyses, as compared to factors such as size, academic performance, and disciplinary problems. For instance, in a detailed investigation of school size effects on school outcomes (Fowler and Walberg, 1991), school and teacher characteristics were measured and correlated with many outcome variables, but school diversity had been practically ignored. The Fowler and Walberg study indicates that small school size has a positive effect on educational outcomes. Considering the strong interaction between school size, class size, and classroom diversity, it is highly probable that the possible explanations of the results relate to diversity, not just the size of the units of study that were repeatedly measured.

Another example is the work of Mitchell, Ortiz, and Mitchell (1987) describing teachers' and school principals' orientations and job performance. These authors provide many details about classrooms but rarely indicate social, academic, or cultural diversity as an instructional challenge. They attribute teachers' work orientations only to "personality," not working conditions. Our findings offer additional interpretations to educational research. The diversity agenda is sometimes taken for granted by researchers or policymakers proposing organizational innovations.

Although diversity is a complex concept, difficult to operationalize for research purposes and to conceptualize for educational policy and teaching, it plays a vital role in teachers' professional lives. This exploratory study suggests

that classroom diversity is part of the context of teaching which has a profound impact on teachers' perspectives and practices. Educational leaders and school principals must become aware of the impact of classroom diversity on teachers as demographic shifts change the nature of the student body in their schools. Pivotal questions that should be addressed include: How can the school support teachers and organize their work roles to help them teach in multicultural classrooms and create positive working environments? It is clear that intrinsic satisfaction, stemming from a sense of accomplishing the cultural and social missions of school and society, may not be enough.

NOTES

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2. The response rate suggests that we must interpret the results with some caution. A comparison of the background characteristics of the respondents to the nonrespondents did not indicate substantial differences beyond two areas: The teachers from the academic senior high schools had a higher level of credentials than the nonrespondents from those high schools, and the overall sample of respondents overrepresented female teachers.
3. The classrooms of the comprehensive junior high schools are significantly more diverse and heterogeneous than those in the senior high schools. The standard deviations of students' achievements in the junior-high-school classrooms ranged from 21.2 to 29.5, and in the senior high schools, they ranged between 13.2 and 25.5.

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