

School leaders' emotional support of teachers through emotional transformation: Qualitative insights into the maintenance of teachers' occupational identity

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Abstract

Leaders' reframing of employees' negative emotions is a vital part of socio-emotional support at work. This qualitative research aimed to achieve a richer understanding of principals' reframing of teachers' negative emotions in principal-teacher relations.

The study used data from semi-structured interviews with 12 principals and 24 teachers and found that teachers' emotional reframing by principals commonly follows intense negative emotions linked to threats to teachers' occupational identity. In addition, the study revealed the use of reframing communication strategies, such as empathic listening, empowering messages and normalizing messages. The results of the study and their implications are discussed.

Keywords: emotion regulation, emotional support, principals, social support, teachers

This is an Accepted Manuscript of an article published by Taylor & Francis in Leadership and Policy in Schools on 11 July 2019, available online: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/15700763.2019.1638421>

1. Introduction

It has been suggested that social support is highly valuable in alleviating negative emotions at work (Dunseath, Beehr, & King, 1995; Ju, Lan, Li, Feng, & You, 2015). A meta-analysis found that supervisors' support had the highest effect on employees' wellbeing among all other sources of support (Halbesleben, 2006). The most explored types of social support are (Colbert, Bono, & Purvanova, 2016): (a) instrumental support, aimed at aiding in task completion (e.g., time, money, etc.); and (b) emotional support, intended to enhance affective wellbeing (e.g., empathy, care, trust, etc.). Littrell, Billingsley, and Cross (1994) indicated that of all sub-types of support, teachers ascribe the greatest importance to receiving emotional support. Despite of the utility of emotional support in principal-teacher relations, unresolved issues remain. The existing theoretical perspectives focus on the global description of emotional support, and therefore underspecify the communicative strategies involved in it. Some researchers have suggested that social support through communication shapes the cognitive appraisal of the stressful situation, making it more manageable (Burlison & Holmstrom, 2008). Similarly, the organizational literature argues that at times social actors at work attempt to encourage other individuals to adopt a new perspective on emotion-eliciting events and reframe their emotions in a more positive light (Williams, 2007). This process, called 'emotional reframing', seems particularly relevant to explore.

Because we lack a theory of how emotional support operates, and what its outcomes are, the purpose of this qualitative research was to achieve a richer understanding of emotional support in principal-teacher relations, focusing on teachers' emotional reframing.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1 The cognitive perspective on emotions and self-emotion regulation

Some scholars view emotions as perceptions of bodily states (e.g., William James) or as being rooted in physiology (e.g., Paul Ekman), but many others suggest that "an emotion is not just physical, like a sneeze. It is an evaluation, now called an 'appraisal'" (Oatley & Johnson-Laird, 2014, p. 134). The latter, which has become highly popular in psychology research and psychological interventions, is also known as the cognitive perspective of emotions (Keltner, Oatley, & Jenkins, 2013).

According to it, emotions are produced when individuals encounter events that catch their attention, and these events are understood in a manner that creates psychological, physiological, and behavioral reactions (Gross & Barrett, 2011).

The cognitive theory of emotions views affect and cognition as intertwined, and this synthesis enables regulation of affect (Gross, 2013).

Emotion regulation is defined as the "attempt to influence which emotions we have, when we have them, and how these emotions are experienced or expressed" (Barsade & Gibson, 2007, p. 41). The dominant model of self-emotion regulation, by James Gross (2002), emphasizes the role of cognitive interpretation of the stimulus in generating the affective response. Gross's model outlines a variety of self-emotion regulation strategies (e.g., situation selection, situation modification, attentional deployment, cognitive reappraisal, response suppression). Two strategies, reappraisal (a "cognitive-linguistic strategy that alters the trajectory of emotional responses by reformulating the meaning of a situation") and suppression (a "strategy directed toward inhibiting behaviors associated with emotional responding") received most of researchers' attention (Goldin, McRae, Ramel & Gross, 2008, p. 577). The application of the first was found in numerous studies to be the most effective in achieving a

variety of desired affective, cognitive, and social outcomes (Gross, 2002). This conclusion was reaffirmed also by a meta-analysis, showing that among emotion regulation strategies the largest effect was that of cognitive reappraisal, which had a small-to-medium effect (Webb, Miles, & Sheeran, 2012).

2.2 Teachers and self-emotion regulation

Self-emotion regulation by teachers is a relatively new field of research. Rosemary Sutton was among the first to mark this topic as an important and independent field of study (see Sutton, 2004). In a study conducted in the US, the vast majority of participating teachers (80%) reported everyday efforts to increase positive emotions, and more than half (65%) described regular attempts to decrease negative emotions (Sutton & Harper, 2009). According to Sutton (2004) "[t]eachers talked about a variety of strategies that were easily classified according to Gross's categories of modifying the situation, attention deployment, and cognitive change" (p. 388). Gong, Chai, Duan, Zhong, & Jiao (2013) reported use of similar self-emotion regulation strategies by Chinese teachers. Sutton and Harper (2009) contended that use of cognitive reappraisal of emotions differentiates between effective and ineffective teachers. US teachers reported that they often try to change their own perceptions of negatively charged emotional events at work (Sutton, 2004; Sutton, Mudrey-Camino, & Knight, 2009). Jiang, Vauras, Volet, and Wang's (2016) study conducted in Finland combined student surveys and teacher interviews, and found that teachers' self-cognitive reappraisal was more effective than suppression in increasing positive-emotion expression and reducing negative-emotion expression.

2.3 Interpersonal emotion regulation and emotional reframing

Coping with one's emotions often takes place in social settings (Zaki & Williams, 2013). Social signals are highly relevant when focusing on affective interpersonal interactions such as those between supervisor and subordinate, because social influence is at the heart of leadership (Shamir, 2010). The literature suggests three types of social signals (Campos, Mumme, Kermoian, & Campos, 1994): (a) emotional contagion (i.e., viewer copying another person's affective behaviors which trigger similar emotions in the viewer); (b) emotion generation by social approval and disapproval; and (c) ascribing affective meaning to perceptions associated with the signal. The two latter types, described by Campos et al. (1994), fit perfectly with the definition of emotion regulation presented earlier, in which one person deliberately attempts to affect the emotions of another.

In the last decade, scholars considered the idea of interpersonal emotion regulation in general (Zaki & Williams, 2013), and in the workplace in particular (Troth, Lawrence, Jordan, & Ashkanasy, 2018; Williams, 2007). These theoretical works are all based on the cognitive perspective on emotions, and draw heavily on Gross's model and its logic. Gross's model suggests that interpersonal emotional reappraisal is likely to make a special contribution to promoting other people's wellbeing in social interactions.

Interpersonal emotional reappraisal, or emotional reframing, is an experience in which one person changes another's negative interpretation of an emotional event into a more positive one (Williams, 2007). The few works that explored emotional reframing did so in a quantitative manner (see a recent review by Troth et al., 2018). For example, in the context of physician-patient relations, it has been found that physicians' anxious attachment was negatively related to their use of interpersonal

emotional reappraisal, which in turn negatively predicted patient satisfaction (Kafetsios, Hantzara, Anagnostopoulos, & Niakas, 2016). Such quantitative exploration did not allow describing the phenomenon in a thick and rich manner. We argue that emotional reframing in work relations is a part of socio-emotional support in a given occupational arena.

2.4 Emotional support of teachers through emotional reframing

Teaching is considered an affective practice (James, 2010). Psychological literature frequently ties identity and emotions together. Often one's emotional distress is an indication of an experience of self-discrepancy (Park & Folkman, 1997). Teaching is a classic public sector profession (Grand, 2010), in which employees often have intrinsic prosocial motivation (i.e., public service motivation) (Giauque, Anderfuhren-Biget, & Varone, 2013; Grant, 2008). Similarly, data on successful principals from the International Successful School Principalship Project (ISSPP) suggests that positive emotions are a key motivator of educators' work commitment (Day, 2007). In school, principal's support is specifically said to mitigate negative emotions that teachers have about themselves and their work, and to reduce their stress and burnout (Song, 2008). Social support is defined as social resources that individuals view as accessible or that are delivered to them by others, within formal or informal relationships (Gottlieb & Bergen, 2010). Teachers who received social support from their supervisors were less likely to be exhausted (Hakanen et al., 2006).

The literature describes two types of social support: instrumental (promoting others' task competence) and emotional (promoting others wellbeing) (Colbert et al., 2016). Principals' emotional support was found to be more effective in reducing teachers stress than other types of support were (Littrell, Billingsley, & Cross, 1994),

and there has been growing interest in the relations between educational leadership and emotions in recent years (Berkovich & Eyal, 2015; Lakomski & Evers, 2017; Ryan & Tutors, 2015). Nevertheless, the scholarly understanding of how principals' emotional support of teachers operates and promotes this outcome is still limited. The imperfect understanding of emotional support follows from the global manner in which this construct is typically explored, which does not detail the elements involved in it (Fenlason & Beehr, 1994). As social support is said to reshape the cognitive appraisal of the stressful situation (Burlison & Holmstrom, 2008), turning to the cognitive theory of emotions, might assist in explaining the importance of emotional reframing.

A recent review indicates that our empirical knowledge about the interpersonal emotion regulation of teachers by school leaders is severely limited (Berkovich & Eyal, 2015). At the same time, both principals and teachers worldwide (e.g., in Canada, UK, Finland, and Israel) recognize the principals' role in helping teachers cope with their negative emotions (Beatty, 2000; Crawford, 2007; Hanhimäki & Tirri, 2009; Tatar, 2009). The same is true regarding our knowledge about interpersonal emotional reframing. Crawford (2007) revealed that school leaders assist others to become mindful of their negative affect, helping to prompt a positive affective change. Some preliminary evidence indicates that in situations of ethical dilemmas, principals play a role in facilitating emotional reframing of teachers and reducing their stress (Hanhimäki & Tirri, 2009).

Therefore, the purpose of the present study is to explore principals' emotional support of teachers, with the aim of providing rich and deep insights into how principals use emotional reframing to support teachers. Prior qualitative explorations of self-emotion regulation of educators have been instrumental in explaining the

manifestations, reasons, and outcomes of educators' self-suppression and emotional expression (Arar, 2017; Hagenauer & Volet, 2014; Oplatka, 2017). The present article is intended to make a similar contribution to interpersonal emotional reframing in the context of principal-teacher relations.

3. Research Context

The research was performed in Israel. The study focused on the public primary education system. In Israel, primary education is mandatory and provided by the state (Berkovich, 2014). Since the mid-1980s, the public system has adopted some elements of decentralization and privatization (e.g., magnet schools, school-based management, parental choice, private financing of services within the public system, deregulation of public services, etc.), which have been gaining momentum in the 21st century (Berkovich, 2014). These elements of privatization and decentralization have been associated with work intensification (Ballet & Kelchtermans, 2009), which in turn, was associated with demands that employees do more work in less time and with fewer resources (Kelliher & Anderson, 2010). Work intensification in the educational context has been noted to amplify the emotional aspects of principals' and teachers' work (see Froese-Germain, 2014; Hauseman, Wang, & Pollock, 2017). Israel is a Mediterranean cultural environment, which is known for a relatively low level of formality and power distance, compared with West-European and North-American countries (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010). The policy developments and local culture make Israel the ideal setting for exploring teachers' emotions and how principals affect them.

4. Method

To explore principals' emotional support of teachers by emotional reframing, we chose a qualitative research approach. An inductive qualitative approach is best suited for obtaining rich information about an underexplored and poorly understood phenomenon, in which participants' perspectives and the context cannot be separated from the phenomenon involved (Merriam, 2002). The study was approved by an IRB.

4.1 Participants and procedure

We used purposive selection because we aspired to learn from participants who have experienced the phenomenon under study and whose accounts can provide rich information about the nature of the phenomenon (Patton, 2015). Specifically, we used purposive criterion sampling (Sandelowski, 2000). We used data from an earlier quantitative study (see Berkovich & Eyal, 2017) to identify principals who, according to their teachers, were highly associated with the experience of emotional reframing (i.e., in the top third of principals). The principals identified in this way (N=24) were, in their teachers' opinions, more strongly associated with promoting emotional reframing (1-7 scale: $M=4.99$, $SD=.28$) than were the principals in the non-targeted group (N=45, $M=3.95$, $SD=.52$). Independent t-tests indicated a significant difference in scores between the two groups ($t(76)=9.09$, $p<.001$). We found no significant differences in the scores of emotional reframing of teachers in the sample by principals' gender and management experience. Of the 24 principals identified as suitable participants in the quantitative set, 12 agreed to participate (50% response rate). No significant differences were found between the principals who agreed to participate and those who refused in emotional reframing, gender, and management experience. Using quantitative data for purposive criterion sampling in a manner that

precedes qualitative exploration is ideal for situations in which we seek to attain "fuller information on why persons scored as they did" (Sandelowski, 2000, p. 249).

Next, because we aimed to identify individuals supported by principals, we used the principals as informants and asked them to recommend teachers capable of reflecting about their emotional dynamics, with whom the principals have had contact in the preceding months in the context of a work event with emotional aspects. In each school, from among the teachers recommended by the principal, we approached two teachers and asked them to participate in the study. The study involved a total of 36 participants: 12 principals and 24 teachers.

The study included ten female and two male principals. Most of the principals held a master's degree, three held a bachelor's degree, and one a doctoral degree. Principals had considerable experience in their current position (3-33 years, $M = 14.33$ years, $SD = 7.99$). The study also included 23 female teachers and one male. Participating teachers held either a bachelor's or master's degree, and had 1-35 years of experience ($M = 14.83$ years, $SD = 8.39$). To answer the research questions, we chose the qualitative data collection technique of semi-structured interviews, which generates rich insights about participants' meanings and meaning-making (Patton, 2015). The interview questions were developed based on the literature review (see Appendixes A & B). The interviews were conducted during the school year and held in a private setting at the schools (in a room or on school grounds); they lasted 50-80 minutes. All interviews were audiotaped and transcribed. All identifying information in the transcripts was replaced by anonymous reference codes.

4.2 Data analysis and authenticity

To analyze the data, we followed the recommendations of Miles and Huberman (2013): (a) conduct open coding by labeling the data; (b) perform a mapping analysis to identify inter-relationships and collapse the data into themes; and (c) create meta-themes out of themes. The two authors analyzed the interview data independently. The transcripts were read to identify the relevant text segments, and the data were hand-sorted. The segments were coded, seeking to maintain the labels as closely as possible to the participants' meaning (Patton, 2015). Next, each researcher searched separately for works relevant to the theoretical language that may be used to conceptualize the themes. The literature and the follow-up discussion inspired the theoretical underpinning and language of the present paper. One important way in which the literature affected our work is in acknowledging the high interrelation between emotions and occupational identity in teaching, which we saw reflected in our data. Although participants did not use the term "occupational identity," we see value in using it as a meta-label for some of the sub-themes. To evaluate the methodological dependability of the study, we resorted to an external auditor, who reviewed the data and the analysis, and concluded that our interpretations represent the data. This is a more suitable technique for authentication than inter-rater reliability, which comes at the expense of richness and may lead to superficial description of the phenomenon.

5. Findings

The analysis of the interviews data yielded three major themes: situations in which principals' emotional support of teachers through emotional reframing occurs; communication strategies used by principals to emotionally support teachers through

reframing; and outcomes of principals' emotional support of teachers through emotional reframing.

5.1 Theme one: Situations in which principals' emotional support of teachers through emotional reframing occurs

Teachers' occupational identity as a central concept in emotional support of teachers. The circumstances in which principals' support of teachers through emotional reframing takes place concern issues related to teachers' occupational identity (N=27). There was agreement among the interviewees that in the teaching profession emotions are related to teachers' occupational identity. Referring to the nature of teaching, principals and teachers used terms like "care," "love," "worry," "concern," "empathy," "devotion," "protect," and "help." Therefore, emotions are a key defining aspect of teachers' work and consequently, work identity. Teachers indicated that there is no distinction between their occupational and personal identity, revealing an overlap and even full integration of work identity in their core self. One teacher explained (S#1-T2):

In educational work, emotion is very very strong... and you take it home with you. Because it is part of you, it's you. I mean there is no separation between me here [at school] or me at home. I'm the same person.

The salience of occupational identity in teachers' self-identity is manifest in their heightened personal sense of responsibility regarding students' growth, which is echoed in the following quote (S#3-T2):

Teacher's work is perhaps more [demanding] than any other profession in the world... Children have the dynamism of development. They are constantly changing... So there is always this pressure... I need to constantly check that

I'm okay, to reflect on what I am doing... You do not call it a day and go home, but it's on your mind at all times.

These excerpts suggest that teachers have a highly internalized identity, and that the demands of teaching work are experienced around the clock. Therefore, many teachers have a sense of work intensification.

Typical situations in which principals' emotional support of teachers was needed. The participants' narratives reveal two types of situations in which principals' emotional support of teachers through emotional reframing was relevant: events in which teachers experience occupational incompetence and those in which teachers experience occupational delegitimization. Both situations were perceived by many principals and teachers as highly threatening to teachers' occupational identity and as a source of intense negative emotions.

The first type of situations emerged as rising intense negative emotions associated with teachers' experiencing occupational inefficacy at work. Occupational inefficacy appeared to be rooted in the teachers' sense of responsibility and their perception of inability to help students' learning and growth. One principal stated (S#9-P): "A teacher has in her class a child she doesn't know how to contain and there's no cooperation from home. So the teacher gets angry... Angry because someone smashed the 'perfect world' she envisioned." Teachers used words such as "disappointment," "sadness," "frustration," and "anger" to describe strong negative emotions related to lack of progress by students or failure in promoting children's wellbeing. In these types of situations, teachers tend to seek help, as one teacher noted in this regard (S#2-T1): "Teachers love to consult, expose, and share their difficulties and emotions." Interviews also indicated that in circumstances of emotional distress teachers are perceived to specifically seek out external social support:

Interviewer: In such a situation, when a teacher experiences frustration, what does she do?

Principal (S#4-P): She comes to talk to me, expecting some sort of here-and-now solution which is always never available. But the venting, sitting and processing together, helps.

This represents the principals' view of their role as classic co-regulators. The two people mentioned in the excerpt share the processing of events and their meaning, but the teacher's dependence on this interaction is clearly marked. The second type of situations described as frequently reflecting occupational identity threats and promoting a need for emotional support are those involving occupational delegitimizing by parents. Ten principals and 11 teachers elaborated on this issue. Participants elaborated on this issue, and one principal (S#5-P) stated that there are "a lot of emotional issues linked to teacher-parent relationships, to parents' criticism of teachers' teaching methods or attitude." One teacher noted (S#1-T1): "Working with parents is one of the most dominant [source of teachers' negative emotions]... Sometimes it breaks you up." Teachers claimed that parents often felt they knew more about the "right" way to educate school children than teachers did, and perceived teachers as being unmotivated and unprofessional. Another teacher described the influence of such a past negative interaction with parents on her mental state (S#7-T1): "[Some] parents had demands, criticism, complaints... These parents made me cry a lot... because I took everything to heart." Participants acknowledged that teachers' interactions with parents are a sensitive issue that may also have administrative consequences and may harm their legitimacy as qualified teachers (S#3-P): "It is a sensitive issue interacting with parents, and teachers know that these interactions can have implications for them." Aggressive parent behavior and

criticism of the teacher was reported to cause teachers to feel "lack of appreciation," "frustration," and "anger." Teachers noted that turning to the principals for support can be more complicated in these cases, but that often principals serve as an important outlet for teachers' "bottled up" emotions resulting from interactions with parents (S#1-T2): "I restrained myself, but at some point I could not control myself anymore. I went to the principal, and she contained me, and there I let everything out." Teachers work alone for most of the day, behind closed doors, with no other adult to share their experience or witness it. Moreover, the privatization and decentralization of the system weakened teachers' status. Power infused the system. Service orientation increased, and parents gained strength in school-home relations. In the environment created by this policy, the principal is the gatekeeper, both bridging between teachers and parents and serving as a buffer between them. This combination of structural and policy effects overcharges teachers with negative emotions, which they let out at times unprofessionally, partly spontaneously and partly as a defensive tactic, in a complex work setting.

According to the interviewees, teachers' negative emotions at work run deeper than the mere practicalities of the emotion-eliciting events. One principal (S#11-P) stated that teachers' grievances should always be treated seriously in order to "see beyond what anyone says. Because there is always something more beyond the things being said." This comment suggests not to view emotional events involving teachers strictly as episodic incidents, but rather in the context of the teachers' history and connection to their work.

5.2 Theme two: Principals' communication strategies linked with emotional support of teachers through emotional reframing

Analysis of the interviews shows that principals' communication strategies involving certain modes of listening and messages promote teachers' emotional reframing. Specifically, principals used empathic listening, reframing messages of empowerment (i.e., the event and its emotional effect should be reinterpreted as a challenge), and reframing messages of normalization (i.e., the event and its emotional effect should be reevaluated as ordinary within school reality) in order to promote teachers' emotional reframing.

Principals' empathic listening. Twenty-four interviewees suggested that principals' emotional support of teachers includes empathic listening. Participants portrayed the principal's empathic communication as "listening," "hearing," "being attentive," and "containing" teachers' emotional expressions, while conveying "empathy" and "concern," and attempting to "understand the place I am coming from." Teachers also indicated the significance of a non-judgmental attitude of the principals' empathic listening (S#12-T2): "[Principals should] not ascribe guilt, but listen... Each of us [the teachers] is unique, and each has her emotions... and the principal needs to know to contain all that."

Furthermore, according to the teachers, empathic listening should avoid a critical tone that "rejects," "blames," "shames," or "judges" them. This was also reflected in accounts of specific events. Following an upsetting exchange with a mother, one teacher described a conversation in which empathic listening was dominant (S#1-T1): "She [the principal] asked me 'what happened?' and said 'let's talk about it.' First, she gave me an opportunity to pour my heart out." At the same time,

some of the principals presented a somewhat limited willingness to support teachers' perspective. One of them said (S#8-P):

With emotions you can't argue. If a teacher feels insulated, it doesn't matter if the feeling was justified or not. I can understand it and be empathic, but I will not identify with her and put myself in her shoes.

Thus, principals' empathic listening communication seems to enable teachers to feel safe and open in discussing their emotions and concerns. Principals stressed further that empathic listening includes not only verbal but also nonverbal behavior, as principals encourage teachers nonverbally, using body language and nodding, sending the message that (S#6-P): "even if I [the principal] sit here and you sit there, the table between us is not a barrier." Thus, empathy transcends not only the work isolation of the teacher, as the principal was not with the teacher while the event took place, but also transcends the hierarchical power relations in the school space, which the table positioned between the principal and the teacher signifies.

Principals' reframing messages. The first type of message that principals use to encourage teachers' emotional reframing is empowerment. This message was described by 18 participants. In one version, an empowering message attempts to strengthen the teachers' efficacy by promoting a strong effort-performance link and by shaping teachers' expectation to influence the desired results. A variation of the principals' empowering reframing message aimed at strengthening teachers' efficacy pointed out the teachers' strengths and reinforced their sense of agency. In the words of one principal (S#11-P): "I listen to the teacher and reflect her strengths back to her." Another principal described it the same way, referring to a conversation with a teacher discouraged by an undisciplined class she had difficulty coping with (S#7-P): "I was careful not to take away her power and position in the classroom... I kept

repeating the message 'you are the manager in the classroom, I'm not there. You are the manager in the classroom.'" This message, which makes one imagine one's control, uses the Pygmalion effect, by setting expectations that affect another person's experience and performance.

Another version of the empowering message attempts to promote the perception of the situation as a complex one, and at the same time emphasizing how this complexity requires the teacher's care. According to one participant (S#10-P), this reframing message cultivates the teachers' care-orientation and encourages them to "place their emphasis on the child. They begin to understand the child's experience and feel for him more." Principals put the annoyance into perspective as an understandable setback, and at the same time stress the teachers' responsibility to care, encouraging them to move from the position of a bystander into a proactive role. Thus, stimulating empathy and compassion toward the child cause teachers to be responsible for students. As one principal said (S#9-P): "The teacher made space from herself [the negative emotion she experienced] and entered the care for the student into her heart." Thus, reframing attempts by principals to reorient the teachers' focus from self to others and to cultivate their tendency to care are aimed at increasing the teachers' sense of responsibility and their internal measure of control.

One principal recalled a remark in this spirit used by her in a conversation she had with a teacher (S#4-P): "Give one minute to this girl... The girl talks back, but from a position of weakness... her parents are getting a divorce." One teacher described such a conversation, in which her principal transformed her negative emotions by providing background information about a student who was acting because her parents were in the process of an ugly divorce, expanding the teacher's perception of the situation (S#10-T2):

There is this girl that I felt like I failed with her. My talk with the principal illuminated other elements in the girl's story. This way it became not a personal frustration due to my failure, but I could see that there is a more complex case, and I needed to take this as a challenge. In this new light, my approach became completely different.

Thus, this reversal tactic of framing failure as a challenge positively reengages teachers with the situation and offers new paths for action. Sixteen participants mentioned another type of reframing message, in which principal's communication was aimed at redefining the difficult situation and negative emotions, making teachers accept these elements as a given, harsh reality that is part of the teaching occupation. One manner in which principals attempted to normalize negative emotions was by encouraging teachers to accept negative emotions and to make a greater distinction between their job and their self-involvement. One principal described her use of this variation of a reframing message (S#2-P):

I told the teacher: "You should create a mental wall to block negative work-related feelings, so you will not carry them around the clock and become exhausted. It's true that we need to take our occupational commitment to heart, but still it's a job, and these children are not your children, so some separation would be good for you."

The interviews revealed that principals' emotional support through emotional reframing also seems to promote normalization by limiting teachers' occupational responsibility. One teacher (S#6-T1) described an evening she organized for parents and children and was concerned that attendance might be low. The principal altered her negative emotions by communicating with her: "It'll be okay. The parents and children who will come will enjoy themselves. You did everything you could and

more." In this way, principals attempt to promote a perception of the event that appears to be critical and dramatic as being more ordinary by limiting the teachers' sense of responsibility. Principals also attempt to communicate that the negative event or its resulting effect are conventional. For example, one teacher who addressed this aspect said (S#8-T1): "[the principal] sees a complete person and broadcasts the sense that you are OK." Another principal noted similarly (S#3-P): "You show the teacher that you understand what happened to her, that it could happen to you too... that this is something very human." The central notion emerging in all these excerpts is a communication that resets the legitimate norm of performance at a lower level, often suggesting that events are destined to happen or beyond the teacher's control.

5.3 Theme three: Outcomes of successful principals' attempts aimed at reframing teachers' emotions

Participants' accounts described two successful outcomes of principals' attempts at reframing teachers' emotions (N=25): teachers' emotional reframing experience and strengthening of their occupational identity.

Teachers' Emotional Reframing. Twenty-five participants described the essence of the emotional reframing experience as cognitive emotional change. The cognitive transformation aspect emerged in various statements presenting emotional reframing as "opening a window to another way of thought," "a different way of thinking," "a change in viewpoint," and "looking at the situation in another way." Teachers described the cognitive change assisted by principals as part of an emotional transformation, resulting in increased positive and decreased negative affects. Principals described this cognitive experience of modification as being accompanied by a positive change in emotional aspect. One principal commented (S#11-P): "When

it [reframing] is successful, you can see it in the teacher's eyes. Suddenly there is positive energy." Another principal noted similarly that (S#9-P): "You see the light in the eyes of the teacher. Before she told you "I have no more energy," and the next thing you know you see her happy." Moreover, teachers' emotional reframing was manifested in the lightening of their intense negative emotion following communication with principals. As one teacher put it (S#4-T1): "Knowing that someone else is listening to you greatly alleviates the negative feeling. It frees you from busying yourself all the time with something churning in your stomach." Thus, teachers' emotional reframing seems to combine cognitive and affective elements, involved in social interaction with principals.

Teachers' Strengthened Occupational Identity. The second outcome of reframing, in addition to the emotional reframing experience, was reflected in interviewees' remarks about the teachers' occupational identity (N=17). Both teachers' and principals' remarks attested to the fact that experiencing emotional reframing was associated by teachers with the strengthening of their occupational identity. The strengthening was manifested in the teachers' perceptions of higher occupational identity-related outcomes, including increased occupational self-esteem, work motivation, and social acceptance at work. One teacher described the outcome of emotional reframing experience as being associated with higher occupational self-esteem (S#2-T2): "It made me stronger. I felt that I understood more, and became a lot more confident with who I am, how I teach." Another teacher noted that (S#7-T2): "The principal sends you out with a can-do attitude; there's nothing you cannot do. She gives you the reinforcement to find the answer by yourself." Additionally, occupational self-esteem appears in a cultivated internal locus of control, enhancing one's occupational efficacy as it emerged in an interview with one of the principals:

Interviewer: When you talk with a teacher, how do you know you're succeeding [in reframing the teacher's emotions]?

Principal (S#6-P): When she [the teacher] starts to tell me “Maybe I'll do this or that... Maybe I'll try to talk to this person or that one.” She starts planning out loud. I remain silent and just listen to her.

Two additional occupational identity-related outcomes of emotional reframing emerged in the analysis. Emotional reframing was found to be related to higher work motivation. One teacher claimed that (S#8-T2) “It [successful emotional reframing] gives you motivation;” and another one noted (S#3-T1): “I have more motivation and more determination to 'crack this nut.'”

Yet another outcome indicating strengthening of teachers' occupational identity as a result of successful emotional reframing is an elevated sense of belonging and acceptance at work, indicating that the teacher fits into a cohort of professional peers. Teachers mentioned this outcome with regard to principals' emotional reframing communication. For example, one of them said (S#4-T1): “I felt I was not alone... [The principal] assured me and said that this [criticism by parents] has happened to her.” Thus, as noted above, successful emotional reframing in principal-teachers relations is important for assisting teachers with positive emotional transformation and for strengthening their occupational identity.

6. Discussion

The purpose of the present research was to shed light on the situated phenomenon of principals' emotional support of teachers through emotional reframing. The insights produced are valuable because research on educational leadership, and specifically on why and how leaders affect teachers' emotions, is limited (Berkovich & Eyal, 2015).

Using a qualitative research approach, we produced a rich description of the phenomenon, outlining its importance, situationality, manifestations, and outcomes. Below we discuss the theoretical contribution of the study, and continue with a practical discussion of the implications of the findings.

The findings of the present study offer several theoretical contributions. First, participants described the key emotion-eliciting events that teachers experience at work, in which principals' emotional support of teachers was instrumental, as being linked to threats to the teachers' internalized occupational identity. This is consistent with claims that teaching is an affective practice (James, 2010), and that affect is central in the educators' work commitment (Day, 2007). These findings help elucidate why the scant evidence on emotional reframing in principal-teacher relations concerned situations in which teachers experienced ethical dilemmas (Hanhimäki & Tirri, 2009), because these situations are likely to challenge individuals' occupational identity. The findings also suggest that teachers' occupational identity may be responsible both for their engagement and for their emotional stress.

Second, the study helped reveal the harmful affective potential of work intensification by highlighting two types of situations that threaten teachers' occupational identity. The first one involves events reflecting the teachers' psychological sense of occupational inadequacy concerning their care for students. This is consistent with prior US research suggesting a link between teachers' perception of occupation as care-oriented and their experiencing of intense negative emotions (Isenbarger & Zembylas, 2006). The second type of situations involves events in which teachers sensed occupational delegitimization. One explanation for this fact is the emerging educational market, in which consumer accountability is dominant (Ranson, 2003), and where the teachers' legitimacy is linked to customer

satisfaction, so that negative encounters with parents can threaten the teachers' professional status (Kelchtermans, 2005). These effects are likely to be amplified in the context of work intensification (see Ballet & Kelchtermans, 2009; Froese-Germain, 2014; Hauseman, Wang, & Pollock, 2017), as both principals and teachers reported it. The study helps better understand why, in a post-bureaucratic context, principals sense growing expectations to "contain" teachers' negative emotions deriving from work intensification (e.g., UK: Crawford, 2007).

Third, the study exposed the communicative complexity of emotional support in principal-teacher relations. Most prior research on social and emotional support dealt with these as a global construct (Fenlason & Beehr, 1994), in the context of principal-teacher relations as well (Littrell et al., 1994). Our inductive analysis broke down the contents of principals' communication strategies involved in promoting teachers' emotional reframing into three components: empathic listening, empowerment messages, and normalization messages. This is consistent with prior educational works that acknowledged the utility of principals' empathic abilities and behaviors in emotionally charged situations involving teachers (Cliffe, 2011; Wesley, 2004). The use of normalizing messages is another indication of the work intensification environment in which the study was conducted. Earlier claims have suggested that teachers' guilt can be reduced by limiting teachers' moral responsibility and the open-ended nature of their work (Hargreaves & Tucker, 1991). Such a sense of guilt is likely to run high under an educational policy environment of privatization and decentralization in which the pressures of teachers' time and energy are high.

Forth, the study stressed the importance of emotional reframing for individual and organizational functioning, as participants associated it with higher occupational self-esteem, work motivation, and social acceptance at work. This reflects the

multifaceted nature of teachers' occupational identity, which includes both intrinsic and social judgments. Similar support for the link between emotional reframing and occupational identity outcomes related to motivation and social acceptance can be found in the literature. It has been suggested that teachers' perspective-taking is a key contributing factor to their responsiveness to students (O'Keefe & Johnston, 1989). Perspective-taking has also been found to be associated with teachers' willingness to invest effort into dealing with misbehaving students (Barr, 2011). These accounts are consistent with prior theoretical and empirical works on the effectiveness of self-cognitive reappraisal in general (Gross, 2002), and in teaching in particular (Jiang et al., 2016; Sutton & Harper, 2009). The study provides valuable support for claims concerning the relevance and significance of interpersonal emotion regulation in organizations (Troth et al., 2018; Williams, 2007), and expands the limited quantitative knowledge on emotional reframing at the workplace (Kafetsios et al., 2016).

The study also has practical implications. First, principals' preparation and professional development programs should address the emotional aspect of principalship and use role-playing simulations to foster awareness and motivation among principals to engage with teachers emotionally. These abilities are particularly crucial for principals interacting with new teachers, who are reported to experience great emotional difficulties (Flores & Day, 2006) and need greater emotional support (Hargreaves, 1998). Second, given that principals' empathic listening and reframing messages were associated with promoting emotional reframing and strengthening occupational identity, training institutions should prepare individuals to embrace these practices. It has been found that a short intervention (2.5-6 hours of instruction and practice) can result in the acquisition of notable and effective empathic listening skills

(Lisper & Rautalinko, 1996). Empowering behaviors can be developed effectively in a 4-days workshop and mentorship, with online peer support (MacPhee et al., 2014). This is consistent with Schmidt's (2010) call to incorporate the study of emotional aspects related to school leadership in leadership preparation programs.

The present study has several limitations. As the analysis was based on insights drawn from a primary school teachers sample, the findings are most relevant to explaining managerial emotional support in primary education systems. Future research can further develop these insights and assess their transferability and relevance to other educational contexts. In addition, teaching is embedded in a national culture that may affect the interpersonal process of emotional reframing. Therefore, it is advisable to conduct future studies in other national contexts. Lastly, the study is based on a sample composed primarily of women. At present, in most Western primary education systems, most of the teachers are women (OECD, 2013). We recommend exploring this topic in the future in less feminine educational work environments as well.

To conclude, the present study used a criterion sample of emotionally highly capable principals to offer a rich description of principals' emotional support of teachers through emotional reframing. The findings shed light on situations in which emotional reframing takes place, the practices used and their outcomes. They also attest to the centrality of teachers' occupational identity in an environment of work intensification and decentralization, such as that of the Israeli public primary system. The findings have several promising applications for both practitioners and trainees, as they stress the importance of the emotional support by reframing process and of the communicative sides of it. Qualitative richness was added to the limited quantitative

knowledge on the phenomenon, as we explained the social complexity of emotional support by reframing in educational supervisory settings.

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Appendix A

Semi-structured interview protocol for teachers.

1. Please talk about yourself and your professional background.
2. What are the characteristics of the school, the teaching staff, and the principal?
3. Do you see your work in school and in classroom as stimulating strong emotions?

If so, what are the most prominent emotions you experience?

4. What are the factors/circumstances that evoke negative emotions among teachers?

How do cope with such negative emotions?

5. Do others among the school staff assist you in dealing with negative emotions at work? If so, what topics are frequently discussed? And how do the reactions of staff members help you?

6. Does the principal help you cope with negative emotions at work? If so, do you turn to the principal or he/she to you? When does this happen? What topics are addressed?

7. Can you recall and describe a specific event in the past in which you felt negative emotions because of a given issue, and a result of an exchange with the principal your emotions become more positive? If so, please elaborate on the behaviors and messages the principal used.

8. How did the principal's behavior and messages affect you?

Appendix B

Semi-structured interview protocol for principals.

1. Please talk about yourself and your professional background.
2. What are the characteristics of the school and of the teaching staff?
3. Does teaching stimulate strong emotions? If so, what are the most prominent emotions teachers encounter?
4. What are the factors/circumstances that evoke teachers' negative emotions? How do teachers cope with negative emotions?
5. Do teachers turn to you for emotional support or do you turn to them? If so, when does it happen?
6. What are the emotionally stimulating topics that teachers bring up with you? What topics that teachers do not broach with you? What behaviors and messages do you use to attempt to assist them? How do teachers react to your attempts?
7. What behaviors and messages did you find most effective in improving teachers' negative affect?
8. Can you recall and describe a specific event in the past in which a teacher approached you with intense negative emotions because of a given issue and as a result of the exchange with you his/her emotions became more positive? If so, please elaborate on the behaviors and messages you used.
9. How did your behavior and messages affect the teacher?
10. How do you know that such exchanges are successful?