No we won't!
Teachers' resistance to educational reform

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Abstract

Purpose – Teachers' resistance to educational reform has been explored, with special attention given to the reasons driving opposition and the resistance practices employed inside school walls. These studies have not, however, examined the agenda setting strategy employed by teachers opposing new policy on the national level, nor has any extensive study focused on the messages or rhetoric characterizing their opposition.

Design/methodology/approach – This study employs a descriptive case study methodology to illustrate the bottom-up political strategy employed by teachers seeking public support for their opposition to reform. Content analysis of entries and manifestos posted on prominent teachers' weblogs and partisan school websites during Israel's 64-day teachers' strike in 2007 was conducted. Texts discussing the reform and its leaders, as well as educational and policy issues were analyzed inductively, divided according to meaning units, and then grouped together into categories.

Findings – Data indicate that the media, and specifically the internet, are perceived as major arena for garnering legitimacy and support. Teachers' rhetoric of resistance to reform was found to be characterized by: the use of emotional and rational appeals, the attempt to present teachers as 'champions of education', the use of dramatic labeling addressed at reformist leaders, and symbolic images of political parties.

Originality/value – The paper present a conceptual model of political processes in the education system. The findings show the agenda setting strategy as reflected in teachers' cross-level bottom-up attempts to influence politics. Furthermore, teachers' rhetoric in resisting educational reform shows great similarity to the rhetoric of political campaigns. Theoretical and practical implications of findings are discussed.

Keywords: Educational Reform, Resistance, Policymaking, Social Media, Politics

1. Introduction

Over the last few decades national governments have frequently used policy-led reforms as a means of improving school system operation, learning processes and student outcomes (Gaziel, 2010; Hess and Kendrick, 2007; Spillane et al., 2002). These governments employed educational reform with the aim of a reconstruction of central components in the school system, such as the managerial system, organizational structure, financing processes, curriculum, pedagogy and human resources issues, so as to attain policy objectives (Gaziel, 2010). Such systematic restructuring often emerged as a result of a feeling shared by national policymakers and the public that the school system failed in its role, mainly with regard to academic achievements or equal opportunities for all students (Barnett and Whitaker, 1996; Cuban, 1990). The subsequent reforms generally aimed to rapidly and dramatically change the system (Fullan and Miles, 1992). Far-reaching reforms often carry broad implications for teachers (Campbell, 1996); therefore, it is not surprising that they have often evoked resistance.

Resistance to change is defined as an affective, cognitive and behavioral response aimed at maintaining the status quo, with the hope of stopping, delaying or altering the proposed change (Bemmels and Reshef, 1991; Van den Heuvel, 2009). Pardo del Val and Fuentes (2003) examined the reasons given by employees when resisting change. Among prominent factors were: differences in values, disagreement on the issues in need of being addressed, inability to implement the reform locally and differences of interests between employees and management. Similar reasons for resistance were found among teachers (Baum, 2002; Gitlin and Margonis, 1995; Oakes et al., 1997).

The attitude of teachers toward a proposed reform is crucial for its success. As street-level bureaucrats, teachers operating in a system have the ability to interpret policy as they see fit (Weatherly and Lipsky, 1977). When they don't support the reform at hand, it has little chance of succeeding (Fullan, 1991; Elmore, 1995). The present study explores teachers' resistance narratives as they appeared online in the context of the 2007 nation-wide Israeli teachers' strike over the "New Horizon" reform.

2. Political Processes and Teachers' Resistance to Reform

Policy decisions which deal with distribution, re-distribution and regulation (Lowi, 1964) can often result in power struggles, especially when parties have different expectations and interests which may conflict in certain circumstances (Lasswell and Kaplan, 1950). Most of the time there is a substantial difficulty in separating policymaking from the attendant politics (Dale, 1983). That's why, one of the key junctions at which power struggles occur is during policy discussion and decision making (Elamin, 2007), in which a variety of policy actors, such as politicians, business leaders, citizens' groups and private individuals (Najam, 1999) debate the suggested reform. In some cases the very choice of the issue under discussion or the way in which it is presented can lead to conflict (Dutton and Penner, 1993), since a proposed organizational solution or a new policy agenda can be perceived as favoring the interests of specific individuals or groups (Pettigrew, 1977). Therefore, political processes and dimensions of power, such as influence, values, ideology, and patterns of cooperation and conflict are relevant to understanding educational policymaking and implementation processes (Bjork and Blase, 2009).

The terms micro-politics and macro-politics are associated with the analysis of political processes in the education and school system. While micro-politics refers to the mechanisms of power which individuals and informal groups employ within schools to achieve their goals; macro-politics refers to the power affecting educational decision-making processes at a regional or national level (Bjork and Blase, 2009; Kelchtermans, 2007; Weiler, 1994).

So far, research has focused on those lateral influence processes (i.e. uni-level influence processes: either at the school level, or at the regional/ national level) and neglected cross-level influence attempts. Such attempts may occur, for example, when specific teachers resist state policy and attempt to mobilize teachers in other schools, or agitate public opinion to change government policy, or when the state attempts to silence such a teacher. Therefore, a conceptual framework of political processes in education is presented to help categorize these circumstances (see Figure 1). The model presents two axes: the arena (i.e. inter-organizational versus intra-organizational) and the policy actors (i.e. individuals and informal groups versus organizations and institutions).

Figure 1: Conceptual model of political processes in the education system

The arena

	Inter-organizational	Intra-organizational
Individuals and informal groups **The policy actors**	Micro-politics	Cross-level bottom-up politics
Organizations and institutions	Cross-level top-down politics	Macro-politics

Teachers' resistance to reform has so far been researched mainly at the school level focusing on the micro-political aspects of the resistance (Ball, 1987, 1994; Blase, 1997) and recommending to principals and policy-makers how to address them (Hess, 1998; Zimmerman, 2006). However, cross-level teachers' resistance in the context of wider public debate has been ignored. Such resistance represents a bottom-up politics and involves the use of non-formal mechanisms to influence decisions and policies from below (Jaeger, 2007). In a democratic setting the political goal in such a power conflict is to gain public legitimacy (Pettigrew, 1985). It is widely agreed that one of the central arenas in which power and legitimacy are gained in today's world is the media (Curran, 2002). Effectively using the media enables the harnessing and consolidation of influence in macro-politics processes (Green-Pedersen and Stubager, 2008).

3. Political Communication and Policy Agenda Setting

There is a growing recognition that politics is becoming more and more communicated and "mediatized" (Mazzoleni and Schulz, 1999). Political communication is defined as purposeful discourse about resource allocation, authority and sanctions, aimed at achieving specific goals (Denton and Woodward, 1990). The political use of the media aims to communicate views, solutions and interpretations of issues, in order to mobilize civic support (Froehlich and Rudiger, 2006).

Political communication has a great significance in shaping the public agenda and interpretation (Scheufele, 2000). Researchers have found that the media has an essential role in defining the important issues on the agenda, prioritizing them, and framing their interpretation (McCombs and Shaw, 1972). This interpretation is highly significant because, if widely adopted, it can motivate political action, mobilizing individuals personally (Scheufele, 2000) and initiating collective pressure on policy conflicts (Dery, 2000). Therefore, policy actors try to influence agenda setting (Kingdon, 1984). Policy actors' attempt to promote a specific problem definition and thus to frame the circumstances and draw attention to certain aspects of the situation, and by doing so, to advance specific solutions (Weiss, 1989).

When this effort assumes an organized form, it is called a political campaign (Trent and Friedenberg, 2008). The emphasis on using the media to convey messages designed for the public is doing so in a persuasive manner (Mutz et al., 1996). Political messages are effective when they are simple to understand (Cobb and Kulinski, 1997 and may use to reason or emotion to persuade the audience (Mio, 1996). Because people are inundated with information (Chaiken and Stangor, 1987), images in the media have great effect (Mio, 1996).

4. Web-based Campaigns and Policy Agenda Setting

The internet has a major impact on the public sphere (Dahlgren, 2005). For instance, Blumler and Kavanah (1999) claim that nowadays the accessibility and the variety of media platforms and technologies has changed the way people receive political information. This reality enables citizens to participate in public debates, unlike in the past when politics was discussed only by politicians, journalists, commentators, experts and leaders of interest groups (Hallett, 2005). The diversification of participants is also reflected by small communities and the proliferation of numerous other alternative voices (Kahn and Kellner, 2004).

Over the past few years researchers have noted an increase in the use of political web-based campaign (Sundar et al., 2003). The new age of media and its platforms are reducing dependence on third parties, allowing individuals to reach the public directly without intermediaries (Hallett, 2005). These technologies create an arena for activism, often named by the moniker cyber-activism (Illia, 2003).

One prominent internet platform that is increasingly used in shaping public opinion is the blog (MacDougall, 2005). A blog is an online journal, in which written posts are published by a blog editor called a blogger. Entries can be written by the editor of the blog or in the name of other writers, while the blog editor directs the posts and discourse it contains. Compared to mainstream media, blogs receive relatively little attention, though there is wide consensus that blogs now play an important role in influencing the public debate in the mainstream media, political processes and policy processes (Farrell and Drezner, 2007). Bloggers are therefore often referred to as opinion leaders (Kavanaugh et al., 2006).

Political blogs contains opinions and commentary on political issues. Regarding their role in public discourse, blogs have been described as the "lens focusing attention on an issue until it catches fire" (Grossman and Hamilton, 2004, p. 3). In addition, blogs allow for rapid publication covering events in real time (MacDougall, 2005). The weblog platform allows individuals and groups rather than professional journalists to express their opinions, resulting in turn in a challenge to the institutionalized structure of media, in the form of a more egalitarian and less hierarchical field for public debate (Pickard, 2008).

Another prominent internet platform is partisan web sites. These sites aim to convey the messages of a candidate or an interest group, although sometimes they argue that their aim is merely to communicate information (Gibson et al.**,** 2003).

This case study investigates the rhetoric and images used in web-based campaigns by teachers to secure public support for their resistance to the "New Horizon" reform in Israel 2007 teachers' strike. During the time of the strike many teachers independently established and maintained blogs. In some schools the teaching staff transformed the school website into a partisan site to express their opinions and win support from parents and pupils.

5. "New Horizon" Reform in Israel

In 2001 the collective wage agreement signed between the Israeli government and the teachers unions had expired. Israel has two teachers unions: "The Teachers Union", uniting most of the secondary school teachers and including about 40,000 members; as well as "The Teachers' Association", comprising kindergarten teachers, primary school teachers and small segment of junior high school teachers, about 80,000 members in total. Between 2001 and 2005, both teachers' unions negotiated with the

Ministry of Finance and Ministry of Education to reach a new collective wage agreement, but without success. The Ministries also sought to attach a system-wide reform to the new wage agreement.

In 2006, after the government had declared its intention of bringing about educational reform, the teachers' unions parted ways. "The Teachers' Association" signed a wage agreement with the government which in principal accepted the reform. That reform, known today as "New Horizon," was intended to extend school day, mainly by adding teaching hours for small-group tutoring. In return, it was declared that the formula used to derive teachers' salaries would be modified so as to lead to salary increases. "The Teachers Union" refused to accept the reform, and its leaders and members declared a work dispute [work to rule] with the aim of reshaping the reform in such a way as to avoid harming their employment conditions while addressing the problems of the system.

The teachers opposed to the reform claimed that their work conditions would be worsened by increasing their work load while in effect reducing their hourly wage. They also claimed the government's desire to extend the teachers' work day was part of a long-term plan to lay off teachers and cutback the total number of teaching personnel. In addition, they argued that the reform did not address the major problems of the Israeli educational system, such as overcrowding in classrooms and the previous years' cumulative cuts in total teaching hours.

Shortly after the start of the 2007-2008 school year, the "The Teachers Union" went on strike. From October 10th 2007 to 12th December 2007 550,000 secondary school pupils stayed at home. The 64 day strike was the longest in the history of the Israeli educational system. During the strike meetings were held between the parties, with various attempts at mediation, but no progress was achieved. The teachers demonstrated in the streets throughout the country. For the duration of the strike the teachers enjoyed strong public support. For example, in a survey of "Channel 10 News" 69% of the Israeli public backed the teachers in their fight and only 10% though that the government demands were reasonable (Channel 10 News, 2007). The high point of the teachers' struggle was a mass demonstration, which included about 100,000 supporters. After two months, under pressure from the labor court and the threat of a back-to-work injunction, the parties held intensive negotiations leading to a new wage agreement partly contingent on postponing discussions on reform for the future. The Prime Minister personally committed to reinstituting the cut teaching

hours, and promised to take action to reduce the large number of pupils in classrooms.

6. Method

The study is based on a qualitative research paradigm (Denzin, & Lincoln, 2000), which strives to find new understandings of processes in their natural environment (Bogdan, & Biklen, 1992). The empirical method used in this paper is a descriptive documentary case study (Gerring, 2004). The purpose of this paper is to illustrate the agenda setting strategy of the virtual teachers' communities which resisted the "New Horizon" reform during the 2007 Israeli strike. Mining the political activity of such a community can provide readers with a close look at teachers' bottom-up resistance rhetoric and political influence strategy. This type of methodology is suited to describing teachers' attitudes and behaviors (see for example Denton et al., 2003; Miller et al., 2005; Smith, 2004).

In order to identify the salient characteristics of the phenomenon, a multiple cases design was selected (Stake, 1995). In a multiple cases design, the selection of cases is guided by replication logic, because a generalization of results is applied to the theory (Yin, 1994). The analysis reveals repeated patterns. Multiple cases, which document activity over a period of time, can facilitate a better understand of political and policymaking processes (Gerring, 2004).

6.1. Site Selection

On-line document collection was conducted in September 2009. First, in order to collect documents regarding teachers' resistance to the "New Horizon" reform, query string inquires were issued with the exact phrases "the teachers' strike" and "the teachers' struggle" (in Hebrew) in the Google Search engine. The 100 top web page links, for each one of the two inquires, were manually collected and HTML files were downloaded, among them four teachers' blogs and two partisan school websites. In the second stage, for the purpose of achieving a more comprehensive view of the on-line community, blogs and partisan school websites that linked out (i.e. "outgoing links") of the six top ranking sites, were manually collected and HTML files were downloaded. In total, ten teachers' blogs and ten partisan school websites were collected. Three blogs that were hosted on servers and four linked partisan school websites whose manifestos were no longer available on-line were omitted from

further analysis. The teachers' blogs and partisan school websites chosen as the research site for this study are presented in Table I.

Table I. Teachers' blogs and partisan school sites analyzed in the study

	Writers	Number of posts in blog/ manifestos on site
1. Teachers' blog (collective blog)	34 teachers	182
2. Rebecca's blog (personal blog)	one teacher	57
3. Daniel's blog (personal blog)	one teacher	29
4. Sara's blog (personal blog)	one teacher	11
5. School A website (Jerusalem)	school staff	3
6. School B website (Jerusalem)	school staff	2
7. School C website (Jerusalem)	school staff	1
8. School D website (Mevaseret Zion)	school staff	3
9. School E website (Haifa)	school staff	2
10. School F website (Emek Israel)	school staff	1

6.2. Analysis

Initially, the texts were screened for relevance. Irrelevant texts - those not containing a message discussing the reform, its leaders or educational and organizational issues on the agenda - were omitted from the process. In all, 289 blog posts and 12 manifestos, published between November 2007 and December 2007 (i.e. during the teachers strike and shortly after it ended), whose writers identified themselves as teachers, were collected and archived. The main text of these entries was analyzed in this study. Readers' comments were not examined.

After the data was collected, the data analysis process began. For the analysis of the texts a content analysis approach was used, which involved comparing, contrasting and categorizing the data (Schwandt, 1997). Content analysis included both explicit and latent claims of various levels of depth and abstraction (Graneheim and Lundman, 2004).

The texts were analyzed using thematic analysis to establish categories of content. The data was divided into conceptual units of meaning with the aim of identifying key themes and grouping them together.

6.3 Self as a Researcher

Is should be noted that the researcher, as a member of Israeli society, has been a participant in this reform debate, and like most of the Israeli public supported the teachers' side in the struggle. The choice to research teachers' agenda setting strategy during that period was very much motivated by his being influenced by it. Although the passing years have provided a wider perspective on events, the fact of past personal involvement may bias the researcher's judgment (Whyte, 1991), and therefore demands careful proceeding and professional self-scrutiny. It is hoped that these precautions have minimized, as much as possible, the researcher's bias.

7. Findings

The data analysis revealed a number of themes relating to the use of media in a political campaign as part of opposition to reform and the design of the messages conveyed. Content analysis of the text entries resulted in the classification of the data into several categories. Five main categories arising from data analysis (Table II).

Table II. Study's categories

Category name	Category theme
1. The 'media front'	perceived centrality of the media as an arena for resisting reform
2. 'Hearts and minds'	use of emotional and rational appeals to persuade the pubic
3. 'Champions of education'	teachers portraying themselves as 'champions of education'
4. 'Fools' and 'villains'	dramatic labeling of policymakers
5. The distance between the 'ivory tower' and the 'trenches'	symbolic images of policy actors

The findings in this chapter will be presented in the order detailed above. In the following sections, each category is described and representative texts examples are presented.

7.1 The 'Media Front'

The analysis indicated that media was viewed by the writers as an important platform for protesting and resisting policy change. An indication of the "mediatized" nature of the struggle and its power to mobile political support was also presented in Rebecca's description of the teachers struggle. Rebecca's description elaborates and sheds light on the reasons that the media front seemed significant in the eyes of the teachers.

> We are at war, there is no other name for it. In this war I participate on three fronts - it could happen only in modern times. The first front, you know - the blog, the second you see in the media - the demonstrations, the third front is contacting members of parliament. I recently understood that the third front is lost. They are silent. Confusing? No doubt. The problem is that it is very hard to win a war like this … You only have yourself to rely on.

Interestingly, the expression "war" expresses the deep emotional motivation and call of duty the teacher felt. In addition, presenting the internet, classic media and national parliament at the same level of importance expresses the new balance various platforms and institutions in modern times.

Moreover, the teachers recognized the power of publishing their agenda online and reaching the pubic directly without mediation. The internet platform was perceived by teachers as enabling mass participation, direct public debate and immediate reactions to current events. Similar thoughts appear in Sara's blog:

> Do you recall what they say all the time about teachers? "They are out of touch, they do not know how to use technology, and students have an advantage over them in technological capabilities". Really?
> And how does this relate to the teachers strike you ask?
> Well, we have the first strike of the internet age. Thousands of teachers are writing letters and circulating them, participating actively in forums,

responding on the TV, radio, internet and launching blogs.

This writer reflects a dynamic in which individuals act in an unorganized and voluntary manner to influence national policymaking processes. Though for each this is an individual decision, many teachers have made a similar choice in the hope of changing government policy.

7.2 'Hearts and Minds'

Another central characteristic in the texts resisting reform was the use of emotional appeals. Rebecca chose to link the emotional aspects of the reform to a deeper sense of public under-appreciation directed towards the teaching profession. The following segment describes those feelings in her own words:

> It is very common to claim that teachers do not work half of the year but you should ask yourself: if it's such a dream job, why didn't you chose this profession? Perhaps because deep down inside you know that being a teacher requires endless giving, involvement and care for students.

Another blogger in the teachers' blog, Rachel, emphasizes that new wage agreement harms and humiliates her and her fellow teachers:

> After many years of hard work as a teacher… all the frustrations which had built up over the years came out. I am a part of a community [of teachers]… facing daily humiliation. Their dignity trampled by a nation that considers them at fault for all its ills. Now I feel that this is the last straw, the pain is so great, it led me to go out into the streets … protesting and trying to explain the injustice done to me and to the community I belong to. Releasing the pain accumulated over years, oppressed by hard work, for the simple reason that I love teaching and love students!

Different variations of these themes were repeated in many of the analyzed entries.

The messages in the texts also included rational appeals aiming to convince the reader that reform was unjustified. These arguments were more informative and demanded

more consideration of the details of the reform on the part of the reader. In one of the partisan school site the school staff wrote:

> In all media arenas they claim that the average teacher only works 24 weekly hours. These people are ignoring the many hours needed to prepare a good class, the hours devoted to review homework and grade exams, teachers' participation in after hours social activities, parents meetings and many more tasks. Is it fair that a lawyer will be compensated only for his court hours? Or a football player will get paid only for 90 minutes play without considering the training and preparation necessary?

This attempt to undermine the public's perception of teachers as "freeloaders" enjoying public funds for little work was found to be a central theme in teachers' rational appeals. An example of this can be found in the teachers' blog where a blogger tried to make sense of the disparity between increases in the work load and wage increases:

> The Ministry of Finance states that wage increase is 26%, but the increase of actual teaching hours from 18 hours to 21 hours is equivalent to an extra work load of 16%, so the wage increase is only 10%. This wage increase of 10% is divided over five years, with a mean of 2% per year. But that isn't the whole story. The treasury 'forgot' to mention that in addition to the 21 regular hours teachers will teach an additional 4 hours in small groups, so the total number of teaching hours will be 25. That is an increase of 38% to the work load. A wage increase of 26% against the 38% increase in the work load.

7.3 'Champions of Education'

The analysis reveals a tendency to tie the present struggle and resistance to reform with a broader struggle over public recognition of the importance of education. The teachers continued to claim that the struggle was not only about teachers' salaries and work conditions, but that they are fighting against the reform because it did not answer to the real needs of students or the problems of the educational system. This can be seen in this text segment from a partisan school site:

This reform does not center around education and pupil welfare. This is an economically driven reform and so budgetary efficiency is at the center. More teaching work hours means less expenses, but more students per teacher, less time to invest in any of the children and advance a significant educational process. The teachers also want reform! But first and foremost a pedagogically driven one that will promote the public education.

Such statements can be viewed as an attempt to claim to that the teachers were the real 'champions of education' in this conflict and as an attempt to "take ownership" of issue in the eyes of the public.

Moreover, an interesting portrayal of teachers as national heroes was evident in the blog of a teacher named Deborah. The teacher compared teachers with the Maccabees [the warrior heroes of the Jewish festival of Hanukah, who defeated the Greek occupation] and with Zionists pioneers, thus equating the teachers struggle with mythical national events:

> I'm Deborah, the daughter of Hannah, lighting a candle to symbolize the 47 days of the teachers struggle and the first day of Hanukkah. I am a part of a family where many members work in the primary and secondary state religious school system as teachers. Among them: six brothers, three sisters-in-law and a grandson. For us the teaching profession is a national and spiritual mission and not merely a job.

> Many generations ago, the Maccabees took upon themselves a holy mission out of genuine belief in God and man. Sixty years ago before the foundation of the state, "modern Maccabees" dried swamps, built cities and laid the ground for a Zionist, Jewish and democratic state. Today, we educators in Israel still believe the Maccabees torch [central symbolic element in the Hanukkah and Zionist myths, symbolizing hope and mission] is not lost!

This presentation uses myths from the past to emphasize the social and national mission of educators. Similar claims of the centrality of teachers to the social order

were repeated in many blogs' entries and employed to strengthen teachers' image as 'champions of education'.

7.4 'Fools' and 'Villains'

An additional prominent element in teachers' narratives was the attempt to present reform leaders as incompetent 'fools' and 'villains' with the purpose of harming the credibility of their arguments. For example, in his blog Daniel presents the Minister of Education as an unfulfilled promise:

> The Minster of Education is no less great promise! After a long period in which public education was destroyed and privatized, came the current minster as a "mirage" and many of us wanted to believe ... [but] public education continues to deteriorate ... like others, she was revealed as nothing more than a great promise that failed.

Another blogger added:

> How come the Minister of Education really does not see what all of us, the teachers, see? Minister of Education! The king is naked!

Another use of dramatic labeling can be seen when Jacob, one of writers in the Teachers' blog, address the Director-General of the Ministry of Finance:

> I want to draw your attention to terminology used by the government in regard to the teachers strike. The Director-General of the Finance Ministry spoke this morning on the radio on the issue of the government's appeal to the Labor Court, to limit the teachers strike. When he was asked by the interviewer about the reason for the government appeal, he said that the negotiations had reached a dead end, though they try to flank us from the left and the right. The term "flank" shows they wish to surprise the opponents [e.g. us the teachers], instead of attacking them face to face. Indeed, this statement reveals the intention of the government - not to reach an agreement with the teachers, not to make a genuine effort to change and improve the education system, but to attack and flank the teachers and to subdue them. And thus perpetuate the low

status of the education system.

7.5 The Distance between the 'Ivory Tower' and the 'Trenches'
The analysis shows how policy leaders were repeatedly displayed as detached from the reality of the school system, and as operating in an 'ivory tower'. A blogger named Jacob, described the manner in which he perceives national policy decisions being made:

> Committees are set up to quickly formulate the reform, or to import the reform "off the shelf" without thinking where it failed, and [then policymakers] attempt to impose it on the teachers. These committees usually consist of people who have no idea what the teaching profession is. They know how to do business, they know how to evaluate and test product quality. But they do not understand education.

At the same time, in many blog entries teachers described themselves as dealing with the real problems of the educational system in their school work, and framed themselves as operating in the 'trenches' of the system. For instance, one partisan school manifesto, posted by school teaching staff, describes the complicated reality in which teachers must operate in:

> Students who have only rights and no obligations, interfering and uninvolved parents, crowded classrooms, cutbacks in teaching hours, constant pressure to achieve the "golden calf"- the matriculation certificate.

Presenting these difficulties as tremendous was aimed at creating the impression that teachers' choice to work in the educational system is admirable. The use of these contradicting and complimentary images of policymakers and teachers was meant to further undermine the legitimacy of the reform leaders' messages.

8. Discussion and Conclusions
This study describes the bottom-up political strategy of teachers, as expressed in the political rhetoric communicated as part of their resistance to educational reform. The findings present the way issues were adapted and presented in the narratives and

messages of opinion leaders (Nisbet and Kotcher, 2009). The study directs attention toward the employment of the media in educational policy debates in the present age. Results suggest that teachers' resistance included bottom-up politics to influence policy decisions. Furthermore, they suggest that teachers' rhetoric, as it emerges from blogs posts and school sites manifestos, contains well-formulated political messages aiming to garner public legitimacy. This legitimacy is the ultimate goal of every democratic power struggle (Pettigrew, 1985).

Six conclusions were derived from the application of the study. One, findings indicate the perceived centrality of the media in general, and the internet in specific, by teachers resisting reform. The media arena was viewed as one of the major, if not the leading arena, in which policy decisions are debated and political influence won. Therefore, many of the attempts to influence political events from the bottom-up were aimed at changing agenda setting through those platforms. Findings portray a technique which utilizes indirect pressure on policymakers, addressing other more accessible actors, to more effectively influence events.

Two, the rhetorical techniques employed in messages resisting reform were similar to those used in political campaigns. One possible explanation for this is that we live in a highly media-centric world, and that in this environment isomorphism and imitation in public debate occur. The findings show that the arguments opposing the "New Horizon" reform are similar to those identified in previous studies as justifying opposition to other political policies. For example, the writers combined emotional arguments with rational arguments and tried to present the opposing side as untrustworthy. These rhetorical techniques resemble those found in campaign blogs of U.S. presentational candidates in 2004 (Trammell, 2006).

Three, teachers attempted to present themselves to the public as 'champions of education'. Similar displays of communicative behavior trying to claim 'issue ownership' have been reported in political studies (Green-Pedersen and Stubager, 2009). Furthermore, it has been found if one party addresses an issue more in the media, the party appears in the public mind as its "owner" (Walgrave et al., 2009). Such rhetorical arguments therefore serve the dual purpose of resisting reform while advancing an image of teachers as caring about the system and possessing special expertise.

Four, employment of dramatic elements to mobilize support for the struggle. For example, the writers described the dominant figures in the government as 'fools'

and 'villains'. This sort of labeling tries to reduce the persuasiveness of the reform leaders' messages by presenting them as unreliable and driven by ulterior motives. The credibility of the communicator is considered a major asset in gaining political support (Mio, 1996). This finding supports previous findings on the use of drama in politics (Borreca, 1993), such as labeling dominant figures in public conflicts 'heroes', 'villains' and 'fools' (Klapp, 1964).

Five, underlying metaphors emerged from the arguments. These latent images presented the reform leaders as cold and detached in their 'ivory tower' and the teachers as emotional and passionate in the 'trenches' of the educational system. Such images are consistent with the claim that power struggles involve several levels of symbolic meanings, in which the stated attribute often represents a more abstract and implicit depiction (Gusfield and Michalowicz, 1984). The symbolic images of educational policy makers as acting from their 'ivory tower' and teachers as operating in the 'trenches' has been mentioned before in the context of educational system conflicts (Schlechty and Joslin, 1984). Effective symbolism is at the heart of successful media employment and public option formation (Mio, 1996), because it simplifies complex issues and makes them accessible to the general public (Thompson, 1996).

9. Limitations and Implications

The current study presents an innovative theoretical framework in two ways. First, it develops a new conceptual model of political processes in education. Such a model can serve researchers as a cornerstone for mapping political processes inside and outside of school walls. Second, the study describes teachers' agenda setting strategy employing bottom-up attempts to exercise influence. Thus, the paper elaborates the operational proceedings of the theoretical definition suggested in the model with regard to the way in which individuals and informal groups can influence national educational policy.

In addition, this study also possesses theoretical significance for educational research because it shifts attention towards the political employment of the media for influencing policy processes in education, a subject which has so far been greatly neglected. The present study focuses on an overlooked aspect of the resistance to educational reform, namely the political messages and rhetoric employed by the opposition.

Nevertheless, study possesses several limitations. The collection of on-line documents was conducted nearly two years after the strike ended. This might have caused the loss of important data regarding teachers' agenda setting strategy. Also, combat-ready opposition is much more motivated and active, possibly marginalizing less aggressive voices on the web (Rainie et al., 2003). Real time data collection of future political events might overcome these shortcomings. Furthermore, because this research is exploratory and preliminary there is need for additional study to examine teachers' bottom-up politics and the employment of media as a political tool in educational policy conflicts. It would be worth examining the relationship between the media messages resisting educational reform and their effectiveness in influencing political opinion and encouraging real world activism. Another important research topic would be to compare the chronological dynamic of messages published by educational reform leaders and their opponents.

The research also poses several practical implications for policymakers. The rise of the media in the public arena makes it impossible to ignore when initiating and implementing policy (Borreca, 1993). The use of media can enable teachers to influence macro-political processes from the bottom up. While, the effects of uni-level politics (micro or macro) are documented (Ball, 1987, 1994; Bjork and Blase, 2009; Blase, 1997; Kelchtermans, 2007; Weiler, 1994), little is known about teachers' bottom-up politics, which may have serious and lasting repercussions on policy actors' morale, public legitimacy and their relationships with others. Therefore, the study's findings might encourage policymakers to promote shared policy formulation with teachers and invest more resources in preparing the ground for change.

Study findings may be applicable to other contexts. Countries with a similar geographic and government structure to Israel (i.e. small and centralized nations, see Inbar, 1986), are more likely to serve as fertile ground for bottom-up politics. Moreover, the findings may be relevant to large decentralized countries in which national control has been replaced by a regional governments (Hanson, 1998).

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