



# Self-determination theory and teachers' motivations to perform emotional labor and emotion work: qualitative study of narratives about coping with students' discipline problems

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## Abstract

This qualitative study investigated teachers' motivation to perform emotion management (i.e., emotional labor and emotion work) in coping with students' discipline problems. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 24 Israeli teachers. Findings indicate that teachers experienced emotional distress when confronted with discipline problems. The study also found that teachers mentioned motivation to perform emotional management related to emotional labor and emotion work to manage their negative emotions. Role modeling, professional standards, preservation of status and authority, and effectiveness were the main introjected and external motivations associated with emotional labor; moral compass and authentic emotional discourse were the main integrated and identified motivations associated with emotion work. Reference to emotional labor aspects was more frequently made by secondary school teachers than among primary school teachers. The theoretical and practical implications of the findings are discussed.

**Keywords** Emotional labor · Emotion work · Discipline · Primary school · Secondary school · Student misbehavior · Teaching

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## 1 Introduction

The concepts of emotions and emotion management<sup>1</sup> have generated significant research interest over the years in various job roles, occupations, and work environments (Grandey et al., 2013). Emotional labor and emotion work are linked with the idea of emotion rules, which encompass socially constructed collective narratives regarding the “appropriate” emotional experiences and expressions in the workplace (see Aromaa et al., 2019). Individuals engage in emotion management to adjust both the internal and outward aspects of their emotional functioning in accordance with the emotion rules associated with their professional roles (Grandey, 2000; Hochschild, 1983; Winograd, 2003). Scholars distinguish between situations where regulation is perceived as being influenced by external pressures to conform to (organizational or professional) role norms and situations where regulation is considered internally driven. The externally imposed type of emotion management, known commonly as *emotional labor* is “sold for a wage,” has “exchange value” (Hochschild, 1983, p. 7), and employees are monitored for compliance with it (Hochschild, 1983). In the case of the voluntary type of emotion regulation, commonly referred to as *emotion work*,<sup>2</sup> employees are free to manage their emotions without being compensated for doing so (Hochschild, 1983). Hochschild (1983) tied the distinction between emotional labor and emotion work directly to compensation or the lack thereof, others suggested renouncing the payment distinction and focusing only on whether employees sense having a personal choice in managing their work-related emotions (Oplatka, 2007).<sup>3</sup> The latter is the viewpoint adopted in this paper. Emotion work is said to be central in care professions (Oplatka, 2007, 2009).

In recent decades, emotions and emotion management in teaching have received increasing attention in the educational literature (Chen, 2019, 2021; Wang et al., 2019; Wang & Song, 2022). Emotions are an inseparable part of human experience (Glomb & Tews, 2004) and can be defined as psycho-physiological reactions to a stimulus that consist of subjective, cognitive, motivational, and expressive components (Artino et al., 2012; Scherer, 2005, 2009). Emotions are a social phenomenon because they are influenced by others, social values, and cultural context (Cross & Hong, 2012; Hochschild, 1990; Miller et al., 2007; Sarbin, 1986; Winograd, 2003).

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<sup>1</sup> The general concept of emotion management is used to describe the strategies individuals employ in regulating their emotions in the workplace, whether as emotional labor or emotion work (Hochschild, 1990). In the past two decades, this concept has evolved owing to significant advancements in psychological research, giving rise to the emerging notion of emotion regulation, which provides more nuanced psychological insights (Grandey et al., 2013). In this article, we use the terms emotion management and emotion regulation interchangeably.

<sup>2</sup> Hochschild (1983) originally used the term to “refer to these same acts [as emotional labor] in a private context where they have use value” (p. 7).

<sup>3</sup> By shifting our perspective away from the rigid payment distinction to whether employees feel empowered to exercise personal choice in managing their work-related emotions, we address the inherent problems associated with this distinction in practice. For example, Oplatka (2007) discussed a case in which employees were not compensated for their participation in organizational after-hours celebrations, although they are expected by their supervisors to attend and maintain a cheerful demeanor; thus, this case represents more “emotional labor” than “emotion work” despite a clear absence of payment for this work obligation.

In general, teachers are expected to hide their negative emotions (e.g., hopelessness), fake unfeared positive ones (e.g., to replace anger), or invest effort into trying to feel an emotion they are expected to feel (e.g., love) (Burić et al., 2019). The literature on emotion management in education suggests that teachers alter their emotional displays and experiences not only to meet external expectations (i.e., emotional labor) but also because they choose to do so out of an internal drive to increase effectiveness and professionalism, promote students' learning, or manage misbehavior (Oplatka, 2007; Sutton, 2004; Sutton et al., 2009; Taxer & Gross, 2018).

Emotional labor was first introduced by Hochschild (1983) as the process by which individuals are mandated to create a publicly observable emotional performance that aligns with organizational demands (Grandey & Gabriel, 2015; Hochschild, 1983; Miller et al., 2007; Steinberg & Figart, 1999; Wharton, 2009). Grandey and Gabriel (2015) suggested that emotional labor should be viewed as a dynamic process mobilized by emotion rules. Emotion rules refer to job-based norms of emotional displays to others, which can be positive, negative, explicit, or implicit (Grandey & Gabriel, 2015). A positive display rule describes expectations for expressing positive emotions, whereas a negative display rule describes the expectation to withhold certain emotions in a given situation. The explicit display rule indicates the expectations of the organization for emotional expression, whereas implicit requirements rely on an individual's perception of emotional expectations (Brown et al., 2018; Diefendorff et al., 2005).

Some organizations or professions provide job autonomy concerning certain work behaviors and do not actively enforce display rules (Goldberg & Grandey, 2007; Grandey & Diamond, 2010), which creates a space for voluntary<sup>4</sup> emotion management (i.e., emotional work) (Oplatka, 2007). Emotional labor is distinct from emotion work in the mandatory vs. discretionary dimension of the motivation to manage emotions (Oplatka, 2007). Three main strategies are noted for meeting emotion rules at work (Grandey & Gabriel, 2015): surface acting (i.e., expression of an unfeared demanded emotion), deep acting (i.e., feeling of a demanded emotion), and expressing genuine emotions (see, e.g., Diefendorff et al., 2005; Grandey & Gabriel, 2015; Miller et al., 2007; Waldbuesser et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2019).

Educational research has examined intensively teachers' emotional labor and its effects on teaching goals, student-teacher interactions, teachers' affect, and teaching-related attitudes and behaviors (see, e.g., Brown et al., 2018; Burić et al., 2019; Hagenauer et al., 2015; Isenbarger & Zembylas, 2006; Oplatka, 2007; Stark & Bettini, 2021; Sutton, 2004, 2007; Tsang, 2011; Zembylas, 2007). In many ways, the monitoring of teachers in today's neoliberal educational environment is more widespread than ever (Page, 2017). It is conducted not only by school leaders but also by students, parents, and peers, at times with the help of technology (Page, 2017). Naturally, this also influences the emotional aspects of the work.

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<sup>4</sup> Although a conceptual distinction can be made between voluntary (non-paid) and required (paid) emotion management at work, in practice the distinction is more complex because of the inherent connection between work and financial compensation. As part of work demands, positive relations with peers and customers are at least partially linked to employees' maintaining a stable income, even if emotion management is not formally demanded.

Within the body of research on teachers' emotions, discipline issues emerged as one of the prominent elicitors of teachers' powerful negative emotions (Aloe et al., 2014; Chang, 2013; Frenzel, 2014; Tsouloupas et al., 2010). To the best of our knowledge, there is no study on K-12 teachers' emotional experience and motivation to perform emotional labor and emotion work in coping with discipline issues. The present study aimed to offer these insights on the topic.

## 1.1 Emotion management in teaching

Teaching is imbued with emotions, and teachers regularly engage in significant emotional labor to meet the pressures they face in complying with the emotion rules of their job (Chang, 2020; Hargreaves, 2000; Isenbarger & Zembylas, 2006) as well as in emotion work in which they so voluntary (Arar & Oplatka, 2018; Oplatka, 2007, 2009). It is socially undesirable for teachers to display negative emotions (Frenzel, 2014), therefore they try to modify and control them to comply with acceptable emotion rules (Isenbarger & Zembylas, 2006). Motivation to perform emotional labor and emotion work is rooted in the social expectations and professional norms of teaching as a caring profession with a strong sense of moral purpose<sup>5</sup> and responsibility (Chang, 2020; Hargreaves, 1998; Huang et al., 2019; Nias, 1996; O'Connor, 2008; Oplatka, 2007; Sachs & Blackmore, 2010; Yin et al., 2016). Although emotional labor is often perceived as externally coerced, scholars argue that teachers' motivation to engage in emotion management can frequently be a discretionary aspect of their role (referred to as emotion work). Many teachers regard their role as closely connected with their internalized self-perception and personal beliefs (Oplatka, 2007, 2009; Zembylas, 2005). Research indicates that teachers' emotion management is a function of how teachers conceptualize the emotional expectations of their work (Brown et al., 2018), their identities (Brown et al., 2014), and the accepted emotional displays in the professional setting (Stark & Bettini, 2021).

### 1.1.1 Teachers' emotion management in coping with discipline problems

Teachers' emotion management in classroom management has received considerable attention in educational research. According to this body of research, discipline problems are some of the key triggers for teachers' negative feelings and efforts to control such emotions (e.g., Chang, 2013; Chang & Taxer, 2021; Sutton et al., 2009; Tsouloupas et al., 2010). Discipline problems make teaching and learning difficult, not only because of the complexity, frequency, and degree of exposure to these behaviors (Chang, 2013; Chang & Taxer, 2021; Crawford et al., 2018; Frenzel, 2014; Wróbel, 2013), but because it causes teachers to experience a range of negative emotions such as anger, frustration, disappointment, and annoyance (Chang, 2013; Chang & Taxer, 2021; Frenzel, 2014; Grossman & Oplatka, 2021; Hagenauer et al., 2016; Sutton,

<sup>5</sup> We suggest that at the collective societal level, teaching is considered a moral purpose. This is not necessarily experienced as a dominant daily drive by teachers (a phenomenon also witnessed among other societal service professionals, such as physicians). Nevertheless, the societal moral purpose of teaching shapes the emotional rules that externally pressure teachers to perform emotional labor and influences the internalized identity of teachers who voluntarily adopt emotional work.

2007). In a study asking teachers to explain an occasion when they regulated their emotions at work, 38.08% of the responses were about misconduct on the part of the students (Chang & Taxer, 2021). Despite the significance of understanding the emotional regulation teachers practice while dealing with disciplinary issues (Chang, 2013; Chang & Taxer, 2021), no study has examined why teachers regulate their emotions in coping with these issues. Therefore, our understanding of how teachers make sense of these motivations when coping with discipline problems remains limited and a better understanding of work motivations may be useful.

## 1.2 Work motivation and self-determination theory

Work motivation is the personal desire to achieve goals relating to one's employment (Gagné & Deci, 2005). Classic writing on motivation differentiates between intrinsic (internal) and extrinsic (external) motivation (Centers & Bugental, 1966). Intrinsic motivation refers to engaging in an activity because it is interesting, enjoyable, or driven by curiosity. Extrinsic motivation refers to doing something because of external consequences or rewards.

According to self-determination theory (SDT), people feel autonomous motivation (self-determination) in their actions when their psychological requirements for autonomy, self-competence, and relatedness are met, and thus individuals are more likely to experience intrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000). The SDT framework helps explain how different types of motivation develop (Howard et al., 2017). The theory suggests that for an extrinsically motivated behavior to become more autonomous, the self-regulation of the behavior and the value attached to it must be internalized (Eyal & Roth, 2011). Internalization is the process of taking an external motivator and making it a part of one's internal value system (Eyal & Roth, 2011). Thus, SDT theory presents a continuum of refined types of extrinsic motivations varying by level of internalization (Howard et al., 2017). Closest to external motivation is introjected motivation, which refers to internalizing a behavior or value with an external perceived locus of causality (Eyal & Roth, 2011). Identified regulation involves personally recognizing the value of a given behavior and engaging in it voluntarily, even if it is not enjoyable and intrinsically motivating (Howard et al., 2017). Finally, integrated regulation, which is closest to classic intrinsic motivation, occurs when a behavior is fully assimilated into one's sense of self and is viewed as expressing part of the person's identity (Eyal & Roth, 2011). Previous research has suggested that self-regulation of negative emotions can be influenced by a variety of motives, which may differ in whether they are perceived as externally imposed and in the degree of autonomy and internalization associated with them (Kim et al., 2002).

### 1.2.1 SDT and motivation to perform emotional labor and emotion work

Research has only recently begun to focus on the motivational processes that encourage workers to control their emotions, with the causes of emotion management receiving far less attention than its effects (Bono & Vey, 2005; Cossette, 2014). SDT provides a useful framework for understanding the process of emotion management at work (Cossette, 2014). Although it is crucial to understand "how" employees carry

out emotional labor, it is equally important to understand “why” they adopt specific approaches. Motivation is a key explanation for why employees engage in emotion management.

According to Ashforth and Humphrey (1993), employees may communicate pre-determined emotions spontaneously. Others have suggested that to adhere to display guidelines, employees must constantly manage their naturally occurring emotional responses (Cossette, 2014). Satisfaction with job demands, such as controlling emotions, has a positive effect on performance when individuals identify with their role (Cossette, 2014; Oplatka, 2007, 2009).

Emotion management that aligns with workers’ salient and valued professional identity has beneficial results (Cossette, 2014). The extent to which employees identify with their job or job values is referred to as role internalization. According to Ashforth and Humphrey (1993), higher internalization of role expectations results in a lesser effort required for emotional labor. Role internalization is thought to affect emotional labor by reducing emotional dissonance (Rubin et al., 2005).

There is some basis for linking extrinsic motivation with emotional labor and intrinsic motivation with emotion work. Employees control their emotions to meet organizational requirements, which by definition, focus on external factors related to task completion (Cossette, 2014). Thus, in most cases, intrinsic motivation is irrelevant to understanding emotional labor at work, and it is best to focus on various types of extrinsic motivations, as outlined in the SDT framework. If workers’ values align with displaying the “appropriate” work-related emotions to clients, organizational expectations become consistent with each employee’s sense of self (Cossette, 2014), and in this sense, more internalized forms of motivations may become significant.

In education, Sutton’s (2004) work describes teachers’ inclinations to perform emotion management that ranges by levels of idealized self-image, according to SDT. Some educators have claimed that they felt embarrassed to express their anger in front of the class, and others wanted to set an example for their students by not expressing their negative emotions (Sutton, 2004). See Table 1 below detailing the relationship between constructs of SDT and emotional management. Thus, we suggest that motivations for emotional labor are rooted more in external drives, and those for emotion work more in internal drives. We excluded intrinsic motivation because our focus is on the teaching profession, which has well-established social, profes-

**Table 1** Conceptual relations between constructs of SDT and emotional management

Type of motivation	Extrinsic motivation				Intrinsic motivation
Sub-type of motivation (perceived locus of causality)	External motivation (external)	Introjected motivation (partially external)	Identified motivation (partially internal)	Integrated Motivation (internal)	--
Type of emotion management in teaching	Emotional labor		Emotion work		--

Note. The term autonomous motivation includes identified, integrated, and intrinsic motivation; the term controlled motivation includes external and introjected motivation

sional, and workplace emotion rules that make the management emotion driven fully by self-determination irrelevant.

## 2 Method

The present study explored the following research question: *What are the experiences and motivations of teachers in employing emotional labor and emotion work when dealing with discipline issues?* We used a qualitative approach to describe and analyze the phenomenon of interest (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). The institutional review board at the authors' university approved the study.

### 2.1 Participants and procedure

The study was carried out in Israel, in four state primary and four state secondary schools. To achieve diversity in the sample (Seawright & Gerring, 2008), our selection criteria included variation in education levels (primary vs. secondary) and in the characteristics of the schools, including setting (urban vs. rural), size, and socioeconomic status (SES). The descriptive information concerning the schools is summarized in Table 2.

Participants were recruited through the schools. First, an appeal was made to school principals describing the research and asking for cooperation. Next, in the schools that agreed, an appeal was made to the teaching staff with a request to participate in the study. The research included 24 teachers, 12 from primary and 12 from secondary schools, 19 women and 5 men. Their ages ranged between 23 and 63 years, and they had 2–36 years of professional experience. Information about the participants is presented in Table 3. In Israeli state schools, coordinators are active teachers and are assigned up to 6 h a week out of the full-time teaching load for coordination responsibly. We also approached primary school principals and VPs. State primary

**Table 2** Information on participating schools

School reference code	Location	Size of school (no. of students)	Students' background
P1	Urban	400	Variety of SES backgrounds, working and middle class
P2	Urban	700	Primarily upper-middle class
P3	Urban	550	Primarily middle class
P4	Rural	450	Variety of SES backgrounds, working and middle class Religious boys' school
S1	Urban	600	Variety of SES backgrounds, a higher proportion of upper- middle class
S2	Rural	800	Diverse SES, a higher proportion of the upper-middle class and a lower proportion of working class
S3	Rural	1050	Variety of SES backgrounds, with a higher proportion of upper-middle class
S4	Urban	2000	Variety of SES backgrounds, with a higher proportion of middle class

Note. P=primary school, S=secondary school

**Table 3** Information on participating teachers

School reference code	Gender	Mean age	Mean teaching experience	Education level	Role <sup>a</sup>
P1 ( <i>n</i> = 3)	100% female	39.6	11.66	100% MA	1 vice-principal, 2 coordinators
P2 ( <i>n</i> = 2)	100% female	42	18	50% BA 50% MA	2 teachers
P3 ( <i>n</i> = 3)	66.6% female	42.6	13.6	33.3% BA 66.6% MA	1 principal, 2 coordinators
P4 ( <i>n</i> = 4)	100% female	31.5	11	75% BA 25% MA	1 coordinator, 3 teachers
S1 ( <i>n</i> = 3)	66.6% female	45.6	15.3	66.6% BA 33.3% MA	2 coordinators, 1 teacher
S2 ( <i>n</i> = 4)	100% female	46	10.5	25% BA 75% MA	3 coordinators, 1 teacher
S3 ( <i>n</i> = 4)	50% female	48.2	21.2	50% BA 50% MA	3 coordinators, 1 teacher
S4 ( <i>n</i> = 1)	100% Male	44	18	PhD	1 teacher

Note. P=primary school, S=secondary school. <sup>a</sup>For participants with additional administrative school roles to teaching, only these roles are noted

school principals and vice-principals (VPs) are formally required to teach for 6 h a week (about a quarter of the full-time teaching load of a primary school teacher).

Semi-structured interviews were conducted by the first author. Please refer to the Appendix at the end for the full interview protocol and list of questions. The goals of the study were described to the teachers and informed them that participation was optional. After receiving assurances that the information (recordings and transcripts) would be used only for research purposes and all identifying information would be omitted from any published results, they signed the informed consent forms. Interviews lasted 45–90 min. All participants were asked the same open-ended questions but allowed the dialogue to flow naturally. All interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, and analyzed.

## 2.2 Data analysis

To ensure methodological rigor and the validity of the data, the researchers examined the interview material using both inductive and deductive methodologies (Schreier, 2014). The researchers first reviewed all interviews to obtain a comprehensive picture of the participants' experiences. Second, the researchers searched for patterns and themes inductively (Huberman & Miles, 2002). Third, the researchers reviewed the interviews from a deductive point of view, after creating provisional codes and consulting the literature on emotional labor and emotion work. Among the deductive codes adopted based on the literature review were "role model" (Humphrey, 2008), "professional standards" (Brown et al., 2014), "emotional authenticity" (Keller & Becker, 2021), and "moral purpose" (Hebson et al., 2007). Next, themes were renamed, merged, broken apart, and refined. For example, inductive codes such as "open discourse" and "personal dialogue" were merged under the new theme of "authentic emotional discourse," inspired deductively by the literature. The

analysis produced the following six final themes: professional standards—managing emotions to adhere to professional norms and expectations; preservation of status and authority—emotional management to maintain authority and respect; role modeling—demonstrating appropriate emotional responses to serve as a behavioral example for students; effectiveness—managing emotions to enhance teaching efficacy and create a conducive learning environment; moral compass—emotional management driven by deeply held personal values and principles; authentic emotional discourse—engaging in honest and transparent emotional exchanges, driven by the value placed on authenticity. The teacher who reported several different motivations while coping with discipline events was counted under several themes. We did not encounter sentences in which one theme was used as a means to an end to achieve the goal of a different theme (for example, an expression like “I use authentic emotional discourse because I want to be effective”). Last, we coded the final themes through an iterative process that involved rereading the themes, consulting our framework (see Table 1) and relevant literature, and discussing each theme to classify it either as a manifestation of either emotional labor or emotion work.

To enhance transferability and to reach correct interpretations of events in their proper context, the authors opted for thick descriptions based on the analysis of the interviews. The first author is a teacher and behavioral-educational consultant with firsthand experience with the researched topic. As a teacher and behavioral-educational consultant, she has worked directly with students to address these problems and guides other educators and parents on effective strategies for managing and improving student behavior. The second author is a researcher of emotions in education. Thus, the researchers were both familiar with the context and used a critical approach to understand how systemic factors influence teachers' emotions and coping with discipline problems. In addition, the researchers were motivated to reflect on the analysis and interpretation. We carried out these processes while acknowledging our assumptions and perspectives that may influence the study findings to ensure a more accurate representation of the teachers' experiences.

### 3 Results

The results of the analyses are presented below under two themes: (a) teachers' emotional experience in coping with discipline problems and (b) teachers' motivation to perform emotion management in coping with discipline problems. The latter is divided into two sub-themes: the motivation to perform emotional labor and emotion work.

#### 3.1 Teachers' emotional experience in coping with discipline problems

Our findings suggest that teachers reported experiencing varying degrees of emotional distress, which included a range of negative emotions, such as anger, disappointment, frustration, emotional upheaval, sadness, insult, helplessness, mental pain, and heartbreak. The teachers' discipline-related emotional experiences were classified into two main groups: *related to noncompliant behavior*, which refers to

students talking during lessons and to non-compliance (e.g., students refusing to stop inappropriate behavior after the teacher's request, refusing to enter the class, or not following the teacher's instructions); and *violent behavior*, which refers to verbal and physical violence toward other students, online abuse, vandalism, and violence directed at teachers. Each group contains a range of emotional experiences (Table 4). Generally, the emotional intensity, as reported by teachers, varied depending on the severity of the discipline issue. More severe discipline problems, such as violent incidents, were associated with higher emotional intensity communicated with lexical explanations of the emotion, such as "genuine anger," "extremely disappointed," or "I was so upset."

Our findings indicate that discipline problems such as talking during the lesson and failure to follow the teacher's instructions are part of non-academic challenges associated with students (Crawford et al., 2018) that elicit emotional experiences in teachers such as irritation, annoyance, disappointment, despair, and anger. For example, a vice-principal (P1-T2), recalling the persistent non-compliant behavior of a student in her homeroom hour, said that at some point she was "so irritated." An 11th-grade coordinator (S3-T8) said that coping with classroom management may cause teachers to feel "anger and frustration, and if it [non-compliant behavior] happens all the time, it can make you feel powerless and incapable."

Verbal and physical violence toward other students and teachers, and vandalism evoked intense emotional experiences in teachers. Primary school teachers described experiencing high levels of anger and helplessness in the face of these disciplinary issues. P3-T7 reported that as a result of having to deal with verbal violence towards another student and herself, "I was angry, very angry." P4-T9, a language coordinator, noted that a teacher under her guidance "felt helpless" when her student cursed and screamed at her. Secondary school teachers reported frustration, disappointment, and experiencing an emotional upheaval beyond anger. S1-T1 described an incident

**Table 4** Teachers' reported discipline-related emotional experiences

Type of discipline issue	Subtype of discipline issue	Teachers' reported emotional experience	Percent of teachers reporting (N=24)
Noncompliant behavior	Talking during lesson	Irritation, annoyance, negative surprise, not understanding	16.6%
	Failure to follow teacher's instructions	Negative surprise, disappointment, frustration, despair, irritation, anger	54.1%
Violent behavior	Verbal, physical, and online violence toward other students	Anger, disappointment and frustration, a state of restlessness and emotional upheaval	33.3%
	Vandalism	Disappointment, frustration, sadness, insult, sense of heartbreak	8.3%
	Verbal violence toward teachers	Disappointment, frustration, emotional upheaval, helplessness, anger	20.8%
	Physical violence toward teachers	Frustration, anger, alertness, tension, emotional upheaval, sadness and insult, injustice and heartache, mental pain, exhaustion	20.8%

Note: Participants were counted in multiple themes; therefore, percentages may not sum up to 100%

in which a student cursed him: "It hurt me. It hurt a lot. The strongest word I can use is "disappointment." You feel frustrated, disappointed, depressed— unpleasant feelings. You're in an emotional upheaval, you feel bad."

It is reasonable to assume that teachers' emotional experience in a disciplinary incident is rooted in the humanistic philosophy underlying teaching occupation (O'Connor, 2008) and in their strong sense of care and commitment to "the other" (Chang, 2020; Mulholland & Wallace, 2012). This dedication was evident at both levels of education and may be seen in the words of a primary teacher, P2-T4: "I love the kids and I love my job... You come with all of your heart and all of your love for children and then you get 'slapped in the face' [confront discipline problems]." S1-T1 stressed the same pattern: "I give my 1000%, she [the student] is very challenging. I call her up to wake her up for school, sometimes even go bring her to school, give her everything." These findings suggest that teachers at both levels of education are emotionally invested in their profession and become vulnerable (Timostsuk & Ugaste, 2012; Yin & Lee, 2012) to negative emotions, which they experience as intense emotional distress when confronted with challenging, stressful, and serious social problems such as violent behavior (Aloe et al., 2014; Moon et al., 2015, 2019; Rubbi Nunan, 2022).

### 3.2 Motivations to perform emotion management in coping with discipline problems

Our findings indicate that teachers cited varied motivations to perform emotion management when dealing with disciplinary issues. The reported teachers' accounts were classified into two groups: *emotional labor*, which refers to mandated engagement with emotion rules and *emotion work*, which refers to more autonomous engagement with those rules. In this analysis, the study also distinguished between primary and secondary schools.

#### 3.2.1 Motivations to perform emotional labor in coping with discipline problems

The findings revealed that 63% of teachers (15 of 24), at both levels of education, alluded to their perceptions of professional norms and organizational expectations regarding emotional expression. Four introjected and external motivations to perform

**Table 5** Teachers' motivation to perform emotional labor when coping with discipline

Motivations	Percent of primary school teachers reporting ( $n=12$ )	Percent of secondary school teachers reporting ( $n=12$ )
Role modeling	25%	25%
<b>Professional standards</b>	<b>41.6%</b>	<b>66.6%</b>
<b>Preservation of status and authority</b>	<b>33.3%</b>	<b>58.3%</b>
Effectiveness	33.3%	50%

Note: Participants were counted in multiple themes; therefore, percentages may not sum up to 100%. Bold shading marks a difference in motivations between the levels of education; no shading indicates a similarity in motivations between the two

emotion management when coping with disciplinary issues surfaced in the narratives. Role modeling, professional standards, preservation of status and authority, and effectiveness were the motivations identified in the emotional labor category (Table 5).

As shown in Table 5, more secondary school teachers cited motivations to perform emotional labor than did primary school teachers, specifically regarding the motivation to uphold professional standards and preserve status and authority, possibly because secondary school teachers work with older students who may be more independent and challenging. Consequently, secondary school teachers might perceive having a lower degree of power in the classroom (Hargreaves, 2000), and the reduced sense of authority and control over students may contribute to an increased need for emotional labor to manage and regulate classroom dynamics effectively.

Top managers' (i.e., principal and vice-principal) primary motivation was preservation of status and authority (100%), whereas coordinators and teachers' primary motivation was professional standards (57.1% and 50%, respectively). Other significant motivations of top managers were professional standards (50%). For coordinators, other prominent motivations were preservation of status and authority (50%) and effectiveness (50%). Additionally, other notable motivations for teachers included role modeling (37.5%) and effectiveness (37.5%).

**3.2.1.1 Role modeling as motivation to perform emotional labor** Being a role model and providing a personal example of displaying and regulating emotions (Brown et al., 2023) for the benefit of students was a requirement discussed in similar terms by teachers at both levels of education. Consistent with Sutton's (2004) findings, in the present study, teachers also reported their tendency to regulate their emotions because of their position as role models (Sutton, 2004), particularly in intense situations such as disciplinary incidents. Teachers noted that modeling emotional control was an essential teaching tool (Waldbuesser et al., 2021) to teach students how to restrain and control their own emotions. For example, P4-T12, a primary school teacher, noted: "Teachers are not allowed to go to the extreme because we want students to learn self-control and restraint. If you stand up in front of him [the student] and don't shout or run away from the class, you're showing him that he can do it too... a personal example." S2-T5, a secondary school teacher stressed: "Teachers are an example of respectful behavior... I think a personal example is the most important thing." This finding is consistent with Karabay's (2019) argument that the way teachers handle challenges guides their students in dealing with their behavior. In this sense, role modeling represents a classic introjected motivation (Cossette, 2014).

**3.2.1.2 Professional standards as motivation to perform emotional labor** Teachers also discussed professional standards as a motivation in cases of breaches of discipline, more frequently in secondary than in primary school. Consistent with the findings of Hagenauer and Volet (2014) and Hagenauer et al. (2016) concerning university teachers in Australia and Germany, teachers in the present study also reported that control of negative emotions had to do with their perceptions of professional standards. For example, a secondary teacher, S1-T2, said: "As an educator, I do

everything with discretion,” and S3-T9 noted: “The role of a teacher and educator still applies to you [when you are angry with a student for misbehaving]... You are supposed to handle the situation with discretion.” Teachers appear to be motivated by a shift in thinking when dealing with difficult students and “play the role” of a teacher that is congruent with the goals and expectations of the workplace (Brown et al., 2014). These motivations seem well suited to mobilize standard emotion regulation by a cognitive change that serves mandated requirements of emotional labor (Grandey, 2000).

**3.2.1.3 Preservation of status and authority as motivation to perform emotional labor** Preservation of status and authority was another motivation described by teachers for performing emotional labor. In terms of Higgins' regulatory focus theory (Brockner & Higgins, 2001), role-modeling motivations reflected a focus on promotion, driven by the potential gains from emotional labor. In contrast, the motivation to preserve status and authority appeared to align more with a prevention focus, aimed at avoiding potential losses. According to the teachers interviewed, it is essential to regulate emotions when coping with discipline issues to maintain the teachers' status. This is necessary to avoid mimicking or ridicule on the part of the students, and not to jeopardize class management, which adversely affects their authority. Students are considered attentive and good evaluators of their teachers' emotional state (Sutton, 2007), as noted by S3-T9: “You should be in a place [of emotional control] where you don't look ridiculous.” S2-T5 said: “I don't shout. Because our squeaky voice sounds ridiculous. I don't want to be impersonated.” S1-T3 explained: “To maintain our status as teachers and educators we are obligated to control our emotions. We want our students to respect us, so we need to act respectfully.” Our results are consistent with scholarly work on K-12 and university teachers in Western countries who share the common belief that negative emotions should be controlled to maintain authority, respect, and appreciation (Hagenauer et al., 2016; Hargreaves, 2000).

**3.2.1.4 Effectiveness as motivation to perform emotional labor** Last, similarly to previous studies (e.g., Cross & Hong, 2012; Hagenauer & Volet, 2014; Sutton, 2004; Sutton et al., 2009; Taxer & Gross, 2018; Yuu, 2010), teachers in the present study also reported a motivation to regulate their emotions when handling discipline issues to create a successful and effective learning environment. An 11th-grade coordinator, S3-T8, noted that loss of control and lack of emotional regulation when coping with discipline may damage a teacher's educational goals: “The teacher won't be able to reach any of his goals [if he doesn't manage his emotions], except getting home by 3 p.m.” A primary school teacher, P3-T7, noted that teachers' poor emotional control in a disciplinary situation may lead to ineffective teaching: “We won't achieve anything and won't make any progress,” Effectiveness is an instrumental goal, considered to

be a distal external motivation that is not part of personally meaningful reasons for conducting an activity (Fryer et al., 2014).

### 3.2.2 Motivations to perform emotion work in coping with discipline problems

The analysis of the interview data also revealed motivations for engaging in emotion work, as teachers mentioned situations in which they were able to regulate their emotions without any external pressure (Oplatka, 2007, 2009; Tsang, 2011). A moral compass and authentic emotional discourse were motivations included in the *emotion work* category (Table 6), representing integrated and identified motivations in SDT terminology.

As seen in Table 6, no major differences emerged between primary and secondary school teachers in their motivations to perform emotional work. All organizational layers, including top managers (i.e., principal and vice-principal) (100%), coordinators (64.2%), and teachers (75%), expressed a strong motivation for authentic emotional discourse. Among coordinators, 42.8% addressed moral compass, whereas among teachers, 37.5% did so.

**3.2.2.1 Moral compass as a motivation to perform emotion work** Teachers indicated that one of the motivations for performing emotion work in coping with discipline problems was a moral compass. This is consistent with existing works indicating that emotions and their regulation are inseparable from teachers' moral obligations (Hargreaves, 1998; Oplatka, 2007). Primary school teachers tended to emphasize their sense of calling, and the students' age and developmental level as a moral compass that guides them in regulating their emotions. "They're young kids," explained the primary teacher, P3-T8, and the language coordinator, P4-T9, said: "My perceptions guide my reaction before, during, and after the incident with a student. And my response may not be appropriate if I don't fully recognize the student's developmental needs." Secondary teachers also stressed the importance of an ethical core, for example, S1-T2: "I expect from myself not to get angry. I cannot break down. This isn't my professional value, it isn't my code of ethics." Thus, teachers regarded charged emotional situations in classrooms not only as pedagogical and technical but also as moral issues, as Kelchtermans (1996, 2011) argued in his studies of the politi-

**Table 6** Teachers' motivation to perform emotion work when coping with discipline

Motivations	Percent of primary school teachers reporting ( $n=12$ )	Percent of secondary school teachers reporting ( $n=12$ )
Moral compass	41.6%	33.3%
Authentic emotional discourse	75%	66.6%

Note: Participants were counted in multiple themes; therefore, percentages may not sum up to 100%

cal and moral roots of teacher vulnerability. Therefore, voluntary emotional expression and regulation appear to be influenced by teachers' moral commitments.

**3.2.2.2 Authentic emotional discourse as a motivation to perform emotion work** Teachers at both levels of education stressed the importance of authentic emotional discourse as a key component of teaching emotional skills, nurturing a personal relationship with students, and creating a positive classroom atmosphere. For example, a primary teacher, P1-T2, said: "It is important for students to know there is something called "emotion." That there is anger, sadness, and disappointment. He needs to know that he can hurt someone. When you express your emotions, create [dialogical] conditions, and describe emotions instead of just naming them, the behavior in the classroom is much better, calmer, and more respectful." S3-T10 noted: "I think that if something is frustrating about a student's behavior, I should disclose that to him. We should keep it real, not embellish the truth. This isn't a conversation between robots. This is a human conversation. So, I choose to show him my frustration and disappointment." The widespread reference to authentic emotional discourse is consistent with Sutton's (2004) discussion of the importance of teachers "being real" and not appearing as "a robot" to the students. Therefore, disclosure of authentic negative emotions in an appropriate way does not jeopardize relationships but bridges "the psychological and emotional distance between teachers and students" (Yuu, 2010, p. 76). The motivation for authentic emotional discourse represents a form of identified motivation that personally acknowledge the value of behavior, even if it is not pleasant.

## 4 Discussion

This qualitative study aimed to gain insight into teachers' motivations to perform emotion management in disciplinary situations. Despite the importance of understanding emotional labor and emotion work (Oplatka, 2007, 2009; Stark & Bettini, 2021), the antecedents and motivation to perform emotion management have scarcely been explored (Cossette, 2014).

The present study makes several contributions. First, the study found that teachers at both levels of education mentioned their motivation to perform emotion management when dealing with disciplinary issues, which were classified into two groups: emotional labor and emotion work. These findings paint a nuanced picture of emotion management in the teaching profession related to a key work challenge, that is, coping with discipline problems. Contrary to reported research in organizations, which describes emotional labor as the requirement to display certain emotions that are organizationally imposed (Grandey & Gabriel, 2015; Hochschild, 1983), teachers considered them to be professionally situated guidelines. This indicates that teachers perceived mainly professional norms to be guiding acceptable emotional expression (see, e.g., Hagenauer & Volet, 2014; Stark & Bettini, 2021; Yin & Lee, 2012), particularly given that schools rarely communicate emotional display rules explicitly

(Stark & Betini, 2021). We focused on investigating how extrinsic forms of motivation in the SDT framework, such as the two controlled motivations (external and introjected) and the two autonomous motivations (identified and integrated) aligned with manifestations of teachers' motivations to perform emotional labor and emotion work. Intrinsic motivation was excluded from our study because of our focus on the teaching profession, where deeply ingrained social, professional, and workplace norms significantly shape emotional experiences. Therefore, fully self-determined emotion management is less likely in the teaching profession.

Second, regarding emotional labor, four main motivations to perform emotion management were identified: professional standards, preservation of status and authority (both were more prevalent among secondary than primary school teachers), role modeling, and effectiveness (similar at both levels of education). Preservation of status and authority aligns with the SDT subtype of external motivation; the other three types of teachers' motivation to perform emotional labor align with the SDT subtype of introjected motivation. Focus on professional standards and the preservation of status and authority in secondary schools may be related to the unique aspects of the setting. Secondary school teachers have emotionally complex interactions (Brown et al., 2023; Hargreaves, 2000; Smith, 2009). However, they operate within large bureaucratic organizations that can provide clearer professional boundaries, which assist them in sustaining positive relationships with their students (Brown et al., 2023; Stark & Bettini, 2021). In addition, it seems that teachers are required to be models of good conduct not only in collectivistic cultures like China (Yin & Lee, 2012) but also in individualistic cultures like Israel.

Third, the research found that teachers at both levels of education discussed two similar autonomous motivations, moral compass and authentic emotional discourse, which were conceptualized as emotion work. These two emotion work motivations align with integrated and identified motivations in the SDT framework. The moral compass represents deeply held values and principles that are integral to a person's identity, therefore it is an integrated motivation. Teachers may engage in authentic emotional discourse because they value honesty and transparency in interactions, even if these behaviors are not as deeply ingrained, therefore it is an identified motivation. The identity of teachers, unlike that of other service professionals, is often viewed as "boundary-less" (Yuu, 2010) because evidence indicated that personal identity is infused to a large extent with professional identity (O'Connor, 2008; Yuu, 2010). Teachers choose to care (O'Connor, 2008) and they choose to disclose their authentic negative emotions when dealing with discipline issues to bridge and strengthen emotional and natural relationships with students (Brown et al., 2023; Yuu, 2010). These requirements may also reflect teachers' values of responsibility that guide them as a moral compass for professional behavior (Chang, 2020; O'Connor, 2008).

The present study has several limitations. First, the qualitative nature of the research prevents generalizing its conclusions, although they may be applied to other contexts. Future research using a quantitative approach could provide further insight into the phenomenon. Second, the researchers asked teachers to recollect key disciplinary events, the emotions they experienced, and why they behaved as they did. A retrospective method based on self-recall might distort information. Future studies can use a variety of techniques, including experience sampling and diaries to cir-

cumvent this issue. Third, the majority of the study sample consisted of women, who often use a more “feminine style” in dealing with work problems and are known to emphasize consideration, collaboration, collegiality, and acknowledging individual variations (Oplatka & Atias, 2007). Therefore, samples with a better balance between male and female teachers should be used in future research. Additionally, teachers' motivations may be influenced by culture (Stark & Bettini, 2021). Therefore, it is advisable to carry out further research in other countries. In sum, the present study examined teachers' motivations to perform emotion management in response to disciplinary incidents in primary and secondary schools. No research appears to have addressed this topic to date. The initial step in closing this gap has been taken by this research.

The study has several practical implications. First, because secondary school teachers mentioned emotional labor more frequently, additional support systems and resources should be invested to address the emotional challenges faced by secondary educators. For example, providing counseling services and peer support groups can advance this goal. Emotional coping is especially critical for novice teachers (Zaretsky & Katz, 2019). Second, training programs should be designed to equip educators with the necessary skills and strategies for managing their emotions effectively (Sutton, 2007). Third, schools should foster a supportive and empathic environment for teachers (Berkovich & Eyal, 2018, 2020). Creating a culture where teachers feel valued and heard can reduce the sense of emotional labor and support internalized motivation that leads to voluntary emotion work. Last, policymakers should take into account the emotional wellbeing of teachers when formulating educational policies. Policies that acknowledge and support teachers in managing emotions can help reduce burnout and promote teachers' wellbeing (Farley & Chamberlain, 2021).

## 5 Appendix: Interview protocol

1. Can you provide some insight into the background and the disciplinary policy in place at the school where you teach or manage?
2. In your opinion, what are the key distinctions between disciplinary policies in elementary schools and high schools?
3. How would you define a discipline problem based on your experience and understanding?
4. Could you share your thoughts on the acceptable methods for addressing student discipline issues within your school?
5. Are there established guidelines or norms in your school for handling disciplinary problems?
6. In your opinion, what are the school's expectations of teachers when it comes to addressing disciplinary issues and how are these expectations communicated?
7. Can you describe your approach to managing disciplinary problems?
8. Please elaborate on your strategies for dealing with discipline issues.

9. In your school, what are considered appropriate emotions to express when addressing disciplinary problems, and why do you believe these emotions are acceptable?
10. Could you recall an incident from the last week where you had to address a disciplinary problem involving a student? How did you handle the situation and what were your emotions at the time?
11. Did you make an effort to regulate your emotions during the incident you mentioned? If so, which emotions were you attempting to control and what was your reasoning behind this?
12. In the same incident you described, what emotions did you actually express and what motivated these emotions?
13. In your opinion, did your actions during the incident align with the expectations of the school? Why or why not?
14. Do you believe that there could be any consequences for you as a result of controlling your emotions when dealing with disciplinary problems? If so, can you specify the potential consequences, the areas they might affect, and how they could manifest?

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## Declarations

**Conflict of interest** The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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