

# The Role and Contribution of Narrative Interviews in Educational Research

Aviva Avidan<sup>1,2,\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of teaching and Learning, M.Ed. Study Program, Gordon College of Education, Haifa, Israel

<sup>2</sup>Education Management and Organization Program, M.Ed. Study Program, Hakibbutzim College of Education, Tel-Aviv, Israel

\*Corresponding author: [adad117@walla.co.il](mailto:adad117@walla.co.il)

**Abstract** This article explores the role and contribution of narrative interviews in educational research, by studying its application as data collecting technique in two different case studies: narrative interviews with directors of an academic college of education and with preschool teachers in Israel. The paper presents two case studies in which the narrative interview was used as a key methodological tool reflecting and describing the historical, cultural and educational contexts in which the subjects act, thus enabling a better understanding of the meaning of their behavior. Moreover, the interview allowed the subjects to reflect on their work processes and reconstruct their past experiences in relation to their roles and self-identities.

**Keywords:** *qualitative research, life history, narrative interview, educational research, history of education*

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## 1. Introduction

The use of narrative interviews as a methodological instrument to collect or extract data in social studies and particularly in qualitative research is not a new phenomenon, as indicated in the scholarship on this technique and on the difficulties related to its implementation in research [1,13,26,33,37].

Narratives in the field of education explore the different ways in which stories on professional experiences in the classroom (usually with a highly emotive content) may be employed by teachers to express their identity [7,40], since the mere act of story-telling provides significance and shapes teachers' understanding of their professional identity. Hargreaves ([22]: 12) emphasizes the fact that teachers' voices have frequently been silenced by educational policy and suppressed or distorted within educational research. Scholarly works on teachers' experiences in their professional worlds [4,5,9,11,22,23,39] express a growing interest in teachers' voices. This article seeks to provide an open and objective platform for these voices to be heard.

## 2. Literature Review

Current research methodologies in history reflect the way in which 'life story'/'personal story' plays an important role not only in literary studies but in the field of history as well. Oplatka [30] explains that the strategy of 'life story' enables to identify focal points of crises, renewal and developmental processes in the course of lives of teachers and directors and to connect between them and

the personal, biographical and conceptual factors within their life-stories. By employing 'life-story' as a methodological tool teachers may track the meaning given to different periods in their personal lives and to developmental processes throughout their professional careers. Goodson [18] maintains that the scholarship on teachers' lives should view professional and personal experiences as part of wider political and social contexts. Goodson turns to teachers' stories and narratives as a means of moving beyond the 'representational crisis towards the nirvana of the narrative, the Valhalla of voice' ([18]: 23). In other words, the researcher should locate his own voice within the wider social and political contexts so that it moves from anecdotal recollections to representations, which may be generalized to a broader context. Goodson [20], states that 'life story' focuses on the personal story, whilst 'life history' aims at understanding the pattern of social relationships as well as the interactions and historical limitations of males and females. 'Life history' explores whether personal issues are also of public interest; thus, placing 'life stories' within the time framework in which we live and within a range of opportunities to narrate our individual story as a unique tale. Hence, it is important to define 'life story' within the appropriate socio-cultural and the historical contexts.

In the field of history of education the comparison between different 'life stories,' as indicated in the case studies discussed in this framework, sheds light on other examples, while taking into account the dissimilarities between these stories, since the scholar is often required to reveal the similarities between these stories and their differences [12].

Case studies are based on multiple individual examples, which are described and compared in order to provide insight into a certain issue. For instance, several schools

might be studied to illustrate alternative approaches to school choice for students. Once studying several cases, the researcher deliberately selects particular cases in order to illustrate representative examples. Although usually qualitative researchers do not generalize their findings, researchers who employ multiple or collective case studies often make claims about generalization [35,38].

The narrative interview, which vociferates 'life stories,' is a research tool that enables to study policies in different fields and to point out changes that unnecessarily stem from similar reasons. Sometimes the narrative interview opens a new possibility to view a familiar environment; thus, neglecting the narrow-minded attitude toward relevant issues. By comparing different 'life stories' the tone may focus on a specific aspect beyond the general overview [28]. At present, narrative interviews are also used by scholars in oral history as well as in other fields such as the history of education, in which data collecting from an interviewee who participated in a certain historical event may provide information that otherwise, could not have been obtained from any other written source. In cases in which it is important to learn about the behavior of a certain group and its professional culture (for instance, the directors and the preschool-teachers presented in this article), the narrative interview is probably the most suitable tool, since it provides an access to the cultural context, the individual behavior and its explanation. After analyzing the collected data, the researcher may subtract a generalized conclusion in regard to the examined phenomenon [2]. The narrative interview's relevance as a methodological tool in qualitative research is embedded in providing data concerning the research questions within certain socio-cultural and historical contexts. It has also a significant importance for the research on the history of education, since it provides an approximation to and resignification of the relationship between past and present educational dilemmas which educators dealt with [12].

### 3. Methodology and Method

#### 3.1. The Research Method

The methodological approach consists of a qualitative study based upon narrative interviews. The two case studies presented in this research consist of a qualitative-narrative approach based upon the biographical genre and methodological tools in the field of social history. In addition to narrative interviews, the assumptions in this work are also based on data collecting from historical documents and their analysis. By combing analysis of historical sources with the findings from the narrative interviews, this article seeks to present a complex and coherent image of preschool teachers and directors in Israel and their socio-cultural contexts.

#### 3.2. The Research Rationale

The rationale in presenting two separate and assumingly unrelated case studies in this research lies in the assumption that both groups of interviewees share a similar fate: their voices are usually silenced in the public

sphere while completing their daily tasks. Unlike elementary school teachers, preschool teachers in Israel do not convene in teacher rooms, and they often meet each other in conferences or conversations with their supervisors. Similar, directors and directors are enclosed in their rooms and only meet their colleagues in administrative reunions. Thus, the personal voices of these two important groups in the field of education are hardly heard in the public sphere, and the aim of this research is to vociferate their life stories. The importance of locating these voices within the educational context was a key factor in selecting qualitative methodology based upon narrative interviews in this study.

#### 3.3. The Research Participants

In the first study we hear the voices of two directors and teacher-educators, one male and one female of a college of education in Israel. In the second study we hear the voices of six preschool teachers who worked in four different cultural environments in Israel: the secular-Jewish sector, the national-religious sector, the Arabic sector, and the Bedouin sector.

#### 3.4. The Research Tool

The narrative interview is used as a key methodological tool to reflect upon and describe the historical, cultural and educational contexts in which the interviewees act.

#### 3.5. The Aim of the Article

To show that the narrative interview enables the interviewees to reflect upon professional processes and to reconstruct their past experiences in light of their roles as educators and to present it in a clear methodological manner.

#### 3.6. Data Analysis

All interviews were recorded and transcribed. The findings were analyzed according to the directors of the 'content analysis' method [34]. Both interviews are based on Lieblich's model [27].

#### 3.7. The Research Contribution

This research seeks to contribute to the scholarship on teachers learning in Israel and the academization processes. The narrative interview thereby provides access to socio-cultural contexts of certain social groups that share a common culture. By sharing their life stories, the interviewees enabled to gain a better understanding of the educational and socio-cultural contexts in a systematic and methodological manner.

## 4. Findings

### Case study I

The first case study examines the educational work of four directors - of which one is a female director and three

are males - who belong to the teacher-educators community of an academic college of education throughout four decades (out of the centennial college's existence). The college's vision, its educational goals, and the means with which the directors pursued these goals during political, social and educational transformations constitute the core of this scholarly study. The goals in this case study were to review and compare educational decisions made by these directors in two significant points of time: during the establishment period (1912-1924) and in the transitional period of academization and accreditation of the B.Ed and M.Ed programs (1981-2009).

The study consists of interviewing the directors concerning their educational vision, aims, and how these visions were implemented within the wider context of the social, political, and educational transformations that occurred during their directorship term at the college.

The directors narrated their experiences in detail and described how they dealt with obstacles and professional dilemmas, focusing on the educational changes that took place in the institute during their term. The directors even openly revealed their relationship with the students and other academic personnel. The interviewees spoke about their managerial decisions, educational principles and achievements, and emphasized their contributions in four aspects: the pedagogical, ideological, cultural and social spheres. Furthermore, they reflected upon their managerial and leadership skills and referred to their personal and professional development processes, which they had experienced during their cadence.

Due to the fact that the directors from the first period (the college's initial years) had already passed away, the analysis of historical sources replaced the narrative interviews. The interviews with both directors from the transitional period and with their staff members emphasized the direct impact of social and historical transformations on the educational reality of the college. Our research began with reviewing the history of the college by studying formal documents and the 1913-1924 College Protocol Book. It appears that the first couple of directors had much to deal with – from answering to the Ottoman regime in Palestine (at times resulting in bribes as a means of maintaining the status quo), to creating a curriculum from scratch (including Turkish, Arabic and French studies, as required by the authorities) and personally caring for the daily maintenance and providing supplies for teachers and students at their own expense.

The two directors who represented the contemporary era were mostly concerned with the college's academic aspect, specifically accreditation of the B.Ed and M.Ed degrees. These concerns related to developing new curriculums and managing the increasing number of new students who had joined after the reforms led by the Ministry of Education.

The male director (years of cadence: 1981-1996) elaborated on his educational vision-

".. My personal vision was to educate the students to become book readers, to have values, respect different cultures and possess social sensitivity and high academic level. This is who I am and who I wanted to see in the next generations as teachers and educators. This was my professional duty and this is how I believe I have influenced the image of the Israeli society. I

accomplished my vision with the help of the educators in the college, people of values and integrity, cultured and knowledgeable who were entirely dedicated to the art of education..."

The female director (years of cadence: 2001-2009) talked about the vast changes she had led in the institute-

"..... The place has undergone major changes and has developed through the eight years of my cadence, moving forward all the time, there was not a single moment of standing still, this is why we became a role-model for the other colleges...we achieved all our goals since we did not stop working or stop dreaming of the next goal. We worked constantly on the academization processes and at the same time recruiting new lecturers, changing curriculums and developing new programs in order to get the accreditation from the Ministry of Education..."

All four directors had accomplished various achievements in four main areas: developing an educational and institutional vision, developing new curricula, leading and developing academization processes, as well as advancing the academic staff and promoting education training in Israel. The directors expressed their core educational principles and their faith in their ability to initiate and lead the academization processes in the institute despite all obstacles. The directors talked about their professional vision and how they envisioned the college as the top institute in the country in pedagogical progress and academic achievements. They also talked about the difficulties in 'racing' for the academization of the college, and how they had to learn and develop new programs according to changing requirements and reforms in the field of education. They pointed out the great responsibility and the feeling of loneliness at the top, while struggling with objections on behalf of academic members who rejected the rapid, ongoing pedagogical and structural changes in their institution. Both directors realized that their ability to lead changes against all odds and to advance onto 'new worlds,' which were always their first priority, were the main factors for their success in this position. They believed that their strong personality, self-confidence, trustworthiness, team-work capabilities and cooperativeness with the staff were accountable for these changes in a relatively short time. Even though these directors fulfilled their role in different terms, their life stories reflected the similarities in their personal characteristics such as: charisma, ambition, self-confidence, taking risks, authority, power, and creativity upon needed, as well as in terms of placing their personal and professional vision beyond all obstacles.

As the director explained-

"... As a director you must possess a few qualities necessary for the job; self-confidence, without it there is absolutely nothing you can do here, you also need to have a vision and be goal-oriented, possess high levels of personal sensitivity and good relations with people, but the most important thing is self-confidence. If you are not sure of yourself and believe in your abilities you can't make the necessary changes in the college. ..."

The other woman director talked about the difference of being a female director among men-

"....A woman's management is different than men's since it has very intense powers especially if she has

high self-esteem. A woman should not be modest about her managerial abilities; on the contrary, she should lead the college confidently according to her vision toward a new educational future. I feel different and I have many advantages because I am a woman..."

These interviews were supported by other narratives, fourteen staff members who worked with the two directors. These narrative interviews clearly indicate that all the staff members viewed the directors as 'leaders' and felt their presence everywhere in the college. They described the directors' abilities and personal traits such as: determination, fierceness, strength, self-confidence, creativeness, flexibility, decisiveness, calmness in times of crises and decision-making, long experience and firmness. At the same time, they also described the college atmosphere as surrounded with missionary feeling; thus, leading the institution to a better place with a shared vision and goal for a major change in the teaching training system in Israel. According to the directors' narrative interviews, the staff felt proud to belong to the college personnel despite the difficulties on the way toward the academization and accreditation of the college.

One of the staff members, the Dean, who worked many years with the two directors said-

"...I felt that both directors were determined and knew where they were leading us to. They dedicated all their time to being 'a leader' in any possible way. They both had a clear vision, high levels of competence and staff management, great courage and therefore were successful in making the significant academic changes needed at their times. They were leaders who did not adapt to the situation but rather changed the situation to their needs. They were in a way pioneers who led the way to generations of educators and students to come..."

Another staff member (a senior lecturer) recalled an event when the male director decided to build a new

'teachers' room instead of the old one that was in use for many years. He took it upon himself to help design it (with the assistance of a professional designer) and to make it a large and comfortable place for pleasant working conditions so that teachers would feel 'at home'..."

### Findings of Case Study I

The narrative interview contributed to the growing awareness on the issue of charismatic 'educational leader' and his/her influence on teachers training in Israel. The directors related to their managerial and leadership abilities and pointed out the personal and professional changes, which affected their years of cadence. As educational leaders, they consciously worked on processes of change in accordance with the political changes and their shifting effect on the educational system. From these stories, we may learn about the goals and characteristics of educational leadership throughout four decades.

The interviewees also reflected upon their actions and recorded their past experiences under duties as well as in other life domains via their narratives. They provided an approximation to their achievements and contribution to the educational field and to teachers training system in Israel. The findings in this study case suggest that a reconstruction of new curricular concepts, values, didactics and content is available via the reflective narratives by the interviewees. Every personal story is primarily a biographic and a personal narrative; yet, we may learn also about the particular historical moment, the emphasis and styles of management, and the managerial styles of operation. Thus, this case study indicates that we may deduce how current teachers training institutions function based upon 'life stories' that code historical moments too.

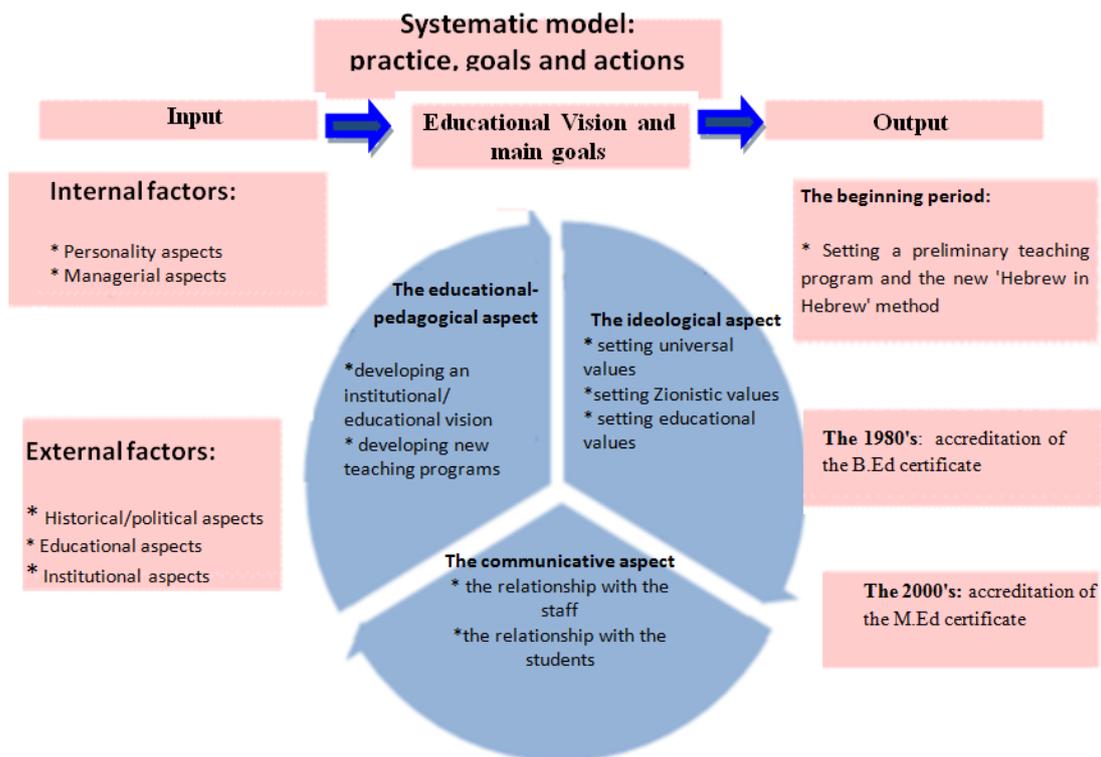


Figure 1. The systematic model: practice, goals and actions

By examining the directors' institutional management, we may extend our knowledge on directorship of academic colleges of education and on the directors' role in specific historical moments. The directors' personal and professional life stories may also contribute to our general understanding of management styles in times of change: during the establishment of the New Hebrew Education System in Palestine, and during the transitional periods of the academization processes and the accreditation of the B.Ed and M.Ed degrees in academic colleges of education in Israel.

These findings are expressed in a 'systematic model' (Figure 1) that depicts the educational actions by the four directors during their term. The model consists of three categories: the input that influenced and led to defining the college's educational vision and the setting of the educational goals; thus, resulting in four significant educational products by the institution: the output. The input factors comprise of internal elements and external ones. The internal elements are: the personality, personal world perception (personal values and vision), the institutional world perception (the organizational vision, goals and aims); the vision and the goals set by the four directors comprise of the following: the ideological/value goals, the educational/pedagogical goals and the communicative goals (building strong and solid relationships with the staff and the students), and the managerial aspects of the four directors (management processes, institutional characteristics and the management characteristics and model). The most common managerial traits shared by all directors are: serving as a role-model, having self-confidence, taking risks, setting values and taking responsibility. The external factors comprise of three aspects: the historical/political aspect, the educational aspect, and the institutional aspect. The output 'products' consist of two products that return to the establishment of the institution: the construction of the first teaching program and the acquisition of new teaching methodology 'Ivrit b'Ivrit' (teaching the Hebrew language only in Hebrew). The last couple of products in the current era are the B.Ed. certificate (Bachelor in Education) and the M.Ed. certificate (Master in Education).

## 5. Case Study II

The second case study focused on preschool teachers in transitional moments. It focused on the personal and professional identities of six preschool teachers who worked in four different cultural environments in Israel: the secular-Jewish sector, the national-religious sector, the Arabic sector, and the Bedouin sector. The information concerning preschool education in these segments of Israeli society is scarce. Hence, the aim of this research was to shed light on the educational work in these fields.

It is rather important to present the Israeli education system to those who are unfamiliar with the Israeli multicultural society and its various sectors. The education system is responsible for all the ethnic sectors but the Orthodox (who have a separate educational system). The other sectors consist of the Jewish national-religious sector and the secular sector, The Arabs (Moslems and

Christians), the Druze sector/community<sup>1</sup> and the Bedouin sector<sup>2</sup>. Each sector has its own supervisors and each preschool has its own principal. The preschool teachers in each sector are rarely in contact with the other sectors and do not share any working connections. Each sector has its own syllabus, education programs, ceremonies and festivals based on their culture and customs.

Based upon the narratives by the six interviewees, this case study revealed a non-prototypical image of their cultural world. Their personal voice (often secretive) expressed the educational discourse of teachers in contemporary Israeli society relative to early childhood education (i.e. parents' growing involvement, social changes, and demographical changes). The life stories presented the complex, and changing role of preschool teachers in the Israeli multi-cultural society, their professional dilemmas, and the ways in which they strive to overcome the difficulties in accordance with the cultural background of their particular sector.

The educational discourse concerning early childhood education in multi-cultural societies such as the Israeli society focuses on two aspects: the importance of early childhood education and the level of parents' involvement in the educational processes that take place in the preschool. The educational dilemmas that constitute part of this discourse were presented by preschool teachers from the various sectors: the preschool teacher in the Jewish secular sector related more to the child's pedagogical development and personal well-being on the one hand, and to her professional development, on the other. She specifically emphasized the parents' demands from her to continue studying and expanding her knowledge academically.

"...I need to continue studying so I can develop professionally and create my own leadership style vis a-vis my staff and the parents. I see myself as an 'educational leader' since I have always led and this is how I am perceived in the eyes of the kids and everyone around me. I need to gain more professional tools and support to position myself as an educational authority..."

The preschool teacher in the Jewish national-religious sector related to the public discussion regarding the various definitions of the term 'religious person' and their importance and influence on the educational process in the

1 The Druze community in Israel is officially recognized as a separate religious entity with its own courts (with jurisdiction in matters of personal status - marriage, divorce, maintenance and adoption) and spiritual leadership. They belong to the Arab culture speak Arabic but they opted against mainstream Arab nationalism in 1948 and have since served (first as volunteers, later within the draft system) in the Israeli Defense Forces and in the Border Police. Worldwide there are probably about one million Druze living mainly in Syria and Lebanon, with 104,000 in Israel, including about 18,000 in the Golan (which came under Israeli rule in 1967) and several thousands who emigrated to Europe and North and South America. The Druze community in Israel has a special standing among the country's minority groups, and members of the community have attained high-level positions in the political, public and military spheres.  
<http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/history-and-overview-of-the-israeli-druze>

2 The Bedouins are an Arab ethno-cultural group, descended from nomads who have historically inhabited the Arabian and Syrian Deserts. The Bedouins are a semi-nomadic group of people. Their name means desert dwellers in Arabic. They live in the southern and northern parts of Israel.

preschool. She also alluded to the following controversial concepts: 'religious identity', 'dressing styles', 'a religious educational role image' and 'different schooling for boys and girls.'

The preschool teacher in the Bedouin sector talked about recent transformations in the sector, such as technological changes: the introduction of computers into the domestic sphere, and the educational development: increasing awareness toward sending toddlers to preschool and to after-school activities; thus, placing the importance of early childhood education as the first priority and acknowledging special education and children with special needs. She emphasized the fact that -

"...Most kids come from low socio-economic background and their parents' level of education is very low, which results in their inability to support their kids in the various pedagogical, developmental and emotional aspects. Therefore, we need to deal with these problems by ourselves..."

The preschool teacher in the Arab sector talked about the general social change and the modernization process in the Arab society that emphasizes the importance of early childhood education and the related difficulties in the classroom toward 'sensitive' subjects such as sex, violence and religion, which are still considered 'taboo' and are not openly discussed among teachers and staff members. Preschool teachers in these sectors tended to talk about cultural differences, as well as the values and customs that distinguish their sectors. They also strongly expressed the ongoing cultural differences in the Israeli society; mainly the different norms and values that separate between the secular Jewish sector and the national religious one. The preschool teacher in the national-religious sector stated that -

".. We need to deal with problems of discipline and violence or with violent kids and sometimes we have to

talk with them about issues they heard on the news connected to rape or sexual harassment. These are educational issues that we can't ignore anymore because of the media and we have to deal with them on a daily basis and it is very difficult for us..."

The preschool teacher in the secular sector stated-  
"... The kids in my preschool come from diverse family models, gay families, divorced families and single mothers and even kids of celebrities from the Israeli media. The most significant change that I see in my 20 years of work is that women today go to work and do not stay at home like they did in the past. They are career-oriented..."

The different narratives indicate that preschool, as a formal institution, expresses in a distinct way the culture in which it is embedded. The dilemmas mentioned by the teachers derive from the local culture and thus express the development of educational and multi-cultural perceptions in early childhood education in the Israeli society since the opening of the first Hebrew Preschool in the year 1898. These dilemmas are still relevant for contemporary educational discourse in early childhood education.

## Findings of Case Study II

The second case study examined the personal and professional identity of six figures in the field of early childhood education in four different sectors in the Israeli society: the Jewish secular sector, the national-religious sector, the Arab sector, and the Bedouin sector. The main findings in this study were based upon content analysis, and they are shown in a model (Figure 2). The findings consist of three subjects: the preschool teacher in an era of changes; the relationship with the Israeli educational system and preschool teachers' support network; and preschool and the educational discourse in the Israeli society.

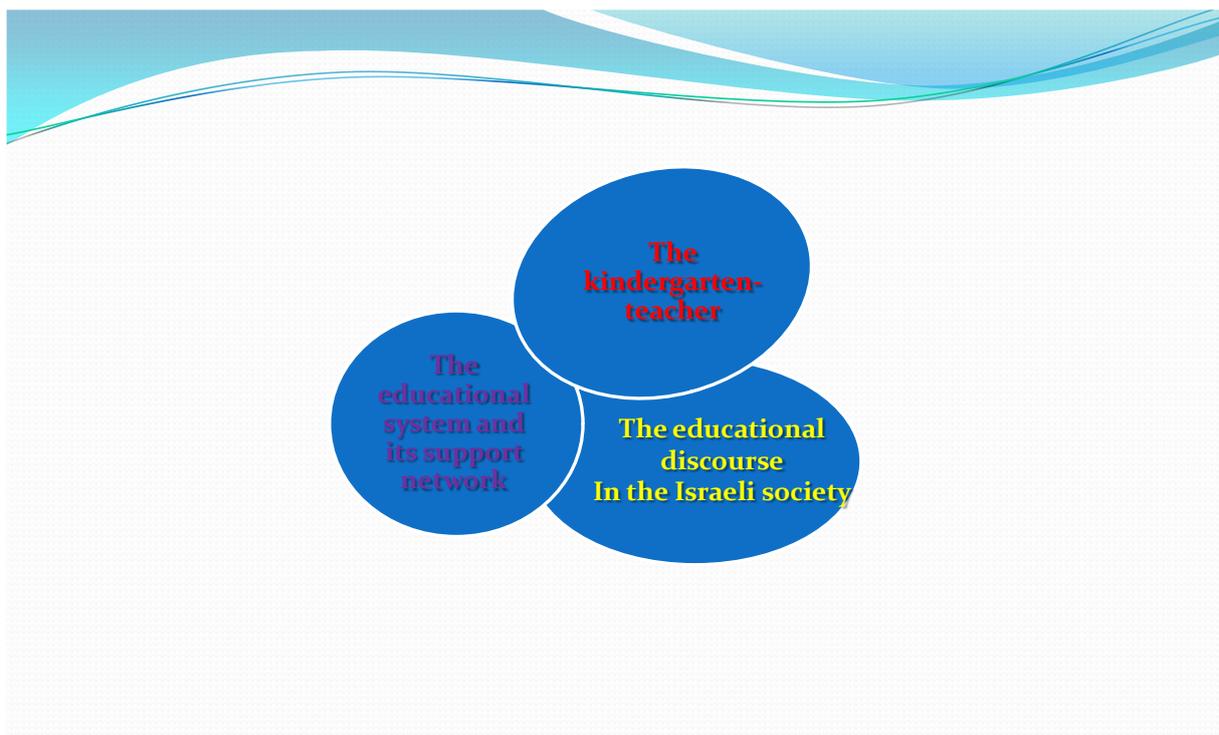
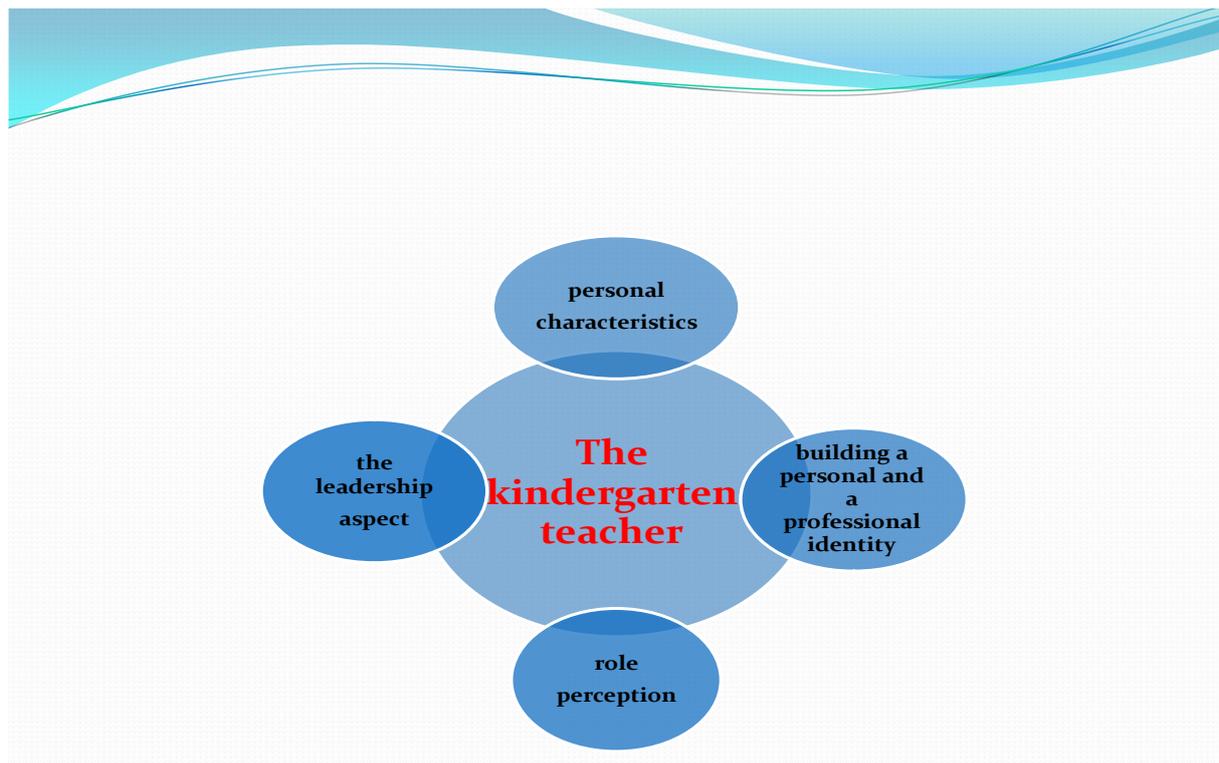


Figure 2. The professional circles of the preschool teacher in the Israeli society



**Figure 3.** The overall image of the kindergarten/preschool teacher in Israel

The first subject introduced the image of the preschool teacher: her role perception and job responsibilities, her emotional aspects, her overall professional identity (which included child self-identity, the preschool self-identity and the identity of the sector where she lives and/or works), and the leadership aspect in her job. The second subject presented the relationship between the preschool teachers and the Israeli educational system in light of various changes that occurred in the society and their effect on the educational system. The last subject presented the educational discourse in the Israeli society regarding early childhood education in its various sectors: the secular, the national-religious, the Arab, and the Bedouin sectors.

The findings offer a portrait of a dynamic preschool teacher (model 3) who is aware of all the different changes and global transitions in general and in the Israeli society specifically. As a result of all these changes, her role perception and her personal identity have sharply changed too. These figures are aware of the changes in preschool as an educational organization in terms of reforms instructed by the Ministry of Education and of parents' growing involvement in decision-making by the educational staff, as well as their particular implications on their work in each ethnic-cultural sector.

According to Siraj-Blatchford and Manni [36], there is a significant gap between preschool teachers' own perception of their role and its implementation in practice due to vague and ambiguous role definitions and the multiple factors and complexity of the various dimensions of their job. It seems that the ambiguity in their role perception, on the one hand, and the autonomy the job entitles, on the other hand, enabled preschool teachers to act according to their own interpretations and beliefs. The interviewees elaborated on their educational vision and beliefs, and their ways of realizing them in cooperation with the 'external arena' (the Ministry of Education and the

community) and with the 'internal arena'- the staff and the parents. It appears that all the interviewees incorporated many characteristics of the 'participative leadership' style [32] in their teaching within the limitations of the open-structured organization in the preschool. They portrayed a sense of trust, belongingness, team work and cooperation with all factors involved. In the interviews, they spoke extensively about the relationships established with their community, and how important it was for them to maintain and preserve the relations with the 'external arena.' They narrated about the children involved in various activities together with the elderly in the community, and programs related to the preservation of the environment. All the interviewed preschool teachers had difficulties perceiving themselves as 'leaders'; yet, they were able to depict 'a bricolage' [25], which included various leadership traits such as: initiation, vision, leading changes, empowerment, cooperation and the willingness to cause a change, which altogether promote authentic leadership. It is probable that since the interviewees had a similar professional background and similar experience in the field of teaching, they expressed these managerial characteristics. All the participants continued their academic and professional development and some even became lecturers at colleges and obtained high managerial positions in early childhood education system.

Three out of the six interviewees related specifically to loneliness in their work that stemmed from the autonomous organizational structure and working structure of preschools in Israel. The interviewees confessed that they had often felt 'alone in the battle' against the authorities and that they lacked professional guidance and personal attitude from the inspector in charge of them or the other preschool-teachers in their first years in the job. As the Arab preschool teacher said:

"...A preschool teacher is always alone. She sometimes does not even know what happens at the neighboring preschool that operates next to her for so many years. You do not know how really good you are, you first feel it from the kids, then you hear it from their parents, but it is not sufficient professionally. Only when my superintendent gave me a compliment I knew for sure I was doing things right..."

The research findings indicate the need to context the feeling of loneliness in various ways: taking after-school courses, continuing their professional development by studying for M.Ed in early childhood education, and guiding new preschool teachers so they could discuss various issues related to the profession. They also initiate activities in the Association for Preschool Teachers in Israel, in order to decrease the feeling of isolation in the field; since unlike school teachers they do not have a 'teachers' room' to convene a few times per day and to engage in social activities, as well as to receive professional support. Maintaining a strong social relationship with the community is another means to decrease their level of isolation, on the one hand, and to strengthen their professional position, on the other hand.

The findings also exposed the implied (or rather hidden) aspect of women's role perception. While often perceiving themselves as 'leaders' and at the same time as 'managers,' beyond a mere semantic issue. The interviewees reflected a personal vision that did not depend directly on their role but rather on their personality and their cultural context. They chose to describe themselves according to the position, which they wanted to create. Among their staff members, they were usually referred to as 'managers'; in front of parents, colleagues and the community, they saw themselves as 'leaders'. They felt it was important for them to position themselves differently in order to be perceived as an 'educational authority.'

The findings present a 'jigsaw puzzle' that represents the inner world of each participant, her professional and cultural world, and her values. This puzzle is entwined in various circles of relationships and connections in the outside world of the preschool, which constitutes the daily environment of preschool -teachers. Thus, it induces the multi-colored educational discourse in relation to the environment where it is located. As in Bronfenbrenner's systems of relations [3] that change and adjust themselves in times of change, and based upon the mental and professional model [29], the findings reflect the inner world of all the actors involved in the educational process: the child, the teacher, the parents and the community.

The role of preschool and preschool teacher as an agent of socialization was also stressed by all the participants. Teaching the children to become individuals who are proud to be a part of the multi-cultural modern society in various ways that expose them to see 'similar' and 'different' human behaviors, and thus educate them to multi-culturalism, justice and social equality, were defined as major goals in their educational vision.

## 6. Discussion and Conclusions

This article explored the role and contribution of narrative interviews in educational research, by studying

its application as data collecting technique in two different case studies: narrative interviews with directors of an academic college of education and with preschool teachers in Israel. Although both case studies may seem relatively remote from each other, they are nevertheless intertwined since they both demonstrate in which way the narrative interview serves as an important methodological tool in the field of history of education. By its mere function, the interview allows people to open up to the researchers in a trusty dialogue that is hardly achieved by other means such as observations, focus groups or any formal documentation may reveal. They want to 'tell their story' and to be heard and the interview presents them with the appropriate platform.

The narrative interviews were viewed as a qualitative research tool that enabled different individuals in different positions and from various social sectors to express their personal voices and to share their professional and personal stories in different time frameworks, thus contributing indirectly to the educational field and history of education. The narrative interview thereby provided access to socio-cultural contexts of certain social groups that share a common culture. By sharing their life stories, the interviewees in this study enabled to gain a better understanding of the educational and socio-cultural contexts in a systematic and methodological manner.

The narrative interview, which was employed in both case studies, presented via life stories the complexity of certain historical transitions in a multi-cultural society. The interviewees were aware of the great responsibilities put on them as educators who were also referred to as 'leaders of change.' The findings in both case studies were based upon 'life stories,' which narrated also the 'collective story' and provided new insights on the life and working habits of a specific sector in the Israeli society.

Moreover, the narrative interview provided 'bottom-up' information on issues such as professional development and learning and teaching. This kind of information is mostly inaccessible in other mediums used by historians such as formal documents. In this way, the narrative interview not only enriched the existing data but also complemented it while establishing wider social and historical relationships. Personal narratives constitute the basic element in describing certain socio-historical phenomena in which the personal biography is anchored. The narratives or the 'life stories' tend to bridge between how researchers perceive 'education' and the historical context in which the educational process generally takes place. Both case studies emphasize the need to share experiences in order to promote personal and social change, and demonstrate how by promoting 'public dialogue' new forms of action can induce a change of social attitudes or religious beliefs [6].

The narrative interviews constituted a central and important tool for understanding the nature and behavior of the interviewees in both case studies. The narrative interview also assisted the participants to reflect upon their working processes and rebuild their past experiences in relation to their duty and self-identity. Additionally, the interviews enabled subjects from different cultural backgrounds and in different professional capacities to express and share their personal and professional stories. Their narratives were often anchored in a certain

social-historical context and, thus, expressed specific standpoints in a particular place and time. The interviews provided access to a socio-cultural context of a group that shared a common culture. Furthermore, they contributed to locate the 'personal voice' within wider social and political contexts. These voices are rarely heard or receive the 'appropriate platform' to be exposed, since they are mostly regarded as 'secluded' or 'isolated' from the general public, as indicated by life stories of national-religious preschool teachers or Arab and Bedouin teachers.

As Goodson and Sikes ([17]: 26) refer to 'the therapeutic potential' of narrative interviews. Goodson argues that in order to understand teachers' development, we need to know more about teachers' lives (1991: 35); moreover, teachers' voices should be heard loudly and articulately ([15]: 112). While examining teachers' daily work, Goodson states that because teachers/directors are the key players in the delivery of all versions of schooling, it is important to listen to their voices 'to understand different perspectives about new moves to reform, restructure and re-conceptualize schooling and the best way to do that is to interview them' (2002, 274-5).

I truly hope that this article allowed teachers' and directors' voices to be heard loud and clear.

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