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NARRATIVE SURVEY: A METHODOLOGY FOR STUDYING MULTIPLE POPULATIONS

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The narrative survey is a qualitative research strategy which offers a method for surveying large populations. While the research community relies on several types of qualitative approaches as alternative research responses to the quantitative types, the survey strategy has been the exclusive domain of positivistic-quantitative research. However, if we seek qualitative understandings in relation to many people, each finding expression as a unique narrative within the survey context, we need to develop a narrative-constructivist alternative to the traditional survey. Narrative survey is such a research strategy which follows the narrative-constructivist approach, uses mainly narrative methods of data collection and analysis, and produces a final narrative report. In this aritcle I describe the narrative survey, bring an example of a study project, and compare it to other research strategies of a similar nature: collective case study, case survey and meta-ethnography, and the "conventional" quantitative survey. (*Narrative Survey, Data Analysis, Data Collection, Mulitple Population, Narrative-Constructivist Approach*)

Surveys are a widely accepted method of research in academia and scholarship as well as in the general public arena (Cohen & Manion, 1989; Fowler, 1988; Hoinville & Jowell, 1977). However, to date, the survey strategy has been the almost exclusive domain of quantitative researchers.

Guba and Lincoln (1998) suggest a distinction between the use of the term "qualitative" as a description of types of methods, and its use in connoting a research paradigm. From their perspective, "both qualitative and quantitative methods may be used appropriately with any research paradigm.

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Questions of method are secondary to questions of paradigm [...]" (Guba & Lincoln, 1998, p. 195). They discriminate between four qualitative research paradigms: positivism, post-positivism, critical theory and constructivism. I have adopted Guba & Lincoln's distinctions and have entitled the research approach presented in this article 'constructivist-qualitative' or have used the term 'narrative-constructivist' – in short 'narrative' – in contrast to the 'positivist-quantitative' approach.

Almost all researchers, qualitative and quantitative alike, see surveys as a means of acquiring quantitative or numerical information on some aspects of the population under examination. This is the "conventional" survey, which is based essentially on the assumptions of the positivistic-quantitative research approach. These assumptions direct researchers to elicit findings that live up to the ideal of a formal mathematical system, which is both context-free and universal. Researchers who have listed the variety of types of qualitative research do not include any type of survey which follows the qualitative approach (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). Tesch (1990) for instance, lists over forty types of qualitative varieties, but none of them include surveys of any type. While the research community relies on several types of qualitative varieties as alternatives to the quantitative types, the survey strategy is the exclusive domain of the positivistic-quantitative researchers.

Nevertheless, many quantitative researchers make use of small-scale qualitative interviews as a basis for developing structured quantitative questionnaires. By means of preliminary qualitative work, they seek to identify the range of behavior, attitudes and issues. These researchers generally use two main methods of data collection: in-depth interviews and/or the focus group. Using the qualitative data from their preliminary studies, researchers are then able to identify the main behavioral groups in the sample, how they should be defined, the phraseology and concepts used by respondents, the variety of opinions on particular issues, the relevant dimensions of attitudes, tentative hypotheses about motivations underlying behavior and attitudes, and so on. Essentially, these researchers use the qualitative stage simply as a means of stimulating or elaborating their ideas. The main and "real" research is still located in the ensuing "conventional" quantitative survey.

Several quantitative researchers have also come to recognize the considerable value of examining attitudes using qualitative methods, and these methods are used over and above their contribution to the design of the large scale structured survey. These researchers acknowledge that a small-

scale qualitative study of 50 or so participants, for instance, can provide useful insights into the nature and parameters of the issues under inquiry (Hoinville & Jowell, 1977). While this combined qualitative-quantitative has merit, these researchers continue to adhere to the positivistic-quantitative approach (Guba & Lincoln, 1998) and their overall treatment of the data continues to rely on quantitative methods. Aside from the qualitative interview, positivistic-quantitative methods (like, for example, having predetermined research questions, statistical analysis and so on) are still used.

One of the most frequent criticisms of qualitative research (even amongst its advocates) is that each research project focuses on a relatively small population. This narrowness of focus indeed arises from the nature of the narrative-constructivist research approach (Guba & Lincoln, 1998; Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). However, while detailed individual narratives, gathered during in-depth interviews, are an important source of data, we sometimes need to survey narratives of large populations if, perhaps, less deeply. The question is not which is the correct research approach, but, rather, what are the researchers' assumptions about the nature of the phenomenon under inquiry and what questions are being asked. Those who adhere to the assumptions of the narrative-constructivist research approach are thus in need of a method to survey the narratives of large populations.

Bruner (1985, 1996) suggests that there are two broad fundamental ways of knowing and thinking in which human beings organize and manage their perception of the world: the positivistic (or in Bruner's termnology the "paradigmatic" or "logico-scientific") and the narrative modes of thought. Each mode of knowledge and thought provides a system for ordering experience and constructing reality. Both provide ways of filtering the perceptual world and of organizing its representation in memory. Efforts to reduce one mode to the other or to favor one at the expense of the other fail to capture the rich ways in which people 'know' and describe events around them (Bruner, 1985).

The 'positivistic' mode is based on the search for universal statements of truth. This mode is primarily appropriate to the natural and physical sciences. On the other hand, the narrative mode (which could also termed 'constructivist' or 'interpretive') is based on the assumption that the rich and complicated phenomena of life and experience are better represented in stories or narratives (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998). Both modes of knowledge and thought are legitimate perspectives on the world, and although different cultures regard them differently, no culture is without both

of them (Bruner, 1996). The positivistic mode seems more adept for relating to physical ‘things’, while the narrative mode is generally more suited to our perception of people and their experience.

The positivistic mode of knowledge and thought, at its most developed, fulfills the ideal of a formal, mathematical system of description and explanation (Polkinhorne, 1995). However, the richness of human events and thought cannot be expressed in definitions, statements of fact, or abstract propositions. It can only be demonstrated or evoked through story (Carter, 1993). Narratives are interpretative tools that constitute a practical, but also highly selective, perspective with which we look at the world around us and give it purpose. Narratives help us to interpret the world (Gudmundsdottir, 1995). People usually encode their experiences in narrative form and they characteristically use stories to explain and justify their thinking and actions. When we think of life as a whole, we tend to think narratively (Clandinin, & Connelly, 2000; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Gudmundsdottir, 1995). Thus, if we seek narrative understandings in relation to many people we need to develop a narrative-constructivist alternative to the positivistic-traditional survey: the narrative survey.

THE PRINCIPLES AND PROCEDURES OF NARRATIVE SURVEY

Narrative survey is a research methodology used by researchers to collect data from large numbers of people’s narratives and to analyze this data as part of the same study (See for example, Shkedi, 1997, 1998; Shkedi & Horenczyk, 1995.)

> Researchers who are primarily interested in comparing cases and want a more systematic approach [. . .] often use methods that look like survey research and appear to rely on the sample-to-population argumentation to generalize. These studies pull together information on a wide variety of cases, rate the cases in terms of “variables” and then look at the associations among the variables using displays or even statistics. (Fireston, 1993, p. 20)

This associational view thus helps the researcher to identify broad patterns across a wide variety of narrative cases. I have called this strategy “narrative survey” to stress its narrative-constructivist assumptions (Guba & Lincoln, 1998) and in order to distinguish it clearly from traditional surveys. Its survey characteristics are very different from those of the conventional quantitative type. It could be argued that in many respects, it is not a “real” survey. I nev-

ertheless use the term “survey” because this strategy, unlike other qualitative research varieties, focuses on the study of a large number of informants.

Researchers tend to favor one of two methods of gathering data: either the nomothetic approach, which emphasizes the quantitative analysis of a few variables from a large sample of cases; or the ideographic approach, which focuses primarily on the qualitative, multi-aspect, in-depth study of one or a small number of narrative cases (Dey, 1993; Larsson, 1993). The narrative survey combines the respective benefits of nomothetic and ideographic approaches in that it yields findings which are more broadly cross-sectional and generalizable than the single or collective narrative cases, while concurrently providing for more in-depth process analyses of the phenomena than is provided by conventional-questionnaire surveys.

The narrative survey strategy is an attempt to integrate the study of the particular with the needs for comprehensive coverage of larger populations and a broader basis for formal generalization. Firestone (1993) argues for three types of generalization from the particular to the general in qualitative studies: [a] case-to-case generalization; [b] generalization from sample to population; and [c] analytic generalization or extrapolation on the basis of a theory. The narrative survey allows for generalization, not only case to case (which is the more common type in single and collective narrative cases), but also generalization to a population and analytical generalization both of which have been the almost exclusive prerogative of the positivistic-quantitative research approach (Kirk & Miller, 1986).

The strength of generalization to a population is that by including large numbers of narrative cases and emphasizing broad cross-case patterns, the researcher is protected from the idiosyncrasies that may appear in single and collective narrative cases. However, in the case of narrative survey, we would not speak of generalization to a population in the same sense as in positivistic-quantitative research. Rather, we develop a special orientation for qualitative generalization (Guba & Lincoln, 1998; Stake, 1995).

Analytic generalization refers to the process of developing theoretical concepts and connections. Researchers who seek analytic generalization will translate their descriptive analysis categories into theoretical terms. By linking the specific research findings to larger theoretical constructs, the researecher shows that the particulars of this study serve to illuminate larger issues and are, therefore, of general significance (Marshal & Rossman, 1989).

The basis for data collection in narrative survey is the assumption that the data we seek to collect is narrative-constructivist by its nature (Bruner, 1996; Clandinin and Connelly, 2000). This data is gathered from people, and focuses on their stories, their explanations for the activities in which they participate, the meaning they give to the phenomena in which they engage, and so on. The narrative-constructivist paradigm is most appropriate for accessing and presenting this type of data.

One of the major concerns of this type of analysis is to understand the informants' world within their context. This type of analysis must be carried out in relation to a cultural setting, because the people being studied take their meaning from their culture. Narrative-constructivist analysis is the process of creating categories from an interpretation of the data. Narrative categorization requires the analyst to create or adapt concepts from and relevant to the data rather than to establish groupings according to a pre-established set of rules and categories (Charmaz, 1995, 2000; Strauss & Corbin, 1990, 1994).

Strauss and Corbin (1990) propose three approaches to analyzing qualitative data that are instructive for researchers and readers of qualitative research. These three approaches can be thought of as being placed variously along a continuum ranging from a low level of interpretation and abstraction engaged in by the researcher, to the higher level of interpretation and abstraction required for theory building. The first approach, which they compare to the work of a journalist, is that taken by the researcher who intends to present the data with almost no analysis. The second approach is a more accurate descriptive work and the purpose of the researcher is to present focused description. The third approach is concerned with building theory. Generally speaking, the narrative survey enables researchers to analyze their data according to each of these three options depending on the purpose of the study and the richness of the data collected. The researchers can use analysis either for a more meaningful presentation or description of the phenomena under inquiry, or for the elaboration of a more theoretical explanation and for grounded theory (Charmaz, 1995, 2000; Straus & Corbin, 1990, 1994).

The purpose of the report of the narrative survey is not to represent each narrative separately, but to bring to light characteristics that emerged from a comparison between a number of narrative cases. The data in the description must be sufficiently descriptive so that the reader can understand what has occurred. The writer becomes the eyes, ears and perceptual senses of the reader. Like in other narrative types of research, the report of the narrative

survey makes extensive use of verbatim quotations. The use of the informants' words is consistent with the narrative research approach, and allows for an authentic presentation of of the people under inquiry.

In narrative survey we need to describe many narrative cases and may also use quantitative methods for description purposes. Nevertheless, we can use them only for those purposes that are consistent with the narrative approach. Most often we use quantitative methods for descriptions that need to designate frequency, either through definite numbers or by the use of percentages. Researchers may find that at times short quantitative descriptions are more focused and clear than a long words description. This does not mean that epistemological differences between the two methodological perspectives, and especially their different criteria for reliability and validity, are ignored (Kuckartz, 1995). Even in instances in which narrative researchers use quantitative methods to describe their findings, the narrative nature of the research is usually preserved.

METHODOLOGICAL COMPARISON BETWEEN NARRATIVE SURVEY AND THREE TYPES OF CASE STUDY

There are many different types of qualitative research, and there is some confusion about their different names. In order to suggest an appropriate methodology for the analysis of and report many single narratives, I suggest the narrative survey and compare it to other research strategies of a similar nature: collective case study (or collective narrative), case survey and meta-ethnography, and the "conventional" quantitative survey as already discussed. The narrative survey strategy "borrows" elements from each of these methods and in many respects is quite similar to them. Nevertheless the narrative survey is a unique strategy and remains quite distinct from these other strategies.

Bellow is a description of each of three strategies, and, by way of comparison, I highlight the unique characteristics of the narrative survey methodology.

Collective case study

The single narrative is a special type of single case study and it is the basic unit of the collective case study. In this type of study, the narrative of the individual person is the "case". In most qualitative research, "cases" are individual narratives or units which share several common characteristics – a family, a tribe, a small business, a neighborhood, a community, an institution, a program, a collective, or a population (Huberman & Miles, 1994). The product of the collective case study is a thick holistic description (narrative). By its nature, the collective case study enables the achievement of a level of understanding and interpretation which is not possible through conventional experimental or survey design (Merriam, 1998).

Stake (1995) identifies two types of case study: intrinsic and instrumental. In the former, we have an intrinsic interest in the individual narrative, not because by studying it we learn about other individuals or about some general problem, but because we need to know more about that particular individual. With an intrinsic case studies, there is little interest in generalizing to other examples or types of narratives. The second type of case study, the instrumental case study, deals with a different situation. We have a research question, a need for a general understanding, and feel that we may gain insight into the question through studying particular narratives. Case studies here are instrumental to accomplishing something other than an understanding of these particular narratives. This is the paradox of narrative cases: by studying the uniqueness of the particular, we come to understand the universal (Simons, 1996). Instrumental case studies aim at some kind of generalization and our choice of informants is based on their potential to be representative (Merriam & Simpson, 1984; Stake, 1995). In narrative survey we are interested mainly in the instrumental type of case study.

Collective case study presents and compares between several single narrative cases. Collective case study may be designed with more concern for representation, albeit that the representativiness of a small sample is sometimes difficult to defend. One of the main characteristics of the collective case study is that, although it deals with several narratives and presents them collectively, each single narrative case is portrayed with its unique features and context. From this perspective one can say that collective case study enhances the research potential of the overall study without forgoing the advantages of qualitative research (Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995; Yin, 1984).

The collective case study yields “thick descriptions” (Geertz, 1973) of several case studies and includes certain types of comparison between them. However, the collective case study is utilized for studying a limited number of narrative cases. Narrative survey offers the field of qualitative research a method for the investigation of a much larger number of narratives.

Case survey

Case survey is a research strategy which synthesizes the results of case studies previously reported upon. This strategy was developed as a means of bringing diverse case studies together within a common conceptual framework in order to enable cumulative findings (Firestone, 1993; Lucas, 1974; Yin & Heald, 1975). This method is also refered to as “the structured content analysis of cases”, or “meta analysis” (Berger, 1983). This approach gives a great deal of attention to measuring and controlling case study findings (Larsson, 1993). The strength of this method lies in its capacity to integrate the findings of diverse narratives/case studies. It is a flexible research method, in which many different types of narrative cases can be brought together, and concepts that the original studies failed to address can be developed and considered (Guba & Lincoln, 1981). The case survey strategy can be used as a secondary form of analysis when numerous relevant case studies are available (Yin, 1984).

The main limitation of isolated cases/narratives is that the insights gained cannot be aggregated in any systematic way. The case survey overcomes this problem by focusing on certain components of the narratives while ignoring their specific contexts and integrating the individual narratives using conventional statistics. The strong appeal of the case survey lies in its ability to transform qualitative evidence into quantitative statements. Because the case survey is based on more than one case/narrative, it also affords the opportunity to generalize (Berger, 1983; Larsson, 1993; Schofield, 1989).

The researcher uses a questionnaire as the research analysis tool, and reviews all case studies or narrative descriptions that have been found to be relevant to the research. The method requires that the researcher test the same set of questions against each case study. The various questions are ‘closed’ to permit easy quantification. The questions are based on the literature and the researcher’s own theoretical perspectives (Berger, 1983). Investigators can select rigorous or loose criteria, depending on the nature of the investigation.

There are nonetheless clear limitations to the case survey method. The number of narratives/cases available that are relevant to any specific question of interest is generally limited. In addition, since the case survey relies on reports of narratives/cases already completed and does not have access to information beyond these reports, data relevant to the survey questions may simply not be available for all of the cases/narratives in the survey. Likewise, the case survey method, with its focus on aggregating information, may not give sufficient attention to the unique factors of the individual cases/narratives. The questionnaire and coding procedures of assigning numbers also simplifies the complex phenomena under investigation (Yin, 1981). However, "coding simplification is a key issue in case survey methodology since it constitutes the bridge from ideograph richness to nomothetic generality" (Larsson, 1993, p. 1519).

Even generalization to other populations (which is perhaps the main reason for using the case survey method) may be problematic. The case survey is unlikely to produce results on which theoretical or statistical generalization may be based. The reason for this is that there is no way to determine the degree to which the existing narratives/cases are representative. Generalization is thus impeded because the selection of individual narratives/cases is beyond the control of the secondary analytical investigator and limited to studies that already have done by others. (Berger, 1983; Yin, 1984). Some of these limitations of the case survey strategy, relating to individual narratives are addressed by the narrative survey.

Meta-ethnography

Meta-ethnography is similar to the case survey strategy in that both aim to synthesize already completed studies. Noblit and Hare (1988), proponents of the meta-ethnography strategy, argue that case survey and other efforts at aggregation tend to ignore the interpretive nature of qualitative research and thus to miss much of what is most important in each study. While the case survey primarily uses quantitative methods to synthesize findings from case studies, meta-ethnography applies qualitative methods to these studies in order to arrive at interpretive, rather than aggregative findings.

Meta-ethnography takes to task one of the main limitations of the case survey: the translation of data in narrative form into quantitative data. Meta-ethnography continues to constitute qualitative research and preserves, as

much as possible, the descriptive-interpretive nature of the original qualitative studies. Meta-ethnography is driven by the desire to construct broad interpretive explanations. It is the translation of the interpretations of one study into the interpretive frames of another. The synthesis of qualitative research should be as interpretive as any single narrative account. Narratives on similar topics can be seen as directly comparable or in unison suggesting a new line of argument. This process includes "a focus on and a listing of the concepts, themes, and metaphors that the author of each study utilizes. The meta-ethnographer lists and organizes these themes and then attempts to relate them to one another." (Schofield, 1989, p. 225)

Many of the limitations of the case survey are still not resolved by meta-ethnography. For example, the number of available studies that are relevant to the specific research questions of interest is beyond the control of a secondary investigator and, therefore, meta-ethnography is unlikely to arrive at findings solid enough to support generalizations. Furthermore, as a process of secondary analysis, meta-ethnography, like case survey, is one step removed from the original "raw material" which may have provided important information and insights to which only a primary researcher could have access. These and other limitations constitute the challenge faced by the narrative survey strategy.

Narrative survey

An example of a narrative survey: Teachers' beliefs about their didactic role. Below is an example taken from a research project focusing on the stories of Israeli Bible teachers, using the methodolgy of the narrative survey. The main method of gathering data in narrative survey, is the interview. However, like other types of narrative study, narrative survey can use also other research methods like observations, document analysis, and so on. This study is based on observations and in-depth interviews conducted with 52 teachers. The sample of interviewees included teachers from the major Israeli orientations: religious, traditional, and secular. While the groups of teachers may not claim to be representative samples of their populations, the relatively large number of respondents provides us with a broad range of views and opinions regarding the teachers of the Bible.

Each teacher was interviewed twice for two to three hours. During the interviews, the interviewer remained focused on a number of topics that

seemed relevant to the study, but allowed the informant to tell his/her story without binding the interview to a fixed agenda of questions in an attempt to allow for the exploration of unique or unanticipated issues that might emerge about the personal and professional worlds of the teachers. Part of the teachers was also observed in at least two Bible lessons. Observations were accompanied by stimulated-recall interviews, so that each teacher clarified and explained what had happened in the lesson, and expressed his or her conception of the teaching process.

The data collected from the 52 teachers was analyzed according to categorization techniques (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) from which there emerged a broad picture of the manner in which teachers perceived the process of teaching Bible. There were three stages of analysis: The first (the initial stage) included a large number of categories which related to issues emerging from the data and reflected my awareness of the theoretical themes investigated in this study. In the second stage (the mapping stage), the data that had been sorted by the initial categorization was classified and ordered according to several main categories.

While in the first stage every narrative is categorized separately, in the second stage, all the cases are categorized congruently. The researchers seek to find connections between the categories on the horizontal and vertical axes on several levels of the categories and their sub-categories. The relationships between categories could be based on several possibilities: causal, contextual or intervening relationships. The lowest categories on the horizontal axis can be specified according to dimensions of prevalence or eminence. In order to see the whole picture and to keep control of the analysis process, the categorization can be represented in a ‘tree’ (see Figure 1).

In the third stage of analysis, careful attention was paid to focus the elements of data into a coherent developmental account around a core category. At this stage, I selected the core category, “Teachers’ concerns in their teaching process”, which included several subordinate categories. Each of the three main sub-categories were related to different aspects of teachers’ concerns in their teaching process; concern with students’ attitudes, with students’ difficulties and with their didactical performance. Each of these three main sub-categories was divided into sub-sub-categories which express the characteristics of the main sub-categories. I then took each of the sub-sub-categories and placed them on a continuum in which the extreme possibilities for the categories’ characteristics became apparent. Most of the categories in

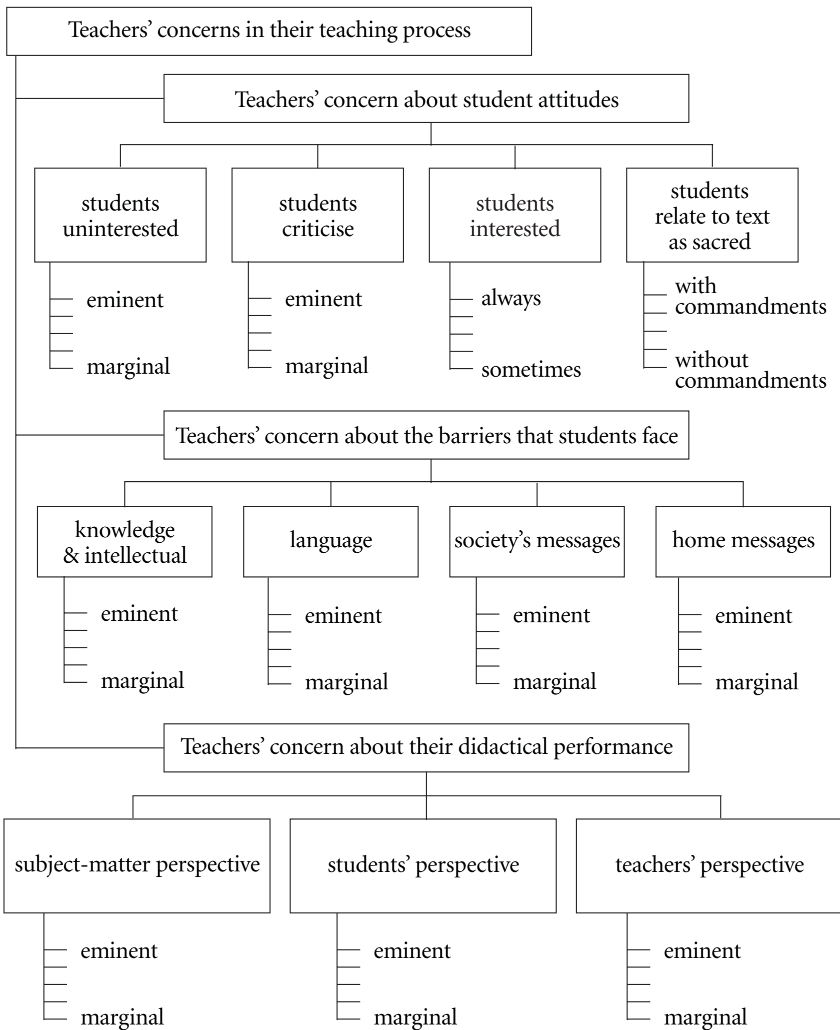

Figure 1

Array of categories

the sample are classed according to the extent of the eminence of the characteristic ('eminent – marginal').

After I had completed the three analytical stages, I had generated a rich description of the categories relating to the 52 participants. All the interviews and observations were analyzed using the same array of categories but, at this stage, each participant was considered as single narrative. In the narrative survey, like in other qualitative strategies that deal with several cases, it is possible to find patterns under the core categories. During the stage of focused analysis, the researcher can determine patterns which are based on the correlation between different categories. By 'correlation' we mean that some groups of narrative cases are characterized by similarities and/or dimensional likenesses of several main categories. Sometimes the patterns are based on a classification of the narrative cases according to the extent to which a certain charactristic of the core category is expressed in each narrative case.

In the following example we introduce three main patterns concerning teachers' beliefs about their teaching role.

a. The teachers' role as a central performer in the teaching process.
b. The role of handling students' cognitive difficulties
c. The role of handling students' indifference and hostility

Although each teacher had a unique personal and professional story, certain patterns were found that showed similarity between different teachers' beliefs about teaching. Almost every teacher (i.e. every personal narrative) expressed a view about: (a) themselves as performer in the teaching process, (b) the handling of students' cognitive difficulties, and (c) the handling of students' indifference and hostility. However, in relation to the degree of eminence and prevalence of each such category, it was found that some teachers emphasized the view that their main role was handling students' cognitive difficulties; others gave more eminence to their role of handling students' indifference and hostility, while yet others characterized their role mainly as a performer in the teaching process. In spite of the fact that almost all of the teachers articulated all of these views, the teachers may be distinguished according to their different emphases, which become the basis for suggesting meaningful patterns.

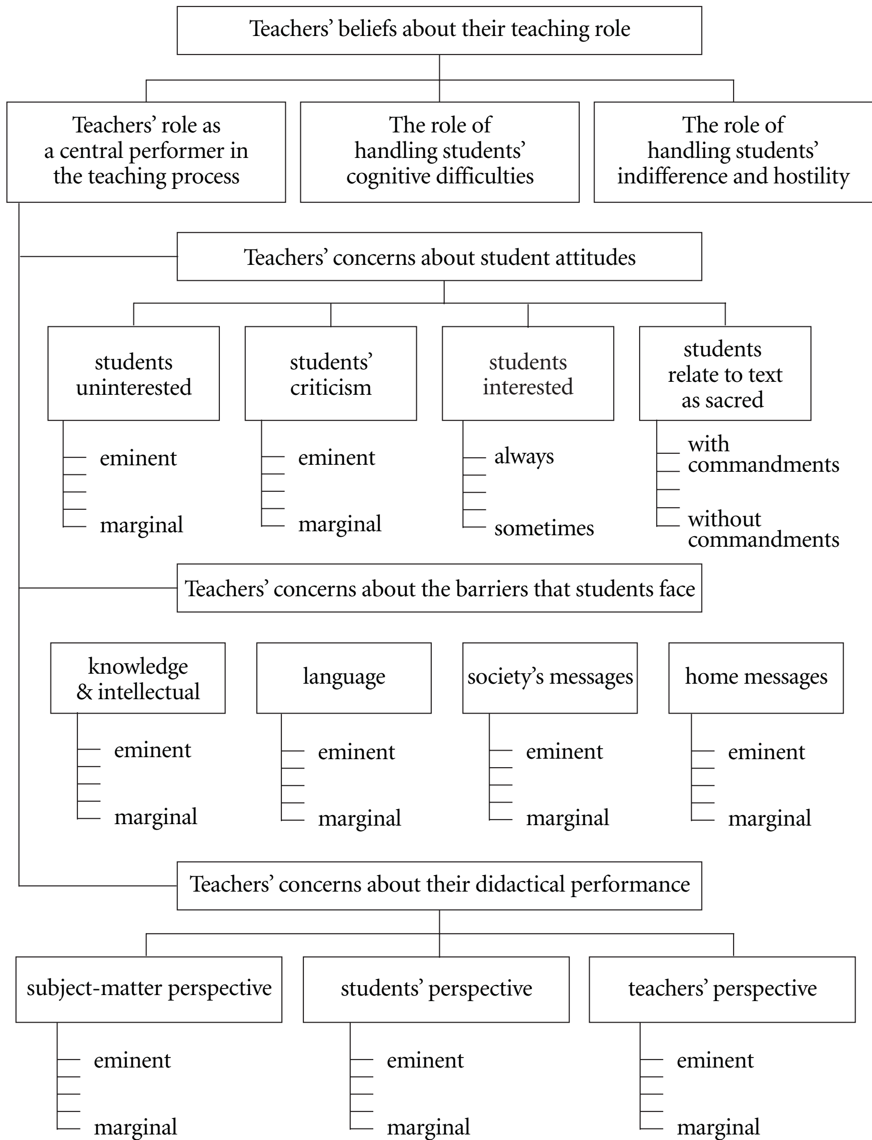

Figure 2

Array of the focused categories

The product of the focused stage is a description of the patterns of teachers' conceptions of their teaching role. This description is built around the core category and uses the families of categories that belong to it. Below is the description of the three actual patterns of teachers' conceptions of their teaching role. For descriptions that need to designate frequency, we find that short quantitative descriptions (either through definite numbers or by the use of percentages) can be more focused and clearer than long verbal descriptions. However, even in the cases in which we use quantitative descriptions, the nature of the description as a whole preserves the narrative mode, as seen below.

a. *The teachers' role as a central performer in the teaching process.* This conception of the teachers' role and responsibility was characteristic of 20 teachers from the study population of 52 teachers. Typical of this group was their overt reference to their role in the teaching-learning process and less reference to student interests, difficulties or hostilities. Informants did not ignore the difficulties that students had in studying the texts, and were not even sure that students were interested *a priori* in the material being taught. The majority of teachers recognized linguistic, comperehension and intellectual difficulties amongst their students. Many pointed out that students *a priori* were not interested in learning. Pnina, one of the teachers, explains:

> Just as with all other subjects in teaching, so it is with texts...When it interests them, they study and listen...If the lesson and the teacher are interesting, they study [...] Students do not want to study at all - That's the starting point... It is the teacher's role to interest and appeal to them (Pnina).

According to many teachers, students study not because the subject interests them, but because the teacher succeeds in moving them towards studying. Certain teachers describe how, little by little, they attracted their students' attention and changed their attitudes from lack of interest to interest in the topic.

> When I first started, they really did not discover the depth and beauty in the Bible, and I think that somehow in these lessons I brought them closer to the beauty and charm [...] in the world of texts there is something nice, if you really know how to teach it properly... (Shimon).

The follwing is a episode from Shosh's lesson. The lesson was dedicate to a historical introduction to the Book of Jeremiah and conducted in the form of a dialogue between Shosh and the students as she tried to extract the information from them:

> Shosh: What is the most important thing that Jeremiah did?
> Student: Religious reform.
> Shosh: Religious reform, great! How was this expressed?
> Student: Concentrated ritual.
> Shosh: Wonderful! What is ’concentrated ritual’? (Writes on board)

Shosh and some other teachers with this conception use the metaphor of ‘actor’ or ‘entertainer’ to describe the teacher’s role and classroom situation:

> [. . .] at that age, they aren’t into these things. The teacher needs to be an actor and entertainer, to do everything in order to rouse their interest, because they are not really into studying. (Elana)

Teachers described how they invested time and effort in planning lessons, trying to make them appealing, encouraging the students and changing the course of the lesson according to their students’responses:

> When I teach a text, it is hard for me [...] because I have to translate it for myself so as to teach it to the children... A teacher cannot take anything for granted or make any assumptions regarding the children. One has to look at who the student is, from where, what he/she knows and does not know [...] to put myself in the childrens’ situation and to think how they would relate... (Lea)

The feeling among teachers that the study process was dependent on them led a good number of them to blame themselves for any failures in attracting the students:

> There are things that are up to me... It depends on how I teach and I need to find a way to rouse their interest [...] if the students are bored it is a sign that I have a problem. I must find a way to interest them.... (Reesa)

Teacher satisfaction arises from the feeling that they can take the students and change their attitude toward the topic from incomprehension to understanding, from hate to love. Some teachers spoke about this process with quite an extent of satisfaction:

> Usually when I’ve been with them for several years, I feel an interaction [...] one of the things that I like is that I’m succeeding in changing attitudes – turning those who ”hate” Bible into ”non- haters”, and making others suddenly discover a world that they thought was closed to them, discover that they have a personal connection to things, that the book ”speaks” to them. Then I feel satisfaction. (Aviva)

b. *The role of handling students’ cognitive difficulties.* Most teachers in the study indicated that students had difficulties studying Biblical texts, but what distinguished the 14 teachers in this category was that for them this

was their dominant concern. Typical of this group were eminent references to student difficulties in the teaching-learning process and less on student interest. Teachers' roles had a narrow scope focusing mainly on the challenge of student difficulties.

> The words, the ideas are abstract [...] Middle school students' level of abstraction is not the highest, so it creates frustration. The frustration leads to lack of motivation and of willingness to work at it [...] It's hard for them to grasp concepts that aren't part of their daily lives... (Nurit).

As mentioned above, most teachers indicated that the main difficulty for the students was linguistic: incomplete vocabulary, incorrect grammatical forms, and complex sentence structures. However the difficulty is not only verbal, but is related to the intellectual struggle with Biblical text. Ruth, one of the teachers, illustrated this kind of students' problems

> The students have a tough problem with understanding the concept of time [...] It is very difficult for them to distinguish between the main idea and the secondary issues (Ruth).

A glance at Ruth's classroom illuminated how Ruth struggled with such cognitive difficulties. Ruth began by reading the chapter.

> I read the section being studied, and it is significant that the children are listening. It focuses their thinking. I read in the correct manner and believe that intonation, punctuation and exactness in reading are very important. They give a different meaning to the text. (Ruth)

When Ruth completed the reading she asked the students to tell the story in their own words. One of the students summarized the contents simply and briefly, and a discussion ensued:

> Ruth: What is the accusation? “Bless God and the King”, that is the accusation. Look at these words. (She writes the words on the board).
> Student: To bless is in the positive sense.
> Ruth: Good, but that does not suit our story, because if Navot blessed, then what is the accusation here?
> (Students throw out all kinds of ideas.)
> Ruth: The word ’bless’ in the Bible has two meanings: positive, as we all know, and negative [...]
> Student: To curse.
> Ruth: Right [...] Navot cursed.

Ruth explained:

> It is not important to me that the children know every word, every meaning. It's important that they understand what is being read [...] As long as the standard of the discussion is maintained and they aren't just saying things thrown out into the air, I'm pleased that the children make associations between current situations and things that we're studying.

Like Ruth, most of this group of teachers claimed that the most difficult learning problems were the requirements that the student had to contend with complex Biblical phrases and an unfamiliar world of concepts and forms of expression. The majority of teachers who perceived the student in this manner saw this difficulty as a significant barrier between the students and Biblical text. Expressions such as "serious obstruction", "gap", "difficult as a punishment", "the text is frightening because of style and writing", "not everyone can get close to a text like this", "the language is like Chinese", "language of a sealed book", "trauma and barriers because of the language" are just some of the expressions that teachers used to describe this difficulty.

Moreover, along with their awareness of the serious difficulties students had, an additional characteristic stood out among teachers adhering to this perception. With proper effort, it seemed to them, the student could reach a satisfactory level of learning and achievement. Among all the teachers who participated in the study, not one viewed these difficulties as insurmountable. Teachers see themselves as committed to dealing with these difficulties.

Most teachers with this perspective indicated relative success in overcoming such difficulties. Teachers frequently describe how they overcome the difficulties of their students, how they adapt the Biblical text to the level and capacity of the students, select suitable texts and emphasize different components of each text.

> The more I study... the more I am conscious of and responsive to the problems of learning: how to read a text, how to present a text, and what problems students have with reading texts (Shira).

More than any other factor, most of these teachers described their didactic struggles with ways of teaching Biblical texts in their attempts to overcome students' difficulties. Teachers mentioned their use of several methods: precise reading, practice, emphasis on the main points of the text, and leading questions, among others. In their view, the key to success lay in assisting stu-

dents to overcome the objective difficulties in the process of their encounter with Biblical text.

> It is important to introduce the text in stimulating ways. [. . .] first of all it is written very densly and the language is not easy at all. So, we have to relate to the text in segments and go over it slowly slowly, to explain difficult words [. . .] The students need very complex comprehension skills, like cause and effect, hypothesis and verification. (Lea)

c. *The role of handling students' indifference and hostility.* Although the majority of teachers in this research stated that students were uninterested in studing Biblical texts, what distinguished this group of 18 teachers was that this characteristic dominated their conception of the students, overshadowing all other teaching-learning components. Typical of this group of teachers was the pronounced reference to student attitudes in the teaching-learning process and less reference to student cognitive abilities and difficulties. Rivka, one of the teachers, described her students' reaction in the course of studying Bible:

> Not interested, irrelevant, despite what I do, for the most part the text will interest some of the students, for most of the children it is not important [...] they make sure to shout out their lack of interest; usually: 'What do we have to do with this text?' I haven't found any text to which they immediately respond [...] (Rivka)

Teachers' conceptions of the struggle with students' indifference and hostility contain two components: First, the student does not take an interest in studying Biblical texts, and the teacher usually does not succeed in awakening any significant interest. Second, despite the fact that students do not show an interest, teachers succeeded, more or less, to get the students to absorb and master the basic material.

Amira, a Bible teacher, taught ninth grade twice a week in a public school in the center of the country. Addressing contemporary issues was very important to Amira and she believed that this brought students closer to the texts. She was convinced that teaching Jeremiah is important because it is relevant. However, Amira was aware that the circle of interested students was quite small:

> [...] Always when I start the first day of teaching Bible, the answer I get is: 'There is no reason, it's just nonsense, it's past and pointless, and math is more important' [...] also the subjects are irrelevant to them in an emotional sense [...] why would a child be interested in the destruction of the Temple? [...] How can they identify with a prophet from whom they are removed by age and time? (Amira)

As if to contradict the above, there was a sudden awakening of sorts in the class observed. A student raised his hand and asked permission to speak:

> Student: Can I ask something?
> Amira: Yes.
> Student: Can you please characterize Jeremiah's image in light of all this?
> Amira: Would anyone like to answer him? [Students talk among themselves.]
> Student: When I have to describe a figure in an exam, how do I go about it?

There was no doubt that the school routine, through the rules, exams, and obligations it places on the students, helped in maintaining a learning framework in fields that students did not find interesting. Amira was aware of this and took advantage of it for her own purposes.

> I encourage them to study texts by heart and for this they receive bonus points. They study for the grade, but in fact they gain familiarity and proficiency in the material [...] (Amira)

Many other teachers suggested that the lack of interest and the prevalence of objections to Biblical study were occasionally a result of students' prejudice against religion. Some teachers explained that they attempted to vary lessons as much as possible in order to attract their students. Many pointed out that they also tried to emphasize the connection to the student's everyday world. Part of their effort to close the gap between their students' life experiences and the Bible was to be open to students' criticism:

> [...] I listen to the criticism, and when I do, I ask that students explain why they feel that way, and what bothers them, and I'm always ready to hear the reasons. Despite this, there is hostility and provocation. (Adva)

Thus, these teachers stated that their efforts had invariably failed to lead to hoped-for results. Some teachers tried to take comfort in the fact that even if students would not take an interest, at least they would know and understand the text. Nevertheless, despite their frustration, the teachers could not be described as apathetic. Like their colleagues, most of these teachers saw themselves as having an important and even determinant role in the teaching process.

CONCLUSION

The research project that is described above used the methodology of the narrative survey for studying teachers' beliefs about their didactic role. The

other research strategies that were also discussed above would deal with this research question in different ways. In order to display the common and different characteristics of each research strategy, we present Table 1 below.

As Table 1 demonstrates, the narative survey, like collective case study, includes the main components of narrative-constructivist research which are: data collection (case survey and meta-ethnography use research already completed), and analysis of the “raw” data (case survey and meta-ethnography draw on reports of completed case studies). While in the research project that is illustrated above we used 52 informants, in collective case study, we generally use only a few informants. The ability to study multiple populations is the main advantage of the narrative survey over the single and collective case study. Like case study and meta-ethnography, the narrative survey uses the narrative-constructivist approach in all stages of the research, including the stage of comparison between many narrative cases in a survey manner. (Case survey uses positivistic-quantitative techniques for comparison between the cases.)

The narrative survey is like the case survey and meta-ethnography in that it focuses on many narrative cases. However, it is unlike these research strategies in that it preserves its qualitative nature in addition to providing access to the primary-raw data. While every single participant in collective case study is investigated in as much depth as possible and every single narrative preserves its context and identity, the multiple participants of the narrative survey provides the sought-after conclusions on the basis of a broad span of participants and has no need for in-depth, narrative-by-narrative, details. Since the narrative survey is based on multiple participants, it can argue more persuasively for some extent of qualitative generalization to population (Firestone, 1993; Stake, 1995), which collective case study obviously cannot.

We could indeed have used the traditional quantitative survey for investigating the subject at hand. We could have found a sufficient number of interviewees and asked them to fill out formal questionnaires and even have interviewed them with through semi-structured interviews. However, in using the positivistic-quantitative approach for collecting data and its analysis, the picture that we would have arrived at, compared to the study that we conducted above using narrative-constructivist methods, would have had less depth and would not have uncovered many of the “secret stories” (Clandinin & Connelly, 1996) that form part of the informants’ world. These types of data can only be revealed through in-depth oral qualitative interviews,

TABLE 1
Comparison between the five types of research

	Collective case study	Case survey	Meta-ethnography	Conventional-quantative survey	Narrative survey
The research approach	**Inductive-interpretive**	**Deductive-Quantitative**	**Inductive-interpretive**	Mainly **Deductive-Quantitative**	**Inductive-interpretive**
Type of data	Use of **primary "raw"** data	Use of **secondary-interpretive** data	Use of **secondary-interpretive** data	Use of **primary "raw"** data	Use of **primary "raw"** data
Varieties of data	Variety of **triangulation** data: observations, interviews and documents	**Descriptions and conclusions** taken from final research reports	**Descriptions and conclusions** taken from final research reports	Mainly **structured questionaire** sometimes interviews	Mainly **interviews**. Sometimes also observations and documents.
Procedure of data collection	Use of **qualitative methods** for data collection	Use of **data already collected**	Use of **data already collected**	Mainly use of **quantitative methods** for data collection	Use of **qualitative methods** for data collection
Sample	Based of **sample of selected "new" informants**	Based of **sample of existing studies**	Based on **sample of existing studies**	Based on **random statistical** sample	Based on **purposeful sample of selected "new" informants**
Case context and identity	Every single case **preserves** its context and identity	Every single case **loses** its unique context and identity	**Dependent** on the number of cases	Every single case **loses** its unique context and identity	Every single case **preserves** its context and identity **in general**
Methods of data analysis	**Qualitative-**based methods	**Quantitative-**based methods	**Qualitative-**based methods	**Quantitative-**based methods	**Qualitative-**based methods
Representation of cases in the final report	**Combination of single and collective** case representation	**Statistical** representation of **cross-elements**	**Dependent** on the number of cases	**Statistical** representation of **cross-elements**	**Narrative cross-case** representation
Claim to generalization	**Case to case** and **analytic qualitative** generalization	**Formal** generalization to **population** (or sites)	**Dependent** on the number of cases	**Formal** generalization to **population** and **analytic generalization**	Qualitative generalization to **population**, **analytic** and sometimes **case to case** generalization
Number of cases	From one to **not more than ten**	From **ten to several tens** to **hundred and several hundreds**	From **two to several tens**	From **several tens** to **several hundreds** up to **several thousand**	From **ten to several tens** to **hundred and several hundreds**

using qualitative-based methods for analysis and narrative cross-case representation.

It therefore seems that for many research projects and goals, when we aim at a broad and in-depth picture of the phenomenon under inquiry, using the strategy of narrative survey is the appropriate, if not the only, choice.

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