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Article

## Analyzing Teachers' Stories

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### Abstract

This article presents an integrated socio-literary approach as a way to analyze work stories. It uses a case of teachers' stories about the administration as an example. The stories focus on grumbles about various activities of members of the management of a school in a small town. The complaints appear in descriptions of the action, the characters, and, in particular, in the way the story is presented to the audience. The stories present a situation of two opposing groups—the administration and the teachers. The presentation of the stories creates a sense of togetherness among the veterans and new teachers in the staff room, and helps the integration of the new teachers into the staff. The veterans use the stories as an opportunity to express their anger at not having been assigned responsibilities on the one hand and their hopes of such promotion on the other. The stories act as a convenient medium to express criticism without entering into open hostilities. Behind them, a common principle can be discerned—the good of the school. The stories describe the infringement of various aspects of the school's social order, and it is possible to elicit from them what general pattern the teachers want to preserve in the school.

**Keywords:** narrative analysis, data analysis, educational research

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### Introduction

This study deals with teachers' stories about the school administration as they are told in the staff room, and presents an integrated analyzing method to understand these work stories.

The huge range of inter- and multi-disciplinary fields dealing with stories has naturally given birth to a wide range of research methods arising from the researchers' varying backgrounds.

Bauman (1986) explains the multiplication of these research methods in terms of the special attributes of the story. He believes that every story appears twice: first, in the happening itself in which the story occurs – that is, the event that is related – and second, during the presentation of the event to others – that is, the telling of the story of the event.

One can also roughly distinguish two general approaches to analyzing stories: the first concentrates on the story itself, while the second, so Bauman contends, emphasizes the presentation of what happened to

others and the social background of the event, while the second concentrates on the story itself. The first approach deals with the story: its structure, its content, the methods and words that the narrators use to build the story. This approach can be seen mainly as literary approach seeing the story as separated from the socio-cultural background it was presented in. The second approach sees the story as a part of a wider socio-cultural whole. Here the stress is on the connection between the narrator and the audience, the place, the time and the way it is narrated. Here, it is not the story that is important but the performance as a way of communication within a specific socio-cultural connection.

Each approach stresses one side of the story, and ignores the other. In this study, I have chosen to use Langellier's (1989) approach, which states that the best way to analyze stories is by a combination of a number of research methods that together present a more detailed and better picture. According to her, I suggest the integrated socio-literary approach as a way to analyze work stories. In this article, I will present an example of this approach using the case of teachers' stories about the administration. I shall describe the background and the situation from which the stories are derived, and perform a textual analysis on the stories themselves. Thus, I shall attempt to clarify the functions they fulfill.

These stories are a way of presenting and maintaining the school's social order by telling and retelling them in the staff room. The staff room is an 'out of context' place, where teachers sit and tell each other about things that have happened in other places, choosing only those parts of the situation that suit their purpose. They present their stories and anecdotes while sitting together and chatting informally (Kainan 1994).

A story is a complex phenomenon: On one hand many elements are expressed whereas others are totally excluded. Here I will show how these stories reflect the socio-cultural world of the teachers, the way its micro politics are presented in the staff room, and the meaning teachers attach to their relationships with the administration and the administration role at school.

### **What is a story?**

A story is defined as an anecdote of limited scope with a concentrated, single-track plot, reaching a rapid climax and then quickly subsiding. The plot is based mainly on an external event or happening, centered on a principle character (Ochmani, 1992). This definition, which is based on literary criticism, focuses on those elements in the story that literature requires – plot and characters. However, it does not address the question of a story's length. It states that a story is of a limited scope, but it is not clear what is considered to be its minimum length. In the field of language, the most often quoted definition of a story is the classic definition given by Labov (1967). He defines a personal story as one of the methods by which some previous personal experience is transmitted by means of a verbal description. The attempt is to reconstruct a past experience, fitting a series of verbal constructs in a certain order to a series of events that (one may assume) actually occurred. Labov emphasizes that the structure of adapted constructs provides an answer regarding the question of the length of the story by defining a minimal story as a series of two constructs in temporal order. Ochmani and Labov have a different view of the internal elements that comprise the story. However, they both agree that the story is a complete unit that links events and actions together, and its meaning must be understood from the whole story, and not from a certain sentence in it. Polanyi (1985) stresses that a story is related for a particular reason, "to make a point" as she notes, or to transmit a certain message.

For the purpose of this study I use the definition of a work story as a reconstruction of a personal experience associated with work, by means of narrative constructs in a temporal order, containing a plot and characters and having a certain message.

## **The work story**

What Langellier (1989) calls a "personal experience story" and Stahl (1989) calls a "personal story," – that is, dealing with the autobiographical experience of the narrator – covers a very wide field. It contains subdivisions into categories, one of which is the work story with which we are concerned in this study. Langellier (1989) defines work stories as belonging to the group of personal experience stories, but centered on the specific area of work. They lie on the boundary between the private and public domains, where the personal experience story is also part of a social process and the acts bridge between personal and collective meanings (Lumski-Feder, 1997). For example, stories told by photocopier technicians are shared by the technicians as they move from one site to another, and these stories create a codex of accepted work rules, methods and solutions (Orr, 1987). Likewise, work stories told by firemen are defined by what situations they tell them in and to whom they are permitted to tell them (McCarl, 1987). Another example of stories crossing the public and private domain is psychologists and therapists in an institution and the stories they tell each other about the meetings held there (Schwartman, 1984).

Together with the interest in work stories, much interest has developed in school-related stories. Zabar-Ben Yehoshua and Dargish (2001) used the term the narrative revolution, while others talked about its meaning to teaching. It was suggested that this kind of research contributed to the description of teaching and teacher education (Elbaz-Luvitch, 2001) and to teacher thinking (Behar-Horenstein, 1999). The term story was presented as defining method and object of inquiry in teaching and learning (Carter, 1993). Stories told by teachers to their pupils during classes have also been investigated. Some works describe the moral aspect of these stories and the messages they transmit to the pupils (Jackson 1987, Egan 1988). Another area of research about school stories is that of stories that pupils tell about school. Pupils tell stories about moral dilemmas they faced, how they solved the dilemma, and how useful the stories were in the pupils' moral education (Tappen & Brown, 1989). Elementary school pupils who are about to transfer to secondary school tell myths and scary stories, and those students lose their fears by means of these stories (Delamont, 1989). There are also stories about how the educational system influenced students' lives (Lieblich, 1998).

All these examples deal with a small part of the general societal process known as public education, and its connection with the personal experiences of individuals in school. This study links the societal field called "work" with the field of personal experience, via the work stories from school. The most prominent research in this area focuses on the linkage between personal autobiography, or the story of personal life experiences, and work in schools. Recently, two broad descriptive articles dealing with this subject from two different points of view were published in Hebrew (see Zabar-Ben Yehoshua & Dargish, 2001 and Elbaz-Luvitch, 2001). Connelly and Clandinin (1994) discuss how teachers' and students' personal stories are central to teacher education and to the improvement of school. They also investigate the connection and the influence that these stories by teachers and administrators have on their attitude to their work, and how they view their roles. Others presented the importance of the personal histories, as a medium, method, and milieu to better understand teacher preparation and development (Knowles & Holt-Reynolds 1991,1994). They deal with the influence of previous life experience and employment history on the thinking and practice of beginning second-career teachers (Novak & Knowles, 1992), or focused on stories of failure of beginning teachers (Schmidt & Knowles, 1995). Another aspect of life histories is self-study and its importance to professional practice (Knowles & Cole, 1994). Trapedo-Dworsky and Cole (1995) analyze the teaching practice of one of the authors and link her pedagogy with her personal history. They stress the dual role of self-study as a form of professional development and as research. Dealing with teachers' career stories to understand teachers' professional development and its political meaning (Kelchtermans, 1993; Kelchtermans & Vandenberghe, 1993, 1996) or describing ethical dilemmas of teachers (Dushnik & Zabar-Ben Yehoshua, 2000) are part of these studies.

Another type of schoolwork story centers on the school as a workplace with various workers who talk to each other about their work. According to this approach, they are school workers just as the photocopier technicians are company workers and the firemen work for the fire department. Since their principal meeting place is the staff room, this is where many of their work stories are heard. The teachers, who come to the staff room during their breaks between lessons, tell each other about the incidents of the day. The stories generally relate what has happened to the teachers in the classroom, with reference to individual pupils, a group of pupils, or the whole class. Another group of stories centers on the relationships between the teachers themselves in the workplace (see, for example, Kainan, 1992, 1995).

In this study, I investigated personal stories of teachers telling of their experience with the management of the school. The study is based on personal, individual, informal, daily experiences of teachers, by means of which one can come to understand a social group and its social attitudes.

## **Methodology**

### **The Research Population**

In the 1950s, with the arrival in Israel of a large-scale wave of Jewish immigration, and as part of a governmental policy of population dispersal, a new township, which I shall here call "New Morning", was established in the southern region of Israel. The goal was to set up a center in which the local community would send their children to school, do their shopping, and make use of the health and local government services. A further aim was to supply a reservoir of workers for the surrounding settlements and the regional services. The first wave of Jewish immigrants, who came and settled in the township in 1955, were mostly from North Africa, and to which were added, over the years, a few people from other countries. In the late 1980s, the population registry showed 81% of the citizens of the town were of North African origin, 8% Persian and Indian, 9% from countries of Eastern Europe (mostly Romania and the former Soviet Union), and 2% Israeli born. Today, the town numbers some 25,000 inhabitants and, in recent years, many new residents have come from the former Soviet Union (no accurate data yet available). Despite the recent waves of immigration, the determining group in terms of numbers and culture is still that from North Africa. Large families with an average of 5.2 family members characterize the town.

The determining settings are mostly those of family and social ties and are largely based on common historical origins. Despite the size of the families and the incoming immigration, there is a negative migration balance, with the younger and more capable people leaving in order to do better elsewhere.

New Morning has a particularly low image in its own eyes and in the eyes of others. It suffers from severe unemployment problems. The principal industry that had been established was textiles, with a little additional agricultural industry. Despite the low wages paid to the workers in these branches, more local companies are closing than opening. The town has one of the highest rates of unemployment in Israel (the sources of statistics are divided as regards numbers and percentages, ranging from 15% to 40%, depending on the source). The name of the town occasionally hits the media headlines, in relation to neglect by the government poverty and unemployment.

## **The Educational System**

Education in Israel is compulsory and free from the age of 5 to the age of 15, and free from the age of 15 to age of 18. Compulsory grades start with 1 year of kindergarten, followed by 6 years of elementary school and 3 years of junior high school; 3 more years of high school are free but not compulsory. There are two parallel systems –secular and religious, and parents can choose which school system their children attend. The dual system also means that in every area there have to be two schools, even if the amount of children in a particular school is small. In most of the country, the comprehensive system rules and in every municipality children from prosperous neighborhood are mixed with those from poorer neighborhoods. However, if the whole municipality is poor (as is the case of New Morning), the school will be a feeder school for that area only. In the elementary and in part of the junior high school, the classes are heterogeneous. In many junior high schools and most of the high schools, there are different systems of streaming and grouping that are aimed at separating those who will or will not pass the matriculation exams and continue to higher education.

The Israeli education system is very centralized. All schools get a fixed budget from the ministry of education and the local authorities, according to the number of students enrolled. More budget money can be obtained for schools that have special problems or those that have special programs designed to meet the needs of specific criteria. High schools are divided into classes and every class has a homeroom teacher responsible for it. All classes of the same form have a form coordinator and all teachers of the same subject have a subject coordinator.

The educational system of New Morning includes several kindergartens and elementary schools, both religious schools and secular ones. The secular comprehensive high school was founded as a two-year high school in 1960. In 1973, it became a six-year comprehensive high school with 82 teachers and 679 students. Because of its situation in a development town, the school gets a higher budget from the government. There is a lot of help for weak students and investments in enriching their cultural background. However, the school has a bad reputation for low achievements and a high dropout rate. The local municipality has various ways of dealing with the school's problems, one of which is to change the principal every three or four years. This change is accompanied by a change of members of the administration. The 8<sup>th</sup> principal is now in her second year.

## **The Teaching Staff**

The teaching staff of the school includes both regular teachers and those with extra responsibilities. The latter are considered having a higher status than the regular teachers. Some of them are also members of the management and assume more than one position of responsibility (for example: level coordinator, home room teacher, subject coordinator, project coordinator, and so on). There are 15 holders of such advanced positions, with all the other staff being regular teachers. Of the regular teachers, 25 are relatively new, with formal educational qualifications that are greater than those of the veteran's teachers. Some of the advanced position holders and some of the veteran teachers are outstanding for their rich experience (three have been with the school since it opened and two studied in the school themselves). Most of the veteran teachers and all the advanced position holders are local residents (some were even born in the town), live close to the school, and their family members are, or were, pupils. These local veterans come from families with similar backgrounds and there are various family and social links between them. These relationships find expression in shared meals and parties, and in meeting at various family events such as weddings, barmitzvas (confirmations) and britot (circumcisions). A few of the veterans, and all of the new teachers, are not locally raised, coming from other settlements, principally from the regional capital. Their family backgrounds are varied and none of them belong to the social network described above.

## **Collection of The Stories<sup>1</sup>**

The stories were collected in the school's staff room over a period of five months, during conversations in the recess and breaks, in the form of participatory observation. One of the (female) teachers collected and recorded the conversations that took place in the staff room. From these, the stories were classified. They dealt with parents, pupils, the families of the teachers themselves, and, in particular, stories about the management (of 30 complete stories, 15 were about the latter). Such stories can be found in many staff rooms in Israel, but here the percentage of stories about administration was higher. None of the storytellers were advanced position holders and the stories were told in small groups of two or three people who sat together in the staff room during recess and breaks. Members of the administration do not sit in the staff room and only go in when they need one of the teachers.

As far as we know, there has not been any major confrontation between the teachers and the administration of the school. The stories were told as a reaction to ordinary daily problems. The villains of the stories were different every time, and the hero of one story becomes the villain of another. Also, the stories were told by men and women and against men and women alike so that it is difficult to see any gender problems. We did not try to check 'who is right' in each situation because we wanted to see what the stories would tell us about this school.

The Hebrew language is in many ways a very direct and harsh language. It reflects a culture where frankness or saying directly what one means is considered a virtue. Neither understatement nor euphemism is used as means of 'softening' descriptions of people or situations. This is in direct contrast to the English culture, which is often implied, and this difference must be taken into consideration when reading this article.

## **Findings**

The stories deal with grumbling about the way the administrators behave in the school. This grumbling appears in the storylines, the characters and, especially, in the way the story is presented to the listeners.

### **The Storyline**

All the stories have a similar plot, describing some conflict between the teacher/narrator and one of the administrators. The stories describe inappropriate conduct on the part of the administrator and the response of the narrator to these behaviors. When all the stories are collected, a detailed list of misdoings is produced:

- Ignoring telephone requests;
- A badly organized school trip;
- Unruly children at a ceremony without a supervisor;
- Shouting at pupils;
- A pupil who prevents class work and is not dealt with;
- No substitute is found for a teacher going on maternity leave till the last minute;
- A blackboard unrepaired for a long time;
- Unruly children;
- Lack of clarity about who is sent to supervise children's activities;
- Unclear instructions and memoranda;
- Inequality in various payments.

The storyline focuses on the teacher's attempt to deal with the grievance by means of applications to, and conversations with, the administrators in an effort to rectify the situation.

### The Characters

There are at least two characters in each of the stories: the villain of the story, one of the administrators, and the narrator, who is the hero. The attributes of the villain are not directly described, but are portrayed by means of his or her actions and statements, with no direct reference to his/her personality. An additional way of presenting the villain is by analogy to the hero of the story. The hero is also presented by means of recapitulating actions and statements. There is hardly any direct reference to the hero's feelings or thoughts, his or her character being conveyed by the description of the actions and statements.

Story Number 18 gives an excellent example of the characters and their portrayal:

A grade 7 mechanechet [homeroom teacher] is sitting in the staff room and talking to a colleague, also a grade 7 homeroom teacher:

*I wanted to take Sunday off – Memorial Day for the Fallen Soldiers – I didn't teach on the Friday before, so I wanted to go and visit my parents for 4 days. I phoned the form coordinator three times to get permission and she never got back to me. What a way to treat people! The fourth time I called – I finally got hold of her, and she said, "No way! You're a mechanechet (a homeroom teacher), I don't know what to say to you. Talk to Judy [the principal of the school]."*

*It's unthinkable that a mechanechet should be absent on Memorial Day.*

*I applied to the acting principal on that day and asked him to find me a substitute and he agreed right away. I called the coordinator at once and told her I had found a substitute. She agreed but only after she'd spoiled the trip for me. What lack of coordination between the administrators!*

There are three characters in this story, the level coordinator (villain), the narrator (heroine), and the acting principal. The coordinator is presented through her actions: she doesn't call back, she "spoils the trip" for the heroine, and, in the denouement, gives her permission. She is also presented through her statements: she objects in principle to the day off, on the grounds that the heroine ought to be present on Memorial Day because she is a mechanechet. At the same time, she does not give a flat refusal and instead sends her to the headmistress to make the decision. Her character is further accentuated by analogy to the heroine:

Heroine	Coordinator
Phones 4 times	Didn't call back
Asks permission to be absent	Does not agree but sends her to the principal
Applies to acting principal	Agrees after "spoiling the trip"

The heroine is presented as someone with a modest and not unreasonable request, but who is required to waste time and effort as a result. She is presented as the blameless protagonist who has been "given the run-around". Interestingly, in most Israeli schools it is customary for a homeroom teacher to accompany her class to ceremonies and other events, especially those of Memorial Day, so in this case, the request was not customary. In most schools they would not have given her permission, so the offer to ask the principal can be seen a generosity by giving her another option.

The coordinator is presented as one who causes the heroine unnecessary bother, doesn't reply to the phone calls, does not agree to the request, sends her to the principal, and finally, after all the running around, gives her consent. By means of the analogy, two characters are presented, one the victim and the other the villain who refuses to give her permission to be absent. Another analogy is given in the description of the acting principal's response. In contrast to the lengthy description of the coordinator's actions, we have one 4 word sentence, "he agreed right away". The teller offers us here an example of a different possible response: instead of "giving the run-around", it is the opposite "agreeing at once". She thus reinforces the "run-around" element in the villain's actions. As a result of the confrontation between the two characters, both undergo a change, which is also an analogy. Initially, the teacher wants to go and the coordinator objects. By the end, the coordinator agrees, but the teacher has changed her mind.

### **The Presentation of the Story**

The main criticism of the management is shown in the way the story is told. The criticisms are both open and veiled, and take several main forms: as an introduction to the story; during the course of the narration itself; or as a conclusion or coda to the story.

#### *Criticism as Part of the Introduction*

This form of criticism is found in only three of the stories. In these instances, the narrators begin with a general announcement explaining the reason for the story and why it is important to tell it. Only then is the story itself related. Here, for example, is Story Number 1.

A veteran language teacher is talking to two other veteran teachers:

*I'm in shock. I can't understand such discrimination. Galit just told me she gets five hours administration [extra pay] for helping the school trips coordinator. And when I took on language coordination of grades 7 and 8, they told me there are no compensation hours. Only a 5% pay increase. [Reference here is to payment in the form of overtime for tasks related to organizing school studies, mostly the task of the coordinator of school trips, which is considered much more demanding work than the narrator's work.]*

*O.K. I agreed. In the end, they didn't even give me that! And Galit doesn't do a thing and gets 5 hours! I'm going right now to Judy and I'm telling her I'm quitting the job [the extra coordination]. I'm not prepared to work for nothing while others get overtime for nothing.*

*After all the support and work I put in over the years for free. And now this discrimination is sickening.*

The narrator opens with two announcements. The first relates to her emotional state and defines her deep disgust upon hearing about the overtime hour's payment; the second defines the central message of the story to follow, discrimination or being treated differently than another teacher. Only after these two

declarations does she turn to the story itself and describe the sequence of events. The conclusion returns to the central message of the story and re-emphasizes the aspect of discrimination. This approach was relatively rare. Most of the narrators preferred to begin with some form of orientation, and with the occurrence itself, and only thereafter registering their grumbles and the general moral of the story.

### *Criticism as Part of the Sequence of Events*

Here, the ways in which the tellers integrate the criticism are more sophisticated. Instead of a statement of principle about the unacceptable behavior of the management, they incorporate their criticism into the stories in many and varied ways:

#### *Incidental observations in the text*

Into their relation of the events, the narrators introduce "by the way" observations that contain criticism of one of the administrators. The observation is inserted into the description so that it seems to belong to the sequence of events, but actually causes a temporary interruption and increases the suspense in the listeners, while referring to the management. Take, for example, Story Number 16:

*Kids were chewing gum and chattering during the Rabin Memorial Day*

*Ceremony. It was revolting. I took one of the children to the level coordinator...*

Ostensibly including a factual incident into her description – of children lightly infringing the rules of decorum during a memorial ceremony – the storyteller inserts a pause. In this interlude, she expresses her opinion of the behavior by using a very strong phrase, "it was revolting", and then goes back to the sequence of events. After a preliminary description of the annoying children, the pause increases the suspense.

#### *The Use of Special Expressions*

There is the use of special expressions, or of slang, and their incorporation in the regular language of the story. Such special phrases or expressions are used as emphasis and serve to create different connotations that reinforce the events as related in the story. Take, for example, Story Number 5:

*I stood there like a moron in front of the pupils...*

The expression "like a moron" is very colloquial, indicating a situation in which a person feels particularly foolish and impotent. The use of slang intensifies the feeling conveyed to the listener. She feels foolish and small like a pupil, and thus begins to speak like a pupil.

#### *Repetition of Words*

The use of the same word several times reinforces the impression created by the description in the story. Take, for example, Story Number 5:

*After the meeting at which we were told that every exceptional case should be sent to the administration, one of the girls arrived wearing a tummy blouse [i.e., wearing a blouse that exposed her midriff]. I sent her to the office to get permission to send her home to*

*change. There was an acting principal on duty who told her to return to the class and that the decision to send a kid home was up to the teacher...*

In the first paragraph of the story, variations of the verb "to send" appears four times.

This repetition creates in the listener a sense of traipsing about from place to place. This traipsing is presented as unnecessary and the use of the verb helps to stress the simple description of the girl who goes to the office and returns to the class.

### *Rhetorical Questions*

The narrators accent the feeling of discomfort in the story by the use of rhetorical questions. These questions focus the listener on those points in the story that seem most critical to the teller. In many cases, the view of the events occurring in the school as peculiar in the eyes of the narrator is reinforced by the use of such a question. The question is often prefixed by "I don't understand it". Here is an example from Story Number 12:

The narrator is a veteran (male) 12th grade homeroom teacher. The listener, also a 12th grade homeroom teacher (female) is also a veteran in the system.

*The year starts, the blackboard in my room is broken and you can't write on it. I asked, first verbally and then in writing, with copies to the coordinators and the management-blanket coverage! Nothing helped.*

*So I personally found somebody who carries out repairs and still nothing helped.*

*I said I'd wait till after Hanukkah [a Jewish Festival] to see if it was replaced. We came back after the holiday. It was still the same old board.*

*I don't understand it. How often d'you need to ask?*

*I went to the principal and I said, "From now on I'm doing the same". No initiatives!*

*Five minutes later, Yoram the janitor turned up and said, "we found another blackboard-just for you!"*

In the middle of the story of the blackboard and his efforts to have it repaired, the narrator stops his tale and turns to the listener with a rhetorical question, formed from two parts: first, the declaration "I don't understand it", meant to emphasize the teacher's amazement at the impossible situation he found himself in; there follows the central point of the story, put as a question "How often d'you need to ask?". He then returns to the regular sequence of events and continues to describe what happened.

Story Number 15 accents the use of most of the above strategies within the narrative, as a way of criticizing the management indirectly.

A new bookkeeping teacher tells a veteran teacher in the staff room:

*The new teacher: Yossi [a coordinator and member of the management] twice came into the class I was teaching, shouting about the lack of responsibilities of the children, about*

*the dirt, about not looking after school equipment, and left. He threatened that if he caught [anybody] the whole class would be punished. He also shouted outside the classroom at pupils who were moving about – such terrible shouts. He was really throwing his weight around. You should have seen it.*

*The veteran teacher: I heard him shouting at teachers if they didn't go into their classes on time that day he was duty principal.*

*The new teacher: He's missing something up top. What, does he think we're kids? Even if it's justified, there's a way to talk and explain oneself, but what does he do except shout and throw his weight around?...*

The narrator uses all the means to emphasize and stress the related event, and to transform it from a trivial, incidental, and unimportant occurrence, into something much more substantial. The more serious the event, so he presents, in a clear and unambiguous way, the weaknesses or failures of the administration. He presents criticism of Yossi, as an addition within the story, when he says, "such appalling shouts." That is, he stops the continuity of the story to interject his opinion of Yossi's behavior in the class. He uses the expression "throwing his weight around" [the actual colloquial Hebrew expression means "showing off his muscles"]. Also, he substitutes for a word such as "announced" the more colloquial "shouted". In addition, if we include the response of the listener, then "shout" appears five times.

#### *Criticism as a Coda or Conclusion*

Criticism is present in all the stories as a coda or conclusion. The criticism appears as a process of generalization, presented as a verbal transfer from an individual name or appellation to a general one. Members of the administration appear in the stories in two forms: the first refers to them by individual name or appellation, being the position they occupy: for instance, the first names Yossi (11, 15), Dida and Mida (10, 13). The principal appears as Judy (1, 18), and another administrator is referred to her by her name, Yochi (8). In reference to their position titles, we find: member of the management (15), level coordinator (17, 18), and duty principal (11). First names are used a lot throughout the stories, the narrators then using "she" or "he" instead of repeating the name or appellation (7, 8, 9).

In the second part of the story, the form changes from private name to the general, with extensive use of such terms as "the management" or "member of the administration" as a general description of the group of position holders in the school (5, 6, 10, 11, 13, 14, 16, 18); there is also much use of the third person "they" or "them" (6, 13, 17) and the use of generally phrased sentences without specific reference to a person or group, as in the following: "Until you bang on the table", "without brute force, nothing gets done", "What a response, the way [they] slight us, who are we dealing with?" (8) Story Number 14, below, demonstrates the kind of transfer discussed above:

A veteran chemistry teacher is talking to a new chemistry teacher:

*I've a boy in the room-unbelievably impudent doesn't let me teach, distracts the class and wastes valuable time. I went to Yossi [the coordinator] who knows the boy well. And what does he say to me? "There's nothing to be done with that boy, I throw up my hands". I told him the boy humiliates me and makes me leave the classroom feeling just rotten and ashamed. And Yossi has nothing to say. I don't understand! It's not enough we suffer from the kids and the administration doesn't do a thing? There's no clear policy about discipline and there's nobody to turn to, to deal with the problem. So angry!*

The narrator describes an individual incident in which she has a relationship with a position holder, referred to by his first name, Yossi. The storyline deals with a conversation between the two of them in which the narrator complains about a pupil and Yossi admits that he has no answer to the problem. The teacher describes her feelings of shame and Yossi does not respond. The narrator then goes on to a number of declarations, dealing with the administration as a whole, working on several levels of abstraction. At the first level, she transforms her own personal distress to an affliction shared by all the teachers, by use of the phrase "we suffer from the kids". Then Yossi is transformed into "the administration". With the help of this transformation, two contrasted groups are presented to the listener – on the one hand, the teachers, and on the other, the management. The former are described as suffering, and the latter as apathetic or ineffectual. At the second level, the degree of abstraction is higher: there is no indication to which the speaker is referring, with a very general reference to the fact that "there's no clear policy about discipline and there's nobody to turn to". Who is failing to set the policy is left unstated; as is whose fault it is that there is nowhere to turn.

At the same time, there is still reference to specific events. There follows a still higher level of abstraction, when the phrase "So angry!" is used, without indication of a person, a group, or an event. There is only a very general definition of the situation, and unless one has heard the whole story, one cannot extract a meaning from the phrase. This definition could equally refer to many other occurrences. The narrator moves from an individual event with specific characters and storyline to a system of generalizations that departs from the event itself, until they end with a completely unspecified declaration.

The transfer from singular to the general in the actual verbal description permits the administration to be transformed from specific individuals and well-known colleagues about whom one can tell a specific story, to an anonymous group – "they/them". This anonymous group is contrasted with another anonymous group – all the teachers, with the character of the narrator being swallowed up among them. This process converts clearly identified colleagues and co-workers to an alienated, vague group, that can be criticized, and the discussion from some incidental occurrence to an important matter of principle.

Gergen & Gergen (1988) suggest analyzing narratives according to the positive or negative development of the events in them. They present three kinds of simple narratives according to their development:

- a. The stable narrative: The story is stable – there are either positive or negative events all the time.
- b. The progressive narrative: The events became better and better till the best end.
- c. The regressive narrative: The events deteriorate from bad to worst.

The narratives in the staff room show a very interesting development: First, most of them show a regressive line of the plot. The events have a tendency to deteriorate from bad to worst. See for example story number 14 (recounted on page 20).

The student disturbed the class.

The teacher asked for help from the grade coordinator.

The answer: nothing can be done.

The teacher explained her feelings of humiliation.

No answer.

Here the beginning is a problem that the teacher is not able to solve alone. This is bad. She has to admit failure and ask for help. This is worse. She does not get help, but instead she gets a very unsatisfactory answer. This is even worse. In a final attempt to get help, she has to admit that the student humiliates her, which puts her in a very vulnerable position. This leads to the worst of all: she does not even get an answer.

Second, even when the actual plot of the story have, what might be called, a positive end, the narrator declares that for him/her this is not so. After so many troubles it is impossible to be happy. For example, remember story number 18. (recounted on page 13), in which the teacher wants to take a day off.

She calls 3 times and does not get an answer – bad situation.

She gets a negative message with a suggestion to ask the principal – worse.

She asks the acting principal and gets her day off – good.

Now she can go and be happy, because the story ends in a positive way. But, the narrator tells us that for her the day off is spoiled already. So by explaining her feelings she turns the positive ending into a negative one. The regressive development of the stories gives the listeners the feeling of deterioration; as if the whole place is doomed, and every meeting with the administration will end in a negative way.

### **Discussion**

The stories told in the teachers' room of the school clearly deal with criticism or, more accurately, with grumbling. Here, I use the term "grumbling" in the sense of a description of something disagreeable, which there is no intention of fixing (Kainan, 1992). The grumbling appears in the storyline, which relates the stages of distress endured by the hero/heroine, as a result of the action or inaction of one of the members of the administration. They are presented with the help of the characters, of whom the hero/heroine is always the suffering teacher, and the villain is a position holder who causes the suffering.

Principally, the grumbles appear in the way the stories are told, in a wide variety of forms of presentation. Sometimes they are part of the opening sentences and sometimes within the storyline itself, by way of incidental general comments, the use of special expressions, repetition of words, and rhetorical questions. They also appear as a coda or conclusion to the story, as part of the process of generalization in which the particular member of the administration is transformed into the management as a whole. The particular injustice of which s/he has been accused becomes a matter of principle. They also appear in the regressive line of the narrative. By means of the storyline, the characters, method of presentation, and development two contrasted groups are created – "the administration" and "the teachers".

The presentation of the stories in the staff room and the creation of the above two opposing groups creates a sense of fellowship among the teachers. This fellowship is aided by the grumbling, by means of which the teachers, both veteran and new, unite against the management. In the Israeli society, one of the properties of the feeling of togetherness is collective grumbling about problems seen as shared by the grumblers (Katriel, 1982). In our staff room, too, the fact of sitting together and the story of the unfairness practiced by "them" help create this sense of fellowship.

This feeling is particularly helpful to the new teachers who wish to integrate into, and become a part of, the social system of the school. In this particular school, this integration is particularly difficult, for while the veterans are residents of the town, the newcomers mostly come from the outside. When they join in,

via the story telling, both as narrators and as listeners, they themselves reinforce the comradeship between themselves and the veterans, and create a sense of belonging to the new place.

The veteran teachers have a slightly different interest. The members of the administration, whom they are censuring, are colleagues, and some are even friends who started out together with them in the school. The veterans not in administration have been left behind when the distribution of advanced positions was done. The stories allow them to express their anger or disappointment without appearing to be bad losers. Moreover, together with not having been given a position, there is also the hope that, with the next change in management, their turn will come and they will get something better.

The question remains as to why the teachers use the telling of stories for this purpose, rather than expressing their criticism directly. The stories provide an agreeable medium for the expression of faultfinding for two main reasons. First, as with any small place like New Morning, relationships are not just confined to the workplace. Among the staff members, especially the veterans who live in the town, there are highly complex systems of relationship. Some of the teachers are related, others are friends, or childhood friends, while others are close neighbors. Such relationships do not permit direct criticism; there is the apprehension, with fear that the disagreement may spread and harm those other connections outside the school. Each side is interested in preserving such relationships, and the use of the stories allows this to happen. The stories are told in the staff room where only the teachers sit. They deal with personal occurrences and therefore permit the situation to be limited to a specific audience. In the same way, the criticism arising from them is limited. Making an open statement of criticism might put the narrator in a position of being opposed to one of his friends, while telling the story in the staff room enables the narrator to indirectly make the criticism without getting into an open conflict.

Second, it is possible to relate the avoidance of direct confrontation to the general atmosphere in the town. Both the high unemployment rate and the knowledge that there is an ever-growing lack of workplaces have an effect on the teachers, although these situations are not directly threatening to them. In such a situation, every employee tends to watch his tongue and avoid getting into trouble with his or her superiors. The teachers are careful about what they say and do their best to avoid direct conflicts with the administration. A personal story that relates to a specific occurrence, and from which a general criticism arises, allows the discussion of problems more indirectly, without exposing oneself to such direct confrontations. It is therefore more appropriate.

Behind all the stories, a common principle can be discerned – the good of the school and, in particular, preservation of good order in the school. The stories present a picture of two sides in the school – the administration and the teachers – with a conflict between them. During the conflict, each side hones its arguments, and sets up its worldview and its position vis-à-vis the conflict (Turner, 1981). The teacher appears in the story as someone who is preserving the social order, since s/he has the good of the school in her/his sights (Kainan, 1992). The stories stress various transgressions of the social order, and via the descriptions of these infractions, one can build up a picture of the general system the teachers want to safeguard, since they are at the heart of good order in the school. Each violation of these general principles is presented as a violation of the existing social order.

When we investigate the transgressions that appear in the stories, we can distinguish the following general principles

1. Supporting the teachers and seeking accommodation with them.
2. A clear, unambiguous policy regarding discipline.
3. Equality, coordination of decision-making, and equal rules for all of the school staff
4. Efficient handling of technical problems.

5. Prior organization of matters, rather than a crisis policy of "putting out fires".

These principles are presented in the stories as characteristic of good school order. The narrators spread and reinforce this message by means of the stories. This good order is supposed to be preserved by the administration and when it is broken, it is up to the teachers to sound the alarm and try to restore order. The stories in the staff room allow the teachers to reiterate these principles again and again, each time by means of another story, so that everybody will know them and will work to preserve them. Such maintenance will preserve good order in the school, so that it operates efficiently and in a well-organized manner. Thus, a good administration is one that preserves good order, and helps it to exist. The story has the function of showing who has seriously violated these principles, and an alert must then be sounded, so that the social order can be maintained.

These relations between the teachers and the administration can be described also in terms of power. Lukes (1979) define power as the ability of *A* to make *B* do something even if it is against his interests. He stressed especially the hidden aspects of power. The most powerful is the one who could create the thoughts, concepts, values, and expectations of his rivals, without them noticing it. Bachrach and Baratz (1970) distinguished between influence on what they called somebody's "course of action" and influence on thoughts and beliefs.

I would like to suggest that the stories in the staff room are the teachers' way to get power in its hidden meaning. Through passing the stories and the principles imbedded in them they create a situation of power. Although people of the administration are in a higher status and formally they have more power, the teachers try to get control by creating their principles and presenting them as if they are common to the whole school. They use the stories as a way to exert power and control the school, in spite of their lower status.

In this article, I have tried to give a demonstration of the integrated socio-literal approach and to show how such approach can give us a better understanding of the work story. The combination of the story and its socio-cultural context enables us to learn more about the common norms of a group as much as the place and function of the stories in this group.

**Notes:**

1. My thanks to the student Aviva Hazan, for her great contribution to this study. Aviva got permission from the school and the staff to collect the stories, and bring them to me, while working as a teacher in the school.

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