



**Alexandru Ioan Cuza University**  
**Department of Philosophy**

**Narrative and role perception of  
pedagogical supervisors in the HILA  
program for youth at risk:  
a philosophical approach**

Supervisor: Prof. Dr. Ioan Alexandru Tofan

Candidate: Dorit Sheffi-Borkow

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# **1. Introduction**

During the past fourteen years I have been working as a pedagogical supervisor in the HILA program - a national program in Israel, established by the Ministry of Education, enabling youth at risk that drop out of high school to meet the formal demands of the educational system and acquire their diplomas.

A network of learning centers runs under the supervision and operational guidelines of the HILA program. These designated learning centers function within Youth Advancement Units that operate all over Israel.

Guided by the outlook that youth at risk is entitled to equal scholastic opportunities in order to continue and complete their formal studies, yet requires more assistance in order to do so, Youth Advancement Units give youth at risk, aged 14-18, the opportunity to receive emotional, social and educational support. Taken together, all scholastic and socio-educational activities aim to

assist the youth in fully integrating into different domains of society, such as the military or civil service, academic studies and the work force.

As a pedagogical supervisor I implement the HILA program, guide and supervise principals and teachers working directly with the youth in these learning centers and so do some thirty colleagues of mine, all over Israel.

The HILA program has and continues to establish itself as a professional and expert in the field of education for youth at risk. It may be suggested that pedagogical supervisors play a central role in this process of professionalization, as they link between the program's management (headed by Ministry of Education personnel) and field workers (principals and teachers in the learning centers).

All pedagogical supervisors meet the formal requirements of the role<sup>1</sup> and beyond this bring 'themselves'- their professional and personal

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<sup>1</sup> These include a B.A., teaching certificate and teaching experience.

experience and experiences, values and educational beliefs. There is no formal training but rather, continuous 'on-the-job' learning and development. This invites much personal interpretation and allows for individual nuances on the way to meeting the program's official goals and targets. Role perception, therefore, may be deemed as significant and as 'playing a role' in such a setting.

Previous research of the HILA program has mainly regarded the work of teachers and, to some extent, the work of learning center principals. Survey of the literature has shown that the unique role of pedagogical supervisors has not, as yet, been examined.

Therefore, this study aimed to identify and understand the way in which pedagogical supervisors perceive their role in light of their narratives; to examine the connection between role perception and professional practice and to contribute to the holistic advancement of the

program in particular and to the field of pedagogy for youth at risk, as a whole.

Beyond a contribution to the holistic advancement of the HILA program and the Israeli educational system, the study hopes to provide an input to the field of pedagogy for youth at risk, an issue of worldwide concern. It wishes to do so by pointing up the uniqueness of the HILA program as an educational alternative when working with youth at risk. It highlights the key role of pedagogical supervision within this system, as providing a professional framework for principals and teachers working directly with the youth.

## **2. Flow of the research**

### **2.1 Theoretical background: concepts, authors and topics**

The research applied a philosophical approach to the study of pedagogical supervisor's narratives and their role perception. The work of Paul Ricoeur served as a central axis of reference and, alongside it, commentary and explanation of his theories, as suggested by Kaplan, Wood, Scott-Bauman and others.

Ricoeur's outlook on the place and significance of narrative in human life and the offer it holds for acquiring knowledge and undergoing processes of change provided the guidelines for understanding and analyzing supervisor's narratives, thus forming the basis for interpreting role perception. His discussion of selfhood and expansion of the question *who?* to the series of questions: "*Who is speaking? Who is acting? Who is telling his or her story?*" and *Who is the moral subject of*

*imputation?*"<sup>2</sup>, serve as an introduction to the four concepts of narrative, identity, hermeneutics and social representation, addressed in the philosophical chapter:

*Narrative*, as a concept which embodies and expands the idea of story and storytelling, was viewed as a 'meta-concept' and *temporality*, *experience*, *affect* and *meaning making* were suggested as its 'sub-concepts'. Narrative's evolvement as a concept was regarded historically, beginning with its Platonic and Aristotelian origins and continuing with contemporary studies, including the works of Benjamin, Brunner, MacIntyre and Strawson (who opposes the narrative outlook).

*Identity*, the second 'meta-concept' and its suggested 'sub-concepts' - *personal identity*, *self-concept* and *uniqueness* – were recognized

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<sup>2</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992, 169.



through the works of Schechtman, Oyserman and Solberger.

Role perception was regarded as an applied aspect of the larger, 'meta-concept' of identity, in light of Ricoeur's later works, especially *Oneself as Another*, which reflected his shift of attention to applied philosophy. In a similar manner, the study offered a view of role perception as an application of identity.

A discussion of Ricoeur's *hermeneutics*, as the theory of interpretation applied in the narrative inquiry and the concept of *social representation*, as enabling the explaining and understanding of "events, behaviors, ideas and exchanges"<sup>3</sup> in the world around, completed the philosophical part of the study. While Ricoeur's hermeneutic theory focused on the individual, the study of social representation, as offered by Foucault, Searle and

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<sup>3</sup> Patrick Rateau et al., "Social Representation Theory", *Handbook of Theories of Social Psychology*, January 2012, 477, doi:10.4135/9781446249222.n50.477

Moscovici's theories, added a collective perspective to the hermeneutics of the self.

## **2.2 Thesis and arguments**

Guided by the view that construction of meaning and gaining of new knowledge could be attained through the interpretation of narratives, this thesis has aimed to learn from the narratives of pedagogical supervisors in the HILA program about their role perceptions in order to reflect and refer to them as a basis for regarding professional practice, and, furthermore, offer options for enhancement.

The thesis refers to the Ricoeurian outlook that "life is no more than a biological phenomenon as long as it has not been interpreted" and telling stories or speaking about them is not accidental but, rather, an integral part of life.<sup>4</sup> Telling a story

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<sup>4</sup> Ricoeur, Paul. "Life in Quest of Narrative." In *On Paul Ricoeur: Narrative and Interpretation*, 20-33. Routledge, 2003. ISBN 0-415-07406-129.

therefore implies engaging in meaningful human action, while adding meaning to life itself through contribution to "mediation between man and the world, between man and man, between man and himself; the mediation between man and the world is what we call *referentiality*; the mediation between men, *communicability*, the mediation between man and himself, *self-understanding*".<sup>5</sup>

The thesis argues that a philosophical approach to the interpretation of the concepts of *narrative* and *identity* allows for processes of learning, meaning making and self-understanding and, thus, may contribute to professional practice and enhancement.

Coupled with the philosophical aspects of the study is the organizational outlook on the place and contribution of knowledge workers to the organization. Knowledge work, as outlined by Mallett and Whapsott, requires proficiency, non-

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<sup>5</sup> Paul Ricoeur, "Life in Quest of Narrative," in *On Paul Ricoeur: Narrative and Interpretation* (Routledge, 2014), 27.

standardization and expertise in a "niche area of practice".<sup>6</sup> It is suggested that pedagogical supervisors may be regarded as knowledge workers and their contribution to the organization and its goals may be enhanced through acknowledgment of their role perceptions.

Taken together, the philosophical approach and the organizational outlook were both addressed in interpretation of the narratives. These, in turn reflected translations of pedagogical supervisor's role perceptions into actions. Thus, they related to Ricoeur's question, as to "what makes an action meaningful and worthy of interpretation?" and his suggestion that an action is meaningful when it leaves its mark on social time.<sup>7</sup>

This thesis viewed pedagogical supervision as a meaningful action, thus worthy of interpretation

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<sup>6</sup> Oliver Mallett and Robert Wapshott, "Mediating Ambiguity: Narrative Identity and Knowledge Workers," *Scandinavian Journal of Management* 28, no. 1 (2012), doi: 10.1016/j.scaman.2011.12.001.

<sup>7</sup> Alison Scott Bauman, "The importance of Paul Ricoeur: an introduction", 100- 101.

and as an action that had, and continues to leave, its mark in the social realm.

### **2.3 Applied research**

The philosophical concepts, of narrative, identity, hermeneutics and social representation, were applied in the third part of the study, which focused on discourse between theory and practice. The hermeneutical interpretation of the narratives and role perceptions of pedagogical supervisors brought forth the voices of the participants, alongside the reflexivity of the researcher. Philosophical concepts were applied in the organizational context, in light of the suggestion that "narrative knowledge is based on the assumption that we make sense of our experience through integrated and sequenced accounts or stories ... and researchers can study and interpret

those stories as a means of understanding organizational processes and events".<sup>8</sup>

The background for this integration was provided in the empirical chapter, which shed light on the different components of the pedagogical supervisors' work, through a survey of the HILA program and its values; work with youth at risk; discussion of supervision; role perception in the organizational setting and the concept of knowledge work.

Alongside, the research design presented narrative as a qualitative form of research and the narrative paradigm as a distinct type of inquiry into human nature. As suggested by Spector-Mersel: "the core of narrative inquiry combines both a philosophical stance towards the nature of

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<sup>8</sup> Ann L. Cunliffe, John T. Luhman, and David M. Boje, "Narrative Temporality: Implications for Organizational Research", *Organization Studies* 25, no. 2 (2004), 263. doi:10.1177/0170840604040038.

social reality and our relationship with it, and the mode in which it should be studied".<sup>9</sup>

Completing the empirical chapter, its methodological part elaborated, amongst other aspects, on the interview as the tool of research, with an emphasis on narrative interviews. Muylaert et. al. characterized such interviews as unstructured and in-depth, inviting the interviewee to share life stories in a social context, thereby leading to the construction of new knowledge and offering a fresh look at the social reality examined.<sup>10</sup>

Furthermore, Josselson pointed up the place of content, meaning and context in the analytic process.<sup>11</sup> These aspects were all addressed. It may be suggested that the analysis of the narrative data,

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<sup>9</sup> Gabriela Spector-Mersel, "Narrative Research: Time for a Paradigm", 206.

<sup>10</sup> Camila Junqueira Muylaert et al., "Narrative Interviews: An Important Resource in Qualitative Research", *Revista Da Escola De Enfermagem Da USP* 48, no. Spe2 (2014): 184, doi:10.1590/s0080-623420140000800027.

<sup>11</sup> Frederick J. Wertz, *Five Ways of Doing Qualitative Analysis*, 226.

occurred within the context of the study's two complementing parts – the philosophical and the empirical - as it attempted to "capture the lived experience of people in terms of their own meaning making and to theorize about it in insightful ways".<sup>12</sup>

### **2.3.1 Ethical aspects of the research**

Ethical aspects pertained to conduct of the research and included adherence to ethical principles of informed and voluntary consent; confidentiality of information shared; anonymity of research participants; beneficence or no harm to participants; and reciprocity.

Beyond these basic principles, a central ethical concern regarding the interviews pertained to interviewer-interviewee relations, with a focus on the question of power – mainly that of the interviewer's over the interviewee. Within the context of the current study this question took on

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid, 225.



an additional dimension, as interviewer and interviewees maintained a collegial-peer relationship. Yet, it is significant to note that all interviewees willingly consented to partake in the study and all ethical principles were strictly followed.

### **3. Results and discussion**

Results of the study are addressed here with regard to the research questions:

#### **How do pedagogical supervisors perceive their role as reflected in their narratives?**

Pedagogical supervisors perceived their role as:

- a meaningful vocation
- providing support for supervisees, especially learning center principals
- requiring pedagogical initiative and leadership
- requiring a sense of mission and commitment to supervisees, youth and the

organization and, in a broader sense, to social change and success

- including a tension between inspection and supervision
- including a sense of loneliness

Though meaningfulness and vocation emerged as central characteristics of role perception, the different dimensions of interpretation pointed up the complexity and multi-layeredness of the supervisory role. It was perceived as professional, worthy and enabling self-realization, included recognition as to the importance of learning but also brought forth the dilemmas and difficulties in working with principals and teachers, due to the tension between inspection and supervision and the sense of loneliness.

**How does a supervisor's philosophical understanding of the role contribute to professional practice?**

Philosophical understanding of the role was found to contribute to professional practice through:

- recognition of the need and significance of combining Kadushin's three elements of supervision – the administrative, the educational and the supportive
- recognition of a sense of professionalism – the supervisor as a professional with professional knowledge worth learning from
- motivation to continue and develop professional practice by strengthening the emotional and supportive aspects of supervision and by developing peer support through construction of a learning and reflective community

'Translation' of the philosophical understanding could be found in adherence to the work with learning center principals and teachers, which all supervisors regarded as their central mission and commitment. Interpretation of the narratives suggested supervisors recognized the need and

significance of combining Kadushin's three elements of supervision – the administrative, the educational and the supportive in order to continue and advance their professional practice. Regarding the supportive aspect, supervisors expressed an understanding that this facet required expansion within their professional repertoire, in order to enrich their toolbox, broaden the backing given to principals and teachers and better equip them in their direct interactions with youth at risk.

**How can the professional practice of supervisors contribute to the pedagogy of youth at risk?**

Professional practice of supervisors could contribute to the pedagogy of youth at risk by:

- supporting therapeutic pedagogy for youth at risk, through strengthening the supportive aspect of pedagogical supervision. Such supervisory practice could provide modeling and allow for a process, parallel, in a way, to that of therapeutic pedagogical work with youth

at risk. By broadening the supportive aspects of supervision, alongside the administrative and pedagogical ones, principals of HILA learning centers and teachers could experience the supportive approach and, thus, adopt work methods relevant to their interactions with the youth.

- changing the work model of pedagogical supervisor in order to enable more time and more in-depth work in each learning center

In light of the research questions and findings, the study offered an outline for a conceptual work model which could allow for translation of the findings into practical conduct by re-thinking the role of pedagogical supervisors in order to enhance professional practice and acknowledge the place of pedagogical supervisors as knowledge workers, experts in their field, with an expertise worth learning from.

The categories of *knowledge, experience, discourse* and *values* which could be taken to reflect this expertise, comprised the layout for the proposed work model of the pedagogical supervisor in the HILA program.

In the proposed work model, each of the categories served as the theoretical thread from which new operational challenges were suggested. In order to meet them the model proposed that each supervisor be assigned to supervise less learning centers than in the present situation but be required to more professional input per learning center.

Adopting a new work model would, therefore, require conceptual change on the part of the organization and the individual supervisor alike.

## **4. Conclusions and further research**

A philosophical approach to the narratives of pedagogical supervisors, it may be suggested, has pointed up the supervisory role as a meaningful function, worthy of interpretation. It has enabled understanding, constructing knowledge and meaning making. These, in turn, assist in achieving supervision's main goal, which, it may be proposed, is to support supervisees in order to enable them to provide quality service for their target population.

The current study and its findings have suggested that pedagogical supervisors in the HILA program perceive their role as a meaningful vocation. Catenacci notes that research has shown a significant influence of role perception on productivity and, therefore, organizations should

assess how workers perceive their role in order to influence productivity.<sup>13</sup>

Regarding the work of pedagogical supervisors, productivity adheres to the development of high quality supervision and holds many challenges for both the worker and the organization.

On the part of the worker, this includes continued strengthening of the different aspects of supervision: the administrative, the educational and, especially, the supportive pillar. Furthermore, it requires an openness to learning and taking on new tasks.

On the part of the organization, recognition of pedagogical supervisors as knowledge workers suggests that their contribution to the organization and its goals can be enhanced through acknowledgment of their role perceptions. This may invite re-defining and re-organizing the role in ways that will enable supervisors to utilize the

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<sup>13</sup> Catenacci, Christina. "Workplace Organizational Behavior Part II: Perception ..."



knowledge and experience brought forth in the narratives. Such re-thinking of the role may assist in continuing and upgrading professional practice so that the work of pedagogical supervisors with and for others will continue to leave its mark on social time and social reality in the program and beyond.

Therefore, the study has offered a revision of the work model of pedagogical supervisors, in light of the knowledge, experience, discourse and values they bring.

Further research may be suggested with regard to continued exploration of role perception of other professional workers in the field of youth at risk and with regard to exploring possibilities for introducing the role of pedagogical supervisor into other education systems, as part of the supportive framework for principals and teachers.

Through the insights offered, regarding role perception and the suggestions for application and further research, the study hopes to have left its

mark regarding both the philosophical and professional aspects.

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