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Understanding Emotion in Educational and Service Organizations through Semi-Structured Interviews: Some Conceptual and Practical Insights

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to illuminate the challenges, complexities, and strategies of semi-structured interviewing in studies about emotion in educational organizations, in general, and about teacher emotion and emotion in educational leadership, in particular, and, thereby, enable interviewers to make thoughtful decisions concerning planning and implementing future interviews on this sensitive issue. After a short review of the literature on semi-structured interviews, I analyze the distinctive characteristics of the planning phase (e.g., sample, sampling, location) and the implementation phase (e.g., the opening stage, rapport, hazards) in interviewing teachers and educational leaders about their emotion management, emotion regulation and internal feelings. Practical insights and recommendations are suggested throughout the text.

Keywords

Semi-Structured Interview, Emotion, Teaching, Educational Leadership

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The aim of this paper is to illuminate the challenges, complexities, and strategies of semi-structured interviewing in studies about emotion in educational organizations, in general, and about teacher emotion and emotion in educational leadership, in particular, and, thereby, enable interviewers to make thoughtful decisions concerning planning and implementing future interviews on this sensitive issue. After a short review of the literature on semi-structured interviews, I analyze the distinctive characteristics of the planning phase (e.g., sample, sampling, location) and the implementation phase (e.g., the opening stage, rapport, hazards) in interviewing teachers and educational leaders about their emotion management, emotion regulation and internal feelings. Practical insights and recommendations are suggested throughout the text. Keywords: Semi-Structured Interview, Emotion, Teaching, Educational Leadership

Introduction

The issue of emotion in educational organizations has been receiving increasing attention in recent years as more and more researchers have explored a wide variety of emotions displayed or suppressed by teachers and educational leaders and traced their determinants and outcomes (e.g., Crawford, 2007; Keller, Frenzel, Goetz, Pekrun, & Hensley, 2014; Yamamoto, Gardiner, & Tenuto, 2014). Thus far, however, most of the investigations have used quantitative methodologies (usually inventories/ questionnaires), influenced considerably by the research on emotion in organizations in the fields of psychology and organizational behavior.

Given the interpretive nature of qualitative research, let alone the dynamic of an interview journey in terms of enthusiasm, commitment, and silence (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009), researchers of emotion in educational organizations might benefit a great deal from using semi-structured interviews in their research design. After all, this dynamic allows the interviewer and the interviewee to create a dialogue in which emotions are transferred verbally and silently through body language and, thereby, may create an atmosphere that facilitates, even encourages, the interviewee to talk about his/her own emotions and feelings authentically. Looking at a sample of definitions of qualitative research sharpens this argument:

Qualitative research is focused on the identification of the possible range of behavioral patterns, opinions, justifications, and explanations. Explaining behavior is not expressed in terms of explained variance but in terms of understanding the underlying processes that lead to specific behavioral outcomes of specific individuals in specific contexts. (Ingham, Vanwesenbeeck, & Kirkland, 2009, p. 147)

Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed, that is, how people make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world. (Merriam, 2009, p. 13)

Thus, qualitative research may help researchers understand the meaning teachers and educational leaders give to emotion management, proper emotion display, and the “right” feelings in teaching within their social and cultural contexts.

My aim in this paper, though, is to illuminate the challenges, complexities, and strategies of semi-structured interviewing in studies about emotion in educational organizations and, thereby, enable interviewers to make thoughtful decisions about planning and implementing interviews on this sensitive issue. More specifically, based on the premise that no standard procedures exist for conducting a research interview or an entire interview investigation (Tracy, 2013), I analyze the distinctive characteristics of the planning phase (e.g., sample, sampling, location) and the implementation phase (e.g., the opening stage, rapport, hazards) in the research on emotion in educational organizations.

Two comments warrant illumination at this stage. First, out of the seven stages of an interview inquiry presented by Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) – thematizing (e.g., clarifying the purpose of the study), designing, interviewing, transcribing, analyzing, verifying, and reporting, I focus in this paper on “designing” and “interviewing” in which the researcher “conduct(s) the interview based on an interview guide and with a reflective approach to the knowledge sought and the interpersonal relation of the interview situation” (ibid., p. 102).

Second, in order to write this paper, I drew on my own experience in conducting research into teacher emotion (e.g., Oplatka & Gamerman, 2017) and emotions in educational leadership (e.g., Oplatka, 2017), and on my experience in guiding and supervising PhD students in these areas of study. My/their reflections on methodological challenges and difficulties in understanding a certain type of emotion, exploring emotion management, or exposing principals’ and teachers’ particular feelings are analyzed throughout the following pages.

The paper may increase our understanding of the ways to overcome the fear interviewers usually feel when talking about emotions with interviewees (Ingham et al., 2009). As I will show throughout the text, commencing the interview with vignettes and then moving to ask broad questions about emotions (e.g., questions about teachers as a professional group) and only afterwards to focus on the interviewees’ feelings and emotion management might help reduce the fear of talking openly about this sensitive topic. The questions should be devised carefully, as I show in this paper, to avoid any inconvenience to both the interviewer and the interviewee. In this way, the paper allows researchers in the area of teacher/educational leader emotion to consider how to design their interview guide and the interviewing process to better explore new themes, feelings and opinions, one of the purposes of the semi-structured interview (Tracy, 2013), and to grasp the complexity of emotion management and regulation in education.

My Context

I am professor of Educational Administration and Leadership at The School of Education, Tel Aviv University, Israel, and currently the head of the department of Educational Policy and Administration. My research focuses on the lives and careers of school teachers and principals, educational marketing, emotions, teaching and educational administration, and the foundations of educational administration as a field of study. As I live and work in Israel, most of my studies have been conducted in the educational systems of my country.

As a qualitative researcher I conduct my studies from this lovely and fruitful research paradigm. When I was a PhD student in the Hebrew University of Jerusalem during the second

half of the 1990s, most of my professors believed quantitative methodologies were the only legitimate methods to study social and educational phenomena, while my dissertation was among the first to be grounded within the naturalist paradigm. Unfortunately, however, I received some negative feedback because of that. Needless to say, though, I am very proud today to study emotions in schools using semi-structured interviews; thus far I have published several works about emotions in teaching and in educational leadership that allow school members to express their emotions not in inventories, as is mostly accepted in psychology even today, but in an open conversation. This paper is a result of my own experience as a qualitative researcher in the area of emotion in educational organizations, and I hope to contribute from my own experience to other researchers who might be interested in understanding emotions in the workplace.

The Study of Sensitive Topics

Interviewing emotions in schools is related, explicitly and implicitly, to the literature about researching sensitive topics defined as those that might cause harm to participants, arouse powerful negative emotions (e.g., anger, sadness, fear, embarrassment), and increase distress among researchers and respondents (Cowles, 1988; Sieber & Stanley, 1988). Lee (1993) defined sensitive research as “research which potentially poses a substantial threat to those who are or have been involved in it” (p. 4), conceptualizing “sensitivity” as an emergent rather than an inherent feature of the relationship between topic and research.

The sensitive topics may include HIV/AIDS (Davis, Bolding, Hart, Sherr, & Elford, 2004), mental health issues, death and bereavement, fertility, abortion, miscarriage, and terminal illnesses such as cancer (Alty & Rodham, 1998). Some authors have paid attention to the emotional well-being of the researchers, rejecting a model of the research as detached and objective, and warning researchers of sensitive issues that they might experience dire emotional consequences (Lee & Lee, 2012).

To face the hazards of doing research on sensitive topics, researchers suggested employing strategies such as building rapport, using open questions sensitively, beginning the interview with self-disclosure, planning the interview very carefully and supporting the interviewee in extremely sensitive situations (Lee, 1993; Rubin & Rubin, 1995). Elmir, Schmied, Jackson, and Wilkes (2011) proposed measures intended to intensify trust between the researcher and the participant so as to facilitate spontaneous exchange of information in a warm and supportive environment. They concluded that, in spite of the potential to cause interviewees in studies about sensitive topics a degree of discomfort, the researcher can minimize this potential by talking about an experience in a safe and respectful environment. However, while interviewers must be empathetic to the distress of participants, they should remember that they are researchers, not counselors (Hennink, Hutter, & Bailey, 2011).

The Interview Method

It is widely accepted that an interview is a professional conversation of daily life with a purpose and specific structure, determined by the interviewer (Parker, 2005; Tracy, 2013; Turner, 2010). It is an interview, where knowledge is constructed in the inter-action between the interviewer and the interviewee (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009), and initial purposes are challenged, crosscut and sometimes subverted by the goals of the interviewees. In this sense, the interview resembles an encounter among people that involves negotiations, calculations, and interpretations, simply because the researcher does not know exactly what the interviewee intends to say (Schostack, 2006).

Unlike an ordinary conversation, however, a semi-structured interview goes beyond the spontaneous exchange of views in everyday conversations; that is, it is an interaction between an interviewer and a respondent in which the interviewer has a general plan of inquiry including a set of topics to be discussed in depth (Babbie, 2016) through a careful questioning and listening approach (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). However, the questioning is not based on a set of questions that must be asked in a particular order. Moreover, like every interaction between individuals, the interview involves a risk of misunderstanding, misjudgment, and misadventure, on one hand, and an opportunity to unearth new things, feelings, and experiences, on the other hand (Schostack, 2006). Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) elaborated on these opportunities:

The qualitative research interview attempts to understand the world from the subjects' points of view, to unfold the meaning of their experiences, to uncover their lived world prior to scientific explanations. (p. 1)

The interview generates the data to be analyzed in the study because through the conversation with the interviewee, the researcher is provided with an opportunity to learn more about a particular aspect of his/her life or professional experience (Willig, 2013). Specifically, the interview allows disclosing the interviewee's personal experiences, life histories, and feelings, and is useful for gaining in-depth information about sensitive topics and contextual influences upon the researched phenomenon (Hennink et al., 2011). According to Schostack (2006), each interview is the means to elucidate and evaluate what is at stake and to elaborate on the researched phenomena. Furthermore, the interviewee can provide rationales, explanations, and justifications for their actions, feelings, and attitudes, as Tracy (2013) explains:

Qualitative interviews provide opportunities for mutual discovery, understanding, reflection, and explanation via a path that is organic, adaptive, and oftentimes energizing... They can explain why they employ certain clichés, jargon, or slang. (p. 132)

As far as a semi-structured interview is concerned, its flexibility by questioning and structure allows the emergence of new topics and findings during the conversation, but at the same time requires thorough preparation before the interview meeting begins and careful listening throughout the conversation (Gillham, 2005). Note, however, that as a result of taking part in the interview, the interviewee may start thinking about aspects of his/her personal and professional experiences in a new or different way, thereby allowing new knowledge and understanding about the research phenomenon.

The Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework that guided my thoughts in writing this paper is the post-positivistic view of research, in general, and of interviewing, in particular. This view consists of reductionistic, logical, empirical, cause-and-effect oriented, and deterministic methodology based on prior theory (Creswell, 2013). According to Guest, Namey, and Mitchell (2013), a post-positivist approach is grounded in two basic premises: (a) interpretations should be derived directly from data observed, and (b) data collection and analysis methods should, in some way, be systematic and transparent.

In this sense, the approach is tightly associated with the scientific method (e.g., inquiry is seen as a series of logically related steps), on one hand, and distances itself from the robust methodological position that seeks a truly objective reality, on the other hand. Put differently,

post-positivists are unlikely to believe in strict cause and effect but rather maintain that all cause and effect is probability that may or may not occur. In contrast, they advocate the existence of multiple views in any reality although they espouse rigorous methods of qualitative data collection and analysis. In doing so, they adopt aspects of the constructivist paradigm in qualitative research which views knowledge as socially constructed and may alter depending on the circumstances (Creswell, 2013). Thus, the reality is contingent upon human practices and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context. The researcher's aim, therefore, is to "engage in research that probes for deeper understanding rather than examining surface features" (Johnson, 1995, p. 4), assuming the reality is changing whether the individuals like it or not.

Foddy (1993) outlines the conjectures underlying the post-positivistic view of interviewing:

The research has a clearly defined topic about which participants have information they are able to access within the research setting; interviewers and interviewees share a common understanding of the interview questions and interviewees are able to respond to these; the interviewees are not supposed to know why the interviewer has asked the question. (p. 13)

Avoidance of self-disclosure is recommended since it shifts the interviewee's attention to the interviewer and changes his/her relationships with the interviewer (Weiss, 1994). Yet, the interviewee in the post-positivistic view has an "inner" or "authentic" self that may be discovered through careful questioning and listening by a sensitive interviewer who manages the interview, asks questions, and encourages the interviewee to talk about the researched phenomenon (Alvesson, 2003). Likewise, the data generated provides "valid" and "reliable" knowledge concerning the beliefs, perceptions, experiences, and opinions of the authentic self of interviewee (Roulston, 2010). But, as Golafshani (2003, p. 604) indicated, "reliability and validity are conceptualized as trustworthiness, rigor and quality in qualitative paradigm." In this sense, the way to increase validity and reliability of a research get affected from the qualitative researchers' perspectives which are to eliminate bias and increase the researcher's truthfulness of a proposition about some social phenomenon.

Exploring Emotions in Education Through Interviews

It is my aim in the next pages to make the reader acquainted with the ways to plan and conduct a semi-structured interview about emotion in the workplace, with special attention being given to the subtle distinctions between sensitive topics such as feelings and emotion and less sensitive topics. Note, though, that in no way do I intend to repeat how-to-do-it explanations of qualitative interviewing more broadly, which one may find in quite a number of books written about qualitative research and interviews. Instead, in this article, every part of the interviewing process is analyzed in light of its relevance specifically to interviewing about emotion and feelings in educational organizations. I start with the planning phase that includes sample, sampling, location, and the interview guide.

The Planning Phase

Semi-structured interviewing requires careful preparation and planning (Willig, 2013). Likewise, every well-designed study, regardless of its type, commences with clear research purposes and/or questions that guide the subsequent stages of the study and provide meaning to the research process. When the topic is emotion in organizations, generally speaking, the

qualitative researcher's purpose is to probe into the meanings of emotion in a specific cultural and organizational context, trace emotional responses to varied stimuli and events in the workplace, and explore forms of emotion regulation among professionals in a particular group. Some possible topics/questions are given below:

- To explore how school principals display or suppress their emotion in different contexts.
- To understand teachers' interpretations of compassion and empathy in school.
- To trace the factors affecting anger display among school teachers.
- To explore the influence of emotion regulation among teachers with their students in the class.

These and related goals are there to help the researcher devise the focus of the study in order to allow participant selection based on appropriate criteria and the interview guide articulation. Consistent with Parker (2005), the purposes are broad enough to enable the interviewee to raise things the researcher could not directly predict, and they are sufficiently focused to enable choosing a group of interviewees whose voice will contribute a great deal to the understanding of the researched phenomenon.

Sample and Sampling: The qualitative researcher needs to think in the planning phase about whom to interview (and why), how to recruit interviewees, and what to ask them (Willig, 2013). At this point, I handle the first two elements, while the last one is discussed at the end of this section.

The question of whom to interview is very critical in the study of emotion in teaching/educational leadership because interviewees may share only emotions they feel, display, and suppress at work. They should also be capable of talking about their own emotions and feelings openly and without fear. Consistent with Roulston (2010), preparation for such a sensitive interview includes background research on potential interviewees at the group level (e.g., teachers in a specific age group, education counsellors who are exposed to emotions in the job very often) and the contexts in which they live and work. In the case of emotion, though, the researcher should be familiar, at least in part, with local values, norms, expressions, and routines related to emotion regulation and "acceptable" feelings in the researched arena. This is of much relevance to researchers who study emotion in schools comprised of minorities, immigrants, and particular religious groups while they belong to the majority group, as every society has its own cultural interpretation of feelings, emotion display and emotion suppression. But, the researcher is not expected to familiarize him/herself with all potential cultural norms when conducting multicultural research as this will be almost an impossible mission. Rather, s/he ought to learn the major cultural scripts dominating in the researched ethnic and religious groups in respect to emotion regulation and feelings in order to be able to distinguish between contexts in which the potential interviewees might live and work. To this end, s/he might be assisted by members with relevant lived experience, experts with relevant knowledge, and past research on the cultural and social structures of these groups.

The next step is the sampling procedure, especially the sort of "purposeful sampling," (i.e., how to identify the types of teachers/educational leaders who could provide the researchers with information about emotions and feelings that fit the parameters of the research questions; Tracy, 2013). According to Guest et al. (2013), in the recruitment stage, the researchers should develop clear inclusion and exclusion criteria to confirm recruitment of interviewees who are "rich" informants.

Following this suggestion, two modes of sampling are available in respect to emotion: (1) *Informants* – Some of the studies focus on emotion display in the school, i.e., on behavioral dimensions of affects (e.g., display of empathy, disappointment, enthusiasm, fury, anger,

compassion). It is likely that teachers and school principals tend to display emotions consistently over a long period of time and, therefore, their colleagues have an opportunity to observe them at work. Therefore, consistent with the snowball sampling technique (Creswell, 2013), the colleagues could be a source of information about potential participants in the study as long as it focuses on specific, well-observable emotions. The shortcoming refers to subjectivity and bias in the judgement of these informants and the difficulty in identifying participants who suppress emotions or rarely express their feelings for a wide variety of reasons.

(2) *Preliminary inventory* – To face the shortcoming of the first technique, or to increase validity, researchers can use an inventory consisting of a list of emotions the respondent is asked to indicate to what extent s/he feels them at work. For example, in a study about disappointment among schoolteachers the potential interviewees receive a list of emotion as shown in Table 1 and are asked to indicate to what extent s/he has experienced each one of them in the workplace. Only those who rated “disappointment” 3 or 4 are invited to participate in the study, assuming they can provide much knowledge about this feeling in teaching.

Table One
Preliminary inventory (Partial)

Please indicate to what degree you feel each of the following emotions in your work

No.	Emotion	Not at all	Very little	Somewhat	To a great extent
1	Enthusiasm	1	2	3	4
2	Anger	1	2	3	4
3	Sadness	1	2	3	4
4	Fear	1	2	3	4
5	Happiness	1	2	3	4
6	Disappointment	1	2	3	4
7	Compassion	1	2	3	4
8	Depression	1	2	3	4
9	Empathy	1	2	3	4
10	Disgust	1	2	3	4

Using both techniques helps increase the likelihood of finding appropriate interviewees who can provide rich information about the emotion at target, although there is never a one hundred percent guarantee. Now, with a list of potential interviewees, the researcher is ready to schedule the interview meeting and arrange a time and place that is mutually agreeable. Given the sensitive topic of emotion, it should be a convenient, comfortable, and safe place for the interviewee. Several options need consideration:

- The principal’s office, where the interviewee feels secure enough to share with the interviewer his/her internal feelings and emotions.
- The teacher’s home, where the interviewee feels secure and in control and is unconstrained by external interruptions from colleagues or distractions.

- An empty classroom in the school after the school day (provided that maintenance workers do not need the classroom. To prevent that, reserving this classroom in advance is recommended).

Notably, as the interview may be interrupted by other school members or stakeholders and given the complexity of interviewing about sensitive topics such as feelings and emotion, the time should be after school. Likewise, the teachers' lounge or nearby cafés are unsuitable places for interviewing teachers/leaders about emotion because of the risk of eavesdroppers, a lack of discretion, or distractions that could disrupt the interview. Congruent with Guest et al. (2013), when teachers and principals talk about the ways they suppress their emotions towards children and parents, for example, they need the best place to build rapport and maintain the flow of the interview, a place that is sufficiently quiet to facilitate conversation on such sensitive topics. To build trusting relationships with the interviewee, however, it is wise to let the principal/teacher choose the best place for them.

Interview Guide: A semi-structured interview is characterized by flexibility and structure at the same time. The interviewer has an interview guide that is filled with questions and probes aimed at encouraging the interviewee to be creative and discuss the research topic so as to obtain the kind of data that will answer the research questions (Tracy, 2013; Willig, 2013). Concurrently, the interviewer should allow the interviewee the space to redefine the research topic in order to be provided with new insights that stimulate the researcher to ask unplanned questions. But, this should be limited in time (e.g., several minutes) and scope (e.g., around the topic of emotions as interviewees might deviate to other professional topics related to their work in school).

A good interview guide consists of a number of sections, each one covering a theme and including a number of questions and specific issues and setting the agenda for the next part of the interview. The interviewer is advised to stick to the particular order in a given interview (Ingham et al., 2009), yet to enable him/herself sufficient flexibility to deviate from this structure when the interviewee raises new and challenging topics or elaborate on his/her experiences even if they will come up later on the interview guide. This order is of high significance when the topic of the interview is the interviewee's emotions and feelings, because, as Hennink et al. (2011) indicated, the aim is to keep building rapport with the interviewee gradually and steadily to allow him/her to feel comfortable enough to expose a personal story.

To exemplify the order of the interview guide in the research on emotion in school that I found very fruitful and effective in gleaning interviewees' experiences in respect to emotions at work, I use interview data from a study that explored empathy regulation and suppression among school principals (Oplatka, 2017) and a study that traced the subjective meanings of compassion and its behavioral expressions among school teachers (Oplatka & Gamerman, 2017). In both studies, the interview guide begins with a vignette, a very short story of real-life experience in the interviewee's role, to which the interviewee is expected to respond, as is repeated below:

I usually identify a student's distress by non-verbal means, just by looking at him. I see a student suffering, I check the reasons for that, what is the basis of the suffering, and I decide discretely what is the best thing to do: a personal conversation? A meeting with the school counselor?

The interviewer gives a copy of the vignette to the teacher, reads it loudly, and then asks the interviewee to respond, first by indicating whether the teacher in the story behaves correctly, and then by explaining how he or she would react in a similar situation. Through the discussion

about this story, the interviewer learns about the teacher's feelings of empathy and compassion towards the students. This may help the interviewees immerse in the issue of emotions and a good starting point because it encourages both the interviewer and the interviewee to talk about emotions freely and smoothly.

The next section includes general questions about the interviewee's role and his/her feelings in this role whose main goal is to stimulate and warmly encourage the interviewee to facilitate in-depth exploration of emotion. A sample of questions in this phase is depicted below:

- Could you share your emotion and feelings in school? What kind of emotions do you experience in class?
- What kind of feelings do you experience when interacting with the principal/students/parents?
- What are appropriate emotions in principalship?
- How do school principals/teachers display emotions in their role? Why?
- What are the emotions the school principal/teacher must display/suppress in the school?
- Have you ever heard about the reform of X...? Could you think about its impact upon the principal's ability to display certain emotions in the school?

These and related questions help promote trust relations between the interviewer and the interviewee and develop a sense of security and rapport. After all, practitioners, in general, and managers, in particular, are more likely to talk about role performances, tasks, and career achievements rather than about emotions and internal feelings. The encouraging questions aim at arousing a desire in the interviewee to share feelings and describe the ways he or she expresses emotion in the workplace. One of my PhD students illustrated the benefit of general questions in a study that explored the feeling of fear among school teachers:

Questions about emotion require familiarity with the interviewee's life and career, so I start with warming up question. So, before I talk about the feeling of fear, I ask what the teacher loves in her role and what she dislikes, and in doing so I prepared her for the questions that are more focused on fear. I think that now I asked about this as if it were another question, I did it calmly and naturally, and didn't let the teacher feel any dramatization...you need to let the interviewee feel it is okay and human to talk about fear.

After the section of general questions, the interview guides include major aspects of the research phenomenon (e.g., a particular feeling in teaching, emotion management in principalship), usually in several parts, each one contains key questions, i.e., the questions that are designed to glean the core information necessary to answer the research questions. The sections should be designed, particularly, to provide answers about the subjective meanings of the phenomenon under investigation, its determinants and outcomes, and the like. A sample of key questions in the research on compassion and empathy in teaching/principalship is demonstrated below:

- How would you define compassion/empathy? (the meaning of the emotion)
- Could you describe a compassionate teacher you met in the past? (the meaning of the emotion)
- What kind of emotion should principals feign in order to succeed in the job? (emotion regulation)

- Can you think of an event in which you should have remained relaxed although you felt very angry? Why did you react like that? (emotion regulation)
- What are the factors affecting teachers to express compassion in the class? (determinants)
- What could prevent you from displaying compassion towards a student? (determinants)
- If I were a school principal, how would I learn when to be empathic and when not to be? Could you elaborate on it? (socialization for emotion management)
- How do teachers express compassion during the school day? Under which circumstances? (emotion regulation)
- What are the implications of compassionate teaching for the students/teachers/school/community? (outcomes)

Every question belongs to a different section as the parentheses in each question show. But, it is important to bear in mind that the questions asked may be very sensitive and even distressing and that the interviewees might feel very vulnerable talking about their feelings. Therefore, it is advisable to design questions that go through a process of development from the simple, neutral, straightforward questions to more complex ones, from general questions about emotions in teaching/ principalship to more personal questions about the interviewee's feelings and emotion management at work. Likewise, as wording of questions is a tricky business that might cause biases (Babbie, 2016), the interviewer should be very careful not to devise an interview guide that promotes certain emotions and disrespects others.

The Implementation Phase

To exemplify the implementation phase in the interviewing process, I follow those who divided this phase into three stages (e.g., Foddy, 2003; Tracy, 2013).

Stage One – Opening: From the considerable literature about interviewing we learn that it is suggested starting the interview by briefly describing the topic and the purpose of the interview, asking permission to use a sound recorder, explaining the technical reasons for recording rather than writing down what the interviewee says, and encouraging the interviewee to describe his/her point of view freely and safely due to high ethical codes of discretion (Babbie, 2016; Ingham et al., 2009; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Tracy, 2013). It is also important to ask the interviewee if she or he has any questions before starting the interview, remembering that the first few minutes of the interview are crucial for its success.

In the case of interviewing teachers and educational leaders about their feelings and modes of emotion management, though, one should bear in mind they may feel tension or anxiety due to the individuals' difficulty in exposing emotional experiences openly. Thus, we may ask what other elements of interviewing should be in the opening phase to increase the likelihood of successfully attaining the information needed to enrich the research on emotion. Several points merit highlighting in this respect:

- As mutuality plays a key role in any social interaction, the interviewer should be open too and talk about his role, the context in which the interview takes place, and other personal revelations that are unlikely to bias the interviewee yet create a good atmosphere and build rapport.
- As practitioners, particularly school principals are likely to be concerned about personal and sensitive issues they might say during the interview, it is very helpful to indicate at this stage that the interview transcript will be delivered to the interviewees to enable them to comment on what they said and to clarify.

This creates a feeling that everything in the interview may be revised, edited, and amended, which is very important in exposing one's feelings.

- As very sensitive issues might arise during the interview, it is the interviewer's obligation to suggest stopping the recording or not transcribing these issues to encourage the interviewees to expose their feelings more profoundly.
- Due to the ideal commitment of educators to student achievement and well-being as well as to the schooling process, it is recommended stressing the potential practical contributions of the study, specifically when the study focuses on emotion in education, a neglected aspect in many neoliberal educational policies in recent years (Crawford, 2007; Oplatka, 2009).
- In studies focusing on a particular emotion, the interviewer should explain to the teacher/educational leader that his knowledge as an expert in the researched emotion is of much value to the study. Usually, the interviewees laugh when hearing that and are ready to provide information as much as possible from their experience.

No doubt the insights above are highly contextualized, depending very much on culture and society. Yet people all over the world seek safety, trust, mutuality, and the like, and therefore the beginning of the interview is very critical, as reflected in the voices of two PhD students who studied emotion in education:

I began the interview by presenting myself and my role in the Ministry of Education. I emphasized that the study is mine, as a doctoral student, not of the Ministry and also discretion... I indicated this is a qualitative study in which the focus is the personal, idiosyncratic voice of the principal, there are no right and wrong answers, and what is important is the principal's personal attitudes and emotions...in this way I built trust.

I talked about myself, my doctoral study that deals with emotion in education, so in this way I removed any fear of a requested study by the Ministry of Education or the Municipality.

When the first stage is over, and the interviewee is ready to talk about emotion and feelings, it is time to move to the main part of the interviewing process.

Stage Two – Asking and Listening: The main part of the interviewing process includes asking the questions in the interview guides, encouraging the interviewee to tell his/her story, using probes, and asking questions deriving from the interviewee's responses. But, the interviewers should be on the alert lest irrelevant data to their research questions arise in the interview and should prompt interviewees to provide the kinds of descriptions that will provide in-depth details of the area of interest (Roulston, 2010). This is extremely important in studies about emotion in school in which the interviewee may avoid talking about some emotions while moving to talk about general educational topics. Several insights about the second stage merit illuminating:

Firstly, consistent with Guest et al. (2013), and due to the complexity of interviewing about emotions, feelings, and affects, it is wiser to start with general questions about emotion such as subjective meanings of emotions or emotion management and other teachers/leaders' emotions and to save sensitive questions for later on. In this sense, it is advised to start with general questions about emotions, move to focus on ideal displays of emotion in principalship/teaching, and end with direct questions about the interviewee's feelings and types of emotion display/suppression, and the factors affecting emotion regulation in the case of the

interviewee him/herself. Note, principals or teachers who express much difficulty in talking about their modes of emotion management or internal feelings will possibly feel safer if asked about their feelings towards external stimuli such as a new educational program, meetings with the parent association, or a particular school event. Only then may they feel confident enough to talk about their feelings such as anger, happiness, sadness, and enthusiasm in their role.

Secondly, listening to one's emotion needs more than directing one's attention towards the other; this is what Schostack (2006) noted as the possibility of gaining an insight into the experiences, concerns, beliefs and ways of seeing. In the case of emotion, it is the responsibility of the interviewer to be attentive and empathic to the internal feelings, breathing, pulse, groans, halting, exhalation, and laugh of the interviewee. The interviewer, though, should not only listen to the principal who reveals his/her feelings or modes of emotion management in different situations, but also to be attentive to the interviewee's ability to express him/herself emotionally and to understand his/her subjective point of view thoroughly. The interview, as Ingham et al. (2009) indicated, should verbalize emotions (e.g., Does this make you sad?) and never ignore them.

Thirdly, as the use of probes in response to the interviewee's previous answer (e.g., What do you mean by that? Can you give an example?) has been discussed at length in the literature about qualitative interviews, some attention about probes in the research on teacher/leader emotion is warranted. Given the difficulty of individuals, particularly of practitioners and managers, to talk about their feelings and emotions in the workplace, probes should be used to support teachers and educational leaders emotionally and encourage them to dig into their hearts proactively. For example, when the interviewee has reservations about talking openly about the ways he or she suppresses undesirable emotions in the school, the interviewer can use probing questions such as, "You mentioned your colleague who shared her emotions with parents...could you elaborate on your feeling towards what she did?" "I understand you are very excited when you are talking about this experience, can I focus on one aspect of it and...?" "When you think today about the way you refrained from displaying your authentic feelings, what would you recommend new principals to do in the same situation?" Other probes can be formulated as follows:

- Could you provide me with an occasion in which you had to be compassionate towards a pupil?
- Why did you feel like that?
- Can you give any illustration of emotion regulation that you outlined right now?

Although the first stage includes building initial rapport between the interviewer and the interviewee, the need to maintain rapport continues in the second stage because semi-structured interviews depend largely on this rapport. Thus, beyond expressing constant interest in what the teacher/educational leader says about emotion in school, a common way in qualitative study to make good contact with the interviewee (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009), when emotions are discussed, facial expressions are very important to increase trust (e.g., a friendly smile, an expression of sorrow or curiosity). Trust is a critical issue in building rapport, as King and Horrocks (2010) clarified:

Building rapport is not about ingratiating yourself with your participant...rapport is essentially about trust – enabling the participant to feel comfortable in opening up to you. (p. 48)

So, how can an interviewer strengthen trust and rapport in an interview meeting that focuses on emotion? From my experience in my own studies and those of my PhD students some points need highlighting:

- It is better to create inter-personal interactions mixed with emotions during the interview meeting rather than directly attempting to convince the principal/teacher to talk about their emotion. In doing so, the interviewee may feel it is just natural to talk about emotion in the workplace, not something exceptional.
- In cases where teachers feel it is unethical to expose socially undesirable, even negative emotions in their work (e.g., fear of or anger at students) due to their professional socialization (Oplatka, 2009), it is advised to open this conversation with examples from “others” – teachers or principals who admitted feeling undesirable feelings, and ask the interviewee to explain the feelings of those “other” teachers. This may maintain rapport and trust as the interviewee will be less likely to feel threatened by the questions.
- As school principals do not usually talk about their emotions or issues of emotion regulation and management but rather about school performance, student achievement and the like, the interviewer should expect many deviations from the main topic and therefore ought to be patient and tolerant. Otherwise, the interviewee might be offended and threatened.

Stage Three – Closing: At the conclusion of the interview, there is an opportunity to ask direct questions about emotion and feeling with no fear of “losing” the interviewee or influencing his/her narrative. First, if the interviewer feels he or she did not receive sufficient information about a particular issue, this is the time to probe into this issue more directly, acknowledging the interviewee’s difficulty to elaborate on it before. Second, the developing, comparative nature of qualitative research analysis allows the finding of themes and categories throughout the data collection (i.e., the interviewing process). Thus, a certain emotional issue might arise in some interviews (i.e., a category), but not in others. To assure full coverage of the issue, it is advised to ask the interviewee about the missing issue directly in the final stage. For example, “Some principals talked about their tendency not to display happiness during the school day. You didn’t mention anything about it. What do you feel about it? Any comment? Any relevance to your feelings and emotion at work?” But, this is a very complex and risky strategy as the interviewer should be careful not to bias the interviewee or expect him to provide some information about the missing issue regardless of its meaning in his work. The interview closes by suggesting that the interviewee reflect upon the research phenomenon and provide the interviewer with alternative information about the emotion under investigation.

Methodological Hazards and Ethical Considerations

Before closing, any research design faces methodological challenges that need to be handled to confirm trustworthiness and reliability. In the case of interviewing about emotion in the workplace, some hazards have to be taken into account before and during the interview meeting. First, as emotion is a very sensitive issue, any possible effect of the interviewer’s social identity on the interviewee, a common weakness of interviews (Willig, 2013), should be considered. In this sense, each individual, including the interviewer, holds beliefs and attitudes that are related to his/her social and cultural contexts and together constitute a part of the social identity. The perceptions of emotion and emotion management is, then, a part of one’s social identity, as our society defines “correct” and “incorrect” forms of emotion management and

“desirable” vs. “undesirable” feelings. Therefore, the interviewer should be very careful not to interpret the interviewee’s emotion management and feelings in the way his/her own culture does, but rather to be open enough to receive alternative ways from a neutral point of view.

Likewise, when talking about the interviewee’s own emotions, one should bear in mind that the interviewee is very vulnerable and sometimes apprehensive and, therefore, any verbal or non-verbal comment from the interviewer that might be interpreted as a threat is likely to impede free and open conversation during the interviewing process. To prevent that, the interviewer should start with broad and neutral questions about emotion in teaching, leadership and the school (e.g., What is compassion for you? What could prevent a teacher from being compassionate in class?), avoid giving positive feedback (verbally or non-verbally) when the interviewee tells how he displayed the researched emotion (but do it when the interviewee is capable of talking about feelings and emotion in the interview in order to encourage him/her to keep talking about this topic), and to refrain from being judgmental during the interview.

Second, and arising from the first point, is reciprocal exchanges of experiences, emotions, and viewpoints between the interviewer and the interviewee, despite some support in the literature for this kind of conversation (e.g., Have, 2005). Because interviewing about emotions and feelings may seem like a friendly conversation, the interviewers should remind themselves they are not having a normal conversation. This is very important given that teachers and educational leaders tend to move to other topics other than emotion due to the difficulty of many to expose their feelings or talk about their emotion management at work.

Third, sometimes the interviewer may suspect that the interviewee is hiding something and therefore keep asking questions for clarifications (Ingham et al., 2009). But, in the case of emotion, ignoring teachers’ and principals’ hesitation to share feelings with the interviewer is probably to miss an important message from the interviewee. Thus, instead of suspecting the teacher or the principal of concealing feelings and emotions and probing into it incessantly, it is better to raise it to the surface and speak openly about this hesitation to allow the interviewee to explain why he or she does not want to talk about feelings. Otherwise, the interviewer will miss important knowledge about the researched emotion and may also exhaust the interviewee for no empirical reason.

Finally, the researcher should distinguish between questions that seek information about the interviewees’ own feelings and their emotion management and regulation in the school, and questions that focus on others’ feelings/emotions as they are perceived by the interviewee. Likewise, not every subjectively-held definition of a particular emotion reflects the interviewee’s authentic feelings and emotions. Thus, the interview guide should include all kinds of questions to cover the researched phenomenon, but the interviewer should be aware of the subtle distinctions among them.

Practical Conclusions for Researchers

Before closing some practical suggestions for researchers who wish to explore emotions in organizations, in general, and in schools, in particular, are warranted:

1. Studying emotions in the workplace may cause harm, distress, and negative emotional responses both to the interviewer and the interviewee and, therefore, should be planned carefully and sensitively.
2. The research purposes should be broad enough to enable the interviewee to raise emotions and related issues the researcher could not directly predict, because emotions are related to many cultural, social organizational characteristics.
3. The question of whom to interview is very critical in the study of emotion in teaching/educational leadership because interviewees may share only emotions

they feel, display, and suppress at work. Therefore, it is suggested to use inventories and snowball sampling to choose the appropriate persons to the study.

4. Because of the complex and sensitive aspects of interviewing emotions, it is advisable to design questions that go through a process of development from the simple, neutral, straightforward questions to more complex ones, from general questions about emotions in teaching/ principalship to more personal questions about the interviewee's feelings and emotion management at work.
5. The researcher should pay careful attention to the opening of the interview to build trust and rapport and to avoid prioritizing a particular emotion over the others in the emergent conversation.

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