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**Agency and communion as factors influencing men's ECEC career trajectories.**

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**Abstract**

Achieving gender balance in ECEC requires both effective recruitment and retention of men. This study examines characteristics of agency and communion as explanatory factors in men's trajectories from entry and throughout their careers. The research extends previous studies on men's entering the profession (author, year; Pirard, 2015) by closely looking at continued decision making along career paths, using agency as the theoretical framework.

Bandura (2006) delineated core agentic properties: intentionality, forethought, self-reactiveness, and self-reflectiveness, while Buchanan & Bardi (2014) distinguished between agency ("getting ahead") and communion ("getting along") as meta-constructs related to wellbeing. Based on a multi-case study paradigm, we used semi-structured interviews and storylines, focused on five veteran male ECEC workers at the end of a five year longitudinal study. Participants agreed to all research procedures. Identification was avoided through pseudonyms and changing identification of work contexts.

Findings showed that men who chose to remain in the classroom exhibited high levels of communion. Their agentic behaviors included passionate intentionality towards work with children, short-term career forethought, and delayed self-reactiveness. In contrast, those who entered administrative positions in their schools and day care centers exhibited high levels of intentionality towards institutional frameworks, long-term career forethought, immediate self-reactiveness, deep self-reflectiveness, and low levels of communion.

These findings shed light on men's retention in the ECEC workforce, suggesting a nuanced re-examination of the glass escalator paradigm which posits that men in women's professions uniformly tend to rise in their organizations.

**Keywords**

gender balance, retention, agency, communion, intentionality

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# Agency and communion as factors influencing men's ECEC career trajectories

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## Aims of the study

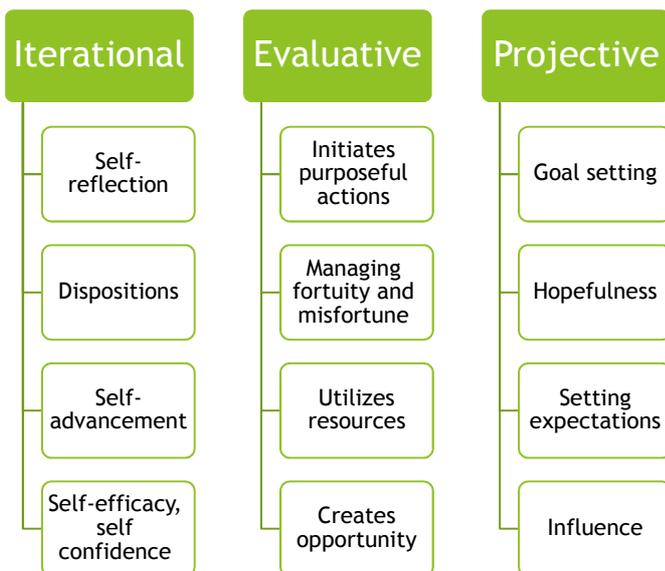
- ▶ How do men's career trajectories in ECEC unfold?
- ▶ What factors affect their career decisions?
- ▶ Can agency theory contribute to understanding men's career trajectories?

**Agency**, characterized as “getting ahead,” involves a self-focused orientation that manifests itself in self-advancement and self-reliance and entails pursuing self-orientated goals, striving for achievement and independence.

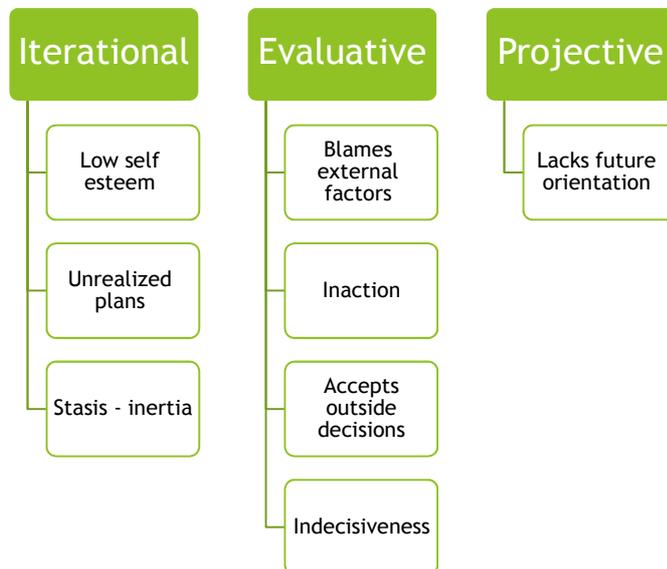
**Communion**, characterized as “getting along,” involves an other-focused orientation that manifests itself in benevolence and interpersonal connections, and it entails consideration of others, helping, and social connectedness

(Buchanan & Bardi, 2015)

## Dimensions of Agentic Behavior



## Dimensions of Non-agentic Behavior



## Dimensions of Communion



## Longitudinal study of men's career trajectories in ECEC

### Original Study (2012-2013)

- ▶ Six veteran ECEC educators
- ▶ All working directly with children in the classroom/nursery
- ▶ Years of service at time of study (2013): 7 - 25 years

Brody, D. (2014) *Men Who Teach Young Children: An International Perspective*, London: IOE Press.

### Follow-up Study (2016-2017)

- ▶ Same participants
- ▶ All but one had changed jobs:
  - Two in kindergarten/nursery
  - Two teaching older children
  - Two managerial ECEC
- ▶ Years of service at time of study: 12 to 30 years
- ▶ One new participant - veteran teacher and ECEC director

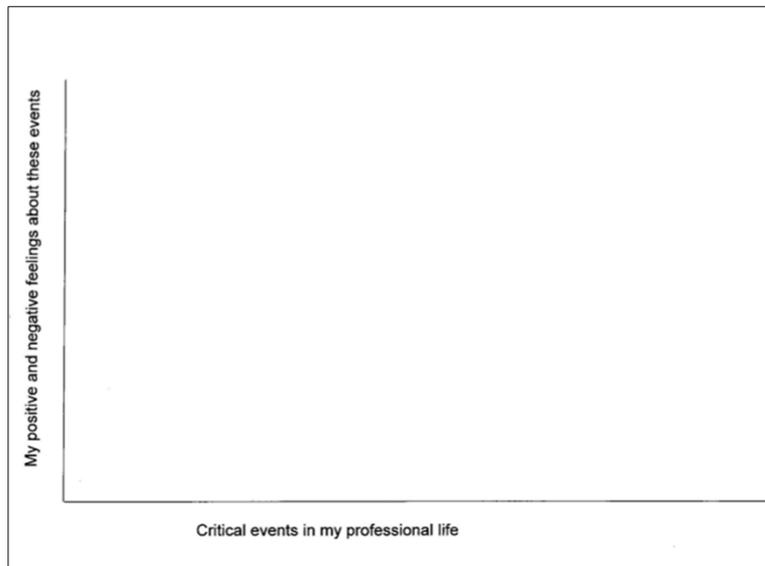
## Methods

- ▶ Narrative interviews about career trajectory
- ▶ Participants draw a storyline of their career trajectory and explain it.

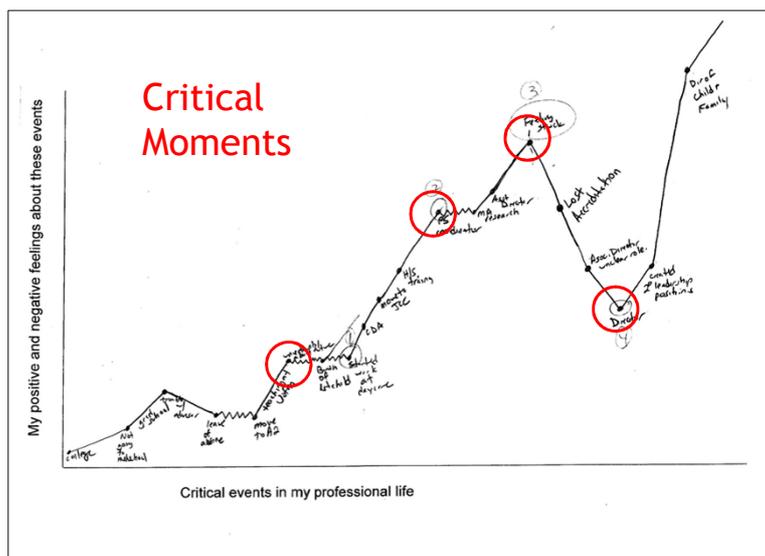
## Analysis

- ▶ Open coding of narrative interview protocol and explanation of storyline
- ▶ Identification and analysis of critical moments in the storyline.
- ▶ Quantitative and qualitative comparison of the seven cases based on data analysis.

## Storyline methodology (Gergen and Gergen, 2000)



## Storyline methodology (Gergen and Gergen, 2000)



## Coding of interview protocols

### Agentic behavior: (Initiates purposeful action.)

“I started to push. In other words, I had a vision, a dream [about establishing a science center for ECEC in the area]. There was active participation on the part of the local community council, and together it came into being. There was a process that pushed itself forward. When everyone is involved, then anything can happen. There is a song ...: *For one small dream, you need a million dreamers who close their eyes*. Here that's not what happened. In order to realize one small dream, you need one crazy person to activate the million others. In my dream, in that vision, I succeeded in exciting those around me.” (Eitan, Israel)

## Coding of interview protocols

### Non-agentic behavior: (Indecisiveness)

“Like I said, I want to have a good balance between work life and personal life, and I think just teaching the children, because that is the part that finds the most joy, ok, you are happy for it, because working with children is nice, I get energy out of it, that is what I want. Perhaps in the future, I don't want the same group because then you get stuck in the routine and everything. Yeah, for now , my main goal is ok, keep it like it is now, and we'll see, and perhaps some changes - like changing to another school, two years from now. I will see it year by year.” (Lucas, the Netherlands)

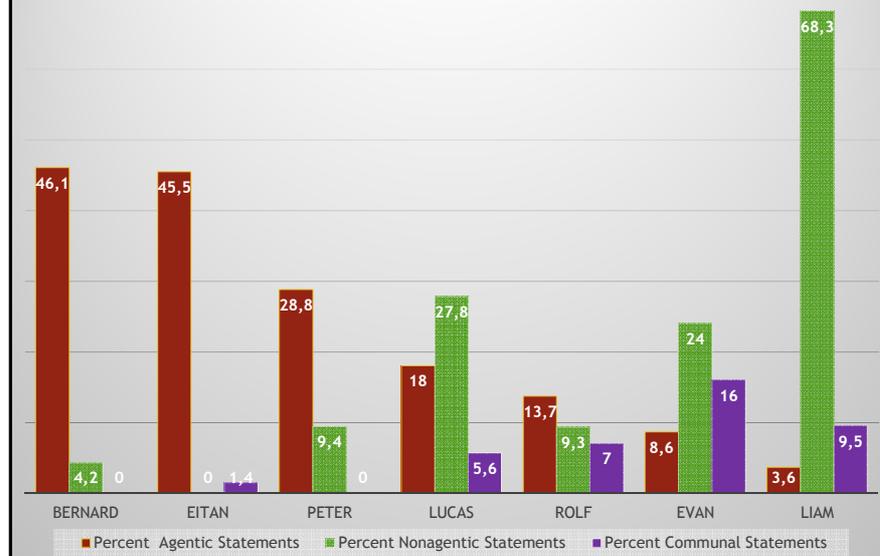
## Coding of interview protocols

### Communion: (Relational orientation)

“When I first came here they didn't have a union rep, there was just a person who was receiving the union information and kind of distributing it to people, but they weren't really involved.... And then it came out that we could have a rep, and nobody wanted to do it. I do feel like I should be protecting peoples' rights .... I didn't necessarily want to do it, but I thought of myself as (pause). Its mainly involved with just the staff here. A lot of it is very routine.... You kind of just make sure that the procedure gets done properly.” (Liam, UK)

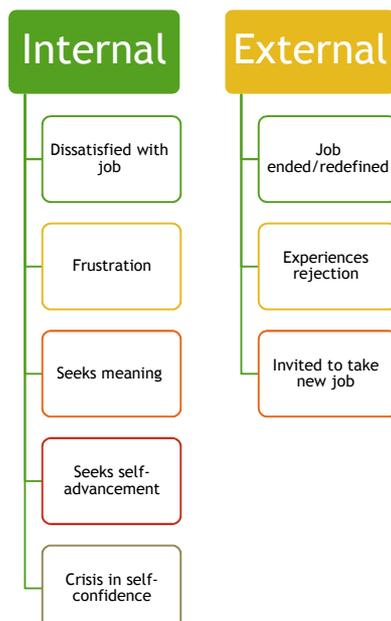
### Findings

Percent Agentic, Nonagentic, Communion Statements by Participant



## Storyline analysis: critical moments

### Source of critical moment



## Response to critical moment

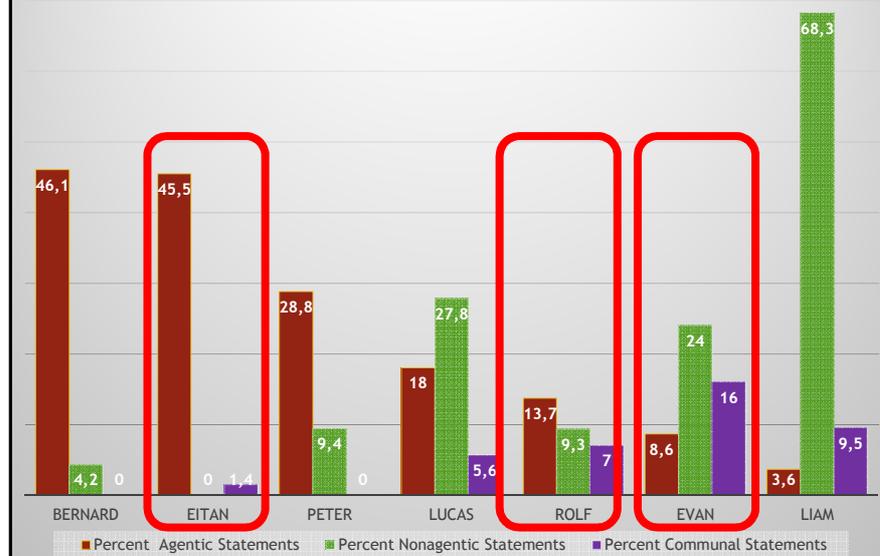
Agentic

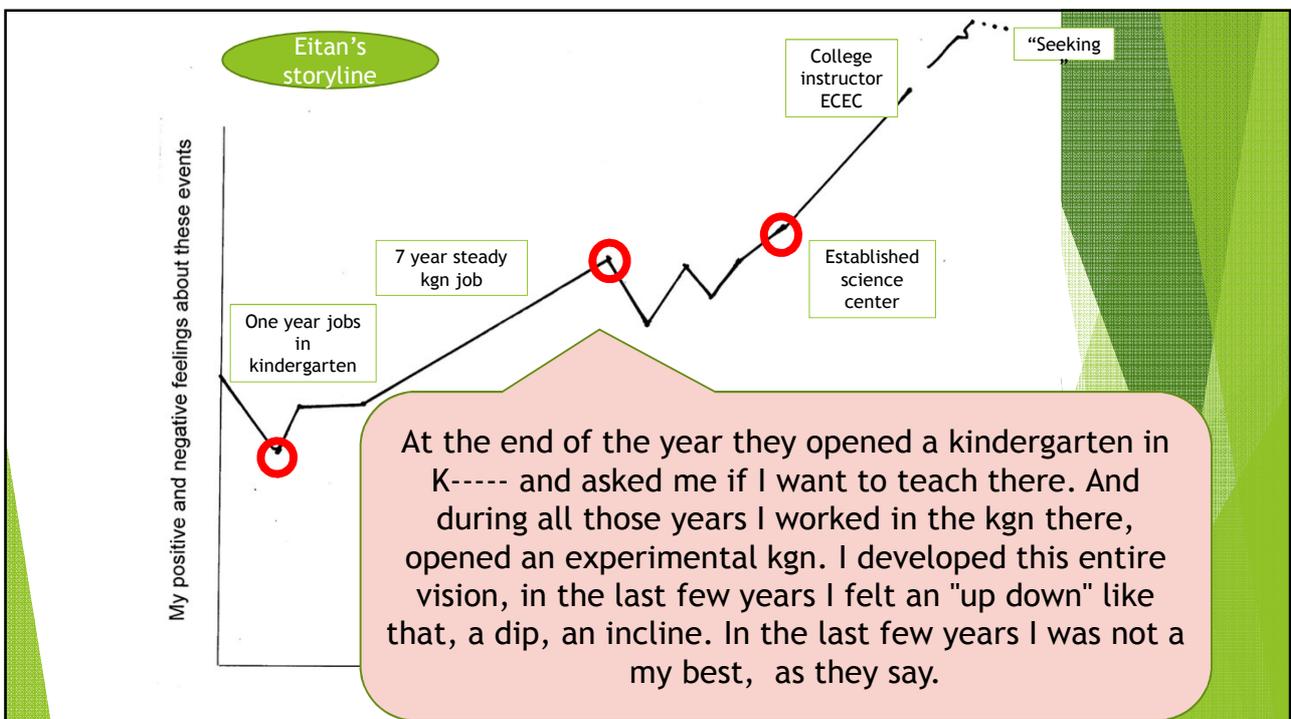
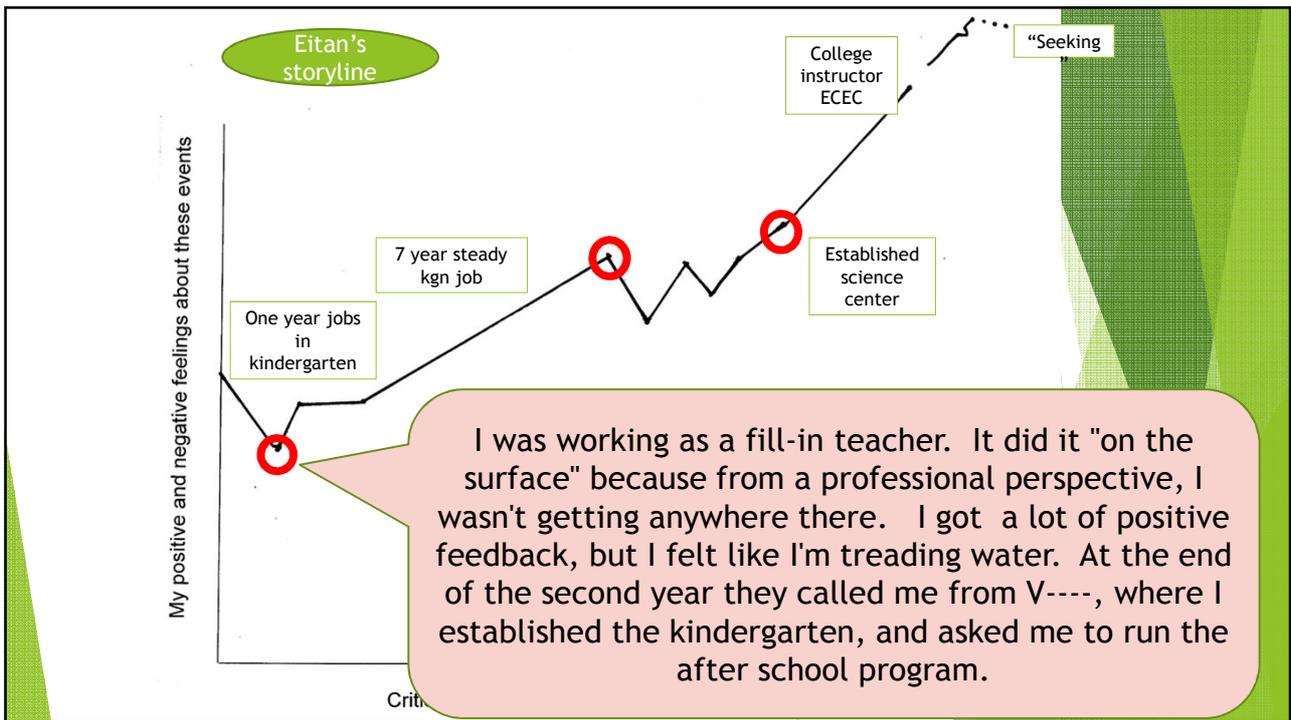
Non-agentic

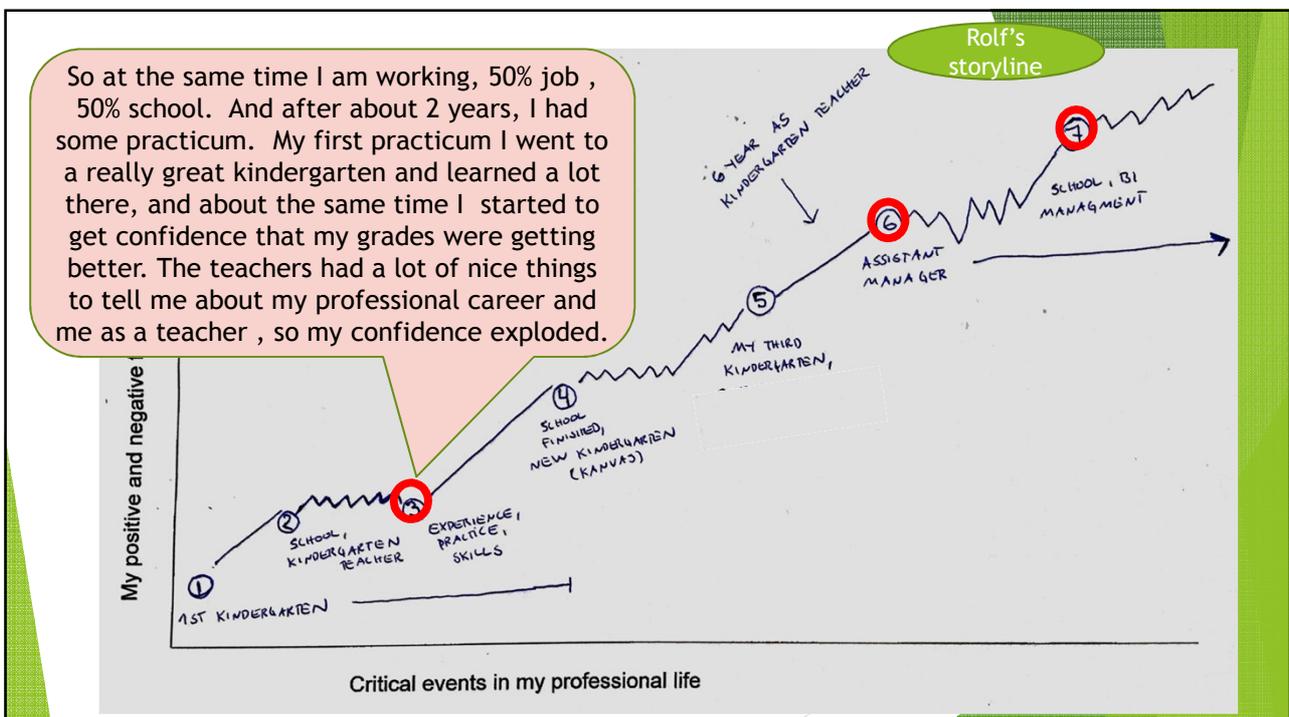
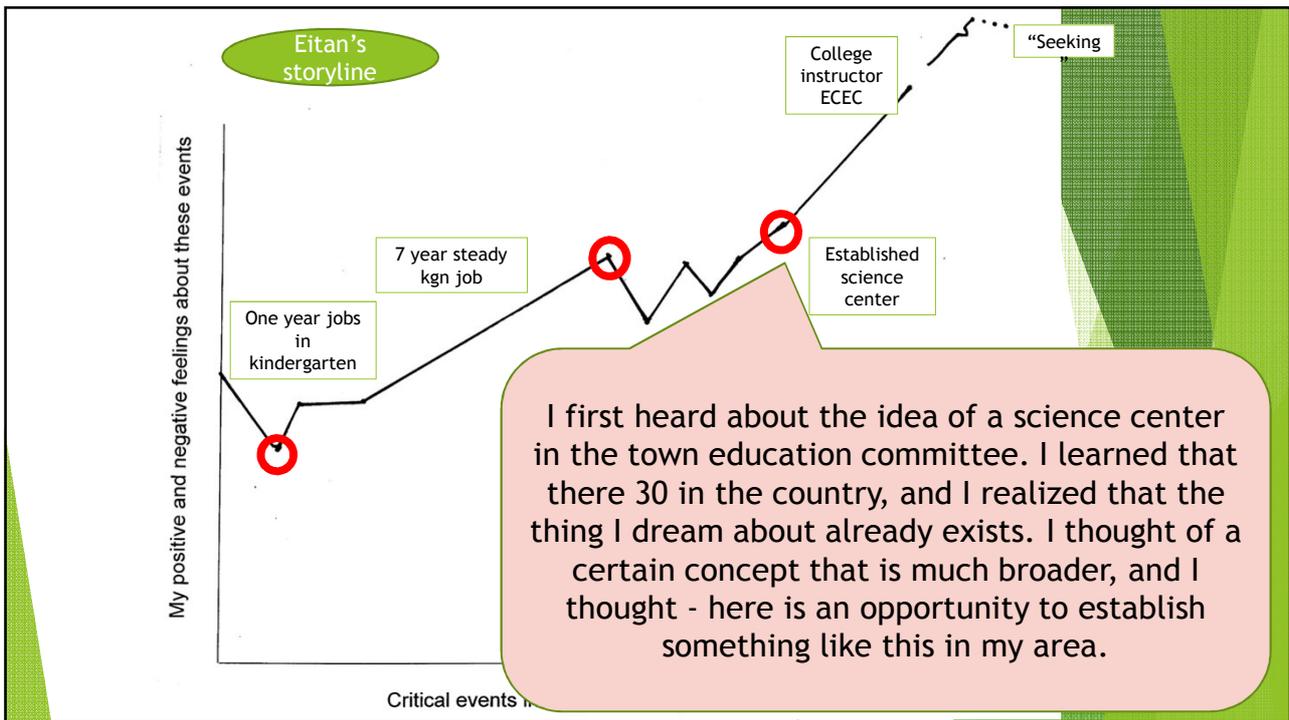
Communion

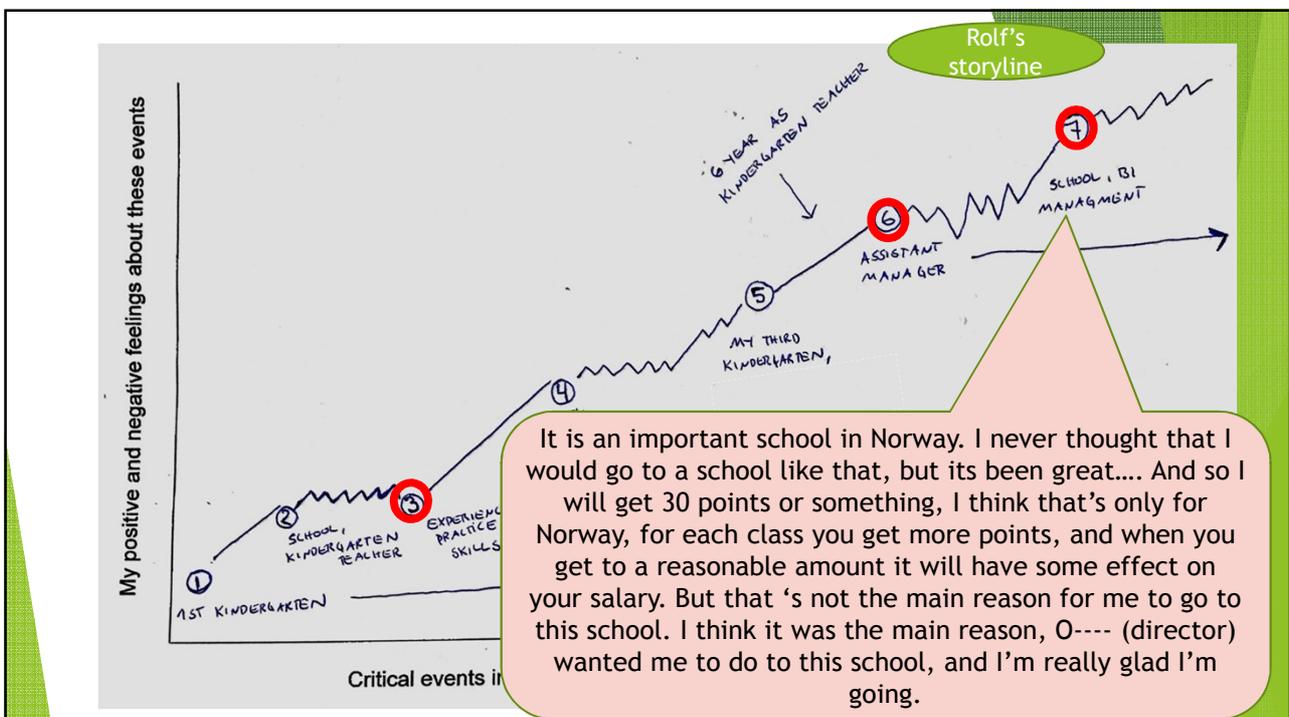
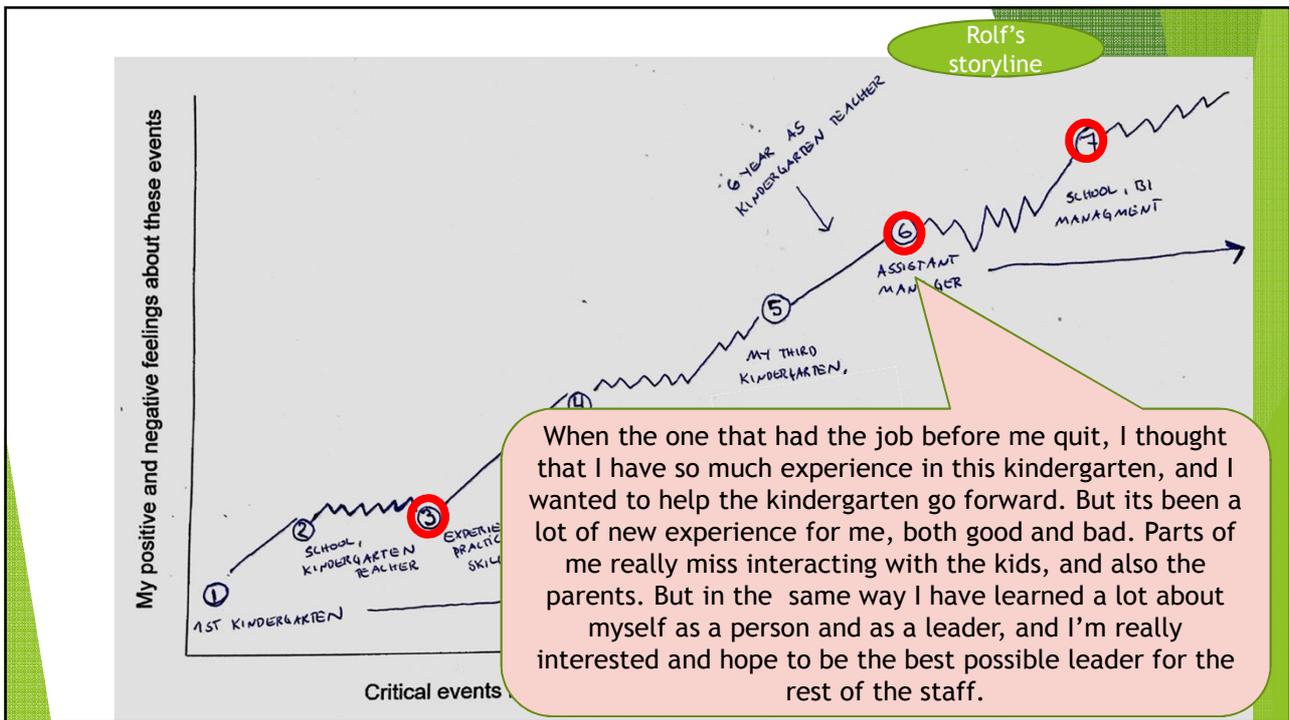
### Findings

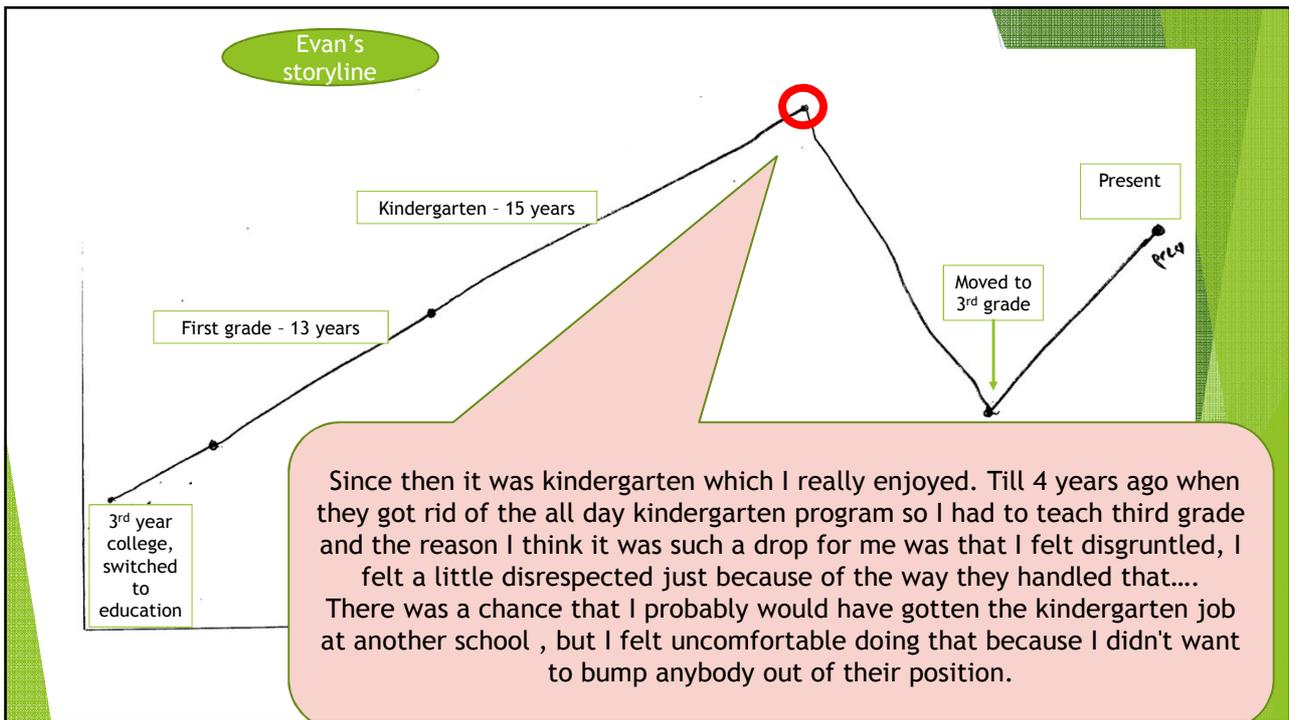
Percent Agentic, Nonagentic, Communion Statements by Participant











	Agentic typology	Type of Critical Moment	Source of CM	Response	Work trajectory
Eitar	Hi agentic, non-agentic and communion are absent	Dissatisfaction, seeking challenge	Internal	Creates new opportunities, initiates purposeful action	Moves from one initiative to the next, consistently in ECEC.
Rolf	Balance: low levels of agentic and non-agentic, with some communion	Invited into new positions, crisis of self-confidence	External - internal	Hopeful and positive outlook, relational orientation, low self-esteem	Steady employment at daycare center, promoted to assistant director
Evan	Low agentic, high non-agentic, high communion	Job redefinition, salary and job reduction	External	Ethical orientation, stasis	Remains in same school, leaves kgn to teach third grade

## Conclusions and Some Questions

- ▶ Understanding men's career decisions in ECEC requires a long term perspective.
- ▶ Agency, non-agency, and communion may be powerful analytic tools for understanding men's career trajectories.
- ▶ If agency and communion are correlated with gender, does this mean that men who stay in the ECEC classroom share an agency/communion profile with female ECEC workers?
- ▶ What kind of retention is desirable for men in ECEC? Is remaining in the classroom an ideal, or should we also value advancement into managerial roles?

Thanks for your attention!

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