**First reviewer**

Thank you for your constructive feedback, it helped me refine my ideas more concisely.

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| **Reviewer’s comments** | **Correction / response** |
| Check that your citation format aligns with the journal's requirements. | This has been addressed throughout the article. The article is now in line with journal guidelines. |
| Page 1: Abstract: Specify more what you mean by “broader public sphere”. | I explained the intent of the phrase “broader public sphere” in the following manner:  “… take part in the broader public sphere and apply their professional skills beyond the confines of the workplace, for example by counselling parents on issues that have only an indirect connection with the educational framework.” [p.1] |
| Page 2: Introduction: Could you explain public/private sphere as you are seeing it? In some places there are public as well as private schools and childcare centers, so I worry that this framing may get confusing. | All the teachers included in this study work in public education and are employed on behalf of the Israel Ministry of Education. [*Study Population*, p.8]  The phrases “private sphere” and “public sphere” refer to the educator’s life within the home and outside the home.  To clarify this, I added parenthetical remarks “(home)” and “(professional, outside the home)” in several places in the article. [pp.2, 6, 12, 15, 17]  The following is an explanation from a feminist scholar of education, to clarify these concepts: Herzog (2002) explains that the existence of two separate life spheres is based on cultural assumptions. Each of the two spheres is based on different principles of social organization, which dictate what social functions take place in each.  According to this view, the “public sphere” refers to the public realm of society. In contrast, the “private sphere” is the intimate realm of activity conducted within the private home. |
| In the second paragraph of the introduction there is a list of themes in the literature and it is not clear why these themes, or how they are connected. | These are the topics addressed in the article. I included this list to introduce the readers to the topics discussed in the article.  To your suggestion, I’ve shortened this passage and focused on the challenge’s general idea. |
| My sense is that it might be a good idea to narrow the literature review more to make a stronger conceptual argument. | I included a review of the literature pertaining to both of the topics that are investigated in the: the role of the mother and the role of the teacher.  I shortened the literature review by deleting the second paragraph of the *Introduction* and the section titled *Empathy as a Women’s Attribute*. |
| Check spelling = Rudick. | I verified the spelling is Ruddick, and have corrected it throughout. |
| Page 3, line 35: Instead of real mothers... maybe say: In reality, mothers... | Thank you for the suggestion, it does sound better, and I changed it in the article. [p.3] |
| Page 4, line 22: Friedrich Froebel (check spelling throughout). | The spelling has been corrected to Fröbel throughout the article. |
| Page 4, line 26: What did you mean by “priority to the status” of mothers as educators? | Fröbel believed in integrating maternal skills into education. Therefore, women who studied in his seminary were granted the necessary certification to educate the children of others (in the public sphere, outside the home).  In the article, I added “as women,” to clarify that feminine traits were a priority in the founding of Fröbel's kindergartens, even though it was done in the public sphere of life (outside the home) where, until that time, only men had worked. [p.4] |
| Page 4: fulfill (spelling). | Corrected in article. |
| Page 5, line 10: Were all women successfully integrated? What challenges/inequities remain? | In the period discussed here (late 18th to mid-19th century), there were no such gaps in the field of early childhood education, or at least none reported. This issue is mentioned here to explain that a radical change took place at that time in the realm of feminism; women were integrated into the public sphere (working outside the home) based on qualities that were attributed to them as women (the same attributes that justified keeping them in the home). [p.4] |
| Page 5/line 18: It seems that you are introducing a research question here? Or is the question more rhetorical? If so, that is confusing for me as a reader. | My intention here was to summarize and emphasize the connection between the role of motherhood and the role of female educators in order to alert readers to the challenge faced by these women, in terms of managing and balancing their skills and knowledge. |
| Page 5/line 18: Your question brings up several thoughts for me: Do all early childhood educators have maternal traits? | This question is highly relevant. However, the women who were interviewed in the study believe that women cannot work in a profession dealing with preschool aged children without maternal skills. In a kindergarten or elementary school, it is not proper to push children to strive to achieve goals without providing love and warmth to the more fragile children. |
| Are they all women? | Since this research investigated the integration of the role of motherhood with the role of the educator, I interviewed only women who are mothers. [*Methodology*, p. 8] |
| Are they really motherly? | They all identified themselves as motherly. |
| Do they all have a higher education? | This is detailed in the *Methods* section:  All the interviewed women hold a teaching certificate and a bachelor’s degree in education from one of the recognized colleges of education in Israel, and half of the interviewees also hold a master’s degree. [*Study* *Population*, p.8] |
| To me, it seems like a privileged standpoint on mothers and teachers, to a degree, but maybe I am missing something? Maybe part of my wonderings here are because I have not been introduced to the context. | This is precisely what the research addresses, your understanding is correct. |
| Page 5/last several lines: This part seems very important for a potential argument about the neoliberal context. The sentiment reminds me a bit of Stephen Ball's (2003) description of how teachers are poised to “struggle for their souls” in neoliberalism. | Thank you very much for the suggested reference—I read the article and it is indeed interesting. I included an idea from Ball (2003), that is relevant to my article in the section on the teachers’ professional identity. [p.5] |
| Sharon Hays’ work on mothering for schooling might also be relevant for your essay. | Thank you, as well, for the reference to Sharon Hays, which I added following the reference to Rich (1994), in the section on *Development of Women's Maternal Behaviors.* [p.3] |
| Page 6: Top: Say more about the meaning of "professional relationship". In what context do the expectations of the kindergarten teacher being a "professional leader" occur? How widespread are they? There is a need to expand on this part more with recent literature. | Following this phrase in the article, I added statements from Sima Haddad, the former director of the Division for Pre-Primary Education at the Ministry of Education, which explains and address these questions. [p.6] |
| Page 7/lines 10-25: Where are you placing the school within the ecologies, how does this relate to public vs private sphere? Again, it is confusing potentially because ECEC is both public and private in many places and mothers/parents get to choose their preferences, at least in some cases. | As clarified above, this article refers to these spheres, as presented in literature, from a feminist perspective: private = inside the house, public = outside the house. It does not refer to private schools. All the interviewed women teach in public schools and kindergartens under the supervision of the Israeli Ministry of Education. [*Study Population*, p.8]  In response to this comment, I added explanations in parentheses “(in the home)” after each reference to the private sphere; and “(outside the home)”, or, “(professional)” alongside the term public sphere, to clarify that it refers to their work life. [pp.2, 6, 12, 15, 17] |
| Page 7: Related to Friedman (2010), there is also literature showing mothers’ over-involvement in education in ways that disadvantages poor and minority students (Brantlinger is one example). There are also critiques of the neoliberal policies that require parents to be involved in schools in ways that support professionalism but do not respond to children’s and families’ cultural strengths (of marginalized children and families). | I strongly agree with what you said.  Thanks to your suggestion of Hays’ book, my awareness of this issue was sharpened, and I added a reference to this book following the reference to Friedman, regarding mothers who are preoccupied with survival and cannot meet the expectations of the mainstream culture. I connected this situation with the current study, where the interviewees said they try to help to these mothers and their children. [p.7] |
| Page 7/lines 44-50: Here I feel that your questions are shifting again. | The research questions do not change; I have now defined the first question more precisely.  In the *Introduction*, I present the following questions:   1. How do female educators experience the intersections between their roles as educators and as mothers? 2. How do each of these roles and identities impact one another?   Later, the same questions are phrased slightly differently, as:   1. How do female early childhood educators experience the interface between their professional and maternal roles and identities? 2. How do these roles and identities impact each other, and why?   The purpose of the article is to present the challenges of integrating these roles, and how female educators who are mothers conduct themselves in this situation. |
| Page 8/study context: Line 3 is redundant with info in the second paragraph. It is unclear where Kindergarten falls in the Israeli context from this paragraph. | Here is the relevant context:  In Israel, most kindergartens are separate educational frameworks (children aged 3-6). I mention the issue of educational leadership because kindergarten teachers are the leaders of these educational institutions.  The kindergarten teachers interviewed in this study all work in public kindergartens under the Israeli Ministry of Education. |
| Did all of the participants currently have children living in their home? | At the time of the study, they all had children living in their homes. The stories they recounted could be either from the recent past or the more distant past. [*Study Population*, p.8] |
| Page 8/I would like more context about the schools the participants worked at and how that fit with your thinking about public/private (if it did). | As mentioned, they all work in public education. In this article, the phrase “private sphere” refers to life in the home while “public sphere” refers to life outside the home. I sometimes used the term “professional sphere” to specify the kindergarten or elementary school. |
| Page 8/Did your snowball participants then suggest additional participants? | Yes, via the snowball effect, one participant recommended others.  I have now clarified this in the article. [p.9] |
| Page 8/line 40: Why were semi-structured interviews the most appropriate? | Because it was important to me to have a uniform direction that would help focus the interviews, I included a number of questions that I consistently asked of all interviewees. I also wanted to remain open to hearing their personal stories and opinions. The semi-structured interviews enable me to remain open to the subjective views of each individual. [p.9] |
| Page 9: The protocol for your interview does not seem to be altogether closely connected to your study as you explained it. Could you reconcile? | I clarified the intention behind each question and transferred the questions themselves to a new *Appendix* section. [p.10, bottom of the page; p.11, top of the page] |
| Page 10: What was the use of memos in your work? | In the *Results* section, there are references to works that explain every phenomenon I found in this study. |
| Page 10: Bottom: You discuss themes and then you shift to a discussion of categories. Are you seeing these as the same? | Yes, these are the same. |
| What did you then do with the category trees? | I derived the themes mentioned in the *Results* section from the category trees. [p.11] |
| How did they affect what you found out related to your research questions? | The research questions are designed to explore how the interviewees experience the interface between their role in the education system and their role as mothers. The analysis indicated a number of categories that describe this interface and the challenges it poses. |
| What from the themes/categories do you present in the Results section? Why? | In the *Results* section I present the themes that are relevant to the social challenges faced by female educators in their role as mothers and as teachers, as this is my research question. |
| How did they affect what you found out related to your research questions? | This is a very interesting question. Sometimes the research revealed topics that I had not asked about. These are not reflected in the research questions, but they are included in the *Results* section in order to accurately portray the words of the interviewees.  It seemed to me that if I adhered strictly to the original research questions and did not incorporate the novel ideas that emerged from the interviewees’ answers, this would constitute a bias and distortion of the results.  For example:   1. I did not have a question about the teachers helping the mothers of the kindergarten or school students, as I did not intend to enter into a discussion of their relationship with the parents of their students in the education system (much as already been written about this). However, more than half of the women told me about their desire to help mothers who were facing extreme difficulties. 2. I did not have a research question about the interviewees’ relationship with their own children’s teachers, as I had not thought about this topic prior to the study. However, the stories I heard made me realize that this relationship poses a social challenge for mothers who are also teachers in kindergartens and elementary schools.   These themes arose from the broad analysis of the categories (the category tree), which led me to recognize that this is a relevant social challenge; perhaps even more so than some of the questions I had prepared in advance. |
| What from the themes/categories do you present in the Results section? Why? | I present the topics that arose from the analysis of the interviews and which revealed interesting new ideas. I included those that seemed relevant to the social challenges faced by female educators in their roles as mothers and as teachers. |
| Page 11: Top: You have some bullet pointed phrases. These seem more like themes (phenomenological) than categories, as marked. | These are topics that came up in the study, and, as subsequently shown, are reinforced by the interviewees’ quotes. I titled the categories in order to present them in a way that would be clear and interesting to read. |
| Page 11 (middle heading): What is the “public sphere” of the mother's life you refer to? I still am not clear on that. | As mentioned, this phrase refers to the woman’s life outside the home. Here the reference is to the professional sphere. The research covers both the personal and professional lives of the interviewed women. In the subheading, I added the word (professional) in parentheses. [p. 11, bottom of the page] |
| Page 12/line 40: You mention “a deficiency of maternal behaviors at home” for some students. How was the context ascertained, for example how do you know it was not the teachers being judgmental of the children's mothers or judging them against a different, perhaps Western, cultural standard? | Thank you for clarifying this point.   1. The interviewed teachers spoke about families in which the mothers are not able to give adequate warmth and love to their children, due to various difficulties that they face. The teachers are aware of this and give more attention to these children (this is relevant to the welfare mothers mentioned in Hays’ work). In any case, these mothers are extremely busy and their children need extra care. Without delving into the concept of “the good mother”, this fact is clarified—thanks to your suggestion—by citing Hays. This is indeed a judgmental position arising from the views of the dominant society. However, in this study, the teachers’ awareness of the mothers’ difficulties leads the teachers to offer help (which of course may not be free from judgment). [p.7] 2. I added a sentence in the article explaining that this is a position that stems from the Western perspective held by most women who studied the field of education, and the belief that warmth and attention are an integral part of a mother-child relationship. It emerged in this study, that the teachers offer assistance to mothers in need. Their judgment does not stem from a negative attitude, although we must note, that such judgement may exist in the teachers’ perception of the situations. [p.14, first paragraph] |
| Page 13, Line 26: Recruiting does not seem to make sense, consider a different word choice, maybe using, or drawing upon? | The word “using” does sound better, so I changed it—thank you for the suggestion. |
| Page 14: Top: There is a statement that mother-teachers use their maternal behaviors instrumentally, as professional tools in the classroom. I was wondering about how emotion stuck to these “choices” or “tools”? Are you seeing the caring at school as a kind of fabrication, explain that part more please? | Thank you for the suggestion to clarify this point. It is important that I convey the idea that professional tools and emotions are integrated. That is, the teachers have emotions, but in the classrooms, they try to appropriately direct their emotions with a sense of professionalism (their emotions are filtered by their professional skills).  Early education teachers must choose when to express their emotions, as well as with which children they should express their emotions more strongly. An example is presented in the article regarding teachers giving additional maternal warmth to children they feel are lacking this type of attention at home. They also may act with particular sensitivity to children who are in special education programs.  It is important to note, that I do not think that expressions of care in school are a fabrication. The teachers’ caring is very real and important!  One finding that emerged in this study is that the teachers’ professional skills enable them to recognize which children need more warmth and which ones need a firmer approach. The teachers must determine in which situations it is beneficial to express warm, caring emotions and in which situations to act in a different way. This is their speciality!  [p.14, bottom of the page] |
| Page 17/lines 25-27: I wondered how the structures of the school system influence the “desire to be an influential and consistent figure” in ways that caused them to forego (spelling) extended maternity and sick days. What cultivates the attitude? Are the teachers afraid they might use their sick days and not have them for a truer emergency? Is it more difficult to prepare for a substitute than actually teach? Is the managerialism of the school so strong that they no longer struggle or grapple between supporting their own and other people's children? | Thank you—it is very important that these issues are clear:   1. This refers to kindergarten teachers who also function as the principals of the small educational institutions in which they work, because in Israel, kindergartens are a distinct branch of the educational system. Therefore, the teachers feel strongly committed to the children and are also responsible for the children’s development and progress in terms of the goals set by the Ministry of Education. Even if others do not agree with this perspective, it is the teachers’ belief. These examples were included in the article to convey the extent to which kindergarten teachers feel responsible for their pupils. It seems that their desire to persevere in their professional work, rather than take days off, comes from the fact that another caregiver (such as a grandmother) can care for their own sick children at home (as noted in the article)—whereas solely they are responsible for their pupils’ educational development. 2. Teachers have enough vacation days a year. This is not a matter of lacking days off, nor a problem in finding replacements; it comes from a feeling of professional responsibility. We can see from the interviewees’ responses that they go to work of their own free will and professional responsibility, not because they are obliged to. [p.15-18] 3. To clarify: The teachers are not giving up maternity leave, but rather deciding not to extend the leave; they may consider extending it, but their sense of professional responsibility overrides this personal desire. |
| Page 23, bottom: states “blatantly crossed professional boundaries”—I would like contextualization with more about what would normally be expected of a teacher in such circumstances. | In these circumstances, the teacher must report the issue of concern to their supervisor and to the welfare services. These families usually receive an appropriate response from the welfare services, and it is assumed that the welfare department should address such issues. Within the confines of her professional role, the teacher should refer such mothers to welfare agencies and continue to offer support to their children at the preschool. However, the interviewee chose to assist the mother out of a desire to “rescue” her or “help her grow”. [p.23, bottom of the page].  A teacher may feel—from her experience and that of her colleagues—that a disaster may occur before the welfare services are able to offer a response to the situation. Therefore, in cases that seem extreme and dangerous, there are teachers who prefer to take risks in terms of the legality of their actions in order to help their students’ mothers, and try to prevent a potential disaster. |

**Second Reviewer**

Thank you very much for these comments; they assist further clarification of the study.

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| **Reviewer’s comments** | **Correction / response** |
| At present, the introductory paragraphs simply summarize parts of the article, so do not draw in the reader. A stronger introduction paragraph is needed—one which clearly establishes the topic of the manuscript and the problem that it addresses. A concluding statement about the aim of the present research will then progress logically to the literature review. | I added questions at the opening of the *Introduction* that might arouse readers’ curiosity. [p.1] |
| The last sentence of the second section (starting ‘Maternal behavior, whether inborn …) is redundant and can be removed. | I deleted this, as suggested. |
| The author refers to “Probel”—please correct to either Froebel or (less often used)—Fröbel. | The name has been corrected to Fröbel throughout the article. |
| I am not convinced that the section on empathy is central to establishing the argument for the present research. | I followed this suggestion and deleted this entire section. |
| The literature review needs to conclude with a clear statement about the research on the topic to date, and how the present research is going to address particular gaps. | I added an additional summary of what has previously been written on the two topics (motherhood, and the development of the profession of early childhood education) along with the reasons for presenting these two topics. [p.7, bottom of the page; p.8, top of the page] |
| Why is the present research significant? How will it add to the current knowledge base? What impact might the findings have? These all need to be more firmly established. | I added an explanation of how this research is significant, what it contributes to the field, and the important implications of this research. [p.7, bottom of the page; p.8, top of the page] |
| Please check the tense of your reported method as there are inconsistencies. APA 7 advises that methods should be reported in the past tense. | This has been corrected throughout the article. |
| Please add a section on the ethical considerations related to recruitment and the conducting of the interviews. | In the *Ethics* section, I have now explained how I preserved the anonymity of the interviewees, how the interviews were conducted at to their convenience, and how I ensured that their words were accurately conveyed. [p.10, top of the page]. |
| I would suggest that a short paragraph is needed to describe the information sought by the interview (e.g., Interview questions sought to gain the interviewee’s insights, experience and opinion about X, Y, and Z). The sample questions can then be placed as an appendix. | To your suggestion, I added a description of the type of information sought in the interviews. The interview questions were moved to a new *Appendix* section. [p.9, second paragraph] |
| Analysis—was trustworthiness of the analytic themes established? | Yes; I am part of a group of four researchers who read each other’s research and offer corresponding critiques. |
| In theme 2, as above, please check for consistency of tense. Report in the past tense (tense inconsistency also occurs in other themes). | Addressed and corrected throughout the article. |
| There is also some content in this theme (first paragraph) of which is unclear as to whether it is reporting research findings, or whether it is a more general statement. If the former, it needs to be phrased as a finding. If the latter, it needs to be supported by literature or removed. | I added a sentence explaining that issues arose in the interviews. [p.11, top of the page] |
| Similarly, in the last paragraph of this theme, a summary statement is provided which generalizes the findings. This should be rephrased to avoid the generalization and instead, present the points as the perspectives of these particular educators. | I added the phrase “presented in this study” to clarify that this refers to the female educators who were interviewed for the present study. [p.14, bottom of the page] |
| p.23: the statement ‘Irit clearly and blatantly crossed professional boundaries’ presents as a negative judgement and should either be rephrased or removed. | I deleted the judgmental sentence and replaced it with a statement that is non-biased and more clearly states the intended meaning. [p.24] |
| The final paragraph of the finding section would be better placed in the discussion. | I moved this paragraph to the *Discussion*.  [p.25, second paragraph] |
| The discussion presents a useful summary of the findings and locates these within relevant literature. Again though, please check that the correct tense is used when reporting findings vs discussing the implications of these findings. | This has been corrected in the article. |
| A section is needed on limitations and directions for future research. The discussion also would benefit from a section on the implications of this work for relevant stakeholders and the broader social-cultural-political implications of the findings. | Thank you, this is indeed very important.  I added the following sections:   1. *Limitations of the Study* [p.28] 2. *Directions for Future Studies* [p.29] 3. *Contribution and Implications of the Current Study* [p.29] |

**Third reviewer**

Thank you very much for your encouraging comments and the suggestions; it helped me to enhance and refine the article.

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| **Reviewer’s comments** | **Correction / response** |
| p.2: The second paragraph in the introduction is overwhelming. Instead of listing so many topics of lit review, sum it up briefly and broadly, and add it to the end of the first paragraph. | In the introduction of the literature review, I shortened the list of topics addressed. I added two sentences to the first paragraph delineating the set of issues that will be covered in the literature review (so that readers will understand why I am presenting theories about motherhood and the teaching profession). [p.2] |
| p.2/3: If you are going to address this, and I can’t yet determine if it salient to your manuscript, you cannot neglect that part of the emphasis on childcare as a female role comes from basic biological capacity to feed babies prior to wide availability of infant formula. | Thank you for pointing out the need to clarify this. A feminist perspective recognizes women’s unique ability to breastfeed, but also notes that parental responsibilities can be shared (as with milk substitutes).  I added a statement from Rich (1995), that explains how society exploits women’s ability to give birth and breastfeed, so that childcare is entrusted to women even past this stage. ]p.2, bottom of the page[ |
| Also, I’d move the stand-alone sentence into the paragraph. In general, these stand-alone sentences as a new paragraph are distracting. The lit review seems scattered. | I deleted this sentence so that it would not be distracting.  I deleted all the sentences that conclude each of the sections, to make the literature review more concise. |
| Setting the societal/country context would be important for this work and this journal, as this varies so greatly from country to country. There are statements or assumptions I bristled at because they would come across as bias or anti-feminist in my home culture, but that may not be the case in your context and that is important to help the reader understand. | Thank you for this comment; your feedback enabled me to realize that I hadn’t clarified the social challenge that arises from the feminist narrative.  This perspective is demonstrated in the article:  The article presents the non-feminist values prevalent in society alongside the feminist perspective, which the interviewees exhibit in their daily lives. One of the purposes of this study is to uproot anti-feminist societal beliefs, using the statement that motherliness and early childhood education are naturally combined. From here, I derived the name of the article: *Social Challenges Facing Women as Educators and Mothers***.** The interviewees don’t specifically talk about feminism, but I found that this concept underlies their behavior. Due to social stigma, they feel pangs of guilt regarding their choices—but their passion for their work overcomes them and they act with feminist values.  Thanks to your feedback, I added a more specific explanation of the conflict between society’s anti-feminist narrative and the women’s feminist behavior. [*Discussion*, first paragraph, fourth line] |
| Upon reading the interview questions (p.9), my earlier confusion continues. It is unclear if the authors are setting out to understand how being a mother impacts their classroom practices, or how their training and own classroom realities align, or the challenges and strengths of being both mother and teacher in terms of own capacity, stress, etc. Maybe it is all of these things, but it’s not clear to this point. | First, your response shows that you understood exactly what I mean! Female educators who are mothers face multiple challenges and confusing situations as they integrate these two roles. This is why the article is entitled *Social Challenges Facing Women as Educators and Mothers***.** In other words, there are challenges in their profession that require female educators to exhibit flexibility by incorporating maternal skills in their work. There are also challenges in their home lives that arise from the responsibility they feel towards their students in the educational system.  Second, I moved the interview questions to the *Appendix*, and noted the intention behind each question in the *Methodology*, so that the messages would be clearer. [p.9, second paragraph]  Finally, the *Results* section provides details for how these roles are integrated and affect each other.  In the third paragraph of the *Discussion*, I present the women’s dilemma of needing to decide between staying at home with their sick children, and going to work.  Here we can see exactly how patriarchalism overwhelms them, although at the end of the day, they choose work, which is a feminist decision. [p.26] |
| Finally, make a strong and clear case for the importance of this work. What do you add to the literature that is novel or innovative? What are the practice, policy, or research implications of your work? | Thank you, this is indeed very important.  I added the following sections to the *Discussion*:   1. *Limitations of the Study* [p.28] 2. *Directions for Future Studies* [p.29] 3. *Contribution and Implications of the Current Study* [p.29] |