

# A Framework to the Understanding of Educational Attitudes: A Convergence of Social Psychology, Psychoanalysis, Philosophy of Education

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## Abstract

We argue that many difficulties in daily school life lie in teachers' attitudes toward education. We distinguish between two fundamental attitudes, which, following Sigmund Freud, we term "superego-based attitude" and "ego-based attitude". The superego-based attitude generally prevails but has only a narrow sociological or psychological basis. The ego-based attitude, though less common, has roots in educational philosophy, psychology, sociology and psychoanalysis and is supported by scientific findings. We show that the superego-based attitude reproduces many of the problems it seeks to solve, which do not arise when an ego-based attitude is implemented. We argue that the concept of cognitive dissonance is essential to the understanding of the difference between the two attitudes. We also argue that teaching methods are only a marginal factor in the daily difficulties in schools, school's relevance, or the development of learning skills. We compare the attitudes of two teachers with similar professional profiles. Both teach social science in conventional high schools, prepare students for final exams, and have some qualifications in educational counseling. One experiences substantial difficulties and a sense of professional helplessness, irrelevance, and failure, while the other expresses self-efficacy and comprehension of the school's reality. It is argued that these differences of experience are deeply embedded in their different educational attitudes, which in turn encompass all aspects of school life and predetermine their educational interactions, in a way that exceeds the effects of any other differences.

## Keywords

Educational Attitudes, Social Psychology, Freud and Education, Maslow and

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## 1. Introduction

Many difficulties in daily school life stem from the teachers' concept of their role. Here we argue that two basic approaches to socialization that have nothing in common are both titled "education" and one of them constitutes a source of many difficulties in daily school life. In line with Leś' (Leś, 2020) suggestion, we use theoretical frameworks from philosophy, psychology and psychoanalysis to explain the differences between these attitudes and the inherent theoretical weaknesses that cause one of them to ceaselessly fail.

Using Freud's terminology, we term one approach "superego-based attitude". Though it prevails in educational systems, this attitude has no roots in the philosophy of education. We compare this approach to a second, which we term "ego-based attitude". The latter, though less common, has roots in educational philosophy, psychology, and psychoanalysis, and is supported by scientific findings. We show that the ego-based attitude is not associated with the difficulties typically associated with the "superego-based attitude". We argue that the difference between the approaches can be explained by theories of motivation, developmental theories and the concept of cognitive dissonance. Based on the distinction between attitudes, we also argue that teaching methods only marginally affect daily difficulties in schools, school's relevance, and the development of learning skills. We use the terms "ego" and "superego" as patterns of moral and instinctual reactions to stimuli that are nurtured during socialization, and not as cerebral material entities.

For teachers with a superego-based attitude, the process of education involves the deferral of students' personal needs and desires for the sake of internalizing a competence set (Chin-I & Po, 2001) consisting of the values, norms, knowledge, and information considered necessary to integrate into society. Similarly to the development of the Freudian superego, this attitude entails a coercive power that is based on the socialized individual's dependence and weakness (Freud, 2019; Rimon-Or et al., 2023). Hence, the reproduction of the students' state of deficiency, through the provision of necessary goods that only the school can provide (such as diplomas or acknowledgment of good behavior or talent) is crucial for the functioning of such an educational system. For teachers with an ego-based attitude, education's aim is to provide a supportive environment for satisfying students' basic needs, in order to empower them and help them reach higher stages of development or achieve desired goals. As Kaplan (Kaplan, 2018) shows, this approach fits in with motivational and developmental theories. Fulfilling deprivation needs further increases intrinsic motivation for further development and the proliferation of needs (Curren, 2020; Decaty & Howard, 2014; Dewey, 1961; Erikson, 1993; Froiland et al., 2012; Gao et al., 2020; Kaplan, 2018; Martin & Dowson, 2009; Noddings, 2005; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Though both attitudes

contain limits of behavior and are based on accepted structures of interaction (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Goffman, 1974; Lyotard, 1989), their differences are crucial. In many cases, superego-based education thwarts the development of learning skills and does not encourage inner motivation for learning, while ego-based education encourages inner motivation for learning, creativity, and critical thinking (Rimon-Or et al., 2023). We argue that the concept of cognitive dissonance explains much of the differences between the attitudes with respect to the development of learning skills and intrinsic motivation to learn.

This issue is of great importance since the discourse of innovation in education today, which is largely focused on new methods of instruction and new technologies, contains a lacuna with respect to efforts to produce inner motivation for learning or significant learning. All relevant research known to us in the field of developmental psychology and motivation, as well as canonical texts in the philosophy of education, link inner motivation for learning and development to the satisfaction of basic physiological and mental needs. This is the case in developmental theories such as Erikson's (Erikson, 1993), or earlier theories by thinkers such as Plato (Plato, 1993) and Rousseau (Rousseau, 1921), as well as many motivational theories (Decaty & Howard, 2014; Deci & Ryan, 2000; Martin & Dowson, 2009; Sethi & Scales, 2020).

Safety, recognition, self-assurance, respect of significant others and self-respect are mentioned in all theories as crucial for the arousal of inner motivation for further development (Bernstein, 2015; Froiland et al., 2012; Honneth, 2009; Martin & Dowson, 2009; Rousseau, 1921; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Accordingly, if teaching methods reproduce students' deprivation needs like the struggle for recognition or survival in the system, the need to attain the required scores, or a fear of failure, no inner motivation for further development or significant learning will occur. Satisfaction of psychological needs is not technology-based but attachment-based (Bandura, 2002; Deci & Ryan, 2000; Gao et al., 2020; Holt, 1982; Kaplan, 2018; Martin & Dowson, 2009; Sethi & Scales, 2020).

In addition to the belief that technology can solve the problem of schools' irrelevance, a false understanding arises that teaching should change since knowledge has become available on the internet. This inference is characterized by a similar lapse. From Plato to the modern age, philosophers of education have referred to knowledge transference in education only as a distorted form of education—one that is irrelevant in principle to human development and thinking abilities (Biesta, 2017; Dewey, 1961; Freire, 2018; Plato, 1891a; Rimon-Or et al., 2023). Hence, new technologies for achieving knowledge cannot be the answer to education's irrelevance. Below we show that teachers' conception of education may be of much greater importance.

How does it happen that such a vast field of discourse and research has become dissociated from the theoretical basis of the problems it seeks to solve? We suggest below that it operates from within a different paradigm than the one in which the problems and the solutions were formulated. The theoretical section expands on this topic and the qualitative case study demonstrates how the two

different concepts of socialization are manifested in daily school life.

## 2. Literature Review

### Education, Growth, Motivation and Cognitive Dissonance

The philosophy of education and social psychology has consistently pointed to two essential roles of education: 1) to provide a space and an opportunity to satisfy developmental needs, and 2) to develop the child's capacity for critical thinking and creativity (Adorno, 2005; Biesta, 2011; Dewey, 1961; Freire, 2018; Plato, 1993; Rousseau, 1921). We suggest that these two aims of education are connected through the concept of cognitive dissonance. Dewey has shown that learning occurs when two contradictory cognitions cluster in perception, usually, when a sensual datum undermines frames of understanding that were formed by previous experiences and socialization (Dewey, 1920, 1938). Nevertheless, the immediate result of such a cluster is not necessarily a new understanding. Firstly, a sense of discomfort arises, which can be ignored or dismissed. A process of thinking and learning will occur only if the subject becomes aware of this feeling and is mentally ready, and enthusiastic enough to defer accepted reasoning and conventions formed by previous experience. Plato pointed to a similar phenomenon in the Allegory of the Cave (Plato, 1891b), as well as to the violence potentially directed against the bearer of the new information, if the perceiving subject is not strong enough to re-examine dominant structures of experience and identity. Adorno (Adorno, 1973, 2005) suggests a similar process. According to Adorno, a tension between perceptions and sensual data is an existential phenomenon, due to an irreducible difference between perception and reality (Adorno, 1973, 1993, 2005; Tauber, 2013). Unless educated to do otherwise, individuals are inclined to adopt a narrow perception of reality that does not shatter its imparted forms of interpretation (Adorno, 2005). Misperceptions, which result from an incapability to defer structures of understanding in response to new data or experiences initiate a subconscious syndrome which, in turn, involves further misperceptions errors and wrongdoing (Adorno, 2005; Arendt, 1972; Elliot & Devine, 1994; Glöckner, 2016; Lavergne & Pelletier, 2016; Plato, 1891a; Rousseau, 1921; Tauber, 2013). Education, in all its philosophical forms, draws its meaning from an awareness of this problem (Dewey, 1961; Freire, 2018; Hajir & Kester, 2020; Packer, 2008; Plato, 1993; Rousseau, 1921; Sosa-Provencio et al., 2020).

The inclination to rationalize prevailing behavior is a human tendency (Crump, 2008). In addition, individuals become attached to the structures of understanding that were constructed during socialization, and they develop their identity and lifestyle in accordance (Altheide, 2000; Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Bourdieu, 1977). Pressure to conform to conventional practices, manners, values, norms, and authority is a prevalent feature of societies (Smeulders, 2020), and the inclination to succumb to such pressure is a developmental stage in Kohlberg's developmental scale (Gibbs, 2019). Hence, events that shatter conceptions generate effects similar to what Festinger designated as cognitive dis-

sonance (Elliot & Devine, 1994; Harmon-Jones & Harmon-Jones, 2007). Virtues such as curiosity, inner motivation to develop, self-confidence, an ability to admit one's errors, independence, and an ability to defy authority are facilitators of the competence to replace the effects of cognitive dissonance with an incentive for learning, as Plato, Rousseau, Dewey and Freire define it. Hence, the cultivation of learning abilities, creativity, and inner motivation for learning is associated with empowerment, self-forgiveness, and the development of resistance to conformism. In Freudian terms, socialization in that direction nurtures forms of responses to stimuli that characterize the ego (Carveth, 2015; Reddish, 2018; Thwaites, 2007). The ego is cultivated through need satisfaction, love, safety, acknowledgment, and caring relations. The ego's moral principle is not obedience to authority or guilty feelings but needs satisfaction in a manner that preserves life and the culture that supports it.

The ability to sense cognitive dissonance (as well as "simple" inconsistencies) when it emerges and to initiate a learning process, in the Deweyan sense, is the point of convergence of self-learning abilities, sense of efficacy, self-confidence, critical thinking, creativity, need development, and cognitive development. Maslow (Maslow, 1954), Erikson (Erikson, 1993), and Ryan and Deci (Ryan & Deci, 2000) have shown that this ability depends on psychological need satisfaction.

#### **Education as Ego Nurturing**

According to Freud, in its initial form as a branch of the id, which is connected to reality and strives to safely satisfy the organism, the ego appears as the source of rationality and reason; It is based on love and connects individuals (Freud, 1989, 2019; Marcuse, 1955). In this sense, the ego functions as the foundation of culture (Freud, 1989). According to Freud's description of the ego, rationality is an adaptive response to the pleasure principle (Carveth, 2010; Freud, 2019; Marcuse, 1955; Reddish, 2018; Thwaites, 2007). In Freudian terms, the ego serves the final goal of the instincts of life (the preservation of life) by attuning to individual needs, developing tolerance towards them and safe ways to satisfy them. Hence, the ego-pattern of reaction to stimuli is the source of individuality, reason, rationality, creativity, and morality, when morality takes form as the interest in the other's needs (Gilligan, 1993; Ophir, 2005; Preston & de Waal, 2002; Robertson et al., 2007). The aforementioned traits decline while reactions to stimuli in the form of the Freudian superego are nurtured (e.g., conformism, obedience, collective identity, and guilty feelings).

The cultural institutions that are constructed according to the ego's instructions are different from the institutions that respond to the prohibitions of the superego; They are based on the principle of constant change and openness toward "dwellers" and "renovations." These characteristics of social institutions echo Dewey's conception of democracy, as well as Gilligan's, Kymlica's, Honneth's, or Illich's vision of a healthy society, although each of them relates to a different aspect of it (Dewey, 1961; Gilligan, 2011; Hajir & Kester, 2020; Hon-

neth, 2009; Illich, 1973; Kymlicka, 2003).

As Holt (Holt, 1982) shows, the teacher who assumes the position of ego-nurturer needs no special facilities or classrooms. This position is embedded in the form of a response to students' presence and appeals. In general, it is an assumed position towards the teacher's profession. Considering the conditions for inner motivation for further development, curiosity, self-learning abilities, and morality in the form of the interest in the other's well-being, the ego-nurturer lays the foundation for learning skills, creativity, a healthy life and a pluralistic society. She can hardly lose her authority since all children and youth need this type of relationship for their development.

In line with Neill (Neill, 1960), Dewey (Dewey, 1961), Freire (Freire, 2018; Shor & Freire, 1987), Holt (Holt, 1982) and Illich (Illich, 1973), teachers who assume the ego-nurturer position will not demand discipline, will not view norm violations as a significant problem and will forgive mischief. Within this attitude, students' difficulties appear as needs to which they—the teachers—should respond. Attending to students' difficulties defines, in fact, the primary task and the boundaries of the educational process. Hence, teachers who assume this stance will not view their student's special needs and challenges as a strain on some desired routine. They will not expect students to perform according to standards. Socialization agents who assume the position of ego-nurturer will direct demands mainly to themselves—to supply the conditions for students' learning and empowerment.

### **Education as Superego Nurturing**

Freud addresses the superego as the domain of the death instincts (Freud, 2019). The death instincts urge the subject to remove stimuli in order to restore a former physiological or emotional state. The death instincts function in three modes: indifference, fight, or flight (Freud, 1961). As long as the stimulus does not stand in their way to rest or to reinstate earlier conditions, they will drive the ego to ignore it; if the stimulus can be restricted, tamed, or removed, they will drive the ego to act in accordance; if neither option is available, the death instincts will drive the ego to withdraw from the scene. Educational relations belong to the second group of conditions: the unruly stimulus (the child) can be either tamed or removed from school; If neither works, the teacher will experience frustration and a desire to quit.

When a teacher assumes the stance of a superego developer, she positions herself in the place of the Freudian father. This is the stance of a social agent who constitutes both the origin of the law and its representative. Like the father in Freud, the teacher is the source of prohibitions, a role model, and a protector (Freud, 2019). Socialization can be performed through soft methods, accompanied by caring relations, and genuine affection, yet from this stance, the teacher's main task is to supervise and tame the child through the use of rewards, punishment, or manipulations (Bourdieu, 2001; Holt, 1982; Kaplan, 2018; Tauber, 2013). Children are measured by their ability to conform. Neither the legitima-

tion of the teachers' authority nor the laws teachers make should be questioned in this process (Bourdieu, 1977; Carveth, 2010; Freud, 2019; Reddish, 2018). When the process is complete, the source of the reason for practices and fundamental beliefs is then situated beyond the frames of experience (Bourdieu, 1977; Freire, 2018; Freud, 2019; Giroux, 2006; Mack, 2002; Parsons, 1999; Reddish, 2018). Hence, an inherent mechanism of ignorance operates at the center of this approach. Maturity is achieved when guilty feelings and fear are associated with deviation from norms and expectations, and with unruly sensations (Freud, 1989, 2019; Mack, 2002). Accordingly, morality is perceived as the adjustment of one's core values and identifying with the collective, and obedience to authorities and laws. These, of course, are also the demands of the Freudian superego. Although this process of socialization might develop thinking qualities in the sense of Bloom's taxonomy, it weakens the virtues that strengthen the ability to resolve cognitive dissonance through learning, and it places the reasons for accepted practices beyond the grasp of cognition.

When the teacher assumes the position of superego nurturer, the concept of dignity and the aspiration to supply unconditional love are replaced by a demand to obey hierarchical codes of honor and hierarchical entitlements to social goods (Davis & Moore, 1944). In this case, demands are addressed to the students—he demand to honor the teachers and to obey their rules. Through this process, students internalize the social order. This course of learning stands in contrast with learning that is initiated by an inner motivation for self-development.

In education as superego-nurturing, social goods, love, security, acceptance, acknowledgment, recognition and social assets for further mobilization are given conditionally—in return for compliance (Freud, 2019). As a result, compliance is based on the child's fear of losing these benefits. Hence, the teachers should constitute a key factor in gaining access to basic mental and social goods. In childhood, these goods will be basic physical and mental needs, which will be conditionally satisfied by the teacher. In high school, teachers must constitute, or at least believe that they constitute a key factor for further mobility. It is this source of authority that teachers can lose: If the children do not fear them, if they possess other means to achieve social mobility, and if the teacher inadequately satisfies their mental needs, learning will become irrelevant. When fear fuels the relationship between teacher and student, and students' security and acknowledgment are conditional, students' existence in the system takes the form of an inherent deficiency: the basic needs to obtain love, respect, or to survive in the system. Under these conditions, motivation for learning and growth is compromised. In addition to the fact that the need to survive in the system is eliminated when one completes school, the requirements for survival are exhausting and boring in principle. As Dewey noticed, the consequence is that in youth and adulthood, learning itself becomes identified with labor and boredom (Dewey, 1961).

Teaching methods might play a role in learning but they are only secondary to

the teacher's attitude. We show below that the teacher's attitude affects all aspects of school life, far beyond the effects of methods of instruction.

The aim of the current study is to examine how the differences in the above educational attitudes are manifest, specifically exploring the following research questions:

- 1) How are these two educational approaches reflected in educational practice?
- 2) What is the nature of teacher-student interactions according to each approach?
- 3) What is the position of each approach on matriculation exams and achievements?
- 4) What is the connection between a teacher's educational approach and their interactions with students and with the school?

### 3. Methodology

The current study compares the educational approaches of two public high school teachers in Israel. Both are homeroom teachers and prepare their students for matriculation exams in academic (rather than vocational) subjects. The teachers' educational worldviews constitute comprehensive examples of the two educational approaches presented in the theoretical background and serve as a test case for a more general argument concerning the differences between these educational attitudes. In this respect, the current study constitutes a case study of this issue. Therefore, according to the instrumental case study approach, the teachers described in this study are of secondary importance, and the primary goal is to offer conclusions that may be generalized beyond the specific cases, and a comprehensive understanding of the differences between these educational approaches (Stake, 2008).

Flyvbjerg (Flyvbjerg, 2011) notes that a case study may also refer to a single individual. In the current study, the comparison is between two single cases that each represents a distinct educational approach described in the literature. The decision to focus and offer an in-depth study of two cases enables a thick description of all the aspects and complexities of each educational approach, (Shkedi, 2000) as it is reflected in the educational practice of a single individual, and the position the educational approaches vis a vis each other in a manner that facilitates comparison, due to the similar profiles of the teachers selected for the study.

These cases were selected from 16 semi-structured interviews with teachers in the Israeli public school system. The cases were selected in a three-phase process:

Phase A: In this phase, we performed open coding of the interviews to identify the key idea in each paragraph (Shimoni, 2016). Based on the coding, we prepared a summary report that describes each teacher's educational approach. The report also noted the main themes that emerged from the interviews: who is the target of honor expectations, what attitude is expected to be given to teacher's



status, the aims of teaching and education, the attitude to norm violations and students' weaknesses, and references to teachers' sense of success in teaching and in the educational process.

Phase B: In this phase, based on the report, we defined the response structure of each of the 16 interviewees, on a continuum from a dignity response pattern (ego-based response) to an honor response (superego-oriented response). In total, 9 teachers were identified as having a response style that is consistent with what can be described as an ego-based attitude, using Freud's terms; and 5 teachers as having a response pattern that cultivates traits that are consistent with what we may describe as a superego-based attitude, using Freud's terms.

Phase C: To select the test cases from among the interviews, we compared the profiles of the interviewees, including experience, professional training, administrative position in school, and the age of students. After this comparison we selected two teachers with similar profiles and different response patterns: Adar—teaches psychology and the bible in a school located in central Israel. She prepares students for matriculation exams and has over 10 years of experience in the school system. She was identified as having a response pattern that cultivates ego-based traits. Billy is a history teacher in a school located in northern Israel, she has 10 years of experience in the school system and a master's degree. She was identified as having an educational approach that cultivates superego-based response patterns. Both have experience as educational advisors. Both teachers are aware that the system suffers from problems that they are unable to solve. Both teachers have a pleasant personality and are well-liked by their students.

Methodological critiques of case studies argue that the conclusions of case studies are not generalizable because each study refers to a specific case and its unique conditions (Harvey, 1990). Despite this methodological challenge, we believe that the focus on the specific cases in the current study is not only a shortcoming but also an advantage, due to the opportunity to conduct a theoretical and research-oriented discussion of the phenomenon that extends beyond the popular arguments on the educational system's focus on achievements and grades, especially in high schools and matriculation exams. The fact that two opposite approaches were identified in two experienced teachers who prepare students for matriculation exams allows us to analyze these approaches and their implications, beyond claims of external pressure imposed on the education system by external factors

## 4. Findings

### Teachers' role perception

As a homeroom teacher, Adar believes that her job is to establish trust and security. She did not mention that she had any expectations that her students would express gratitude for her efforts.

*I believe that a homeroom teacher is a figure that protects [students] and en-*

*cases them in warmth. A homeroom teacher should be the person who manages to see the students, and not only through her own ego...creating an open dialogue is the foundation for building this trust.*

Billy considers her role as a homeroom teacher as establishing a source of authority for students and supervising them. This position also allows her to be a source of support and security. In exchange, she demands that they be committed, loyal, and meet her expectations.

*As a homeroom teacher, you have to be a regimental sergeant, you have to understand them, get angry at them, make sure they were their uniform...in my education class [the students] are really emotionally attached to me, they really love me a lot and I worked very hard with them... I'll talk about my disappointment as a teacher... Now I would expect [that the efforts to achieve good matriculation scores] would be for me.*

Both teachers are aware of a gap between the students' needs and the functioning the education system, and both are aware that they are unable to solve this problem by themselves.

Adar identifies the source of the problem as the gap between students' needs and their topics and interest and the material that she is required to teach. She tries to bridge these gaps by being attentive to her students and diverting the topics of study to whatever interests them and to what she considers relevant to their world.

*[I think about] how to communicate with the kids, how to teach them to communicate with each other, how to communicate with me... It's mainly the focal thing that is at the top of my priorities...the material, too, but I always integrate it into the issue. I also took the material in my own direction, to whatever we were talking about.*

Billy focuses all her resources on preparations for matriculation exams and attributes the gap between students' needs and the system's demands to fatigue which is an outcome of concentration on stimuli outside the school, especially work. She devoted the entire first section of her interview to descriptions of her students' fatigue.

*They are really tired... There is no scholastic problem but they are tired and have limited availability for studying because they work, they work long hours... And I really feel the pressure...*

Billy feels that she and the other teachers are doing everything they can, but things slip from their grasp, without the teachers being able to control the process. She feels that in general, the school fails to bridge the gap between the demands of the education system and the student's own needs.

*As a team in school, we lately feel...frustration and disappointment: that everything you are doing and all the goals you want to set, and all the places that you really fight to give yourself and invest your energy out of a sense of mission – many times it is all ineffective.*

Attitude toward norm violations

Adar considers disciplinary violations as an integral part of the learning process and she doesn't consider them as "problems." In addition, she does not consider external signs of discipline such as a quiet classroom, as an indication of learning.

*There is always some level of disciplinary problems but I wouldn't call them disciplinary problems...when I teach at 14:30, you can terrorize the students and then you'll get quiet, but there won't be any learning...quiet doesn't mean that there is learning...*

According to Billy's approach, learning is possible only when students follow strict and structured rules regarding all aspects of school life. She stated that the school uses all the means at its disposal to fight each potential violation of order and discipline, and she works out of complete agreement with this strategy.

*There is a lot of attention to uniforms, the students can't stand it... We strongly believe that this is where it all begins...the moment you loosen [the reins], torn jeans, shorts, flip-flops—we have this feeling that it's like going to the beach... No jeans with tears, not even one tiny tear, because we believe that this small tear will grow. We don't allow any hair colors, even a streak, because this streak could turn into the entire head of hair.*

Under the heading of fighting violence, the level of supervision in Billy's school expands to body gestures and physical activities [that students use to release their tension and stress]:

*In our school, there is zero tolerance for violence. When they play in the hallway and jump on each other, or just jump up and down or hit each other in play—the violence procedure is activated immediately! Sent home for suspension, parents are called to school, a meeting with the principal, a comment in the student's record, a letter is issued, zero tolerance for violence.*

#### Critique of the training process

Both teachers noted that their training process was deficient and did not contribute to their professional capabilities, yet each teacher indicated a different area of deficiency.

In Adar's view, teaching should be a dynamic process, but teacher training encourages teachers to use well-trodden paths and prevents them from going outside the box.

*They are taught how to make a lesson plan "After 10 minutes I will do this, and after 10 minutes I will do that..." They are put into a kind of framework, and after that you can't tell them to think outside the box... It shouldn't be like that...*

Billy noted the lack of emphasis on technical and administrative issues, which she believes constitute a significant part of a teacher's work. In the following section, she referred to training in educational consultancy:

*I felt the absence of a course on didactic testing... We were not taught what a file should contain, how to construct the forms, what you need to write, or even, how to draft letters to the district committee.*

### Attitude toward achievement seeking

Adar does not consider a school's certificates as a unique resource or as an essential part of the learning process. She shows her students a realistic picture—they have the choice whether to invest in studying for matriculation exams or to continue to develop in other directions in the future, directions that don't require a matriculation certificate, or to complete a matriculation certificate after high school<sup>1</sup>.

*When they enter high school, teachers tell them, "You have to leave with a good matriculation certificate because you won't succeed in life without it." ... Kids come up to me and say, "I need a matriculation certificate otherwise I won't succeed in life." I tell them, "You will do just fine in life even without a matriculation certificate. I also did my bachelor's degree at the Open University<sup>2</sup>. I never remember my students' grades... They don't interest me."*

Billy views matriculation exams and their outcomes to be very significant, both for the system and for the students, and she believes that success on matriculation exams is critical for the future of the students and the school.

*[The school is always] "breathing down our necks" about the percentage of students who complete matriculations in the school, the class, the grade... They should really understand that we have a common desire...for them to really succeed, and get a good matriculation certificate...I tell them that it's not for me, to have a higher success rate...I am really looking three years ahead, so that you won't have to improve [your grade]...the teachers are frustrated that [the students] don't understand this.*

Billy knows that today there are other ways of getting a matriculation certificate but this understanding does not cause her to reduce her pressure on the students; instead, it causes confusion in view of the contradiction between the importance that she attributes to matriculation exams, their actual importance and the indifference of the students, who are aware of other mobility options.

*They are reluctant to complete their matriculation certificates [after graduation]...they have a lot of options, that we [When I was in high school] didn't have. With us, you knew that if you graduated without such a number of units, you would [have to] complete your certificate—not at the next exam date or the next term, but through a private school. I tell them that, but they don't understand what I want from them.*

### Teachers' personalized treatment of students

Adar finds time to give individual treatment to each student, even though her classes are large. Her personal treatment is part of the class's weekly routine and is reflected in the lessons.

<sup>1</sup>In Israel, a matriculation certificate plays a focal role in determining one's social mobility potential. Matriculation certificates are issued by the Ministry of Education, not by the school. Schools are merely responsible for preparing students for the exams. Therefore, students may complete their certificates in other settings.

<sup>2</sup>A matriculation certificate is not an admission requirement in The Open University, which is a public university.

*Every Sunday morning I tell my class that I want to hear how they are and how they weekend went. I ask them to tell me about the family meals, the fights... Whoever wants to talk does so, and whoever doesn't want to—doesn't talk. It's enough that I asked them and repeated it a few minutes later, or I complimented a student on a pretty blouse.*

Billy also understands the importance of personalized treatment of her students but she argues that the school system and a large number of students make that impossible. She believes that there is a significant gap between students' needs and teachers' ability to address these needs. The outcome is that students' needs are marginalized in the educational process.

*I think that the students would like their teacher to ask them how they are and if they are sad; they expect the teacher to understand that, but a teacher can't know that...the teacher enters a classroom with 40 students, and students today are not simple, so if in the past you could identify a sad child, today it is more difficult to do so.*

#### Independence or dependence on parents

Adar believes that in adolescence, the responsibility for learning should be transferred to students, and parents shouldn't be involved in a manner that enervates their children. She refuses to cooperate with parents' desire for the school to "fix" their children, and she wants the students to cope with the challenges that emerge in school by themselves.

*One father called me and said, "I know math and there was one datum missing in the exam." I say to him, "what do you care about your son's exam? Tell your son that it was missing and have him tell the teacher, let him deal with it".*

In contrast, Billy views herself as the parents' "long arm" and she stresses the need for parents' cooperation to complete scholastic assignments. She wants to mobilize the students through her ties with the parents, even though students are legally adults (according to Israeli law).

*In my class, the parents are very cooperative... I notify the parents that there are tutoring sessions and ask them to pay attention. I come in the morning and write to parents that only 10 kids are in the class, but they are already 18 so parents don't really [help].*

#### Expectations of students to respect the teachers due to their status

In Adar's view, students' conduct in the classroom is connected to their personal challenges, and she plays down the significance of students' attitude toward the teacher.

*Teachers are preoccupied with their egos all day long, not from a bad place but from a very natural and automatic place, but when you are a professional you can't act automatically or naturally. When a student is late for my class, if my first thought is that he is disrespecting me, so then I am busy with my own ego. He may be disrespectful but that's only one of another 1500 other possible reasons [for his lateness].*

Billy identifies herself as having a focal position in the learning process and

therefore she views any lack of cooperation or desire to learn as a sign of disrespect and as an indication of her own personal failure.

*I've been their homeroom teacher for three years. I know that they love me very much... I look at the entire class as a whole and wonder where did I fail? In three years I haven't managed to bring them to the place where I need them to be all in.*

Another component of Billy's perception of the teacher as the central axis of the teaching and education process is her expectation that the kids respect her. She considers the fulfillment of this expectation as a closure to the learning process. She does not explain her expectation but for her, it is the educational process itself.

*I would like for a child to leave here knowing better how to respect their elder, and not because they are older but because they deserve respect.*

#### Source of motivation

Adar considers adolescence to be a difficult period that affects students' ability to concentrate on their studies. In her opinion, this is an understanding of adolescence as a given state that should be respected.

*They are constantly engaged in survival because of all the major changes that they are experiences themselves. A 13-year-old comes into school and a teacher says something to him and Boom! He's in survival mode. He's fighting for his life and he couldn't care less about what you are teaching.*

Billy also recognizes students' lack of mental availability for learning but she tries to fight it by conducting workshops and motivational sessions, although she reports that they are not effective.

*We have classes on motivation... They laugh all the time. After all, how much can you talk about motivation? Can I say that it helps? We can't measure it, if it penetrates into someone. You see them sitting and listening, and it interests them. But [I don't know] whether they apply [these lessons] in practice.*

## 5. Discussion

Both teachers in this research are educators and teach in similar schools. Both are aware of the serious problem of students' lack of interest; both have no solution to this situation, yet the discourse that they express to their students and to themselves is completely different.

Billy conducts herself on the basis of an educational approach that we termed superego based. Accordingly, she views her role as a disciplinarian and attributes great importance to the certificates that the school "grants." She measures her success in terms of her students' achievements on their matriculation exams, and the honor she receives from her students. As we explained earlier, intrinsic motivation for learning, creativity, and individuality cannot develop from this type of socialization.

Billy takes for granted the legitimacy and mandatory nature of demands for obedience and efficiency, and the procedures that she seeks to impose on the

students as if these constitute the indisputable core of the educational process. Her approach illustrates the significance of fixation within a normative setting that stands beyond and dictates experience, a fixation which is reflected in Bourdieu's (Bourdieu, 1977, 1990, 2001) concept of habitus, Berger and Luckmann's (Berger & Luckmann, 1966) concept of "the social construction of reality," Goffman's (Goffman, 1956) concept of the "definition of the situation," or Durkheim's concept of "social facts" (Hund, 1982). According to all of the writers above, including Adorno (Adorno, 2005), these "facts" that are embedded in the individual's perception restrict his/her abilities to encompass reality.

In terms of Maslow's (Maslow, 1954) hierarchy of needs and Deci and Ryan's (Ryan & Deci, 2000) theory of motivation, Billy and her school create deficiency needs that prevent the arousal of inner motivation for further development. This deficiency is critical for the teacher's ability to assume the position of the Freudian father. The deficiency is created in two systems: First, the school imposes requirements that encompass almost all aspects of conduct in school as well as a considerable share of life at home, and students must meet these requirements in order to survive in the system. Second, the school possesses rare goods that only it can provide, and without students' need for these goods, they would not be motivated to obey the rules or complete assignments (in the case of high school, this good is the matriculation certificate). Billy's confusion when she describes the loss of exclusivity of the good that she possesses (the matriculation certificate) reveals the focal position that this good assumes in shaping the discourse and its justifications. She views the existence of alternative routes to a matriculation certificate as a problem, and her statements become illogical and inconsistent. At the moment that the school loses the exclusivity of the good it possesses, no justification can be found for its demands, and the authority of the teacher, as well as students' motivation to learn, are compromised. Actually, the loss of the exclusivity of the matriculation certificate is the loss of the discourse through which the school operates.

Frequently, feelings like those that Billy expresses—that students are not interested in what schools have to offer—drive the search for new curricula and teaching methods that are more relevant to students' lives. Developmental and motivational theories, and the connection between cognitive dissonance and the arousal of critical thinking and creativity, which we presented in the theoretical section, show that this strategy results from confusion. Motivation for learning emerges when deficiency needs are satisfied, and such a situation cannot exist in an educational or teaching setting whose foundation generates such needs. In superego-based teaching relations, the development of understanding, in terms of Bloom's taxonomy, might occur if such development is critical for passing tests (Dewey, 1961, 1966). It is also possible that implementing new learning tools will make the struggle for survival in the system a more pleasant one. It is also possible that new methods of teaching will help some students to improve what is considered to be "higher academic abilities." However, if such "higher

academic abilities” can develop through the efforts to satisfy deficiency needs, they will be the abilities to survive in the system and to adapt one’s intellectual strengths to the system’s demands. The latter skill does not necessarily constitute an intellectual drive for critical thinking, creativity, or motivation for learning that stems from the learner’s needs or the needs of society, nor does it serve human curiosity for knowledge (Adorno, 2005; Adorno & Becker, 1999; Dewey, 1961; Shudak & Avoseh, 2015; Zembylas, 2015). Actually, intellectual skills deployed through efforts to survive in systems might equally serve oppressors, dictators, mass murderers, and destructive corporations (Adorno, 1973; Freire, 2018; Giroux, 2006).

The perspective we presented above offers an explanation of students’ fatigue and indifference mentioned by Billy: In effect, the students are in a daily struggle for survival as they engage in all aspects of school life, from attires to behavioral norms, in search of an attentive ear or waiving the search for someone to listen, to the assessment of teachers and students, and the race to reach the end of the learning course. Students are tired of the struggle for survival that no longer serves any effective purpose because alternative routes of social mobility are available to them.

Billy’s argument that teachers cannot be mentally available for their students under stressful conditions, such as a teacher-student ratio of 1:40, seems logical in itself. Yet, in comparison to Adar’s behavior, we find that the problem may be in Billy’s attitude toward education: She adopted an approach that considers the reproduction of the system’s operations as the school’s main aim, independent of the needs of the children that the system is supposed to serve (Waller, 1932). In contrast, for Adar, attentiveness to her students is an integral part of the educational work and her teaching hours. She even suspends school requirements to obey the rules in favor of what she understands as respect for students’ unique needs.

The major difference between these two approaches is evident from Adar’s view that rule violations are not considered to be an issue that requires a response. Adar does not equate silence with attentiveness, or disciplinary misconduct with inattentiveness. She tries to create a space for students and their problems, including lateness and other deviations from the rules. In this manner, Adar’s presence constitutes an inhibiting factor for requirements and pressure, and to the extent possible offers a space for rest, security, and growth. These are the conditions for the development of learning abilities, both in terms of coping with contradicting cognitions in the form of learning and in terms of needs and motivational theories. The space that she creates for her students is not an inherent part of the system—it is the outcome of her attitude toward her work. We should, however, note that in the totality of the boiling pressure cooker of the school, such behavior may have no more than a limited effect.

Adar represents an educational approach that pursues a relationship between child and socialization agent in a pattern that may be called ago cultivation, using Freud’s terms. This attitude reflects a respect for individual dignity: an atti-



tude of one person toward another that allows the other to feel respected (Hernandez, 2015), or, in Goffman's (Goffman, 1956) terms, tact. Adar's students are not fundamentally different from Billy's, and yet they are not conceptualized as bearers of problems, either academic or disciplinary in nature. Still, for her, her students certainly reflect the system's failures. The difference between Billy's and Adar's educational interactions does not lie in their students' culture of behaviors, but in the teachers' attitude toward their existence as adolescent students.

Adar does not try to inject knowledge into her students, but rather, as far as possible, to adapt the knowledge to her students' interests. Through an ego-response cultivating attitude, the socialization agent asks himself to define the need of the socialized, rather than define the threat to social order that the socialized represents, or what the socialized lacks in order to function in compliance with the system's requirements or to succeed in terms of the competitive over prestigious resources (Hernandez, 2015; Noddings, 2005; Reddish, 2018). For this reason, we can say that this attitude is grounded in logic: the logic of needs and the aspiration to satisfy them.

Although Adar, like Billy, prepares students for matriculation exams, she attributes little significance to the issue of exams, other than her statement that she downplays the importance of grades and the importance of earning a certificate during high school. In Aadar's case, exactly as in Billi's, the significance of exams does not stem from a realistic assessment of their potential role in social mobility since either is none. It rather derives from the pattern that shapes the teacher's approach to educational interactions: In the approach that cultivates superego responses, rare resources that only the father or his substitutes can offer have significant importance. In contrast, in the approach that cultivates ego responses, such resources have no intrinsic value. If they exist, they will be distributed to the socialized unconditionally or will be construed as a resource with multiple substitutes and no shortage.

Here we return to Billy's argument that motivation for learning begins with the approach of the teacher who commands their students' respect. This argument has different implications in both approaches. Within the superego cultivation approach, this statement implies that a teacher who establishes authority-based relationships may gain the respect and trust of their students. These may develop intrinsic motivation for learning that evinces their desire to gain the teacher's respect, or to integrate into society on the terms of the "father's rules." Love is an assimilation of the father's rules and recognition of the father's ability to act as a comforting and guiding figure. In contrast, in ego-cultivating education, the meaning of this statement is that when a student's basic needs for recognition, a safe space, and dignity are satisfied, the student develops intrinsic motivation for learning and further development. These conditions ease the pressure of contradictory cognitions and when cognitive dissonance occurs, they create a space for learning, in the Platonic, Deweyan, or Freirean sense (a development of experience), to replace cognitive dissonance and cognitive fixations.

The latter process is critical thinking and a basis for creativity (Dewey, 1938; Freire, 2018; Giroux, 2006; Plato, 1891b, 1891a).

## 6. Summary

In this paper, we demonstrated that what is called “education” is in fact two different approaches toward students in school. Borrowing from Freud, the first can be entitled “the cultivation of the superego” and the second—“the cultivation of the ego.” Since Plato, these two attitudes have been recognized in the philosophy of education, although under different terms, and are reflected in teachers’ everyday work in schools. Many problems that preoccupy educational systems worldwide may be unrelated to teaching methods or global cultural developments, and instead are inherent to the “superego attitude.” The “cultivation of the superego” is an attitude toward education in which the goal is to inculcate norms, values, and discipline. It is based on students’ dependence on their teachers and the system. The ethics in this educational approach is a hierarchical and coercive code of honor. This approach reproduces deficiency needs, using Maslow’s terms, and therefore it cannot develop critical thinking, creativity, or inner motivation for further development. According to all theories of education, this approach disseminates ignorance and cognitive fixations. In the “cultivation of the ego” attitude, the teacher aspires to create a space of dignity for the student by suspending social requirements of obedience, and through attentiveness to the student’s needs. These are pre-conditions for the arousal of critical thinking, creativity, and tolerance. Here we showed that most of the problems that characterize the superego approach do not exist in the ego approach.

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## Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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