

## **Why children fail?**

**An excursion into homeroom teachers' beliefs on the reasons for school failure while reflecting on their explanatory language and considering the educational strategies these languages allow for.**

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## **Introduction**

The unique role that teachers play relative to students and the kinds of experiences that teachers create for students suggest that teachers may exert a powerful influence on the way students adjust and function in school contexts (Van der Heijden et al., 2015; Zee & Koomen, 2016). Following Whitman (1881), we could say that teachers are not individuals but a multitude and as such their mediating efforts might be the most significant in facilitating students' inhabiting complex school ecosystems.

Homeroom teachers even more so, for they mediate and interpret complex institutional, pedagogical, and social dynamics for students and while doing this, as part of a larger corps of professionals, they are pivotal in helping shape students school experience and their sense of failure or achievement when facing school cognitive and emotional demands (Kashy-Rosenbaum et al., 2018; Won et al., 2017).

It should come as no surprise then, that we have a keen interest in understanding the factors homeroom teachers attribute to students' failures. Educational institutions have a strong tendency to assess outcomes, and these assessments often lead to questions about homeroom teachers' accountability in their roles, as well as the creation of systems aimed at categorising students into those who succeed and those who fail.

Willingness to gain such insight involved a straightforward approach: conducting open interviews with homeroom teachers to inquire about the factors contributing to students' failures and subsequently structuring and comprehending their responses. Following this effort, I conducted a teachers workshop with 20 of the homeroom teachers interviewed in which we focused on the language used by homeroom teachers when considering a student's failure. My efforts to organise and comprehend their feedback were guided by several theoretical assumptions, some of which have a rich intellectual history.

We operated under the assumption that the concepts chosen by homeroom teachers to elucidate students' failures could unveil insights into two significant aspects:

1. The intellectual and disciplinary domains informing their explanations and perceptions.
2. The metaphors embedded in the language used by teachers, shedding light on their conceptions of learners/students and the learning process.

Moreover, and perhaps even more importantly, our curiosity extended to whether the language and metaphors employed to interpret students' failures possessed the capacity to aid homeroom teachers in formulating more effective educational strategies.

In summary, our work unearthed a language predominantly influenced by psychological and therapeutic viewpoints. This language underscored a dualistic perspective on human nature, emphasising the individualistic nature of learning as a cognitive attribute, putting the responsibility for the learning on the student while little attention was paid to the disciplinary contents being taught.

Although the present report's point of departure may sound ambitious, for it suggests that the beliefs/perceptions/perspectives of homeroom teachers regarding school failure might hold the key to some aspects of educational reform in general and to the betterment of homeroom teacher education in particular, in reality it is very modest. All we will be suggesting is that without paying attention to the language/discourse (our access point to the assumed teachers' beliefs/perceptions/perspectives) that homeroom teachers hold, not much can be attained. We also suggest that changes in language might help change homeroom teachers' understanding of the learner and the learning process and possibly open new venues for educational practice.

I believe the case that will be presented aligns with the broader trend of educational modernization observed in many countries worldwide. However, I'll defer to others to provide concrete evidence regarding its applicability in different regions.

We begin with a review of theoretical perspectives that underpin our approach, followed by description of the research process undertaken and finalising with our interpretations which are not intended to be received as categorical or definitive but to be open for further interpretation.

### **Theoretical review**

Our review begins by exploring the intersection of three educational, related, trends in modern Western societies. This exploration aids in understanding and subsequently

addressing the phenomena discussed in our work. More specifically we point at the educationalization of social problems, the medicalization of education and the psychologization of educational discourse and practice.

### ***Educationalization***

The concept of the educationalization of social problems revolves around the growing tendency to transfer societal issues into the educational realm. Educational systems which at the beginning of the eighteenth century held a rather marginal role are today asked to take responsibility and find solutions for growing social problems while consuming an enormous share of the time and treasure of both states and citizens (Labaree, 2008). A pivotal figure in this movement was Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi, a Swiss reformer who, by the nineteenth century, had become a significant influence on educators (Tröhler, 2016). As per this evolving educational culture, education was perceived as a crucial tool for shaping citizens and advancing societal development (Trohler, 2016). This belief led to the establishment and growth of educational systems throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, as education gained increasing societal recognition and the societal demands for education escalated. Consequently, educational questions started to attract considerable academic interest.

Over the past two centuries, the growth and solidification of this education-centric culture have been shaped by the interplay among practitioners' experiences, policy decisions, and academic research. These elements have acted as foundational supports for the evolution of schooling systems (Tröhler, 2015).

Thus, the educational system becomes a vessel for societal ideals and a forum for expressing aspirational but often unrealistic goals (Labaree, 2008). This expansion of educational responsibilities often pushed educational institutions beyond their practical and conceptual capabilities, leading to repeated failures (Bridges, 2008). The underlying idea is that many issues traditionally seen as belonging to other social realms (like economic inequality, racial discrimination, or behavioural problems) can be resolved or ameliorated through educational interventions. Schools are now increasingly faced with the responsibility of addressing a range of societal issues, including drug abuse, sex education, civic responsibility, and mental health.

In their search for remedies educational institutions are expected to align their efforts with the principles of individualism central to liberal ideology, aiming to reshape the hearts, minds, and abilities of individual students to address broader societal challenges. This perspective suggests that education systems are not just centres of learning, but platforms for expressing societal aspirations, upholding individual choice while grappling with the potential of unmet goals (Fendler, 2018). Education, therefore, becomes a symbol of civic pride and a ground for debating and showcasing our ideals while, at the same time it risks becoming a scapegoat for societal shortcomings, bearing the burden of unrealized collective ambitions.

This approach reflects a societal desire to address complex social issues through the individualistic lens of education, sometimes at the cost of more comprehensive socio-political strategies (Labaree, 2008). While education is a powerful tool for social change, the educationalization approach sometimes overlooks the complexities of these issues and the need for broader socio-political solutions. It can put undue pressure on educational systems to resolve problems that are deeply rooted in societal structures.

### ***Medicalization***

The concept of medicalization, refers to the process by which human conditions and problems come to be defined and treated as medical issues. This process involves labelling these conditions as illnesses or disorders and using medical interventions to address them (Conrad, 2007). Tröhler (2013) positions the process of medicalization in the wake of World War II, where he discerns a shift in the role of academia, particularly in research, that heralded the onset of a technocratic culture.

This culture placed a higher value on expert opinions over the practical wisdom of seasoned professionals. This shift was marked initially by the rise of a technological rationale, which by the 1970s, gave way to a medical paradigm. This new paradigm championed an organismic perspective of social realities, often without substantial discourse or challenge. Consequently, social research began to operate under the largely unchallenged assumptions of this medical paradigm.

Ludwig von Bertalanffy (1952), an Austrian biologist and a pioneer in general systems theory, critiqued the dominant mechanistic approach to understanding life. He challenged the concept of "reduction," a method of understanding complex entities by breaking them down into simpler components. Yet reductionism, while effective in understanding mechanical

systems, like a car's individual parts, falls short in explaining the self-maintaining nature of living organisms (Tröhler, 2013).

Bertalanffy advocated for an "organismic biology" within a broader "general systems theory." This approach looks at systems as wholes, considering how various components interact and function together. This perspective is applicable not just to biological organisms but also to social groups, personalities, and even technological systems. By the late 1960s, systems analysis had become a prevalent concept, especially in biomedical fields, and this perspective started influencing the field of education. This shift led to the medicalization of social research, where the focus was on the functionality of parts within a system, often at the expense of understanding the system's overall dynamics (Coombs, 1968). Consequently, educational research began to prioritize statistical evidence of isolated effects within the system over a holistic understanding. This trend mirrored the approach in clinical trials in medicine, where the efficacy of treatments is established through statistical evidence rather than a deeper understanding of why they work (Barry, 2006).

Tohler (2013) suggests that this shift towards a medical model in social research paradoxically resulted in diminished opportunities for meaningful reform. This was primarily due to the marginalization of professional experience, common sense, and political discussion, giving way to a new class of experts deeply entrenched in the biomedical research methodology. As a result, the space for practical, experiential knowledge in the reform process was considerably reduced. Furthermore, this trend extended into the domain of curriculum decision-making. The prevailing belief was that such decisions should be the prerogative of experts with significant vision and competence in their academic fields, rather than being made by elected school boards or other educational practitioners. This perspective was notably supported by Israel Sheffler who highlighted physics as the model discipline for academic education (see, Tröhler, 2015). This approach underscores a significant shift in the educational landscape, where expertise in a specific academic discipline, rather than broader educational experience or democratic processes, became the benchmark for shaping educational content and policy. We will now approach the third trend mentioned: the psychologization of educational discourse and practice.

### ***Psychologization of education***

In recent decades educational theorists have highlighted the growing psychologization of educational discourse in western-dominated cultural contexts, (Bekerman & Zembylas, 2017;

Rose, 1998). The psychologization of education can be seen as a subset of the medicalization process, we just discussed. More specifically in education, medicalization also refers to the trend of interpreting and treating educational challenges and behavioural issues in students through a medical lens.

Educational discourses have embraced therapeutic discourse, a psychology-based system of assumptions about the self, its boundaries, development and social relations. This can include diagnosing students with specific learning disabilities or behavioural disorders and addressing these challenges with medical interventions, such as prescription medications. For example, behaviours that might once have been considered part of a normal range of childhood behaviour (like restlessness or lack of focus) are increasingly being diagnosed as neurodevelopmental disorders and treated medically (Norbury & Sparks, 2013).

A related though different aspect of the psychologization of education (or the therapeutic turn) refers to the growing infusion of psychological theories and practices within educational contexts (Furedi, 2004). This trend emphasises the integration of concepts such as emotional intelligence and mental well-being into educational curricula and an increasing focus on a therapy culture in education (Ecclestone & Hayes, 2009).

A more focused review of therapeutic discourse in education unfolds a complex landscape where emotions, self-perceptions, and temporality interplay significantly in pedagogical contexts as Segal et al (2022) analysis illuminates. Comber et al (2009) note that therapeutic discourses paradoxically coexist with a punitive policy climate in educational settings while fostering caring relationships in the shadow of corporate-managerial influences. Hyldgaard's (2006) comparison of education to psychoanalysis further enriches this dialogue by delineating the distinct roles of the educator and analyst, underscoring the pedagogic necessity for external authorization against the psychoanalytic stance of non-presumptive listening. Resistance to this therapeutic shift, as Keck (2020) discusses, calls for empirical backing to validate its impact on teacher identity and educational practices. Lindgren et al. (2011) observations on the evolving hierarchy of teacher skills, prioritising social competencies over traditional knowledge, echo this therapeutic narrative. The discourse extends into policy, with Hardley et al. (2021) examining the integration of holistic health and wellbeing frameworks into British educational policy, advocating for emotional intelligence to enhance learning and social integration.

Schools are increasingly adopting roles traditionally associated with mental health professionals, highlighting a societal focus on personal development and emotional health. While this approach has brought much-needed attention to learning differences and mental health issues, it also raises concerns about over-diagnosis and the tendency to seek medical solutions for problems that may have educational, environmental, or social roots while underscoring the challenges of addressing complex needs within the educational framework and potentially marginalising traditional educational strategies.

Concurrently there is an increasing recognition (Tyrer & Fazel, 2014) of education as the primary catalyst for fostering learners' resilience, social and emotional development, and for producing individualized, self-reliant and inward-looking subjects trained to maximize human capital according to the tenets of neoliberalism (Leviste, 2023). This process focuses on maximizing human capital, often neglecting the broader societal context.

Furedi (2004, 2017) highlights a pivotal shift in Western conceptions of personhood, marked by an increased focus on emotions and the integration of psychological language into educational discourse, presenting these insights as universal solutions. This therapeutic trend in education (Rose, 1998; Bekerman & Zembylas, 2018), grounded in psycho-emotional and neuroscience discourses, is advocated as a response to societal issues, especially for "at-risk" groups (Ecclestone, 2011; Keck, 2020). Complementing this perspective, De Vos (2015) and Ecclestone and Brunila (2015) explore state-driven educational efforts that prioritize emotional well-being to boost student outcomes and employability, utilizing these discourses to confront educational and social challenges. This consolidated approach seeks to improve the conditions of vulnerable populations without redundancy, emphasizing the role of emotional health in addressing the complexities faced by these groups.

However, this focus on psycho-emotional catalysts sidesteps a critical examination of the contextual and structural factors underlying social disadvantage and injustice. The growing emphasis on emotional dysfunction and psychological vulnerability in public discourse, highlighted in interdisciplinary works, has recast social and cultural issues as psychological ones (Furedi, 2004). This trend leads to the pathologizing of social issues as individual psychological weaknesses, overshadowing enduring structural inequalities and their political and ideological underpinnings.

Contrasting views exist, however. Scholars like Downes (2018) and Hella & Wright (2009) argue that psychologized approaches can foster caring relationships, potentially addressing



social injustice and enhancing well-being in educational settings. A more nuanced perspective on educational psychology's role and impact is presented by Alexander's work (2018) which positions educational psychology as a bridge between scientific evidence and educational practice.

The intersection of these three trends – educationalization, medicalization, and psychologization – in education presents a complex landscape. These paradigms reflect a societal inclination towards specialized, institutional solutions for multifaceted problems. Each approach brings unique insights and tools but also poses risks of oversimplification and reductionism.

The educationalization of social problems can burden educational systems with societal issues that require broader solutions. The medicalization and psychologization trends, while recognizing individual student needs, may lead to an overemphasis on medical and psychological interventions at the expense of broader educational approaches.

In essence, these trends highlight a shift in the educational mission – from a focus on academic learning to a more holistic view of individual student development. Though this shift underscores the need for balanced, multidisciplinary strategies in education, acknowledging the importance of educational, medical, and psychological perspectives, our work might show the need to remain vigilant about their limitations and potential overreach.

### ***Teachers' beliefs and teachers' reflection***

School cultures shape what teachers do, think, and feel; some of these 'cultures' are more appropriate and conducive to learning than others (Beaudoin & Taylor, 2004; Hargreaves, 1995; Hongboontri & Keawkhong, 2014; MacNeil et al., 2009).

Within this context teachers assume a critical role in creating classroom environments that encourage students to become active, self-motivated learners. Thus, classroom interventions aimed at improving both student motivation and their academic outcomes should consider teachers' perceptions regarding motivation, learning and instruction (Roeser et al., 2002). These perceptions are associated with teachers' beliefs about the effectiveness of instructional strategies and inform the many decisions they make each day in the classroom. Within classroom contexts, teachers mediate many of the effects of schooling on student

motivation and student outcomes (Bong, 2001), and yet, research examining the relationship among teacher beliefs, instructional practices and classroom goal orientations is sparse (Deemer, 2004; Talbert & McLaughlin, 1999).

Uncovering how teachers' beliefs about teaching and learning influence their instructional practices and students' goals in the classroom is important for understanding how to create learning environments focused on mastery and understanding. Although the importance of teacher beliefs has been realized and much has been written in the literature (Fives & Gill, 2014), there is still a lack of a clear conceptualization which limits the potential explanatory and predictive potential of teacher beliefs.

Pajares (1992) offers a comprehensive analysis of teachers' beliefs, suggesting they should be seen as an individual's assessment of the truthfulness of certain ideas. Richardson (1996) conceptualized beliefs as understandings or notions held by an individual that they consider to be true. Murphy and Mason (2006) further expanded the definition of beliefs to encompass everything a person accepts or wishes to be true, noting that beliefs don't necessarily require nor are they always capable of verification.

We are told that teachers hold a great variety of beliefs: beliefs about the role that education can play, explanations for individual variation, how teaching works, and how the learner learns ; epistemological beliefs; beliefs about their students in relation to culture, motivation, and intelligence; beliefs about the work of pedagogies; and beliefs about how self-control, self-efficacy, and self-worth operate in them and their students (Kennedy, 1997; Levin, 2014).

Teachers' beliefs can be seen as a key form of personal knowledge (Kagan, 1992), as such they act as an epistemological foundation influencing teachers' cognitive, emotional, and behavioral choices in classroom settings. These beliefs significantly affect their teaching methods and interactions with students, and are linked to teaching dispositions that enhance student motivation and learning (Collie et al., 2012; De Corte et al., 2008; Muis & Foy, 2010).

The distinction between beliefs and knowledge has been the subject of various scholarly discussions (see for example, Nespor, 1987; Smith & Siegel, 2004; and Southerland et al., 2001). A general consensus in academic literature, views beliefs and knowledge as largely intersecting concepts, following trends set by prior research in the field (Hoy et al., 2006).

Teacher's beliefs in their ability to facilitate student learning (teaching efficacy), impacts their classroom goals. Teachers with lower efficacy tend to exert less effort in lesson planning and show minimal persistence with struggling students, along with limited teaching strategies. In contrast, highly efficacious teachers are proactive in resource acquisition and lesson development, persistent with challenged students, and utilize diverse teaching methods to enhance student understanding (Kleinsasser, 2014; Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998).

Research today acknowledges that teachers' beliefs are closely related to the practical knowledge that guides teachers' behavior and that they tend to be subjective and personal while reflecting a community's agreed upon knowledge (Hoy et al., 2006; Lundeberg & Levin, 2003). Of utmost importance to our present effort is the research which points at the powerful effects of teachers' beliefs on their students' achievements (Watt & Richardson, 2015); beliefs which are communicated, nonverbally and which heavily influence students' sense of self-efficacy and motivation (Rosenthal, 2002).

The work of Donald Schön (Schön, 1983), made reflection a prominent theme in the literature on teacher education. Teachers' self-awareness and self-reflection play a crucial role in harmonizing their beliefs with their teaching methods (Buehl & Beck, 2014). Critical reflection, as defined in teacher professional development literature, draws heavily on John Dewey's work. Dewey's concept of reflective thought involves active and thorough evaluation of beliefs or knowledge, characterized by open-mindedness and responsibility (Liu, 2015; Rodgers, 2002). Tripp and Rich (2012) define reflection as a self-critical process where teachers assess the impact of their pedagogical decisions to improve their practices.

Reflection is fundamental in the learning process, with Postholm (2008) highlighting its importance in the evolution of teaching practices. Teachers' reflexivity has been associated with the ability to think critically (Tsangaridou & O'Sullivan, 1997) facilitating self-management through self-observation (Shepel, 1995) as well as with the ability to link thought and action (Correa Molina et al., 2010) prompting teachers to consider a range of potential actions and potentially transforming their approach (Shepell, 1995).

Co-organization and self-organization in activity content are essential for teacher learning, where integrating everyday language with scientific concepts can bridge the gap between theory and practice (Kvernbekk, 2011). Vygotsky emphasized the interconnectedness of thoughts, emotions, and intentions with actions, underlining their significance in

understanding language and fostering professional development within a socio-cultural context (DiPardo & Potter, 2003).

Discrepancies between beliefs and practices can arise from a lack of self-awareness (Roehrig et al., 2011). Addressing these discrepancies through reflection enables teachers to modify their beliefs or practices (Phipps & Borg, 2009). For both pre-service and practicing teachers, self-reflection is key to aligning beliefs with practices and developing coherent belief systems (Potari & Georgiadou–Kabouridis, 2009). Therefore, teachers should be encouraged to recognize and reflect on the congruence or incongruence of their beliefs and practices.

For our work we conceive of beliefs and reflection as social practices represented in language and inscribed with warranted repertoires for action (Ottesen, 2007) .

Teacher beliefs on students' achievements and their theories of mind have for the most part been examined separately, yet their mutual attention to how individuals develop appear to be addressing similar concerns and to be generated from some very basic metaphors (Skott, 2015). Teacher metaphors though shaped by the multiple environments in which teachers evolve are not fixed and unchangeable. Making explicit the metaphors that shape thinking and practice in education is not just a theoretical exercise; it is a matter of uncovering the assumptions that underlie our interpretations so that we can more deliberately direct our actions (Cook-Sather, 2001). It is crucial, then, to pay more attention to how reflecting on our language will uncover our metaphors and redirect our educational work.

### ***On language and metaphors***

Language plays a crucial role in shaping and understanding beliefs and ideologies. As a fundamental aspect of culture language goes beyond linguistics and reveals our identities and thought processes. Language is one of our main tools to create and express our cultural belongings; language serves and allows for our thinking (Vygotsky, 1962) and functions as a window into the human mind but also is a social process whose study belongs to anthropology as much as to linguistics (Duranti, 2001). Moreover, language also reflects individual and group values and beliefs (Bourdieu, 1991). In this sense the language we use, the discourses we share, and the rhetoric we practice have the potential to both expand and limit possibilities for change. Furthermore, the interaction of language with its context is pivotal in the creation of meaning (Fairclough, 1992, 1995) and the types of language endorsed by a community significantly influence the identities and thought patterns of its

members (Fairclough, 1995) so much so that in a sense you belong the moment your discourse is recognized by community members as theirs. Last but not least we need to seriously consider the power of languages/discourses in legitimizing certain ideas while suppressing others (Ladson-Billings, 1998). The nuances of language reveal the deep-seated beliefs, values, and cognitive processes of a society. This intricate relationship between language and ideology becomes particularly evident when we consider the power of metaphors with which we deal next.

Almost four decades ago, Lakoff and Johnson (1980) published a seminal book on the centrality of metaphors in our lives, suggesting that metaphors stand at the basis of the ways in which we conform, encounter and perform that which we call 'reality'. One of the basic arguments of that book is that metaphors do not simply describe reality, but rather create reality. In this sense, metaphors are 'cognitive' tools through which we construct meaning and understand the world (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999). Even those who believe in the possibility of language being partially literal (Reinhart, 1983) would readily agree that many important subjects cannot be described literally, at least not well. States of mind and many elements of spiritual life are like this. Being inaccessible to the senses, they require comparisons because they cannot be depicted literally in images or in words. What is inaccessible to the senses tends to defeat the literal. Metaphors are then more than just a figure of speech that refers to expressing one thing in terms of another. The words we use affect our understandings of the world and thus "changes in our conceptual system do change what is real for us and affect how we perceive the world and act upon those perceptions" (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 146).

Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) theory of metaphors have been highly praised as well as highly criticized. Two main criticisms we need to acknowledge and keep present, as we advance in the paper, relate to the fact that Lakoff and Johnson emphasize the universal, mechanical and monolithic aspects of metaphor in partial disregard of the contextual aspects of embodiment; and that they emphasize the role of universal bodily experience instead of the interaction of body and context (Kövecses, 2008) and thus its relationship to culture.

Despite these criticisms, however, Lakoff and Johnson's theory of metaphors have taught us an important thing: that metaphors are Janus-faced. On one hand, they can offer creative opportunities confronting a curious phenomenon; on the other hand, they can also limit us for at times we utilize metaphors that hide other aspects of a concept. Hence metaphors are

important, for not only do they affect our concepts or views of reality, they can also alter the world in which we live, because once we perceive a concept or an idea in a particular manner, we are more likely to change how we act. In short: metaphors enable ways of living in the world as much as they mislead us (Hayles, 2001).

Importantly, then, as Lakoff and Johnson (1980) note, new metaphors create new realities, because thanks to them we begin to understand our experiences differently, acting and producing consequences accordingly. Given that metaphors bring with them certain expectations as to what is possible to think and do, the choice of a metaphor is a highly consequential matter (Sfard, 1998).

Our present interest is to consider the possibility that as our understanding of the learner and or the learning changes so changes our understanding of what education is and how it is done.

Lakoff (2006) underscores the power of language to reframe debates. By controlling educational rhetoric, we can challenge misconceptions like schools being akin to factories or education being solely about standardization. Lakoff's exploration of "frames" in linguistics and cognitive science extends to politics and is equally relevant to education and school reform, inherently political domains. Frames, as mental structures, shape our perception, reasoning, and actions, often unconsciously (Lakoff, 2006). As language and metaphors, they not only define problems and solutions but can obscure underlying issues (Lakoff, 2006). In politics, Lakoff demonstrates how framing has reshaped American politics, a concept equally applicable to the complexities of school reform.

In the context of education and educators their rhetoric is more than just a means of articulating ideas. Education and educators' rhetoric frames hold the power to both expand and, crucially, constrain the possibilities for change. This underlines the importance of a deep and critical engagement first with the language used in any human activity to fully grasp its underlying ideology and implications and second to consider strategies to possibly reshape educational rhetorical frames.

Making explicit the metaphors that shape thinking and practice in education is not just a theoretical exercise; it is a matter of uncovering the assumptions that underlie our interpretations so that we can more deliberately direct our actions (Cook-Sather, 2001). It is crucial, then, to pay more attention to how reflecting on our language will uncover our

metaphors and redirect our educational work. The 'image' of the child (Dodd-Nufrio, 2011) in our case that held by educators has profound implications for the ways in which we make sense of their (and our) place within the world, their capabilities and our interactions with them. Dwelling upon how particular images of the child come about, are sustained or superseded by others, dependent upon time and context, is important (Dahlberg, 1999; James & James, 2001) and we hope has the potential to better our educational efforts.

The above should be enough to justify our particular interest in homeroom teachers' reflections and on some specific issues in their language use, those related to their beliefs about the reasons why children fail (or not) in school. This focus follows from our appreciation that language use as well as the interpretative frameworks available to people, teachers included, is the product of rather long acculturating and socializing processes. If we want homeroom teachers to reflect on their foundational beliefs, which means reflecting on their language use, it is because we hope that doing so will help them optimize their educational work.

### **Setting and Research Methodology**

To enhance our understanding of homeroom teachers' perspectives on student failure and its impact on their pedagogical approaches, we engaged in comprehensive research involving fifty-six (56) middle and high school homeroom teachers from diverse sectors of the Israeli education system, including Secular, Haredi, Arab, and Religious tracks. Our methodology involved conducting detailed interviews where homeroom teachers shared insights about their roles, their interactions with other school roles, their self-efficacy, and more. A key focus of these interviews was exploring their interpretations of what constitutes a 'failing student', based on school standards. Through probing questions, we were able to dissect and better comprehend the multifaceted categories homeroom teachers use to explain academic failure.

Building on these interview insights, we organized a workshop with twenty (20) participating homeroom teachers. The interactive sessions were designed to discuss our findings, introduce various theoretical perspectives that emphasize ontology, evaluate the implications of identified discourses (such as pedagogical content and psychologized therapeutic discourses), and encourage homeroom teachers to reconsider their views and use of metaphors on learners, learning processes, and their interrelations with other key figures in the school environment.

All interviews were conducted in Hebrew and extended between 50 and 75 minutes. The excerpts provided below have been translated by the author from their original Hebrew. The English translations aim to stay as close as possible to the Hebrew source material, which may occasionally result in phrasing that sounds somewhat complex or unconventional. The interviews were conveniently conducted using Zoom, which facilitated flexible scheduling and comfortable settings for the participants. This approach was positively received, as it fostered a sense of closeness and attentiveness.

The in-person workshop, consisting of five six-hour sessions, was held in the afternoons at the central facility of the educational NGO in Jerusalem who supported the effort and took responsibility for all logistical needs of the workshop. Participating homeroom teachers received credits from the Ministry of Education, a stipend, and reimbursement for travel expenses. All participants, in both interviews and the workshop, were consenting adults. The entire research project received approval from the office of the Chief Scientist of the Ministry of Education.

The homeroom teacher participants varied in their subject expertise and experience. Of the 56 interviewees, 38 taught humanities, 9 social sciences, and 9 maths/science subjects. Their teaching experience ranged from five (5) to over twenty-five (25) years. The group included 25 teachers from secular state Hebrew-speaking schools, 14 from state religious Hebrew-speaking schools, 10 from ultra-orthodox Hebrew-speaking schools, 4 from state Arabic-speaking schools, and 3 from state joint religious-secular Hebrew-speaking schools. The gender distribution was 41 females and 15 males, with 10 of these males teaching at ultra-orthodox schools.

The workshop's twenty (20) homeroom teacher participants included 5 males and 15 females, representing a diverse mix of schools, 6 came from religious schools, 6 from secular schools, 3 from ultra-orthodox schools, 3 from arab speaking schools, and 2 from secular/religious schools. Both the interviews and the workshops were fully recorded and transcribed for in-depth analysis.

As mentioned we started from a set of open ended questions rather than detailed hypotheses and targets for verification. We approached the data gathered through a qualitative Grounded Theory Methodology (GTM), a general methodology for building theories that are grounded on systematically gathered and analysed data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). GTM offered us a flexible set of inductive strategies for collecting and analysing qualitative data generating



new theories from the data for it emphasizes building inductive theories through data analysis (Charmaz, 2000; Strauss & Corbin, 1994). This involved a process whereby abstractions were built up incrementally from detailed analysis of data, resulting in one or more concepts that integrate aspects of the environment from which they are derived.

Given that words are the way by which most people create their worlds, understand their being in it, and explain themselves and their circumstances we saw our main task to find patterns within those words and to present those patterns while at the same time staying as close to the construction of the world as the participants originally experienced it (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994).

We engaged in persistent interaction with data and analysis, identifying patterns or higher-level abstractions as a result of prolonged immersion in, and engagement with, the data. These patterns of higher-level abstractions take the form of categories or classes, so that a number of instances— incidents, examples, or such like—are grouped together because they have some property in common, in other words we adopted a process of categorization. Worth noting is that early in our analysis of the interviews we reached theoretical saturation which seemed to indicate that we were indeed dealing with discourses which have been in a sense ritualized. Yet, we did not stop our analysis and continued to do it through all gathered interviews just to make sure we were not missing any possible new categories.

All data gathered was subjected to a thematic analysis in order to establish theoretical categories using three stages of coding: (a) open coding, which helped us identify main concepts – their properties and dimensions; (b) axial coding which while creating new connections between identified categories and subcategories allowed for the organization of the fractured data in new ways , and (c) selective coding which allowed us to identify categories at a higher level of abstraction so as to redefine new theoretical insights (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006; Walker & Myrick, 2006). In addition, relevant portions of the transcripts were subjected to a critical discourse analysis dealing with the overt and latent dimensions of the selected texts so as to identify possible naturalizing discourse strategies, strategies for the manufacturing of consensus, legitimacy and dominance, and other regulatory linguistic strategies (Fairclough et al., 2013; Forchtner & Wodak, 2017).

When we finalized our first thorough analysis, we incorporated ChatGPT4 for results validation through the lens of evolving AI technology. The questions we asked from ChatGPT4 were very general at first (e.g., What are the main issues raised in the interviews

by the homeroom teachers interviewed?) and only later we prompted ChatGPT4 to consider more specific questions (e.g. Do homeroom teachers create connections between the reasons for failure they mention and the disciplinary subjects they teach?). The results of the ChatGPT analysis validated to a great extent our own in-depth analysis.

For whatever will develop at the end of our analysis we do not claim the status of grand or overarching theories, but rather we offer the resulting theories as hopefully substantive, statements that draw upon, and have theoretical power constrained by a specified context. We hope that whatever we have to offer will be assessed for its utility in certain situations and not for their claims to universal validity, absolute truth, and veracity; assessed initially against the background from which they have been derived. We wish our products to have “grab” and “work” in the sense of indicating how the theory can lead to enhanced practice and understanding of the participants.

Though the above represents our general approach to data analysis, when considering the interviews with the homeroom teachers we also applied in our analysis a concept mapping approach (Kinchin et al., 2010; Ruiz-Primo & Shavelson, 1996) for this approach has been found useful in helping expose knowledge encompassing complex processes or interrelationships while giving a focus to the sets of propositions by which individuals construct meaning (Ruiz-Primo & Shavelson, 1996). The approach aligns well with the grounded theory view of qualitative data analysis the priority of which is not compression; but instead, the need to expand conceptual frameworks by raising further questions and opening up enquiry (Coffey et al., 1996).

All in all, the analytical approach aided us in uncovering the intricate relationships and links existing among the main concepts used by homeroom teachers to explain their understanding of educational failure and feed the explorative activities we undertook in the context of the workshops. We believe this study carries implications for homeroom teacher training and ongoing professional education. It offers insights on how to help pre-service and in-service teachers in general, and homeroom teachers in particular, realize the potential benefits and harms of each discourse and how not to surrender to a dichotomous perspective regarding educational languages and their circumstances.

## **Findings**

Upon initial examination of the interviews, an intricate interplay of emotional, social, and environmental factors emerges as influential in shaping students' academic outcomes. The homeroom teachers' insights emphasize a holistic educational perspective that nurtures an environment fostering both personal growth and academic achievement.

Key elements in this discourse on students' needs are evident, including the fundamental importance of meeting basic requirements such as proper nutrition, sufficient sleep, and a conducive learning atmosphere.

Furthermore, the significance of positive reinforcement from parents, homeroom teachers, and peers is emphasized as a means to boost a student's self-esteem and motivation. The homeroom teachers underscore the role of resilience in helping students overcome challenges, highlighting the critical support systems both at home and in school. They also recognize the potential for students without strong familial support to thrive through positive interactions with friends or mentors who provide encouragement.

Additionally, the impact of early life experiences on students' confidence and motivation is acknowledged as a pivotal factor in shaping their perspectives on success and failure. Socioeconomic factors are also recognized for their influence on student success, although it is emphasized that these are not the sole determinants. All these points are highlighted because difficulties in any of these areas can significantly hinder a student's learning process. The homeroom teachers also acknowledge the evolving nature of teaching and the importance of experience in understanding and addressing students' needs and reflect on their own growth and commitment to ongoing self-improvement. Finally, it is recognized that students are diverse, and the challenges they face require diverse approaches for addressing them and improving academic performance. All in all their perspectives align with modern educational theories and discourses that stress the importance of addressing the whole student, including their emotional and social needs, in the learning process.

Just to give a few examples of this complex understanding consider the following excerpt from two homeroom teachers, one teaching maths, and the other literature, the letters and numbers following each excerpt indicate the anonymous identity of the interviewee and the lines in the transcript from where the excerpt is taken; they state:

This is really such a big question... What I am like this comes to my mind, that there is a kind of triangle here: there is the school system - the social system, there is the child, and there is

the family from which the child comes. I think it's actually the three main factors that... the child, the family and the educational system...A child who succeeds and a child who does not succeed, it is found there: in the education system, in the child himself and in the parents - in the family from which they came. It's big...T14: 14664-14669

The reasons for failure and for success are around me not only teachers and adults but the whole context. So I really think that the basis for everything - both success and failure - goes beyond the teachers and adults around me. T1:56-57

Upon closer examination, it becomes evident that interviewees central focus lies in the emphasis placed by the homeroom teachers on the significance of emotional, cognitive, and motivational factors in students' academic achievements and setbacks.

To provide a clear perspective on this emphasis, let's begin by quantifying the frequency of these concepts in the interviews, which will underscore their prominence. The term 'emotional' emerges most frequently, with 498 mentions (notably accompanied by 'availability' in 122 instances). 'Motivation' follows with 309 mentions (with an additional 100 mentions of its related concept, 'will'), and 'cognition' is mentioned 258 times (to which we could add associated concepts such as 'intelligence,' which appears 106 times, and 'mental capacities,' mentioned 21 times).

All interviewees mention these or related concepts as central in their explanations of student's failure in varied and complex ways. Just as an example we can look at a civic studies homeroom teacher; she states:

What I want to say is that if I now put, let's say, some specific axis, these two parameters (emotional and cognitive), then they are not disconnected from each other, there is no one specific direction. I believe that they affect each other, which is specific today, it's as if some other parameter has entered this range, that if you have a certain neurological problem, then I... it affects in terms of... let's say it's my studies, but there are other things that are also related to things that bring you motivation, like a social situation in class... T40 13787-13791

We devote the following section to showing the ways in which these concepts are used and further on on how they are related.

### ***Emotion***

Before delving into the emotional aspect, it's worth noting that the interviews do not provide a singular, concrete definition of 'emotional.' Rather, it is used variably, often representing a broad category encompassing diverse phenomena.

For instance, emotional issues can stem from a wide range of events, as indicated by one homeroom teacher:

And I've seen it countless times...There is a very large correlation between the two things. If a student loses a parent, or the parents go through a divorce, or a student who experiences social difficulties - this greatly affects his ability to learn, even if in another reality he would have done very well. So the state of mind can have an effect. And of course social pressure can also greatly affect the student's achievements. T21: 6698-6702

The complexity of students' emotional experiences is further illustrated by the homeroom teacher who notes:

So we return again to the first point I said that this is a lot of an emotional part, that these are children who sometimes have difficult stories, difficult life stories, that the emotional world has taken up so much space for them that the academic world is pushed aside. T19, 6024-6028

Additionally, emotional issues can impact even high-ability students, as exemplified here:

I mean one student with good abilities - I mean even high but there is some kind of emotional background that stops her from focusing on her studies and devoting energy and resources and space to it in her life, and she is busy with other things. T24, 7830-7834

The interviews also highlight that the age group of these students is characterized by a significant emotional component, as expressed by one homeroom teacher:

So, first of all, specifically, I want to say that many times you tell yourself that teenager's study in their least free years for learning...and also studies show that, by and large, they study in their least free years. They are busy with hormones, social affairs, their sexual development, growing up - everything is... the world is more dichotomous. Everything makes them jump. If I fight with my parents, I can't study. The ability to regulate is less good.' T26: 9338-9344

In essence, the 'emotional' encompasses a wide spectrum of experiences, shaping various aspects of students' lives, as noted by another homeroom teacher:

He is preoccupied with existential things... They are looking for the social place - it is very disturbing to them what happens between certain friendships. Lots of conflicts like this ... What happens on social networks, WhatsApp groups, Instagram and Tiktok... it's the social issue. There is the theme of the house - children carry with them family secrets, events that happen within the family, family stories... comparisons between them and other siblings...It is an emotional difficulty in my eyes, which does not allow her to get out of it. T9: 3096-3107

In conclusion, the interviews highlight the diverse and critical role of 'emotional' aspects in influencing and shaping the academic experiences of students.

### ***Motivation***

We will now move into the second most mentioned concept when homeroom teachers deal with students' failure, motivation. Motivation even more so than the emotional is a slippery iterative concept which seems very subjugated to both emotions and cognition.

As if true, it is not that a person is born with motivation or not or lack of motivation. Reality builds his motivation... yes. As if it's not necessarily what my abilities are, it's all the experience.... Yes, it's also social influences T27: 9666-9668

So motivation above is considered a product of surrounding realities for others motivation is an internal trait.

Motivation in my eyes is something that is really internal. Motivation is an internal drive. Some kind of desire you have to succeed, which pushes you... It's not just such a desire: I have a dream. A dream is cute, it's not enough. Fine... T22: 7193-7194

Regardless of it being social or individual its ultimate expression and influence seem to be dependent on its internal expression/functioning.

And I think a lot about this... that we see that he (the student) is not able to express himself...and he is not comfortable here either... he doesn't manage to mobilize internal motivation for this matter of learning, or maybe he is alienated from theoretical learning... because it doesn't interest him enough, because he doesn't succeed, and then this experience

of failure turns into some kind of pattern or something that really fixes him, and becomes some kind of acquired helplessness. T13: 4361-4366

Mobilizing motivation, an inherent quality within students, becomes challenging when they lack interest in the subject matter. Repeated occurrences of this disinterest can lead to a feeling of helplessness.

School evaluations can affect motivation, repeated failure has such an effect.

So when they don't see many, many, many successes - many times successes, and only failure and failure and failure - then they have no motivation. T49: 16418-16419

Motivation is also conceived as an interactional product of homeroom teacher students' interactions.

We teachers can make this thing - this engine called desire - we can stop the engine or start this engine. Yes, but it's not just the teachers who turn it on. It's the child and the teacher together. Now ask me how much - I don't know. T38: 13342-13343

At times motivation is about pleasing others' expectations, yet it seems more appreciated when motivation derives from an internal strength.

So I think it (motivation) is both outside the child and inside the child. I think that when it is outside the child, there is often satisfaction, lack... This is how I translate things that students have told me over the years, and I know from their conversations. There is quite a lot of desire to please, a desire not to disappoint, both the parents, themselves of course, and the environment. Having some of them is what drives motivation, it's an understanding that it's some kind of key to success ... And some students are very goal oriented. I mean, they are motivated, they know what is right, what is needed. There are some internal sources into this thing. Of course, it always works best when there are internal sources. T26: 9257-9267

Motivation, extrinsic or intrinsic are not easily separated; they seem to act on each other.

Because it very much depends on who the child is, who the grandfather is. For that matter, I look at students who come from a home where academic success is very important, okay? That child is imbued with a goal, he sat at the expense of games... activities, and will study in his free time. He'll go home and sit with a pile of books, okay? Now, I can say that it is external or internal motivation - that is a question. On the one hand, it's internal - he wants it.

On the other hand, it is external, but it has already entered inside. Now, also for example grandfather - it could be a grandfather who you don't want to fail, because he will look at you badly, okay. It could be something else entirely. It could be: I want to make grandpa have good moments. I want him to be proud of me. So, it very much depends on each case. T32: 11358-11364

These excerpts suggest that homeroom teachers perceive motivation as originating from a combination of factors; they recognize motivation as a dynamic element influenced by personal desire, family and social contexts, mood swings, and environmental factors. These factors are at times considered to have precedence one to the other and at times as working in tandem.

### *Cognition*

We will now explore homeroom teachers' considerations regarding cognition, which, along with emotion and motivation, forms the fundamental triad used by homeroom teachers to explain students' failures. Cognition which, but for a few exceptions, lacks a definitive or precise categorization in the interviews, is unanimously recognized by teachers as critical in the learning process.

The first excerpt provides some insight into this:

I think low mental ability is expressed in a shallow interpretation of reality, inability to read between the lines, inability to understand deeper situations, more complex interactions, cause and effect - not understanding how something affects something else. A kind of childish innocence that does not mature, because there is no understanding of a reason and a deeper motive. I mean, you can understand the reason and the simplest reason, but things are a little more in-depth, it's hard to understand. T20: 6366-6370.

This observation, although precise, hinges on the subjective interpretation of the observer. The teacher is the judge of the depth of the students' understanding.

The following account presents a similar theme, focusing on the subjective observer's attempt to understand the observed:



(on cognition) When I start drinking, I really also fall asleep - that's another topic... and there was some stage where people talked to me and I talked, but I couldn't connect... each sentence by itself, it was coherent, but I didn't understand why I was saying it... no... There was actually continuity in this sense... I mean, there wasn't this self that unites the sentences. And then I remember saying the sentence - I said: Wow, now I understand some of my students! What does it look like when you suddenly say something...? Now, I understand the level of the sentence, but how does it relate to the conversation? ...I mean, I straight away took it to the place I ordered. I said: here, students, this is what they suddenly experience when for some reason they do not understand - whether it is because they are not interested, whether it is because there is a problem. And suddenly I experienced it right from the inside - what does a lack of understanding look like, what does a problem with a sentence suddenly look like, when every sentence in itself is understandable - it's like this kind of aphasia, you know how to read the letters, you don't know how to put the word together. So, uh... T43: 15169-15181.

These narratives highlight the complex challenge of cognition, particularly in understanding and connecting ideas, and underscore the importance of integrating diverse cognitive processes in learning.

Look, this is something that cannot be ignored. In terms of the value of human beings, yes, in my eyes it's a disaster, that they take people who are more cognitively developed, and give them more respect, for example... But what can be done that realistically it is much easier for these people to manage in certain things, in certain areas? It is on the one hand. Now, to tell you that he is a better person because of it? Definitely not! And sometimes even the opposite. It really, really depends on what you do with the talents you got. But it's a clear thing, like one born blond and one red-haired, one tall and one short, the same. T32: 11314-11321

Though somewhat ambivalent towards the concept, the homeroom teacher recognizes cognition's centrality. He acknowledges the unfortunate reality where individuals with more developed cognitive abilities often receive more respect and are perceived as better equipped for certain tasks. However, cognitive development does not inherently make someone a better person.

Another reason could be: the child's cognitive abilities may be low. Maybe not in all fields, but he can succeed in one field, and in the other field he really, really fails - he fails again and again. T39: 13460-13463

Cognition is not uniform or consistent across all areas. The passage acknowledges that a child may have low cognitive abilities in certain areas, leading to repeated failures in those specific fields, despite potentially succeeding in others.

I'm just thinking about a student who has been crying all the time since the beginning of the year. Okay, she started seventh grade, a difficult transition - constantly crying, and she can sit and cry and do nothing in class... I mean, her behavior is her choice. It is difficult for her and she is suffering and in pain and she is under stress and she is in fear - no matter what made her cry - she cannot control that. She can feel that way. But she can choose how to behave. I mean, there is some cognitive connection to emotion T37: 12643-12648

The above, a complex passage discusses a student undergoing emotional challenges, specifically focusing on the relationship between emotions, cognitive processes, and personal choice in behaviour. The homeroom teacher suggests that cognition plays a role as a choice in addressing emotional issues.

Collectively, these excerpts offer a complex understanding of cognition in education. They underscore the diversity of cognitive abilities among students, the impact of external factors on learning, and the potential interaction between the cognitive, behavioural, and the emotional in individual activity.

### ***Entangled categories***

In the educational context, the concepts of cognition, emotion, and motivation, as used by homeroom teachers, lack precision and are often entangled in ways that blur their distinctiveness. This entanglement complicates understanding their individual contributions to learning processes, potentially diminishing their analytical value. The following excerpts illustrate this complexity.

I think so. Actually the second type means something like: the cognitive function is normal, and even above that, but the girl is not free to use her cognitive abilities, for one reason or another T36: 12391-12393

This excerpt highlights how cognition is influenced by factors beyond pure intellectual ability, possibly including emotional or motivational issues.

Look, when it's very, very clear, like that girl I told in maths - no, I have no doubts. But when I have issues... issues for example such as the cases of retrieval and memory, many times I

can try to guess whether it is really based on a cognitive issue or an emotional issue T4:  
1316-1318

Not even identifying a learning event as anchored in cognition is always easy. Similar events can be related at times to more than one source. Particularly distinguishing between cognitive and emotional sources seems to be challenging. Difficulties with maths appear to be clearly cognitive, but memory and retrieval can be easily related to emotional issues that affect these abilities.

One of the most prominent emotional things that I see is that a child simply does not believe that he will succeed. If he doesn't believe he can succeed he surrenders in advance. He reads the first word in a test or at work, a task - what he received - reads the second word, and he says: what, what, what, I don't understand, I don't understand, I don't understand. T37:  
12583-12588

This passage illustrates how a student's belief in their ability to succeed (or lack thereof) can significantly impact their performance. The emotional aspect of self-belief becomes a barrier to learning. The excerpt presents the interplay as one internal to the student; in the following one we will read a similar phenomenon but this time the interplay occurs between the inside and the outside.

It starts with the abilities, because when a teacher recognizes abilities in a child, somehow his motivation also increases, because he... there is something that affects him. But it really depends on the case, because many times I also meet children who have been told that they are not capable, like that child, and he decided that he would not give up. T19: 6038-6042

The interplay between the recognition of the student's ability (which influences the self-confidence of the student) and the student's motivation (here almost synonym with cognitive abilities) boosts the student's learning process. This time internal drives and external validation feed each other; the social has taken the place of the individual.

I think two points. One of them is the ass - the ability to sit and practice, because I see mentally weak students who have the patience to sit and practice, and they succeed and they don't fail. But usually, it comes all combined. I mean, we are not in exact science here, that I

can do a laboratory experiment and separate and clean everything from everything and test only one factor. T20: 6372-6375

The cognitive, the mental abilities not always directly available to the observer are influenced by the 'ass' the ability to sit and practice. Learning is often a combination of various factors including the ability to practise, emotional resilience, and some mental abilities.

Hanging. If you're emotionally charged, and you... you can't think at all - not just abstract or non-abstract. If you are currently emotionally charged, and you are not at all... not there T15: 4903-4904

Regardless of cognitive ability, intense emotional states can completely hinder cognitive processes, reinforcing the idea that emotional wellbeing is crucial for effective learning.

It could be that a child... is not available for learning... and then we try to find out through the emotional or therapeutic place, to see if there is a significant emotional difficulty that needs to be addressed, so that we can see at all what the educational potential of that person is.

Now, all we can say for a moment is that it is completely impossible to disconnect cognition and emotion. But it could be that really in my terminology I made such a logical separation of... wait, if there is a learning difficulty of a learning disability, and I isolate this component, then suddenly something will happen. Sometimes and many times it can be together. It may be that due to difficulty in absorbing the material and processing the material, a significant experience of frustration was created, an experience of failure, lack of success was created...

A student approaches this thing with a kind of frustration, alienation from this thing or sayings like: Well, I won't succeed, well, that's me, bad. And then things really are together... and then we see the person, of course... it's very difficult for us to separate that. It's some kind of whole... we tell ourselves as a team, a complete story, which is not segmented into segments, but a complete story, of: here is child X, he has such and such difficulties, he deals with them in one way or another. He manages to rally in favour of this thing more or less.

T13: 4523-4555

This passage delves deeper into the inseparability of cognition and emotion, especially in the context of learning difficulties. It shows the homeroom teachers trying to make sense of the students' problems with separate categories which he clearly believes are inseparable. The teacher is in search of a complete story for the wholeness of the child which might be impeded by the working categories with which homeroom teachers work.

... Some people are born with certain abilities, with certain talents. There are people who are more, and there are people who are less now, along with that, and you can't separate - together, you can't separate the motivation, because there are children - there are students whose mental ability, let's say this, is perfectly fine, there is no problem there, but the motivation does not exist, the desire does not exist, they are not interested in it, they are interested in something else. T11: 3769-3773

Cognitive abilities when not accompanied by motivation/interest/desire will not deliver the expected results in the learning process. Intellectual capacities are limited by the amount of motivation the student displays.

Now, talents can be both (product of) cognitive, and experience, yes. There could be someone who is very, very smart, but he has not experienced this study, so it will take him a long time. There can be someone who is less smart, who has a lot of training in the field... yes, you can see a student who in one class is really one of the weakest, and in another class, he is one of the best, which is also related to motivation, an experience of success. T32: 11201-11210

This excerpt discusses the variability of talents and skills among students and across different domains, including cognitive abilities and experiences, and how these factors influence motivation and success in different subjects

...that the motivational sits on top of the emotional completely. But sometimes a child really wants to, but is not available at the moment... I don't know, I have to think about it myself. It's a refinement. But I think there are things in it. Like it's... there's something emotional here. There is something here that we also discussed about the environmental factors, which is as if everything builds the same motivation. T9: 3166-3169

An interesting statement which prioritizes motivation over the emotional at first and soon after turns the table to make the emotional reign over motivation. All in all the excerpt explores the intricate relationship between motivation, emotion, and environmental factors.

Our last excerpt creates a full identification between motivation and certain emotions product of successful experiences.

... apparently motivation is an emotion. Emotion is actually a reward that our mind gives us after an experience of success. T30: 10640-10641

The narrative constructed from these excerpts paints a complex picture of the learning process, where cognition, emotion, and motivation are deeply entangled. It becomes evident that these elements cannot be viewed in isolation. The emotional state of a student significantly impacts their cognitive abilities and motivation. Similarly, cognitive challenges can lead to emotional distress, which in turn affects motivation. Understanding this intricate relationship seems crucial for educators when trying to make sense of the learner and the learning process.

It goes without saying that homeroom teachers are well-aware and recognize the substantial impact of external factors on students. In the following section, we present a selection of their insights on this topic.

### ***Other sources for students' problems***

Homeroom teachers are keenly aware that student failure can stem from factors beyond the primary aspects of cognition, emotion, and motivation. These additional reasons can often be described as more 'objective', grounded in tangible, real-world situations rather than just internal psychological states. However, it's notable that these reasons are less frequently mentioned in our recorded interviews. Interestingly, seldom even when an objective reason is identified, as observed in the last excerpt of this section, a diagnosis leaning more towards emotional or cognitive aspects is often suggested. This possibly indicates primacy of internal states in the homeroom teachers' considerations.

So that day, she was busy crying, let's say, because her father suddenly talks to her and tells her that he can't meet her and she can't come to him, because there is this story. She will not be emotionally available for learning, because she is busy in the story, and she is busy in what happened in the morning, and she is not interested in the Bible, nor is she interested in literature, nor is she interested... She doesn't even listen to what I'm talking to her. T49: 17092-17095

The interviewee underlines the relevance of external family issues in significantly disrupting a student's emotional availability for learning, overshadowing their cognitive abilities.

And there are really children whose emotional issues have a terrible effect on their difficulties, which can come on the background of maybe a little... I don't like to use this

term, but a bit of environmental retardation - a lack of investment on the part of the home. The environment from which the child comes. Many times, it is a matter of low self-esteem, which is also, by the way, one related to the other - I mean, because of the disability, there can be matters of low self-esteem. That's more or less. Like I suppose it's all mixed together, we see it all together T4: 1286-1291

The excerpt points out the impact of the home environment on students' emotional well-being and self-esteem, showing how external conditions create internal emotional states.

I say: now that I'm talking about background, then I say: it can be a real background of knowledge, and it can also be the way things are presented. I mean, he may have encountered this material before, but it was presented to him incorrectly. For that matter, if you have to learn material from 1 to 10 - from a low level to a high level - he met it for the first time at level 3 and skipped levels 1 and 2 - so for me there is a lack of background here, because he did not build it correctly, so you... T31: 10835-10838

The excerpt above highlights the role of background knowledge and the manner of initial learning experiences in shaping a student's understanding, emphasizing the importance of proper foundational learning.

These guys are big, they demand something very real, and they demand something that will give them an answer, that will give them exactly what they need, where it meets me and in what it helps me. They want big things and they want things... the system today is trying to change and grow a little more and develop a little more and broaden horizons and that's it. But I personally still feel that she (the student) is going to this place of a very productive life of: earn in high-tech, be it... still as if the guys here are looking for other things. T34: 11931-11936

The homeroom teacher reflects on the educational system's evolution, suggesting a mismatch between students' desire for practical, real-world learning and the system's offerings.

Because the system usually, with all the sadness involved, it's about a student who is one of forty children in a class, and it's about big schools, for which a student is... as if I'm being careful, but really a student is just another student, he says. They do not treat the individual, the soul. T46: 15836-15838

The interviewee critiques the educational system's focus on the collective rather than individual needs, underlining the necessity for personalized education.

There are many students who we say: he is a very very smart boy. He has no interest in studying now. And he had such days that he didn't have the references to deal with studies now. He can't sit in maths class because he knows that mom couldn't pay the electricity bill yesterday and there's no light in the house. He wasn't available for that. But the cognitive ability - he had it, he had it. If we could keep him a little longer, if we had... if we had the ability to convince him to do some kind of treatment, if we could give him a job. You know, all kinds of things like that - maybe it would have given him appeals, and we would have seen more of his abilities. T5: 1686-1690

This last excerpt identifies socio-economic challenges as critical factors affecting a student's engagement and concentration in school, despite having the cognitive ability. All together the excerpts reveal a nuanced understanding among homeroom teachers of the various factors influencing student success. While internal factors like cognition, emotion, and motivation are crucial, also external realities such as family dynamics, socio-economic status, and the educational environment significantly impact students' learning experiences. And yet the last excerpt seems to tilt the weight towards internal factors (if we had the ability to convince him to do some kind of treatment), and not the socio-economic challenges, outside. An approach which is reflected in all interviews we conducted.

### *Inside Outside*

In exploring how homeroom teachers understand and interpret student failure, it is crucial to delve into their conceptions of the learner and the learning process. A key aspect of this exploration involves discerning where homeroom teachers believe the foundational elements of learning and the sources/reasons for failure are situated.

The following excerpts give an idea of where the teachers stand regarding this issue. We will see that all but one have clear answers to my question regarding where emotions, cognition, and motivation are. In following sections, we will return to these issues and further consider where the teachers position the problems, they believe students have when failing



[Where is the maturity? Where is the cognition?] Where it's physically, I won't tell you. I can only say how it manifests itself. T14: 4759-4760

This rather unique response suggests a reluctance or inability to pinpoint the exact physical location of cognitive and emotional processes, focusing instead on their manifestations.

...cognition is obviously part of the brain. Now, if a person is injured in the brain - I mean, God forbid an accident that there are parts of the brain, which studies have also proven, that the person will be injured. The memory part can be damaged, there is in the frontal lobe, in... If we are talking about a physical place, it is more in the back of the brain. There is the feelings system, where if a person is hurt, his feelings can be hurt. It's big. But it's hard to say. Cognition - I don't believe that a person who falls off a finger has a problem with cognition, or a person who falls off a finger will later have emotional problems. T29: 10259-10264

Where is the cognition? in the brain. T43: 14495-14496

These excerpts position cognition and emotions in the brain, highlighting a biological basis for these processes.

[Where is the cognition?] in the brain. And so they come to a neurologist who diagnoses them... It is clear to me that the big story of attention and concentration is broader. I mean, it is possible that there is something in the way the educational institutions are built, it can also foster such a situation. T43: 15059-15064

The homeroom teacher locates cognition in the brain but also points to the broader educational context influencing cognitive processes.

[If I were to ask you where are the feelings of the students?] The feelings - in his heart. I'm not convinced. I think our feelings are in our hearts and minds. It has a connection between them. There is a connection. The abilities are in the mind, not in the heart and the feelings in the head and heart. T45: 15689-15693

Now emotions are located in the heart, at first, but soon the brain becomes also a location for emotions. Abilities find their place only in the mind.

She had lots and lots of things to say to her father, at that moment she was talking, and she was a little more free. I won't say 100 percent, but it made some room in my heart for learning... not 100 percent, but... [Is the vacancy in the heart?] Somewhere... yes, also in the

heart...and in thought.[By thought - you mean in the brain?] In the brain, yes. T49: 16572  
16581

The possibility to air emotional issues in dialogue frees place (to learn). Place is vacated in the heart and in the brain. Though not fully clear it seems that first the emotional is located in the heart and brain and if it takes up all free space learning cannot take place. Given the opportunity to free some space (by airing emotions) learning becomes possible which could position cognition in the heart and brain as well.

[If I were to ask you: where is this feeling inside - where would you say] In heart and mind...Some like... the understanding is in the mind, and the feeling is in the heart... the feeling that I feel security. I feel as if in my mind I must be given security, but in my heart I feel the security...Yes. As if in the brain - what are our expectations, what should be. But in the heart, did things come true or not? [Do you mean that it's in the heart and mind, or is it a metaphor] No, I'm saying that in the mind it's as if the person understands what he needs in order for him to feel this way and that way. T51: 16706-16728

This view portrays emotions as a feeling of security experienced both in the heart and the mind, emphasizing a dualistic understanding of emotional experiences - inside.

[Where is the motivation] In understanding. It is something internal. [So where is the understanding?] Near. There is the big brain and the small brain. [I mean, are all these things inside?] Motivation is something that can really be changed a lot. There is one who has previously put himself in: I can't succeed - his motivation is poor. You come, empower him - you change his motivation. There is one who has come to the understanding that he cannot - here the difficulty is greater. Depends on what causes the negative motivation over the positive. [When you say: if you empower him, what are you empowering when you empower someone?] The self in you. Everyone has what they have. [Where is this self?] Where does it reside in the body? either in the head or in the heart. T33: 11806-11817

The homeroom teacher views motivation as stemming from understanding, an internal process located in the brain. Empowerment is seen as a key to altering motivation, suggesting a complex interplay between cognition and emotion.

The narratives provided by these homeroom teachers illustrate a diverse range of perspectives on where cognition, emotion, and motivation are situated. For the most part the inside (of the student) is pointed at. If so it can be assumed that the efforts to deal with learning

foundational problems should be directed to interventions inside the student. Understanding the learner and the learning process focuses the educator in the internal functioning of the student; educational efforts should be directed in this direction.

### ***The student has a problem***

We further analysed the transcripts to see if homeroom teachers, who locate cognition, emotion, and motivation within the student, also view the broader issues students face as internal to them. Our goal was simple: to determine if the homeroom teachers perceive the students' overall challenges as being a part of the students themselves, rooted in their internal states. This inquiry aimed to establish whether homeroom teachers believe that the difficulties students encounter are not just external hurdles but also inherent aspects of the students' own cognitive, emotional, and motivational makeup. One of the interviewees stated.

Yes, because yes there is the dimension of personal ability in my eyes. Look, like in the end it could be that if I go a little deeper, I'll tell you: you know what? Come to think of it, that's it. But as if from the conversation at the moment, yes, I think everyone has their own abilities in the end. It's OK. This does not mean that one is less good or one is better. Everyone has a different role in the world. T34: 12178-12181

This homeroom teacher views personal abilities as innate, differing from individual to individual, but not as indicators of inferiority or superiority. All that is implied is an internal locus of personal abilities within each student.

There is another issue... this is the issue of attention and concentration, and the treatment of attention and concentration, and the detection of an attention and concentration problem, which also sometimes causes children to fail in school. And there is the issue ... of distractions - the Internet and smartphones, and children who spend hours and hours on the screen. It's not just about children, it's also about adults after that... we, as teachers, are probably not interesting enough, as the screens are interesting to them. There is some gap here. Children who are on the screen for hours, and then they arrive in a classroom, and they don't find any stimulation there to listen or learn, and they have become more accustomed to this type of other stimulation. And that's the things that hang like that, just like that in the child T42: 14673-14684

Here, the homeroom teacher acknowledges external factors like the internet and smartphones as distractions but also points out that internal issues like attention, concentration, and learning disabilities play a significant role in a child's academic performance.

The will is theirs, it comes from them, no matter what I say. That's why sometimes.... say, why did I bring that child as an example? Because he is a child who at the very last second, we saved him from failing, and it's us, it's ours. It was me who sat with him in matriculation, and held his hand so that he wouldn't get out of matriculation. So this is an example that the will was ours more than his. And here with her, I feel that the desire is ours more than hers. And once the will is truly hers, she'll do it somehow. T16: 5007-5010

This homeroom teacher reflects on the internal will of the student, suggesting that sometimes the desire to succeed is more externally driven by teachers than the students themselves.

So apparently this name, it's this very, very intriguing thing called: the soul of this child and the inner world of this child, that's how... that's what interests me... what interests me about the story, is what's going on inside the boy or girl, how are they... They come here, with what feelings, what they experience here and what they would like. And I spend a lot of time talking to them - clarifying these things... because these children we can't understand "this thing"... But something there is not happening - something there is not happening... what a will on the part of the same child to reach an experience of success, to learn, to be intrigued by certain things - so we are left facing this thing sometimes a little helpless and we have a hard time with it. We don't like to be like that. We like to constantly think: Oh, I know, the solution will come from here or there. And sometimes it works for us. But when we take things out of the toolbox, tool after tool, and something doesn't happen - then we are left with the experience of: wait, does every child necessarily have to learn these concepts of what learning is in school? It is clear that he is constantly learning a lot of things in life. T13: 4398-4416

This excerpt discusses the student's behaviour as an internal part of them, a part the homeroom teacher struggles to understand but not always successfully.

Wow, that's what-it's complex! Because I'm thinking out loud now, and I'm asking out loud: Is rudeness and vulgar behaviour and lack of manners, because that's how he grew up and that's what he was exposed to, and he doesn't understand at certain stages... Today he's in a different place - today we talked about it. Does it belong to him? He grows on it, he grows

up, it already becomes a part of him. But it may be that when he is exposed to something else, and he sees and is seen - I mean, not that he disappears, not that he is transparent - it is possible that this exposure will cause him some kind of change. But you can't say it's not his. T3: 921-925

Though the homeroom teacher acknowledges that problems may be influenced by a broader social system that's to say problems do not necessarily originate in the child they ultimately become his.

As if automatically, I'll tell you: it's the boy's. But it's not just the child's. I mean, from the moment it's mine in the system, it becomes my problem too. It will also become a company problem. We never teach them cleanly of what is happening outside. We always teach them in a broader context. In the end, I do aim to bring them out as good citizens, that they know how to conduct themselves in the world, with the shortcomings of these problems that they are equipped with, so uh... so it is his, but in the end, it is not clean from the environment. T4: 1484-1488

Problems may originate within the child, but they cannot be seen as belonging only to him. The students' problems are part of the broader educational system, reflecting a belief in the interconnectedness of internal and external factors.

The problems belong to the child. The solutions are often with us, or the tools for him to find the solutions are with me. I can give him these tools and give him these parts. The problems are his T5: 1742=1743

This homeroom teacher believes that while problems are internal to the child, the solutions or tools to address these issues often come from external sources, like teachers.

These excerpts jointly indicate that teachers perceive students' challenges as primarily internal, embedded within their cognitive, emotional, and motivational makeup. Teachers view themselves as facilitators who can provide tools and guidance to help students navigate their internal challenges, highlighting an intricate balance between the internal states of students and the external educational environment.

### *Looking for help*

When homeroom teachers identify students facing challenges, whether educational or otherwise (often these issues are interconnected), they typically turn to these two professional groups for assistance. School counsellors who operate at the school level, directly interacting with students and teachers and school psychologists who work at the municipal level, offering specialized support and guidance. Both roles key functions are to support the well-being, emotional health, and educational success of students and are overseen by the Ministry of Education and serve as critical resources for teachers dealing with student issues. The term "diagnosis" is frequently used in this context, mentioned 81 times across various interviews. It represents the method homeroom teachers commonly refer to when addressing and understanding the nature of students' problems. The following excerpts provide insights into how the homeroom teachers consider the need to involve these professionals when addressing students' challenges and or consider the diagnosis submitted by the professionals upon their request.

The truth, so maybe I'll go ahead and say that most of the classes I teach are ... excellent classes of the school - in any case, more motivated and more interested students come... So I have fewer difficulties... I see less difficulties, so-called objective ones, in terms of psychodidactic difficulties - those that need diagnosis. The difficulties I encounter are more difficulties that are based on an emotional or neurological background. It's very, very noticeable: a child who is not available for learning, for parties... and that's basically why he falls... you see lack of participation, lack of interest, preoccupation with other things. You take him for a talk, and also look in the hallway many times, and also in class - you see that the child is busy with other things. Usually the preoccupation is either social or preoccupation with the family or socio-economic background with which he comes... So emotional appeals to learning is, in my eyes, the primary factor that a child... I will say that... for whom there is a difficulty. The second difficulty is the difficulty when you see a very serious neurological or attention difficulty, a child very much promises that he won't disturb and he won't talk, and here he is with me... and once again... he can't stop himself, and this greatly interferes ... he disconnects many times from the course of the lesson... Usually we will check what happens in other subjects, other teachers - what they say, how they experience the same student. And we will go to the diagnosis - a good examination... to see if there are really things in the body, and if so, we will offer the appropriate treatment - emotional, because sometimes it is attention on an emotional basis. Or on a truly neurological basis that needs medication. Yes, I

have seen students, but very few, who have objective psychodidactic difficulties - that it is difficult for them to write, dysgraphic. I rarely encounter them. T9: 3056-3081

This homeroom teacher distinguishes between emotional/neurological difficulties and objective psychodidactic difficulties. They note that issues often stem from emotional or family backgrounds, affecting students' availability for learning. Attention issues are highlighted as needing diagnosis and treatment, possibly involving medication. The homeroom teacher acknowledges encountering few students with clear psychodidactic challenges like dysgraphia.

Everything is difficult for me in studies. So they do see it little by little, that the adult world kind of puts them in the category of: My friend, you're in trouble! What's going on? You are not functioning as a student! What's going on? You are not achieving. They start telling his parents - we: Come on, maybe go to a neurologist, maybe a diagnosis. They start pulling all these rabbits out of the hat. T13: 4440-4444

This comment reflects a process where struggling students are quickly categorized as having problems, leading to suggestions for neurological assessments or other diagnoses. It implies a somewhat hasty or superficial approach to labelling students' difficulties.

And I told him: Yes, I think she needs a didactic diagnosis, to see what learning disabilities she has. So everything has to be adjusted. And that's only after you know the kids... We have two difficulties here: one is a didactic difficulty, which meanwhile, following the conversation, turns out to be the most distinct from background difficulties or emotional difficulties. That's right T18: 5749-5754

The homeroom teacher emphasizes the need for a didactic diagnosis to identify learning disabilities, suggesting that understanding students' specific challenges is crucial and that a diagnosis is the best way to identify them. He differentiates between didactic and emotional or background difficulties, stressing the distinct nature of these issues.

I think, maybe they still need to be improved and perfected, but I think they are good in their essence (the diagnosis), because they give some kind of direction. I'm not sure that every school or every teacher has the ability to give the right answer for that student. And here is my problem with diagnoses, because I say: Okay, the student has already done this whole tract of diagnosis. Mentally, by the way, it sometimes destroys the student. By the way, it can

also strengthen him. I have female students who said: So I'm not screwed, I'm not screwed, I just need to take Ritalin. T21: 7036-7042

This homeroom teacher is ambivalent about the impact of diagnoses, noting they can either harm or help students' self-perception. They express concern about schools' and teachers' capacity to adequately respond to diagnosed needs, indicating a gap between diagnosis and effective intervention.

I think that it's just their perspective - they don't see the... professional factor that comes from the outside, even if he watched my class to give me some kind of diagnosis, some kind of tool, he doesn't manage to see what's included the way I manage to see it. I often feel that the tools they give me are more like plasters, and not something that really treats the root of the problem. T10: 3506-3510

The homeroom teacher feels external professional assessments (diagnoses) fail to capture the full complexity of the issues they see in students. They suggest that provided solutions are often superficial, not addressing the root problems.

Later, I realized: I want to get to know the child clean - really clean, and only then I see if I have questions, things I don't understand - I go for a diagnosis. So I see if there is adequacy, if there are gaps. T39: 13530-13532

Here, the homeroom teacher describes a deliberate approach, wanting to understand a student thoroughly before seeking a diagnosis. This suggests a preference for a more holistic and informed approach to diagnosing.

I always go on... if on this topic of learning disabilities, I always go on the topic of diagnosis. And if I go on the topic of diagnosis, then I usually also go for a psychodidactic diagnosis. Then I'm more organized in terms of both the recommendations, and where the recommendations are more organized and how, and also directs me more. T42: 14808-14810

This homeroom teacher prioritizes diagnosis for learning disabilities, viewing it as a structured way to understand students' challenges and inform recommendations and interventions.

Diagnosis is a standard part of the approach in Israeli schools when addressing students with challenges, commonly emerging in these situations. The homeroom teachers, however, paint a complex picture of how diagnosis is perceived and utilized within the education system.



While homeroom teachers understand the value of diagnosing specific educational and emotional issues, they are also conscious of the drawbacks. Concerns include a tendency to depend too much on diagnostic labels, the potential negative effects on students' self-perception, and the disconnect between diagnosis and effective, actionable support.

Is ever disciplinary content part of the problem?

The interviews with homeroom teachers reveal a somewhat surprising insight: disciplinary content is not commonly seen as a significant factor in students' learning difficulties. This perspective persists even when homeroom teachers are directly asked about the potential challenges posed by the content they teach. Instead, homeroom teachers often focus on other aspects such as social, cognitive, emotional, or family difficulties. This observation suggests a tendency among homeroom teachers to view the content as secondary to other more dominant factors affecting student learning; and yet the first two homeroom teachers remind us that there are those who might think differently, and or accuse the interviewer of presenting biased questions.

But I can't say that there isn't a problem with the discipline, because I don't... I don't teach these subjects either, and I'm also conservative in this regard. I think that the things you learn, most of them are things that even if you can't do anything with them, then it enriches your world as a human being. But here is the question of mediation - if you make it interesting, if you make it connect with the student, etc., etc. Not everyone does it. T25 8412-8421

The homeroom teacher here reflects on the importance of making educational content relevant and interesting, allowing for an understanding of content knowledge being an issue which needs to be accounted for in the process of learning. He acknowledges that even subjects that are not directly useful in everyday life, (e.g. high school maths or Bible studies), can enrich students' worlds if presented engagingly, making content more central than what we will see as the rule in the interviews.

So my blindness is not just a matter of the ego. I will never testify that there is a problem with the discipline, because I am the person of the discipline, and then I testify against myself... I mean, I say: the very interview itself invites the speech that you receive from us and not the speech on the content. ...my answer to that would be: could be. T2: 709-716

The homeroom teacher admits to a possible "blindness" regarding the discipline they teach and its relative influence. This 'blindness' is not attributed to ego or an unwillingness to admit

flaws in the subject matter. Instead, it's a recognition that being deeply involved in a discipline might affect their perspective, making it challenging to critically assess its effectiveness or relevance in the learning process. The homeroom teacher suggests that the interview itself shapes the kind of responses given.

...so I always tell the student: you can't sleep the whole class, not listen, chat, and expect that now you are three days before the test you will study and succeed. There are children like that... and if you try to learn all the material that I am now teaching for a year's material... - you try to study it for three days - you will not succeed. I mean, some kids will succeed. But most kids won't make it. ... Things that are not verbose - English, mathematics, physics, etc. - so again, practice. I think the real learning is, let's say, it's... it's either it's kind of repetitive or... or the student is... it's very interesting to him, okay? It's something that got into his head for the first time, because it's a field that turns him on, he's interested, and then things stick. I mean, in the end we... in the end we remember the things we are interested in. Yes, that's something that's very obvious, so... that's I think the way people learn. T28: 9784-9798

This homeroom teacher emphasizes the importance of a consistent and engaged learning process. They point out that last-minute studying is often ineffective, highlighting the need for ongoing engagement with the material. This view underscores the belief that success in learning is more about the process and method of study than the complexity or nature of the content itself. Yet, most interviewees suggest otherwise.

But it seems natural to me that we really focused on the social difficulty or the family and emotional difficulties, because in the end... students with that arrive (with it) in their bag. The books are just material. In the end he arrives with this load for the school day...[but now you say that you think that the problems of students' success or failure do not depend on the content taught] Yes, not necessarily, not necessarily. Yes, of course... you know, it's a wide range, and it could be that someone who really has an objective difficulty - dyscalculia, dyslexia, etc., is not that. Maybe a little simpler thing too, but... but by and large yes (it is not dependent on content). T34: 12074-12081

The focus of this excerpt is on social and emotional difficulties as more significant than the content being taught. The homeroom teacher implies that students' personal and emotional baggage impacts their ability to engage with and absorb educational material, suggesting that the root of learning challenges often lies outside the academic content.

That is, with the standardization, the child is expected to know what the derivative of a function to the second degree is, something that he will never use in life, most of them. And there is a child who gets stuck with the statement of: But it won't serve me, it's not important to me. It is not important to me, and I will try not to understand it, because it is not important to me. In my eyes, he is doing a very, very intelligent thing. [You mean, the problem of not understanding mathematics or physics or history is never related to the material itself, but the material stimulates the other things: cognition, emotions?]. I think so. T20: 6576-6514

This excerpt reflects a perspective where academic content serves primarily as a stimulus for developing cognitive and emotional skills. The homeroom teacher seems to believe that the real issue is not the disciplinary content itself but how it engages students' interests and cognitive abilities.

Or in other words: as I know from my own life - when the mind is free and relaxed, then it perceives better. So the student who is struggling in my eyes is not a student... he is having academic difficulties, because this is the measure that I, in terms of my profession, am obliged to measure. But it doesn't sit at all at all... the solution to his difficulties are rarely educational solutions. T2: 439-443

The interviewee suggests that learning difficulties often stem from broader contextual issues rather than the academic content itself. They imply that factors such as the educational environment and students' personal circumstances play a crucial role in learning outcomes.

...a child who insists on learning maths, and has difficulty understanding maths, and for that he needs to practise, but he doesn't have the ass to sit down and do it himself patiently, so he needs the teacher to sit down...okay, also in history. I mean, no problem. The problem can always be related to the fact that he doesn't have an ass or doesn't have a suitable environment...that he doesn't have the ability either. It may also be that the child does not have the ability. I... I have a very, very, very bad memory for names - very bad for names. I remember coming out of my high school in history with the feeling that I was going to get a 100, and I got a 56. There was a very, very big gap. So I have a problem. So I won't succeed in history, because I have a problem with remembering names. T20: 6639-6649

The homeroom teacher acknowledges that difficulties in learning can arise from a mix of factors, including the student's abilities, their study environment, and their personal effort.

This perspective does not necessarily recognize that the discipline itself is part of a multifaceted learning process.

These excerpts collectively illustrate a nuanced understanding among homeroom teachers regarding the role of disciplinary content in learning. While content is a fundamental aspect of education, it is often not seen as the primary hurdle in students' learning journey. Instead, factors such as the interests of the student, the students' emotional and social contexts, and the process of engaging with the content are deemed more critical.

### *Socioeconomic factors*

The following excerpts from interviews with homeroom teachers provide valuable insights into how socio-economic status (SES) is considered in the context of student performance and failure. These perspectives reveal the multifaceted and often subtle ways in which SES factors into educational outcomes and become entangled with some of the categories we discussed above.

The socioeconomic background is lower, so yes, it can lead to emotional difficulties as well...yes, I hesitate. It's not 100 percent... I hesitate. You know what? I also go back to my childhood. The kind of socioeconomic situation of... my parents... they worked hard, and my mother was uneducated, and yet... there are a lot of people like me. [30:00] So that... it didn't prevent, because it doesn't mean that such a house... they did encourage us to study, and I think that even without it, I had an internal drive. T27: 9737-9743

This homeroom teacher reflects on his own upbringing, acknowledging that a lower socioeconomic background can lead to emotional difficulties but doesn't necessarily hinder academic success.

It emphasizes the role of internal drive and parental encouragement in overcoming socioeconomic barriers.

So I am here, because I remembered special classes, where almost 90% of the students come from a low socioeconomic status. And from there I concluded that there is a connection. This does not mean that the students in a high socioeconomic status do not fail, but less so. T53: 17856-17858

This comment suggests a correlation between lower SES and higher instances of student failure, though it acknowledges that failure isn't exclusive to any socio-economic group.

Look, quite a few of the students that I'm talking about, really the socioeconomic situation is there. But we also have quite a few students for who... that's not the point. I can tell you that I had a student in the class we graduated from... whose sister... the house is a very good house, there is no problem, the parents are engaged in free trades, an older sister who studied at a good school and she was very successful, and she cannot meet the bar. T3: 887-890

The homeroom teacher shares an example of a student from a well-off background facing academic pressure, indicating that SES is not the sole determinant of academic success or struggle.

There is the more expensive area ... but that's where I've also seen struggling children who come, so I can't say that it's a socioeconomic situation or something like that. I can give an example of... I had a student with very low parents - I don't know how to say it,... without education and with very, very low verbal ability, it was difficult for us to even explain the children's situation to them. And with the help of the push we gave the children, they both excelled each in their class. So they may have come with some level of failure, but we were able to pick it up. But there is something in the house that does that. I can't think of anyone, except those who are really low cognitive. I can't think of any of our failing students who had a perfect home. T16: 5072-5086

Here, the homeroom teacher notes challenges faced by students from lower SES backgrounds, including limited parental educational support. However, they also highlight the potential for success with appropriate school support, suggesting that a nurturing environment can mitigate SES-related challenges.

I think she is less available for learning; more things occupy them. This child whose parents' divorce, happens more often in the low socioeconomic status. I think that less resources... I think that children in a low socioeconomic status come to school more emotionally charged. I think they experience the world differently from children.... They go to bed worried sometimes... I have a not bad example at all... I have a student - he is from the honors class, ... he stopped me and said to me: I know exactly what you mean. There is a filmmaker, his name is Hitchcock,... creates very, very long moments of tension, to surprise the viewer at the end. It's similar, right? I told him: This is not similar, this is this, this is exactly this. I think that a student from a lower socioeconomic status will experience fewer mind-expanding moments in quotation marks, maybe read fewer books, maybe go less, I don't know, to the museum. As if there is some kind of gap in the level of interest that is developed in children. The level of

investment that is invested in children, in a way that seems to me, natural and sad, but natural  
T17: 5402-5416

This homeroom teacher observes that students from lower SES backgrounds may come to school more emotionally burdened and have fewer opportunities for cultural enrichment, impacting their educational experiences.

Such a student, I use a word I don't like, yes, but who has the "potential" for success, but is in an environment that does not realize the potential (low socioeconomic)- does not give him soil - it is a bit like sowing a seed in the ground and not watering the soil. Then how will the plant grow? It has the potential to grow. But if you don't water it and don't give it the fertilizer it needs, it won't grow. T21: 6935-6938

The analogy of a seed needing water and fertilizer to grow is used to describe students with potential in low SES environments. This metaphor underscores the importance of providing adequate support for realizing potential.

I'm trying to think. First of all, the socioeconomic background plays a role, because it is really very evident that what the parents give, both during childhood and later, is very, very significant support for the children...a parent who can help with homework is not the same as a parent who can never help with homework. Starting from a very, very young age, a parent who is free to even make sure that the child has done his homework, is not the same as a parent who cannot make sure... A parent who can free the child from financial worries, this is very significant. I had a student who had to work - had to work to have something to eat. It is very, very debilitating, very, very difficult... T23: 7654-7661

This excerpt highlights the impact of SES on parental support, noting that parents' ability to help with homework or alleviate financial worries plays a significant role in a child's academic life.

Socioeconomic? I don't know how to say. I don't look at people like that. T25: 8447

This homeroom teacher expresses a reluctance to consider SES in evaluating students, suggesting a desire to treat all students equally regardless of their background.

These excerpts point at the fact that homeroom teachers are aware of the complex role socioeconomic status plays in student achievement. While acknowledging that lower SES can contribute to educational failure, they also recognize that it's not a definitive predictor of

failure or success. Homeroom teachers observe that internal motivation, family support, and school environment significantly influence outcomes. Additionally, they note the importance of nurturing potential in all students, regardless of their socio-economic background, and the value of providing equitable support to foster academic success.

### *On Equality*

The following excerpts explore the concept of equality in the context of student failure and academic challenges. The homeroom teachers discuss their perspectives on individual differences in abilities and the implications for educational equality.

And in the end, a lot of it also rests on a sense of ability. The language is a difficult language, the content is difficult. Physics is hard - obviously, obviously! And there are also those who can't, and that's okay. I can't learn physics either - I wasn't born with these abilities. T34: 12141-12143

The homeroom teacher acknowledges that not everyone is capable of excelling in every subject, like physics, due to inherent abilities or interests. This perspective accepts individual differences in learning capacity as natural (even genetic).

It's not the same for everyone, no. Because everyone has a different role in this world. We don't have the same role. Everyone has a different vocation in this world. There is much in common, but many people have different paths - what did he come down to this world for? What does he have to fix in this world? Why did his soul descend for 70-80 years? Of course, not only this affects the character or abilities or desires of the person, but also the other two partners. Naturally, the mother and the father - they contribute their part, the more... perhaps the more practical, the more connective, the more practical, but the soul, God Almighty is "my God, a soul that you gave me". He gives each and every one the soul. T33: 11713 - 11718

This comment reflects a belief in the unique roles and destinies of individuals, influenced by both spiritual (soul) and practical (parental) factors. It suggests that each person's unique path affects their character, abilities, and desires, implying that this diversity needs to be acknowledged (not all are the same) but not necessarily judged (for all have different roles).

Yes, yes, not everyone can understand five units of maths, I really think so. And that's just fine T18: 5771

The homeroom teacher recognizes that not every student can grasp complex subjects, such as advanced mathematics, and considers this normal. It naturalizes an acceptance of varying academic strengths among students based on their individual abilities.

Even when a student really has... I see that he has high thinking - maybe I really don't have to use the word 'high', because it really ranks people as higher and lower, heaven forbid. So maybe it's really not appropriate to use the word 'high thought'. Let's say, there is a person whose thinking is adapted to a certain form, to certain messages. He is more ready to receive these messages in an easy and clear way. And there are people whose thinking is not sufficiently adapted to these messages. This does not indicate any superiority and any superior value that he has in relation to others. It's just a catalogue, nothing more than that  
T30: 10589-10594

Here, the homeroom teacher is cautious about labelling thinking as 'high', to avoid implying a hierarchy of intelligence. Yet, the homeroom teacher suggests that people are differently attuned to certain types of information, emphasizing diversity in cognitive processing trying hard not to attribute value judgments.

The excerpts highlight diverse understandings among homeroom teachers regarding equality in education. They recognize that students have different abilities, interests, and backgrounds, which contribute to diverse educational experiences and outcomes. It is apparent that the homeroom teachers are diligent in their commitment to preventing the establishment of hierarchies based on ability or intelligence, instead, they aim to normalize and embrace the 'natural' variations in individual cognitive capabilities.

#### Disciplinary content and social emotional pedagogies

The excerpts we explore here delve into the intricate relationship between pedagogic disciplinary content and social emotional pedagogies. We will examine several passages that hint at a pronounced distinction between these two components. For example, teaching a subject such as mathematics is often perceived as being distinctly separate from addressing a student's social and emotional needs. This perspective suggests that the methodologies employed in teaching academic subjects are largely isolated from other aspects of a student's comprehensive development, focusing solely on their cognitive skills. Nevertheless, it is crucial to acknowledge that while homeroom teacher narratives do recognize a link between these aspects, there is a persistent sense that, despite their connection, these elements are not



wholly integrated in actual teaching practice, or in the homeroom teacher's understanding of what 'good' pedagogy is all about.

In the first excerpt, a clear demarcation is drawn between 'teaching' as an act of delivering disciplinary content, and 'educating', which seems to encompass activities aimed at engaging the student holistically, beyond just cognitive aspects.

Because I am a teacher, I feel that I am engaged in teaching, and when I am educating, I am engaged in education. And when I'm involved in education, I feel that my whole job is to give some kind of peace to the children or some kind of calmness to... really open up to them a little, let them burden me for a moment, and open up their body, mind, and head, so that they can bring out their abilities... T5: 1728-1731

The same educator in the subsequent excerpt delineates more explicitly the distinction between what she terms 'educational tools' and 'study tools' - the former leaning towards social skills and the latter towards disciplinary content.

Ah... that I'm not talking now about educational tools. Of course I can give him study tools - it's individual hours or practice. But I'm talking more about... about teaching him how to speak his words correctly, teaching him how to behave in front of people, in front of his teachers, differently, to have a better interaction between them. To talk to him, to hear what he is going through, that he will take a moment and vent. T5: 1745-1748

Another educator suggests a similar bifurcation, implying that while a student with high abilities might not require special emotional attention during disciplinary instruction, a student with lower abilities necessitates a concerted effort in both the disciplinary and social-emotional realms. Here, the two are seen as distinct yet occasionally overlapping areas of focus. Only through the pedagogies used for disciplinary study homeroom teachers cannot offer the needed social emotional support at least not for low ability students.

They cannot go without each other. Maybe a child with high ability, you can be satisfied with my emotions, but a child with low ability - both abilities, I mean - a child with low ability, so you need the technical side. T16: 5067-5068

The following excerpt explicitly discusses this separation. Here, the distinction is made between the role of a professional teacher focusing on a specific subject and that of a

homeroom teacher, for whom emotional aspects are more prominent, as if these emotional aspects could not be sufficiently present when teaching a disciplinary subject.

For me, there is a separation between being a professional teacher who teaches a subject, which is one thing, and my other hat, which is teaching a class (homeroom teacher). As a class teacher, I hold this thing in all subjects of that child, and then the emphasis is much greater as his homeroom teacher, on the emotional aspect. T26 9448-9451

Some teachers, with experience, seem able to bridge the gap between these two spheres - disciplinary and emotional pedagogies. A competent teacher, they suggest, can achieve remarkable results with students, even those with limited abilities.

Today I am much more available to these places, and I think that I also have a connection... A good teacher is a much greater success. A bad teacher - this is a failure many times very certain. A good teacher can create - a good pedagogue, who is a character - can create in many students even who have almost no strength and appeals and a tet-a-tet and that, can work wonders. A catastrophic teacher can make disasters, even in students who have strength and motivation, okay? T26: 9493-9500

This last educator introduces the concept of interconnectedness as an ideal, yet emphasizes that achieving this level of synergy between different pedagogical approaches is a process that requires time and experience. This subtly underscores the notion that these pedagogies are initially separate entities.

### **Halfway Summary**

This halfway summary synthesizes insights from the interviews with homeroom teachers, focusing on their perceptions of student failure. Initially acknowledging the homeroom teachers' nod to a holistic view of students, we categorize their explanations for student failure into three intertwined domains: emotion, motivation, and cognition. Despite recognizing these as key factors, we note a lack of clarity in how homeroom teachers delineate these categories, potentially diminishing their utility in analytical contexts.

We then highlight additional 'objective' factors identified by homeroom teachers, contrasting them with the previously mentioned subjective elements. These objective factors, though less frequently mentioned, suggest that homeroom teachers possess a diverse explanatory vocabulary for student failure, leaning towards subjective interpretations.

Exploring homeroom teachers' perspectives further, we examine their conceptualizations of the learner and the learning process. The predominance of internal factors (cognition, emotion, motivation) in their explanations suggests a view where failure is predominantly an internal, individual issue, beyond the immediate perception and influence of teachers or wider contexts. A failure of the students' individual system, a system which is not directly available to the homeroom teacher's senses and that gets described by a language which lacks clarity and by categories which are so much entangled that they might not allow for the planning of interventions which might help the student in his failing position.

Homeroom teacher narratives reinforce this internal focus, with external influences playing a secondary role. In addressing student failure, homeroom teachers frequently turn to school psychologists and counsellors, emphasizing diagnosis as a key approach. However, there is an awareness of the limitations and potential negative impacts of diagnostic labels.

Surprisingly, disciplinary content is often relegated to a secondary status compared to internal student factors, even when directly questioned. This observation leads to an exploration of homeroom teachers' views on socio-economic influences and individual differences among students. While acknowledging the role of socio-economic factors, homeroom teachers still prioritize internal over external factors.

The dichotomy between pedagogies focusing on cognitive skills and those addressing socio-emotional aspects is apparent. Homeroom teachers tend to see these as separate realms, with limited integration or recognition of their potential interconnectedness.

Our analysis did not reveal significant differences between female and male homeroom teachers, suggesting no substantial gender differences in the analysis. This lack of differentiation may be attributed to the language and socialization processes inherent in their teacher training and professional activities. However, we did sense some differences between homeroom teachers (all male) in ultraorthodox schools and other homeroom teachers (male and female) in the other schools studied. These differences pertained to what could be understood as a more embodied approach to learning in the ultraorthodox population, possibly related to the religious emphasis on the practical execution of religious law. We chose not to include this issue in our present report, recognizing that it warrants further research, as do the gender issues mentioned above.

Reflecting on these findings, we question the potential for reframing the language and approaches used by homeroom teachers. Such a shift could foster a more holistic understanding and address the split realities in educational practice, potentially offering more effective solutions to student failure. This exploration continues in the second phase of our research: the homeroom teachers' workshop.

### **The homeroom teachers' workshop**

The homeroom teachers' Workshop series spanned five sessions, each lasting six hours, and involved 20 middle school and high school homeroom teachers. These educators represented a diverse range of Israeli schools, including secular, religious, ultra-orthodox, and Arab institutions. The schools of the participating homeroom teachers varied in socioeconomic status (SES), ranging from clusters 3 to 7 as ranked by the Ministry of Education.

Throughout the workshop, a substantial volume of data was collected, including video recorded sessions that were fully transcribed and extensive written materials. These written materials comprised assignments from each session and evaluations completed by the homeroom teachers at the conclusion of the workshops. For the purposes of this report, the focus will be primarily on the written assignments and evaluations. This decision is based on the clarity and specificity of these documents, as they provide focused insights into the homeroom teachers' understanding and reflections on the workshop content. These written responses are presumed to be the outcome of a thoughtful reflection process, as the homeroom teachers had ample time to contemplate and articulate their experiences and learnings between the workshop sessions. The workshops were comprehensively recorded to support research purposes and to aid participants who might have missed a session, in line with the Ministry of Education's allowance for up to 20% non-participation. These recordings proved particularly useful for homeroom teachers who wanted to revisit workshop content during assignment preparation.

The workshop's focus was on language, discourse, and the ways we inadvertently become conduits of meanings not entirely our own. It aimed to sensitize participants to how discourses and metaphors shape our realities and the inherent challenges in altering them. By understanding the construction of our realities, we hoped to learn how to effect change despite various obstacles.

Participants were informed that post-session assignments were crucial. These tasks, evolving with each session's developments, would form a significant part of the final assignment required for Ministry of Education credits. Assignments involved watching the recordings and writing a two/three-page document to: A) Summarize understanding and learnings from the session. B) Express thoughts, identify any issues, or raise questions from the learned content. C) Suggest future session activities based on previous experiences or reflections.

### ***The first workshop***

The inaugural workshop began with participants introducing themselves and an overview of the workshop's objectives and agenda. Following this brief introduction, the moderator distributed copies of an interview with a homeroom teacher, specifically focusing on the homeroom teacher's initial response to a question about why children fail in school. This response encapsulated the previously discussed themes of cognition, motivation, and emotions.

Participants were then asked to read this short excerpt aloud and interpret what the homeroom teacher meant. It quickly became clear that the homeroom teachers faced two main challenges: firstly, articulating their understanding of the homeroom teacher's statement, and secondly, reaching a consensus on the meanings of the main categories used by the interviewee to explain student failure. This exercise revealed to the homeroom teachers their own difficulties in finding a common language for concepts they frequently used in discussions about students.

This activity served as a starting point for exploring the complexities of routine communication. It also provided an opportunity for the moderator to introduce some theoretical concepts about language and its meaning, and to pose questions about the effectiveness of using such abstract and ambiguous language when trying to assist students in overcoming their failures.

In the workshop's second segment, the participants, grouped by homeroom teachers from different schools, were tasked with discussing their metaphors for the learning process and the learner. These discussions were animated, and each group managed to agree on a metaphor that resonated with them collectively. Following this, each group shared their chosen metaphors with the larger group, which led to an engaging group discussion.

The excerpts from the homeroom teachers' assignments provide insightful reflections on various concepts and their implications in education.

The first excerpt belongs to the one homeroom teacher who could not participate in the first encounter but took upon himself to watch the recordings in full.

We discussed a lot of words in depth on Wednesday, words such as: a student's self-image (high or low), a student's potential (high or low), objective difficulties or subjective difficulties, thought, interiority, environmental retardation and more. During the discussion we tried to describe, define and quantify many of the concepts, seemingly so understandable and clear to everyone. From watching the video, it became clear that a whole group of teachers have an extremely difficult time clearly defining or quantifying these very personal concepts. Each teacher sees things differently according to his world of values, the educational school he studied in and according to which he was shaped, his age, gender, religion and the society he came from. How can a child's self-image be quantified? I have no ability to know exactly what he thinks or feels, but I only have the ability to subjectively interpret his behavior through a very defined and narrow cultural and/or professional prism. Similarly, how can one distinguish what is objective difficulty and what is subjective difficulty? These are things that affect each other directly and the boundaries between them are extremely blurred. T48: 341-351

The participant explains that homeroom teachers discussed the difficulty in defining and quantifying concepts like self-image and potential, which are subjective and influenced by individual teachers' backgrounds, values, education, age, gender, religion, and society. The challenge lies in objectively assessing these personal concepts, as they are often seen through a narrow cultural or professional lens. The homeroom teacher realizes that he lacks the ability to interpret the students behaviors and acknowledges the dangers of doing so.

...The reference here is first of all to the day-to-day use of language in the simplest interactions to which we respond spontaneously and almost without further thought. But it is precisely the obvious that turns out to be complex (what is complex? Here is already an example of a metaphor that requires elaboration) when you wonder about it. Our everyday language is full of a treasure trove of images and metaphors that, when you wonder about them, you can reveal surprising depths and connections on the one hand, as well as find points where you can challenge common perceptions or prejudices, some of which have taken root, among other things, under the influence of language...In this sense, language discussion

is broad and crosses all areas of human communication or expression. But here, the focus is supposed to be the educational field in which we operate (I say field and again a metaphor is thrown in...). T42: 11-20

The excerpt emphasizes the complexity hidden in everyday language, especially in metaphors and images. This complexity becomes apparent when delving into the language, revealing depths and connections, and challenging common perceptions, particularly in the educational field.

The first and probably the most important thing is the importance of language in our training, to pay attention to nuances in language, to the words we use mainly in our profession (see "Can you get up to the board?" Eliana stood up without answering when that was not what was asked at all) to think in this way, speak and answer in this way. T40: 106-109

This excerpt highlights the realisation of the importance of being attentive to language nuances in teaching, recognizing that words used in professional settings can be interpreted differently than intended, as illustrated by the example of Eliana. Is Eliana's behavior a misunderstanding or is the request made of her already ritualized to be understood not as the formal rules of language indicate.

I understood from the lesson that sometimes what is clear to me in terms of my language is not always clear to others. I can sometimes use a term, understood and defined at my levels of understanding and in my personal acquaintances with students it is also acceptable to use, but it turns out that the person speaking in front of me does not know this term and perceives it as different from the way I do. And then we had a misunderstanding. T41: 466-469

This participant reflects on the realization that what is clear in one's language may not be clear to others. Terms familiar to a teacher may be unknown or differently perceived by others, leading to communication gaps.

Are there words, which even if they are not clear to us, are used by us as if they are clear and if we do this are we doing something good for the child as a result of this? T50: 606-607

Similarly, this homeroom teacher questions whether using words that are not clear to homeroom teachers themselves might inadvertently affect students positively or negatively.

The first insight that came to my mind is that a person's cultural environment produces the languages we use, and there are things that are not understood. This definitely causes

misrepresentation of cases/students, and who knows where that leads? To incorrect judgement, to incorrect teaching methods that we use with our students. Using words that we don't understand, abstraction we do not understand, causes incitement and the flattening of the different meanings of the word. T53 1515-1520

The insight here is that a person's cultural background shapes the language used, leading to misunderstandings and potentially incorrect judgments or teaching methods. Using words without fully understanding them can lead to oversimplification and misinterpretation.

The workshop participants seem to have recognized the complexity and subjectivity inherent in key educational concepts and language. They understand that their backgrounds and experiences shape their perceptions and interpretations, which can lead to diverse understandings and potential communication gaps. This underscores the importance of being aware of language nuances and cultural influences in the educational setting. The reflections highlight the need for educators to be mindful of their language and assumptions, as these can significantly impact their teaching methods and interactions with students.

The following set of excerpts delve more into the complexities of language use in education, particularly how language shapes perceptions and approaches to teaching and understanding students.

We tend to spontaneously categorize learning problems under categories of impairments or of emotional or environmental analysis of the child. But how much do we wonder about our vocabulary or assessments? How accustomed are we to accepting them for granted? Have we thought about the consequences of such a reference to reality? (It is possible that the consequences are positive. But in any case, did we clarify the matter or did we accept the obvious?) My feeling was that for some of the participants, the things at first caused surprise and even shock, and later discomfort and even paralysis (that's why I mentioned in the meeting Adorno's parable of the many legs; when asked which leg he uses each time and thinking about it, he stopped walking. The moderator agreed with the question but less with the image) and was afraid to continue taking part in the discussion. Just like the Socratic discussion that questioned and questioned people about the very common uses of language such as knowledge, good, beautiful, and the way in which this caused some of them paralysis and embarrassment thus distinguishing thousands of differences, wondering about the common use of language caused some of the participants to lose a little confidence or to wonder about the meaning of each and to where are we headed.



I don't mean this as a criticism. On the contrary, if I understand correctly, this is exactly the goal (at least one of the goals) of this discussion style. The only way to take a monument like everyday language and show how complex it is, how many hidden assumptions it contains and more, this is sometimes shocking and challenging the routine expression. In the foreignness of the most familiar (I am touched by Jacques Derrida's expression on the monolingualism of the other "I have one language and it is not mine"). Then consciousness (a concept that itself requires discussion) opens up and the discussion can be expanded and progress is made.

Here I note to myself that because these topics are also dear to me in the theoretical and philosophical aspect, it was easy for me to forget during most of the discussion that we are dealing with education in particular and not with a general discussion about language. I hope to remind myself of this at the next meeting and be more alert and deliberate. T42: 44-64

The homeroom teacher, well trained in some philosophical aspects, reflects on how the workshop prompted a reevaluation of the vocabulary and assessments used in education. The discussion led to surprise, discomfort, and even a sense of paralysis as participants grappled with the complexities of language. This homeroom teacher appreciates the challenging nature of the discussion, recognizing it as a method to uncover hidden assumptions in everyday language. He also notes a personal reminder to focus more on the educational context in future discussions

Do we come to make assumptions about students based on the behaviour we have seen and detailed or based on what we have assumed? (our stereotypes)

This is a topic I hadn't thought about before and I liked the discussion about it at the meeting. How best to describe a child? What is more human and sensitive? A detailed description describing a stooped child, with slightly closed eyes who does not smile and walks stooped or simply say "that the child looks sad"? T40: 116-120

In the above excerpt the participant homeroom teacher discusses the newfound awareness of how descriptions and assumptions about students are formed. The discussion made them question whether it's better to provide a detailed description of a student or use abstract terms. This homeroom teacher learned the importance of being cautious with language, especially when labelling students, as it can lead to different interpretations among educators.

Another thing I learned and understood is "abstraction hides the world" - for example the word "love" which groups activities within it, is economical and limited. Not everyone understands the word as I understand it, therefore abstraction hides and diminishes the meaning.

The question is, as a teacher with the students, how do I serve my goals for the students better, through description (of situations, of student situation) or through abstraction (shortening processes - the child is sad, upset today, I think I'm beautiful, etc.)? This is our main question in the workshop.

It is important in these discussions to remain in the educational field because it can go in many directions. T40: 130-136

This excerpt touches on how abstract terms can hide the complexity of the world. The homeroom teacher ponders the balance between detailed descriptions and abstractions in communicating about students. The focus is on how to best use language to achieve educational goals, emphasizing the need to stay within the educational context

I wanted to say, I knew it was very important to look at the child through more than one "lens", and now I understand it even better - I need to consider additional aspects, and not be judgmental. Furthermore, I learned that when we give a name (a category) to someone, for example "spoiled", we have to be careful, because each member of the team may understand something different, if we can through good descriptions better share our understanding, then we can better adapt learning strategies to him, and this enriches the understanding about the child. In other words, we as educators should be careful with the use of the language - we should offer clear descriptions, and in particular the description of failing children. And I agree with the moderator when he says that we as teachers work all the time with language and should be careful. And the Hebrew language is certainly complex. T44: 844-852

Here the homeroom teacher reflects on the importance of considering multiple aspects of a student's behavior and not jumping to conclusions. They learned the significance of careful language use when describing students, particularly those who are struggling, and how careful description as opposed to the use or acknowledged categories can lead to more effective teaching strategies.

You need to know how to use these words, for example, disability, low self-esteem... Believe in the student's ability - believe in yourself, I believe in you. The power of the words we say

as teachers should make us think deeply about whether the encouragements we give them are not idle encouragements, these are strengths that they may not have or that they do not understand, or understand differently than I intended, words that are thrown around by us teachers, but say/explain little to the student. I would be happy to continue talking about it in future meetings. When I come these days to register certificates at the end of the first semester, should the teacher's notes in the certificate be only general and about bringing out the strengths that the student has or should she also write explanatory detailed notes that will build him up for the next semester, but then the question arises following the training, what are these notes and how to write them. Do, I believe in your ability to succeed? Is this legitimate? It's great that you believe, what about the student? And where does your faith in him come from? And who are you to believe, maybe he doesn't want to or doesn't need to or doesn't know what lies in it. Then the question comes to me: What is this faith and if he doesn't succeed, is he disappointing me and himself? Why doesn't he succeed? T38: 887-905

This homeroom teacher contemplates the influence of the words teachers use and the beliefs they hold about their students. They question the impact of such language on students and how it aligns with the students' own perceptions and abilities. The homeroom teacher expresses a desire to further explore these themes in future sessions and reflects on the implications of these ideas for writing student evaluations.

During the latter part of the session, the participants were asked to brainstorm in groups metaphors representing school. The metaphors mentioned ranged from 'negative' connotations like prisons and madhouses to 'positive' ones like 'family', and 'garden'. The exercise sparked an engaging and insightful conversation which led to an inquiry about educational content and pedagogical approaches, raised by both the participants and the moderator. One of the homeroom teachers succinctly summarized the event saying.

I learned a lot from the different points of view raised by all the participants...Also, many questions of educational content or pedagogical measures were raised by both the participants and the instructor. We learned about wonderful meanings of word etymologies. Text (from latin textum-ui to knit), the image of kindergarten education (boundaries) and important questions arose about the purpose of education (to everyone's surprise, the facilitator showed that no participant mentioned academic achievements as an educational purpose and he wondered, why?) T41: 69-71

It became clear to me from the discussion, that descriptions and "slots" in which I define my students, are not necessarily accurate in reflecting reality as it is in the eyes of the student on the one hand, and dramatically affect the way I treat the student in class and teaching on the other hand. Not only that, the words and metaphors I use in the ears of my colleagues and students, build and shape their self-consciousness and/or professional consciousness. T48: 352-356

These reflections from various homeroom teachers reveal a deepened understanding of the intricate relationship between language and education. The session seemed to successfully prompt educators to reconsider their use of language, the assumptions they make, and how these factors influence their interactions with and perceptions of students. This introspection marks a significant step towards more thoughtful and effective teaching practices. The reflective process is a crucial stride towards grasping the importance of clear communication, eschewing jargon, in discussions about student needs with parents, students, and peers. Such clarity aids in fostering a mutual understanding and setting clear expectations and probable directions for change.

### ***The second workshop***

The workshop's second session began with revisiting and refining key topics from the initial meeting. Following this, the group engaged in a collaborative exercise with mixed teams, focusing on two main tasks: a) exploring learning metaphors, particularly regarding the role of the learner, and b) analyzing and contemplating the methods by which students learn. The activity proved to be both enriching and productive. Participants felt that there was much to glean from the examples shared, as they offered a deep dive into the nuances of learning.

During the session, the group also examined the dual nature of abstraction – its efficiency in encapsulating a wealth of information presumed to be understood by the participants, as well as its tendency to oversimplify and obscure the underlying meanings of concepts. An important part of the discussion centered on the interplay between emotions and disciplinary subjects, specifically exploring how disciplinary content intertwines with emotional and pedagogical aspects. Additionally, the group delved into the Western concept of the homunculus – the idea of an internal 'real me' that drives actions and facilitates learning. This concept sparked interesting conversations about the nature of self, motivation and learning.

These excerpts from the second workshop session offer a glimpse into the homeroom teachers' evolving understanding and reflections on various educational concepts.

First of all, the purpose of the lesson was clear to me compared to the previous lesson. I think the importance of how to articulate and its projective awareness are now clear to me. In the lesson it was suggested to consider the importance and power of repetition in learning. Also, the ideal learning should be done through the whole body, in contrast to the Western concept that attaches importance only to the brain. In this way, the study becomes deeply embedded in the student. I would like to hear how such learning can be implemented in the education system and also to discuss how an 'ideal school' should look. T50: 1604-1609

This homeroom teacher appreciated the clarity of the session's objectives, particularly understanding the importance of articulation and awareness in teaching. They noted the emphasis on holistic learning involving the whole body, contrasting with the Western focus solely on the individual brain. The homeroom teacher expressed interest in exploring how such an approach could be integrated into the education system and the idea of an 'ideal school'

The attempt to hang the learning (or lack thereof) on motivation. What is motivation? Is this an observable thing? Does using language that implies subjectivity and internal motives help us help the student, or is it unnecessary. Instead, you can focus on describing facts. The student did not learn, he did so and so, did not match our expectations in learning, etc. The moderator's claim is that knowledge in the West is perceived (under the influence of Descartes and not only) as an internal aspect of the soul (another concept that requires discussion). In general, there is a focus on the head while ignoring the body (the school architecture is also aimed at this) and this is based on a perception of knowledge that is concentrated in the head. The problem of the Homunculus (the difficult problem of consciousness) was mentioned, which assumes some interiority within us (in the image of a small man/soul/inner being) that deciphers the knowledge, transmits it, etc... We cannot enter the head of the other. Instead, we can look at knowledge as an activity (here again the aspects from the philosophy of language return. ... We also talked a lot about the fact that there is no need to assume innate intelligence gaps. It's actually all related to practice that improves skills. Very similar to what we learned, Oakeshott clarifies that not only language, but every field of knowledge is not learned through theory, but through practical involvement through experimentation and experimentation and progress (this is not only in driving, it is also in art,

cooking, and fields that are considered more complex). All this shows that the body also has intelligence (not in the sense of awareness or something from the Eastern ideas) and is involved in learning. When you internalize these ideas... you get a picture that eliminates a large part of the educational language accepted today. The division between fields of knowledge with an emphasis, for example, on the separation of mathematics from other intellectual fields and its emphasis on a mental or brain difference, become unnecessary. The attempt to divide between students who are suitable for a mathematical head and an artistic head for example, does not hold water according to this. Everything has to do with the growing conditions and environment, habits and cultivation. T43: 931-957

The homeroom teacher pondered on the role of motivation in learning, questioning its observability and usefulness in educational language. He also considered the Western perception of knowledge which focuses on learning as an internal process while overlooking the role of the body in learning. He seems ready to challenge traditional educational mental categories when considering the importance of practice and skill development over innate intelligence.

What do you have to say about what you learned today? Something in the negativity of man's interiority "that little man" that seemingly does not exist. It's hard for me to understand and grasp the idea that there is no interiority, that there is no emotion that promotes learning just because we don't see them. I'm not saying that it doesn't exist, but I feel that it is impossible to make a separation in learning between the two things. Not sure if it's black and white. I want to believe there is a mix of the two. In any case, after going around with the last meeting in my head during the last few days, I feel that what is in this approach gives me hope, turns the difficulty of the students into something simpler, maybe even reduces the difficulty and says that in practice everything is possible. T40 1094-1101

This participant grappled with the idea of human interiority, finding it challenging to completely separate emotions from the learning process. They expressed a belief in a blended approach to learning, combining internal and external factors. The workshop approach offered them hope by simplifying student difficulties and suggesting that all learning is possible with the right methods and activities.

(The moderator said) It is easiest for us to remove responsibility from us and say the student is weak, he has learning disabilities. It removes responsibility from us. But if instead we try to think of ways to recruit the student and how to help him practice what he is not used to

doing, it will be more positive and correct for him. The word motivation is a word that does not help. We see no motivation. We only see that in practice the student does not learn. And instead of deciding for him what he feels and what he has or doesn't have, we should focus on what he doesn't actually do and try to help there. These points are a bit difficult and also not accepted by everyone. I think they should be expanded upon as we move on. T51 1244-1254

This excerpt reflects on shifting the focus from labelling students as weak or unmotivated to finding ways to engage them in learning. The homeroom teacher suggests moving away from assumptions about students' feelings and focusing on practical ways to assist in their learning. This perspective, while challenging, was seen as a necessary area for further exploration.

Case study description of our student's failure. The description must be according to the language of the school staff and counsellors (as in a parents' meeting). In general, a child who does not succeed academically is described in his parents' ears, in his own ears as a child who does not realize his potential. At the level of the school staff and the counsellors there is mainly an emphasis on the child's problems as objective thus not being related to the school. The school's structure or conduct. Popular among these reasons are the following: the student is neglected by his parents, emotionally or materially, the child may have emotional or communication problems, the student's family ties are lacking (one of the parents is not in the picture for example) or the child suffers from learning disabilities, attention and concentration problems, and organic difficulties of one kind or another. T48: 1329-1336

The homeroom teacher describes how academic failure is typically communicated to students and parents, often attributing it to external factors or inherent deficiencies. This description highlights a tendency in the education system to use language that externalizes problems and avoids system-based accountability.

The beginning of the meeting was a continuation of what we talked about before, the power of words which are actually produced by languages we speak and which are languages that we don't have or "as if" they are ours, but actually the environment produces our own language and we use it and it turns out that it actually controls us and not the other way around. "Where you hang the problem, you will find the solution" I linked this sentence to the word "disability" and I asked myself why it is attached usually to the failures and difficulties among students. Is it easier and faster to diagnose and determine without even knowing what its interpretation is? How much it warns us against continuing to draw from the pool of words we have accumulated without awareness of their meaning and interpretation! T47: 1389-1397

This homeroom teacher reflects on the power of language and its influence on perception and problem-solving. He questioned the automatic association of 'disability' with student difficulties, suggesting a need for greater awareness and critical examination of the language used in education; the need for this language to be clear to all involved in its use.

The second workshop session prompted homeroom teachers to deeply reconsider and question established educational concepts and language. Through discussions on motivation, holistic learning, and the role of language in shaping educational practices, the homeroom teachers were challenged to rethink their approaches to teaching and student assessment. These reflections indicate a growing awareness among educators of the complex dynamics involved in learning and the need for more thoughtful use of accepted educational categories to better develop helpful educational strategies.

### ***The third workshop***

One participant aptly named the third workshop 'Things in the Heart Are Not Things' (T41:1945), capturing its essence. The workshop was a natural progression from its predecessors, retaining the theme of language as a key learning tool. However, it shifted focus towards more theoretical discussions, facilitated by the moderator, who allowed ample time for group dialogue. It delved into two primary subjects: the study of metaphors and their significance, and a thorough critique of the Western body-mind/soul dichotomy. This dichotomy, seen in both Platonic and Cartesian thought, tends to prioritize the inner realm in matters of knowledge, emotions, feelings, thoughts, beliefs, and more. We examined its connection to the previously discussed concept of the homunculus, the 'little Cartesian man,' considered the essence of human existence. Challenging these notions, we introduced an alternative perspective that emphasizes human behaviour and the role of the entire body in learning and knowledge acquisition. It's crucial to note that our aim in these discussions was always grounded in the practical, specifically in how this embodied approach can inform pedagogical methods to aid struggling students.

The following excerpts encapsulate homeroom teachers' reflections and reactions to the third workshop, each offering a unique perspective on the themes discussed and their practical implications in the educational context.

I will offer a case and discuss it from the point of view we have learned...A very frenetic and active student...A good thing in itself. This is because in learning he often interrupts, talks



with others, makes noise, gets up and throws things at others and more... Many times he starts learning and then loses it. He sits down to write a test or a paper and after a few minutes he gets up, chats, loses interest and after that says it's out of his control... This student is declared by all his acquaintances to be severely suffering from severe attention deficit disorder and he was even sent for diagnosis... You can think of him differently. Instead of cataloguing and labelling him, first of all describe the situation in facts... Try to activate him, play with him in class (that is, recruit him to learn through a game in which he will take part as a participant and not as an observer). Show him a video about a disruptive student and talk to him about it. It requires patience and to think big of course... But worth a try. T43 2032-2047

The homeroom teacher discusses a student with severe attention deficit disorder, suggesting a shift from labeling to a more factual description of behaviors. The homeroom teacher recommends engaging strategies like games and discussions about disruptive behavior, emphasizing patience and a broader view for effective learning.

Our constant use of metaphors. I didn't notice it at all even though it's very logical and obvious (happened to me several times in our meetings) and at the same time the power of metaphors and our ability to use them to teach better and on the other hand to be careful with them; find a balance... The idea of the denial of internal factors received a clearer explanation in this meeting. And how do I express this in the field of teaching and how do I use it to help students succeed more... The refinement of not treating the events of students as personal/individual, taking them as something inclusive that is made up of different events and different variables that make up the child's reality and affects him and his learning - make the idea of denying internal factors something more logical to me. I manage now to understand how the exterior affects us probably much more than our character, or our genetics. Still not one hundred percent agree but can understand the line of thinking. T40: 2223-2237

The homeroom teacher reflects on the frequent, yet unnoticed use of metaphors in teaching. They also ponder on the concept of denying internal states, viewing events as inclusive realities that shape a child's world, thereby understanding how external factors significantly influence students.

I really connected to the discussion that developed in class about motivation, and the distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Most of the practices I know in the classroom see motivation as a uniform phenomenon that moves across a scale on one side of

which is low motivation and on the other end is high motivation. The class discussion presented motivation as a phenomenon divided into two types of motivations. One is internal motivation - a motivation that comes from within the child (if it comes), and one that we as teachers are unable to influence as it is something hidden and largely endogenous, and the other is external motivation - one that can be improved by helping the child to create motivation for actions or thoughts. The discussion in class made me think and read a little about the concept that is so common among us as teachers, "motivation". T48 2316-2323

This excerpt delves into the class discussion on motivation, distinguishing between intrinsic and extrinsic types. It challenges the conventional view of motivation as a mostly internal phenomenon, inspiring the homeroom teacher to rethink and research this concept.

We moved to the word motivation, I already feel the change in myself, I myself start to distance myself and avoid it, due to all the discussions and interpretations that were around that it does not actually exist, the question arises whether we as teachers find it easier to say that it is internal and we do not have access to it...In my opinion, instead of looking for the answer, it is better to try to help the student plan something that will benefit him and stimulate him to the desired activity, we must try to be in the relevant world of the student to bring all the fashions together and not focus only on a specific subject and disconnect from other things... We stopped for a moment for the word knowledge in the same context that it is inside the head...the question arises, how do we help the student? If we are not precise enough and unclear it is difficult to help him, I conclude from this that the responsibility lays with the teacher or the educational figure who is in contact with the student, probably it is the same if we are not clear with our children then as a mother I expect my son to understand me "in the sense that he intended" Or should I ask myself whether I was clear enough? So how do I expect the student to understand me, a fascinating issue! T47: 2401-2424

The homeroom teacher contemplates the overemphasis on internal motivation and suggests focusing on planning practical activities that interest students. She stresses the importance of clarity and relevance from the educator's side to aid student understanding. Comparing what was discussed to her being a mother expecting her children to understand her wishes helps her concretize and understand the ideas discussed.

Right from the moment I started writing and answering this assignment, I directly remembered one of my students in the 10th grade that now I am reproducing the process I went through, I feel that I was judgmental at the beginning and I was not clear enough for

him, I felt that he did not want to learn Hebrew and that he had no "motivation" but I am correcting for the correct interpretation "He wouldn't have done what I asked of him", I chose two days ago that everyone would bring their own exercises and sit in the grass and enjoy the magical weather and start practicing a new subject through activity, suddenly I discovered another cooperative person, fresh, enthusiastic, made me happy and then I turned to him and asked " Where were you?" He answered me, "Teacher, you know if all the lessons are like this, I will be the first to participate, thank you for waking me up." the learning and the topics relevant to the students' world! First, to change my perceptions and the interpretation of the situations in which the student finds himself, to experiment with them more, at least if it works with one student then it will surely do with other students. T47: 2463-2476

A homeroom teacher recounts a positive experience with a previously unengaged student after changing her understanding of the problem and then her teaching approach. This incident highlights the need for educators to adapt their perceptions and methods to resonate with students' interests.

Following the meeting, a number of insights came to my mind and I found myself in a different conversation with the teaching staff than the one I was in until now...The attempt to accurately describe the student according to his actions... and trying to avoid putting it into an abstract concept had a great impact. We talked about the fact that our use of metaphors makes us relate to the interiority of the child, it directs our thought...As soon as we turn something that happens to a student or behavior into a certain individual trait, we are doing something wrong here. We put him in a category that already marks him... and the suggestion that came up during the meeting instead of giving the name to the phenomenon - to talk in terms of the behaviour ... a second example I am thinking of - to correct teachers in meetings in which we talk about the class, to draw their attention to the need to speak less about what we feel comfortable with - he does not care about what is done in the lessons -, and be more attentive to the details of his behaviour... The discourse needs to take responsibility for the child and avoid defining that the child is the or has a problem - a disability... thus freeing ourselves from responsibility. T41: 2485-2512

The homeroom teacher underscores the importance of describing students based on actions rather than abstract concepts. They advocate for focusing on specific behaviours in classroom discussions and taking responsibility for student development instead of attributing issues to inherent traits or disabilities.

I have a student in the class who has difficulty reading and although he has progressed relative to himself, there is still a process to go through with him in this area, when the goal at this stage is to improve the level of pace and accuracy in reading, to achieve fluency... After the workshop meeting, I thought to myself... wait... no I asked him if he would perhaps like to practice reading on a specific subject/area that he particularly likes? ... think about how to build the program together with him, and in this way I will give more meaning to learning, and then there is a better chance that he will perform the same activities that I would like him to perform under my guidance ... and in addition, following what we talked (in the workshop), for example in the morning reading, I already sat him next to a child who reads well (of course I had a stimulating conversation with the child that reads well) and they worked together on reading under my guidance, and I must point out that a change in this action of changing place and working in pairs (a combination of a child who has difficulty with one with good reading skills) made a significant difference and the child is now waiting for the next reading session...T49: 2674-2689

The homeroom teacher reflects on aiding a student with reading difficulties. Seeking to improve the student's fluency, pace, and accuracy, the homeroom teacher asks the student to practice reading topics of personal interest, aiming to make learning more meaningful. Additionally, the homeroom teacher pairs the student with a proficient reader during morning sessions, a strategy that significantly improves the student's engagement and eagerness for future reading activities.

These reflections demonstrate the impact of the workshop's discussions on the homeroom teachers' perspectives and methodologies. The common thread in these narratives is the shift towards a more inclusive, behaviour-focused approach in teaching, emphasizing the need for educators to adapt to the unique needs and realities of their students. This transformation showcases a move away from traditional, often rigid educational paradigms which focus on the students' 'traits of mind', towards a more dynamic, empathetic, and effective embodied teaching methodology.

### ***The fourth workshop***

This workshop further explored the themes of abstractions and metaphors, treating them as two interlinked aspects of the same idea. It critically examined western concepts such as

knowledge, consciousness, emotions, diagnoses, and language, linking them to notions of the homunculus and interiority. This led to a reinforced understanding of the importance of focusing on observable behaviors. The overarching aim was to explore languages, metaphors, and understandings of both the learner and learning process that could lead to effective pedagogical strategies, particularly for students who are struggling with learning outcomes.

The session kicked off with collaborative activities, encouraging participants to consider innovative teaching approaches in various subjects, inspired by earlier discussions and suggested metaphors. A notable discussion revolved around a metaphor presented by a biology homeroom teacher, who used varying water samples to demonstrate their effects on algae. This example was recognized as a model of experiential and active learning, which goes beyond the simple transfer of content.

The discussions then moved to the theme of moving from concrete experiences to abstract concepts, highlighting a contrast with conventional learning methods that often start with abstract ideas disconnected from the underlying processes and contexts. The group contemplated the idea of applying this concrete-to-abstract approach to humanities subjects, akin to the algae example. This involves envisioning teaching methods that go past mere content delivery, such as embodying the principles of democracy in classroom practices, rather than just learning about them from textbooks.

The fourth workshop emphasized the significance of experiential learning and the journey from tangible experiences to abstract comprehension. It also posed a challenge to the participants to integrate these methods across diverse educational fields.

The following excerpts are reflections from homeroom teachers during this session. These reflections reveal insights and changes in their educational approaches, particularly focusing on the use of metaphors, abstractions, and practical methods in teaching.

The problem is when we give these names without enough behavioural expression. The shortcut (the name) takes shape and colour and becomes concrete and essentialized in isolation from the behaviour...a general word has the benefits of a shortcut and order. The question is when it is right to use them [generalization must be used with awareness of the price that the individual may pay]...the usefulness of diagnosing a student stands in direct relation to the benefit (or damage) for the student as a result of him being catalogued by the diagnosis... The pedagogy reflects the process that the metaphors we discussed mention, that

is, if we are aware of the metaphors, we will change the way of teaching (for example, in history, we will not try to overload the student's head with study material, but will give tasks that are compatible with historical practice and understanding) ... these days I write a half-yearly report for the students. Following what was learned - I use much more clear and concrete comments. Mainly the educator's comment that refers to the student's performance and expectations from him. I try to write in a very practical way without words like - concentration, connection, seriousness, and more of those common in the way teachers and educators talk. T39: 3535-3559

This homeroom teacher discusses the importance of connecting labels and generalizations to specific behaviours. They emphasize that diagnosis and pedagogy should reflect the metaphors discussed in the workshop, moving towards more practical and clear communication in teaching.

Most of the workshop I didn't get to the bottom of the moderator's mind. I thought he believed that teaching should only be done with practical tools. That is, what I teach must have a practical expression to it. Now, if I am not mistaken, he is not against abstract learning as long as the tangible point is clear to the students, but it must be maintained at any given moment because it is the guarantee of understanding. For the same reason, those who cannot explain what they claim to have understood, necessarily did not understand it...I learned from the lesson to do a little differently... that there should be a communicative 'ping pong' between me and the students. Any telling on my part will require feedback from the students that if I cannot teach a subject only with practical tools or if it is difficult and requires a lot of preparation, at the very least I will make sure that we maintain the same language, through feedback. T39: 2032-2047

The homeroom teacher expresses the value of 'communicative ping pong' with students, ensuring mutual understanding through feedback. They stress the importance of maintaining a tangible point in abstract learning to guarantee comprehension.

In light of the things, we discussed during the workshops until this moment, I would do every activity in class with more detail and explanation. I would also perhaps do individual meetings with each student for a formative assessment where I also let him talk about himself, and show him clearly what I would like him to do differently...In addition, I would listen a little more to the students about "what they want to learn today" and make sure that they have fun and not just learn. I would also put more emphasis on presenting the concepts

through which I grade different tasks, so that the student would understand more what is expected of him. T53: 370-3373

Here, the homeroom teacher expresses a shift towards a more detailed, concrete, and individualized approach, including formative assessments and considering students' interests in learning, ensuring enjoyment alongside education.

In conclusion, we must believe in our students that they can and are able to do and perform on their own, not be judgmental towards them, our students need us to hear from the inside - in the little person the phrase "help me do it myself", the more a student does on his own, he will learn more and practice more, education is a process that the student acquires with the help of experiences, doing and imitating in the environment and is not acquired by listening to words that have no meaning. T47: 3285-3289

The homeroom teacher emphasizes the importance of believing in students and encouraging independence. They advocate for experiential learning over mere verbal instruction.

I think I'm leaving this training with a lot of thoughts about what I do in class. I admit that many things unsettled me in the meetings, but this is a positive thing. That's the only way you can really learn and not when repeating things we agreed to in the past...I learned a lot about metaphors and what our speech does to us. It used to seem so innocent to me but suddenly it seems that behind every word there is planning and goals and consequences. We look in all directions but we don't pay attention to our speech...And I'm surprised that words like motivation were used in everything I learned about education. Suddenly it's really unclear and maybe it doesn't help. It is better to focus on what the student does and does not do and not insert thoughts and psychological analyses as if I were inside his head. T50: 3415-3423

The homeroom teacher reflects on the impact of language and metaphors in teaching, questioning the traditional use of terms like 'motivation' and advocating for a focus on observable student actions.

The moderator does not dispute that the student has difficulty and fails - but instead of putting a sticker or giving one word for all the difficulty, let's see how he solved the exam, how he deals with learning in the classroom in a more detailed way and then we can also help him more. T40: 2896-2898

This homeroom teacher suggests a detailed approach to understanding students' difficulties, moving away from oversimplified labelling towards a thorough analysis of their performance and classroom behaviour.

In this meeting I learned how much we miss the goal when we rely on external tests and do not relate to the student's actual learning in the classroom. We try to shorten the process and deal with students who find it difficult. Of course, the conditions in Israel do not allow us to act in a different way, especially in the classrooms of the regular education. But I think that the very awareness of this will change our speech and the way we teach in the classroom.

T40: 2935-2939

The homeroom teacher seems to realize the limitations of external testing in truly assessing students' learning, advocating for a classroom-focused approach. She recognizes the limiting power of the conditions of the Israeli educational system but believes even a bit of awareness can help.

And I've already started thinking about other metaphors and different ways of teaching (even this week, twice in class I applied a metaphor of a director in a play and not of a teacher standing at the front). Also, you put a greater emphasis on referring to what actually happens in the environment and in learning and less on supposedly guessing what is inaccessible to us, namely the student's inner world. One of the sentences that penetrated my heart the most is what the moderator repeated, a woman who says to her husband who takes care of her and all her needs and is always attentive to her "you don't love me". This sentence got me more than many reasoned arguments. This unsettled me and showed me how absurd the whole idea of giving the inside of the individual his thoughts and intentions a separate status from the way the behaviour is actually implemented can sound. T43: 2857-2864

This excerpt points at the homeroom teacher's application of metaphors in teaching, shifting the focus from guessing the student's inner world to observing actual behaviour and learning environment.

These reflections from the fourth session seem to show an evolving and significant shift in homeroom teachers' perspectives towards a more practical, student-centric, and behaviour-focused approach in education. The discussions and activities in the workshop have led to a deeper understanding of the role of language, metaphors, and practical applications in



teaching, encouraging homeroom teachers to innovate and adapt their methods for more effective learning outcomes.

### ***Workshop five and evaluation***

The fifth workshop commenced with participants being invited to answer evaluative questions about the entire workshop series. This exercise aimed to reflect on key topics discussed previously and to provide space for additional insights on these subjects. Participants were instructed to keep their responses anonymous, and no records were maintained of who said what during the subsequent discussions.

The NGO that played a pivotal role in organizing the workshop conducted its separate evaluation. Although I chose not to access this evaluation, I was informed that it reflected a very positive reception of the workshop. This positive feeling was further underscored by the NGO's eagerness to organize another workshop the following year. Unfortunately, plans for the subsequent workshop were disrupted due to the outbreak of war between Israel and Hamas in Gaza in October 2023.

The final session of the workshop also focused on a theoretical exploration of two critical concepts in contemporary educational discourse: identity and culture. These concepts were intricately linked to the primary themes of the workshop, including internal and external human characteristics, abstractions, and other related topics. This session provided an opportunity to delve deeper into these concepts and their relevance to the educational field.

The evaluations of the workshop participants provide insightful reflections on the impact of the workshop on their professional development and educational practice. These reflections largely echo the insights gathered from previous sessions of the workshops. This repetition, we believe, is beneficial. Redundancy plays a significant role in the learning process, and the recurring appearance of these themes suggests a growing appreciation and understanding of the issues at hand.

All in all the participants revisited several critical topics which they felt had been central in our work throughout the workshop. Key among these was the problematic nature of psychologized/therapeutic language and its approach to learning difficulties. This language they mentioned tends to oversimplify complex processes into a single 'product/concept,' leading to objectification and overlooking the need for tailored, individual approaches for each student. The homeroom teachers also recognized that such language often shifts

responsibility away from educators, attributing challenges solely to students. They indicated that they wanted seriously to try and implement a shift in focus towards behavioural aspects of learning, rather than purely abstract or 'mentalistic' concepts acknowledging that learning involves the entire body, not just the mind, and emphasizing the critical role of practice in educational activity. Another point raised was the nature of learning in different fields, like mathematics, which is often viewed as abstract but is, in fact, similar to more experiential studies.

The workshop was commended for enhancing homeroom teachers' sensitivity to language used in educational contexts, both in interactions with students and colleagues. Homeroom teachers became cognizant of the pitfalls of abstract language, which often leaves recipients confused. They also explored the influence of metaphors, specifically 'transfer' and 'construction,' on attitudes towards learning, recognizing the more inclusive and active nature of 'work' and 'play' metaphors.

Participants identified the workshop as a valuable professional development tool, yet expressed a need for more practical demonstrations and real-world examples to better implement the concepts discussed. They expressed interest in further exploring the theories underpinning education, particularly issues like human equality, the impact of socioeconomic factors, and the nuances of language.

The exchange of ideas among a diverse group of educators from across the Israeli school system was seen as particularly beneficial. There was a consensus on the importance of accurate descriptions of learning and social processes, emphasizing that narrow descriptions can be misleading. Broadening the scope of analysis can lead to a deeper understanding and more effective strategies for student improvement.

Finally, participants appreciated the workshop's role in fostering a non-judgmental approach and reflective thinking, enhancing their professional development. It encouraged them to adopt new perspectives, believed to be beneficial in advancing their students' education.

## **Conclusions**

In this report, I have detailed the two primary phases of our research: firstly, the series of interviews conducted, and secondly, the homeroom teachers' workshop. In this concluding

section I will recapitulate in short the main findings and elucidate both what I have learned and the possible broader implications for the betterment of our school children's education.

Our research began with certain presumptions, as outlined in our theoretical introduction, which revolved around concepts such as the 'educalization' of society, the 'medicalization' of education, and the pervasive use of therapeutic language in the educational context, also referred to as the 'psychologization' of education.

We also mentioned the importance of considering homeroom teachers' perceptions and beliefs for these can be seen as an epistemological foundation influencing homeroom teachers' cognitive, emotional, and behavioural choices in classroom settings thus affecting their teaching methods and interactions with students. Last but not least we pointed at the need to focus on homeroom teacher beliefs on students' achievements and their theories of mind and the metaphors they generate and the ones from which they are generated.

All in all, the theoretical underpinning of our research pointed at the crucial role language plays in shaping and understanding beliefs and ideologies; out of a belief in that the language we use, the discourses we share, and the rhetoric we practise have the potential to both expand and limit possibilities for change. In exploring the profound role of language, we recognize that it is more than a mere vehicle for communication; it is a mirror reflecting the ideology, culture, and action that underpin our being in the world. The nuances of language reveal the deep-seated beliefs, values, and cognitive processes of a society; making explicit the metaphors that shape thinking and practice in education is not just a theoretical exercise; it is a matter of uncovering the assumptions that underlie our interpretations so that we can more deliberately direct our actions.

The interviews revealed that homeroom teachers predominantly utilize a narrow, psychology-centric language focusing on cognition, motivation, and emotions when addressing student failures. Alongside this observation, we noted other significant trends. Homeroom teachers often default to diagnosing students as a response to underperformance, seeing professional diagnostics as the most responsible approach, given their own perceived limitations in analysing mental states and reflecting a deep-seated western dualistic view of learners. This perspective sharply divides the 'internal' mental state of students from their 'external' physical existence and environment, leading homeroom teachers to primarily focus on the 'mind' as the area requiring intervention. Additionally, homeroom teachers frequently factor in external contextual elements, predominantly family background or history, into their explanations for

student failure. Despite awareness of contextual influences, there is scant acknowledgment of socioeconomic factors impacting student success. Even when considering external factors, they tend to link them back to mental or psychological issues – family tensions due to divorce or sibling rivalry, for example. Interestingly, some homeroom teachers' narratives veered towards attributing student success or failure to inherent traits or 'DNA', effectively creating a dichotomy between 'natural' and 'contextual' factors (one which reflects the internal external dichotomy mentioned). There seems to be a tendency to lean towards 'natural' explanations for student failure, shifting between the two categories as needed. At times, in the narratives examined, the 'mental' and 'DNA' aspects of individuals are intertwined in such a way that they collectively underscore the belief that educational challenges are deeply ingrained within the individual student. Moreover, homeroom teachers tend to sharply differentiate between the so-called 'humanistic/verbal' subjects like history and literature and 'scientific' subjects such as maths and biology, implying a belief in innate abilities specific to each subject area.

These perspectives subtly suggest that the roots of a student's difficulties are personal, belonging solely to the student, thereby distancing these issues from external factors or shared responsibilities. Moreover, these perspectives seem to approach the difficulties of students as traits of the solipsistic self, moving them away from educational or pedagogical contexts and aligning them more with therapeutic domains. In summary, what we have uncovered is a complex network of foundational beliefs reinforcing a worldview where education, particularly pedagogy, has little significance. The focus, instead, is on the intrinsic nature of the student and their family environment, relegating educational strategies to the periphery. This perspective highlights a critical area for further exploration and potential reevaluation in our approach to education.

Moreover, the therapeutic language used by homeroom teachers when describing students' failures (or success), lacks precision and consistency, as evidenced by the varied interpretations and interconnections of these psychological categories by different interviewees. Such inconsistencies dilute their explanatory power. These findings echo the insights of prior research discussed in our theoretical introduction, reaffirming the established conclusions. What they potentially contribute are nuanced insights into how these perspectives manifest in language, the metaphors employed, and the underlying ideologies they reflect. Furthermore, they introduce additional layers of complexity to the interplay of the primary categories and themes identified by the homeroom teachers, revealing the intricate ways in which they are interwoven.

In the workshops homeroom teachers were able, with rather ease, to acknowledge the limitations of the language they used in serving the educational needs of the students this language was supposed to assist. Homeroom teachers affirmed the workshop had helped them to become more sensitive to the language they use in education in general and more specifically when talking to their students, the parents or among their colleagues. They had become aware of the ‘dangers’ of using abstractions which at times leave those for whom they are intended without enough clarity even to try and correct what they have been told might not be right. The homeroom teachers also delved into the role of their metaphors, as these related to the learner and the learning process, in shaping their educational attitudes and strategies. They seemed to agree that there is much to be gained from thinking about how to properly describe learning or social processes of a particular student, emphasizing that a bad description of this process is a narrow description and stating that when you widen the scope of the analysis, you see that a family or the homeroom teacher or student might not be ‘guilty’ as thought. Lastly, upon completion of the workshops, they added that the training has strengthened their desire to be less judgmental, and felt that they had already passed part of the reflective activity needed to filter the words and the language they use; the workshop had helped their professional development and had made them start looking at things from a new perspective, that they believe can promote their student’s wellbeing and educational progress.

We should not be surprised by the lack of suitability of the classificatory schemes made available to homeroom teachers by therapeutic/psychologized nomenclature (mainly, cognition, emotion, and motivation). These limitations have been already anticipated in the therapeutic disciplines’ literature dealing with these issues. Within the cognitive sciences and just as an example, Allen (2017) reflects these concerns while denying the need for clarity and suggesting that cognitive scientists need not be concerned with the absence of a concrete definition for cognition for the quest by philosophers for a definitive "signature of cognition" takes place at a level of detail irrelevant to both cognitive scientists and philosophers in the cognitive science domain. Scarantino (2012) can help us exemplify similar problems in the affective sciences for which emotions are central; her main point being that the present classificatory scheme supporting the affective sciences is no longer suitable to its needs and that they need to be seriously revised if they are to become useful again for scientific exploration. Aligning with Allen (2017) who believed cognition can be conceived as a natural category, Scarantino makes a similar push for searching in affective science for natural kinds

of discrete emotions. Contemporary theories about motivation to learn have been also recently reviewed by Cook and Artino (2016) who have articulated the key intersections and distinctions among these theories. Attribution theory, social cognitive theory, goal orientation theory, and self-determination theory figure among the theories reviewed with the authors noting the recurrent themes of competence, value, attributions, and interactions between individuals and the learning context that characterize them and pointing at the potential confusion they can create when theoreticians and researchers are not careful enough nor precise enough in how they define, operationalise and measure different motivational constructs.

Neither should we be surprised by the deep-seated western dualistic views homeroom teachers hold of the individual learner. The deep-rooted dualistic view in Western thought, which separates mind and body, traces back to Plato (Hutchinson, 1999; Ranciere, 2004) and was later further cemented by Descartes (Christofidou, 2001; Swenson, 1998) who suggested a fundamental distinction between the mind (or soul) and the physical world, arguing that the mind, unlike physical objects, isn't subject to physical laws. Such thinking has pervaded various domains, shaping our understanding of dualities like culture and nature, rationality and emotion, and has influenced how we perceive concepts central to education, such as intelligence and the realm of the emotional. This dualistic approach, while historically significant, has been challenged by the empirical science (Barad, 2007; Braidotti, 2013; Varela et al., 1991) and has been critiqued for its limitations in addressing the complexities of education and human experience (Nikolas Rose, 1998; Rose, 1999), suggesting a need for more integrated perspectives that recognize the interplay between the mind, body, and environment.

Solipsistic representations of students should come as no surprise either. Dualistic perspectives align closely with the individual solipsistic representation's homeroom teachers hold when considering their students and the roots of student's difficulties. These difficulties are conceived as personal, belonging solely to the individual and thereby detached from contextual factors or shared responsibilities. As such these difficulties are distanced from educational or pedagogical contexts and aligned with therapeutic domains. The notion of the individual self, emphasizing personal uniqueness and autonomy, emerged in Europe during the sixteenth century and gained positive connotations over time. This modern view of the self as rational and detached emerged from historical and social changes, particularly with the rise of the nation-state, which used education and other mechanisms to promote a uniform

culture and individualism. This process involved redefining power and control, moving from overt rulership to more subtle forms of domination, including through educational systems that encouraged a sense of individuality aligned with state interests (Bourke et al., 2015; Foucault, 1983).

Homeroom teachers, not merely by virtue of their profession but as products and participants of a society deeply ingrained in Western historical narratives, reflect in their interviews and while participating in the workshops the phenomena we initially outlined, namely the educationalization of social issues, medicalization of education, and the psychologization of educational discourse and practices. While homeroom teachers might not explicitly use the terminologies preferred by theoreticians, our analysis suggests that the linguistic categories they employ resonate with these theoretical frameworks. Their tendency to pathologize and diagnose dovetails with the concept of medicalization. The terms they frequently use to describe students facing academic challenges (e.g., motivation, cognition) align with the psychologization of educational discourse. Moreover, their implicit acknowledgment that modern schools are tasked with addressing issues traditionally outside the educational domain illustrates their adherence to the educationalization of society.

The confluence of educationalization, medicalization, and psychologization within education crafts a multifaceted terrain where each approach, though potentially insightful and beneficial, carries the risk of oversimplification and reductionism. The educationalization of societal challenges might overburden educational frameworks with issues that demand more comprehensive resolutions. Meanwhile, the tendencies towards medicalization and psychologization, despite their focus on individual needs, risk prioritizing medical and psychological solutions over more inclusive educational strategies.

Ultimately, these trends signify a paradigm shift in educational objectives—from a traditional emphasis on scholarly instruction to a broader, more integrative approach to individual student development. While these trends underscore a shift towards a holistic educational mission focusing on comprehensive student development, they necessitate a cautious approach to their limitations and potential adverse effects, particularly the subtle departure from traditional educational goals towards a therapeutic orientation, as evidenced in our research.

The data analysis reveals that the adoption of these perspectives and particularly the embracement of therapeutic discourse encapsulate a psychology-infused network of

metaphors and beliefs, including epistemological beliefs about the self, its identity, growth, and social interactions. These discourses, metaphors, and beliefs, which mutually reinforce one another, serve as key drivers in promoting students' resilience, social, and emotional growth, shaping individuals who are self-dependent, introspective, and primed to optimize human capital as per neoliberal principles. This emphasis on psycho-emotional drivers tends to overlook a critical assessment of the broader contextual and structural roots of social disparities and injustice, often recasting societal issues as personal psychological shortcomings and thereby eclipsing persistent structural inequities and their deeper political and ideological bases. As if social disadvantages would be normatively tied to the development of mental health problems (Harwood and Allen, 2014).

Therapeutic constructs have come to dominate the educational landscape and have trained the gaze of homeroom teacher's educators. The language used by homeroom teachers can pathologize and normalize student failure, simultaneously lowering their expectations and increasing their empathy (Segal & Plotkin Amrami, 2022). Such empathetic identification can undermine homeroom teachers' pedagogical effectiveness, and reliance on therapeutic reasoning dictates a course of action that ultimately benefits neither the homeroom teachers' professional objectives nor the students' needs. Actions derived from a therapeutic stance tend to be diagnostic rather than pedagogical. We need to problematize the very concepts that have become canonical if we want to overcome such problems for otherwise education and pedagogy face the risk of theoretical ossification (Pedersen, 2012).

We understand that broad societal changes are challenging to achieve and advocate for incremental approaches rather than overarching solutions. Our stance is not against psychologized perspectives per se, acknowledging their potential contributions, especially in addressing the emotional dimensions of learning. However, the dualities and separations these perspectives introduce, such as between the mental and physical or the intrinsic and contextual, warrant careful consideration.

Before we proceed, I'd like to make it clear, to prevent any misunderstandings, that I am not inherently against emotions, motivation, or cognition. Nor am I advocating for stringent discipline or mourning the loss of traditional authority. My position is not a call for a revival of basic educational tenets or for the forceful transmission of subject-specific knowledge to students. Our appeal is simply to support homeroom teachers in overcoming the contrived separation between body and mind, and/or soul, between rationality and cognition, and/or



emotion. This division is reinforced by psychological narratives that limit their capacity to break free from such confines. Ultimately, we aim for homeroom teachers to explore the potential of broadening their comprehension of both the learner and the learning process by adopting more holistic and less divisive perspectives, and by making their language more explicit and illustrative, which might better serve those they wish to educate.

Homeroom teachers frame in their rhetoric both the problems and the potential solutions they believe are available but these frames are not fixed and can be reframed through dialogic interventions (Bannister, 2015; Rainio & Hofmann, 2021). Thus we propose practical steps to improve the situation for students and teachers without confronting systemic resistance. As stated, our findings show homeroom teachers' receptiveness to discussions on educational language and metaphors, recognizing the need for clearer and more explanatory discourse. In general, we need to work with homeroom teachers to break down the perceived barriers between mind and body, emotion and cognition, the internal and external worlds, and the social versus the individual realms.

This approach could empower homeroom teachers to recognize that instructing in both scientific and humanistic disciplines influence the full spectrum of human experience, merging emotional and cognitive aspects, as well as internal and external experiences, into a cohesive whole. Interventions could include workshops for in-service homeroom teachers to critically assess their language and metaphors and their implications for learning, and adjustments in homeroom teacher training to ensure psychological perspectives are taught with both clarity and a critical lens. These workshops should also aim to equip homeroom teachers with the tools and understanding necessary to recognize and address systemic inequalities that affect their students, fostering social-critical consciousness. Homeroom teachers need education on the various social, political, and economic factors contributing to educational disparities, including historical contexts, institutional racism, and socioeconomic challenges faced by marginalised students (Seider, Clark, and Graves, 2020).

Workshops should encourage reflective practice, helping homeroom teachers to become aware of their implicit biases and how these might impact their teaching. They should also provide strategies for culturally responsive teaching, using methods and materials that are inclusive of students' cultural backgrounds to make learning more relevant and engaging while fostering a classroom environment that encourages critical thinking and discussion about social justice issues which is essential for student empowerment.

Though acknowledging the centrality of emotional aspects in education we need not to convert homeroom teachers into counsellors (Stout, 2000), despite the benefits counselling skills might bring to teaching; similarly, education shouldn't turn into group therapy (Steadman Rice, 2002), although fostering a collaborative environment in the classroom can enhance the learning experience. Moreover, it is important for educators to recognize that while socio-historical contexts significantly influence student development, not all aspects can be traced back to early experiences, or 'the womb' as Furedi (1966) aptly noted. History may leave its marks, but it does not predetermine failure or preclude educational intervention. History never becomes DNA and failure is not deterministic nor ever becomes unavailable for pedagogical interventions.

More in particular we need to confront present language. Language reflects both the ideology and the actions of those that speak it. Language influences and structures our thoughts and scaffolds our being (Vygotsky, 1987). It is rich with cultural significance and mirrors our societal and political ideologies (Bourdieu, 1970). The power of rhetoric lies in its ability to both broaden and, crucially, restrict avenues for transformation. Thus, educators must scrutinize not just the content of their communication but also how different discourses, like therapeutic discourse in this context, validate certain ideas while marginalizing others (Ladson-Billings, 1998).

Educators seem to recognize the shortcomings of their metaphors and rhetoric. Education is not a thing; it is an activity. Knowledge is not literally transmitted from teacher to student, and education is not merely the acquisition of particular bits of knowledge by the minds of individuals. We need to begin reframing how we think and therefore how we talk about education. Lakoff (2006) states that frames being unconscious and automatic facilitate our most basic ideas and concepts, they shape the way we reason, and they even impact how we perceive and how we act. Frames not only define issues, problems, causes, and solutions; they also hide relevant issues and causes. We posit that educators need first to become aware of the frames through which they work and then work hard to find new ones which will help them achieve their goals by developing new frames and new strategies more detailed, explicit and accessible to those with whom they execute their educational work. Thus, we must first reframe the debate by taking control of the rhetoric used to describe the situation and possibilities for changing it.

Students are not really failing; they are well adapted to a system which has been framed in a rhetoric which aims at sorting out the successful from the failing without bearing responsibility and instead putting responsibility on the individual, a move for which the therapeutic is of utmost importance. The reframing needs to develop a vocabulary that can both help educators clearly and coherently elucidate a concrete and explanatory language that can help students deal with the difficulties they encounter instead of offering a language that allows students to understand that there is nothing normal nor pathological in failing. Words and names are important; they shape ideas, identity, position/place, and possibility. It's important to remember, as Lakoff (2006) emphasizes, that developing new foundational perspectives necessitates proactively championing our values and principles, consistently reiterating them and that this effort should be coordinated among multiple organizations spanning various fields.

There are viable alternatives to the traditional psychological frameworks in education. In recent years, researchers such as Bereiter (Bereiter, 2005), Martínez et al. (Martinez Mateo et al., 2013), Paavola et al. (Paavola et al., 2004), and Sfard (Sfard, 1998) have been exploring learner and learning concepts through the lenses of cognitive, situated, and socio-cultural theories (Hodkinson et al., 2008). While these approaches remain within the bounds of Western epistemology, they offer a nuanced view that transcends the conventional dichotomy between individual and social aspects of learning. Further advancements in understanding learning processes have been made through relational materialist and non-representational theories (Barad, 2007; DeLanda, 2006; Deleuze, 1990; Deleuze & Guattari, 1988; Manzotti, 2006), alongside biological frameworks proposed by Maturana and Varela (1973, 1987) and approaches rooted in biosemiotics and edusemiotics (Sebeok, 2001; Stables & Semetsky, 2014). These perspectives have enriched the discourse on self, mind, and learning, presenting innovative ways to conceptualize and study these phenomena.

Despite these theoretical advancements, there is a recognized need for more in-depth analysis. While significant strides have been made in understanding the epistemological underpinnings of educational methods through policy and curriculum analysis, there remains a gap in empirical research focusing on the specific language—be it therapeutic or other—used by educators in professional discussions about student performance. This gap underscores the importance of further empirical investigation to illuminate how such discourse influences educational practice.

Rethinking homeroom teacher training, devoid of its conventional psychological constraints, could mark a significant advancement in education, ensuring that future educators are equipped with a more nuanced and critical understanding of their pedagogical role and of the processes involved in learning and the learning process.

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## **APPENDIX 1**

### ***Interview Design and Approach***

The interviews were designed to encourage the interviewees to be as explicative as possible. In advance, they were informed that we were interested in the general question: "Why do you think children fail in school?" For the purpose of our study, failure was defined according to school achievement tests.

We utilized an open-ended, unstructured interview schedule. All interviews were conducted by the principal researcher to minimize potential bias and ensure consistency in the interviews and questions asked.

#### **Initial Biographical Questions**

Before addressing the central topic, we asked teachers to share their personal biographies. Specifically, we requested information on the following:

The secondary schools they attended.

The degrees they earned at university or teachers' college.

The evolution of their professional lives, including:

Number of years teaching.

Grades and subjects taught.

Any coordination or administrative positions held in the schools they taught.

After receiving answers to these questions, we asked them to define what a homeroom teacher is and does. Once we had sufficient personal and professional information, we introduced our main question: "Why do you think children fail?"

#### **Main Interview Question**

Upon asking the main question, we allowed teachers to seek clarification on what we meant by "failure." This issue was commonly raised at the beginning of the conversation. We clarified that failure, for us, is what the school system defines as failure, usually grades in exams below a certain level. This question enabled teachers to cover a wide variety of issues in their responses.

Throughout the interviews, we ensured that we clearly understood the teachers' responses. We typically asked for examples to elucidate their points (e.g., if a teacher mentioned a child having cognitive difficulties, we asked for an example or an explanation of what cognitive difficulties look like).

#### Ensuring Clarity and Avoiding Jargon

We were also careful not to accept professional jargon or categories without clear meanings. We asked for synonyms and examples to better understand the teachers' meanings. Follow-up questions were used throughout whenever we felt that issues raised needed further exploration for a better understanding.

#### Sensitivity to Interviewees

Great care was taken to avoid upsetting the interviewees or making them feel that their knowledge was being challenged or doubted. Inquisitive questions were often preceded by statements such as, "Let me tell you what I understood you said so I can make sure I understand you properly," or "I need you to better explain what you have answered (or give me an example) because I want to make sure I'm properly registering your views."

#### Interview Experience

Overall, teachers appeared comfortable with the interview process and appreciated the researchers' interest in their views. At times, through our questions, they realized that some of the categories they used might not be as clear as expected. This realization often led to more thoughtful and detailed responses.

## APPENDIX 2

### *Use of Chat for Validating Initial Analysis*

To ensure the robustness and accuracy of our initial analysis of the interviews conducted for the report, we utilized a chat-based AI (Chat4) tool to validate our findings. This appendix outlines the methodology and process followed in using the AI tool to cross-check and refine the themes and insights derived from the interview data.

#### Methodology

##### 1. Data Preparation:

- Transcripts of the interviews were prepared, ensuring they were verbatim and included all contextual information.

- A few of the transcripts were translated into English using a digital tool, such as Google Translate. The translation was done because we assumed that ChatGPT would perform better with English text. To verify our assumption, we fed ChatGPT with a few English-translated transcripts as well as the same transcripts in their original Hebrew. We then asked ChatGPT to analyze both the English and Hebrew versions and compared the analyses. We found that both analyses were very similar, which allowed us to continue using the Hebrew transcripts for our analysis. Throughout, Chat used English as its language of communication.

##### 2. Feeding Prompts to Chat AI:

- Specific prompts were created based on the key themes identified in the initial analysis. The prompts were designed to elicit detailed responses from the AI tool to validate the initial findings.

##### 3. Sample Prompts Used:

- Identifying Main Reasons for Student Failure:
  - "The following text is an interview with a teacher where I ask about the reasons for students' failure. Please tell me which are the main reasons the teacher mentions. Show examples from the teacher's answers, indicating which teacher it is. You will know who the teacher is by the name with which the interview starts (e.g., T1, T2, etc.)."
- Connecting Teacher's Answers:

- "Can you show me with examples from the teacher's text how the categories you mention are connected?"

- Frequency of Keywords:

- "Using the same interview (e.g., T6), can you tell me how many times the words cognition, cognitive, emotional, and motivation are used in the text?" (counting has still not proven to successful)

- Category Relationships:

- "Using T3, can you tell me which of the main categories (cognition, emotion, motivation) goes the most with which other and when?"

- Locating Concepts:

- "Using T3, can you tell me if the teacher locates cognition, emotions, and motivation in any specific place inside or outside the students?"

- Teacher's Definitions:

- "Using T3, can you tell me if the teacher has any definitions for cognition, motivation, and emotion?"

- Discipline References:

- "Does the teacher ever make reference to the disciplines they teach? Do they ever seem to believe that the reason for the students' failure is related to the discipline being taught?"

- Overall Analysis:

- "Can you tell me what you think about the teacher's answers?"

#### 4. Engaging with the AI Tool:

- The AI tool was engaged iteratively. Initial prompts were fed to the tool, responses were analyzed, and follow-up questions were generated to dive deeper into the insights provided.



- Responses from the AI were compared against the initial analysis to identify any discrepancies, new insights, or areas requiring further exploration.

#### 5. Validation and Refinement:

- Consistency Check: The consistency of themes and findings from the initial analysis with the AI tool's responses was checked. Consistent themes were noted as validated, while any inconsistencies were flagged for further review.

- Insight Enhancement: New insights or perspectives offered by the AI tool (if and when found reliable and relevant) were incorporated into the analysis to enhance the depth and breadth of the findings.

- Clarification and Examples: Additional clarification and examples provided by the AI tool were used to bolster the existing data, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the themes.

#### Conclusion

Incorporating the chat-based AI tool into the validation process of my initial analysis provided a robust mechanism for cross-checking and refining the themes and insights derived from the interview data. This methodological approach enhanced the reliability and depth of the findings, ultimately contributing to a more comprehensive and accurate report. The AI tool's iterative engagement and detailed responses ensured that the final report was both accurate and reflective of the diverse perspectives shared by the teachers.

