

## ECOLOGICAL MODEL OF INSPIRED TEACHING AMONG EDUCATORS

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### ABSTRACT

The current study examined educators' perceptions of figures who inspired them and shaped their educational outlook. The study was conducted according to the ecological model by Bronfenbrenner (1986), a holistic model that attributes changes in human behavior to leaders' interactions and interrelations with their surroundings throughout their life. Interviews were conducted with 90 educators: school counselors, teachers, homeroom teachers, and principals. Qualitative analysis found that 72% of the educators were inspired them to engage in education and teaching by figures who were meaningful for them in their childhood. Of these, about 18% were influenced by a figure in their nuclear family and about 54% by teachers or principals. The figures who inspired educators shared several qualities: excellence, ethics, and emotional engagement. Concerning their own educational approach, about 69% of the educators emphasized shaping the student's personality, 25% emphasized shaping the student as a mature citizen, and 6% emphasized shaping the school culture. The research findings indicate the importance of integrating inspiring figures in the teacher training process, as these will cause students of teaching to internalize the meaning of the teaching experience that accompanies one throughout one's life.

**Keywords:** Ecological model, inspiration, education, leadership, teacher training

### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Inspiring Teaching

Hendriks (2020) defines inspiring teaching as practice that meets high professional standards, is socially responsible, and is meaningful for its practitioners. In his view, good work is based on excellence, ethics, and engagement (Hendriks, 2018). He distinguishes between the following types of teaching:

- Excellent teaching that can be inspiring. The proficiency, sincerity, and wisdom of professionals arouses admiration and sparks a passion to devote oneself to some type of work and excel at it. The excellent teacher explains clearly, facilitates discussions sensitively, provides supportive feedback, arouses thought, builds suspense, and produces changes that advance the lesson on both the cognitive level and the motivational level. On the cognitive level, teachers help the students understand and mediate complex contents for them. On the motivational level, they arouse in students the desire for additional learning in the discipline taught.
- Ethical teaching dedicated to the students' intellectual, emotional, and human development (Lamm, 2002). When education is responsible for the humaneness within

people, The teacher inspires, relinquishes selfish interests, is willing to devote oneself to doing good for others, arouses excitement at a life of ethical meaning, urges life that supports others who needs us, namely, for the sake of a greater purpose.

- Engaged teaching, where teachers are engaged in teaching, are enthusiastic about the contents and mediating them to the students, and stimulate students with their joy of teaching. Lamm (2000) refers to a state of teacher engagement in the students' life, where the teacher feels affection for the students. True teacher affection does not accept the students as is. It desires to educate and change them. In this case, the students expect this affection of the teacher and want the teacher to believe in them and make demands of them.

## 1.2 Motivations for Choosing a Career in Education and Teaching

Extrinsic and intrinsic motivations for students' choice of a career in education and teaching are distinct (Geoghegan, 2023). Intrinsic motivations are related to fundamental features of the education and teaching profession and have been found to be the most significant motivational causes of students' choice. In contrast, extrinsic motivations are related to utilitarian aims that are external to the education and teaching profession, such as material rewards, salary, working conditions, and the teacher's welfare, as well as social rewards such as social recognition of teachers' professional status and autonomy. Various researchers (Fray & Gore, 2018) note that students' professional motivation to engage in the profession of education and teaching is based on intrinsic motivations. These motivations are defined as elements perceived by the individual as generating utility originating from the aims of teaching and its fundamental qualities, and perceived by future teachers as consistent with their skills and personality.

Motivations for choosing a career in education and teaching are also related to identification with educational figures and significant teachers who serve as role models, as well as teachers imprinted on one's memory as destructive figures, who arouse a desire to engage in education and teaching in order to avoid resembling them (Butler, 2017). To explain the primary motivation for primary motivation for engaging in the profession of education and teaching, Richardson and Watt (2014) suggested the expectancy-value approach, based on the recognition that a certain type of behavior is good and worthy of being embraced, even if it does not involve extrinsic or intrinsic rewards or is not the outcome of a moral demand. The expectancy-value approach presents one with an internal demand or at least a recommendation to endorse a certain manner of behavior because it is worthy and not because it is lucrative. In addition, there is the individual's need for self-realization and self-fulfillment, which heads the needs hierarchy devised by Maslow (1970), who argues that individuals tend to choose a career in which they believe they can fulfill themselves most significantly and in which they expect that their unique skills will be manifested.

## 1.3 The Theory of Social Learning and Attachment

According to the theory of social learning put forth by Bandura and Walters (1977), most of our behaviors are learned by observing and emulating others rather than from our own personal experience. Social learning is not a passive or technical process but rather an active process that involves the cognitive action of drawing conclusions. We mimic the behaviors of other people around us once we arrive at the understanding that these behaviors lead to positive

results. We all use models in our life for the purpose of learning and we all serve as role models for other people.

Gross et al. (2017) noted that when children feel that they can approach an adult in times of difficulty and know that this adult will supply an effective, sensitive response, they feel protected and are able to explore and learn their physical and social environment. Mak et al. (2018), who studied the quality of children's relationships with significant adults, found that these relationships are internalized and constitute a cognitive map used by the child as a tool for interpreting and understanding social situations encountered in later stages of life. Moreover, children's secure relationships with their parents predict pro-social behavior and more harmonious relations with the peer group, as well as more attentive and engaged behavior at school.

In contrast, Ebbert et al. (2019) claimed that children who feel that adults disregard their difficulties or fail to provide them a suitable solution find it difficult to utilize adults as a source of support. Children form emotional relations with various significant adults, who give them security on different levels and in different contexts. The primary significant figures are of course the parents, but children also see other adults who take part in raising them (such as grandparents) as significant figures who provide security and protection.

In modern western society, as most children spend many hours in educational settings, teachers too constitute significant attachment figures whom the child approaches when in a predicament. Having a significant attachment figure at school indicates to the child know that there is an available adult who will provide support and try to help (Hagenauer et al., 2015). Teachers' sensitivity is defined as awareness of students' academic and emotional needs. Hence, sensitive teachers consistently provide consolation, comfort, and encouragement. They are aware of the student's possible emotional problems and difficulties and notice a lack of comprehension and academic difficulties. When teachers are sensitive, students feel comfortable seeking their support and guidance, participate in class freely, and are not concerned about making mistakes while learning. A significant emotional relationship with the teacher can also be a source of protection for children who are at potential risk, as in the case of children from a low socioeconomic background, children who start school with relatively low readiness, or children with emotional or cognitive adjustment difficulties. Pakarinen et al. (2020) claimed that the teacher-student relationship continues to be significant in the advanced grades as well, particularly in the transition from elementary to junior high school. This transition places many students at risk of a decline in their academic achievements and in their school engagement and a rise in their anti-social behavior. Moreover, those who see the homeroom teacher or subject teacher as an attachment figure report more engagement in school and better achievements than others. Liu et al. (2015) added that a secure student-teacher relationship can allow the teacher to be more involved in students' life and help them with present and future dilemmas.

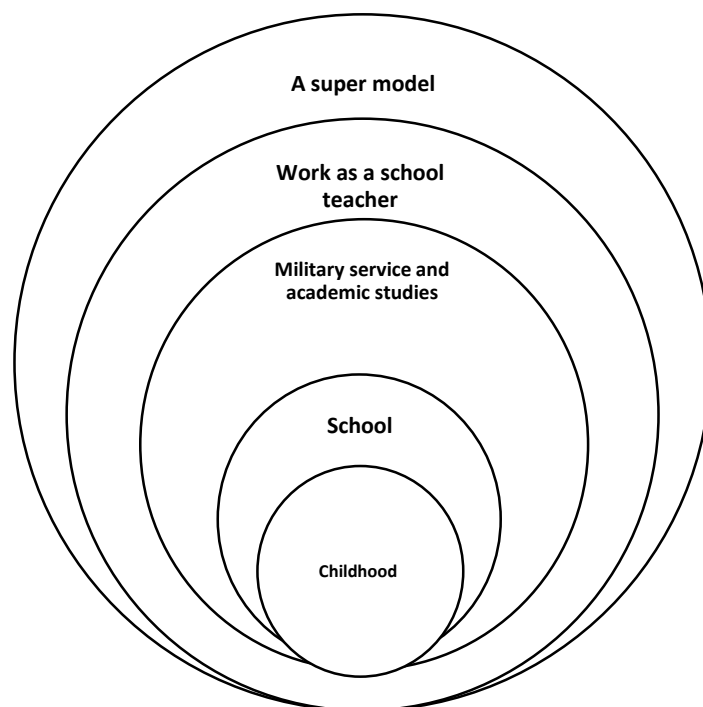
## 2.0 THE ECOLOGICAL MODEL

Bronfenbrenner (1986) developed the ecological model, which focuses on the developing individual, the individual's environment, and the interrelations between the two. A basic premise of this model is that all human activity occurs in a complex and dynamic sociocultural context. Ecological transitions have developmental importance deriving from the fact that they

nearly always involve a role change. Roles have the power to change attitude to people. The model distinguishes between five hierarchical levels of the environment:

1. **Microsystem** –the level closest to the child, the nuclear family in which the child is raised, which in turn directly affects the child’s development.
2. **Mesosystem** –the interrelations between the student and teachers at school. The set of relations on this level affect the student’s development through interactions with the staff in the education system.
3. **Ecosystem** – systems that have an impact on the adolescent. This system is comprised of cultural values, norms and laws, during military service and academic studies.
4. **Macrosystem** –the culture and ideology of society at large, encompassing the school principals and teacher’s place of residence and employment.
5. **Chronosystem** – the global environmental events throughout life that affect the teacher, such as global model leadership.

**Figure 1: The Ecological Model**



### 2.1 The Ecological Impact on Students’ Choice of Career

As perceived by Bronfenbrenner (1986), the microsystem is a system relates to the level closest to the child, the systems in which she was raised, which in turn directly affect her development. Children see their parents as the first and most influential role model in their life. Howard et al. (2015) contend that these close relationships may affect children’s career choices and ambitions. When children have parents who are educators, they are exposed to a unique set of influences and experiences that may shape their perceptions of education and teaching.

When parents are schoolteachers, children may follow in their footsteps and become teachers themselves for various reasons: Growing up in a home with teacher-parents exposes children

to the world of education from a young age; They are familiar with the routine, challenges, and rewards of the profession, a familiarity that makes it a natural and convenient choice for them. When the parents are enthusiastic and dedicated teachers who love their work, children may witness the fulfillment and satisfaction that teaching can provide through joint experiences, discussions about education, and even visits to the classroom. The positive qualities, values, and influence displayed by their teacher-parents may strongly inspire them to choose teaching as a meaningful and satisfying career (Verschueren, 2020). Children who observe their parents positively impacting their students' lives may be motivated to contribute to society in a similar way. They see the potential of having a significant impact on another person by teaching compassion, empathy, patience, and commitment to lifelong learning, and this can be a reason to choose a future career in teaching. Children may feel pride in their parents' profession and this pride can be a motivating factor in their own career choice.

According to Bronfenbrenner (1986), the mesosystem is the system formed from the interrelations between students and teachers in school. Researchers have noted that 'good teaching' is a practice that meets high professional standards, and is socially responsible and meaningful for the practitioners (Devine et al., 2013). Celik (2017) claimed that excellent teachers arouse inspiration and passion due to their excellence, ethics, and engagement. Inspiring teachers are experts in their domain. They convey enthusiasm and nurture positive relations with students. They are flexible, reflective, and adapt to their practices, as well as producing purposeful and meaningful learning for their students. They also help the students discover where their skills can be integrated with their passions, promote a safe and stimulating climate in the classroom, motivate clear and positive class management, develop cooperation, and bring innovation to the classroom. According to Celik and Yildiz (2017), the excellent teacher explains clearly, facilitates discussions sensitively, provides supportive feedback, and arouses thought. Teachers bring to the classroom scholastic knowledge and themselves as individuals who care for the students' well-being. Ben-Gal et al. (2021) claimed that children's direct interrelations with their teachers are significant in three aspects: (a) the intrapersonal aspect: Studies show that teacher-student relations enhance the child's self-esteem; (b) the social aspect: Support for children and their guidance regarding peer relations lead to more optimal conduct in the social sphere; and (c) the scholastic aspect, manifested in the child's enlistment in tasks within the school.

Grissom et al. (2021) stress that the students identify the humane side of the teacher or principal. Teacher-student connections serve emotional, behavioral, and academic aims. The teacher affords the students an open channel of communication, where they can express their inner world, as well as share personal, complex, and frustrating experiences. Qardaku (2019) adds that the teacher, as one who leads the learning, should strongly emphasize forming a meaningful personal relationship with the students. The teacher-student relationship also enhance students' sense of belonging, which, in turn, affects students' physical, emotional, and social development. In addition, students – who feel a sense of belonging to the school – develop positive attitudes to it and to their peers. They increase their engagement in learning and in the various activities involved in their studies. In fact, their social behavior and compliance with school norms improves. In addition, their problems decrease and their academic achievements improve (Orlan, 2018). The nature of the relationship and its impact are dependent on the teacher and students (Weinberger & Bakshi-Brosh, 2013).



Special and inspiring schoolteachers can have a deep continuous impact on students' choice of career, particularly on their choice to become teachers. Bergmark et al. (2018) note that excellent teachers form strong personal relations with their students and demonstrate real concern for their well-being, academic growth, and personal development. These relations can instill in students a sense of trust and motivation to emulate their teachers, their 'mentors.' Excellent teachers use creative and innovative teaching methods that arouse students' interest and encourage their engagement in the learning process. In addition, these teachers provide individual support and adapted guidance to meet the student's needs. They form a safe and supportive environment in class, where students feel appreciated and respected and thus, in the future, the students will strive to form similar environments for their own students to ensure their emotional well-being while learning (Qardaku, 2019). In addition, excellent teachers' enthusiastic attitude to the profession of education and teaching and their dedication to nurturing love for learning might stimulate their students to wish to share this passion with their own future students.

Lavy and Naama-Ghanayim (2020) argue that the nature of teacher-student attachment has a considerable impact on students' self-perception and on their developing self-image. The formation of one's self-image is related to how students perceive and interpret how they are viewed by significant figures in their life. Seeing themselves through their teacher's eyes, students can experience themselves as having value. Personal teacher-student discussions on topics beyond academic achievements show students different ways of building self-esteem irrespective of academic success (Orlan, 2018). Therefore, students' need a teacher who is an attachment figure throughout their years of schooling. This relationship becomes more crucial from grades 7-8 and onward, during the transition between childhood and adulthood. In this period students make important decisions that will affect the future course of their life. They undergo psychological upheavals, various crises, and more complex situations than those encountered in childhood. They also begin to be much more aware of their ordeals and of events in their surroundings, and it therefore becomes more important to talk to them and help them analyze what they are going through (Orlan, 2018).

According to Bronfenbrenner (1986), the ecosystem is a system comprised of cultural values as well as norms and laws. Throughout an adult's life, during military service and academic studies, the individual is inspired by military leaders or academic leaders and applies the same qualities when engaging in education and teaching.

Bolles and Patrizio (2016) noted that military commanders usually serve as leaders and guides for their soldiers. Through their guidance, support, and example commanders can inspire soldiers to develop leadership capabilities and a sense of responsibility. These qualities can be well translated into a teaching career, where efficient leadership and mentoring are essential. Meerits and Kivipõld (2020) added that military service often requires soldiers to adapt to changing circumstances and solve complex problems. These skills can be transferred to teaching, where educators must adapt their approach to meet students' diverse needs and find innovative solutions to educational challenges. Many people join the army out of a sense of duty and obligation to serve their country. Similarly, teaching is a service-oriented profession that includes a positive impact on students' life and contribution to society.

Chamo and Ben-Yosef Azulay (2017) noted that there is indeed a common element shared by the professional identity of commanders in military organizations and teachers in the field of education. Education is perceived as an inseparable part of the commander's role within the army's organizational framework. Accordingly, the training of leading commanders includes educational goals, which include reinforcing a sense of belonging and commitment to the organization; developing self-awareness, social sensitivity, and concern for human dignity; special attention to disadvantaged groups; establishing personal connections and an optimal educational climate; demonstrating expertise, and imparting norms and values. Chamo and Ben-Yosef Azulay (2017) emphasized the similarity between the educational field and the military field in the three ideological respects: (a) socialization, (b) acculturation (imparting values and behavior norms); and (c) individualization (education focusing on individuals and their needs).

Main et al. (2019) claimed that military leaders are skilled in planning and implementing strategies and school principals are inspired by them to create detailed programs for developing curricula and evaluating students and to display initiatives for improving the school. Military leaders advocate order and discipline. Principals and teachers can use school procedures to implement orderly routines and create a focused and organized learning environment. Clear, efficient, and concise communication is very important for efficient activity, so principals and teachers inspired by the military approach can ensure that instructions, expectations, and feedback are conveyed efficiently to all stakeholders within the educational community. They are more open to adapting their teaching strategies based on students' needs. Therefore, leaders and teachers inspired by military leadership may encourage collaboration among the staff and cultivate a sense of fraternity and shared goals (Chamo & Ben-Yosef Azulay, 2017). Moreover, principals emphasize the importance of personal responsibility among teachers and students and ensure accountability for one's own roles and tasks (Ilaiyan et al., 2007).

Researchers of the military domain (Fray & Gore, 2018) noted that military leaders usually lead through personal and professional example and thus demonstrate the behaviors and qualities they expect of their subordinates. In the educational context, military leaders may serve as dedicated figures with integrity who work hard for their teachers and students. They are able prepared to manage unexpected situations such as emergencies or conflicts, while minimizing disruptions of the learning environment. Military organizations give preference to continuous training and improvement. Educational leaders inspired by this may stress professional development for teachers and encourage them to constantly improve their teaching capabilities. Principals who are inspired by a military model may encourage resilience and persistence among teachers and students, and facilitate the importance of resilience, growth, and the ability to overcome obstacles (Ben Shalom, 2015).

Williams and Williams (2011) stated that effective university lecturers often display enthusiasm and a passion for the topic of their research. This enthusiasm can stimulate a similar passion among the students and motivate them to share this excitement with the young generations as schoolteachers, and therefore these lecturers are inspiring. They use fascinating and innovative teaching methods that students may wish to reconstruct in their own teaching career. Outstanding lecturers display a high level of expertise in their field, which may motivate students to continue towards a career in teaching to share their knowledge and insights with others. Lecturers demonstrate to students how education can change one's life and opens doors

to new opportunities, which may inspire students to become educators themselves and influence the lives of the next generations.

According to Bronfenbrenner (1986), the macrosystem is a system the culture and ideology of society, as reflected in the teacher's current work environment. It is comprised of the policy and laws of the organization. Teachers' workplace is the school, where they interact with principals and with inspiring educators. Of the various roles in the educational organization, the role of principal is considered the most significant for the organization's success and operation and some see him as the heart of the school (Oplatka, 2010). At present, the role of the school principal is a systemic role and it features a high degree of uncertainty, instability, constant attention to thousands of single events that potentially involve ethical dilemmas. The principal operates under nonlinear management conditions, which include a dynamic environment, a weak connection between the components of the management structure, multiple and contradictory aims, incomprehensible tasks, multiple possible solutions for each problem, results that are not easily measurable, untested and unproven work procedures, unpredictable or inestimable educational results and unclear division of authority. Therefore, successful principals have personality traits such as persistence, empathy, patience, cognitive flexibility, creativity, openness, accessibility, compassion, honesty, transparency, integrity, consistency, decisiveness, daring, and awareness of others and their situation. In addition, successful principals were found to be motivated by personal, ethical, and educational values (Smith & Squires, 2016) and by a sense of institutional mission and educational vision for the success of the school. These principals are capable of manifesting their values clearly in the school context, and their leadership is attentive, learning-focused, and decentralized. Principals assume responsibility for mediating external dictates and adapt the application of these dictates to the school's vision and aims.

An inspiring principal stimulates the sense of a common goal and passion among teachers. Teachers who see their principal as deeply committed to the educational task and to the school's values are motivated to make their best efforts in the classroom. They engage in continuous professional development, for example by studying for advanced degrees to improve their teaching skills and techniques (Ridwan, 2021). An inspiring principal will nurture a collaborative culture among the teachers. When teachers respect and admire their principal's leadership they are more inclined to work together, share ideas, and collaborate on projects that benefit the entire school community. They feel supported and appreciated, as the principal leads them to a healthy and harmonious work environment in the school, one with efficient communication. When teachers observe their principal embracing new educational trends and strategies, they are more open to try these in their own classrooms (Daş et al., 2022).

When teachers admire their principal, this admiration creates a foundation of trust that reinforces cooperation in the entire school community. Teachers who strive to resemble their principal will develop a strong sense of professional identity. They will view themselves not only as educators but rather also as leaders who can have a positive influence on their students and colleagues (Muali et al., 2022). In the long term, they tend to remain more committed to their role at the schools where they work. This stability can contribute to the overall consistency and growth of the school community.



According to Bronfenbrenner (1986), a chronosystem is a system of environmental or global events that occur throughout one's life and shape one's personality, roles, and profession. In the context of the current study, these events involve global role models whose actions affected the country, society, nation, legacy, culture, environment, and the world. People who are exemplary figures with accomplishments and outstanding conduct in different domains who left a mark on their nation's history, and on future generations. These figures are goal-focused, visionaries, role models, and admired personalities. They are willing to invest extensive efforts and even to devote their life to the good of society. In their actions, exemplary figures represent many values, especially love of humankind, the nation, and the land; responsibility; helping and giving to others; charity; benevolence; social justice; initiative; and leadership. The values that guide their actions constitute standards of social behavior. Principals inspired by them may display willingness to embrace new educational approaches, technologies, and teaching methods. They may encourage teachers to think creatively and to be open to change, to educating, and to improving society. Educators inspired by them prioritize the school's educational designation and emphasize its role in shaping future generations. Educators affected by them may develop and plan a vision for their school's future and evoke a desire in teachers and students to work towards achieving shared aims. Educators behave and operate ethically, for instance they focus on creating a containing environment that respects different backgrounds and cultures.

Principals inspired by exemplary figures may act to cultivate a cooperative culture between teachers, students, parents, and the community. They may encourage partnerships and teamwork to achieve educational excellence. They are resilient when dealing with difficult situations, advocate essential changes and overcoming obstacles. Since exemplary figures often empower others to become leaders in their own right, principals who follow them may empower teachers to assume leadership roles, encourage student leadership initiatives, and promote professional development. These role models created a continuous legacy that continues to influence society. The following are examples of exemplary historical figures.

Janusz Korczak was a Jewish-Polish pediatrician, educator, and author. He is known primarily for his pioneering work in the field of child psychology and for his activity on behalf of children's rights (Dorot & Davidovich, 2021). Korczak's commitment to children's well-being and rights inspires educators to prioritize their students' emotional and developmental needs. His emphasis on addressing children with respect stimulates teachers to create a nurturing and supportive learning environment (Shner, 2018). Korczak's indefatigable efforts and the strong stand he took throughout his life with the aim of increasing the good and reducing the evil in the world, are an inspirational example that offers principals hope of potential success.

Theodor Herzl was a visionary and the father of modern political Zionism. Herzl's determination and dedication to his vision can urge teachers to instill in their students the importance of a dream or goal and to work vigorously to achieve it. In his life, Herzl made a great impression on everyone who met him, and after his death his figure was further exalted and became a legend (Yahel, 2022). He displayed a combination of a chivalrous and royal appearance with political leadership and deep idealism. He symbolizes the idea of the rebirth of the Jewish nation and instigated a new period in the history of the Jewish people. Herzl's Zionist vision took its inspiration from secular ideals reflecting an open, pluralistic society.

David Ben-Gurion was Israel's first prime minister and played a central role in Israel's establishment and development. His leadership, resilience, and commitment to the survival of the Jewish state can be a source of inspiration for teachers. Teachers can utilize him as a role model and encourage students to assume leadership roles (Bareli & Katz, 2008). His main aim was to facilitate national unity and to realize moral norms, fulfill ideals, and understand the historical context of significant events, as well as to shape society under human laws of ethics and justice.

## **2.2 Shaping the Vision of Educators and Teachers**

An educational vision begins with a personal dream of one who seeks to correct the world, and the expectation is that it will be realized (Holosko et al., 2015). The dream can relate to students, the school, the community, or even the personal place and mission of the dreamer; to realize it the dream must be translated into a concrete vision that portrays a living scenario of the desired future. A vision is a central component of leadership: It is a compass that directs a leader to find the path led and that is to be realized; it outlines the course of the leader and of each member of the organization who follows the leader. An organizational vision allows each member of the organization to connect his or her desires, personal identity, and development plans to the aims of the organization and future directions of development. It is the foundation for enlisting commitment and meaning in the organization.

The educational vision is an image of the organization's optimal future or a well-defined set of ideal goals that the leader wants the organization to achieve in the future. A well-structured vision creates tension and highlights the gap between the actual situation and the ideal situation that members of the organization try to reduce through their collaborative work (Pensieri, 2019). According to Kurland et al. (2010), a shared educational vision unifies and combines the beliefs of the school team regarding the preferred goals, methods, and organizational climate, which establish behavioral norms in the school. The school vision stresses the interests of the learners and is grounded in a commitment to high professional standards of teaching practice. The principal and their leadership play an important role in crafting an educational vision. Leithwood et al. (2021) argued that a principal's leadership and educational vision help create a consensus among the teachers regarding the norms, values, and beliefs that are related to the continuous improvement in their work with their students. In this respect, the school vision is strongly connected to the school's successful and effective functioning.

## **3.0 RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

1. Which figures and qualities inspire educators at present, consistent with the ecological model?
2. What is the focus of educators' vision at present? Do their visions focus on the students, the school culture, or the shaping of future graduates?

## **4.0 MATERIALS AND METHODS**

The current study used a semi-structured questionnaire and interviews with 90 educators who work in schools in Israel: teachers, homeroom teachers, school counselors, school principals, and one supervisor. Of these, 64 were women and 26 men. Their mean age was 43.9 years and their mean experience in their current school was 20.7 years. Most educators (71%) had a

master's degree, 20% had a bachelor's degree, and 9% had a PhD. In addition, 43.3% of the educators taught or worked in high school, 32% in elementary school, and 25.5% in a junior high school. The educators were from different parts of Israel: 22.2% taught or worked in the Tel Aviv area, 17.7% in the Judea and Samaria area, 16.6% in the central area, 15.5% in the southern area, and 14.4% in the Jerusalem area.

## 5.0 RESULTS

The first research question examined which figures and qualities that inspired the participants, consistent with the ecological model. Table 1 presents the time period, the role of the educational figure, and his or her unique qualities, all consistent with the ecological model.

**Figure 1: The Ecological Model**

Inspiring figure	N	%	Excerpts from Educator's Reports
<b>Microsystem: Childhood home</b>			
Father	5	5.5	My father was an educator. I heard stories from students who met him and studied with him, who spoke of how much they admire him despite the passing time. I absorbed his approach to his students, and his endless giving and devotion. For instance, my father would regularly wake up one of his students to help him get to school and to this day the student remembers this and thanks him for not giving up on him.
Mother	11	12.2	My mother was a teacher and a principal. She displayed total devotion and loved each and every student as if they were her own. My mother was an amazing person who instilled in all her children a love of education.
<b>Mesosystem: Studies in the educational system</b>			
Homeroom teacher	18	20.0	My eighth grade teacher made a great impression on me. I felt how much she loved me and how much she cared about me. She was attentive to me with regard to studies and my sensitive family situation. I strive to be like her with my students, she was an anchor and a meaningful figure for me.
My teachers	13	14.4	An English teacher who noticed that my problems were not merely the result of pressure and anxiety, which is what everyone thought, but rather to a severe attention problem and dyslexia. She saw that there was a gap between my good speaking skills in English and my exam results... so she fought for me.
School sub-leadership	8	8.8	The teacher helped me learn what to avoid in class and how not to behave toward students. The math teacher in my high school who ridiculed me in front of the entire class. He told me to come to the board to solve an exercise. When I had finished he said: Your work is

			terrible, you will come to school during the vacation because you have no chance of passing the exams.
My principals	5	5.5	The school principal who founded my school. She made no compromises when it came to quality, she made demands of herself and of the children. She put all her energy and her entire life into her work. A very dear woman whose impact on the school climate and on its spirit remained evident many years after her departure.
The head of the yeshiva	5	5.5	The rabbi, the head of the yeshiva. I learned from him how much power and influence the principal has in an educational institution, and how much responsibility this role encompasses, both towards the students and towards the parents. A good principal should know how to empower the parents, allow the parents to deliberate with him on issues concerning their child's education, and to balance between the points of the triangle: parents, student, and school.
<b>Ecosystem: Studies in academia/military service</b>			
Army commander	2	2.2	I was a soldier-teacher who worked with disadvantaged boys. My commander was a figure who influenced me. I saw how the soldiers listened to her and respected her and were also connected to her as a friend.
Period of academic studies	5	5.5	A pedagogic instructor in my master's program in school counseling. The lesson I learned from her is to examine things nonjudgmentally, with an open mind. She managed to see our souls. She taught us a very true lesson, that there is no single pattern of school counselor.
<b>Macrosystem: Work in a school</b>			
Principals	7	7.5	The principal of the junior high where I worked, who to this day is a source of inspiration for me, particularly for her relations with the teachers and students. She strengthened my desire to be a principal and to invest in self-development. Her personality was highly liked by many people at the school where we worked and elsewhere.
Colleagues	3	3.3	A wonderful teacher on the team. Full of giving. In my early years at the school, she supported me, taught me, and gave me a lot. She helped me appreciate my role on the team and taught me learning methods for early education. A pleasant, ethical smart, sensitive women with a sense of inner calm. She had the ability to touch every child personally. She displayed sensitivity and empathy to each of her students, all in a charming manner.

Students	1	1.1	The students themselves are very influential - they teach me and inspire me.
Chronosystem: Adulthood			
Top leadership	7	8.5	Janusz Korczak, Miriam Peretz, David Ben-Gurion, Herzl, Yoram Harpaz (a well-known educator), David Ben-Gurion (his leadership and ability to lead many processes against all odds).
Total	90	100	

Table 1 indicates that, according for 17.7% of the educators, their educational inspiration was shaped during their childhood (microsystem). In addition, 54.2% of the educators were influenced during their school years (mesosystem), where students maintain relations with teachers, the principal, the school counselor, and the homeroom teacher. Moreover, 7.7% of the educators were influenced during their period of academic studies and military service (ecosystem). Of all educators, 12.1% were influenced by colleagues, principals, and students when working in the educational system (macrosystem), and 7.8% contended that their educational inspiration was shaped by historical role models who were top leaders (chronosystem). In summary, about 72% of the educators were influenced by significant figures during their childhood.

The second research question examined the focus of the educators’ current vision. Does their vision focus on the school climate and culture, the students, or the future graduates? Table 2 summarizes educators’ visions.

**Table 2: Educators’ Visions**

Focus of the vision	%	Focus of the educator’s vision
The school climate and culture	6.5%	The school aspires to be a leader in the region in pedagogic innovation, in technology, the arts, and science, and be a school that teaches students to uphold values of love of the homeland, respect for others, and striving for academic and social excellence.
The students	69.0%	To care for students’ psychological, emotional, social, and finally academic well-being: to love them, contain them, hug them, and set boundaries for them.
The graduates and future citizens	24.5%	To give all students a hope of self-realization, the ability to do things, and not be invisible. Every person has a place in this world and they too can develop themselves and realize their hopes and dreams at some stage in their lives.
Total	100%	

Table 2 shows that the personal vision of 69.0% of educators focuses on the treatment of students, the vision of 24.5% of educators focuses on the graduates and future citizens, and the vision of only 6.5% of educators focuses on the school culture and climate.



## 6.0 DISCUSSION

We have good memories of our ‘teachers for life’ as formative and empowering educational figures, who typically are endowed with a rare combination of four pedagogic traits: empathic concern for the students’ well-being and dignity, good teaching skills that facilitate significant learning, they set a personal example through their conduct, and constitute a fertile source of enrichment and inspiration. Gardner et al. (2001) define ‘good work’ as work that meets a high professional standard, reflects social responsibility, and is significant for the individual performing the work. In good teaching, there are three aspects of teaching that have the potential to inspire students: the teacher’s professionalism, humaneness, and unique personality.

Martin Buber’s famous saying that teaching itself does not educate; it is the teacher who educates (1963) embodies the view that, in the educational domain, the individual and their work are inseparable. A separation may be possible in other crafts and arts, such as among painters or composers or even among professionals such as engineers and their work products. Educators influence others through their personality and human intensity as much as, and maybe even more, than through their work and teaching. In addition, formulated at the conclusion of a lengthy and intricate debate on the ideological logic of various educational outlooks, Adar (1963) argued that teachers are good; they are better than their teaching.

The ecological model relates to five hierarchic levels of one’s lived environment: the first level is childhood (microsystem), where parent-child relations are of primary significance. The second level is the period of schooling (mesosystem), where students are involved in relationships with teachers, the principal, the school counselor, and the homeroom teacher. The third level is the period of academic studies and military service (ecosystem). The fourth level is the workplace at the school, which influences staff members, principals, and students (macrosystem). The fifth level is educational inspiration shaped by top leaders who are historical role models (chronosystem).

The first research question examined the figures and qualities that inspired educators, consistent with the ecological model. The findings indicated that the educational inspiration of 17.7% of the educators was shaped during their childhood (microsystem). In addition, 54.2% of the educators were influenced during their studies in the educational system (mesosystem), where students are involved in relationships with teachers, the principal, the school counselor, and the homeroom teacher. 7.7% of the educators were influenced during their period of academic studies and military service (ecosystem), and 12.1% of the educators were influenced by colleagues and principals during their period of employment and their work in the educational system (macrosystem). The educational inspiration of 7.8% of the educators was shaped by leaders who are historical role models (chronosystem). In summary, about 72% of the educators were influenced by a significant figure in their childhood (before age 18).

The second research question examined educators’ current vision. Does their vision focus on the school culture, the student, or the future graduate? The personal vision of 69% of the educators focuses on the students, 24.5% on graduates and future citizens, and the vision of only 6.5% of educators focused on school culture and climate.

All five systems comprising the ecological circle with which the educator has a mutual relationship, from childhood to adulthood, were found to influence the educators and their educational vision. However, the microsystem and mesosystem levels were found to have a greater impact than the three other systems. Seventy-two percent of educators in our study were influenced in childhood by educators who were close family members such as grandparents or parents, and by educators at their school. The educational vision of 69% focused on students' personal-emotional growth, and to a lesser degree on students' academic achievements.

The considerable impact of former teachers on the present development of teachers and educators at school, which exceeded the effect of parents, commanders, academic lecturers, school principals, and exemplary figures, can be attributed to several factors:

- **Encouragement, support, proximity, and daily interaction:** In their formative years, students usually spend a significant amount of time with their teachers at school daily. This lengthy and close interaction allows the teachers to have a more direct and immediate influence on their students' lives than do parents, who may have other professional commitments. Teachers are known for providing encouragement and support to students, while cultivating a positive study environment. Their words of encouragement can increase students' confidence and motivation.
- **Pedagogical role:** Teachers were trained specifically in pedagogy, and they have primary responsibility for imparting knowledge and values to their students. This pedagogical role usually includes nurturing and guiding students, a role that gives them a natural ability to influence students' educational and personal development.
- **Diverse perspectives:** Parents fulfill an essential role in raising the child and may offer a holistic perspective on life and values. Teachers, in contrast, focus on academic and personal growth in an educational context. Therefore, students might perceive their teachers as primary influencing forces on topics related to education and career choice.
- **Time of influence:** During childhood and adolescence, students are more readily influenced and open to external influences. As authority figures in the educational environment, teachers can have a continuous impact on their students' aspirations, interests, and values in this critical period.
- **Specialization and expertise:** Parents may have expertise in areas other than education, which may not correspond with their children's fields of interest or career trajectories. In contrast, teachers are usually experts in their discipline or subject, which makes them better able to guide students in these fields.
- **Diversifying role models:** While parents are undoubtedly important role models, students often encounter many teachers with different teaching styles and varied backgrounds and experiences along their academic journey. This exposure to diverse role models can shape students' perspectives and aims.
- **Joint experiences:** Teachers and students share joint experiences in the school environment. These joint experiences, such as interactions in class, academic challenges, and after-school activities, can form strong connections and strengthen teacher-student relations.
- **Accessible guidance:** Teachers are usually more accessible than other people in their students' lives to provide guidance and support during the school year. They can provide prompt feedback, answer questions, and offer advice related to academic courses and occupations, and thus become a readily available source of support.

- Stages of development: During their childhood and adolescence, students undergo critical stages of cognitive, emotional, and social development. Teachers are well positioned to understand and support students in these stages of development and to shape their views and behaviors. When a teacher identifies and celebrates a student's achievements or skills, this can significantly affect the student's sense of self-value and motivation.
- Structure of the educational system and future direction: The structure of the educational system often situates teachers in a more direct teaching role, while parents may have wider responsibility beyond academia. As a result, teachers are naturally in charge of guiding students in educational matters. Teachers can expose students to different career trajectories and opportunities within their discipline. This exposure can be important for shaping students' fields of interest and for their choice of a future career.

In summary, educators play an extremely significant role as they are adults who spend a relatively lengthy amount of time with the adolescents, experience their world, and can thus understand them better than others. If they know how to conduct themselves with the adolescents sensitively, understand their needs, provide them with assistance when necessary, and lead them towards the goals they set, teachers will gain the adolescents' trust and a desire to embrace the teacher's own values and educational path, and will thus have the privilege of having a formative effect on their students' identity. The research results indicate the need for and importance of developing leadership among teachers as early as the student-teacher stage, due to their huge potential for influencing their students in general, and especially students at the identity formation stage. Teachers' influence will leave its mark on students' future life as well. Recognizing the potential to affect a positive change in society through education can motivate the student to join the teaching profession. In fact, the teachers' special qualities, teaching methods, and personal relationships, probably help inspire students to become schoolteachers, as students aspire to reconstruct the positive experiences and influences, they received throughout their years at school. The educational vision of some 70% of educators in our study had a student-centered focus rather than a focus on the school or students' professional future. Findings of the study support the argument that the role of the leadership is to generate more leaders rather than followers (Maxwell, 2013).

Most educators in our study received their educational inspiration from exemplary figures in childhood and during school years. Moreover, the personal vision of most principals focuses on the students and their personal capabilities.

## **Declaration of Interest Statement**

The authors report there are no competing interests to declare.

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