

## Chapter 1

# Reading Freud Today for the Destiny of Education

While no one can predict the future of education, touches of its presence in our hopes and fears can be just as difficult to grasp, since education is subject to mistiming. Education, after all, is a concept, a problem, the means to address itself, a measure of its own success and failure, a preparation, a transference neurosis, and, for each generation, an archive of ambitions, disappointments, and conflicted learning. As cultural imperative, education is also the playground for practices of and attitudes toward humane involvement, its study, and its transformation. Freud's (1925c) often quoted formulation of education and psychoanalysis as two of the impossible maddening professions (the third is that of law) gave a nod to their vulnerabilities, subject as they are, to asymmetrical relations, dependency, and the emotional world of others. Anyone who has tried to present these fields of human inquiry and practice as more than a technical function of instilling authority and specifying directives to be followed, and anyone who is interested in the professional formation of the impossible professions, is likely to question more than just how and what kind of learning can or cannot occur. These professions are also subject to the transference, to the emotional situations of communication, and to contingencies of their history. They bring their own questions as to how they affect their own imaginary. If these human professions require thinking, they are situations where the mind can be lost, dropped, misunderstood, and even denied. And how difficult it is to picture these professions as flowering from the earliest situations of infantile and group life.

Freud's on-going project of specifying why we have education at all was slow to evolve and is found in his interest in constructing a meta-psychology of learning that, he argued, was needed to better relate to the human problem of suffering, repetition, and pleasure and to instruct the future of psychoanalysis. Freud wished to create a more capacious presentation situating education in a psychoanalytic field but in so doing, the idea of education as our epistemological paradox may have fallen away from the Freudian project. We can still ask, what is it about the working through of education that captured Freud's imagination? And what happens to the psychoanalytic field when the problem of education is seen through the prisms of psychical life? (Britzman 2011).

When I discussed these questions with colleagues in the fields of education, psychology, and psychoanalysis, some were surprised that Freud had anything at all to say about education. While many knew that Freud rooted the destiny of sexuality in the affairs and imagination of the asymmetries made from relations between adults and children, their thoughts of education remained affixed to a strange combination of the needs of early life, the imagined children, their own childhood reminiscences, and the protective functions of compulsory institutions. Many forgot that when Freud's (1914a) essay "On Narcissism: An Introduction" called the baby "His Majesty the Baby," he gave a sly nod to the early influences of family narcissism as our first education (91). But in doing that, he fused education with narcissism, narcissism with omnipotence, and learning with the other. When I tried to work out some of these surprising outcomes with my colleagues, many could not consider psychoanalysis as a theory of education beyond institutional control and subject to the transference and what follows, namely expressions of uncertainty, vulnerability, love and hate, and dependency in intersubjective life. While most of Freud's technical concepts emerge from scenes of affected life and its functions such as transference, working through, and even free association, these psychical procedures seemed too far removed from education as both environmental provision that has to do with relationality and as bounded by prohibitions against touching. I was left to wonder how it has come to be that thoughts of education feel so far away from the developments of internal life and from imagination. Would it be the case that a stark censorship that limits where education and psychoanalysis meet is symptomatic of superego anxiety (the cruelest education) and the imperative of having to suffer and learn without knowing why? And if

so, was this one reason why Freud's depth psychology had to propose the invisible hand of education as one of the impossible professions?

Throughout Freud's writing, education takes on increasing significance and pressure, not only for the child who requires education but also for the adult who bears the psychical weight of presenting authority, love, knowledge, and desire, along with communicating their cultural frustrations, hatreds, and misprisions. Even in these situations, there is something unruly or self-theorizing about the human's quest to interpret their world, usually with little to go on and against all odds. Such was the case of Freud's (1905) "little sex theorist," where the child joined their wishes to the instinct to know. With this little group psychology, themes of happiness and unhappiness and love and hate became the holdouts of psychical life. Freud proposed we study the fate of affect in our trials and tribulations with the hope of translation and thinking needed for opening minds. Here is where education becomes our problem: learning depends on taking in the world with an interest in knowledge of the world of others, and those attempts to find out what the world is really like with others who have their own minds. But learning also depends on our fantasies of learning and our theories of where knowledge and people come from. Conflicts are inevitable and even needed. In these relational gestations, education presents as unfinished, incomplete, and subject to resistance, forgetting, denial, and heartbreak. The epistemological paradox is that while we have all been through an education as our childhood, we have hardly come to terms with its afterwardness in our capacity to both know and not know the self. How difficult it is to consider impressions of education never thought to be education.

Freudian theory has also provided the tactical gambit for contemporary writers to critique current psychological theories of learning that rely upon the diagnosis of deficits and preoccupations with affect regulation and anxiety disorders. For example, responding to the growing industry of the many editions of the American Psychological Association's *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* and its creep into schools, universities, hospitals, clinics, insurance agencies, popular self-diagnosis discussions of websites, social media platforms, and campaigns for mental health, Paul Verhaeghe (2004) has proposed "the impotence of epistemology" that flounders on the error of the categories of the normal and the pathological. Much earlier, Georges Canguilhem (1991) refused to split off these terms from the stream of life: "there is not in itself an *a priori*

ontological difference between a successful living form and an unsuccessful form” (31). Darian Leader’s (2011) response to the history of madness in psychiatry puts the contemporary dilemma this way: “However valid we might believe such conceptions of illness and health to be, we must surely take seriously the inner life and beliefs of each person and avoid imposing our worldview on them” (7). A case in point is Barbara Taylor’s (2014) memoir on madness. She examined the social abandonment of humane treatment that she argues must depend upon the environmental provision of safe space and holding. Each of these critiques has a foothold in psychoanalysis with education. There is the education of a profession and then the primary education where childhood finds its own diagnosis in success and failure, and feeling smart or dumb, good, or bad, normal or freakish, and loved or hated. There is the education that cares for us, the education we flee, and the one we create.

My working assumption is that Freud’s unfinished correspondence with the education of psychoanalysis, and this includes his own learning, provides a frame in which to work through our educational and psychological malaise that often comes in the form of a failure of imagination, depression, fear of indeterminacy, and an attraction to quick solutions. It is a dilemma that founds one’s sense of education and often felt as alienation and as *déjà vu*. Feelings of repetition have their roots in how each profession is affected by a psychology of education crafted while growing up and in compliance, opposition, or revolt with one’s parents and teachers (Britzman 2003; 2011; 2012). While Freud leaves us with the idea that novel practices of education might usher in an important future for psychoanalysis beyond the clinic, he also proposed on-going psychical contradictions created from trying to imagine the future of education as more than a repetition of the past lessons. The playground of education begins with Freud’s capacious formulation of incomplete psychology as ushered in by the primacy of the other, the *Nebenmensch*, someone nearby who helps. The educator’s dilemma belongs to meeting the representations of human drives while having to lean on them. And today, if the response is “too bad, no one wants the drives anymore,” we may ask, *But why?*

### From Insight to Construction

There were urgent reasons why education mattered to Freud, some of which were tied to the problem of treatment while others involved problems of transmitting psychoanalysis and its views on sexuality, upbringing,

mental life, professional training, and cultural unhappiness. Throughout his writing Freud experimented with variations of three formal models of formative and destructive education that tried to bridge the gulf between psychical reality and material reality: the Kantian Enlightenment of *Aufklärung* (or the disillusionment of superstition through dogmatic means); the romantic *Bildung* (or the bringing up of culture and life through the creation of a self with genetic means); and the adult treatment, *Nacherziehung* (or the analytic position of novel education, translated as after-education and, at times, as re-education). The model for after-education belongs to the technique of handling the transference, both negative and positive. These fields of theory and their scenes of affiliation and construction in analytic work have created new conditions for expressing the sources of intersubjective education along with critiques on the proprietary limits of consciousness.

While Freud's orientations to education tended to focus the movements from affect to intellect and then from insight to conviction, the idea of self-knowledge in our time has shifted from the mastery of expertise to a capacity to tolerate the pain of incompleteness or frustration that involves us all in the contemporary work of historical reparation and learning to live. The new models oriented by Freudian relationality and pedagogical transitions are occasions to rethink objects of affiliation and scenes of politics, and, with deconstruction, turn toward internal critiques of what psychoanalytic education can do for those undergoing its training (Parker 2019). There is also a great interest in the study of contradictions as affecting the object of knowledge, the framing of the problem, and the knower's generational point of view (Smith 2023). Instead of enlightenment, the current interest is with disaffecting education and the consideration of a ruthless education, mainly led through protest and movements for social change that also now have the responsibility to critique their own assumptions so as to affect internal and external conditions for transformation (Swartz 2019). Instead of a discovery model of things unseen but there all along, one finds novel interest in the urgencies of existence and the field of dreams, sexuality, and translations of psychical reality (Levine 2022; Scarfone 2018a; Soreanu 2018). And where psychoanalysis was initially dedicated to making the unconscious conscious, attention has turned to emotional situations of trying to affect the course of education by simply asking, *What now?*

It is, however, with Freud's first model of education that one finds psychical activity through its entangled relations to family romance, civic life, and cultural discontentment. The eighteenth-century European

Enlightenment proposed a revolution in knowledge, authority, reason, and publicity with the introduction of a speaking subject who, with proper education, may step into the wider stages of politics, think for the self, tell the truth, and obey the law (Schmidt 1996). With Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, Freud placed philosophical education into the human condition with the argument that humans are the only species that need education. Extending Kant's moral philosophy of education into the folds of psychical reality, Freud then joined natality to the problem of enlightenment with the idea that the child's helplessness and dependency on others and its need for care quickly transforms the utility of need into the desire for love, being, and the drive to know, all jubilant libidinal urges that impress sexual curiosity and the wish for how the other must meet these demands (Freud 1905). The special knowledge that reasons without much cause and that gives the self a foothold into language and thinking, Freud argued, belongs to phantasies of sexuality, to the self as other, and then, to curiosity toward what other people are like. From these radical premises that link the desire for knowledge to love and the authority of the other, Freud's first model of education developed from the studied ethical pressures of *Aufklärung*, or Enlightenment. By the mid-twentieth century, Hannah Arendt (1993) proposed the crisis of education as the problem of knowledge that involved both an ethical quest and psychological tie to the adult's responsibility to tell the truth about what life is like. Inevitably, psychology was pulled into the fray and new obstacles were made from this demand for truth. Michel Foucault's (1998) exemplary historicity treated psychology as "a cultural form . . . in which there emerged such things as confession, casuistry, dialogue, discourses, and argumentations" (249) that incite the triad of knowledge/power/pleasure. Foucault then added a new set of constraints: "Every psychology is a pedagogy, all decipherment is a therapeutics; you cannot know something without transforming" (255). At stake in enlightenment is the limit of knowledge and what transformation or learning may and may not signify. What could not be accounted for in the civic model of education was human aggression and the additional factor of human desire. How does one prepare for what is already there?

Yet the science of subjectivity, as it played out in the clinic, also meant that psychological knowledge was not transcendent. The flux of psychology involves figuring out the qualities of encounter and the challenge of understanding the understandings of others. Freud's method was also a function of learning where pathways of association were animated by the transference. Here is where the civic model takes an interper-

sonal turn, such as the one described by Harry Stack Sullivan's life history interview, where the patient takes the lead and serves as the bridge between the clinic and the world and speaks of "records of encounter" (Wake 2011, 14). What could not be accounted for in the enlightenment model of knowledge was precisely a record of encounter, or how a story of anyone becomes a self.

Freud's second model of education turned to the formation of libido and otherness. To grasp the destiny of childhood love and its infantile theories of sexuality, Freud drew from the romance of *Bildung* as educational formation made from the aesthetic conflicts of love, knowledge, beauty, and authority in the bringing up of culture and life. Here knowledge as reason emerges from its psychical impressions—the affects, representations, and drives—and carries a challenge to perception and symbolization. He placed into this intersubjective mix the contingencies of object relations, conflicts in the family romance, the return of infantile theories of sexuality and anxiety, the question of belief, certainty, and ideality, and the destruction of the Oedipal complex. *Bildung* involves an adolescent revolt in inner life and narratives of the belatedness between ignorance and self-knowledge with the difficult conflation of knowledge with guilt (Strachey 1941). The aesthetics of *Bildung* is expressed through its literary representation of the *Bildungsroman*, or the novelistic bringing up of the adolescent's suffering from the thickets of love, culture, and life to the fleeting consolations of self-knowledge as limit (Bloom 1979; Kristeva 1990, 2010; Neubauer 1992). Here we find that education is no longer a progressive march amassing the building blocks of knowledge but instead a crumbling edifice of knowledge that provokes a destructive or negative element constituted through retroaction and deferral. The subjective aspect of internalizing knowledge leaves in its wake the feeling that learning comes too late. Such regret or "if only I knew . . ." is associated with anxiety and the pathos of lost time, broken hearts, and awareness of the body's limitations. Essentially, the *Bildungsroman*, or novel education, proceeds error-by-error and Freud's literary model may have drawn from Jonathan Wolfgang van Goethe's tragic novella of adolescent love as revolt, *The Sufferings of Young Werther*.

With his interest in building a psychoanalytic movement and creating what had never existed before, Freud's third model of education linked the fate of clinicians to the public and the psychoanalytic clinic to the publication of psychoanalytic knowledge. *Nacherziehung*, or after-education, was made to distinguish the education of children from that of the

adult looking back on a childhood's education of desire. After-education became a treatment of language and thought and so a cure by narrative. The problem of reason then gave way to the desire for free association needed for the designs of rendering meaning capacious and with conviction. It is here that memory is under construction, threaded with the transference, and proceeds by way of remembering, repeating, and working through (Freud 1914b). His third model, however, contains elements of both Enlightenment—now as knowledge dedicated to free association, honesty, and truth—and of *Bildung*—transformed into a narrative that relates authority and suffering to desire. Only in his third model, however, did Freud add the question of pedagogical style that he supposed was instructed by a psychology of transference-love and resistance. The sticky concept of resistance, however, is perhaps the most misunderstood idea in psychoanalysis, for the question is, *What is resisted?* Resistance comes in many forms: transference, ego, love, and resistance to resistance. But it was only the third model of after-education that allowed Freud to open pedagogy to the experiences of free association, meant to loosen the defense mechanisms of repression, resistance, and splitting and permit the wondering mind its capacity to bind affect and idea into significance.

Freud's turn to education also involved imagination as the heart of the psychoanalytic situation and, in this way, leaned on his second relational model of *Bildung*. Much of what Freud had to say is unimaginable: linking education to sexual curiosity, forces of repression, and forgetting and negation; finding in education its group psychology, the erotic transference, and the aftermath of the Oedipal complex; and asking educators to confront or at least imagine the precarious problem of the reality principle as a poor substitute for the pleasure principle. In his late lectures Freud (1933) argued that the situation of education, if it is to be felt as more than a repetition of what has already happened to teachers and parents, must somehow find an approach between non-interference and frustration. "Unless this problem is entirely insoluble," Freud wrote, "an optimum must be discovered which will enable education to achieve the most and damage the least" (149). As a signifier for the clinic of human relations, the education Freud constructed cannot be extricated from the human condition of neurosis considered as an unsolvable problem of love and anxieties over its loss. Indeed, education does make us nervous. And in this sense, Freud changed the imaginary of learning from the accrual of knowledge found in his first two models to the subject's capacity for tolerating the uncertainties of life, loss, separation, and working through.



## Late Pedagogy

In one of his last, incomplete papers written in his exile in London, which carried the English title “Some Elementary Lessons in Psycho-Analysis” (1940b), Freud had in mind the difficulties with presenting psychoanalysis to “an uninstructed public” (281). But we should be wary as to whether we are ever uninstructed. Freud is most concerned with transmission as tied to reception, and this short paper thinks out loud with a note on the problem of pedagogical style, now linked to a psychology of education. Much of what he has to say mirrors his earlier series of papers on beginning psychoanalytic technique. If the topic is so unpopular, if there is resistance to resistance, how might the limits of pedagogy be recognized? Freud debates whether it is best to begin introducing psychoanalysis with what is self-evident but underappreciated, then gradually add new ideas, and finally invite the audience to contribute their understanding. We should recognize a basic pedagogy here. Freud calls this style “the genetic approach” and finds it unconvincing; learning by experience is akin to the problem of self-cure and *Bildung*, his second model. He named his other pedagogical method “dogmatic,” but knew its dangers. A dogmatic pedagogy suffers from critics, since dogma demands unconditional acceptance and ignores the nagging conflicts agonizing the weaves of learning. Elements of both pedagogical styles lean on a combination of Freud’s early models of enlightenment and *Bildung*: the genetic approach constitutes student-centered learning, whereas the dogmatic approach may be found in critical pedagogy. Yet the problem resides with the subject of psychoanalysis and Freud tells us what any pedagogy must gamble with: “Psycho-analysis has little prospect of becoming liked or popular. It is not merely that much of what it has to say offends people’s feelings. Almost as much difficulty is created by the fact that our science involves a number of hypotheses . . . which are bound to seem strange to ordinary modes of thought and which fundamentally contradict current views. But there is no help for it” (1940b, 282).

Education does gamble with “ordinary modes of thought” and these conventions do foreclose the question of why both teachers and students carry forward the old wishes for immediate gratification with wishes that learning be devoid of conflict, paradox, and contradictions. It is within the nexus of wishes and defenses that Freud treats education as a psychical entity subject to the pleasure and reality principles. He passed this other education through to its narcissistic blows, felt in the work of parenting,

in the schooling of children, in university teaching, in the psychoanalytic clinic, and in the formation of the impossible professions. Quite a bit interferes, including the asymmetrical situations that involve not following instructions. Frustration is its atmosphere since education resides in the slips of unaccountable meaning, the gap between experience and knowledge, and libidinal conflicts of group psychology. The psychological paradox is that if there is no happy education, it must still lean upon happiness and pleasure. And Freud wondered if the unconscious lifeworld (*Lebenswelt*) of education as a psychological address to pedagogy could be remembered and worked through (Laplanche 1999a, 1999b; Leader 2000). Indeed, this approach may constitute a pedagogy for otherness.

Freud's (1919) earlier discussion on psychoanalysis and the university mentions his hopes for the future of psychoanalytic education, and today, one might stretch this essay into a psychoanalytic approach to both teaching and learning beyond the clinic and the work of psychoanalyzing education. While his discussion focused on a psychoanalytic curriculum for medical schools, one might extend his comments to general education and to a general theory of learning from emotional situations made from being with others. Freud gave a key distinction as to the order of psychoanalytic learning and, in setting aside the split between genetic and dogmatic pedagogy, created a third space of culture. One may learn *about* psychoanalysis, and one may learn *from* it. The abiding learning—where conviction takes hold—belongs to the speech theatre of the psychoanalytic couple. And yet for those outside the clinic, there is still psychical reality. It may be apprehended and felt with literature, mythology, history and art, and passions for what exists and does not exist. In any event, psychical reality brings knowledge of self and other into tension with illusions, breakdowns, and cultural fictions. In this third space of culture, pedagogy and psychology become “a literary genre” (Felman 1987, 91), to be read as a case affected by the rearrangements of its own fictions. We may see here the bare elements of *Bildung* and its privileging of affect, along with aesthetic conflicts over the nature of beauty, knowledge, relationality, and truth.

### *Umwelt* Education

At the heart of Freud's psychoanalysis is a recommendation that we analyze our psychology of education from the vantage of what is forgotten

in childhood and treat its history both as a piece of current psychology and as our psychological situation. Not only does education have psychical consequences, education is itself a psychological effect of the human's need for education. And because this need for socialization confronts epistemophilia, or the drive to know and master, any education is affected by the combine of love and authority and anxieties over their loss. How difficult it can be to distinguish the structures, techniques, and imaginary of education from the affects, desires, phantasies, and wishes of those involved. But this merging of the inner and outer world may also be precisely what makes education so difficult to know and to find.

There is an emotional logic at stake in Freud's radical claim for "depth education" and it has to do with the elaborate dispersal of chains of associations and their broken links. Dispersed scenes of education animate a forgotten history of learning that has a second chance in transference via the channels of success and failure, punishments and rewards, and certainty and resistance to knowledge that generally fall between the lines of frustration and gratification. It is probably no mistake that when Freud (1914b) described "the playground of transference" he borrowed his metaphor from the schoolyard, where what does rule are games of let's pretend, role switches, accidents, cries for help, fights with enemies, hiding from others, worries over friendships, jealousy, pride, and rough-and-tumble play (154). Freud (1914c) observed these antics that occur behind the teacher's back as his schoolboy psychology. A year earlier, in "The Claims of Psycho-Analysis to Scientific Interest" (1913b), a hopeful Freud left the future of this education to educators: "Whatever we can expect in the way of prophylaxis against neurosis in the individual lies in the hands of a psychoanalytically enlightened education" (190).

Freud's early work, founded in the values of education as enlightenment, was optimistic about the relation between knowledge and understanding and teaching and learning. It may have been his most cognitive approach. His theories of the drives as border between psyche and soma, however, pressed education to its breaking point. With a measure of ambivalence, Freud's (1933) "New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis" proposed that the greatest challenge to the psychology of education emerges from what is already functioning, namely "the power of an insubordinate instinctual constitution" (149). He was referring to the mythology of the drives of Eros and Thanatos. In acknowledging the conflict between unity and destruction and the thin line between them, Freud pressed the purpose of education beyond our nature, when he

wrote, “[education] must be given another and higher aim, liberated from the prevailing demands of society” (150). This “higher aim” of freedom is also embroiled in the conflict between the immediacies of the drives in their search satisfaction and objects, and the capacity for delay from acting made from thinking, sublimation, imagination, and free association. Freud leaves us to grapple with this great unsolvable problem: that education should have a higher aim because our original aim misses the mark.

So too with the world at war where Freud penned his most stringent critiques of education. Near the end of *Civilization and its Discontents* (1930), Freud asked again about the future of care, learning, and suffering by providing an answer: “As regards the therapeutic application of our knowledge, what would be the use of the most correct analysis of social neuroses, since no one possesses authority to impose such a therapy upon the group?” (144).

The psychoanalytic models we inherit and revise for a psychology of education belong to the intimacies of the clinic, the ethic of free association, the destiny of the drives, the enigma of the unconscious, and now our unfinished return of history that will indeed challenge what any theory of learning can mean today. These humane situations may only be met with respect for the challenges of intersubjectivity, the depths of intrapsychic life, and the uncertainties of communication. As for the soft ground for ethics, if education is to become more than a repetition of what has already happened to us, we would have to ask, *Where is education now?*