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EDUCATIONAL VALUES: INTRINSIC OR EXTRINSIC
A Study of Parent Pupil Preferences

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INTRODUCTION

A perennial problem faced by teachers, administrators and educational researchers is that of improving the performance levels of high school pupils. Efforts to understand some of the factors which contribute to scholastic achievement have established correlations between performance levels and a variety of physical, emotional, psychological and cultural conditions. As well, over the last fifteen years a great deal of work has been concentrated on cultural influences upon school achievement and recently the concept of cultural difference has been found useful in predicting to differential levels of achievement. Cultural difference has been applied to differences in life styles within as well as between ethnic groups. Cultural anthropologists have drawn attention to the existence of subcultures which cut across ethnic lines and may have economic or regional origins. It is possible, for example, to speak of 'urban' vs. 'rural' culture and similarly to speak of the 'culture of poverty'.

The cultural differences observed are variations of the collectively shared values which characterize the national culture. The national culture into which one is socialized from birth provides its members with beliefs about acceptable goals. The belief system inherent in

a national culture is reflected in the music, drama, literature, religion, law, politics, commerce, in short, every aspect of social behaviour. In a modern society the belief system is more universally available principally because of the pervasive influence of the mass media.

However, despite naturally accepted cultural norms there is considerable variation in individual behaviour. Apparently between cultural norms and their behavioural manifestations there intercedes the individual and sub-cultural interpretations of social values. Attitudes or personal valuation modes may constitute the interface between the enforcement of universals and the acting out of particulars. To illustrate, the number of books in the home is known to correlate with SES and scholastic achievement level. Their presence may be the result of a mental set toward books and even though an appreciation of the value of books is part of the national culture, it is the interpretation of that value at a subcultural level which determines how much effort and interest is devoted to buying, borrowing and reading books. If this is so, then value interpretations, or evaluative styles, may be the critical determinants of subcultural differences and it should follow that alleviating some of the negative effects of cultural difference would be easier if evaluative styles were better understood.

Accordingly the present study is devoted to this end and the thrust of the argument upon which it is predicated holds that attitudes

toward education are culturally based but that cultural values are individually interpreted according to either of two valuation modes: instrumental or terminal. Attention will be devoted to determining the manner, as well as the degree, to which social objects are valued.

There is already considerable research to indicate a significant relationship between positive attitudes toward education and school achievement levels. However, there is relatively little research into the nature of valuation, or into the relationship between attitudes toward education and the established cultural norms.

Just as studies of cognitive style have gone beyond the correlation of intelligence with achievement, it is proposed that evaluative style, or mode, can go beyond the correlation of educational attitudes with achievement.

The approach to be used is in accord with the position taken by Meehan in his analysis of explanation in social science (1968). Meehan, taking a stance similar to Popper, argues for the viability of theory falsification as the most efficient route to explanation. This approach is contrary to that employed in deductive analysis and consequently does not purport to provide universally valid truths. For this reason the present study attempts only to test a theory about the way in which valuation mode affects the scholastic performance of a select set of New Zealand Fourth Form pupils. If the hypothesis holds up under the specified conditions the outcome will provide at least a rationale for

intervention in the immediate situation and the proposition that its generalizability merits test.

The presentation has been organized so that Chapter I is concerned with questions of cultural norms of value orientations. Chapter II considers the relevant research. Chapter III elaborates a research model appropriate to the empirical investigation of the nature of educational attitudes. Chapter IV describes the development of the measurement instrument and the general methodological procedures employed. Chapter V presents the findings and Chapter VI discusses the implications of the findings.