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SOCIAL EXCHANGE  
Participation in Pre-Schools

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## ABSTRACT

Pre-school roll numbers indicate that the proportion of European children who attend pre-school in New Zealand is greater than the proportion of ethnic minority group children. This thesis presents an exploratory study of some of the patterns of participation that exist within one Kindergarten. These patterns are compared with a non-participant sample which consisted of mothers from different ethnic backgrounds. In order to provide a viable framework for comparison, the study is carried out within the general context of exchange theory.

A research review of participation in education is presented at the beginning of the study. This is done in order to establish a rationale for some issues raised later in the study with regard to ethnic minority groups. As well, the research literature provides a base for examination of the research problem in the social exchange area.

Some theoretical implications of social exchange are then examined under three sections, the mechanics, commodities and dynamics of exchange. The empirical model is then presented with implications from the theory translated to the case of the Kindergarten and Playcentre.

Hypotheses are stated together with a definition of the research problem in the research design chapter. As well, the methodology including sample, interview techniques and data analysis are presented.

Results obtained from the interviews are then presented under three headings of access to information, anticipated rewards and expectation-meeting. A discussion which co-ordinates questions central to the research problem, and results and theoretical implications follows the presentation of results.

Finally, the conclusion highlights some implications from the results. These are discussed with direct relationship to Kindergartens and Playcentres.

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## INTRODUCTION

At the present time, pre-school services are somewhat underdeveloped. The need to expand them is underlined by the long waiting lists for entry and the lack of buildings for both Playcentres and Kindergartens. Although parents of pre-schoolers have in theory a certain flexibility in choice of alternative services, the growing demand for places has restricted, if not eliminated the opportunity to choose. As a consequence, both organisations will inevitably come to employ a selection device of some kind, intentional or non-intentional, thus determining who shall benefit from the service and who shall not.

Information available concerning growth patterns in Kindergartens and Playcentres indicates that a large proportion of minority group children are among those who for one reason or another are not recipients of the service. The question of whether this trend is one that is imposed, albeit unwittingly, by the organisations, or is self-imposed by parents, has important implications for the future development of pre-school education. If it is imposed by the organisation, then the manner in which this occurs needs to be identified. If it is self-imposed by non-participants, then it may be necessary to extend the range of alternatives available in the pre-school area in order to enable those who wish to participate to do so.

The question of why some mothers participate and others do not is the theme of this present study and it is to be approached by means of social exchange theory, principally because social exchange theory provides a useful means for viewing patterns of participation that already exist. Thus the study is structured to examine the nature of parent participation in pre-schools within the context of exchange theory. Further, the study is centred around the following questions fundamental to the issue:

1. How does ethnic background affect participation in pre-school organisations?
2. Is there a difference in communication patterns between participant and non-participant mothers that allows for accurate information gathering concerning participation?

3. What are the reward expectations of participant mothers in pre-school organisations?

To this end, the thesis is organised in the following way. Chapter One is a resumé of recent research which highlights some aspects pertinent to participation in education. Chapter Two is a consideration of the theoretical orientation within which the study is presented, that of social exchange. In Chapter Three, the empirical model is developed. Implications inherent in the theoretical stance for two pre-school organisations, the Kindergarten Association and the Playcentre Movement are discussed. Chapter Four serves two purposes. First issues central to the research problem are outlined and second, the research design is explicated. Results of the investigation are given in Chapter Five. The final Chapter is a discussion of the results. Discussion is presented within the framework of issues that arise from the research presented in Chapter One, the theoretical stance in Chapter Two and the empirical model developed in Chapter Three. Finally, in the conclusion, the outcome of the discussion is considered further in the light of the questions presented in this Introduction.

## Chapter One

### RESEARCH REVIEW

Material presented in Chapter one is arranged to highlight some of the relevant research concerned with parent and child participation in both the formal education system and the pre-school. The research review is not constructed in a conventional manner, but rather consists of a selection of research evidence used to argue a case and explicate the following items:

1. Ethnic cultural background and status as variables that influence participation and performance in education.
2. 'Client' participation in education as a dichotomy of parent/child participation.
3. Importance of decision making as a facilitator of achievement.

Thelen (1954) has made the point that every group is both a microcosm of the prevailing culture and yet a unique event, for each group develops its own set of norms. Being a part of an environment larger than its own particular setting, a group both receives pressures and exerts pressure on other groups, thus requiring continued adjustments. People move in and out of diverse groups, thus giving occasion for individual adjustment in a variety of situations.

The importance of situational factors in learning has been stressed by Bruner (1972) who sees cultural learning differences as lying not so much in differences between skills possessed, but rather as residing in differences in situations to which differing cultural groups apply the skills. Different minor cultural groups may possess the same underlying competencies as major cultural groups. Differences in performance are accounted for by the situational context in which the competence is expressed. For example, groups of Kpelle rice

farmers and Yale students were both asked to estimate the quantity of given amounts of rice. Although the students were rated higher in intelligence, the farmers' performance in the task was rated as superior. Differences in performance were accounted for by the situation in which the competency was expressed. (Gay and Cole, 1967.)

One inference that may be drawn from such research is that where children from minority cultures enter the school situation without learning experiences available to majority group children, performance will differ. However, conclusions about potential ability would require additional information. Further, such difference may be due to the situational context in which the competency is expressed. One solution to the problem of differences in performance due to the situational context may be for minority group children entering the education system to have opportunity to transfer already acquired skills in ways that will allow them to participate in the acquisition of intellectual skills necessary for success in a dominant culture. Opportunity to use already acquired skills contrasts with the line of 'cultural deprivation' taken in earlier research. Previously, research has attempted to discover origins of differences in performance by minority and majority culture groups. For instance minority groups have been seen as lacking in achievement motivation (Ausubal, 1964), lacking in the development of an elaborated language code (Bernstein, 1967), lacking in independent initiative and the ability to delay gratification (Chilman and Hunt, 1966).

From findings of this nature it could be argued that the ability of many minority culture members will not allow for participation on equal terms with members of majority culture groups. However, there may be considerable value in discovering what exists in a traditional system of learning that will allow minority groups to participate more proficiently in education. Where this occurred in conjunction with

necessary adjustments within the system, participation would then be based on a model of reciprocity rather than one of compensation or deficiency.

An example of a possibly important feature of participation within minority and majority culture groups emerges from tentative research carried out by Graves and Graves (1973) in schools, kindergartens and playcentres. In the study, differences in patterns of group formation were highlighted. Polynesians were seen to exhibit an 'inclusive' mode of interaction, while Europeans displayed an 'exclusive' mode. Differences in cultural norms are seen to govern contrasting principles in the formation of social units. Groups formed on the basis of 'inclusion' aim at solidarity among members and are pervaded by a sense of belonging. 'Exclusion' as a principle of group formation sets a standard whereby either solitary activities occur by individuals in the presence of others, or intensive one-to-one relations develop with a single other person.

Two earlier exploratory studies carried out by Ritchie (1968) and McDonald (1973) appear to support, in part, the differences found between minority and majority culture groups in the Graves' study. Ritchie suggests that it is the dominant culture that makes participation by Maori students a problem in the school. The apparent poor performance of Maori children is seen as resting far less on parental and home deficiencies than on the intransigent nature of the schools. Lack of participation amongst Maori parents at parent-teacher meetings and lack of support for the school are seen as symptoms of the problem rather than being the problem

McDonald's study indicated that in playcentres where a multi-racial composition of members emerged over a period of time, centres that were originally predominantly Maori, with Maori leadership, tended to become Pakeha dominated and finally Pakeha in composition as Maori mothers ceased to participate. In those multi-racial groups where Maoris did continue to participate, they did so at the formal level rather than the

informal, as this was where initial association mostly occurred. The separation effect was seen as being a consequence of differences in reasons for participation. Pakeha mothers were seen as participating for reasons of friendship while Maori mothers tended to participate for kinship reasons.

The differences found in European, Polynesian and Maori styles of participation have important implications for education institutions. For instance if pre-schools and formal education organisations do function only from an 'exclusive' mode to promote participation in learning activities then the European student may be adequately catered for, while the Polynesian or Maori student may be at a considerable disadvantage. Similarly if one of the major functions of the school is to assist in the child's socialisation, then again non-european students may be in a situation that could be detrimental to social and intellectual well-being by hindering participation rather than promoting it.

The discussion this far has centred on ethnic cultural factors as they may affect participation in education. Status, allocated through position and socio-economic factors may also influence participation. For instance restraints on people of low status against communicating in social situations involving individuals of unequal status have been noted by Hurwitz, Zarder and Hymovitch (1960). Individuals with high status were seen to communicate more frequently than individuals with low status. If, as is suggested in this present study, communication does provide the means of reinforcement and information gathering necessary to evaluate others expectations, then participants of low status may be most likely to withdraw from groups because of lack of information. This is in line with the Lewin, Zippitt and White (1939) research where it was demonstrated that social climate within the groups affected both performance and satisfaction of members. Again, where group composition includes members of high and low status, low status members may be

dissatisfied with the degree of participation they can display and consequently withdraw from the group. Such factors may help account for lack of parent participation in parent/teacher meetings and pre-schools as well as the high rate of truancy that appears to occur in schools amongst Polynesian and Maori students.

In order to accommodate adequately for participation in education by all members, both potential and actual, some changes may be required in the present system of education organisations. If so, then this statement made by Simon concerning participation becomes highly relevant. He says:

"Significant changes in human behaviour can be brought about rapidly only if the persons who are expected to change participate in deciding what the change shall be, and how it shall be made." (1955)

Implicit in and central to this statement is the notion that in order to obtain and maintain participation, activities engaged in by participants must be seen by them to be relevant. Where participants are involved in making decisions concerning activities they are to engage in, these are more likely to be seen by them as relevant. The statement is highlighted by results of a study carried out by French and Israel (1960), where a group of workers were given opportunity to participate in decisions concerning their work activities in order to increase production. However, even after participation in the decision making had occurred the expected production increase did not follow. Results were attributed to the fact that the decisions in which the workers participated had little relevance to their actual day-to-day work. For optimum participation by students in schools, work activities probably need also to have relevance for them. Again involvement in decision making may provide the most efficient means of this kind of feedback to students. A study carried out by Flanders (1951) showed that where students did participate in classroom decision ~~there was~~ less hostility towards teachers and less tension amongst students. Further the degree to which teachers are able to participate in

school decision making may be positively correlated with their interaction with students as Flijals (1967) found.

If involvement by workers, students and teachers in decision making facilitates participation, then parent involvement may also reasonably be expected to facilitate their participation. In line with this statement, a study by Cloward and Jones (1963) showed a positive correlation between the involvement of parents in schools affairs and their evaluation of the importance of education together with attitudes towards school as an institution.

While it is recognised in this present study that many education organisations do in fact attempt to involve students, teachers and parents in organisation affairs, the area of involvement is very often at the fund raising, cup of tea, small discussion level. When students, teachers and parents participate actively in decision making at a level of individual relevancy, then participation patterns may become markedly different.

Parental patterns characteristic of lower socio-economic groups have been noted by Chilman (1966) as showing an anticipation of failure and distrust of middle class institutions such as schools. Such characteristics may actually be reinforced by the institutions through lack of communication and presentation of opportunity to take part in decision making activities.

Repercussions from having parents involved in decision making may be more important than just that of having parent participation. Parent participation as a facilitator of their children's achievement appears to be an important variable in education. Again this is in line with available research. Studies carried out by Schiff (1967) and Lopate et al (1970) indicated that parent participation and co-operation in school affairs led to higher pupil achievement, better school attendance and study habits. Again, engaging parents in school activities that were relevant to their children's achievement was found by Shipman (1965) to assist in development of attitudes in children that aided achievement. Parental interest in a child's education is seen by Douglas (1964) as the most general variable that

influences school success. However, unless parental interest is given opportunity to become manifest through actual relevant participation, it may remain only a general rather than specific influential variable. Where parent-teacher meetings have poor attendance, lack of parental support is often attributed to lack of parental interest. More pertinent may be lack of relevance as perceived by parents rather than lack of interest. Parents have little or no opportunity to participate in decisions that will affect the day-by-day activities of their children in education organisations.

Within the pre-school area, parent participation may be the critical factor in facilitating the later success of children from minority ethnic groups. Grotberg (1972) in fact sees the degree to which parents participate in the decision making process and educational programme of an institution as a possible determinant of the level of effect of that institution. While the Maori and Polynesian student may appear in some cases to be a reluctant participant, it may be that school organisation and methods of planning combined serve at best only to mitigate the effects of already existing differences as Calvert (1969) suggests.

All children, and particularly minority culture group children who have not participated in pre-school activities may already be at a disadvantage on entry to the infant room in relation to children who have attended pre-school. As the Report of the Committee of Enquiry into Pre-school Education states:

".... there is evidence in support of the view that social setting has an impact on children's cognitive development. Those who come from homes which do not transmit the varied cultural patterns, experiences and verbal skills which are characteristic of New Zealand society, commonly have difficulty in profiting from their educational opportunities. (1971, p.31.)

At this point, the relevancy of reciprocity as a model for participation becomes important rather than the deficiency model. Where only the individual has constantly to make adjustments, performance of minority culture group children is unlikely to reach the levels of realised potential.

Summary

The research has been arranged in this chapter to emphasize the importance of three areas in relation to participation in education. They are as follows:

1. Ethnic cultural background and status as variables that influence participation and performance in education.
2. The importance of parent and child participation in education.
3. Participation in decision making as a facilitator of achievement.

The importance of reciprocity as a model of participation for minority culture groups has been stressed rather than a compensatory model. Such a model would include decision making activities by parents and students, thus allowing for a greater degree of relevancy in educational programmes, and thus increasing performance.