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PARENT AND TEACHER BELIEFS
AND
TEACHER-PUPIL INTERACTION

A Pilot Study

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of the requirements for the degree of
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ABSTRACT

This investigation reports a quasi experimental study of teachers' verbal contacts with pupils during their first year of formal schooling. It was expected that consensus of certain beliefs about teaching priorities held between teacher and parent would be related to the frequency of teacher approval expressed towards pupils - and also that the frequency of teachers' expressed disapproval towards pupils would be related to parent-teacher disensus. The gross propositions directing this study are that:

1. Parents hold a variety of beliefs concerning the activities which will facilitate success at school for their children.
2. These beliefs are transmitted to the children during the socializing process.
3. Teachers also develop a variety of beliefs concerning pupil activities which will facilitate success at school.
4. When parental socialization practices produce in their children behaviours that are in relative agreement with a particular teacher's expectations for the pupil role, teacher approval will be a characteristic feature of teacher-pupil interaction.
5. When parental socialization practices produce in their children behaviours that are in relative disagreement with a particular teacher's expectations for the pupil role, teacher expectations are affronted and teacher disapproval will be the characteristic feature of teacher-pupil interaction.
6. Parent teacher disensus-consensus will be reflected in teacher treatment of pupils and will be expressed through different patterns of verbal contact during classroom interaction.

Six statements, paired in all possible combinations, describing the different ways in which pupils might behave in order to succeed in school were presented in a questionnaire to 21 teachers of five year old school pupils. Of these 21 teachers, the six used were those holding the strongest preferences for one of each category of beliefs about school success. Over 80% of parents of children in these six classrooms completed the same questionnaire. Subsequent analysis determined which parents held views most similar to or different from their child's teacher. The 32 pupils whose parents' beliefs were most isomorphic with those of their child's teacher, and the 32 pupils whose parents' beliefs were most contrary to those of their child's teacher, were selected for the study. Of the 64 pupil subjects, half were boys and half were girls.

Each of the six teachers was observed for three hours. Two trained observers, using a radio microphone, tape recorder and written records collected data covering all teacher verbal contacts with the selected pupil subjects during the period. Only those teacher verbal contacts categorized as negative and positive sanctions or negative and positive directions, were recorded.

Analysis of the data revealed that parent-teacher disensus and consensus of beliefs is significantly related to differences in both quality and quantity of teacher verbal contacts with the children observed during their first year at school. Such differences in teacher contacts with pupils occurred independently of pupil sex status although sex status served to compound the direction of results.

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INTRODUCTION

This thesis owes its origin to a problem accentuated by a series of events and conditions that pertained in a particular New Zealand primary school. The school, situated at the growing fringe of a Government housing project was beset by the problems of rapid growth, constant changes of professional and ancillary staff, ubiquitous insecurity and a preponderance of inexperienced teachers.

Teachers, while coping with the realities of the situation were able to establish sound personal relationships with some pupils but not with others.

While many of the usually accepted principles of teaching found application in the classrooms, for many teachers the more difficult situations found some solution in the development of warm affective classroom climates. Absenteeism, aggression, theft, insecurity, aversion for particular subjects or school in general found at least some amelioration in an approach to pupils based on helping the individual feel worthy, important and secure.

From such a situation and its partial solution then, arose a series of puzzling events. Why did a change of teacher solve some pupils' problems and yet create difficulties for others? Why did personal attention and effort by one teacher reduce the deviant behaviour of boys and yet appear to increase deviant behaviour by girls? Why did different teachers' perceptions of the same pupil, even over a lengthy period, remain so disparate? Did the pupil really behave so differently for different teachers, or was it that some teachers were simply more accepting, more capable and more flexible than others.

The beginning of an answer was suggested to the writer by a series of events taking place at the conclusion of his first year at the school. Measures of pupil achievement in the basic subjects taken at that time proved somewhat below the expectations of teachers. Some rationalized the outcomes

by pointing out that intelligence tests showed their classes to be below average in ability and requested pupils of higher ability for the following year. On commencing the succeeding year, all teachers received pupil records in which pupil aptitudes were emphasized, intelligence scores omitted and pupil weaknesses minimized. Almost universal satisfaction was expressed with the types of pupils comprising the classes and with the superior abilities of the current year's class when compared with the abilities of the previous year's class. Despite the fact that general ability levels of classes had not changed, during the year, teachers expressed satisfaction with pupil progress and behaviour. Pupil achievement at the conclusion of the year appeared to be improved. While many factors were involved in such a complex situation, the possibility of a self-fulfilling prophecy condition could not be totally ignored. The real problem was beginning to emerge. What was the relationship between teacher perception of a pupil and that pupil's behaviour at school? Was knowledge about a pupil and his background in some way influencing the behaviour of a teacher toward that pupil? Could the day to day activity of teachers based on such knowledge, influence pupil achievement? Furthermore, if pupils achievements were affected by the deliberate or unconscious preferences of teachers, how were such teacher preferences manifested?

While social status and ethnic factors appeared to have some relevance in the overall situation, there were too many specific exceptions to allow for the acceptance of such factors as causative. Confrontation and discussion with militant or dissatisfied parents, when considered together with the behaviour of their children towards the respective teachers, suggested a further proposition - one believed by many teachers. Whatever the parents attitudes to the teacher, those attitudes will be reflected in some

degree in the behaviour of the child vis a vis the teacher. Such a premise had implications for the questions raised earlier and a problem which seemed possible of investigation suggested itself. Do parent and teacher agreements and disagreements about the training or education of children have an effect on teacher-pupil interactions at school? If they do have an effect, how are such agreements and differences manifested and to what degree?

Over a period of time the implications clarified. It appeared reasonable to believe that, where a teacher was in strong agreement with a parent about the treatment of children and the purposes of education, rapport between teacher and pupil would be facilitated and that on the other hand, parent-teacher disagreements would hinder teacher-pupil rapport. It also appeared reasonable to conjecture that the presence or absence of teacher-pupil rapport must in some way be expressed in teacher behaviour indicating approval or disapproval of pupil behaviour.

In order to investigate such a series of propositions, identification of parent-teacher relationships representing consensus and disensus of values and beliefs was necessary. A questionnaire was used to establish the beliefs held by parents and teachers about pupil behaviours that would facilitate pupil success at school. In addition, comparison of teachers' and parents' answers helped to identify two main types of pupils - (i.e. pupils whose parents were in close agreement with the teacher and those whose parents disagreed strongly with the teacher). Teachers' interactions with the two groups of pupils identified in this manner were observed in the normal classroom situation and similarities and differences recorded.

The first chapter of this thesis identifies the problems, determines their parameters and surveys the contribution of previous literature and empirical evidence

to their solution. Chapter two provides a theoretical basis for the solution of the problems presented and for the propositions involved. The research design and details of its operationalization are explained in chapter three. Results of the study are presented in chapter four and discussed in chapter five where final conclusions and suggestions for further investigation are stated.

Such then is the substantive background to the present study which does not seek to isolate right from wrong, the good from the bad, the desirable from the undesirable nor to proffer evidence for the improvement of teaching or education. There are many variables and relationships of teaching and education about which little factual information is available. It is hoped that this study provides additional data contributing to more accurate knowledge of the antecedents of classroom behaviour.