C U R I O S I T Y A N D S E L F - C O N C E P T

O F S C H O O L A D J U S T M E N T

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A B S T R A C T

This study, as a piece of descriptive research, is an extension of a similar one done by Maw and Maw (1970) concerning the relationship between curiosity and the self-concept. Whereas they hypothesised that children high in curiosity are also those who have successfully interacted with their environments, the general hypothesis for this study was that children who have positive self-concepts of themselves in the school environment will also be ones who exhibit curiosity in that situation. This hypothesis was formulated as a consequence of the writer's adherence to a theory of active intelligence, and view of self-concept as a highly task-specific construct.

Measures of curiosity, global self-concept, and self-concept of school adjustment were taken. In general terms curiosity was defined as a preferred cognitive strategy which is utilized to cope with challenging stimuli and manifested in the way in which the individual is predisposed to achieve and resolve conceptual conflicts. Global self-concept was defined as an individual's perception of his innate capacity to cope effectively with his environment. Similarly self-concept of school adjustment was defined as a student's perception of his innate capacity to cope effectively in the specific environment of the classroom.

Each of these three variables was operationally defined in terms of the instruments used to measure them. Where possible, the same instruments as used by Maw and Maw in their study were used in this research. No new instruments were constructed for this study. Measures of curiosity were taken from Maw and Maw : (1) Teacher's Rating Scale of Curiosity, (2) Self-appraisal of curiosity, (3) The Which to Discuss Test. Measures of global self-concept were obtained from the following instruments: (1) Parts of the California Test of Personality (C.T.P.), (2) Parts of the Children's Personality Questionnaire (C.P.Q.). A measure of self-concept of school adjustment was obtained from subjects recorded responses to factor 2 E : School

Relations, of the California Test of Personality (C.T.P.) and from the tester's recorded observation on the Bristol Social Adjustment Scale : factor U (Unforthcomingess).

P.A.T. results for reading comprehension and maths were taken from school records.

The subjects were 20 children from the senior room of a local two-teacher school. There were ten boys and ten girls. It is felt that they are representative of New Zealand rural children. Administration and scoring of the tests was done by the writer, who at the time of testing was also the children's teacher.

The results of the study did not support the general hypothesis, and only partly supported Maw and Maw's (1970) findings. However, some relationship between the variables curiosity, self-concept and self-concept of school adjustment was shown to exist. Also a highly significant relationship was recorded between curiosity and school achievement. A lack of significant relationship recorded between the teacher's rating of curiosity and the C.T.P. measure of Total Personal Adjustment was taken to suggest that either the tests in fact measure different things than curiosity and personal adjustment or, that there was error in administration or scoring of at least one of the tests. Both of these factors, as measured on the same tests, correlated significantly in the Maw and Maw study. Unfortunately the lack of correlation mentioned above also affected the recorded relationship between the teacher's rating and the school adjustment measure from the C.T.P.

One implication of these results is that curiosity as a task-specific concept is merely one aspect of cognition. The possibility of marker bias was discussed, but if this can be discounted then the significant correlations which existed between curiosity, school adjustment and school performance can all be taken as evidence that curiosity is in fact connected with intelligence. Consequently, it would seem that better school adjustment is more readily found in higher achievers.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In attempting to determine whether high-curiosity boys differed from low-curiosity boys in their self-concepts Maw and Maw (1970) selected 15 high curiosity boys and 14 low curiosity boys on the basis of a definition of curiosity. Several instruments purporting to measure aspects of the self-concept were then administered. All of these indicated that high curiosity boys do have more positive self-concepts than low curiosity boys.

Their general hypothesis, that children high in curiosity are also those who have successfully interacted with their environments, was supported by the results of their study.

Purkey (1970), in an analysis of the growth of the self concept maintains that in his treatment of motivation, White (1959) suggested that from infancy onward the child obtains a biologically given sense of pleasure from becoming competent in mastering his environment (p. 29). From this it can be assumed that the development of the child's self-concept is dependent upon his success in coping with his early experiences. Hamachek (1965) pointed out that subjects produce different self-descriptions in specific contexts (p. 465). Accordingly it is assumed by the writer that the child's view of himself as a learner may be less favourable than that of himself as a person.

The present study is intended to show that while a child may have a very good global self-concept the enhancement of curiosity as an intrinsic motive in the classrrom situation is dependent upon his perception of himself in that specific situation.

Curiosity in this study will later be defined as a cognitive activity, in an information processing sense, which the child uses in coping with challenging stimuli. Accordingly it is acknowledged that curiosity is evoked by an interest in novelty when stimuli cannot be accommodated to the child's existing schemata.

In the classroom the easiest way for a child to gain positive affect from significant others is for him to show interest, work to his capacity and, co-operate. Consequently it is suggested here that the classroom is an environment which reinforces success. In striving to maintain favour and approval many children learn to give answer-orientated responses, yet Shouksmith (1970) maintains that divergent thinkers are ones who are prepared to take risks.

Consequently, although schools very often profess to be encouraging creativity and curiosity it seems that both are too often stifled, (perhaps unwittingly) by the way in which teachers shape their pupil's responses. As Miller (1970) states :

> . . . (expectancies) may constrain the child by prompting his withdrawal from potential informational acquisition and task involvements that are perhaps within his limits. (p. 184)

The degree to which such withdrawal occurs will be dependent upon his previous and current success in similar situations. Generally these will be confined to the classroom. It is not illogical then to conclude that the child with an already negative view of himself as a student will tend to avoid further damaging his self-concept by adopting protective avoidance strategies to cope with the situation.

The present study, as a piece of descriptive research, is thus an extension upon that done by Maw and Maw. Although measures of global self-concept are taken, as they were by Maw and Maw, the emphasis is on a measure of the child's self-concept of school adjustment. A measure more specific to the school environment.

Hunt (1961) pointed out that :

> The developing interest in novelty gives rise to the curiosity that motivates a continuing process of growth and change in the child's central processes and in his relationship to his environment. (p. 145-6)

Further, Hunt argues that curiosity is evoked by an interest in novelty when stimuli cannot be accommodated to the child's existing schemata. If this statement is accepted then the implications are that boredom is a consequence of too easily attained accommodation.

Certainly some of our brighter new entrants face this problem in being subjected to an unwarranted pre-reading programme.

The present study is concerned with that which is above referred to as "existed schemata", which is here seen as the child's processed information in storage. That curiosity can be evoked by an interest in novelty is accepted, and the present study will attempt to investigate how such a process can be encouraged.

Piaget (1936, p. 274) said new objects or phenomena which are almost assimilable arouse an interest and an attempt at accommodation which is greater than if they were assimilated immediately. Therefore it would seem that the presentation of too difficult material in the learning situation will serve to inhibit rather than evoke curiosity.

Curriculum planners have been influenced by Bruner's (1967, p. 114) emphasis in which he sees curiosity as almost a prototype of the intrinsic motive. Consequently teachers are being increasingly appealed to to teach within a framework which pays reference to curiosity. Five year olds enter school in varying stages of readiness and just how receptive they are to learn to read depends in part, upon such cognitive factors as attitudes and interests. Similarly, many of them arrive at school with positive self-concepts. However, Purkey (1970, p. 7) pointed out that the self-concept is made up of many beliefs about oneself, each of which has its own negative or positive value. Accordingly he distinguishes between global self-concept, which is the same notion of self-concept as mentioned above, and a variety of separate task specific self concepts. Consequently it follows that the teacher's influence in shaping the learner's attitude towards school is considerable. The presentation of material of either too little or too great a degree of difficulty resulting in the fostering of a lack of interest. McReynolds (1970) stated :

> . . . individuals tend to find most interesting, and hence to be most highly motivated to participate in activities that match their own reinforcement rate. (p. 37)

The implications here are that it is quite conceivable that many children who possess positive global self-concepts develop negative attitudes towards school, and consequently negative self-concepts in that specific situation as a result of an inappropriate presentation of learning tasks.

It is the purpose of the present study to investigate the relationship between how the child sees himself in the learning situation and his manifested curiosity. It is expected that there will be some discrepancy between his global view of self and his view of himself as a learner. Assuming this is the case it is also expected that those children who will be shown to have positive self-concepts but negative attitudes to school will also score low on measures of curiosity. Similarly, it is expected that those who have negative global self-concepts will also score poorly on measures of curiosity.