School Rejection and its

Amelioration

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Summary

Some results from a survey carried out among a nationally representative sample of 4,000 pupils, most of whom had passed the school leaving age, and 1,200 teachers in the Republic of Ireland are summarized.

About a third of the pupils seemed to be disenchanted with school, and larger proportions were unhappy with certain school subjects and with schools' ability to achieve some of their main goals.

By their own admission most teachers do not do much to work towards the educational goals which most teachers, pupils, parents and ex-pupils believe to be the most important. On the other hand they are not entirely convinced of the value of the goal they work hardest to reach, which is examination attainment. They believe that this confers few benefits on their pupils other than the ability to enter a better job.

It is argued that the data suggest that teachers do not work towards the goals they themselves believe to be most important and that they do little to tackle the problem of disenchantment because of the constraints which the social selective functions of education bring to bear on them, because they have adopted a 'single factor' model of the intellect, because they have an undifferentiated concept of pupils and their values and interests, because they are unaware of pupils' values and interests, and because they do not really know how to achieve the goals which they believe to be most important.

Teachers themselves are not to blame for this state of affairs. Researchers have failed to supply them with a more appropriate model of the intellect, with an examination system which gives both teachers and pupils recognition for working towards the most important goals of education, with an adequate understanding of the nature of these competencies and the way in which they are to be fostered, or with means of ascertaining pupils' values and interests so as to be able to gear educational programmes to those values and interests.

Samples

The data to be presented are drawn from a survey of nationally representative samples of some 4,000 pupils, aged 14 to 18, and 1,200 post-primary teachers, in the Republic of Ireland. The information from the pupils was collected by means of self-completion questionnaires. The teachers were interviewed. The survey interviewers, who were not on the school staff, also handed out and collected the pupils' questionnaires and supervised the pupils whilst they were completing them. All questionnaires and interview schedules, which incorporated both closed and open-ended questions, were developed through an extensive programme of exploratory and pilot interviewing. Whilst they were in the course of development they were regularly reviewed by an advisory committee composed largely of teachers.

The purpose of the survey

The main purpose of the survey was to collect data relevant to evaluating the post-primary educational system as a whole. Providing such an evaluation was taken to involve, firstly, assessing what the goals of post-primary education should be, secondly, obtaining teachers' and pupils' subjective assessments of whether those goals were being attained and, thirdly, asking why the goals were not being better attained.

Availability of survey results

The data from the survey have been published in full, and some of their implications discussed, in three volumes published by the Irish Association for Curriculum Development (Raven et al., 1975 a and b; Raven, 1976). These volumes have also been filed with ERIC. These data can be used to illuminate a wide range of problems of international significance including such topics as 'What are the effects of examinations?', 'How effectively are schools attaining their main goals?', and 'What attitudes, values and behaviour patterns do teachers portray, and what are the implications likely to be for their pupils?'. A summary of the survey data, together with a discussion of some of these issues — and a fuller discussion of the problem of pupil motivation briefly discussed in this paper — will be found in the author's *Education, Values and Society: The Objectives of Education and the Nature and Development of Competence* (H.K. Lewis, 1977).

Extent of school rejection

About a third of the pupils sometimes or always hated going to school and felt they would be happier in a job if they left school immediately and got a job. More than half of them considered that more than half of their school subjects were either boring or useless. More than a quarter of the pupils thought that their school should do more to achieve 90 per cent of the objectives we asked them about, and more than half of them felt that half the objectives deserved more attention.

There is therefore a major problem of disenchantment with school. So great is the disenchantment that it is difficult to see how teachers can achieve any goal effectively, let alone foster motivational dispositions like initiative, ability to work with others, self-confidence, and considerateness.

Correlates of disenchantment

The level of disenchantment varies little with pupils' backgrounds, but it does vary with their anticipated destination in society. Forty-six per cent of those who intended to become doctors, dentists, etc. looked forward to going to school most days, compared with 24 per cent of those who intended to become manual workers. Fifty-one per cent of those who expected to become building and construction workers said that they would be much happier if they left

school now and got a job, compared with eight per cent of those who expected to become scientists.

Three points deserve to be emphasized:

a. The delayed gratification hypothesis is not sustained: pupils who are going to get the best jobs *like* school: they are not delaying anything: they have their cake and eat it.

b. Those who are going to be teachers and administrators have no knowledge of what it feels like to be unhappy at school. They are unaware of the need for change.

c. The solution to the problem of school rejection seems to have more to do with running a series of courses suited to pupils who have different values and who will enter different sectors of society than with running enrichment programmes to adjust all to the same course.

A detailed analysis was made of the characteristics of school rejectors. It was of very great interest — and something of a surprise — to find that, though school rejectors had very different occupational aspirations from those who accepted school, they did not have different felt needs from school, nor wish to see different things changed in their school, nor react differently to corporal punishment, nor think they would respond favourably to different sorts of teachers. Further, in the course of another study (Raven and Litton, 1976, 1977) we found little relationship between school rejection and IQ, but school rejectors, in addition to having different occupational aspirations from other pupils, more often than others smoked, drank, stayed out late, and got into trouble with the police.

These results, by showing that school rejection is more closely related to anticipated destination than to background, and unrelated to other variables mentioned, seriously call into question hypotheses that school rejection results from a clash of values between the home and the school or that it results from experience of failure at school. The less *intelligent* don't reject school more than others. Those who intend to go into jobs for which it is irrelevant do.

Reality seems less esoteric and more down to earth than educational theorists would have us believe. If pupils don't like school it is because they cannot see the relevance of what they are doing at school to the sort of jobs they expect to

enter. They do not ask — and nor do many educationalists either — what schools might be doing to help them to develop the competencies they will need to develop if they are to perform well in the jobs they hope to enter and the life styles associated with them. As far as their perception of the objectives of education are concerned they echo the views of their fellow pupils, teachers, and parents. As we shall see later, they believe that schools should be helping them to develop their characters, but they are no more critical than are others of the fact that (in the opinion of most teachers at least) schools don't happen to be doing much to achieve that objective.

Why do they continue to come to school?

If these pupils don't like school why are they there? They are there doggedly trying to pass examinations which they know will buy their entry to a decent way of life. However they also know that the subject content on which these certificates are based is of little practical value. It should be noted that this perception of the lack of value of school subjects is shared by many of the pupils who like school. Although pupils thought it was very important to pass examinations, most of them did not think it was very important to learn about aspects of school subjects not required for examination purposes or about non-examination subjects. This contrasts markedly with their desire to have other non-examination activities on the curriculum. It may be inferred that they do not value the *content* of their subjects, and this inference is supported by their answers to two questions. They were asked 'How do you feel if a teacher gives you a lesson which you *enjoy* but which you don't think will help you to pass an examination?'. Half of them felt annoyed by such activities. They were also asked if they thought there were any advantages in staying on at school beyond the compulsory school attendance age for pupils who were not taking examinations. Fifty-seven per cent of the boys and 39 per cent of the girls felt that there were few or hardly any advantages in doing this. There therefore seem to be good grounds for concluding that passing examinations represents an overriding objective for many pupils.

What could be done to reduce levels of disenchantment?

At this point we may make a brief reference to the considerable amount of data we have available which are relevant to the question 'What could be done to make courses more relevant and involving?'. Unfortunately, since space here is limited, it has been necessary to opt to discuss some of the basic factors which seem to be responsible for the problem of school rejection, rather than the data available to assist teachers to develop more appropriate educational programmes. The data relevant to this second question have been published in full in the three volumes available from the IACD, and summarized and discussed in Raven (1977). It includes information on pupils' reactions to a number of the incentives, rewards and punishments often employed in school settings, their reactions to a variety of alternative patterns of teacher behaviour, their felt needs from education, their reactions to their school subjects, and their more basic life goals and values. Readers whose appetites are whetted by the snippets of information given below should refer to the previously mentioned publications.

Information obtained on the jobs which pupils expected to enter forcefully raised the question of what competencies were required to perform well in those jobs. When we reflected on the question of what qualities would be required to perform well in these jobs it appeared that these qualities included decision-taking ability, initiative, responsibility, the ability to work with others, and the ability to make one's own observations and learn *without* instruction. This suggestion was reinforced by the fact that both teachers and pupils agreed that a major objective of education should be to foster self-confidence, initiative, the ability to make one's own observations and learn without instruction, and independence. But both teachers and pupils agreed that schools as they were currently organized did little to work toward such goals. If teachers could spend more time working towards them it might seem that pupils' felt needs would be better met, and that their levels of enthusiasm would improve.

Data on the pupils' values prompted us to wonder whether educational programmes as they are currently organized capitalize on pupils' interest in their families, working with their friends, and being treated as mature and responsible grown-ups, or whether they provide them with opportunities to apply what they have learned.

Still more forcefully, data on the satisfactions pupils hoped to get out of their jobs led us to

wonder whether schools provide an opportunity to experience the satisfactions pupils desire — that is, whether they really encourage them to take a pride in their work, to work with their friends, and to engage in varied activities. Schools look remarkably like the places where pupils do *not* want to be — places in which it is necessary to work with paper, to do things quickly, and to be a small cog in a large organization. Once again it seemed that there was ample scope to redesign educational tasks in order to capitalize on these springs of pupil motivation.

Toward the heart of the problem

In spite of the importance of implementing the improvements suggested by these data, this material did not seem to be so useful from the point of view of developing an understanding of the problem of disenchantment with post-primary school as did some other reflections suggested by the data. In order to develop these ideas we must first summarize the relevant findings and later tie them together to form an integrated argument. The first result to be reported is the somewhat surprising finding that many teachers are aware that many of their pupils think the subjects they are teaching are boring and useless, but are unable to do anything effective about it.

Second, although there is a great deal of agreement between teachers and pupils as to what schools should be doing, teachers think that examination performance, pupil guidance, vocational preparation, and the provision of other instrumentally valuable information, is a great deal less important than do pupils. They think it is much more important than do their pupils to introduce them to new academic subjects and aspects of subjects.

Many teachers are also more satisfied than the pupils with what they do to make their lessons enjoyable and with the amount done to encourage independence. They are dissatisfied with their pupils' achievements in the area of the three Rs, while the pupils are relatively satisfied.

Next, whereas pupils vary considerably from one to another, and in systematic ways, in what they want out of education, most teachers think that courses directed towards the same goals are equally appropriate for the more and the less academic pupils. In addition, while some of our data show that some pupils are more adequately catered for than others, other data show that

teachers as a rule think that the courses currently available cater equally well for more and less academic pupils.

Fourthly, many teachers markedly underestimate their pupils' serious-mindedness. They over-estimate their concern with pop music, dancing and earning money and underestimate their desire to have a job which they like, to be able to apply what they have learned at school, to be able to pass examinations, and to be able to help their families.

However, the most disturbing finding is that, as we have said, most teachers do relatively little to work towards the educational objectives which they themselves believe to be the most important. Many also think all but two of the objectives which we asked them about are at present not very well or poorly attained. The two objectives which significantly more than half the teachers think are 'moderately well' or 'well' attained are passing examinations and teaching pupils to know right from wrong.

It therefore seems that the pupils are quite right to be demoralized: by their own admission most teachers do little to work towards the goals which both they and their pupils believe to be the most important objectives of education, and they feel that these goals are poorly attained.

Why do teachers not change their courses when they know that a considerable proportion of their pupils are bored? Why do they not work towards the goals they themselves consider to be most important? What information would help them work towards these goals more effectively? What changes are required in the institutional structures in which they work so that these can encourage them to work towards the goals which, it seems, most people connected with education believe to be the most important?

Why do teachers not attend to the goals they believe to be the most important?

One reason why teachers do not work towards the goals they believe to be the most important is that they do not think that their priorities are shared by their fellow teachers, pupils, or their pupils' parents (Musgrove and Taylor, 1971; Kelly, 1970). They live in a state of pluralistic ignorance in which they believe that they are the odd man out. If they became aware that everyone, to a very great extent, agrees with them, they would be able to put their case more forcefully and be less

fearful of the reactions of their colleagues, pupils, and parents to their branching out and doing something different. From the data available there is no longer any room for doubt that everyone connected with education is agreed that schools should be *primarily* concerned with character development, not with conveying academic information.

Yet if teachers are to work more effectively towards this goal they lack a great deal of information. In the first place many of them lack a clear understanding of how to achieve it. In fact its achievement involves working from pupils' values and interests, and the data we have collected demonstrate that many teachers misperceive pupils' values and interests and, in particular, are not aware of how these vary from pupil to pupil.

However, important though they are, these are only two components of the explanation of why teachers do not do more to reach the goals they believe to be most important. Their behaviour is, in fact, heavily overdetermined.

The next component of the explanation is that they refuse to discuss the social functions of education explicitly and are, as a result, unable to capitalize on the pressures these functions bring to bear on themselves and their pupils in order to achieve their own goals more effectively.

We have seen that teachers do not consider getting their pupils through examinations to be a very important educational goal but that, in practice, it is the goal towards the achievement of which they devote most of their energies. Although not one of their main priorities it ends up being the objective which is best attained. Furthermore a fifth of the teachers said their pupils derived no benefits from studying their subjects if they did not pass the examination and, pressed to be specific about the benefits their pupils would derive, the remainder of the teachers mentioned very few benefits. Many of the benefits which were listed turned out to be variations on the theme 'They will learn more about my subject'.

Why should it be that teachers spend their time working towards a goal they do not consider to be very important, which they believe confers few, if any, benefits, which they (inaccurately as it happens) believe their pupils do not value, and which results in many of their pupils being bored and being known to be bored?

If they recognized — as the pupils recognize, and as data reviewed by Berg (1973), Jencks

(1973), and Raven (1973 and 1977) suggest is objectively the case — that examination passes perform the task of allocating pupils' status positions in society, but that mastery of academic subjects does not help the pupils to lead their lives more effectively, one would have expected them to have behaved rather differently. One would have expected them to have said, 'Yes, examinations are important, but, no, the study of new subjects and aspects of examination subjects is not very important.'

Yet they don't do this. One reason for this may be that they dislike, are, indeed, frightened of, the idea that the social function of education (i.e., their own role in society) is to allocate pupils' life chances. Nevertheless, although they resist acknowledging this role explicitly, they may know in their hearts that this is what happens and therefore allow their behaviour to be controlled by it. After all it is not only the pupils' future which is determined by examination attainments but also their own reputation as teachers.

Such suggestions are supported by the next data. When offered the opportunity to say that examinations should evaluate progress towards the goals of education they themselves considered most important, most teachers, somewhat surprisingly, said that examinations should not do this. If they recognized the role which examinations — and the social selective functions associated with them — play in deflecting them from their own goals, one would have expected them to have said that they should. Making the pupils' future progress dependent on their having developed these characteristics would enable, indeed stimulate, teachers and pupils to strive hard to foster them.

The role of the social functions of education, coupled with teachers' unwillingness to recognize them and find ways of turning them to their own advantage, may also be responsible for the fact that many teachers are unaware of their pupils' values, and underestimate their serious-mindedness and responsibility. If they feel obliged to pressurize their pupils to work towards a goal which they do not themselves accept and which they believe confers few benefits on their pupils, they could not possibly trust their pupils to work towards educational goals on their own. They would feel obliged to behave in an autocratic, non-delegatory manner. They would therefore not be able to engage their pupils in the sorts of

activities which would lead them to get to know their pupils' values and to become aware of their other qualities and competencies. Given the situation in which they find themselves it would create acute cognitive dissonance if they developed a respect for pupils who possessed qualities other than academic ability.

How can pupils be expected to be enthusiastic in a situation which teachers themselves must find soul destroying, in which neither they nor their teachers are able to work towards the goals they consider to be most important, and in which goals cannot be varied from pupil to pupil depending on their values and interests?

The processes described in the last paragraph but one may also be partly responsible for another finding which itself seems to contribute to many teachers failing to work towards the goals which both they and their pupils believe to be the most important and to them failing to capitalize on the available springs of pupil motivation. The problem alluded to here is that teachers seem to have adopted a single factor model of the intellect. Asked to describe 'academic' and 'less academic' pupils, only a third of the teachers described 'less academic' pupils as 'pupils who have other qualities' or 'pupils who are good at other things'. Two-thirds of them defined them as pupils who were lazy, disruptive, disinterested, incapable of learning, and no good at anything. Some went so far as to say that they had no place in school. In other words the majority of the teachers had themselves not recognized that the qualities which came at the top of their own list of priorities are not closely related to academic ability.

One more thread to be traced in the explanation of teachers' failure to work towards the goals which both they and their pupils believe to be the most important and their failure to tackle the problem of public disenchantment has to do with their perception of the meaning of equality of educational opportunity. Half the sample of teachers were asked to rate the importance of the educational objectives we asked them about with the 'more academic' pupils in mind. The other half were asked to have the 'less academic' pupils in mind. The surprising finding was that there was very little difference between the responses of the two groups of teachers. This was true of the teachers' ratings of the importance of the objectives for the two groups of pupils, their ratings of the effort they expended in order

to achieve the objectives, and for their ratings of the extent to which the objectives were attained in each case. In other words, in spite of our own evidence that pupils do vary considerably from one to another in what they want out of education and in their reactions to it, and in spite of the fact that this variation is in part associated with what would normally be regarded as the academic–non-academic dimension, teachers were unaware of this variation. They defined equality of educational opportunity as the *same* courses for everyone, and they not only thought that they provided the same courses for everyone but also thought that the goals were equally well attained for everyone.

This in itself would be a disturbing finding. But what is more disturbing is the implication it carries. For it implies that at least most teachers have not recognized that working towards their own goals means working towards different goals with different pupils and working in different ways to achieve the *same* goals with pupils who have different values and aspirations.

In other words teachers' own perceptions, both of the structure of the intellect and of the varieties of pupils, seem in themselves to represent major barriers to their achieving their own goals.

The final strand in the explanation of why many teachers do not work towards the goals they consider most important is that they are not acutely aware that they do not know how to work towards them. By international standards the IEA results (Raven and Litton, 1976; Litton and Raven, 1977 and Torney, Oppenheim and Farnen, 1976) show that relatively few teachers in Ireland had involved themselves in curriculum development programmes, perhaps because of a lack of awareness of the problem. In addition, although we have much more data on teachers' understanding of curriculum processes than we have so far been able to analyse, it is clear from the analyses that have been undertaken that their understanding of many curriculum innovations is not very deep.

Implications

If teachers are to achieve the goals they themselves consider most important it therefore seems that they need an evaluation system which will provide recognition for both themselves and their pupils for working towards these goals, they need a more complex and differentiated model of the intellect, they need to be able to find out what

are their pupils' values and interests, and they need to understand better how to use information on their pupils' values and aspirations to design educational programmes to foster the competencies which they, their pupils, and their pupils' parents believe to be so important.

The problem in a nutshell

Although the data we have collected point to a large number of ways in which school tasks could be made more relevant, rewarding and enthusiasm-generating for all pupils, the data we have summarized here show that the lack of enthusiasm for their tasks notable in the responses of some pupils seems to be based on the fact that most teachers are not working towards the goals they themselves consider to be most important, are none too clear about how to go about achieving these goals, do not recognize the need for diversity in types of input, and fail to take steps to deal with the conflict between the social functions performed by the educational system and its genuine educational role. The implications for educational policy makers, lecturers in teacher training colleges, and researchers should not be far to seek. On our shoulders rests more than the burden of creating an alienated youth who will be unlikely to participate in educational programmes in the future, and squandering national resources. We have also placed teachers in an intolerable situation by not taking steps to institute more appropriate policies and courses, and by not taking steps to collect the necessary research data.

Further research and development needed

It will be clear from what has been said that there is a great need for more research into the goals of education, into the nature of the competencies we have discussed, the relationships between them and between them and academic ability, and into the way in which these competencies are to be fostered and assessed. A much better understanding is needed of the processes through which these competencies develop and more relevant educational exercises remain to be developed. Instruments are needed to help teachers identify their pupils' values and felt needs from education and to help them to monitor progress towards their goals. Ways of recording pupils' attainments in these areas need to be developed so that pupils and teachers can be given credit for their efforts in this direction.

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Additional data on teachers' perceptions of the role of examinations, the effects which examinations have on their own and their pupils' behaviour, and suggestions for remedial action which might be taken will be found in:

RAVEN, J. (1975). Appendix J in *The Intermediate Certificate Examination: Final Report of the Minister for Education's Committee to Examine the Form and Function of the Intermediate Examination*. Chairman: P. Andrews. Dublin: Stationery Office.