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PREVIEW
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COMPARISON OF THE TEACHER CONCEPT THAT IS HELD BY
PRESCHOOL CHILDREN AND THEIR MOTHERS

by

Betty Spillers Beeson

A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty of
The Graduate College in the University of Nebraska
In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements
For the Degree of Doctor of Education
Department of Elementary Education

Under the Supervision of Professor O. W. Kopp

Lincoln, Nebraska

August, 1975

TITLE

COMPARISON OF THE TEACHER CONCEPT THAT IS HELD BY

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B.B.

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PREVIEW

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The preconception of school life held by the young child is important. Since the kindergarten teacher is the focal point of this school life, the relationship between the child and the teacher has an impact on the process and product of instruction. The positive or negative concept of a teacher that the mother has and its possible influence on the concept of a teacher that the child brings to school will affect this relationship. Knowledge of this concept and how it relates to the concept held by the mother may help the teacher to improve the quality of his or her relationship with the child.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

It was the purpose of this study to determine the relationship between the concept of a teacher held by the mother and the concept of a teacher held by the child in a selected group of children of middle socioeconomic status, who will attend kindergarten in the 1975-1976 school year in the Omaha Metropolitan Area of Nebraska.

The hypothesis was stated that if a mother held a positive concept of a teacher, the child would hold a positive concept of a teacher; and if a mother held a negative concept of a teacher, the child would hold a negative concept of a teacher.

To test this hypothesis, estimates of the following were needed:

- (1) the concept of a teacher held by the mother,
- (2) the concept of a teacher held by the child,
- (3) the relationship between (1) and (2).

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Today most writers and educators would agree that the home background of the child has a significant influence on the school experience of the child. Heffernan and Todd state that ". . . children reflect critical parental attitudes in their school relations."¹ If mothers have either a positive or a negative concept of a teacher, then the preschool child may also have either a positive or a negative concept of a teacher.

The importance of the concept of the teacher held by the preschool child was aptly covered by Hymes:

Identification has an unusually valuable place in the good teaching of young children. . . . Children identify only with people they like! The rest of us are mere passersby, parts of the scenery, wallflowers. We may set spectacular examples but if the children have no deep feeling for us, we simply are not on their wavelength—we have to reach them some other way. Identification only operates when relationships are close, warm, friendly The good teacher of young children goes out of her way to build intimate bonds Every youngster has to feel: This is my teacher, as if he were the apple of her eye.²

¹Helen Heffernan and Vivian Edminston Todd, Elementary Teacher's Guide to Working with Parents (West Nyack, New York: Parker Publishing Company, Inc., 1969), p. 9.

²James L. Hymes, Jr., Teaching the Child Under Six (Columbus, Ohio: Charles E. Merrill Publishing Company, 1968), p. 104.

The preponderance of research concerning the concept of a teacher has involved students who have had this concept influenced by the school environment. There has been little, if any, research to ascertain the concept of a teacher that the preschool child brings to school with him.

What does a child who has never had a teacher expect a teacher to do or say? Does the child think of a teacher as one who is supportive? In fact, what does the teacher actually know about the feeling and expectations these children hold on the first day of school?

Margolin found that kindergarten children were rarely asked to tell someone else what they are thinking. She continued, "With the exception of psychologically stated concerns regarding fear of losing mother, only a limited number of children's impressions are on record."³

The investigator, when she was a beginning kindergarten teacher, assumed that the children would have a positive concept of a teacher. Consequently, the teaching plans were developed on this basis. If the possibility that even one child held a negative concept of a teacher had been considered, plans for the first day would have included not only activities to establish and reinforce a positive relationship, but also to dispel the doubts and fears of the teacher which the child has.

³Edythe Margolin, Sociocultural Elements in Early Childhood Education (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, Inc., 1974), p. 388.

The results of this study could increase the understanding of the kindergarten teacher of the concept of a teacher that the mothers and the preschool children have. It could also add to the knowledge of how the concept of a teacher held by a child is related to the concept of a teacher held by a mother. This knowledge may enable the kindergarten teacher to establish better child-teacher relationships earlier. Educators constantly look for effective ways of improving the pupil-teacher relationship.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

Concept. "A thought, an opinion, an idea, or a mental image."⁴

Early childhood education. "Group settings which are deliberately intended to effect developmental changes in children in the age range from birth up to the age of entering the first grade."⁵

Preschool child. "A child up to 5 years of age."⁶ A child who has not previously attended any early childhood education program such as Headstart or nursery school,

Omaha Metropolitan Area. An area defined by the U. S. Bureau

⁴Carter V. Good (ed.), Dictionary of Education (third edition; New York: McGraw-Hill, 1973), p. 96.

⁵Lilian Katz, "Early Childhood Education as a Discipline," Young Children, XXVI (December, 1970), p. 83.

⁶Good, op. cit., p. 124.

of Census as a standard metropolitan statistical area.⁷

Middle socioeconomic status. A socioeconomic status determined by the occupation of the main supporter of the family, including occupations in groups two through six on the Revised Scale for Rating Occupation by Warner.⁸

Relationship. "A teacher with a strong relationship theme possesses good relating skills such as listening, patience, and caring, and sees the building of relationships as the best way to help students grow and develop."⁹

Democratic orientation. "A teacher with a democratic orientation works out problems with the students and sees supervision as supportive and understanding. This person does not deal with problems in an authoritarian manner."¹⁰

Teacher concept. The predominant opinion or mental image of a teacher, specifically the qualities of relationship and democratic orientation.

Mother Opinionnaire. An opinionnaire designed by the researcher to assess the concept of a teacher held by a mother, specifically the

⁷U. S. Bureau of the Census, U. S. Census of Population: 1970, I, Characteristics of the Population (Washington: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1972), pp. 29-34.

⁸W. Lloyd Warner, Social Class in America (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1960), pp. 140-141.

⁹Title III, ESEA, "Project Empathy" (Omaha: Office of Public Information Services, Omaha Public Schools, 1974). (Mimeographed.)

¹⁰Ibid.

qualities of relationship and democratic orientation.

Pictorial Test of Teacher Concept. A test devised by the investigator to assess the concept of a teacher held by a preschool child, specifically the qualities of relationship and democratic orientation.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

It is recognized that preschool children have a variety of background experiences which could influence the preconception of a teacher. For the purpose of this study, the following limitations were utilized:

1. Selected children who will start to kindergarten in the 1975-1976 school year in the Omaha Metropolitan Area.
2. Children who do not have older brothers and sisters.
3. Children who have not attended an early childhood education program such as nursery school or Headstart.
4. Children of middle socioeconomic status as defined.
5. The teacher qualities of relationship and democratic orientation as previously defined. It is not the intent of the investigator to evaluate the desirability of the qualities being explored.
6. An analysis of the predominant concept of the teacher held by each: the mother and the child.

ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY

This study is divided into five chapters. The first chapter contains a brief introduction, a statement of the problem, the significance of the study, the definition of terms, the limitations of the study, and the organization of the remainder of the study.

Chapter II is devoted to a review of related opinions and ideas expressed by various educators. Brief summaries of studies relevant to the topic of the investigation are also included.

A detailed description of how the study was planned and conducted is found in Chapter III.

Chapter IV describes and interprets the analysis of the collected data. Tables and figures of the analysis also have been presented in this chapter.

The summary of the data, the conclusions reached, and further recommendations form the content of Chapter V.

PREVIEW

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

INTRODUCTION

The importance of the experiences of children before six years of age has been recognized by great educators for centuries. In the seventeenth century, Comenius advocated a school of infancy for children during the first six years. Among the writings of Comenius were The School for Little Children and the well-known Orbis Pictus. This philosophy is discussed by Good: "Lessons and all learning must be made pleasant and the parents should prepare the child for school by showing him that school is a happy place."¹

A century later, Pestalozzi stressed the importance of the home and the social regeneration of society through the education of the child. He instructed mothers on the education of the children, and wrote a manual for mothers. Good summarized this position concerning the teacher of young children: "Personal love for the child must guide the teacher who stands in the parents' place."²

Froebel spoke of the importance of motherhood, the far reaching effects of the early relations between mother and child, and for

¹H. G. Good, A History of Western Education (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1963), p. 195.

²Ibid., p. 244.

supplementary roles of mother and teacher in the education of the child. The first kindergarten which was developed by Froebel in the nineteenth century was named by him, "garden of children" to reflect concern that it be free from formal schooling.³ He wanted children ". . . to be allowed under gentle treatment to develop freely."⁴

There has been a new interest in young children recently by those outside the field of early childhood education. Federal funding available in the 1960's and 1970's has led to a multiplicity of programs for preschool children. Studies by Piaget,⁵ Bruner,⁶ and Bloom⁷ on the development of cognitive skills and early learning, have directed attention to the education of young children. Today, ". . . the state of childhood has become as rarely before, the concern and preoccupation of adults."⁸

Research in the field of early childhood education is on the upsurge. One area of this research that is only beginning to be delved

³ Carroll Atkinson and Eugene T. Maleska, The Story of Education (Philadelphia: Chilton Company, 1962), p. 126.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Jean Piaget, The Origins of Intelligence in Children (New York: International Universities Press, 1952).

⁶ Jerome Bruner, The Process of Education (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1961).

⁷ Benjamin S. Bloom, Stability and Change in Human Characteristics (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1964).

⁸ Philippe Muller, The Tasks of Childhood (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1969), p. 7.

into, as suggested by Butler,⁹ and Horowitz and Paden,¹⁰ is the teacher. The teacher of young children is in a position to have tremendous influence upon the lives of these children.

Margolin appeared to concur when she stated that studies are needed to explore what children expect from adults, how children respond to the first few weeks of school, and how they react to the teacher, an unfamiliar adult.¹¹

Relatively few studies have explored the concepts which school children have of their teachers, or the concepts which parents have of teachers. The research related to this report includes those studies pertaining to the concept of a teacher held by a school child and the concept of a teacher held by a parent. A review of the opinions and ideas of educators in the early childhood field concerning the teacher of preschool children, and the concepts of preschool children relating to the teacher and school was included.

⁹Annie L. Butler, "Area of Recent Research in Early Childhood Education," Childhood Education, XLIII (December, 1971), p. 245.

¹⁰Frances Horowitz and Lucile Paden, "The Effectiveness of Environmental Intervention Programs," Review of Child Developmental Research, eds. Bettye Caldwell and Henry Ricciuti (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1973), p. 384.

¹¹Edythe Margolin, Sociocultural Elements in Early Childhood Education (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, Inc., 1974), p. 388.

TEACHER OF PRESCHOOL CHILDREN

A statement by Leeper in 1974 illustrated the personal qualities she believed were needed in the preschool teacher.

In the selection of teachers for preschool children, special attention is given to personal qualities such as warmth, openness, humor, efficiency, confidence, appearance, creativity, speech, voice, and the ability to communicate well by speaking clearly and choosing words carefully.¹²

Todd and Heffernan noted the importance of love in the preschool group.

Appreciating the importance of love in the preschool groups leads to recognition that a capacity for love is an essential attribute in the preschool teacher. . . . At preschool age levels, when children learn rapidly through imitation of those about them, it is important that they have a loving teacher as their pattern to imitate.¹³

The importance of the personal qualities of the preschool teacher in relation to the good mental health of the child was discussed by Wills and Lindberg.

Positive teacher-pupil relationships are important to good mental hygiene. A friendly teacher is necessary to a favorable climate. He encourages fellowship among children. He exhibits concern for children's problems, and is interested in their achievements. . . . Children think of their teacher as an adult friend and loyal counselor.¹⁴

¹²Sarah Hammond Leeper, et al., Good Schools for Young Children (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1974), p. 107.

¹³Vivian Edminston Todd and Helen Heffernan, The Years Before School (New York: Macmillan Company, 1964), p. 78.

¹⁴Clarice Wills and Lucile Lindberg, Kindergarten for Today's Children (Chicago: Follett Publishing Company, 1967), p. 155.

King and Kerber stressed the need for the teacher of young children to establish rapport and a positive classroom climate early in the school year and to ". . . maintain a warm acceptance of each individual as a valuable and unique member of the group throughout the session or school year."¹⁵ In discussing the personal qualities of the preschool teacher they use personal warmth, emotional maturity, and the ability to empathize with others, to describe the desired traits.¹⁶

Describing the teachers in the English primary schools, Rogers emphasized:

Finally, one might say that the teachers in the kinds of schools I visited seem to care deeply, perhaps passionately, about children. Children are to be taken seriously, not laughed at or ridiculed in the staff room. Children are to be watched; children are to be listened to; children are to learn from; children are the essential ingredient in the teaching-learning process; children make one's job exciting, challenging, and truly professional. This point cannot possibly be exaggerated.¹⁷

Love and Osborne suggest that not all teachers of preschool children possess these characteristics in their statement:

The schools hope to produce warm and humanistic children, and it does this by subjecting children who are warm, honest,

¹⁵ Edith King and August Kerber, The Sociology of Early Childhood Education (New York: American Book Company, 1968), p. 255.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 156.

¹⁷ Vincent R. Rogers, "English and American Primary Schools," Revisiting Early Childhood Education, ed. Joe L. Frost (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1973), p. 445.

and humanistic to treatment by cool, impersonal, dishonest, and inhumane teachers.¹⁸

Commenting on classroom relationships between teachers and pupils, Margolin cautions:

They sometimes reduce themselves to a struggle for power, the teacher often sustaining a position based on "the principle of the thing." And often it is not the principle but a personality characteristic in the teacher who is determined to be the winner. . . . Teachers who appreciate or at least are intrigued by differences in children are less inclined to censure and more inclined to understand.¹⁹

TEACHER CONCEPT HELD BY THE PRESCHOOL CHILD

From reviewing the literature, it seemed tenable to conclude that the assumption was frequently made that the preschool child has a positive concept of a teacher. For example, Headley wrote, "Most children look forward eagerly to starting school . . . and they are usually prepared to like everything they will be doing."²⁰

In describing the teacher-child relationship on the first day of kindergarten, Langdon and Stout state: "Most children enter school ready to be friends. If now and then there is one who is not, then he needs more of the teacher's friendship and understanding."²¹

¹⁸Harold D. Love and W. H. Osborne, Early Childhood Education (Springfield, Illinois: Charles C. Thomas Publisher, 1971), p. 23.

¹⁹Margolin, op. cit., p. 243.

²⁰Neith E. Headley, Foster and Headley's Education in the Kindergarten (4th ed.; New York: American Book Company, 1966), p. 238.

²¹Grace Langdon and Irving W. Stout, Teaching in the Primary Grades (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1964), p. 2.

Salot and Leavitt concur with the positive concept on the beginning day of school in their statement, "Most children enter happily into the kindergarten atmosphere as they wave a 'goodbye' to mother."²²

Humphrey also agreed on the positive feelings toward school before starting that were held by the child.

The preschool child normally comes to school eagerly and enthusiastically. Some may be shy and fearful of parting from their mothers. However, most of them have positive feelings toward school.²³

It was further stated that one of the problems confronting the nursery school teacher was helping the child maintain his positive feelings.²⁴

Hymes emphasizes the importance of the first day of school in his statement: "Young children should never come trooping in all at once on opening day, strangers to each other, strangers to the teacher."²⁵ He stresses the importance of many opening days, encouraging mothers to stay, and the need for the teacher to treat the children

²²Lorraine Salot and Jerome E. Leavitt, The Beginning Kindergarten Teacher (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Burgess Publishing Company, 1965), p. 16.

²³Enid F. Humphrey, "The Effects of Preschool Attendance on Children from Upper Socioeconomic Backgrounds in Selected Areas of Personal Assessment" (unpublished Doctor's thesis, The University of Nebraska, Lincoln, 1974), p. 35.

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵James L. Hymes, Jr., Teaching the Child Under Six (Columbus, Ohio: Charles E. Merrill Publishing Company, 1968), p. 41.

warmly and sensitively so that ". . . 'almost all' young children will take this crucial separation in their stride."²⁶

TEACHER CONCEPT HELD BY THE SCHOOL CHILD

A study by Biber and Lewis was found to have relevance to the present study. Thirteen picture situations were devised to elicit from young children expression of their feelings toward their teachers and their life in school. The writers investigated pupil expectations toward teacher responses in the areas of trouble, happiness, good behavior, bad behavior, punishments, and anger. The subjects were ninety-seven first and second-grade children in a private experimental school.²⁷

One finding reported was that:

. . . the children of the private school were absorbing a less stringent system of values, conceiving basic relationships (of which the teacher-child relation is certainly one) with a lesser degree of servile compliance and fewer fears of devastating disapproval or punishment.²⁸

Another finding indicated that children generally saw their teacher as sympathetic and helpful, though unemotional.²⁹

Biber and Lewis discussed the responses to punishment made by the children:

²⁶Ibid., p. 42.

²⁷Barbara Biber and Claudia Lewis, "An Experimental Study of What Young School Children Expect from Their Teachers," Genetic Psychology Monographs, XL (August, 1949), pp. 3-97.

²⁸Ibid.

²⁹Ibid.