

TEACHERS' VIEW OF THEIR SCHOOL

Philip Greenway
David Harvey
Terence Lee

Monash University

How teachers see themselves in relation to their school, their motives for teaching, their pupils, their own family etc. will have a bearing on their competency as teachers. The present study was carried out as part of a staff development program aimed at increasing the participants' awareness of themselves as teachers. Combs (1972, 1978) stresses the concept of the 'self as an instrument' for teachers and argues that good teaching is the product of teacher beliefs about themselves and others. Similarly Hart (1974) in discussing the model of the self-renewing teacher wrote "teachers will need a commitment to self development that extends far beyond ordinary possession of classroom competencies", (p.488)

Research into staff development indicates that for it to be successful a number of conditions must be fulfilled. Teachers need to feel involved, principals and those in leadership positions should participate (Miller, 1977). Programs should take account of the personal motives of participants (Cooper *et al.*, 1973). They should be ongoing with a continuing group (Lett & Williams, 1975). Teachers need feedback about their progress (Miller, 1977) and effective methods for evaluating programs need to be developed (Brayne & Peach, 1973).

The repertory grid (Fransella & Bannister, 1977) has been widely used to investigate interpersonal relationships, and individuals' attitudes to various aspects of their environment. The repertory grid was used in the present study to provide teachers with a systematic framework for elaborating their perceptions of a number of aspects of their school environment. All the teachers rated 29 aspects (elements) of school life e.g. migrant children in terms of 17 feeling statements (constructs) e.g., makes me feel depressed. To provide teachers with systematic feedback each of their grids was submitted to a principal components analysis and the elements and constructs plotted for the first two components. This method has several advantages over other methods. Firstly, it is an objective assessment of the teacher's own statement of his or her perceptions. Secondly, it tends to uncover issues which are important to the teachers themselves. Thirdly, it highlights the different orientations of the different teachers in a school.

METHOD

The school studied was a state primary school in Melbourne's southern suburbs, having a total staff of 15, 12 of whom participated in the study. The principal was away while most of the research took place. Of the 12 teachers, 2 were male and 10 female. 4 were aged 40-50, 3 were aged 30-40 and 5 were aged 20-30. Most were fairly experienced teachers with only 4 having had less than 5 years' teaching experience.

A list of 29 topics of school life (elements) were chosen on the basis of informal discussions with several teachers. They were teaching goals, self as a teacher, school curriculum, teachers' union, experienced teachers, in-service training, involved parents, own family, migrant children, own motives for teaching, disruptive children, the school, future for students, female teachers, school hierarchy, others' motives for teaching, own class, remedial children, consultants, inspectors, staff relationships, gifted children, school policy, local community, social life in school, male teachers, uninterested parents, and future career. 17 feeling statements (constructs) were chosen intuitively on the basis that they would be meaningful for teachers and enable them to discriminate between the elements. The constructs were of the form, makes me feel They were sympathy for, that the job's worthwhile, depressed at times, no real concern, accountable for/to, that change is resisted, that we work as a team, that the job is hard, that I'd like to do something other than teach, a sense of powerlessness, pride in the school, that the system works badly, a great deal of satisfaction, a sense of belonging, fairly passive, that traditional teaching approaches are important, that people are aware of the problems. Each teacher rated the 29 elements on each of the 17 constructs using a 5 point scale in which 5 = strongly agree, 4 = agree, 3 = ambivalent, 2 = disagree, 1 = strongly disagree.

The research was carried out by a psychologist working for the Education Department as part of a staff development program. The co-operation of the staff was sought at a staff meeting, during which there was a discussion on the need for teachers to be aware of their attitudes, and of the repertory grid methodology. They were told that there were no right or wrong answers, that confidentiality would be maintained by the use of code names and that they would receive feedback about their grids as soon as possible. They were given a week to complete the grid and were given envelopes for those who wished to seal their returns. After one week 12 of the 14 available teachers had completed their grids. These were then analysed individually using the INGRID principal components analysis computer program. The element and construct loadings were then plotted on the 2 first components for each teacher. These plots were then distributed to the teachers at a staff meeting and a discussion held concerning points of significance to look for in each plot. The teachers were shown how to identify the principal components on the basis of the element and construct loadings. They were asked to look at elements and constructs in relation to element 2, self as a teacher. The following questions were discussed. What makes the job hard? What makes you feel powerless? Is in-service related to team work? Is self as a teacher related to teaching goals? Are your teaching goals related to school policy? Are your own motives for teaching related to teaching goals? Which elements are for you associated with satisfaction? In a subsequent session consideration was given to the use of the plots as a means of (1) increasing teacher self-awareness of their own perceptions of various aspects of the school environment and their impact on self-identify, (2) uncovering latent issues, questions and potential conflicts within the school as a pre-requisite for establishing relevant objectives for staff development. Following these discussions each teacher was offered an appointment time to discuss his or her plot privately.

In order to identify teachers with similar concerns within the school the elements were grouped into those which were related to the teacher's self image, to the institution of the school,

or to children and their parents. Elements which did not fit any of these categories were excluded. These were beginning teachers, experienced teachers, female/male teachers, and the local community. There were 8 self related elements, teaching goals, self as a teacher, own family, own motives for teaching, others' motives for teachers, own class, social life, and future career. There were 9 school related elements, curriculum, in-service, teachers' union, school, hierarchy, consultants and inspectors. There were 7 children related elements, involved parents, migrant children, uninterested parents, disruptive children, future for students, gifted children and remedial children. At least 3 or more element loadings greater than .45 were taken as a rough guide for grouping a teacher with others with similar patterns of element loadings.

Results

The heuristic for clustering teachers yielded 5 meaningful groupings of teachers.

Group 1. Teachers concerned with their self-image, the school and children.

The two teachers in this group were both experienced but new to the school. Elma was a teacher in this group. She had had about 5 years' teaching experience, most of it in the upper grades of primary school. She had just returned after 13 months confinement leave and was now teaching grade 3. The first component (36%)* for Elma distinguished between uninterested parents (0.98)*, staff relationships (0.73) and school social life (0.69) on the one hand and teaching goals (-0.69), own class (-0.37) and involved parents (-0.20) on the other. The latter made Elma feel satisfied with teaching (-0.85), take pride in the school (-0.82) and have a sense of belonging (-0.80) the former did not. The second component (19.9%) distinguished between the elements male teachers (0.58) and in-service training (0.57) and elements future career (-0.47) and beginning teachers (-0.59). The former were described as making Elma feel no real concern (0.57), the job is hard (0.57) and the job is not worthwhile (0.43). The latter elements were associated with the opposite kinds of feelings.

Groups 2. Teachers concerned with their self-image and children. The two teachers in this group were both female and in their middle age, both were in the infant department of the school. Both had been working for over 20 years. Neither loaded the school factors probably because they were not interested in promotion. Both were confident teachers who enjoyed teaching infants. Both of these teachers felt that their families did not fully support them in their teaching careers.

Jill was one of these teachers. She had taught for over twenty years mainly in the infant grades. Her first component (27.9%) distinguished between elements such as, own family (0.93), own class (0.70), self as a teacher (0.45) and elements the local community (-0.51), school social life (-0.53), and consultants (-0.95). Constructs positively associated the former and negatively with latter elements were make me feel sympathy for (0.81), makes the job worthwhile (0.73) and

*The amount of variance accounted for by a component is given in parentheses as also are factor loadings.

helps us work as a team (0.72). Jill's second component (14.9%) distinguished between the elements, uninterested parents (0.56) and elements remedial children (-0.68) and students' future (-0.60). The latter made Jill feel real concern (-0.69), accountable (-0.53) and that traditional teaching approaches are important (0.81).

Group 3. Teachers concerned mainly with their self-image. The 3 teachers in this group all worked in the senior primary grades. They had considerable contact with each other especially with regard to curriculum matters. Ross was a member of this group. He had been teaching for over 20 years and was a senior teacher in the upper grades of the school. Ross' first component (35.5%) distinguished between elements in-service training (0.72), disruptive children (0.58) and inspectors (0.50) and elements, self as a teacher (-0.65), own class (-0.66), gifted children (-0.74) and own motives for teaching (-0.96). Constructs positively associated with the latter elements were, make the job worthwhile (0.38), give a sense of belonging (0.37) and feel pride in the school (0.33).

Group 4. Teachers mainly concerned with the school. Vera was the only teacher whose loadings concerned mainly only the school. She had been teaching for over 20 years, the last 10 of which had been in her present school. She was the teacher in charge of the infant section of the school. Vera's first component (32%) distinguished between elements such as school social life (0.96), staff relationships (0.82) and the school (0.65) and elements such as in-service training (-0.96), own family (-0.63) and the curriculum (-0.53). The former Vera described as making her feel a sense of not belonging (0.38), that she would like to change jobs (0.73), and a feeling of powerlessness (0.75). The latter elements were associated with the opposite kinds of feelings. Vera's second component (17.1%) distinguished between elements such as, the school curriculum (0.69), the local community (0.60) and experienced teachers (0.56) and elements future career (-0.45) and self as a teacher (-0.47). The constructs, of no real concern (0.39), fairly passive (0.67) and traditional teaching approaches are important (0.61) were positively associated with the former elements.

Group 5. Teachers concerned mainly with children. This group of 4 teachers was very mixed in amount of teaching experience and background. They had in common that elements such as remedial, gifted, or migrant children were associated with feelings of satisfaction and concern. Joan, a member of this group, was a student teacher in her third year of training to be a primary teacher. She was on an eight week practicum. Joan's first component (39%) distinguished between the elements, teachers' union (0.50), curriculum (0.53) and school policy (0.47) and elements, remedial children (-0.63), migrant children (-0.70), and gifted children (-0.79). The latter elements were described positively as giving satisfaction (-0.72), helping foster teamwork (-0.73) and pride in the school (-0.71). These feelings for Joan were not associated with the first set of elements. Her second component (14.3%) emphasized the elements, self as a teacher (0.71), and teaching goals (0.68). Joan felt these elements were associated with feelings that the job is here (0.66) and that traditional teaching approaches are important (0.49).

Discussion

In general the teachers expressed clearly which elements in their school environment gave them satisfaction and a sense of belonging. These were the teacher's own class, and family, gifted children, interested parents, and the school curriculum. Quite clearly these elements affect a teacher's sense of worth in a profound way. Aspects of school life which were often seen as not satisfying were school social life, consultants, uninterested parents, disruptive children, inspectors, and the local community. These elements either meant little to the teachers studied, e.g. school social life or cause them trouble, e.g. disruptive children and detract from their self-confidence. Children related elements were important for 8 out of 12 teachers. If one also considers that only 3 teachers emphasized school related elements, then it becomes clear that it is the personal rather than the institutional aspects of teaching which were important for the teachers of this primary school. It is probably true that most of the teachers studied had an implicit view of themselves as teachers which was closely related to themselves as parents actual or potential. The individual cases described above often contrasted institutional elements e.g. inspectors with self or children related elements. The one teacher who stressed the school as an institution, Vera, had just been promoted to head of the infant department. This teacher was however very much the exception. Even the 3 teachers who stressed self-related elements tended to contrast these with institutional elements. All 3 associated self related elements with the construct "the job is worth while". It is also interesting that where the construct "pride in the school" was stressed, it was not construed to apply to institutional elements. The negative flavour which these elements seem to have suggests that for this school at least, institutional aspects of school life were not presented in a way in which they could be integrated in to the individual's personal teaching life.

The present study was exploratory. The repertory grid technique does clearly allow the research to study the teacher's personal experience in a way which is acceptable to both. Much emphasis has been put on teacher-personality (Hamachek, 1959) and the perceptual-belief systems of teachers (Combs, 1978). These areas are undoubtedly important to study. The repertory grid is an ideal instrument to do so. However, a more interesting line of research may be to apply the methodology of Rosenberg (1976) which is basically an expansion of personal construct theory, to study the implicit personality theories which teachers hold. It then becomes possible to enable the teachers to become aware of the theories they hold about children in general and particular types of children; to be aware that how they construe the various aspects of school life might be intimately connected with their feelings of dissatisfaction. As Hart (1974) pointed out in discussing the concept of the 'self-renewal' teachers need a commitment to self development that extends far beyond competency in the classroom.

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