What Kind of Schools Do Pupils Want?

VERNON L. REPLOGLE

Directly and frankly, pupils report in this article their likes and dislikes about their school, their teachers, their studies. Vernon L. Replogle is principal of the Thomas Metcalf Elementary School, Illinois State Normal University, Normal, Illinois.

SHEER economy in learning demands that the desires, concerns and goals of the learner be given more than passing consideration. Learning apparently takes place best in an environment in which the learner feels secure and is not hampered by undue frustration. Thus it becomes necessary to learn from the child himself those things which make for security and those which seem to increase frustration. Even though the optimal growth and development of the child is the true purpose for much of our educational effort, the educator listens all too infrequently to the voices of the children as he plans the educational program.

With this in mind the writer, assisted by a number of cooperating elementary school teachers,[1] went directly to pupils in an effort to find out what they say, how they feel and what they like and dislike about their school. Children from grades two through eight were given an opportunity to express themselves freely about various aspects of their school environment. Some expressed themselves in writing, some in informal group discussion, and some in individual talks with their teacher. Insofar as possible, comments of the pupils are reproduced in the exact terminology of the child.

[1] Teachers who participated in this study were: Mary Arnold, Ruth Cole, Francis Damm, Wezette Hayden, Alice Hitchcock, Faye Mansfield, Mary Rozum, Ethel Stein and Sadie Udstuen, all members of the staff of the Illinois State Normal University Training School, Normal, Ill. Supplementary data were supplied from the Springfield, Mo., public schools by Elsie Butler, and from the Wilmette, Ill., schools by Carrie Chase. Approximately 700 pupils were involved.

What Did Pupils Say?

The following data are submitted without any claim of scientific validity, at least in the sense of the physical sciences; nevertheless, the evidence is highly significant and implies much for the achievement of better teaching and better learning. When pupils were given opportunity to comment about what makes a good school environment, they talked of many things. Though the subject of teachers stole the show, pupils were concerned also about their peers; their classroom furniture and school buildings; their school studies and activities; their experiences outside of class; and their parents.

About My Teachers

Pupils look to their teachers for many things. For example, they want a teacher who understands their troubles; who likes and has faith in them; who is attractive, wears nice

clothes and has a nice smile; who does not make belittling comparisons with other pupils or classes. They ask that their teacher provide something new and interesting to do, and refrain from talking too much, always getting mad, and holding a grudge. Pupils further specify that they want a teacher who is bright and cheerful; who stays home when sick; who is friendly and compliments one as often as the situation justifies; who is patient and willing to explain problems until they are understood; who has an interesting voice and a sense of humor; who is strict but not too strict; and much more. But let the pupils speak for themselves.

Because of space limitation, only comments most representative and most often repeated are reported. (Number at end of quote indicates grade level of pupil.)

I like a teacher who understands my troubles. (8). . . . I like my teacher because she understands me and helps me when I need it. (6). . . . They help us read. (2). . . . Teachers let us have parties. (2). . . . Why do teachers like everybody but me? (5). . . . I like a teacher who is fair and believes what you tell her. (8). . . . I don't think teachers should wear the same clothes every day; they get so tiring. (5). . . . I like a teacher who has a really friendly smile—not a fake one. (8). . . . I like a teacher who does not embarrass you before the whole class. (8). . . . I like a teacher to teach and explain things but not to harp on something *she* likes for a long time. (6). . . . I like teachers who don't always say, "Do this, Do that, Don't do that." (3). . . . I am glad teachers are not crabby and sneery. (5). . . . I like teachers who can make the subject interesting and worth while. Always has something new for you to do. (8). . . . I like teachers who smile and are kind. (2). . . . I am glad teachers are not grouchy and unfriendly. (5). . . . I like teachers who stay home when they are sick instead of telling you they have a headache and are cross. (7). . . . I like to have a teacher compliment me—sometimes. (5). . . . I like a teacher who is patient and who will keep explaining things until I really understand them. (8). . . . I am glad teachers are nice to you when you make mistakes. (4). . . . I like a teacher whose voice is interesting. (8). . . . I like teachers who give directions clear. (3). . . . I like teachers who laugh with you. (7). . . . I like my teacher because she kids with us and is not always serious. (6). . . . I like teachers to be strict but not too strict. (8). . . . Why do teachers have to be so strict? (5). . . . Teachers should not make the whole class stay after school when one or two persons act up. (4).

About My Classmates

These pupils want their peers to be modest, friendly, trustworthy, polite and active, and have interests and tastes similar to their own. They want their friends to be popular; they want classmates who will like them; who have a sense of humor; and they endorse the practice of having boys and girls together at school. They like their friends to be clean and are pleased when every child is fortunate enough not to be poor. Supporting comments follow:

I want them to be friendly—not too loud and noisy. (8). . . . I don't like people who try to "hog" the whole show in sports or who talk all the time so others don't have a chance to say a few things. (8). . . . I don't like

a "show-off." (6). . . . I like my best friends because they are clean and nice to me. (5). . . . I like the students because they are kind and just, and always willing to help you out. (5). . . . Children at this school are friendly, not fresh. (3). . . . I like people who are frank and don't talk behind your back. (8). . . . I don't like a person who tries to boss you around. (6). . . . I like John because he and I like sports. (6). . . . I like someone with a good personality, someone who is interested in many different things, especially the things I like. (8). . . . I like an active person who wants to do things instead of sitting around and reading a book all the time. (7). . . . I like a person that the other kids like too. (8). . . . I hope I have friends in the room, but if I don't I still like everyone. (7). . . . I like school because you can make new friends. (5). . . . I like unselfish people who will help you and are willing to lend you things you need. (8). . . . I like it because boys and girls work together here and we don't sit apart. (3). . . . I like school because we are so much alike and no one is poor. (3). . . . They come to my house when I am lonesome. (2). . . . I like people with a good sense of humor and who are able to take a joke; I like them to have a good appearance too. . . . I hate people who are not clean. (8). . . . I like my friends because they are clean and nice. (6).

About My Classroom

In general, pupils want movable desks which are comfortable, quiet, of the right size, easy to get things in and out of, and which are large enough to hold all their supplies. They want their rooms to be light, nicely decorated with colored chalkboards and spacious enough to avoid a feeling of being "cooped-up." They ask for "plenty of book cases and cabinets." They want acoustically treated rooms, and controls to prevent excessive fluctuation of temperature. Whether it be in the classroom or somewhere else in the building they desire a place to keep their personal belongings. Sample comments follow:

I like our desks because they are easy to get into. (6). . . . I like the chairs because they are comfortable. (6). . . . I like the desks because they hold a lot. (4). . . . Can't we have desks that do not make a noise? (8). . . . I like our furniture because you can move your desk and seat around. (3). . . . I don't like my desk because it doesn't open at the top and when you try to get things out, they fall out. (5). . . . We need better heating and lighting. (3). . . . I should like more and bigger windows. (5). . . . I would like green blackboards because they are prettier and easier on your eyes. (6). . . . I like rooms that are nicely decorated and have plenty of book cases and cabinets. (8). . . . We ought to have good soundproofing so it wouldn't sound so noisy in the halls. (8). . . . We aren't cooped up, we have plenty of room. (3). . . . I wish our room could have the same temperature as the others so you wouldn't freeze in one and bake in another. (8). . . . Lockers for everyone would eliminate a lot of mix-ups. (7).

About School Buildings

There was insistent demand for well lighted, acoustically treated, gaily decorated buildings of preferably one story and not more than two. There must be plenty of *cold* drinking fountains and adequate special service rooms such as gyms, auditorium, a "cafeteria with

good cooks" and "a room for movies alone that could remain set up." The building must be safe and equipped with good fire exits.

The upper-graders want special rooms for clubs "with all equipment needed," "nice halls that can be decorated," and "a browsing room adjoining the library where we can use the magazines whenever we want to." For example, they say:

I like our school building because it has an auditorium and we can give pageants and plays. (6). . . . One thing wrong is three flights of stairs (whew!) especially when I have a French horn. (7). . . . I would like to have a fire exit in each room. (5). . . . I like *cold* drinking fountains. (5). . . . I like good cooks in the cafeteria that don't make you eat what you don't like. (4). . . . I would like a nice big gym well equipped, and lockers with plenty of room. (8). . . . I wish we had a big lunchroom where you don't hear the dishes all the time. (7). . . . I don't see why schools can't have air-conditioning; screens on the windows too. (7).

About My Playground

There is overwhelming agreement that the playground should be large, safe and well equipped with slides, teeters, swings, ample basketball courts, a skating rink for winter and baseball diamonds a-plenty. Pupils of all ages want separate playground space for widely different age levels. They say:

We like lots of playground space, also a slide outside. (5). . . . Our playground is nice because it has lots of equipment. (3). . . . I like our play-



Courtesy, Ill. State Normal Training School

Pupils like to share in planning their varied activities

ground because they try to keep it safe. (6). . . . The little kids should have a separate playground. They get in the way and may get hurt. (8). . . . Why can't we have a baseball diamond of our own? The seventh-graders chase us off. (5). . . . I like our school because we don't have too many rules. We can snowball each other and play in the snow. (3).

About My School Studies

Pupils were not as articulate about their school studies as they were in other areas. Nevertheless, it was clear that pupils want to spend their time on things "interesting and worth while," they dislike to review things they "already know," and prefer to *do* things rather than have "too much talking about them." The majority indicate a need for and express a desire to gain competency in the 3 R's, but they want to help plan *how* the work shall be done.

I don't seem to like language except when we are writing letters for something. (5). . . . I like a variety of interesting things. (5). . . . I like reading because it has such interesting stories. (6). . . . I like art because we can make things for our fathers and mothers. (3). . . . I like arithmetic because we do it in a fun way. (4). . . . I like arithmetic because you have to know arithmetic to get along in this world—also right now. (6). . . . I like science because I like to do experiments. (6). . . . I like to plan what we do and do it. (4). . . . In arithmetic we are always reviewing last year's work. (7). . . . We have such nice programs; it's so nice to have music every day. (3). . . . I like to read library books to the first grade. (7). . . . *Talking* about safety so much is not important to me. (4). . . . Things we already know about we don't like to study about. (6). . . . I like gym because you get to move around and talk. (7). . . . You have to know how to read in geographies, histories and social studies books or it will blow you up! (4). . . . I like a subject with discussions that you can take part in—not just listening and reading. (8).

About Informal Activities at School

The kinds of activities which appeal to children whether they be in the classroom or outside it are those that have a high potential for providing opportunities to work with others, to make new friends and to gain new skills and competencies. They seem to be asking for activities recreational in nature but which at the same time give to them status and a feeling of security. They appreciate a share in planning their varied activities. They say:

I'd like to take more bus trips; it would be educational and we'd enjoy it also. (5). . . . I like the way we get a chance to be in the plays at the assembly, and get in safety patrol and the student council. (5). . . . I like intramurals because our gym coaches teach us how to play football, basketball, etc. (6). . . . I like the parties because they help me to learn to plan a program. (6). . . . I like the parties because we get to be on different committees. (5). . . . I like our homeroom business meetings. (6). . . . I like Girl Scouts because it gives us a chance to get together and talk. (6). . . . I like the parties (birthday, Christmas, etc.) our mothers give us. (3). . . . I like our after-school sports because everyone can take part even if he isn't very good. (8). . . . Our school room parties are too dull;

they are planned too much by the teacher; we ought to be able to make more noise. (7). . . . Boy, don't think I'd forget the parties; we have lots of fun. (7). . . . Why can't we have more jobs to do, like watering plants, emptying the pencil sharpener, dusting erasers and delivering messages? (5).

About Miscellaneous Things

Comments which did not logically fall under any of the preceding headings reflected a deep concern about health and safety. Pupils like the idea of having a nurse nearby. They appreciate good fire escapes and they feel that fire drills are very important. The safety patrol provides added feeling of security for many. In response to "What things about school do you think are most important?" several class groups placed "safety" at the top of the list. Sample comments follow:

I like to know that there is a school nurse here to take care of us when we get sick. (3). . . . I like the safety patrol. It makes our coming to school safer, especially for little children. (6). . . . I do not like to live so far from school and have to cross so many dangerous streets. (5). . . . I am glad we have good fire escapes. (5). . . . Our school thinks of safety first. (3). . . . When you get hurt they bandage you up. (2).

One third grader likes his school because it has a kindergarten. He says, "It gave me a good start." Several pupils indicated concern about individual shortcomings which placed them at a disadvantage with their peers. One boy would like to learn to read better. Says he, "I wish I could read better so I could be in the next group." Still another was suffering from his inability to hit a baseball; this fourth grade boy came home to his mother, fell on the bed and cried, "I'd give all my brains if I could just swat a ball one time." An eighth grader was worried about his small size. "I would like school if I were as big as the other boys. Do you think I will grow?" Another fourth grader was not so troubled; he was glad that "we have a janitor that keeps a nice school and does not sit and rest."

Some Implications for the Learning Environment

Findings of this study tend to support the generally accepted principles of good learning, verbalized so well in theory but not so well practiced. For example: the mind cannot be educated apart from the emotional and physical self; learning is a function of the total environment; it must be active, purposive and goal-centered. Security provides an essential basis for good learning.

The children were saying these same things in their own language when they spoke of the importance of teachers who are friendly, patient and understanding and who can relate the learning situation to their own needs and interests. They asked that teaching methods be direct, with a minimum of talking and a maximum of doing. This they felt would make school work worth while. They expressed desire for peers who are friendly, trustworthy and active, with a sense of humor and wide interests. Having friends is of utmost importance to children. Friends, security and good learning seem inextricably interrelated.

Pupils recognized the importance of good physical conditions when they

asked for well equipped and comfortable classrooms with due regard to eyes, ears and body temperature. They seemed to reject the ridiculous fantasy that they come to school to read, write and figure *only*. They want to use their skills and competencies to achieve ends and purposes more vital to them. Children want to include such informal activities as parties, dances, plays, games and committee work as a part of the regular school day.

From the child's point of view, good education for him must consider all aspects of his living; it must take account of his total environment. Since this coincides with important principles of good learning, perhaps the school would do well to listen more often to the voices of its children. Again may it be pointed out that pupils and modern education are close together in theory, not so close together in practice.

Developing Maturity in Youth

ARTHUR E. HAMALAINEN

How schools can assist children and youth toward higher levels of maturity is discussed by Arthur E. Hamalainen, Principal, Plandome School, Manhasset, New York.

"MATURITY" as a goal in education has probably always been a major objective of teachers. At various times we have labeled this aim, "Education for Growth," "Education for Citizenship," "Education for Life Adjustment" or by some other similar terminology. Certainly every teacher at all conscientious has believed that his job is to help children grow toward maturity. Since this seems so evident it may well be questioned why at this time we should again attempt to redefine a point so obvious to us all.

The real fact, as Overstreet has indicated,[1] is that maturity as a concept representing growth of the individual's total life has had to wait for a historical process of development in many fields. Formulation of an adequate basis of maturity has had to await development of an adequate mathematics, physics, chemistry, biology, physiology and psychology. So, while the schools since time immemorial have taught for maturity as a fundamental goal, a truly functional statement of maturity has had to wait until the present century. Only now have the synthesis of these fields of thought and the re-examination of old values in the light of this synthesis brought us a workable concept of maturity.

This new synthesis has supplied us with enough tools and information to make a school which will help youth in developing a quality of maturity not previously thought possible. We have better means of knowing when children and youth are matching their

[1] Harry Overstreet, *The Mature Mind*. New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1949.

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