

CHAPTER 8

THE PROBLEM OF LEAVING SCHOOL TOO EARLY [DROPPING OUT]

8.1 Introduction

This chapter deals with the problem of White youth in the Republic of South Africa dropping out of school.¹

Currently [1979], this problem has become timely because:

- As a small part of the total population of our country, Whites occupy leading positions and positions of responsibility in all vocational fields;
- Our country is developing quickly in technological areas, and has a great need for highly schooled people for employment;
- Specialization has increased in a highly differentiated, complex and demanding world of employment and, indeed, in the areas of the professions, technologies, sciences, social services, economics, organizations, trades, etc. in which people, in their calling, work with machines, instruments, computers, appliances, administrative organizations and with *people*.

As an emerging country, the R.S.A. has a pressing need for employable people who can meet the high demands required by a modern technological societal structure with their knowledge and skills, and who are ready and qualified for the long and intense preparation needed to meet these demands. Therefore, the human potential of our country, in the form of brainpower, manpower and the highest possible level of qualification of each available White citizen, and where no-Whites are dispersible in their contribution to society. If this is not the case, we will have to combat the problem of a manpower shortage which can restrain the necessary development of our country. “The erosion of manpower potential is a luxury that cannot be afforded in the South Africa of the twentieth

century. Therefore, the most effective way of harnessing and ‘cultivating human potential’ in our country is urgent,” according to Gresse.²

The seriousness and scope of this problem is illuminated by the findings of Project Talent Survey by the Human Sciences Research Council, from which it seems that only 38.1% of a large group of Standard 6 [8th grade—U.S.A.] pupils of 1965 were found in Standard 10 [12th grade—U.S.A.] in 1969. Thus, because of failing exams and dropping out, in 1969 61.9% of the pupils were not found in Standard 10, and it seems that approximately 55% of the Standard 6 group had left school before they had reached Standard 10.³

The problem of dropping out of school too early, indeed, is a sociopedagogical matter:

- it is a social-societal problem if, by educating and teaching, an optimal contribution of qualified manpower to society cannot be realized, and the contribution of educating and teaching to the development of the country falls short. From this, the origin of the problem is found in societal forms, i.e., in the family, school and society.
- pedagogically, dropping out of school means that a *pedagogical value judgment* of becoming adult, and preparation for life of the youth is expressed, since school is left before a youth has attained what he/she is able to⁴ so that, with the quality of his/her life and vocation, he/she cannot be assimilated as an optimal participant in society.

8.2 Definition of dropping out of school [too early]

The concept of *leaving school too early* refers to the phenomenon of a pupil of average or above average intellectual potential who, for one or another reason, does not adequately realize this potential for the sake of an optimal school achievement. He/she does not fully implement his/her cognitive potentialities and underachieves on this basis; he/she fails in the school situation and leaves before he/she has succeeded at the Standard [grade] which, indeed, is achievable for him/her. Thus, for him/her, there is a discrepancy

between his/her *attainable* and *attained* level of school achievement. A less intelligent pupil who leaves school early (e.g., after Standard 6 or Standard 8) because his/her intellectual potentialities do not allow him/her to achieve higher, is not one who leaves school *too early*, since he/she has attained the level of which he/she is capable.

The terms “dropout” and “underachiever” also hold for one who leaves school too early.

8.3 The origins of leaving school too early

The origins of leaving school too early are found in one or more of the following group factors: personal factors; family factors; school factors; societal factors.

8.3.1 Personal factors:

It is possible that a child or youth, because of deviancies in person structure (life of impulse, temperament, character), is not able to deal with his/her school situation as a teaching and learning, as well as a social situation. A constitutional neurotically predisposed disposition implies that such a youth is characterized by personal weakness, personal disintegration, inner instability, and a lack of dynamic equilibrium with personality and vital defects (a-vital neurosis). His/her relationships and behaviors then are characterized by:

- restrained growing up (infantility)
- disturbed contact
- psychic disturbance, especially emotional lability
- lack of engagement in any social situation
- hypersensitivity
- inclination to withdraw
- negative self-image
- mental bondedness
- independence
- weak-willed
- neurotic tendencies.

His/her personal problems hinder him/her in being able to be open enough to the learning material and for his/her fellow persons, and he/she cannot adequately engage him/herself in the class group and school community, which are preconditions for the optimal actualization of intellectual potentialities. His/her miscarried and unfortunate school experience mean that ultimately he/she experiences scholastic defeat and proceed to leave school too early. A neurotically inclined pupil quickly finds him/herself in unfortunate and educative impeding isolation because of his/her being constrained, his/her defensive attitude, anxiety and uncertainty, apathy, animosity and deviant behavior.

Often, the personal problems of youth can be coupled with his/her developmental phase, e.g., mood swing, conflict, sensitivity, impotence, stubbornness, aloofness, insecurity, and loneliness which characterize the time of puberty. One in puberty is addressed strongly by his/her own body, and often cannot assimilate the progression to biological and mental adulthood. Then his/her inability to deal with anxiety, conflict and the tension between biological and social demands block his/her intellectual achievement. Also, his/her encounter with the opposite gender in this phase means for him/her an emotionally loaded relationship which can lead to learning problems. In addition, his/her energy is sapped by the fast bodily growth and change he/she experiences, and he/she direct him/herself, as such, to the overwhelming experience of his/her own body which impedes and blocks a directedness to school achievement. "This then is the modern teenager: a boy or girl whose energies are already sapped by the sheer process of physical growth, caught up in a whirl of school work and social activities in and out of school, confronted by decisions which will affect his entire life, confused by the shifting attitudes of his parents, teachers and society in general, all of whom doubt him and his behaviour, and bewildered by the complex and rapidly changing civilization into which he must soon fit, assuming all of the responsibilities of maturity."⁵

8.3.2 Family factors:

As in the case of all the other sociopedagogical problems, the problem of leaving school too early can find it origin in family life

and family educating. In chapter 5 it was shown how the following family factors can give rise to sociopedagogical problems such as leaving school too early: disturbed relationship of living together (pedagogical and non-pedagogical), mistakes in educating and unfavorable family situations. If the family does not mean a space for a child, of basic security and safety, and he/she does not receive the love, warmth, acceptance, authority, etc. for which he/she has a need, this means that, for him/her, it is an attack on his/her entire existence, and this is an unfavorable condition for his/her going out to the school situation and for achieving in this context.

Adequate educative communication is a precondition for a child's optimal achievement because it includes communicating to him/her the demands and expectations about achieving in school.

Intelligence is a cognitive potentiality which only can be realized on an optimal level based on emotional stability and an adequate cognitive, affective and normative educating to do so. The connection between a labile family life and inadequate family educating, on the one hand, and leaving school too early, on the other hand, can be aligned as follows:

- labile family relationships and educative distress give rise to a
- disturbed emotional life (anxiety, insecurity, etc.) which leads to an
- underachievement (blocked achieving) which prompts
- leaving school too early.

The above unfavorable factors push a child into a constraining position of anxiety and distress which provides the foundation for his/her underachievement. This deprives him/her of the daring to deal with the school's demands, and his/her underachievement essentially is a form of deviant behavior. There is almost no psychic disturbance of a child and no environmental defect which cannot reflect itself in the deterioration of school achievement. The concepts being *prepared for school* and being *school vulnerable* refer to a child who has not been educated to defend him/herself against school and to implement his/her intelligence. He/she then is not ready and responsible enough to accept a task, cannot concentrate on learning material, he/she is not directed and motivated to learn, he/she cannot engage well in a class situation as

a social situation, etc. This lack of attunement and engagement mean that a child is a potential dropout. By educative and social neglect, he/she is not formed to be prepared for school.

8.3.3 School factors:

Several factors which can give rise to leaving school too early also are found in the school and classroom situation. Especially if the school inadequately realizes its teaching and socializing functions, an unfavorable situation is created within which a child becomes a potential dropout:

- Teaching function: When the learning material is not adequately unlocked for a child, he/she does not acquire an effective grasp of it and, for him/her this means an underachievement of the material and, on this basis, will want to leave school (This is a didactic matter).
- Relationship of understanding: If a teacher does not accept each child as he/she is, and understand each child with his/her unique personality, and if he/she does not take care to present realistic achievement expectations, the unrealistic demands and expectation can be too high or too low and can lead to a child experiencing discouragement or boredom, on the basis of which his/her poor directedness will have underachieving and dropping out as results.
- Social engagement: If, in the help of anyone involved in the event of living together as teaching, the school and class atmosphere are not experienced by a pupil as an emotionally *safe learning and social space*, his/her lack of social engagement can give rise to underachievement and dropping out of school. A pupil must be able to be adequately linked up with the class group, and a positive social climate is needed for an undisturbed personal unfolding and adequate learning achievement. It is a prerequisite that working and living together in school will be a meaningful and fruitful experience for a pupil. If a pupil feels at home in the class, this promotes his/her schoolwork. A relaxed communicating in the social interaction within a classroom means successful learning, while dis-communicating impedes learning.

- Peer groups: A pupil can be seduced by the norms and pressure of unfavorable groups (e.g., a class gang) to an indifference, rebelliousness and negativity toward the school, the teacher and the learning material such that he/she cannot fulfill the demands of propriety regarding schoolwork.
- Educative communication: A teacher who, in his/her contact with the pupils, cannot adequately consider the level of their becoming adult, gender, level of intelligence, emancipation, milieu and communication problems of the pupils. His/her negative, autocratic, negation and lack of understanding or permissive communication create the possibility of an unfortunate school experience for the pupil, of underachievement and of dropping out of school.
- Learning to work: A child must be motivated to want to learn and work. If educating to task acceptance in school fails, the school loses its holding power on the pupil.
- Learning to live and work together: Inadequate association and learning-in-association with fellow persons means for pupils a state of isolation in school from which they want to escape as soon as possible by dropping out of school.
- Learning meaningful diversions: If a child is not engaged in extramural activities of the school, an opportunity for compensatory achievements for him/her is lost (compensate for an unsatisfactory school achievement in areas of sports, leadership, or culture). An extramural achievement can contribute greatly to a child staying in school because his/her experience of the school situation as meaningful can be found in them.
- Learn to respect values: In school, a child must learn that it is meaningful and valuable to achieve to the best of one's ability. If the life and time of childhood are not fulfilled by an adequate, meaningful learning achievement, it means underachievement and leaving school too early are fulfillments of child life which are not valuable.
- True to life learning material: A child questions the worth of learning material which is alien to life. He/she does not find it meaningful to achieve with it, and often experiences problems of subject and vocational choice regarding subjects and subject directions which appear to be meaningless to him/her

- Future orientation: If this fails in school, a pupil does not acquire a motivating vocational ideal toward which he/she can work and achieve in school. If he/she is not influenced by striving for a higher level of preparation, and then he/she finds little satisfaction and finds it undesirable to leave school to go to work for vocational profit.

Thus, in all respects, the school must be “child accommodative” and if school falls short in this respect, a pupil will not stay in school as long as possible. “(The) essential threat is in a collectivism and utilitarian depersonalization by the concentration in impersonal life situations in large classes and an attunement to overemphasized intellectualized examinations and quantifications in maximum distinction and first classes – quantitatively and qualitatively,” according to Du Plessis.⁶

In connection with the problem of leaving school too early, Garbers⁷ presents the following as criteria by which a “good” school can be recognized:

- Does the school exercise a strong holding power on the pupils?
- Do the pupils in a particular school achieve according to ability?
- Does there exist in the school an opportunity for all pupils to achieve and participate non-scholastically?
- Do the school experiences play a role in a child’s future perspective?
- To what extent is there disharmony between school and society?
- What is the nature of the educative relationship in school?
- Can the school take into consideration the support of the family?
- Are the relationships among the pupils such that they promote learning activities and support?
- Do peer group relationships work with persons outside of the school as school alienating or promoting school hostility?
- Does the teaching climate of a school promote educating and teaching?
- How mobile is the school population?
- How heterogeneous is the school population?

Finally, the following two alarming tendencies can give rise to leaving school early:

- (i) More to learn and quicker: The pressure on pupils of higher demands are continually increasing regarding learning material, achievement, tasks and examinations.
- (ii) Get rid of the maladapted: There is increasing impatience with “problem children” at school because they delay the progress of others and usually show negative and rebellious attitudes toward school.⁸

8.3.4 Societal factors:

The following societal conditions can work as factors which influence youth to leave school too early:

- Economic-technological development: This creates an abundance of opportunities for work and favorable economic conditions which make it easier and more attractive for youth to leave school too early for the sake of earning money.
- Manpower shortage: This means youth with poor qualifications and training can find a “good” job with a satisfactory salary. Employers bid for employees with attractive salaries, even if they are unschooled, and in this way they are “seduced away” from school too early.
- Materialism: The idea of “make money” to get part of the prosperity seems for youth more attractive than the thought of effort to obtain adequate school achievement.
- Experiencing enjoyment: A pupil will escape investing in school so he/she can “enjoy life”.
- Youth alienation: Youth experience achievement in school as meaningless because this would mean that he/she conforms with the unacceptable “establishment”.
- Drugs: Youth who abuse drugs cannot adequately realize their potentialities for school achievement. Drug abuse means “dropping out” of the “rat race” of school. There is a close connection between drug abuse and leaving school too early.
- Being milieu impeded: A pedagogically and socially neglected youth in a milieu-impeded family is not educated to an

- adequate school achievement and proceeds to drop out (See Chapter 9).
- Permissiveness: In a permissive society and in permissive educating a youth is excessively free from demands and responsibilities, and not free to fulfill demands and responsibilities which involve effort to achieve in school.
 - Massification: Youth leave school too early to make money by which they can participate in the culture of mass youth. He/she can afford youth styles, radios, LP records, motorbikes and a variety of entertainment such as disco, movies, etc.
 - Identity crisis: Youth who experience identity confusion, a negative self-image, meaninglessness, aimlessness and feelings of inferiority quickly escape the school situation to try to find, in a life of apparent adulthood, his/her own identity (meaningfulness).

Du Plessis⁹ summarizes this matter as follows: “(It is) a complicated social-cultural structure within which tender-aged secondary school youth must make their way. They live in a world of international and internal tensions – ‘peace on earth or earth in pieces, we have become masters of matter – now we must become masters of ourselves’. Faster conveyances, communication, heightened production by automation, worshipping the dollar that continually decreases in value, increased doubt in spiritual values that parents, teachers and even the church propagate, the pressure that school exercises with its increasing demands, increasing tendency to be directed by others by a lack of inner directedness, historical worshipping of Elvis Presley and his type (all creations of the brainpower and money of adults), all of which make the life of modern youth full of tension.”

8.4 The situation of the potential school dropout

8.4.1 Characteristics of school dropouts

A potential school dropout is involved with *educative distress*, especially in needing to *feel secure*, in his/her *relationships* with his/her educators (parents and teachers), in his/her direction to the *future* and feelings of acceptance and belonging. (“They don’t accept me with my failing, and I doubt if I belong with them.”).

Especially the parents are not directed to the pleasant and to the everyday in their communication with their child but are preoccupied with his/her learning problems and school failures, and they direct all of their educative interventions to them. They are uneasy, alarmed and pessimistic about their child's future. Educative communication is disturbed by the problem of the child's school failure, and this further impedes educating the child. In his situation of conflict, the potential dropout experiences isolation, loneliness, anxiety, inferiority and insecurity. His/her exploration and emancipation (also regarding the social) are inadequately realized. His/her behavior can be isolating and aggressive as a response to his/her situation of distress and failing.

Although each pupil is a unique person, those who leave school too early show the following common characteristics:¹⁰

- They experience failing and unfortunate school experiences which impede learning activity; achieve below their intellectual abilities, are truants, avoid classes and often show behavior problems.
- A purposeful and constructive future-plan is missing and there is a strong inclination to escape an unpleasant school situation. They enter the labor market passively and unequipped.
- Emotional disturbance is the origin and result of school failure. It blocks learning achievement even though the child has enough intelligence.
- They are unengaged in the school situation with personal problems (neurotic, rebellious). The school is not for them a place where social life is exercised.
- For a potential school dropout, the school is a conflict situation. They pull back because they cannot achieve in any area there. The growing up of the potential dropout is retarded, also with respect to independence and responsibility.
- Their behavior often is hyperactive or passive, rebellious, infantile, etc.
- Each potential school dropout has his/her own, unique experiences of his/her own problems and his/her own individual vulnerability, shortcomings, potentialities, etc.

8.4.2 Family situation:

The pedagogical we-ness of a potential dropout and his/her parents is disturbed. In addition to their own problems and their youth's problem of bodily experiences and sexuality which the parents must deal with, looms the problem of underachievement and school failure. In this problematic situation, the parents' counter-actions express *powerlessness, aggression and opposition* regarding their youth:

- They feel *powerless*, angry and perplexed about the problem. Their confused, negative and inconsistent behaviors against the dropout worsen the problem because their lack of understanding means not supporting the child in his/her distress.
- The parents are inclined to rejection, suspicion and distrust, and want to *limit* what they allow their youth to do. They are irritated with the passivity and rebelliousness of their youth. They are inclined to a nagging, constraining or over-interfering. Other important aspects of educating such as socializing youth and their sexual educating are damaged.¹¹

8.4.3 School situation:

Here the fruitful results of the meritorious research by Botha¹² are reported. According to Botha, there is a *duality* in the learning relationships of the potential school dropout, and he finds the following regarding the school situation of these youth:

- Being stuck: A potential dropout experiences hibeing bogged down in the school situation. He/she cannot meet the intellectual demands made of regarding learning because emotionally he/she is so disorganized that he/she cannot concentrate and cannot think on an abstract, cognitive level. Thus, in his/her emotional life, he/she is "pathically flooded" - he/she is involved with his/her emotions such that he/she is not able to distance him/herself to think properly.
- Learning relationships: The potential school dropout experiences (social) uncertainty in his/her learning

- relationships with teachers and fellow pupils and is inclined to reject these learning relationships (social isolation and loneliness mean *social distress*). He/she also withdraws from learning activities and school subjects. Also, the things (books, apparatuses, learning materials) have no positive power of attraction because he/she associates them with *learning* with respect to which he/she experiences failure.
- Boundary situations: A potential school dropout “will” accept only superficially the learning norms with respect to homework, studies and future career because he/she is aware that he/she must fulfill demands. However, he/she cannot realize these learning norms and finds him/herself bogged down in the school situation. His/her boundary situation is a conflict situation, and the conflict is that he/she gladly *will* achieve and meet demands, but that he/she *cannot* because of his/her disturbed emotional life. He/she experiences conflict between what *ought to be* (the achievement attainable) and what *is* (the achievement attained, and being bogged down). He/she is at the boundary between realizing and not realizing learning norms and demands, and for him/her this means doubt and uncertainty. In addition, he/she is at the boundary between leaving school and successfully completing his/her school career. Schooling is an unpleasant and unacceptable situation which he/she begins to reject and from which he/she wants to escape by creating a world-in-opposition to the school world.
 - World-in-opposition: A potential school dropout *escapes* the school situation in a world-of-opposition to the school in which demands and learning norms are opposed and rejected. Here, he/she is involved with an emotionally *pleasurable experiencing* to escape learning norms. He/she especially escapes into a contemporary youthful world of fantasy, sport, music, pleasure and material things (motorbikes, recordings, record player, skateboards, etc.). It is a world in which a contemporary youth is exposed to disturbances in his/her social life. His/her socialization, social-societal orientation and identity forming then mean a meaningless and pedagogically improper escape from responsibility. He/she takes the initiative him/herself (unaccompanied) to select societal influences because he/she bonds him/herself with

tendencies and groups in society which are in opposition to the norms of the adult lifeworld. He/she proceeds to unfavorable formations of groups of youth which also oppose the adult lifeworld. He/she seeks a social-societal position in society separate from the norms which the school represents.¹³

Also, as soon as he/she has proceeded to actually leave school, his/her socialization and social-societal orientation take an additional unfavorable and unfortunate course, since the rebellious, disenchanted, and socially alienated youth are let loose in the labor market with training and vocational preparation which is so deficient that he/she can obtain nothing more than a tedious, dead-end position in the world of work. Although he/she then has sufficient free time and hard cash at his/her disposal, he/she doesn't have the discipline to use his/her free time in constructive ways, and he/she remains bored and aimless. Because he/she has derailed from the way to a meaningful, satisfying vocational practice, he/she experiences his/her inferior status as a social failing, and he/she compensates by self-accepted behavior and extravagantly wasting money on indulgent clothing and empty entertainment.

8.5 Eliminating the problem of leaving school too early

8.5.1 Identifying the potential school dropout

The earlier a pupil is identified as a potential school dropout, the better because only then can means of prevention or correction be implemented and used by available experts. A potential school dropout's underachievement, world-in-opposition and unfortunate school situation must be identified, and he/she must be *known*, *recognized* and *acknowledged* (and not be negated). Then, the school must refer him/her to the Pedagogical School Services of the involved teaching department for expert orthopedagogic help. After a thorough pedagogical diagnostic* for each potential school dropout, a comprehensive *orthopedagogic program of providing*

* Pedagogical diagnostic:

(i) Obtaining a *person image* of the potential school dropout.

(ii) Analyzing the *problematic educative situation* of the potential school dropout.

help must be designed and implemented which includes the following forms of orthopedagogic help:

8.5.2 Pedotherapy:

A potential school dropout must be helped in pedotherapy (especially in the form of conversational therapy) to:

- digest his/her situation of distress (personal shortcomings and underachievement)
- correct his/her disturbed pedagogical and social relationships
- adequately engage him/her in the school and its activities
- illuminate and eliminate his/her emotional disturbances and experiences of conflict
- acquire a meaningful future perspective
- attribute a different, positive meaning to his/her life and the school situation--thus, to discover new values.

8.5.3 Parental guidance:

The parents of a potential school dropout must be intensively guided in their correction of their child's situation of distress to change it to a more adaptable, realizable and bearable educative situation for him/her. They must be supported and guided by an expert orthopedagogue to:

- eliminate their own conflicts and personal problems
- realize educative and emotional security (love and trust) with respect to their child
- eliminate their pedagogical impotence, pedagogical anxiety and pedagogical confusion
- eliminate their disturbed family relationships, educative relationships and educative communication so that a favorable, firm family and educative community can be realized
- correct educative neglect, educative mistakes and impeding family situations
- educate their child in positive, purposeful ways to a school preparedness
- favorably assimilate and interpret for their child societal factors which influence him/her to leave school too early.

This guiding and influencing occurs in an event of *schooling* the parents by means of support, counseling, forming, leading and objective information.

8.5.4 Orthodidactic assistance:

Providing orthodidactic help or corrective teaching must be realized with a potential school dropout to eliminate the specific learning problems which he/she has experienced in the various school subjects (e.g., Mathematics) so that, by adequately re-teaching the learning content to him/her, he/she can acquire a grasp of it, which is necessary for an adequate learning achievement. This includes help and guidance with study methods.

8.5.5 Coordinating orthopedagogue, parents and school:

The orthopedagogue must coordinate with the parents and the school so that all can work together to eliminate the total problematic educative situation of a potential school dropout. Also, the didactic help and sympathy of the teacher is necessary in eliminating learning problems, while the guardian teacher and the educative leader of the school also have important tasks.

References

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