CHAPTER 8
THE PROBLEM OF LEAVING SCHOOL TOO EARLY
[DROPPING OUT]

8.1 Introduction

This chapter deals with the problem of White youths 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 dispensible in their contribution to society. If this is not the case, we will have to combat the problem of a manpower shortage that 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 particular 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 is able to[4] so that with the quality of his life and vocation he 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 does not fully implement his cognitive potentialities and under-achieves on this basis; he fails in the school situation and leaves before he has succeeded at the Standard [grade] that indeed is achievable for him. Thus, for him, there is a discrepancy between his *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 intellectual potentialities do not allow him to achieve higher is not one who leaves school *too early* since he has attained the level of which he is capable.

The names "drop-out" and "under-achiever" also hold for one who leaves school too early.

8.3 The origins of leaving school too early

The origins 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 on the basis of deviancies in person structure (life of impulse, temperament, character) is not able to deal with his 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 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 personal problems hinder him in being able to be open enough to the learning material and for his fellow persons and he cannot adequately engage himself in the class group and school community that are preconditions for the optimal actualization of intellectual potentialities. His miscarried and unfortunate school experience mean that ultimately he experiences scholastic defeat and proceed

to leave school too early. A neurotically inclined pupil quickly finds himself in unfortunate and educative impeding isolation because of his being constrained, his defensive attitude, anxiety and uncertainty, apathy, animosity and deviant behavior.

Often the personal problems of youth can be coupled with his developmental phase, e.g., mood swing, conflict, sensitivity, impotence, stubbornness, aloofness, insecurity, and loneliness that characterize the time of puberty. One in puberty is addressed strongly by his own body and often cannot assimilate the progression to biological and mental adulthood. Then his inability to deal with anxiety, conflict and the tension between biological and social demands block his intellectual achievement. Also, his encounter with the opposite gender in this phase means for him an emotionally loaded relationship that can lead to learning problems. In addition, his energy is sapped by the fast bodily growth and change he experiences, and he direct himself as such to the overwhelming experience of his own body that 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 of the other sociopedagogical problems, the problem of leaving school too early can find it origin in family life and family educating. In chapter V 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 particular unfavorable family situations. If for a child the family does not mean a space of basic security and safety and he does not receive there the love, warmth, acceptance, authority, etc. for which he has a need, this means that for him it is an attack on his entire

existence and this is an unfavorable condition for his 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 a child the demands and expectations about achieving in school. Intelligence is a cognitive potentiality that only can be realized on an optimal level on the basis of 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
- under-achievement (blocked achieving) which prompts
- leaving school too early.

The above unfavorable factors push a child into a constraining position of anxiety and distress that provide the foundation for his under-achievement. This deprives him of the daring to deal with the school's demands and his under-achievement essentially is a form of deviant behavior. There is almost no psychic disturbance of a child and no environmental defect that 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 himself against school and to implement his intelligence. He then is not ready and responsible enough to accept a task, cannot concentrate on learning material, he is not directed and motivated to learn, he 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 is not formed to be prepared for school.

8.3.3 School factors:

Several factors that 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 does not acquire an effective grasp of it and for him this means an under-achievement of the material on the basis of which he will want to leave school (This clearly is a didactic matter).
- Relationship of understanding: If a teacher does not accept as he is and understand each child with his unique personality and he does not take care to present realistic achievement expectations, the unrealistic demands and expectation can be too high or too low that can lead to a child experiencing discouragement or boredom on the basis of which his poor directedness will have under-achievening 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 lack of social engagement can give rise to under-achievement 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. It is a known fact that if a pupil feels at home in the class, this promotes his schoolwork. A relaxed communicating in the social interaction within a classroom means for a pupil 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 towards the school, the teacher and the learning material such that he cannot fulfill the demands of propriety regarding schoolwork.
- Educative communication: A teacher can in his contact with the pupils not adequately take into account the level of becoming adult, gender, level of intelligence, emancipation, milieu and communication problems of the pupils. His

negative, autocratic, negation and lack of understanding or permissive communication creates the possibility of an unfortunate school experience for the pupil, of under-achievement 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 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 experience of the school situation as meaningful can be found in them.
- Learn to respect values: A child must learn in school 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 under-achievement and leaving school too early are fulfillments of child life that are not valuable.
- True to life learning material: A child questions the worth of learning material that is alien to life. He does not find it meaningful to achieve with it and also often experiences problems of subject and vocational choice regarding subjects and subject directions that appear to be meaningless to him
- Future orientation: It this fails in school, a pupil does not acquire a motivating vocational ideal towards which he can work and achieve in school. If he is not influenced by striving for a higher level of preparation, and then he finds little satisfaction and finds it undesirable to leave school in order to go to work for vocational profit.

The school thus must in all respects 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 over-emphasized 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, Garbers[7] 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 the 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 account the support of the family?
- Are the relationships among the pupils of such a nature 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 that influence youths to leave school too early:

- Economic-technological development: This creates an abundance of opportunities for work and favorable economic conditions that make it easier and more attractive for youths to leave school too early for the sake of earning money.
- Manpower shortage: This means youths 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 in order to obtain adequate school achievement.
- Experiencing enjoyment: A pupil will escape investing in school so he can "enjoy life".
- Youth alienation: Youths experience achievement in school as meaningless because this would mean that he conforms with the unacceptable "establishment".
- Drugs: Youths 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 that involve effort to achieve in school.
- Massification: Youths leave school too early to make money by which they can participate in the culture of mass youth. He is able to afford youth styles, radios, LP records, motorbikes and a variety of entertainment such as disco, movies, etc.
- Identity crisis: Youths 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 own identity (meaningfulness).

Du Plessis[9] summarizes this matter as follows: "(It is) a complicated social-cultural structure within which tender-aged secondary school youths 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, worshiping 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 worshiping of Elvis Presley and his type (all creations of the brainpower and money of adults), all of which make the life of modern youths 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 *relationships* with his educators (his parents and teachers), in his 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 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 exploration and emancipation (also regarding the social) are inadequately realized. His behavior can be isolating and aggressive as a response to his 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 that 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 at his disposal.
- 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, rebvellious, infantile, etc.
- Each potential school dropout has his own, unique experiences of his own problems and his own individual vulnerability, shortcomings, potentialities, etc.

8.4.2 Family situation:

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

- 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 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 youths and their sexual educating are damaged.[11]

8.4.3 School situation:

Here the fruitful results of the meritorious research by Botha[12] 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 youths:

- Being stuck: A potential dropout experiences himself as being bogged down in the school situation. He cannot meet the intellectual demands made of him regarding learning because emotionally he is so disorganized that he cannot concentrate and cannot think on an abstract, cognitive level. Thus, in his emotional life, he is "pathically flooded" -- he is involved with his emotions such that he is not able to distance himself to think properly.
- Learning relationships: The potential school dropout experiences (social) uncertainty in his learning relationships with teachers and fellow pupils and is inclined to reject these learning relationships (social isolation and loneliness mean *social distress*). He also withdraws himself from learning activities and school subjects. Also the things (books, apparatuses, learning materials) have no positive power of attraction because he associates them with *learning* with respect to which he experiences failure.
- Boundary situations: A potential school dropout "will" accept ony superficially the learning norms with respect to homework, studies and future career because he is aware that he must fulfill demands. However, he cannot realize these learning norms and finds himself bogged down in the school

situation. His boundary situation is a conflict situation and the conflict is that he gladly *will* achieve and meet demands but that he *cannot* on the basis of his disturbed emotional life. He experiences conflict between what *ought to be* (the achievement attainable) and what *is* (the achievement attained and being bogged down). He is at the boundary between realizing and not realizing learning norms and demands and for him this means doubt and uncertainty. In addition, he is at the boundary between leaving school and successfully completing his school career. Schooling is an unpleasant and unacceptable situation that he begins to reject and from which he 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 is involved with an emotionally *pleasurable experiencing* in order to escape learning norms. He 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 social life. His socialization, social-societal orientation and identity forming then mean a meaningless and pedagogically improper escape from responsibility. He takes the initiative himself (unaccompanied) to select societal influences because he bonds himself with tendencies and groups in society that are in opposition to the norms of the adult lifeworld. He proceeds to unfavorable formations of groups of youths that also oppose the adult lifeworld. He seeks a social-societal position in society separate from the norms that the school represents.[13]

Also, as soon as he has proceeded to actually leave school, his socialization and social-societal orientation take an additional unfavorable and unfortunate course since the rebellious, disenchanted, and socially alienated youths are let loose in the labor market with training and vocational preparation that is so deficient that he can obtain nothing more than a tedious, dead-end position in the world of work. Although he then has sufficient free time and

hard cash at his disposal, he doesn't have the discipline to use his free time in constructive ways and he remains bored and aimless. Because he has derailed from the way to a meaningful, satisfying vocational practice, he experiences his inferior status as a social failing and he 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 under-achievement, world-in-opposition and unfortunate school situation must be identified and he must be *known, recognized* and *acknowledged* (and not be negated). Then the school must refer him to the Pedagogical School Services of the involved teaching department for expert orthopedagogical help. After a thorough pedagogical diagnostic[*] for each potential school dropout a comprehensive *orthopedagogical program of providing help* must be designed and implemented that includes the following forms of orthopedagogical help:

8.5.2 Pedotherapy:

A potential school dropout must be helped in pedotherapy (especially in the form of conversational therapy) in order to:
- digest his situation of distress (personal shortcomings and under-achievement)
- correct his disturbed pedagogical and social relationships
- adequately engage him in the school and all of its activities
- illuminate and eliminate his emotional disturbances and experiences of conflict
- acquire a meaningful future perspective

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[*] Pedagogical diagnostic:
(i) Obtaining a *person image* of the potential school dropout.
(ii) Analyzing the *problematic educative situation* of the potential school dropout.

- attribute a different, positive meaning to his 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 in order to change it to a more adaptable, realizable and bearable educative situation for him. They must be supported and guided by an expert orthopedagogue in order 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 that influence him 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 Orthodidactical assistance:

Providing orthodidactical help or corrective teaching must be realized with a potential school dropout in order to eliminate the specific learning problems that he has experienced in the various school subjects (e.g., Mathematics) so that by adequately re-teaching the learning content to him he can acquire a grasp of it that 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 didactical 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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[6]Du Plessis, P. J. J.: op cit., p. 114.

[7]Garbers, J. G.: "'n Skooldiagnostiese ondersoek na skoolstaking" (article).

[8]Du Plessis, P. J. J.: op cit., pp. 124 and 125.

[9]Du Pessis, P. J. J.: op cit., p. 130.

[10]See: Du Plessis, op cit., pp. 118-120.

[11]See: (i) Du Plessis, P. J. J.: op cit., pp. 120 and 121. (ii) Botha, T. R.: op cit., p. 118.

[12]Botha, T. R.: *Die dualiteit in die leerverhoudinge van die potensiele Skoolvelater,* N. G. Kerkboekhandel, Pretoria, 1973.

[13]Thus Botha, T. R.: op cit.