

**BAR-ILAN UNIVERSITY**

**Graduates' Experiences of Elementary School from  
Educational and Values Perspectives**

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## **Abstract**

This research is based on the educational values and learning aspects of elementary school graduates.

Previous research mainly dealt with memories of the pupil's elementary school days, quality of teaching and other educational aspects. A few studies also examined educational values from the retrospective viewpoint of graduates, as and the general influence of elementary education on them.

The current study offers an opportunity to see realistically through the eyes of the pupils, their educational experience from their past.

### **From the aim described above the following questions were derived:**

What is the image of the "desired graduate", that schools wish to produce, in the eyes of the graduates?

Who are the teachers that remained embedded in the consciousness of the students as adults? Why?

How would the graduates appraise the educational system and the meaning it brought to their lives?

In reviewing the literature available, the educational objectives are shown to be an ideological blend of content and various practices by different schools, the teachers and school's educational aspirations, methods of pedagogical instruction and understandings of "new education" as criticism' of practices in the field. It proceeds to provide a portrayal of inspiring teachers and the long-term effects of education on the students.

## **Research Method**

This study was carried out in an interpretative qualitative paradigm that aimed to meet the participants of the study in their natural environment and to learn about the phenomenon being investigated as understood and explained by the participants themselves.

In one way or another there were long term effects on the pupils:

Among the influences of school are:

**Personal impact** – instilling significant values in life and success in studies.

**Social influence** – an opportunity to develop social relationships amongst the pupils and with the wider community.

**Professional influence** - choice of learning tracks connected with the educational vision of the school: for example showing humanity, empathy and encouragement towards others.

**Effect of learning with actual benefit** - "reaching for the stars", mainly because knowledge is understood to give power.

**Effect of bitter memories** - behaviour not associated with education, but a feeling of being oppressed, made to feel a failure by a member of the teaching staff and so becoming despondent.

The study participants graduated through the national state and national state religious systems and were aged 20-40. For the purpose of the research, I interviewed eight women and 6 men. The semi-structured in-depth interviews were analysed using content analysis.

### **Main Findings**

The results of this research showed that the state and religious systems both passed on values: universal values along with local values, interpersonal values and individual values, love of the country, offering help and assistance to the weak or the community, respecting friends and the elderly (for most of the participants).

Values of empowerment and renewal on a personal level, were found to be very low. Participants stated that the school incorporated value of perseverance and profound, deep help mainly in the field of learning and study. The main activities of school, as seen in the data, are directed toward higher educational achievements in the various fields of knowledge – especially in mathematics and English. The school fails to see the student's individuality and gives little space to improve self-confidence. The educational system fosters instructional unity over individuality.

The participants voiced a variance of feelings: Positive feelings of those who saw school as contributing to the development of learning and values. However, there were also those who saw inconsistencies between the stated values of the school and its

practice. These contradictions, as participants looked back, led to a diagnosis of school as lacking values.

Memories of past teachers were very significant in this study. Amongst the best teachers that the students remembered were those who managed to capture their attention and stimulate them. These teachers showed respect and a humane attitude to pupils. They had charismatic personalities and vision that helped pupils to progress. This, according to the graduates, mattered more than their final score. These teachers demonstrated a serious, professional attitude and provided educational experiences that stimulated interest among the students.

### **Discussion**

In the discussion the findings were examined in light of previous studies, most of which had similar findings. Critical analysis of the data was conducted in relation to the notion of the "Ideal Graduate" which was extensively researched by Tzvi Lam (1973).

Furthermore, the data revealed conflicting themes and messages in the school, and these were examined in reference to the research literature. As Lam described, the pursuit of academic achievement in school can weaken individuality.

Two theoretical references were drawn on: "The Hierarchy of Needs" (Maslow, 1943) and Carl Rogers' description of the interpersonal affinity in learning (Rogers, 1973). These two theories stress that it is better to nurture the fragile relationship that exists between teacher and pupil, even in the long run. The effects from school and the experience of being educated run deep.

Finally, educational implications for the current post-modern era are discussed, and suggestions are made for significant pedagogical activity, based on a humanistic approach. Limitations of the research are described, as well as suggestions for future, continued work in the field.

On the opposing side, the graduates also described teachers with whom the meeting was negative and detrimental, awakening feelings of rejection. These teachers were described in terms opposite to the successful teachers. These teachers acted in a demeaning, harmful manner towards their students. They did not give the weak pupils encouragement; rather, they even looked for flaws in them. The result left a traumatic,

long term impression on the pupils. Some of these teachers did not know how to "control" a class in the right way. They were too strict with the pupils and had to raise their voice, in order to silence them. Their professional responsibility was weak. From time to time, they busied themselves with personal matters at the expense of teaching time and did not provide a good example of behaviour. The pupils left school having 'missed out', remembering this until today.