

EXPECTATIONS OF SCHOOLS IN VICTORIA

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ABSTRACT

This paper reports a questionnaire survey of expectations of schools by parents and teachers from Victorian high and technical schools. The study partially replicated the Australia-wide survey of Campbell and Robinson. The main differences between the surveys was that while Campbell and Robinson surveyed chiefly elite groups the present survey was directed at parents and teachers as a whole. The present survey also included some new items. Expectations of parents and teachers differed chiefly in the area of preparation for work, while both groups were doubtful that Victorian state schools provide adequate standards of numeracy, literacy or academic competence.

Parents and teachers at five Victorian state schools were surveyed by means of a questionnaire on their beliefs as to the achievements of schools. The schools included three high schools and two technical schools. One hundred parents and the entire staff of each school were sent questionnaires. The response rate for parents was 30.5%, for teachers 38%.

The questionnaire was based on that of Campbell and Robinson (1979). Questions were taken mainly from the sections of their instrument devoted to the functions of schools, the content of the curriculum, children's motivation to learn and the fostering of learning. Questions from their section on curriculum development were judged too confusing and new questions were devised in this area. In addition, a section was added on the successes and failures of state and private non-Catholic schools.

Returns were analysed using the same method as that of Campbell and Robinson. Respondents were asked to rate 56 statements about schools on a five-point scale from: "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree". If more than 90% marked either "agree" or "strongly agree" the item was scored as showing "very high positive agreement", if from 67-89% marked these categories the items was scored as showing "general agreement"; from 34-66% as showing "no consensus"; from 11-33% as showing "general disagreement"; from 0-10% as showing "very high disagreement".

In general results closely mirrored those found by Campbell and Robinson (1979) for Victorian parents and teachers, who were generally similar to those from other states.

Fig. 1: Comparison of the Present Survey with Campbell and Robinson's Victorian Results

Columns headed "Present Survey" give results from the five schools so far included in the present study - three high and two technical. Those headed "Campbell and Robinson" give results for Victorian parents and teachers from Campbell and Robinson (1979). Columns headed "P" indicate parents, those headed "T" teachers. "VH+" indicates 90-100% marked either "agree" or "agree strongly"; "G+" - 67-89%; "NC" - 34-66%; "G" - 11-33%; "VH-" - 0-10%.

	<u>Present Survey</u>		<u>Campbell & Robinson</u>	
	P	T	P	T
<u>AIMS</u>				
PRIMARY FUNCTION OF SCHOOLS SHOULD BE TO:				
1. Prepare boys to enter the workforce.....	VH+	NC	VH+	G+
2. Prepare girls to enter the workforce.....	G+	NC		
3. Help individuals ensure that their children have a good start in life	VH+	G+	Not Asked	
4. Prepare children to continue learning when school days are over.....	VH+	VH+	VH+	VH+
5. Help children to cope with their present life experiences.....	VH+	VH+	VH+	VH+
6. Assist the home in eradicating the natural selfishness of children.....	NC	NC	G-	G-
7. Assist children to see new or alternative ways of solving societal problems.....	G+	VH+	G+	G+
8. Develop in each child a sense of personal worth and esteem.....	VH+	VH+	VH+	VH+
9. Prepare boys to fill established positions in society.....	NC	NC	G+	NC
10. Prepare children to work co-operatively with others in building their cultures and societies.....	VH+	VH+	VH+	VH+
11. Prepare girls to fill established positions in society.....	NC	G-		
<u>DEVELOPMENT OF THE CURRICULA</u>				
THE SCHOOL CURRICULA SHOULD BE DEVELOPED BY:				
12. Academic experts in the subject areas.....	G+	NC	NC	G+
13. Classroom teachers.....	G+	VH+	Not Asked	
14. School students.....	NC	NC	Not Asked	
15. Business leaders.....	NC	NC	Not Asked	
16. Trade union representatives.....	G-	G-	Not Asked	
17. The Victorian Education Department.....	G+	NC	Not Asked	
18. The local community	NC	G+	Not Asked	
<u>SCHOOL CURRICULA</u>				
THE SCHOOL CURRICULA SHOULD BE PRIMARILY CONCERNED WITH ENSURING THAT CHILDREN KNOW:				
19. How to discover new knowledge.....	VH+	VH+	VH+	VH+
20. The history of the Christian culture, and the laws of God.....	NC	G-	NC	NC
21. The established basics of reading, writing, arithmetic and spelling.....	VH+	VH+	VH+	VH+
22. Their own feelings and personalities.....	G+	VH+	G+	G+
23. How different cultures are solving common problems.....	VH+	G+	G+	G+
24. Basic disciplines such as history and science.....	VH+	G+	VH+	VH+
25. The changes that are occurring in Australian society.....	VH+	VH+	VH+	VH+
26. That all people have worth and value, by virtue of being human.....	G+	VH+	VH+	VH+
27. Skills and attitudes needed to maintain the economic structure.....	G+	NC	G+	NC
28. How to assemble facts, pose questions, and arrive at tentative answers.....	VH+	G+	VH+	VH+

	<u>Present Survey</u>		<u>Campbell & Robinson</u>	
	P	T	P	T
<u>MOTIVATION TO LEARN</u>				
CHILDREN ARE MOTIVATED MAINLY BY:				
29. Teachers displaying warmth, supportiveness, and respect towards them.....	VH+	G+	VH+	VH+
30. Rewards and punishments bestowed by the teachers.....	NC	NC	VH-	VH-
31. Being given challenging learning tasks....	VH+	VH+	G+	VH+
32. Teachers stressing the terrors of eternal damnation.....	VH-	VH-	VH-	VH-
33. Teachers demonstrating that the material is socially relevant.....	NC	NC	NC	NC
34. Teachers ensuring that they feel needed and valued in the activities.....	G+	G+	G+	G+
35. Working co-operatively with other pupils on group projects, etc.....	G+	G+	G+	G+
36. Teachers stressing the need to live up to the expectations of God.....	G-	G-	G-	G-
37. Teachers giving direction and providing firm discipline and structure.....	G+	G+	NC	NC
38. Teachers ensuring that they do, indeed, learn effectively.....	G+	NC	G+	G+
<u>WAYS OF LEARNING</u>				
A MOST EFFECTIVE WAY OF LEARNING IS FOR:				
39. Children and teachers to work together on significant problem.....	VH+	G+	VH+	VH+
40. The children to memorize material, especially Biblical history, by rote....	G-	NC	G-	VH-
41. The teacher to instruct and demonstrate.	G+	G+	G+	G+
42. The children to raise issues, discuss and argue in the way that mature scholars do.....	G+	NC	NC	NC
43. The children to study examples of moral and ethical behaviour within the Christian framework.....	NC	G-	NC	NC
44. The teaching to be tailored to the needs of each learner.....	G+	G+	G+	G+
45. The children to test their own understandings by relating them to new or different experiences.....	G+	VH+	G+	VH+
46. The children to proceed in their own ways and at their own paces.....	G-	NC	G-	NC
47. The teacher to maintain a "distance" between himself or herself and the children	G-	G-	NC	NC
48. The children to study in their local communities by way of surveys, projects and the like.....	G+	G+	VH+	G+
<u>SUCCESS AND FAILURE OF SCHOOLS</u>				
STATE SCHOOLS HAVE SUCCEEDING PROVIDING:				
49. Adequate standards of literacy and numeracy.....	NC	NC	Not Asked	
50. Appropriate levels of manners and discipline.....	NC	NC	Not Asked	
51. A sufficiently rigorous approach to academic subjects.....	NC	NC	Not Asked	
52. Understanding of the society we live in.	NC	NC	Not Asked	
PRIVATE NON-CATHOLIC SCHOOLS HAVE SUCCEEDED IN PROVIDING:				
53. Adequate standards of literacy and numeracy.....	G+	G+	Not Asked	
54. Appropriate levels of manners and discipline.....	NC	NC	Not Asked	
55. A sufficiently rigorous approach to academic subjects.....	G+	G+	Not Asked	
56. Understanding of the society we live in.	NC	NC	Not Asked	

Three areas of disagreement with their findings did, however, emerge. Contrary to their results Victorian teachers were considerably less oriented to preparing children for the workforce than Victorian parents. Campbell and Robinson had respondents rate the statement: 'A primary function of school should be to prepare children to enter the workforce'. They found that Victorian teachers, like those from most other states, were in 'general agreement' with this, while Victorian parents, again like those in most other states, had very 'high positive agreement'. The present survey tried to find out if expectations for boys and girls were different and asked separate questions for boys and girls. Among teachers only 48% agreed for boys and 45% for girls. Among parents, 90% agreed for boys and 86% for girls. This contradicts Campbell and Robinson's claim that on this issue teachers are 'not markedly out of step with other groups' (p. 15). In rating the statement that 'The school curricula should be primarily concerned with ensuring that children know the skills and attitudes needed to maintain the economic structure' 85% of parents agreed, but only 65% of teachers.

Campbell and Robinson's section on who should develop the curriculum was confusing, as several groups who might contribute to the curriculum were mentioned in each statement, as in 'School curricula should be developed mainly by education officials in association with academic experts and researchers.' The present survey contained statements that mentioned each of the following groups singly, but not in combination: 'academic experts in the subject areas', 'classroom teachers', 'school students', business leaders', 'trade union representatives', 'the Victorian Education Department', 'the local community'. Teachers gave 'very high agreement' to 'classroom teachers' and 'general agreement' to 'the local community' while parents gave 'general agreement' to 'academic experts', 'classroom teachers' and 'the Victorian Education Department'. These are in the direction of differences between parents and teachers mentioned by Campbell and Robinson but show more marked divergences.

Finally, both teachers and parents were concerned at the performance of Victorian state schools as against that of private non-Catholic schools. There was 'no consensus' among either group that state schools had provided 'adequate standards of numeracy and literacy', 'appropriate levels of manners and discipline', 'a sufficiently rigorous approach to academic subjects' or 'an understanding of the society we live in'. Both groups had 'general agreement' that private non-Catholic schools had succeeded in the areas of literacy, numeracy and academic subjects. This should not, however, be taken as any indication that teachers failed to rank basic skills highly; like parents they rated the item concerned with this more highly than any other.

It is worth considering whether the divergences between parents and teachers are a product of more generalised differences between professionals and non-professionals. To investigate this, professional parents were compared with non-professionals. There were few differences between the two groups on school as a preparation for work. Professional parents were rather more in favour of the curriculum being devised by academic experts and the Victorian Education Department than other parents. They were also more favourable to the achievements of private non-Catholic schools, having 'general agreement' that they provided adequate standards of literacy, numeracy, manners and discipline and 'very high positive agreement' that they provided a sufficiently rigorous approach to academic subjects. Teachers thus have views on these issues that are different from those of other professionals. It is also of interest that only 17% of the parents who responded were professionals, though this category was defined broadly. The skilled and unskilled manual worker categories, however, seemed under-represented with only 11% of replies being from these groups.

It is also worthwhile considering the interpretation that Campbell and Robinson give to their findings. Their overall argument is that Australian schools have shifted from an industrial model, based on the nineteenth century factory, through a post-Sputnik period in which an academic model gained ground, to a period in which a post-industrial emphasis on

humane values and the ability to investigate problems is emerging. In one central respect this historical picture is undoubtedly untrue. The academic model was far from being imported into Australia in the post-Sputnik period. Rather, it had its roots in the much earlier models provided in Europe since the middle ages by the grammar school, the choir school and the gymnasium (Leese, 1968; Simon, 1974; Lawson and Silver, 1973; Samuel and Thomas, 1949). In Victoria the adaptation of Frank Tate's agricultural colleges to this model occurred at an early period in the evolution of the state secondary school system (Martin, 1977). At the same time, the Australian private non-Catholic school system was largely patterned on the British public schools as reformed by Arnold (UNESCO Report, 1962; Bessant, 1971). The real history of the relation between the industrial and the academic models of schooling in Australia, as in many European countries, overlays a long-existing division between private and state schools. The former cater for the academically successful students and for those among the better-off who dislike their children mixing with the poor, with a combination of the two motives often entering into the decision to send children to such schools. The state school system, both here and overseas, used to have a much clearer division of its roles, which were to provide academic schools for the academic student and schools based more clearly on the industrial model for the academic failure destined for manual occupations. At first this model was largely confined to the primary school, but with the coming of mass secondary education after the second world war, was widely extended to secondary schools (Hadow Report, 1926; Taylor, 1963).

Belief in humane values and the decline of corporal punishment and of the teacher as a remote authority figure are trends that have affected all types of school. Lovegrove and Lewis (1982) found this was particularly approved by Victorian secondary school students. At the same time, since the 1960's, the academic and non-academic sectors of the Australian state schooling system have tended to merge, with the decline of entrance exams and a growing commitment to the rhetoric of equality of opportunity (Crittendon, 1981).

Campbell and Robinson argue that their findings indicate current widespread support for both the academic and the humanist models of education. They interpret this as showing the current period to be one of transition from the former to the latter as dominant outlooks on education. It is more plausible, in my view, to see this finding as showing that for some students the community would like an academic content allied to kindly but firm modes of discipline. However, the strong commitment by parents to school as a preparation for work means that parents would presumably also like to see a form of non-academic education offered as a preparation for manual occupations. This might be along the lines of the existing Victorian technical schools or in some other form. It would need to include as a core element in its curriculum a mastery of the basic skills of numeracy and literacy.

I conclude with a point of agreement. Campbell and Robinson point out that the public often expects the education system to meet contradictory demands (p. 14). These demands may not be mutually exclusive, but they may interfere with one another. Perhaps the two most significant conflicts are those between the wish for equality of opportunity and for high academic standards and between the wish for non-authoritarian discipline and for learning to take place in an orderly manner. While formal comparisons of results from schools with streaming and those without it have produced inconclusive results (Sorenson, 1970; Rosenbaum, 1975; Richer, 1976) there is little doubt in the minds of many practitioners that the more able students are often less extended in a mixed-ability class. While dreamers have hoped for authority in schools based solely on mutual respect, in practice students generally accord respect to those prepared to administer some kind of sanction, negative as well as positive. The public is not Solomon; each of us who are faced with these problems feel our own way towards a workable compromise. Hopefully, we are also beginning to realise that we also have to live with one another's compromises.

This report should not be interpreted as showing that teachers differ widely from parents on educational issues or that the present results differ widely from those of Campbell and Robinson (1979). On most issues, the present study agrees with Campbell and Robinson's findings and, in particular, with their finding that teachers do not differ markedly from other social groups. The points of difference highlighted in the present report are emphasised solely because they are of interest.

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