

Do students, parents and teachers have the same views  
of their schools?

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**Abstract:**

This paper addresses the identification of school qualities, preferred learning styles of students, students interests in learning and the source of encouragement for such and attitudes to learning. The opinions are those of school communities - primary and secondary students, their teachers and parents. The respondents reported in this article were involved with schools in the Ballarat diocese. Questionnaires were used to enlist both quantitative and qualitative responses. The latter gives indications of the life of schools and the future challenges faced through learning/teaching relationships. Knowledge gained clarifies school situations and the hidden curriculum. The question posed is, Do we see reality through the eyes of clients?

**Methodology:**

The research is being conducted within the Ballarat diocese which consists of three zones, Zones 13, 14 and 15. The study is from 1990-95. It has been funded by the National Catholic Education Commission. In this article, the discussion is based on 1991 data and presents qualitative responses collected from primary schools and secondary schools. In the study of the Ballarat diocese, in 1991, Year 5 students (approximately 1100) and Year 9 students (approximately 700) teachers and parents of these students comprised the respondents. Three questionnaires (for student, teacher and parent) were used to ascertain characteristics within the schools, students' preferred learning styles, attitudes to learning, interests in learning and the sources of encouragement for such. A Likert scale was given to ascertain the extent to which certain features existed. The scale ranged from none, a little, some, a fair amount, to a lot. The division for comparison was none/a little compared to a

fair amount/a lot. A T test was applied.

#### Background:

The functions of schools are expressed in different terms ranging from the introduction of basic disciplines of knowledge, the transmission of basic skills, the custodian provision for students and the distribution of students to the workforce (Holmes and Wynne, 1989) to emphases on the total development of students (Ministry of Education, 1988) and/or integration of the home, parish and community (Hawker, 1985). Other functions are the setting of high expectations and the promotion of a sense of community (Purkey and Smith, 1983). It can also be argued that the distinctiveness of schools is clarified through vision and mission statements of schools. For example, Catholic schools seek to promote education within a community climate that is permeated by the gospel spirit of freedom and love (The Congregation of Catholic Education, 1988:1) Characteristics which are claimed to be embedded in Catholic Schools can be translated into terms of justice, peace, challenge, sincerity, equality, joy and community. In relation to the climate which a school emphasises the first question posed is, Do students, teachers and parents recognise these qualities in schools?

The effectiveness of schools is not only dependent on qualities, for example, peace and justice, but also on effective classroom teaching (Cohen, 1983). Effective Teaching involves different means of instruction. For example, direct instruction (Good and Brophy, 1989), co-operative learning (Slavin, 1983), cross-age tutoring (Cohen, Kulik and Kulik, 1982) and programmed instruction (Walberg, 1985) aid students' success. These modes of learning involve individual students, peers and teachers in the students' learning process. Also the means by which students learn can be considered within three modes - by the writing, speaking and doing modes. Students create in these ways. It can be argued that these means of learning imply a recognised relationship between the performing self and

the process or product which one values (Kach and Bovich, 1978 as cited by Salzgaver, 1981). A second question asked is, Do students, teachers and parents know students' preferred learning styles and the influence of others on students' learning? Another factor addressed in this article is attitudes to learning. Hence, Do students, parents and teachers project positive attitude to learning in the past, present and future? It is suggested that the attitudes of teachers and parents might influence student learning. Also to know students' interests in learning at school and the sources of encouragement given to students were considered important issues in this study. Hence the questions, What areas of learning at school gain students' interest? and, Who encourages students in their interests in learning?

#### Findings:

Do students, teachers and parents recognise qualities in schools? When provided with a list of characteristics which some schools emphasise in accordance with gospel values, namely, justice, peace, challenge, sincerity, equality, joy and community, the following information was gained in relation to all schools. The four main qualities experienced by 79.7, 65.7, 65.4 and 54.8 percent of primary students at the fair amount/a lot rating were joy, community, justice and peace. Secondary students indicated that joy, then community, peace and justice were experienced by 57.9, 55.6, 50.3 and 50 percent of students at the same rating. Parents, like students, recognised peace, joy and community within schools but differed in the fourth characteristic; parents indicated equality. Teachers agreed with students in regard to justice and joy and further indicated the existence of sincerity and challenge. Secondary students, teachers and parents stressed challenge as one of two characteristics to be emphasised in the future, while, both primary and secondary students also emphasised joy particularly. Some 54.2 percent of primary students and 45.1 percent of secondary students rated challenge at the fair amount/a lot rating. Some 49.4 percent of primary students and 40.2 percent of secondary students ranked equality at the same rating. An important finding was that 25.0 percent of primary students and 27.0 of

secondary

students indicated their experience of challenge at the rate of none or a little; similar percentages of students indicated the same categories of response for their experience of equality. By comparison, 11.8 and 10.6 percent of parents rated challenge and equality at the none/a little rating; teachers did not give the lower rating to challenge but indicated a 6.8

response to equality at this level. However from the evidence it can be said that students, teachers and parents show some agreement as to an environment permeated by gospel values.

It can be argued that the hidden curriculum is the promotion of the gospel qualities within the environment, so, the qualitative responses of students provided an interesting perspective of schools.

For both groups of students, justice was defined as friendship, kindness, and understanding of others and as a means to destroy fear and build trust. It was seen as necessary "to give everyone a fair go" or so "no people get trodden on". Experiences of justice were described as present in the classroom, playground, through rule keeping and friendship and caring for others. Teachers were seen as most influential in the promotion of justice. The only negative experiences related to teasing and the impact of bullies, however this was registered by less than .03 percent of the primary respondents.

Peace was defined by students with reference to care for others, as love, friendship and forgiveness and as the opposite to war and fights; it was also seen as an inner quality as a result of relationship (primary students) to harmony and acceptance of different people (secondary students). Peace was experienced in classroom and playground activities and through prayer and reflection. Primary students spoke of fights detracting from peace while secondary students made reference to "too much noise" as a competitor of peace.

Joy was defined as happiness through the experience of friendship and play

and as a basic need for all people. Particular mention was made of laughter and jokes contributing to joy. Joy was also seen as a means to comfort others; recognition was made of the sadness in some peoples' lives. Joy was experienced by students through friendship and achievement. Indications of a lack of joy were expressions of boredom and having few friends.

Community was defined within the parameters of helping and caring for others and working with them; students saw it in terms of adults working for the school for example through working bees. Secondary students emphasised the mission of schools to build community and made particular reference to leadership and pastoral care programs within schools. The experiences of community for students were within class, through friends, the church and community extended to outside school. Teachers were seen by students as an influence on building community within schools.

While justice, peace, joy and community were the four most frequent qualities recognised by students, the qualitative data in regard to challenge, sincerity and equality is also significant. Challenge was defined in relation to endeavoring to try harder, urging each other to do well and attempting the more difficult issue. Challenge when experienced was mainly associated with positive comments relayed to students, encouragement given when one had done some wrong and encouragement given in the areas of sport and maths. Teachers were seen to challenge students mainly in sport and maths. A most interesting observation by a primary student was, "If the school's too comfortable, challenge doesn't happen".

Sincerity was defined in terms of speaking well of others and demonstrating positive attitudes to all people. Students experienced sincerity through trust and friendship and frequently could recognise it by "the looks on faces". Also it was stated that sincerity is particularly emphasised in Catholic schools. Secondary students stated their ability to recognise a lack of sincerity within some students and staff. According to students, teachers were significant

models for spreading sincerity.

Recognition of equality was defined in terms of fair treatment, no sex discrimination, respecting the rights of all and the needs of both boys and girls, and the means to ensure inclusion of all. Primary students' experiences of equality were through classroom arrangements, playing together and in sport activities. The boys gave indications of particular

instances where girls were excluded. Secondary students made reference to the existence of social status, some students perhaps 'ranking higher than others' and instances of prejudice which detracted from equality in schools.

In reviewing the characteristics of schools as interpreted by students it is stressed that teachers were seen as promoting justice, community, challenge and sincerity and in fact, three of these qualities, namely justice, challenge and sincerity, together with joy, were the ones which received most recognition for their existence in schools by teachers. Another important finding was that the concept of church was associated with the characteristics of peace, community and sincerity.

In addition to the consideration of qualities within schools, the study addressed students' means of learning (from teachers, peers and self) and preferred learning styles. Do students, teachers and parents recognise students' preferred learning styles and the influence of these groups on students learning? Students learn by different modes of instruction - by writing, speaking and doing. Both primary and secondary students indicate most students prefer to learn by doing, then by writing and then by speaking; parents too support this order while teachers reverse the order of writing and speaking. Approximately 25 percent of students do not recognise learning by speaking; parents support the students' views on this.

Students indicated that teachers' direct instruction was the most significant means of learning, followed by individual learning. Some 73.0 percent of primary students and

81.0 percent of secondary students chose to learn for personal satisfaction. Some 25.3 percent of primary students and 18.8 percent of secondary students rated learning from peers at the none/a little category. Parents also supported this finding by an indication of 18.7 percent at the same rating. What was an important finding was the fact that parents indicated the same order as students - learning from teachers, then by oneself, then from peers. By contrast teachers placed learning from peers ahead of individual learning. Do students, teachers and parents indicate positive attitudes to learning in the past, /present and future?

In the study it was further desired to establish students' attitudes to learning in the past, present and future. Indeed, ratings for all three categories by both primary and secondary students were at 80.0+ percent at the a fair amount/a lot category. Also important was that the responses of teachers and parents indicated positive attitudes to learning in the past, present and future with response rates of 90+ and 80+ percent at the same ratings.

More detailed responses are - for primary students learning in the past was rated at a fair amount/a lot by 86.9 percent of students, the present by 82.8 percent of students and the future by 86.2 percent of students. Percentages of secondary students for the same categories were 79.6, 86.5 and 83.5 percent. Teachers at the same rating were for the past, 96.7 percent; the present, 93.5 percent and the future 95.0 percent. The percentages of parents who rated the past, present and future at the same rating, a fair amount/a lot, were 86.6 percent, 87.4 percent and 81.1 percent. Hence, students claim positive attitudes to learning and are surrounded by teachers and parents with similar attitudes.

In response to the value of learning in the past, students indicated that they had learnt literacy and numeracy skills, had learnt a lot, gained knowledge, and learnt by example; they also indicated that past learning influenced present achievement. Mention was also made of the influence good teachers had on students' learning. In regard to learning

at the present time  
the main responses from students related to the present influencing  
secondary education and  
the need for good education. The responses in regard to the value of  
learning in the future  
stressed three important issues - learning was seen as necessary for a good  
education and  
employment; students expressed the desire for learning and an 'I want to  
know' attitude was  
portrayed, and, frequent mention was made of setting example and 'making  
something of your  
life'.

While information was gained about the qualities of the learning  
environment, students'  
preferred learning styles, the influence of teachers and of other students  
and individuals on their own learning, and attitudes to learning, two other  
questions were addressed - What  
areas of learning at school gain students' interest? and Who encourages  
students in their  
interest in learning?  
In response to interest in learning at school the most frequently mentioned  
subjects were  
maths, sport, art and language by primary students. Some of the same  
subjects were registered  
as those of interest by secondary students. For example in Zone 13,  
secondary students  
preferences were art, maths, woodwork, science and sport; in Zone 15 the  
order of preferences  
was sport, art, english, maths. In addition to their interests in learning  
approximately 70.0  
percent of primary students and 60.0 of secondary students recognised their  
giftedness. While  
recognition was mainly in the areas of sport and music for primary  
students, secondary  
students, in addition to specifying academic subjects and skills,  
identified their leadership  
capacity and potential for caring for younger children and the elderly.  
Encouragers of  
learning were the family then specifically Mum then Dad, then teachers and  
friends within  
the inner Ballarat region (Zone 13). However, for Zones 14 and 15 parents  
and teachers had  
almost equal recognition as encouragers of students' interests in learning  
at school. These facts  
about encouragers of students' learning were obtained from students.

#### Conclusion:

The study has been influential in detecting qualities apparent in Catholic  
schools, qualities

which are consistent with the emphasis of a school that is permeated with gospel values. The study has also shown that students, teachers and parents agree to a great extent on students' first preferred learning styles and the influence of teachers on students' learning. The majority of students also express positive attitudes to learning and indeed are surrounded by teachers and parents who do likewise. The study shows that students are encouraged in their learning at school. Issues which need further exploration are the characteristics of challenge and equality, learning from peers and learning by speaking (oral mode).

Indeed, students, teachers and parents have supplied information which clarifies that they do not have exactly the same views of their schools, but there are definite similarities in some

areas. Such information can assist schools in future planning for indeed much of what has been investigated might be the hidden curriculum of schools, has been revealed.

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