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## The Attitudes and Values of Melbourne Adolescents towards Schooling and the Future

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## Conclusions

Preparing a teacher is a shared responsibility. An attempt has been made to outline who benefits, how they benefit, and most importantly, the collegial relationship that can make this a fruitful experience for everyone.

Co-operating teachers improve their own teaching skills as they critically examine the art and science of teaching. They also have an impact on the profession.

Student teachers have an opportunity to experiment with new techniques and make the transition from college students to teachers. While this initial induction into a professional career is traumatic, an effective co-operative effort can lessen the trauma, enhance their experience, and contribute to their growth.

Supervisors have an opportunity to influence the profession. By preparing individuals to enter the profession, college supervisors influence administrators and classroom teachers as well as teaching candidates. No other effort provides such rich opportunities for developing enduring ties with the local schools.

The school administration, local community, and children are potential benefactors in a thoughtful, co-operative effort to prepare new teachers. State departments of education recommend expectations; local schools, through co-operating teachers, help implement the field experiences; and college faculty members work co-operatively with each of these agencies to ensure that the experiences are productive and that expected competencies are developed.

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## THE ATTITUDES AND VALUES OF MELBOURNE ADOLESCENTS TOWARDS SCHOOLING AND THE FUTURE

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It has been long evident in the research literature that students in different countries hold quite different views about school and about learning at school (e.g. Husen, 1967; King, Moor & Mundy, 1974). Likewise, their value orientations towards life in general, as well as towards school in particular, vary (e.g. Jackson, 1968; Robinson, 1973; Himmelweit and Swift, 1969). Only recently, however, have such issues been widely researched in Australia (e.g. Anderson, 1978; Batten & Girling-Butcher, 1981).

The present study explored the emerging views and perspectives of adolescent views and perspectives concerning schooling and life generally. Attitudes towards the curriculum were sought, since the literature suggests curriculum decisions are critical to future plans and goals. In addition, however, a wide variety of general, social and educational issues was investigated to tap student affective concerns since there is much recent evidence to suggest that cognitive and affective factors interact to influence schooling outcomes (Marjoribanks, 1981). More general attitudes towards the school in terms of what it does, fails to do, and should be doing from an adolescent perspective were tapped in line with a growing emphasis in Australia on policy-oriented research (Anderson, 1980), and a desire to improve the quality of educational offerings (Williams et al, 1982).

Sex differences in attitudes and perspectives have been reported in some studies. For example, girls were found to be more positive in their attitudes towards school but such satisfaction did not correlate with ability and achievement measures (Tenenbaum, 1940; Leipold, 1957; Jackson and Getzels, 1959). In Australia, Keeves (1974) found that girls were more favourably disposed towards school than were boys in New South Wales, but that in Victoria, no differences emerged. A study conducted in the Australian Capital Territory also found that girls held more positive attitudes towards school than did boys (Keeves, 1972). Anderson (1978) found in South Australia and Queensland that females were more satisfied

with school than were males. Overseas, Komarovsky (1953) found that girls were more compliant at school - neater, more restrained, dependent.

Sampson and Watkins (1978) investigated adolescent attitudes to four aspects of school life - school in general, choice of subjects, discipline, and uniforms. Attitudes were examined in relation to sex, form (grade) level, and school type. Marked sex differences were evident, with girls again showing more favourable attitudes to school than did the boys. With increasing age, students tended to reject school values more. The analyses by school type (geographical location, single-sex or coeducational) revealed no clear-cut trends in attitudes to the four selected aspects of school life. On the question of school discipline, more boys tended to agree that strict discipline was necessary, although similar proportions of boys and girls were undecided about the necessity for strict discipline.

As to whether positive attitudes of students towards school and to life generally are directly related to aspects such as school type, few Australian studies were located that could provide answers to such questions. Batten & Girling-Butcher (1981) examined quality of school life in relation to year level, sex and school of the student respondents. They found that girls in the middle and upper levels of secondary schools seem to derive more enjoyment, perceived benefit and satisfaction from their schooling than did boys. A study by Anderson (1978) in Queensland and South Australia found that there were few consistent relationships between student attitudes and school factors and patterns of motivations. There has to date, however, been little research that explores the goals and future plans of students simultaneously with an examination of their views of schooling and its relevance to these plans.

In their analysis of the kinds of changes secondary school students would like to see introduced, Anderson and Beswick (1972) found students wanted continuous assessment rather than end of year examinations. In relation to school subjects, ninety per cent of all students agreed that there should be greater emphasis of subjects which had future job relevance. Attitudes to content and method of schooling reflected a need for more diversity and the inclusion of technical and academic subjects.

What types of questions were used, then, in the present study to explore further attitudes and values of Australian adolescents? Some

questions explored whether students expected the curriculum to be vocationally oriented for it to be 'useful'. Other questions related schooling to aspects of autonomy (e.g. "School helps you to become independent and able to stand on your own feet") or to other aspects of self-development (e.g. "Having to plan and carry out your own work is confusing"). Additional questions explored life values (e.g. "The secret of happiness is not to hope for much in life and be content with what you have got" or "A wise person will live for today and let tomorrow take care of itself"), and role and status ("Form captains do a very useful job" and "The prefects are the more important students in my school and getting to be a prefect is important"). The attitudes and views of students were considered in terms of three analytic categories: (a) planning and the future; (b) value of schooling; and (c) school curriculum and innovation.

### Sample

Subjects were selected by a two-stage sampling procedure. The first stage defined the population to be sampled as all students born in 1958 attending Melbourne Metropolitan secondary schools teaching more than thirty students born in that year. The 295 schools meeting these criteria were then stratified according to the sex composition of students and a socio-economic ranking of the location (Lancaster-Jones, 1968). A subsample of 10 per cent was chosen from this stratified sample, this being a proportion manageable in practical terms and yet sufficient in size to permit the application of multi-variate procedures. The second stage of sampling involved selecting twenty-five students at random from each of the schools. The total number of students included in the second stage of the sampling was 796, of whom 400 were female, 396 male. This student sampling represented approximately 18 per cent of all fourteen-year olds enrolled in 1972 in the multi-track system of state-financed schools (high schools and technical schools) and independent free-paying schools (Roman Catholic and non-Catholic schools including Protestant and non-denominational and non-religious private schools). Further details of the sampling frame can be found in Poole (1983).

### Data Collection

Students in the sample were given a questionnaire containing full response categories of the Likert-type scale format. The

questionnaire was group administered by a team of trained researchers. School personnel were not involved in the administration of the questionnaire. The questions asked were those reported in the results section in Tables 1 to 3.

## Results

### (a) Planning and Future Orientation

Students believed it was important to plan their careers and their lives (Table 1). Nearly all students favoured having some sort of goal to work towards, rather than just living for today. Students had faith in the value of hard work rather than luck in achieving their goals and obtaining success.

**Table 1: Planning and future orientations**

Statement	Agree%	Disagree%
Luck mediates the effect of hard work on chances of success	27.6	72.4
It's not worth doing much about your career now because plans rarely work out	9.0	91.0
The main thing in life is to have some sort of goal to aim towards	88.8	11.2
It really doesn't matter how well you do at school	14.3	85.7
An educated person stands a better chance in life than an uneducated person	86.5	13.5
People like me find it difficult to get good jobs no matter how much education we have	17.8	82.2
Planning makes a person unhappy since your plans hardly ever work out	14.2	85.8
Employers pay a lot of attention to school reports and examination results	91.9	8.1
It is wise to think about next year's schoolwork rather than concentrate on what you are doing	54.4	45.6
A lot of schooling is necessary to avoid a dead-end job	72.2	27.8
A wise person will live for today and let tomorrow take care of itself	32.1	67.9
You should not hope for too much in life, to avoid disappointment	20.6	79.4
Failure on examinations ruins a person's chances of life	23.8	76.2

Most students felt that their education was of value. Adolescents believed that a person needed a lot of education to avoid a dead-end job and that an educated person stood a better chance in life and that it did matter how well you achieved at school.

Sex differences were not marked although, on average, females were slightly more future-oriented than males; more often believed in hard work rather than luck and in career planning; and most often had a positive attitude towards employment and expectations for the future.

Students of both sexes had equal regard for the value of a goal in life and did not believe in just living for today. Males, slightly more often than females, admitted that an educated person had a better chance in life than an uneducated one. Females were more inclined to reject the idea that failure in exams meant chances in life were ruined completely.

Concerning school type differences, technical and independent school groups tended very much to define the extremes of attitudes to planning and future orientation and awareness, with Catholic students closer to independent students and high school students closer to the technical students in their views. Technical students were least in favour of career planning, of the value of planning in general, of the importance of a goal in life, and showed less conviction concerning the worth of schooling and its employment potential. Independent students, at the other extreme, were most convinced of the importance of the need to plan for the future and to have life goals. Technical students also disagreed with the view that we should 'live for today' but they tended to believe, more than students from other school types, that failure in examinations would ruin their life chances. Overall, despite such variations, a large percentage of students from all school types believed that an educated person stood a better chance in life than an uneducated one.

### (b) Value of schooling

Nearly all students believed in the value of schooling (Table 2). School was not considered a waste of time. Adolescents expected that schools would provide them with training in independence and in career selection. Students expected employers to take cognizance of their school results, but did not generally believe that failure in exams ruined their life chances completely. Moreover, adolescents

rejected the notion that they should not expect too much from schools. In addition, more than three-quarters of the adolescents denied that they were bored or fed up with schooling. As indicated above (Planning and Future Orientation), adolescents saw an instrumental value in schooling: a lot of schooling would help them avoid a dead-end job and provide them with a better chance in life. In addition, adolescents believed that an educated person stood a better chance in life than an uneducated one.

**Table 2: Value of Schooling**

Statement	% Frequency	
	Agree	Disagree
Some people require education for their jobs but for most of us it is a waste of time	14.6	85.4
It really doesn't matter much how well you do at school	14.3	85.7
School helps you become independent	69.1	30.9
School teaches about different sorts of careers	44.7	55.3
Employers pay a lot of attention to school reports and examination results	91.9	8.1
Failure in examinations ruins a person's chances in life*	23.8	76.2
You should not expect too much from school, for you would only be disappointed	16.2	83.8
I get bored and fed up with school and do not really enjoy anything connected with it	20.2	79.8
A lot of schooling is necessary to avoid a dead-end job	72.2	27.8
An educated person stands a better chance in life than an uneducated person	86.5	13.5

\*Some items from Table 1 are included as they refer to failure plans and current perceptions of the value of schooling.

Females placed more faith in the value of schooling, especially in terms of avoiding a dead-end job, and in obtaining employment after school. More females than males rejected the notion that schooling was a waste of time. However, females were slightly less satisfied with the careers' advice they had received than were their male counterparts. Students of both sexes thought that employers should take note of their school reports; that school performance did matter; and that school was not boring.

Attitudes to schooling considered in terms of school type, reflected the patterns discussed above in relation to attitudes to planning, but the polarisation between the technical and independent students was not as great. Private school students rejected more often than did technical students the notion that school was boring and dull, compared with the students from all other school types. Private school students, especially those in non-catholic independent schools, were more optimistic about their chances of employment in the light of their schooling. Students from all schools thought that an educated person had a better chance, that employers would take note of school reports and that it did not matter how well you performed at school. Technical students were most in favour of actual career facilities available at school and thought, more often than other students did, that school taught them how to become independent. More technical and high school students favoured the tenet that a lot of schooling is necessary to avoid a dead-end job.

### (c) School Curriculum and Innovation

Nearly three-quarters of the students enjoyed planning their own work (Table 3). Over sixty per cent of students would like to see adults and parents teaching practical skills in schools. Most students favoured breadth of curricula offerings and believed that technical and academic subjects should be taught side by side in schools. Large numbers of students would like to do projects useful to the community. Over ninety per cent thought that they would find school better if classes were more interesting. However, the vast majority of students admitted that the subjects they took now were interesting. About sixty per cent of adolescents would like to attend school part time and work a few days a week. Most students found discussion in classes a useful learning experience. Nearly two thirds of all students disagreed with the suggestion that exams are the only fair method of assessment, although nearly thirty per cent of students agreed with this opinion.

**Table 3: School Curriculum and Innovation**

Statement	% Frequency	
	Agree	Disagree
Examinations are the only fair test of a student's knowledge	29.4	60.6
Planning one's own work is enjoyable	64.0	26.0
Adults and parents should spend time in school, teaching practical skills	59.9	40.1
Participation in classroom discussion is more valuable than teachers explaining everything	84.6	15.4
Technical and academic subjects should be offered in the same school	88.0	12.0
We should be able to undertake projects useful to the community as part of our schoolwork	86.0	14.0
I would like learning better if classes were more interesting	92.8	7.2
It should be possible to work and attend a normal school part-time (2 days a week)	58.1	41.9
Most of the subjects I take are interesting	76.9	23.1

Sex differences in attitudes to curriculum and innovation were not great, although females were slightly more in favour of change than were males. For example, slightly more females thought there were alternatives to examinations; slightly more females than males would like to attend school part-time; slightly more females than males favoured discussion in class. The majority of students enjoyed planning their work but slightly more males than females reported this. Most students of both sexes welcomed a range of technical and academic subjects being represented in the curriculum. School type differences were in most cases small. Students in independent schools were the most dissatisfied with the status quo in this area while the technical students were the most satisfied. More students in independent schools wanted the opportunity to plan their own work, followed by Catholic and high school students; with technical students much less insistent about this. Most students from all the school types would like to see technical and academic subjects

taught side by side. The independent school sectors were marginally more willing to learn more about the countries from which our migrants came, although this varied according to the age of the student with social liberalism decreasing with age for students at independent schools but increasing for students at technical schools. Differences were small in attitude to community work, but with students at independent schools slightly more in favour than other students. Most students, from all schools, however, agreed that they would like learning even better if their classes were more interesting, although general satisfaction with classes was expressed. A small majority of students from all schools were in agreement with the suggestion that adults and parents be involved in teaching in schools. A large majority of students thought discussion was a lot more useful than teachers explaining everything, with independent students most in agreement and technical students least so. There is a large discrepancy between schools in reference to the fairness of examinations as an assessment procedure. Over three-quarters of students in independent schools did not grant their exclusive suitability. About two thirds of students in Catholic and high schools were of this opinion also, but fewer than half the students at technical schools admitted any disenchantment with exams as a method of assessment.

### Summary and Discussion

Overall, students believed that it was important to plan their careers and future lives. Goal setting was seen as important, as was hard work. In addition, most students believed their education was of value, and that more of it led to better life chances displaying 'socially endorsing' values rather than alienated ones. Students in independent non-government schools were the most committed to education and future planning. Adolescents expected their schools to provide them with training in independence and in job choice. Females placed greater value on schooling than did males, as did students in independent schools, consistent with findings reported by Keeves (1974) and Anderson (1978). Higher levels of satisfaction with schooling were also found among those two groups of students. As to school curriculum and methods of learning, most students enjoyed planning their own work, wanted more diverse offerings and practical courses. They attributed success to ability and effort and planning. Some sixty per cent of adolescents felt they would like to attend school part-time and work a few days a week.

Differences in value orientations clearly existed between the male and female students in the sample. For example, females see the need for full participation in classroom discussion; whereas males were more interested in aspects of school which channel them towards their careers or examination success. The interesting question is whether this is a difference that has been socialised into the two groups or whether the school is, in fact, compounding the problem by passing on its own value orientations which reinforce earlier socialisation patterns.

Once again it is important to consider not merely the patterns of differences to emerge but to consider the role of teachers, curriculum, and general school policy in terms of e.g. underlining the significance attached to being good at sport, but failing to highlight the significance of being good at classroom discussion or becoming independent and showing initiative. That is to say, the educational system has long neglected to reflect upon its role as a transmitter of values and attitudes. That the school sees this as its role is universally espoused in policy documents concerning the aims of individual schools. However, curricular offerings have rarely included value components, other than within specially constructed guidelines developed in religious and moral education programmes, or in facets of English and Social Studies programmes. Although the emerging focus for new curricular offerings seems to be in the area of careers education, it could well be that educators should be giving more prominence to values education, since values not only help shape expectations but appear to influence achievement and future life styles.

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