

ASPECTS OF CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION LIKED AND DISLIKED BY PARENTS

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Introduction

Each year the Gallup Poll conducts a survey of attitudes toward public education and each year the majority of public school parents has rated the school as satisfactory or above. Two much more detailed studies of parental attitudes in Florida, one conducted by Norman P. Luttbeg for the Florida Department of Education (1970) and this author's study (Floyd, 1975) substantiated Gallup's findings as being representative of Florida. However, the level of satisfaction could be higher. It has been suggested that one way to accomplish this might be to identify those aspects of the school program which parents particularly like or dislike and either alter the program or provide more information about those aspects of the program.

Most research on what parents like or dislike about their children's schools has solicited responses in very general categories the majority of which do not relate to the academic aspects of the school and many of which educators have little control over, such as funding and bussing for desegregation purposes. However, educators at all levels can effect change in the area of curriculum and instruction. Therefore, this study attempted to identify the particular aspects of curriculum and instruction that parents liked and disliked. In addition, significant relationships between demographic characteristics of the parent and aspects liked or disliked were sought.

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Methodology

Parents of over forty-five hundred public school students in grades 1 through 12 were interviewed. These parents were residents of eight Florida counties: Escambia, Leon, Jefferson, Duval, Manatee, Lee, Palm Beach and Dade. The method of selection of subjects varied somewhat in different counties. In Escambia, Jefferson, Lee, Leon, Manatee, and Palm Beach the parents were randomly selected from central lists of students. Since such lists were not available to the researchers in Dade County, an area probability technique was employed to select a random sample of public school parents. In Duval County no central list of students was maintained, so it was necessary to randomly select parents from individual school lists. The schools used were also randomly selected.

Table 1 shows the number of respondents by county and the per cent of the enrollments that the respondents presented. As indicated in the table parents of slightly less than 1% of the total school enrollment in the eight counties were interviewed.

TABLE 1
SCHOOL ENROLLMENT, NUMBER OF INTERVIEWS, AND
PERCENTS OF TOTAL INTERVIEWED BY COUNTY

	1972 Total School Enrollment	Number of Interviews	Percent of Total Interviewed
Dade	235,015	175	0.1%
Duval	107,892	972	0.8
Escambia	47,947	517	1.0
Jefferson	2,470	302	12.4
Lee	23,274	321	1.4
Leon	20,949	704	3.2
Manatee	17,526	443	2.4
Palm Beach	64,758	1,111	1.6
Total	519,831	4,545	0.9%

As indicated in Table 2 the sample was composed of nearly twice as many women as men. This is a common occurrence in survey research and a difficult one to overcome, since a greater proportion of women are at home during the day. However, it must be acknowledged that the sample is not proportionate to the total population on the basis of sex.

TABLE 2
DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONDENTS BY SEX

Sex	Male	Female
Frequency	1,512	2,979
Percent	34	66

Table 3 depicts the racial distribution of the sample and the racial distribution of Florida based on the 1970 Census data (U.S. Census, 1972). The sample has

TABLE 3
DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONDENTS AND FLORIDA POPULATION BY RACE

Race	Black	White	Other
Frequency	1,217	3,178	96
Precent	27.1	70.8	2.1
Florida Percent	15.3	84.3	.4

somewhat higher percentages of minority group members than the total population. Although no specific figures are available the minority groups probably make up a higher percentage of the population within the age brackets that this study treats than they do of the total population, due to the high percentages of whites in the older age groups in Florida.

TABLE 4
AGE DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONDENTS

Age Group	25 & under	26-35	36-45	46-55	56-65	over 65
Frequency	45	1,280	2,032	872	188	74
Percent	1.0	28.5	45.2	19.4	4.2	1.6

Table 4 indicates the age composition of the sample. This distribution reflects the concentration of parents of school age children in the middle age brackets.

The educational level of the parents in the sample and a comparison of the sample with the average educational attainment of adult Florida residents as shown by the 1970 Census is depicted in Table 5.

TABLE 5

COMPARISON OF RESPONDENTS AND FLORIDA AVERAGE EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

Years of school	0	1-8	9-12	13-16	17
Respondents	0.2%	15.9%	60.4%	18.0%	5.4%
Florida average	1.6	26.2	50.3	17.9	4.0

Table 6 shows the socioeconomic status distribution of the sample. The Duncan Socio-Economic Index (Duncan, 1961) was used to measure respondents' socioeconomic status. An underlying assumption is that socioeconomic status is a continuum rather than a hierarchy of discrete classes (Blau, 1967) but to analyze the data it was necessary to establish categories (0-9) graded from low to high status (Duncan, 1967). The proportions of the working population found in each Duncan decile are not equal. Therefore, the concern in this study was not that the distribution be equal, but that all deciles were represented in the study (Haug, 1971).

TABLE 6

SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS OF RESPONDENTS

Duncan decile	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Frequency	102	561	79	273	499	337	258	453	1,021	583
Percent	2.4	13.6	1.9	6.6	12.0	8.1	6.2	10.9	24.5	14.0

Although the sample is not entirely proportional to the population of Florida, it is adequately distributed to allow analysis on the basis of the various demographic characteristics identified.

Interviews were carried out in parents' homes by personnel of National Analyst, Inc., of Philadelphia. The interview questionnaire, containing 187 items, was developed by personnel of the Institute of Behavioral Research at Florida Atlantic University.

This study is based on parental responses to only two items.

"What do you like most about the types of courses and instruction your child is receiving?"

"What do you like least about the types of courses and instruction your child is receiving?"

Open ended questions were used to avoid suggesting any type of response to the parents. However, complete freedom of response made analysis of the data much more complicated. An initial review of the responses showed that 14.9% of the responses concerning what parents liked and 1.5% of those comments dealing with what they disliked were so general that they could not be categorized. Another 4.5% of the favorable responses and 9.6% of the unfavorable ones dealt with aspects of the school other than courses and instruction. These were eliminated and the remaining responses were categorized. Fourteen categories were developed. The responses were then coded and placed on computer tapes. However, when the tables were

generated to establish relationships with the demographic factors even further simplification was necessary. To facilitate the statistical analysis and interpretation of the data any category which did not receive at least 3% of the responses was eliminated. This greatly reduced the number of empty cells in the contingency tables which would have made it impossible to calculate a meaningful chi square.

As the data collected were of the nominal and ordinal levels, chi square had been selected as the appropriate technique for establishing the statistical significance of the relationships found in the study. With a sample of over 4,000 care had to be exercised to avoid establishing significance on the basis of a weak relationship. Therefore, a .001 level of significance was used to make the decision that the relationship was not a random occurrence.

RESULTS

The following section will present the percentages of parents who identified the various aspects of courses and instruction as what they particularly liked or disliked. The relationships between these likes and dislikes and several demographic characteristics will also be presented.

Aspects Liked by Parents

After the elimination of the irrelevant responses and the categories receiving the minor numbers of responses, six aspects of curriculum and

instruction remained. Table 7 shows the categories and resulting percentages.

TABLE 7
ASPECTS OF COURSES AND INSTRUCTION LIKED BY PARENTS
(In Percentage)

Pro- gres- sive Curric- ulum	Aca- demic Courses	Voca- tional Courses	Teacher Effec- tive- ness	Avail- ability of educa- tional mate- rials	Level of Child's Achieve- ment
12.3	14.5	3.6	44.9	3.5	20.1

The teacher, with 44.9% of the responses, was by far the most popular aspect. To determine the specific types of statements made concerning teachers, several hundred questionnaires were screened. Although many of the responses dealt with the effectiveness of the teacher's instruction, the majority dealt with the teacher's relationship with the individual child in terms of giving extra help, liking the child or being fair to the child.

The level of their child's achievement received the second highest number of responses. This, of course, is a result of the courses and

instruction rather than an aspect of it, but the deleting of a single category with so many responses could not be justified.

A category, which was labeled academic courses, included responses related to basic skills and course content rather than instructional methods. This category received 14.5% of the responses.

Responses about individualized instruction, project work, student-interest centered activities, non-graded or open classrooms, and the developing of attitudes and interpersonal relationships were included in a category called progressive curriculum which received 12.3% of the responses.

Two other categories, vocational courses and availability of educational materials received small and nearly equal numbers of responses.

Aspects Disliked by Parents

The data relating to areas disliked by parents were treated in the same manner as that relating to areas parents like. Here eight categories remained after the irrelevant data were omitted. Table 8 portrays this information.

TABLE 8
ASPECTS OF COURSES AND INSTRUCTION DISLIKED BY PARENTS
(In Percentage)

School is Too Easy	Pro-gres-sive Curric-ulum	Aca-demic Courses	Classes Are Too Large	Teacher Not Effec-tive	Poor Disci-pline In Class-room	Lack of Educa-tional Methods	Child is Achiev-ing Below Desired Level
18.2	5.0	12.7	10.4	34.9	6.2	3.6	8.9

The teacher not being effective was the most popular category in this set and statements made in this area depicted the offending teacher as ineffective, disinterested or unconcerned.

A perception of the school as being too easy academically was also widespread. A category called academic courses received 12.7% of the responses. A review of over 100 of these responses showed two major areas of dissatisfaction. One of these was a lack of emphasis on the basic skills and the second was specific course content, particularly modern mathematics.

Another concern was class size. Some 10.4% of Florida parents surveyed viewed classes as too large. Gallup (1973) found that 83% of the public school parents in his sample felt that class size was a very important factor in student achievement. In 1976, Gallup (1976) proposed ways of

reducing school costs. Increasing class size received a negative response from 74% of the public school parents. Parental consensus favors smaller classes.

Relationships Between Responses and Demographic Characteristics

Having established the basic aspects liked and disliked, relationships were then sought between these factors and the parent's level of education, race, socioeconomic status and the grade level of his child. Guttman's lambda was used to establish the strength of these relationships.

Education

A significant relationship did exist between the parent's educational level and the aspects of curriculum he liked. The percentage selecting each category are shown in Table 9. The more formal education a parent had had the more likely was a response which could be classified as relating to a progressive curriculum. The response pattern dealing with academic courses corresponds with that for progressive curriculum. Those parents with fewer years of schooling liked emphasis on basic skill subjects and gave a greater number of responses dealing with course content than with methodology.

In the 1975 survey Gallup (1975) asked: "Should a student be able to progress through the school system at his own speed and without regard to the usual grade levels?"

TABLE 9

ASPECTS OF COURSES AND INSTRUCTION LIKED BY PARENTS
GROUPED BY EDUCATIONAL LEVEL OF PARENT
(In Percentage)

	Years of Education			
	8 or less	9-12	13-16	17 & over
Progressive curriculum	5.1%	12.3%	20.8%	23.2%
Academic courses	17.8	14.7	10.9	11.0
Vocational courses	3.5	4.3	2.1	1.8
Teacher effectiveness	37.6	44.5	49.5	52.4
Availability of educational materials	2.8	3.8	3.3	2.4
Level of child's achievement	33.3	20.4	13.4	9.1
	100.1% (N=433)	100.0% (N=1640)	100.0% (N=523)	99.9% (N=164)

$$\chi^2 = 144.34$$

$$p < .001$$

$$\lambda = .25$$

This received a favorable response from 55% of the respondents who had an elementary school education, 64% of the high school graduates and 69% of the college graduates.

The 1977 Gallup Poll asked the question: "Do you favor or oppose the back-to-basic movement?" (Gallup, 1977)

The results of this study concur with Gallup's findings. A total of 93% of the parents possessing a grade school education favor it, as do 84% of the high school graduate group and 81% of the parents who were college graduates.

As indicated earlier, the teacher received the highest percentage of any category. A strong positive relationship existed between the level of parental education and the selection of teacher effectiveness with over 52% of the parents with more than a four year college degree selecting this category. This relationship was of interest, since one of the common explanations given for parent identification of the teacher in such surveys has been that they are ill-informed and select the teacher as the only identifiable aspect of the school. In this survey 15% more of the highly educated parents gave this response, than did parents having only an elementary school education. This would appear to contradict such an explanation. Perhaps a more reasonable explanation would relate to Luttbeg's (FDOE, 1970) finding that education increased the parent's perception of interpersonal relationships as a more important aspect of the curriculum.

This explanation would relate to the selection of progressive curriculum as well as the selection of the teacher.

No significant relationship existed between the aspects of curriculum disliked and the education of the parent. However, Table 10 shows the percentages in each category.

Ineffective teachers, of course, received the highest percentages. However, the perception of the school as being too easy academically was also widespread.

The only response category that appeared to have any significant relationship to the education of the parent was dissatisfaction with the level of the child's achievement. This showed a rather strong inverse relationship, which was also true in Table 9 concerning likes. More highly educated parents did not give their children's level of achievement as a basis for dissatisfaction as often as parents with fewer years of formal education. The reason for this may be the emphasis put on the affective realm by these parents or it may be that their children tend to achieve more adequately, so it isn't a problem to them.

TABLE 10

ASPECTS OF COURSES AND INSTRUCTION DISLIKED BY PARENTS
GROUPED BY EDUCATIONAL LEVEL OF PARENT
(In Percentage)

	Years of Education			
	8 or less	9-12	13-16	17 & over
School is too easy	19.5%	18.8%	21.3%	22.1%
Progressive curriculum is not effective	1.1	5.7	6.7	4.1
Academic courses	5.2	8.2	10.2	7.6
Classes are too large	8.0	10.9	13.4	11.7
Teacher not effective	44.8	36.6	36.2	40.0
Poor discipline in classroom	8.0	7.1	6.0	4.1
Lack of educational materials	2.9	4.0	2.7	6.9
Child achieving below desired level	10.4	8.6	3.5	3.4
	99.9% (N=174)	99.9% (N=1116)	100.0% (N=403)	99.9% (N=145)

$$\chi^2 = 42.58$$

$$p < .01$$

Race

Table 11 shows the categorical results in relation to the race of the parent. The relationship was significant and Table 11 shows several very pronounced relationships.

Eleven percent more white parents were pleased with the innovative aspects of the curriculum than were black parents or other minority group parents. Black parents particularly liked the academic courses which as noted earlier included mainly responses related to basic skills. This substantiates a finding of Luttbeg that Blacks put great stress on fundamentals but does not agree with Gallup's (1977) finding related to race and the back-to-basics movement where he found a greater percentage of whites than non-whites accepting the movement.

Nearly 50% of the white parents named the teacher as what they liked, while only 31% of the black parents named the teacher. Also highly related to race was the response category dealing with the level of the child's achievement. Black parents were 20% more apt to give this response than white parents.

Thus, white parents' responses more often dealt with instructional techniques and the teacher and black parents' responses more often involved subject matter and their children's accomplishments.

TABLE 11

ASPECTS OF COURSES AND INSTRUCTION LIKED BY PARENTS
GROUPED BY RACE (In Percentage)

	Race		
	White	Black	Other*
Progressive curriculum	16.8%	5.4%	4.2%
Academic courses	11.6	21.9	5.6
Vocational courses	3.7	3.6	2.8
Teacher is effective	49.8	31.2	56.3
Availability of educational materials	3.8	2.8	1.4
Child is achieving well	14.3	35.1	29.6
	100.0% (N=1935)	100.0% (N=754)	99.9% (N=71)

$$\chi^2 = 267.46$$

$$p < .001$$

$$\lambda = .26$$

*Parents of Cuban, Puerto Rican, Mexican, Oriental, and American Indian heritage were placed in this category.

Table 12 shows the aspects of courses and instruction disliked categorized by race. The relationship was significant, but the strength of the relationship was negligible. An inspection of Table 12 shows little variation in the percentages. The size of the chi square was strongly influenced by the small number of black responses concerning progressive education and the large number concerning achievement.

Socioeconomic Status

Socioeconomic status was also found to be significantly related to the aspects liked by parents. Table 13 provides the data categorized according to the Duncan Socio-Economic Index. The indication of progressive programs or teachers as what was liked about the quality of courses and instruction was directly related to socioeconomic status. The percentage variation in the selection of progressive curriculum is quite marked. At the low end of the socioeconomic continuum only 4.4% of the parents mentioned this, while at the high end the percentage had increased to 24.5%. The percentage of variation in the naming of teachers was close to 10% which is a significant variation, although not as marked as that found in relation to progressive programs.

The identifying of academic courses or level of child's achievement as what the parent liked was inversely related to socioeconomic status. The variation in responses concerning academic courses was less than 10%,

TABLE 12

ASPECTS OF COURSES AND INSTRUCTION DISLIKED BY PARENTS
GROUPED BY RACE (In Percentage)

Aspect disliked	Race		
	White	Black	Other*
School is too easy	19.3%	19.9%	50.0%
Progressive curriculum	6.3	0.8	0.0
Academic courses	8.6	6.8	5.0
Classes are too large	12.0	7.1	10.0
Teacher not effective	37.1	41.4	20.0
Poor discipline in classroom	7.2	3.4	10.0
Lack of educational materials	4.1	2.6	0.0
Child is achieving below desired level	5.4	18.0	5.0
	100.0% (N=1552)	100.0% (N=266)	100.0% (N=20)

$$\chi^2 = 92.9$$

$$p < .001$$

$$\lambda = .011$$

*Parents of Cuban, Puerto Rican, Mexican, Oriental, and American Indian heritage were placed in this category.

TABLE 13

ASPECTS OF COURSES AND INSTRUCTION LIKED BY PARENTS GROUPED BY SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS
(In Percentage)

	Socioeconomic Status									
	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Progressive curriculum	4.4%	7.5%	6.3%	7.4%	8.8%	13.0%	10.6%	13.2%	16.7%	24.5%
Academic courses	17.6	19.9	27.1	16.1	13.8	10.9	12.1	14.8	9.5	11.5
Vocational courses	0.0	2.8	8.3	6.0	4.7	2.6	4.3	3.9	1.9	2.5
Teacher is effective and concerned	39.7	33.5	27.1	38.3	42.1	45.8	53.9	45.9	52.6	48.7
Availability of educational materials	4.4	1.2	4.2	5.4	4.7	3.1	3.5	3.9	2.3	3.2
Level of child's achievement	33.8	35.1	27.1	26.8	25.9	24.5	15.6	18.3	16.9	9.6
	99.9% (N=68)	100.0% (N=322)	100.1% (N=48)	100.0% (N=149)	100.0% (N=297)	99.9% (N=192)	100.0% (N=141)	100.0% (N=257)	99.9% (N=515)	100.0% (N=314)

 $\chi^2 = 199.55$

p < .001

 $\lambda = .28$

but for responses about the level of child's achievement the variation was over 20%.

The percentage of parents indicating a like for vocational courses increased in the second quarter of the socioeconomic continuum. This may have been related to the vocational aspirations parents in this group have for their children.

No significant relationship existed between the aspects of courses and instruction disliked by the parent and the socioeconomic status of the parent. Table 14 shows the random nature of the responses.

Knowing the race, educational level and socioeconomic status does provide some indication of the aspects of courses and instruction liked by the parent but does not give any meaningful information about what they dislike.

Grade Level

The last variable considered was the grade level. Each parent was asked to respond in relation to one child and to indicate the grade level of that child. Table 15 shows the breakdown of responses by grade level. The relationship here was significant, but the lambda was so weak that it would be of no value in future prediction. The only relationship visible in Table 15 is in the area of vocational courses which would, of course, have been expected.

TABLE 14

ASPECTS OF COURSES AND INSTRUCTION DISLIKED BY PARENTS GROUPED BY SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS
(In Percentage)

	Socioeconomic Status									
	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
School is too easy	22.2%	17.2%	18.3%	13.0%	22.1%	19.5%	24.4%	18.4%	17.3%	20.9%
Progressive curriculum	0.0	2.0	4.5	5.4	3.4	6.0	5.6	5.3	5.9	7.4
Academic courses	5.6	7.3	0.0	9.8	8.2	3.8	11.1	14.5	6.9	8.7
Classes are too large	5.6	6.6	9.1	12.0	9.6	13.5	10.0	9.7	11.6	13.2
Teacher not effective	38.9	39.1	54.5	42.4	38.9	32.3	31.1	36.7	41.2	35.4
Poor discipline in classroom	5.6	7.9	4.5	6.5	4.3	7.5	6.7	5.3	9.2	5.1
Lack of educational materials	0.0	1.3	4.5	1.1	5.3	3.8	2.2	5.3	3.7	5.1
Child achieving below desired level	22.2	18.5	4.5	9.8	8.2	13.5	8.9	4.8	4.1	4.2
	100.1% (N=18)	99.9% (N=151)	99.9% (N=22)	100.0% (N=92)	100.0% (N=208)	99.9% (N=133)	100.0% (N=90)	100.0% (N=207)	99.9% (N=490)	100.0% (N=311)

TABLE 15
ASPECTS OF COURSES AND INSTRUCTION LIKED BY PARENTS GROUPED BY GRADE LEVEL OF THE CHILD
(In Percentage)

	Grade Level											
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Progressive curriculum	15.2%	20.7%	19.1%	14.5%	15.0%	11.1%	12.7%	10.0%	10.9%	11.4%	13.1%	5.8%
Academic courses	9.5	12.1	10.2	14.9	11.8	15.6	11.9	19.1	17.1	18.6	15.9	15.8
Vocational courses	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.5	0.5	1.4	3.8	6.7	7.1	6.3	11.9	11.7
Teacher is effective & concerned	47.4	45.5	53.8	51.9	50.0	40.9	43.1	37.8	44.5	38.8	39.8	49.2
Availability of educational materials	2.4	3.5	3.0	3.3	4.1	3.9	4.9	5.7	2.4	3.0	1.1	2.5
Level of child's achievement	25.6	18.2	14.0	14.9	18.6	27.0	23.6	20.6	18.0	21.9	18.2	15.0
	100.1% (N=211)	100.0% (N=198)	100.1% (N=236)	100.0% (N=214)	100.0% (N=220)	99.9% (N=359)	100.0% (N=369)	99.9% (N=209)	100.0% (N=211)	100.0% (N=237)	100.0% (N=176)	100.0% (N=120)

$\chi^2 = 82.56$

$p < .001$

$\lambda = .013$

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