

THE ROLE OF THE HIGH SCHOOL AS PERCEIVED AND COMMUNICATED BY PARENTS AND TEACHERS

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This paper deals with perceptions which high school teachers and parents of high school students hold about the role of the high school. The paper also treats two other problems: (a) how well teachers understand the perceptions of parents concerning the role of the high school, and (b) the extent to which differences occur in these perceptions of parents from different social classes.

Problem

Four null hypotheses were stated and tested. These hypotheses appear below.

1. There are no significant differences between teachers' and parents' perceptions of the role of the high school.
2. There are no significant differences between teachers' perceptions of the role of the high school and what parents predict teachers will believe.
3. There are no significant differences between parents' perceptions of the role of the high school and what teachers predict parents will believe.
4. There are no significant differences between the responses of the designated upper and lower socio-economic class parent groups as compared with teachers.

Procedure

Sample

The sampling procedure was in two operations--first, schools were selected, and then individuals were selected.

Schools were selected which met the following criteria:

1. Membership in the Southern Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools.
2. Caucasian student body.
3. Location in an incorporated city having a population of not less than 20,000.
4. Being evaluated by the Southern Association during years 1959-1961.
5. Serving at least grades 10 through 12.
6. Student population in grades 10 through 12 of at least 500.

Five Florida schools were finally selected for inclusion in the study. These schools served cosmopolitan areas, and the population of these areas included a wide range of social, economic, and geographic strata.

All teachers from each of the five schools were asked to complete two checklists. In each school two groups of 75 parents were randomly selected and asked to complete a checklist.

Data

All teachers and parents were asked to complete the McGuire-White Index of Social Status and a checklist dealing with the responsibility of the high school. Data from the McGuire-White Index enables classifying the respondent into one of five social classes; upper, upper-middle, lower-middle, upper-lower, and lower-lower. The checklist consisted of 21 items, each dealing with a possible responsibility of the high school.

Items such as "Help pupils master the content of mathematics and science" and "Help pupils learn how to think for themselves and to make choices intelligently" constituted the checklist which appears as part of Table 1. Each item was rated on a five-point scale:

- 5--Great Responsibility
- 4--Definite Responsibility
- 3--Some Responsibility
- 2--Little Responsibility
- 1--No Responsibility

Teachers completed the checklist responding in terms of what they perceived as the role of the high school. Two weeks later they completed the checklist again responding in terms of what they believed parents perceived as the role of the high school, i. e. they attempted to predict parent responses. The two week delay was implemented to lessen the possibility of teachers' attempting to correlate their perceptions with the predictions of parents.

Two groups of 75 parents of tenth grade students were selected at random from each school. One group in each school completed the checklist in terms of what they perceived as the role of the high school. The second group in each school completed the checklist in terms of what they believed teachers perceived as the role of the high school, i. e. they attempted to predict teacher responses.

Two hundred seventy-one teachers completed the checklist at both times. This number represented 78% of the teachers from the five schools. Two hundred sixty-six parents completed the checklist in terms of what they perceived as the role of the high school, representing 71% return. Two hundred thirty-nine parents completed the checklist attempting to predict teacher responses, representing 74% return. Slightly less than 25% of each parent group consisted of individuals who were subsequently identified as being in the lower social class.

Analysis

The five point scale for each item of the checklist was dichotomized into two groups. The high category consisted of responses 4 and 5, "Great Responsibility" and "Definite Responsibility." The Low category consisted of the other three responses. This reduction into two groups

was made due to the difficulty involved in attaching exact values to an attitude scale.¹

Data concerning social class was also combined into two groups. The upper category contained upper, upper-middle, and lower-middle class parents, and the lower group contained upper-lower and lower-lower class parents.

All analyses were done by the chi-square technique. Data were placed in a two-by-two table with high and low categories from checklists as one variable; and parent-teacher or teacher-parent social class as the other variable. Results were analyzed accordingly. Obtained chi-squares were regarded as significant when they were equal to or greater than the magnitude needed for significance at the .01 level.

Results

Summary data dealing with teachers' and parents' responses to the items of the checklist and with the significance of differences of responses to the items by the various groups appear in Table 1. The first hypothesis dealt with the similarity of parent and teacher perceptions of the role of the high school. On ten of the twenty-one items the responses of the two groups were significantly different.

The second hypothesis dealt with the similarity of teacher perceptions and parent predictions of teacher perceptions. On fourteen of the twenty-one items (67%) significant differences were noted.

The third hypothesis dealt with the similarity between parent perceptions and teacher predictions of parent perceptions. No significant differences were noted on any of the twenty-one items.

The fourth hypothesis dealt with similarity between teacher and parent perceptions when parents were categorized according to social class. Upper class parents (the combined upper and middle according to the McGuire-White Index) and teachers responded differently on eleven of the twenty-one items; whereas lower class parents and teachers differed on only three of the twenty-one items. When upper class parents attempted to predict teacher responses, they failed to do so on fifteen of the twenty-one items. When teachers attempted to predict the responses of upper class parents, they failed to do so on only one of the twenty-one items, but when they attempted to predict the responses of lower class parents they failed to do so on three items.

Analysis of Differences between Teacher-Parent Perceptions and Predictions

Survey Item	Significance of Difference					
	Teacher Perceptions vs. Parent Perceptions		Teacher Perceptions vs. Parent Predictions		Teacher Perceptions vs. Parent Predictions	
	Total Parents	Upper Lower Parents	Total Parents	Upper Lower Parents	Total Parents	Upper Lower Parents
"Help pupils..."						
1. prepare for college						
2. learn about problems of family life	S	S	S	S		S
3. master content of math and science	S	S				S
4. master skills needed to get and hold a job						
5. learn how to use money wisely						S
6. learn how to think for themselves and make choices intelligently				S		
7. distinguish right from wrong and act accordingly		S	S	S	S	
8. learn how to get along with others	S	S	S	S		
9. learn facts about sex				S		
10. learn about religions				S		
11. learn sports and recreational activities						
12. learn good work habits and study skills				S		
13. learn about functions and problems of government	S	S	S	S		
14. acquire good manner, poise, appearance, and confidence				S	S	
15. gain appreciation of good art, music, literature	S	S		S		
16. learn to analyze propaganda	S	S	S	S	S	
17. learn importance of spiritual values in society	S	S		S		S
18. gain an understanding of self and others	S	S		S		
19. learn citizenship and participate in public affairs	S	S				
20. improve reading skills				S	S	
21. master the three R's						

¹In this table, "S" indicates significant difference at .01 level.

Table 2

Per Cent of Groups Rating Items in the High Category

Item	Per Cent Rating Item High			
	Teachers' Perceptions	Teachers' Predictions	Parents' Perceptions	Parents' Predictions
1	93	88	90	86
2	47	27	29	25
3	79	76	83	83
4	72	79	78	71
5	40	31	34	25
6	93	76	79	72
7	79	58	56	54
8	73	61	60	57
9	19	18	27	15
10	16	8	15	14
11	46	48	50	62
12	92	85	85	84
13	88	81	80	73
14	63	49	49	48
15	72	54	58	51
16	77	50	65	52
17	48	30	36	31
18	72	51	52	50
19	85	74	76	88
20	91	88	85	79
21	90	92	90	83

Generally the data reveal that there are substantial differences between parents and teachers as to the appropriate role of the high school. Teachers predict more accurately responses of parents than parents predict teacher responses. This may indicate a one-way line of communication from parent to teacher, and an inoperative or non-existent line of communication from teacher to parent. Teachers and lower class parents agree more highly and predict the responses of each other more accurately than do teachers and upper class parents. This indicates a possible error in categorization, or in assigning middle class status and beliefs to teachers.

It is interesting to note in Table 2 that all groups assign or predict rather high levels of responsibility to the high school. Differences are often in degree of responsibility assigned. Teachers rather consistently assigned more responsibility to the high school than did parents.

Footnote

¹Mildred Partin, Surveys, Polls, and Samples: Practical Procedures
(New York: Harper and Brothers, 1950), p. 190.