

Schoolchildren's Perception of Their Rights

A Pilot Study

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The author gratefully acknowledges the assistance of Mr. Craig Laughton, a student at Monash University and the cooperation of the staff and students of Westall Secondary College and Caulfield Grammar School.

Introduction

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child was ratified by Australia in December 1990. The Convention contains 55 articles, 41 of which are substantive, the others being procedural.

The Convention has been analysed in legal and other literature in Australia. Its ratification was actively promoted by the National Children's Bureau of Australia and other bodies. Its implementation is the primary responsibility of the Federal and State governments. Periodic reports are required to be made to a Committee of the United Nations established for this purpose. It is foreseen that non-government organisations in each ratifying country will be invited to comment on the performance of their country. This surely means that the NCBA has a role in monitoring the implementation of the Convention.

Accordingly, it seemed necessary and opportune to consider the impact of the Convention on children themselves.

The object of this modest pilot project was to test the knowledge and views of two groups of secondary schoolchildren, at schools of a diverse character. Westall Secondary College, a coeducational State school in the Melbourne suburb of Clayton, is one of these schools. The vast majority of its pupils come from homes where English is not the first language. It prides itself, with justification, on its diversity of cultures.

The other school is an eminent Melbourne private boys' school, Caulfield Grammar. This school has an enviable academic and sporting reputation. Its pupils are almost all Australian-born and come from predominantly middle-class and upper middle-class homes.

The Methodology

Mr Craig Laughton and I spent three hours at each school. Three separate groups were chosen, of different ages. Each group comprised 30-35 students. Because of internal logistic difficulties, it was not possible to choose identical age groups at each school. At Westall Secondary School, the groups consisted of students drawn from years 8, 9-10, and 11 - that is, boys and girls aged from about 13 to 17. At Caulfield Grammar School, the sample was younger - the groups comprised years 7 to 9, that is, boys from about 12 to 15.

The 1st part of the questionnaire

Mr Laughton drafted the Questionnaire, which consisted of two parts. At the beginning of each class, every participant was first asked to complete Part 1, which sought to ascertain whether the pupils had any prior knowledge of the Convention, whether they considered it to be desirable or necessary, and the effect that they thought such a Convention might have on their lives. The results are shown in TABLE A.

TABLE A: Survey on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child
Part 1: General Questions.

1. Are you aware that the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child exists?

	Yes	No	Not sure	No answer
Westall S.C.				
Year 8	8%	92%	-	-
Years 9-10	29%	71%	-	-
Year 11	40%	60%	-	-
Caulfield G.S.				
Year 7	8%	92%	-	-
Year 8	5%	95%	-	-
Year 9	16%	84%	-	-

2. In your opinion should a child be permitted to have rights?

	Yes	No	Not sure	No answer
Westall S.C.				
Year 8	100%	-	-	-
Years 9-10	95%	5%	-	-
Year 11	100%	-	-	-
Caulfield G.S.				
Year 7	100%	-	-	-
Year 8	100%	-	-	-
Year 9	86%	14%	-	-

3. Is the creation of such a convention which states certain specific rights for the child a good idea?

	Yes	No	Not sure	No answer
Westall S.C.				
Year 8	88%	12%	-	-
Years 9-10	90%	10%	-	-
Year 11	100%	-	-	-
Caulfield G.S.				
Year 7	100%	-	-	-
Year 8	100%	-	-	-
Year 9	92%	8%	-	-

TABLE A continued

4. Are you aware of any of the rights which the convention bestows upon you as the child?

	Yes	No	Not sure	No answer
Westall S.C.				
Year 8	17%	83%	-	-
Years 9-10	18%	82%	-	-
Year 11	16%	84%	-	-
Caulfield G.S.				
Year 7	5%	95%	-	-
Year 8	5%	95%	-	-
Year 9	8%	92%	-	-

5. Have you seen any evidence which would suggest to you that the convention is having an effect upon you and your 'environment'?

	Yes	No	Not sure	No answer
Westall S.C.				
Year 8	12%	88%	-	-
Years 9-10	28%	72%	-	-
Year 11	11%	89%	-	-
Caulfield G.S.				
Year 7	9%	91%	-	-
Year 8	5%	95%	-	-
Year 9	-	100%	-	-

6. Thus far can you see any real benefits which have come to you as a result of the convention?

	Yes	No	Not sure	No answer
Westall S.C.				
Year 8	-	100%	-	-
Years 9-10	13%	87%	-	-
Year 11	3%	97%	-	-
Caulfield G.S.				
Year 7	4%	96%	-	-
Year 8	12%	88%	-	-
Year 9	-	100%	-	-

7. Do you think that the existence of the Convention will influence the way in which you are treated by your parents?

	Yes	No	Not sure	No answer
Westall S.C.				
Year 8	45%	55%	-	-
Years 9-10	68%	32%	-	-
Year 11	58%	42%	-	-
Caulfield G.S.				
Year 7	79%	41%	-	-
Year 8	36%	64%	-	-
Year 9	64%	36%	-	-

8. If you knew more about the Convention, could you see it having an influence upon your everyday life?

	Yes	No	Not sure	No answer
Westall S.C.				
Year 8	58%	42%	-	-
Years 9-10	68%	32%	-	-
Year 11	44%	56%	-	-
Caulfield G.S.				
Year 7	64%	36%	-	-
Year 8	72%	28%	-	-
Year 9	46%	54%	-	-

Comment

The answers reveal that most of the children were unaware of the Convention's existence. A greater proportion of the older children at Westall Secondary School had, however, at least heard about it (40% in Year 11), but even these were in a minority. Even of those who had heard of it however, only a small proportion expressed any awareness of any of the specific rights granted by the Convention. Significantly, perhaps, the pupils of Westall Secondary School showed a greater knowledge than those at Caulfield Grammar School.

It is somewhat surprising that as many as 28% of the second Westall group considered that the Convention was nevertheless having some effect. But the vast majority of the students (100% indeed in the third Caulfield group) considered that the Convention so far had had no effect and provided them with no benefit.

In contrast to their ignorance of the existence of Convention, there was a strong feeling among the groups that a Convention was desirable, or at least, that children should be accorded rights. It is perhaps surprising that there was some opposition to this view. It is interesting to speculate on why 14% of the Year 9 group at Caulfield Grammar were not convinced of the need for rights!

The answers to questions 7 and 8 reveal some cynicism. Not all students were convinced that the Convention would have any effect on the way they were treated by their parents. Nor were all convinced that knowledge of the Convention would affect their lives at all. But it must be emphasised that this questionnaire was completed before the classes had been informed about the Convention, and discussed some of its provisions.

The results of the second part of the questionnaire confirm that, after learning about the Convention, the students were convinced both that it was necessary and that it could have many practical advantages for children.

It was, however, an inescapable conclusion that, if the boys and girls surveyed are typical of Australia's

secondary school children, there has been a lamentable failure to disseminate information about the Convention to its principal beneficiaries.

There seems to have been little attempt to educate children as to their rights under the Convention. The teachers who attended the sessions seemed to be as bemused as the children. And yet, it seems, the children themselves had an inherent interest in learning about it, considering that (*prima facie*) it could be a significant factor in influencing their lives. The answers to this questionnaire confirmed my impression that there has been a dismally poor effort, on the part of the responsible authorities, the media and the educational system to educate children as to their rights.

The Explanation

After the students had completed and handed in the first part of the questionnaire, I gave a brief account of the history of the Convention, outlining its adoption by the General Assembly of the United Nations in 1989 and its subsequent ratification by Australia and other countries. I pointed out that there was a misapprehension in some quarters that the Convention was unnecessary in Australia, because existing laws and practices were satisfactory and superior to the minimum standards set by the Convention. I gave brief examples of some of the rights set out by the Convention, and invited the students to consider whether they were accorded to children in Australia.

Class Discussion

The students then split into two groups for discussion. Mr Laughton and I took one group each.

Discussion centred around several practical questions drafted by me. Not all the questions were dealt with in the forty minutes available – and often students themselves would raise their own questions as the discussion progressed.

Discussion in each group was animated. Sometimes it was not easy to control the class, for it seemed that every student wanted to put forward his or her view. It was interesting to note

that very frequently a student would take a conservative stance – and especially at Westall Secondary College, would argue in favour of a 'parental right'.

Both Mr Laughton and I were struck by the maturity and understanding of the children, the diversity and individuality of their views, and their appreciation of the delicacy of the issues.

The following is the list of problems drafted for use in class discussion.

Questions for class discussion

1. Fred is a 13 year old secondary school boy who has been taken into Caulfield Police Station, accused of stealing a packet of cornflakes from Coles Supermarket. He does not want to answer any questions put by the police until he has seen a lawyer.

Do you think the police ought to agree to his request?

2. Janice is an eleven year orphaned girl with a severe mental handicap. Community Services Victoria have found a married couple who they consider would be suitable to adopt her.

When Janice first meets the husband, she takes an immediate dislike to him, and bursts into tears.

Do you think that her wish not to be adopted by them should prevent the adoption?

3. Freda Ulyssia Cremonovskia is a girl of 14, born in Poland, who is being subjected to a great deal of abuse because of her name. She wants to change both her first name and her surname, but her parents are horrified by the thought of this.

Do you think she should be allowed to change her name?

4. Deborah is an eleven year old girl who lives with her divorced mother and the mother's de facto husband. The de facto husband has hit her on the face because she came home with a poor school report.

(a) *Do you think the de facto husband should be allowed to do this?*

(b) *Do you think that adults (including parents) should ever be allowed to inflict physical punishment on children?*

5. Craig is a 15 year old boy who has been immediately expelled from secondary school because he was caught travelling without a train ticket. He complains that he was not allowed to put his point of view to the headmistress of the school.

(a) *Do you think that Craig should have been allowed to present his view?*

(b) *Do you think that he should have had the right to be represented by a lawyer?*

6. Yelena is a 16 year old girl who has been charged in the Children's Court with shoplifting.

She complains that, as she has lived in Australia only one year, having emigrated with her parents from CIS in 1990, she should be allowed to give her evidence in Russian, for her English is not fluent.

The magistrate has refused her request, on the ground that it would be too inconvenient.

Do you think that a child not fluent in English should be allowed to give evidence in his or her native tongue?

7. Fergus is a 14 year old Scottish boy, recently arrived in Australia. He is required by his school to take part in a game of rugby football.

He objects to this, on the ground that the game is too dangerous.

Do you think his objection is justified?

8. June is a 13 year old girl who is romantically involved with a 21 year old young man. She has been receiving love letters from him, which she keeps locked in a drawer in her bedroom.

Her mother, who suspected the relationship, has broken into the drawer and taken the letters.

Do you think the mother had the right to do this?

9. Marcia is a 14 years old Roman Catholic girl who has become pregnant.

She has not told her parents, but has been to see her doctor, and asked for an abortion.

The doctor has refused to recommend the abortion, without her parents' consent. He has indeed threatened to tell the parents of the pregnancy.

Marcia, who thinks that her parents would never consent to the abortion, wishes to have the abortion without her parents' knowledge.

Do you think she should have the right to an abortion without parental consent?

10. Duncan is a 15 year old boy who has been rejected by his mother and her de facto husband. They have thrown him out of the house. He is presently sleeping 'rough' in various parks.

Do you think the government has an obligation to find him a home?

11. Jemila is an eight year old Muslim girl, originally from Malaysia. She goes to a Clayton Primary school. When she turned up in a Muslim veil, the headmistress sent her home to change into 'normal clothes'.

Do you think the headmistress was justified?

12. Norman is a 12 year old boy who was born outside marriage. He lives with his mother, who has always refused to tell him who his father is. Norman is embarrassed at school because his friends all have a father.

Do you think his mother should be obliged to reveal the father's identity?

Part 2 of the Questionnaire

At the end of the session, the students were then told to complete the second part of the questionnaire overnight. They were instructed not to allow themselves to be influenced by adult opinion. Discussion amongst peers, however, was encouraged. Confidentiality was assured. They were asked not to put names on their answers, but simply to state the year of their class.

The questionnaires were collected by their teachers next morning, and the answers were collated by Mr Laughton. The questionnaire and its results are shown in TABLE B.

TABLE B: Survey on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child
Part 2: Specific questions concerning the Convention.

1. Article 1 of the Convention defines a child as a person under 18. Do you resent the use of the word 'child' in the Convention?

	Yes	No	Not sure	No answer
Westall S.C.				
Year 8	44%	50%	6%	-
Years 9-10	50%	50%	-	-
Year 11	28%	60%	12%	-
Caulfield G.S.				
Year 7	45%	55%	-	-
Year 8	20%	80%	-	-
Year 9	46%	54%	-	-

2. Do you believe that an embryo should be included in the Convention?

	Yes	No	Not sure	No answer
Westall S.C.				
Year 8	16%	66%	18%	-
Years 9-10	43%	43%	-	14%
Year 11	43%	40%	17%	-
Caulfield G.S.				
Year 7	31%	69%	-	-
Year 8	41%	59%	-	-
Year 9	20%	80%	-	-

3. Article 12 says that a child capable of forming his or her own views has the right to express those views. At what age do you consider a 'child' is capable of forming his or her own views?

	10-11	12-13	14	15	16	17	18	teenager	Not sure	No ans.
Westall S.C.										
Year 8	14%	35%	14%	7%	7%	-	-	7%	-	16%
Yrs 9-10	6%	18%	-	38%	-	-	6%	-	10%	22%
Year 11	-	18%	6%	12%	18%	-	18%	10%	-	18%
Caulfield G.S.										
Year 7	16%	12%	15%	30%	-	-	33%	-	-	-
Year 8	47%	-	10%	-	-	-	43%	-	-	-
Year 9	20%	8%	25%	13%	13%	-	21%	-	-	-

4. The Convention defines a child as 'every human being below the age of 18 years'. Do you think this definition is too broad?

	Yes	No	Not sure	No answer
Westall S.C.				
Year 8	10%	90%	-	-
Years 9-10	20%	80%	-	-
Year 11	50%	27%	13%	10%
Caulfield G.S.				
Year 7	54%	42%	4%	-
Year 8	40%	60%	-	-
Year 9	33%	67%	-	-

5. Article 12(1) states that 'a child who is capable of forming his or her own views has the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child'.

(a) Do you feel that you have this right?

	Yes	No	Not sure	No answer
Westall S.C.				
Year 8	44%	50%	6%	-
Years 9-10	85%	10%	5%	-
Year 11	75%	18%	-	7%
Caulfield G.S.				
Year 7	77%	19%	4%	-
Year 8	84%	16%	-	-
Year 9	80%	20%	-	-

TABLE B continued

5. (b) If you were accused of an offence, do you think that you, as a child, should have an automatic right to legal advice?

	Yes	No	Not sure	No answer
Westall S.C.				
Year 8	27%	16%	7%	50%
Years 9-10	80%	15%	5%	-
Year 11	81%	12%	7%	-
Caulfield G.S.				
Year 7	86%	10%	4%	-
Year 8	100%	-	-	-
Year 9	100%	-	-	-

6. Article 13 gives the right to freedom of expression as a right of the child. Do you think that your letters, diaries etc. should be read by your parents?

	Yes	No	Not sure	No answer
Westall S.C.				
Year 8	7%	72%	7%	14%
Years 9-10	12%	75%	-	13%
Year 11	31%	69%	-	-
Caulfield G.S.				
Year 7	4%	81%	15%	-
Year 8	-	100%	-	-
Year 9	-	100%	-	-

7. Article 14 states that 'Australia shall respect the right of the child to freedom of thought, conscience and religion'.

(a) Do you think that you should have the right to choose your own religion?

	Yes	No	Not sure	No answer
Westall S.C.				
Year 8	61%	22%	17%	-
Years 9-10	50%	-	-	50%
Year 11	62%	25%	13%	-
Caulfield G.S.				
Year 7	92%	4%	4%	-
Year 8	92%	8%	-	-
Year 9	66%	34%	-	-

7. (b) Do you think that you should have the right to vote?

	Yes	No	Not sure	No answer
Westall S.C.				
Year 8	55%	27%	5%	13%
Years 9-10	38%	18%	-	44%
Year 11	81%	12%	-	7%
Caulfield G.S.				
Year 7	50%	46%	4%	-
Year 8	40%	60%	-	-
Year 9	54%	46%	-	-

8. Article 15 says that Australia recognises the rights of the child to freedom of association and to freedom of peaceful assembly.

(a) Do you think that this means that you should be able to mix with anyone you choose?

	Yes	No	Not sure	No answer
Westall S.C.				
Year 8	77%	11%	12%	-
Years 9-10	37%	18%	-	45%
Year 11	75%	25%	-	-
Caulfield G.S.				
Year 7	95%	5%	-	-
Year 8	84%	16%	-	-
Year 9	86%	14%	-	-

Comment

The students were invited to make comments while completing this questionnaire and to make any further suggestions or comments at the end of it. The remarks that follow have taken into consideration many of the comments of the students themselves.

It was readily apparent that, as the students gave the matter more thought, the Convention was perceived to offer them several major advantages. Its existence challenged them to consider issues that had been previously only dimly perceived. The exercise struck a responsive chord.

On some issues, there was a strong consensus. Most significant was the unanimity of the Caulfield students in Years 8 and 9 on the automatic right of a child to legal advice when accused of a crime. The students at Westall were not quite so certain of this, but there was a substantial majority in favour of this right.

There was also a strong preference for the right of a child to choose his or her own religion. This response was more equivocal at Westall Secondary School, where perhaps more children belonged to cultures where to deviate from a parent's religion is considered sinful.

The greater readiness of 'migrant' children to accept parental authority is strikingly revealed in the Westall school's answers to question 6 - where a surprisingly high number of children accepted that a parent might legitimately read a child's letters and diaries. In contrast, one Caulfield student wrote: 'Diaries are personal property and they would not like it if we went through theirs'. And another commented acridly: 'I don't allow them to unless I want them to'.

Remarkably, however, the majority of Westall schoolchildren considered that they should have a right to vote. This may be attributed to the slightly older age groups surveyed there. (Note particularly the 81% Year 11 response at Westall). One Caulfield Grammar (Year 7) comment was: 'I think that voting should be made non-compulsory so that minors who understand should be able to vote'.

TABLE B continued

8. (b) Do you think that your parents have the right to stop you from mixing with certain types of people whom they consider undesirable?

	Yes	No	Not sure	No answer
Westall S.C.				
Year 8	38%	44%	7%	11%
Years 9-10	31%	18%	-	51%
Year 11	31%	63%	6%	-
Caulfield G.S.				
Year 7	36%	60%	4%	-
Year 8	24%	56%	-	20%
Year 9	46%	54%	-	-

8. (c) Do you think that children of divorced parents should have the right to choose which person they live with?

	Yes	No	Not sure	No answer
Westall S.C.				
Year 8	83%	-	-	17%
Years 9-10	62%	-	-	38%
Year 11	81%	12%	-	7%
Caulfield G.S.				
Year 7	91%	9%	-	-
Year 8	100%	-	-	-
Year 9	100%	-	-	-

9. Article 17 states that the mass media are encouraged to distribute material of social and cultural benefit to children, and have particular regard to children from minority groups and Aborigines.**(a) Do you think that newspapers discuss children's issues sufficiently?**

	Yes	No	Not sure	No answer
Westall S.C.				
Year 8	22%	61%	17%	-
Years 9-10	12%	37%	7%	44%
Year 11	12%	75%	13%	-
Caulfield G.S.				
Year 7	32%	57%	11%	-
Year 8	8%	72%	20%	-
Year 9	93%	5%	2%	-

9. (b) Do you think that television programmes are a harmful influence on children?

	Yes	No	Not sure	No answer
Westall S.C.				
Year 8	27%	44%	7%	22%
Years 9-10	18%	31%	7%	44%
Year 11	43%	50%	7%	-
Caulfield G.S.				
Year 7	28%	72%	4%	-
Year 8	92%	8%	-	-
Year 9	40%	60%	-	-

9. (c) Do you think that there should be a special newspaper for children?

	Yes	No	Not sure	No answer
Westall S.C.				
Year 8	55%	33%	-	12%
Years 9-10	31%	12%	-	57%
Year 11	56%	37%	7%	-
Caulfield G.S.				
Year 7	45%	51%	4%	-
Year 8	50%	50%	-	-
Year 9	54%	46%	-	-

A quite significant number of students from both schools thought that children should not necessarily be permitted to mix with anyone whom they might choose. A significant minority thought that parents had a right to stop them from mixing with undesirable persons. This, it is suggested, signifies a manifestation of maturity in young people beyond that to which they have often been credited.

There was remarkable unanimity at Caulfield on the right of a child of divorced parents to choose the parent with whom he or she should live – and a high degree of support of this view at Westall too. This is interesting, as it certainly does not represent current Australian law – under which a child's views are only one factor to be taken into account.

It is difficult to account for the extraordinary difference of views on the influence of television. It is strange that there was such a divergence among the different age groups at Caulfield Grammar School. But, apart from year 8 at that school (92% of whom thought the television was harmful), the remaining schoolchildren did not consider television to be harmful.

The polyglot nature of Westall Secondary College resulted in some heartfelt and heart-rending answers to questions on multi-culturalism, racism and cultural assimilation. It is significant that most non-Australian students complained of being 'picked on'.

It was also significant that many more students at Westall than at Caulfield tolerated corporal punishment, both at school and at home.

Encouragingly, one feels, students at both schools were more inclined to favour learning of a foreign language as they became older.

The results of the questions on sport and leisure were illuminating, and in some instances surprising. Almost every student at Caulfield Grammar School considered it a right of a child to choose his own sport and it was evident from the class discussion that this was an issue of some topicality at Caulfield Grammar School. Not surprisingly, a greater number of students at the more affluent school were satisfied with the available facilities for

TABLE B continued

9. (d) Are you native to Australia? If 'yes' go to Question 10. If 'no' finish Question 9.

	Yes	No	Not sure	No answer
Westall S.C.				
Year 8	52%	48%	-	-
Years 9-10	22%	78%	-	-
Year 11	56%	44%	-	-
Caulfield G.S.				
Year 7	77%	23%	-	-
Year 8	100%	-	-	-
Year 9	100%	-	-	-

9. (e) Do you think that coming from another country results in you being picked on in any way?

	Yes	No	Not sure	No answer
Westall S.C.				
Year 8	66%	16%	7%	11%
Years 9-10	37%	12%	7%	44%
Year 11	44%	56%	-	-
Caulfield G.S.				
Year 7	60%	40%	-	-
Year 8	-	-	-	-
Year 9	-	-	-	-

9. (f) Do you feel that your cultural heritage is being maintained in Australia?

	Yes	No	Not sure	No answer
Westall S.C.				
Year 8	55%	7%	-	38%
Years 9-10	31%	12%	18%	39%
Year 11	37%	31%	18%	14%
Caulfield G.S.				
Year 7	60%	57%	-	-
Year 8	-	-	-	-
Year 9	-	-	-	-

9. (g) As a migrant child do you feel 'Australian'?

	Yes	No	Not sure	No answer
Westall S.C.				
Year 8	16%	44%	33%	7%
Years 9-10	31%	25%	7%	37%
Year 11	37%	28%	22%	13%
Caulfield G.S.				
Year 7	80%	20%	-	-
Year 8	-	-	-	-
Year 9	-	-	-	-

10. Article 19 deals with the protection of the child from 'abuse'. Do you think physical punishment for a child is appropriate?

(a) at school?

	Yes	No	Not sure	No answer
Westall S.C.				
Year 8	16%	66%	7%	11%
Years 9-10	12%	37%	-	51%
Year 11	25%	62%	13%	-
Caulfield G.S.				
Year 7	10%	90%	-	-
Year 8	16%	84%	-	-
Year 9	-	100%	-	-

sport and recreation. But students of both schools were considered that certain sports were too dangerous. It is interesting to compare the list of these, in order of frequency:

Westall Secondary College

Year 8: Rugby, football, hockey, gridiron;

Year 9-10: Rugby, cricket, football, soccer;

Year 11: Rugby, football, hockey, cricket, soccer, tennis.

Caulfield Grammar

Year 7: Rugby, cricket, football, roller blades;

Year 8: Rugby, cricket, hockey, boxing;

Year 9: Cricket, rugby, football, soccer.

It is perhaps not surprising that rugby easily tops this list. But it is remarkable that a non-contact sport, cricket, is seen as the next most dangerous game, especially at Caulfield Grammar School which has a high reputation for excellence in this sport, and a fine ground.

Cricket authorities should take note of this survey. The argument that the bouncer is fast bowler's legitimate weapon, and essential to encourage the hook shot, has clearly not convinced these young people!

There was an intriguing divergence between the schools on the integration of handicapped children into mainstream schools. Westall students tended to favour, Caulfield students to disfavour, integration. The Westall responses to the question, 'Should handicapped children have to go to separate schools?' revealed a great deal of maturity and sensitivity.

eg, (1) 'Yes, for the safety of the handicapped from being discriminated by 'normal' kids'.

(2) 'Yes and No. Yes, so they can feel and be equal to everyone else. No, their learning process would be much slower, therefore affecting other students'.

(3) 'Yes. These schools can provide a better education for the handicapped child'.

TABLE B: continued

10. Do you think that physical punishment for a child is appropriate: (b) at home?

	Yes	No	Not sure	No answer
Westall S.C.				
Year 8	44%	38%	14%	4%
Years 9-10	25%	25%	7%	43%
Year 11	31%	62%	7%	-
Caulfield G.S.				
Year 7	10%	90%	-	-
Year 8	25%	75%	-	-
Year 9	33%	67%	-	-

11. What age do you think children should have to stay at school till?

	14 & below	15	16	17	18	over 18	Not sure	No ans.
Westall S.C.								
Year 8	-	17%	17%	11%	16%	-	22%	17%
Yrs 9-10	25%	38%	13%	-	6%	-	-	18%
Year 11	-	12%	19%	6%	6%	19%	10%	28%
Caulfield G.S.								
Year 7	30%	40%	30%	-	-	-	-	-
Year 8	10%	13%	45%	-	23%	-	9%	-
Year 9	14%	21%	28%	14%	14%	-	9%	-

12. Do you think that a child should have to learn a foreign language?

	Yes	No	Not sure	No answer
Westall S.C.				
Year 8	22%	50%	14%	14%
Years 9-10	31%	25%	-	44%
Year 11	43%	43%	14%	-
Caulfield G.S.				
Year 7	41%	59%	-	-
Year 8	16%	84%	-	-
Year 9	40%	53%	7%	-

13. (a) Do you think that you should have the right to choose the games you play?

	Yes	No	Not sure	No answer
Westall S.C.				
Year 8	83%	-	7%	10%
Years 9-10	55%	25%	-	25%
Year 11	87%	13%	-	-
Caulfield G.S.				
Year 7	90%	10%	-	-
Year 8	100%	-	-	-
Year 9	93%	7%	-	-

13. (b) Do you think that some games are too dangerous? If so, name them.

	Yes	No	Not sure	No answer
Westall S.C.				
Year 8	55%	22%	-	23%
Years 9-10	37%	19%	-	44%
Year 11	75%	19%	-	6%
Caulfield G.S.				
Year 7	81%	19%	-	-
Year 8	58%	42%	-	-
Year 9	53%	47%	-	-

On the key question, whether the Convention might create problems within the family unit, many more Westall than Caulfield students were prepared to concede that it would. Several Westall students in their comments, gave considerable attention to those problems, for example:

(1) 'Parents might not like the fact that children have all these rights and that parental consent is no longer as important and they feel they have no control over their children.'

On the other hand, one student responded, eloquently and beautifully -

(2) 'There won't be any problems arising, because my family has a bond of understanding with each other.'

Finally, there were some fascinating answers to the open question, 'What other rights do you think that you should be entitled to?' They are presented without comment:

Westall Secondary College

'I think my parents should not force me to translate for them, because I sometimes don't even understand the word myself.'

'Teachers shouldn't force weak students and other sick students to run a long distance or play tiring sports, eg, netball, basketball, etc.'

'Children should not be exposed to things such as cigarettes etc. It is very sad to see children of the age of 11, 12, 13 etc. smoking, especially in schools. This is very sad.'

'Children who are 16 years and above have to pay adult fees (trains, movies etc) but they cannot vote, go to night-clubs etc...governments should make up their minds what age group belongs to 'adult' and 'child' then we should be entitled to 'adult' rights just like we have to pay 'adult' fees.'

'A child needs no more rights.'

'Lowering the legal age to drive.'

'The right to have freedom.'

Caulfield Grammar School

'I think that Australian rights are fairly reasonable.'

'A fair go for every child no matter

TABLE B continued

13. (c) Do you think you have enough facilities and opportunities for sport and leisure?

	Yes	No	Not sure	No answer
Westall S.C.				
Year 8	61%	22%	-	17%
Years 9-10	50%	19%	-	31%
Year 11	25%	61%	-	14%
Caulfield G.S.				
Year 7	68%	32%	-	-
Year 8	68%	24%	8%	-
Year 9	66%	34%	-	-

14. Article 24 of the Convention says that the child has the right to the highest attainable standard of health, and the right to the access to health care services.

(a) Do you think that Australia is producing a healthy society for a child to live in?

	Yes	No	Not sure	No answer
Westall S.C.				
Year 8	33%	39%	14%	14%
Years 9-10	31%	19%	-	50%
Year 11	31%	63%	-	6%
Caulfield G.S.				
Year 7	72%	28%	-	-
Year 8	66%	26%	8%	-
Year 9	80%	20%	-	-

14. (b) When you get sick do you think that you receive adequate medical services?

	Yes	No	Not sure	No answer
Westall S.C.				
Year 8	72%	7%	-	21%
Years 9-10	43%	7%	-	50%
Year 11	50%	31%	7%	12%
Caulfield G.S.				
Year 7	86%	14%	-	-
Year 8	91%	-	9%	-
Year 9	100%	-	-	-

14. (c) Do you think that handicapped children should go to separate schools?

	Yes	No	Not sure	No answer
Westall S.C.				
Year 8	27%	50%	11%	12%
Years 9-10	18%	31%	51%	-
Year 11	33%	50%	7%	10%
Caulfield G.S.				
Year 7	60%	40%	-	-
Year 8	58%	34%	8%	-
Year 9	53%	40%	7%	-

14. (d) Do you think that a child should be able to have a medical operation without parental consent?

	Yes	No	Not sure	No answer
Westall S.C.				
Year 8	22%	55%	16%	7%
Years 9-10	11%	63%	26%	-
Year 11	38%	31%	7%	24%
Caulfield G.S.				
Year 7	40%	36%	24%	-
Year 8	33%	54%	13%	-
Year 9	60%	40%	-	-

who they are!

'We should be able to drink. We should be able to drive cars.'

'Shelter, food, education, good health care and legal representation.'

'Freedom of choice.'

'More freedom of speech.'

'Decent education and a stable home.'

Conclusion

This exercise, statistically small though it may have been, seems to prove the need for a more intensive effort to disseminate information on the Convention. It also argues convincingly for the need to take into account the views of children themselves. Both Mr. Laughton and I were highly impressed by the maturity of the students shown both in class discussion and in the answers to the questionnaire.

Much more must be done to give children a voice. Educational authorities should include classes on the Convention in their curricula - indeed it would not be difficult to draft a full year course on the issues raised in it.

The media have been deficient in the role placed on them by Article 17 to disseminate information on the Convention. Grave doubts, too, must be raised on whether government agencies have been effective in publicising the Convention.

The disturbing conclusion from this survey is that Australian society has so far failed to appreciate the significance of the Convention, at the same time as children themselves seem receptive to its import and yearning to know more about it and debate it. ♦

TABLE B continued

**15. Article 32 deals with freedom from economic exploitation.
(a) Do you think that children should be allowed to work?**

	Yes	No	Not sure	No answer
Westall S.C.				
Year 8	55%	22%	7%	5%
Years 9-10	44%	19%	-	37%
Year 11	44%	31%	-	25%
Caulfield G.S.				
Year 7	78%	22%	-	-
Year 8	100%	-	-	-
Year 9	93%	7%	-	-

15. (b) Do you think that children are being exploited in other ways? If so, explain.

	Yes	No	Not sure	No answer
Westall S.C.				
Year 8	33%	27%	33%	7%
Years 9-10	33%	20%	15%	32%
Year 11	37%	25%	-	38%
Caulfield G.S.				
Year 7	45%	55%	-	-
Year 8	58%	34%	8%	-
Year 9	40%	60%	-	-

16. Do you see the Convention creating problems within your family unit?

	Yes	No	Not sure	No answer
Westall S.C.				
Year 8	27%	66%	7%	-
Years 9-10	18%	38%	25%	19%
Year 11	33%	56%	11%	-
Caulfield G.S.				
Year 7	9%	91%	-	-
Year 8	8%	92%	-	-
Year 9	7%	93%	-	-

17. What other rights do you think that a child should be entitled to?

[The response to this question is dealt with in the Comment]



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