

To market, to market: An historic account of how schools have marketed themselves over the past 150 years

Carole Hooper[†]

*Centre for the Study of Higher Education
The University of Melbourne*

This article provides an historical account of how fee-charging Victorian schools have marketed themselves over the past 150 years (via the use of advertisements, brochures, and prospectuses) in order to promote those aspects of schooling believed to be of most importance to potential customers (parents). While some of the features – most notably the success of pupils at examinations held at the completion of schooling – have always been emphasised in promotional material, others deemed worthy of attention in the nineteenth century, have now been replaced by quite different features in contemporary advertisements.

Introduction

Today the words ‘market’ and ‘marketing’ are ubiquitous. Once ‘markets’ were places where goods were bought and sold, while ‘marketing’ referred to ‘the action or business of buying and selling’.¹ But over the past few decades the meanings have expanded somewhat, so that now far greater emphasis is placed upon first identifying, and then satisfying, the needs of the recipients of the exchange. Hence the American Marketing Association defines marketing as, ‘the activity, set of institutions, and processes for creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging offerings that have value for customers, clients, partners, and society at large.’²

[†] Address for correspondence: Dr. Carole Hooper, Centre for the Study of Higher Education, The University of Melbourne, Parkville 3010.
Email: c.hooper@unimelb.edu.au.

Increasingly, schools both overseas and in Australia have adopted more market-oriented approaches, designed to encourage potential customers to purchase their services. Yet, while contemporary marketing language and some of the means of communication may be new, schools have always promoted themselves. Although in mid-nineteenth century England, mistresses of girls' schools with claims to selectiveness dared not advertise, as this was 'considered ungentle and was in effect a confession of failure', such reticence certainly belongs to the past.³

The following discussion provides an account of how fee-charging Victorian schools (especially those offering a 'higher', or secondary, education) have engaged in marketing practices during the past 150 years. In particular, the specific features considered worthy of promotion in the mid-to-late nineteenth century are compared to those emphasised in more recent times. While today schools have access to a wider variety of media, especially greater opportunities for visual representation, newspaper and journal advertisements, together with printed prospectuses and brochures (including those available on-line), remain the most commonly used methods of promotion.⁴ These advertisements and brochures serve as a form of 'promise in advance' and seek 'to reflect in some way, the fantasies and aspirations of their target markets'.⁵ Such promises are problematic, for schools as service-providers are offering intangible products that cannot be physically possessed, tested in advance, or have outcomes that can be predicted with any certainty.⁶

No attempt will be made to evaluate the success or otherwise of the market-oriented approaches adopted, or to ascertain whether the claims of marketers can indeed be sustained, rather the intention is to identify what aspects/attributes/characteristics of schools were emphasised in different periods and how these are represented. Presumably the features highlighted in a school's promotional material are those deemed desirable by the customers (parents) seeking their services.

Schooling in the nineteenth century

In the mid-nineteenth century, the newly-established colony of Victoria faced a rapid growth in population (from both immigration and natural increase), which placed increasing strain on a nascent and ever-expanding educational system. Schools of all types vied for the custom of parents, and despite attendance not being made compulsory until 1873, most children went to school: the majority attended government-funded schools, while others were taught at denominational schools or those established by individuals for private profit. As well as being differentiated by the type of ownership (government, denominational, private), schools were co-educational or single sex; of varying size; and residential or day. Parents therefore had a wide range of schools from which to choose, especially if they lived in Melbourne or in one of the larger regional towns.

At a time when schools were in the process of establishing themselves, promotional activities were of particular importance, and as is still the case, competition for pupils was most intense amongst those offering a secondary education - the most lucrative sector of the school market. In the earlier period only a minority of parents sought a higher education for their children: few students completed secondary school, and by 1900 only five per cent of pupils enrolled at Victorian schools were aged 15 or over. It was not until 1905 that the state began to establish its own secondary schools, although prior to 1870 many of the government-aided schools included 'higher' subjects, such as classical and modern languages, and mathematics, within the general course of study, thereby enabling some students to prepare for the University of Melbourne's matriculation and civil service examinations.⁷

Despite the government's somewhat tardy entry into the field of secondary education, it was opposed by many in the non-government sector, and was even labelled 'pure socialism' by the Rev. William Fitchett, principal of MLC, who avowed the state had no right to compete in the 'general business of education'; a business he estimated to be worth 'three quarters of a million

sterling'.⁸ Yet Fitchett and his colleagues continued to be protected from competition from the public sector by a clause in the 1910 Education Act that disallowed state secondary or 'high' schools to be established unless the Minister of Education was 'satisfied that adequate provision does not exist in the locality for secondary education of an approved kind.'⁹ As a result of this prohibition, by 1920 only five of the 24 non-selective state high schools were located in Melbourne, it was not until 1921 that one was established south of the Yarra, and it took another 30 years for the first matriculation class to be established in the eastern or southern suburbs – at Box Hill Boys' High School.¹⁰

Just as in the early twentieth century Fitchett had been outraged at the prospect of state competition (albeit restricted), some decades earlier, private schoolmasters had objected to government aid being provided to the four leading religious denominations for 'the erection and support of grammar schools', when between 1853 and 1856, the Victorian parliament voted £35,000 pounds in grants to enable the denominations to found five all-boys schools (known at the time as 'public grammar schools'); namely the Melbourne Grammar School, Geelong Grammar School, Scotch College, Wesley College, and St Patrick's College. It was hoped that these institutions would provide students for the nascent University of Melbourne that enrolled its first students in 1855. No part of the grant was used to establish girls' schools because at that time females were prohibited from attending the university. The religious denominations began to establish corporate schools for girls in the last quarter of the nineteenth century (beginning with the Presbyterian Ladies' College in 1875) and then in the first decades of the following century they also acquired a number of private schools.¹¹

The parliamentary grants provided the denominational public grammar schools with a competitive advantage resented by those involved with private institutions. In 1858 Charles Goslett, a private schoolmaster, called on Edward Bromby, Head Master of Melbourne Grammar, 'wanting to know what we taught that justified a private subsidy [the parliamentary grant] as he was a

ruined man and so were his brethren in the bush'.¹² Yet even these large subsidies failed to ensure the financial viability of the public grammar schools, as the history of three of the five was to attest. The first to experience difficulties was the Geelong Grammar School (described by the editor of the *Argus* as 'our great Victorian muddle, the terror and scandal of the Church of England'), which closed in June 1861 due to financial problems. It remained 'close shut – dreary – desolate – resembling a hospital without patients', before reopening in 1863.¹³ But enrolment remained low and for many years the school had to service the substantial debt. Then in 1861, Dr Goold, the Catholic Archbishop, decided to close St Patrick's College, 'following the clandestine departure from the colony of its president, Dr Barry, who left the college in debt to the tune of over £5,000'.¹⁴ A third school, Wesley College, similarly found it difficult to survive and it was only prevented from being sold due to the fact that by 1897 the accumulated deficit of above £15,000 'certainly exceeded the market value of the school and land'.¹⁵

As the financial viability of a school depended upon the support of sufficient fee-paying clientele, pupils needed to be enticed in sufficient numbers, and the monetary woes experienced by the public grammar schools, despite the liberal grants received from the government, highlight the precarious environment in which schools were placed. The failure of the Geelong Grammar School was attributed to competition from a government-aided school, the Geelong National Grammar School, described by a correspondent to the *Argus* as a 'National School of a very superior character supported by the gentry of the neighbourhood who sent their children to it'.¹⁶

Many private schools faced even greater difficulties, especially during periods of economic upheaval, including the depressions of the 1890s and 1930s. As Constance Tisdall, principal of a family-run private girls' school for over 40 years, observed in 1961, the rivalry between schools led to uncertainty and insecurity. 'Nowadays, parents are only too grateful to have their children accepted by the school; in those days the gratitude was all on the

side of the school that received them'.¹⁷ Yet despite Tisdall's optimism, uncertainty re-emerged when a recession in the early 1980s and an economic slump in 1991 again led to a fall in enrolments. Such downturns, as Janet McCalman observes, 'unnerved private schools, which had invested heavily in new infrastructure. To survive they have succumbed to the glossy brochures and hyped promises of the marketing gurus'.¹⁸

So despite somewhat changing fortunes, many fee-charging independent schools have survived for over a century and are now regarded as being among the 'elite' Victorian educational institutions. What 'promises' do these make in their promotional material? What particular aspects of schooling are promoted in their advertisements? And how do these features differ from those features deemed worthy of attention in the nineteenth century? As the following discussion demonstrates, some of these aspects have always been promoted, while others are no longer considered important.

Academic achievement

The successful performance of pupils at examinations, especially those undertaken at the completion of schooling was, and remains, the feature highlighted most consistently in school advertisements. Securing passes at such tests has always been considered important in establishing and maintaining a school's reputation and was imperative for the prosperity of Victorian schools.¹⁹ Therefore they sought to prove they were capable of preparing students for the public examinations, especially the matriculation, that had been conducted from 1856 by the University of Melbourne. This examination, although intended to test a student's suitability for tertiary study, had increasingly come to be used as a de facto school leaving certificate and also as an independent means of validating a school's academic program. It was the need for a similar external assessment of girls' schooling that led eventually to their being admitted to the matriculation examination from 1871, and once this was achieved, exclusion from the

university itself proved more difficult to justify. Admission of women to the university itself followed a decade later.

While academic success has always been lauded by schools, one interesting difference is that in the earlier period, heads of schools were often berated for placing undue emphasis on pupils' success at external examinations, and for using these results as a form of promotion. An 'objectionable feature' of speech days, according to the editor of the *Argus* in 1870, was schools 'turning them into so many advertising media for puffing the educational wares': a view supported by a Victorian Minister for Education, Charles Pearson, who noted in 1889 that 'it was well-known that certain schools deliberately traded upon getting results in the matriculation examinations'.²⁰ Schools were accused of attempting to persuade the public that a school advertising a large list of matriculation passes had 'established its claim to be regarded as a place of education that deserves support'.²¹

Because only a small number of students from any one institution entered for the matriculation examination in the middle decades of the nineteenth century, school advertisements often contained quite specific information; such as, the number of subjects passed by each pupil, the number who had obtained honours and various awards, or accounts of past pupils' progress at the university.²² Wesley College advertised in 1870 that 'five pupils passed the examinations for the Civil Service. Six matriculated in the University, one with "credit" ... One passed the first B.A. degree examination.'²³ Gradually schools sought to establish an ongoing 'tradition' of scholastic achievement, such as the claim by Carlton College in 1881 that, 'During the past seven years 59 pupils have passed for matriculation, and 82 for civil service. Last November 19 old pupils passed their yearly examination at the University.'²⁴

As Roach observed, English public schools in the mid-nineteenth century were in the 'myth-making business' and once these historical myths had been established, they increased a school's drawing power. A similar claim can be made in relation to Victorian schools.²⁵ Pupils' success at examinations was crucial to

the establishment of such myths: success was often established with the aid of numerous of former state school scholars, the recipients of scholarships that had enabled them to attend non-government institutions. Clements has argued that these pupils were an important component in the battle for institutional dominance, as any school with a greater percentage of scholarship holders *should* have obtained better matriculation results, and any argument ‘which did not take into account the number of scholarship holders in a school was likely to be invalid.’²⁶ The extent of their contribution can be demonstrated by the fact that of the 365 pupils attending Scotch College in 1889, 91 (25%) were scholarship holders, while the same year, 45 attended MLC.²⁷

Academic success, once achieved by a school, helped create a self-perpetuating cycle, and as Peel and McCalman have observed of contemporary schools,

the most prestigious schools attract the ambitious and talented. Private schools lure clever students with scholarships and the academically selective have the pick of the bunch. Prestige builds on prestige and success breeds even more success.²⁸

But while schools in the nineteenth century were keen to acknowledge the achievement of high-performing students at examinations, only a very small percentage of the age cohort entered for the matriculation, and the majority was unsuccessful. During the years 1875 to 1904 (before a temporary abolition of the examination), the pass rate remained below 50 per cent, and poor performance at all upper secondary examinations continued during the first half of the twentieth century: in 1928, only 41 out of 134 candidates from Melbourne Grammar who sat for the Intermediate Certificate passed, as did 12 of the 65 from Geelong Grammar. Success was sometimes even treated with disdain. Scotch College, a school that consistently sought and achieved high pass rates (as did the state selective high schools), was labelled ‘that High School’ by pupils from Melbourne Grammar during the 1930s.²⁹

Until the second half of the twentieth century, three-quarters of all university entrants came from non-government schools, therefore

private schools, according to Richard Teese, 'did not need to be particularly efficient', for a bare pass at the matriculation examination would guarantee university entrance. As quotas for courses at the University of Melbourne were not introduced until the 1950s, and at first only applied to applicants to the medical faculty, it was not until the demand for higher education positions 'outstripped supply, and as more and more of this demand came from an expanding state sector [that] the private schools were compelled to become academically competitive'.³⁰

Once academic achievement became essential to securing entry to high status tertiary courses and privileged occupations, schools endeavoured to assure prospective parents that this was an achievable outcome for their children. As the proportion of students remaining until the final year of secondary school increased substantially (rising from 28 to 82 per cent in the decade to 1992), private schools established what Teese describes as 'a target of *global success* for each class of pupils, not merely success for the meritocratic few'.³¹ So rather than merely indicating the number of pupils who have passed the final examinations, schools now attempt to quantify academic success by emphasising that relatively high percentages of pupils have achieved an Equivalent National Tertiary Education Rank (ENTER) above a certain level: most commonly the percentage who obtained 90 or above; the number of pupils and/or percentage who obtained 99; or the number of 'perfect scores'.³² While some schools prefer to claim in more general terms that their results are 'outstanding', indicating 'intellectual excellence' or 'academic excellence', advertising in this manner might raise suspicions of lesser performance.

Today it is apparent that the 'leading' or 'elite' schools gain very similar results at the Victorian Certificate of Education examination. Teese suggests that as a group the independent schools have deliberately targeted the subjects within the curriculum 'amenable to the greatest investment and yielding the highest returns'. Academic controls are used 'to screen out the

“rich but thick” pupils in order to preserve the ability mix in subjects on which a school’s reputation depends’.³³

Their success in abolishing failure – or, to be precise, exporting it – and monopolizing access to the strategic heights of the academic curriculum is now so complete that almost all of their students are offered places in university.³⁴

Some advertisements for independent schools highlight examination success as the single most important feature and make it the sole message in some advertisements: ‘MLC and top results’; St Catherine’s School ‘Outstanding VCE results.’³⁵ But recently others have tried to position themselves above the fray by claiming not to concentrate *only* on examination results: at St Michael’s Grammar School ‘we prepare students for life, not just exams; and at Brighton Grammar School, ‘It’s about the journey ... not just the destination’.³⁶

Curriculum

Although, as Teese notes, private schools have focussed on achieving success in the more academic areas of the curriculum (languages, advanced mathematics, and the physical sciences), these subjects are not referred to specifically in advertisements.³⁷ Instead, emphasis is placed on subject areas that may be regarded as somewhat distinctive or unusual, many of which comprise what is now referred to as the ‘co-curriculum’. Co-curricular activities include participation in the visual and performing arts, sporting activities, outdoor education, and other cultural pursuits. This emphasis allows special attention to be placed on the availability of specific resources and facilities available at a school, and brochures and prospectuses are replete with coloured photographs of students participating in dramatic performances (presumably in the school’s own theatre), playing musical instruments (primarily stringed, if not part of an ensemble), creating works of art in well-resourced studios, swimming in pools, rowing and sailing, or visiting foreign countries.

Another aspect highlighted by schools in contemporary advertisements, is the breadth of the curriculum; although this again is presented in general rather than specific terms. At Korowa Anglican Girls' School students can choose from 'around 40 subjects or at MLC from 'more than 50 subjects in Years 11 and 12'; while Carey Baptist Grammar School offers 'extensive curriculum choice' and Strathcona Baptist Girls' Grammar, 'extensive choice'.³⁸

The relatively sparse amount of information provided on the course of study offered at a particular school in contemporary advertisements, marks another difference between the two eras. In the mid-nineteenth century it was not uncommon for schools to list every subject taught (often a list of dubious credibility). Others gave a more generic description, using shorthand terms such as 'a liberal education' or 'a thorough English education'. Many boys' schools offered parallel courses of study to upper secondary students: one comprising classical languages and higher mathematics for pupils hoping to study at the university and the other that included modern languages and commercial subjects for pupils intending to pursue mercantile or commercial pursuits. Some curricular changes occurred: for example, in the latter decades of the century science subjects were added and the teaching of Greek declined.

At first there was some differentiation in the course of study provided for girls, especially in the period when they were prohibited from studying at the university: at Torrington House, 'young gentlewomen' were offered, 'a sound course of instruction and every accomplishment requisite for a lady'.³⁹ But increasingly the subjects requisite for the matriculation examination were included in the curriculum and the proportion of female students entering for the examination increased markedly, although the numbers studying at the university did not equal that of boys for many decades.⁴⁰ In the early years of the twentieth century, a prospectus for Victoria College (for Ladies) advised that,

To market, to market

When desired, students will be prepared for the Matriculation Examination ... Still the aim of the College will be rather to give a wholesome practical training in all that will be most useful in family and social life.⁴¹

This indicates that schools needed to reassure parents that the teaching of the accomplishments would not be neglected.

The teaching staff

While pupils' success at public examinations has always been lauded by schools, the extent to which they can claim responsibility for this achievement, as distinct from family and social influences, is debatable. According to Simon Marginson, 'research has failed to conclusively separate schools effects on student achievement, from the effects of home background'.⁴² In addition Teese observes that success in the more academic areas of the curriculum is 'linked closely to an educated lifestyle and arise from the continuous and informal training given by families rather than explicit and methodological instruction in school'.⁴³ Of course an individual's own abilities should perhaps be regarded as paramount, for as a nineteenth century head master noted, it was 'a common delusion that a first-rate head master can make the clever boy a genius, and transform the dullard into an average member of society. The fact is that no teaching can take the place of natural endowment'.⁴⁴

Yet, if schools claim to have positively affected pupils' scholastic performance (as is implicit in their advertisements), then it might be expected that the abilities and exertions of the teaching staff would be emphasised as significant contributors to that achievement. Certainly a correlation between teaching and student performance was implied in nineteenth century advertisements. Information about principals in particular was important at a time when Geoffrey Blainey said of parents that 'as a considerable portion ... knew nothing about education and had no particular church associations, they were inclined to send their sons to a school whose head master was both capable and pre-eminent'.⁴⁵

However details about the qualifications and experience of other members of staff, also appeared in advertisements. Among the resident masters at Scotch College in 1859, was George Morrison Esq. M.A., ‘First prizeman in Classics, Mathematics, and Natural Philosophy, formerly Mathematical Master in the Royal Navy and Military Academy, Portsmouth’.⁴⁶ Even smaller establishments provided at least the name of the principal, together with his or her qualifications: the head master of the St Kilda Grammar, William Northcott, was ‘B.A., Wrangler 1850, late scholar of Caius College Cambridge, and Head Mathematical Master at the Preparatory Military School, Wimbledon’.⁴⁷

The practice of identifying individual members of staff was maintained by many of the larger schools during the second half of the nineteenth century, often well into the twentieth, and nearly all schools continued at least to provide the name and qualifications of the head teacher.⁴⁸ Yet contemporary advertisements, by contrast, only rarely identify individual teachers, and if mentioned at all, it is only in a generic sense: they are ‘highly experienced’ at PLC, ‘caring and professional’ at Xavier College, ‘dedicated and experienced’ at Ivanhoe Girls’ Grammar School, ‘passionate’ at Loretto, and ‘dedicated and nurturing’ at MLC.⁴⁹ Even principals are not named, except in unusual instances, such as a new appointment: a rather bizarre example being an advertisement for Fintona Girls’ School showing a portrait of the new principal that would not have looked out of place in *Vanity Fair*.

Today the general, rather than specific, nature of references made to the teaching staff can be illustrated by examining an annual guide to Victorian independent schools published in the *Melbourne Weekly* over the past fifteen years. The 1995-6 guide contained advertisements for 24 schools, and in only one instance was the name of a member of the academic staff provided – the head of a junior school. In all other cases, the only persons associated with the school named, or had their positions named, were members of the non-teaching staff, such as bursars or registrars.⁵⁰ Despite the subsequent adoption of a more formulaic pattern, whereby schools provide information in two-page spreads,

under a number of prescribed headings (including a statement from the principal), by 2008, less than half the 25 schools advertising in the guide named the principal, and in only two instances were the principal's qualifications provided.⁵¹ It appears it is now no longer considered necessary to identify individual members of the teaching staff, indicate what positions they hold, or provide information about their professional experience. Instead there is the implicit suggestion that a school exists as an independent entity, with a reputation that is unrelated to the individuals who comprise the teaching staff. As Ken Rowe, principal research fellow at the Australian Council for Educational Research, commented in 2002:

if you read the glossy prospectuses of many private schools, there is lots of information about the state-of-the-art gymnasium or music suites but very little about the school's main asset: the teachers and their expertise.⁵²

Physical and emotional well-being

In the nineteenth century far greater emphasis was placed on the physical conditions of a school and its environment than is the case today. At a time when disease was believed to be caused by 'bad air', or miasma, head masters and mistresses sought to ensure parents that their schools were located in healthy locations, away from malodorous, poisonous vapours, and that schoolrooms were adequately ventilated. High positions were considered especially beneficial for ensuring purer air quality: Lauriston was situated 'on the top of a hill', the Vieuxseux Ladies' College occupied an elevated and healthy situation', and Geelong College on 'an elevated site, unrivalled for salubrity'.⁵³ Schools vied for the claim of being situated in the 'healthiest' suburb in Melbourne, a distinction shared apparently by many, including PLC in East Melbourne, Genazzano College in Kew, Hawthorn Grammar School, Preston Grammar School, and Victoria College in Heidelberg.⁵⁴

The amount of land available for recreational activities and sport was also emphasised in advertisements, the adjective 'spacious'

being much favoured, as at the South Melbourne Grammar School with its 'spacious grounds for football and cricket'.⁵⁵ Schools located outside metropolitan Melbourne may have had an advantage in this respect, as demonstrated by the claim that Geelong College was 'quite in the country. It has a football ground, a cricket-field, a gymnasium, double-asphalted tennis court, asphalted walks, a weatherboard shed for exercise in the wet weather, large swimming bath and shower-baths'.⁵⁶ Increasingly in the second half of the nineteenth century, girls' schools advertised the availability of sporting and recreational facilities: a prospectus for PLC published in 1875 stressed the availability of baths, extensive grounds, and a gymnasium to allow for physical exercise, while at Sorbonne Ladies' College in Melbourne, there were three acres to be used as recreation ground.⁵⁷

By contrast, although spacious grounds and sporting facilities are still mentioned in contemporary advertisements, and photographs of students participating in sporting activities are often featured, now far greater emphasis is placed on the need to provide for pupils' emotional or psychological, rather than physical, well-being. Advertisements include words such as 'caring', 'community', or 'nurturing', and reference is made to a pastoral care programs, or the presence of counsellors. Meadmore and Meadmore found in an analysis of documents produced by 30 Australian 'elite schools' during the period 1999 to 2003, that increasingly they claimed to offer schooling of the type that developed positive self-esteem, together with the claim that 'self-esteem is positioned as being central to quality teaching and learning'.⁵⁸ As Steven Ward noted in an historical study of self-esteem, this concept has developed from a fragile idea, to a basic truth about human experience: a 'truth' which asserts that high levels of self-esteem are regarded as essential to the development of positive attributes, including good academic performance and personal success.⁵⁹

According to Meadmore and Meadmore, schools now market self-esteem as a value-added commodity that can be bought through the purchase of the right sort of educational package, as illustrated

in the following advertisements: Ruyton Girls' School believes that 'self-esteem and confidence are fundamental to each girl's personal, social and academic success'; at St Michael's Grammar School 'self esteem and personal achievement' are fostered; and at MLC the pastoral care program focuses on 'individual learning needs, whilst building self-esteem'.⁶⁰

Values: community versus self interest

As well as purporting to foster self-esteem, contemporary schools also claim to cater for the special needs of the individual: at Firbank Anglican School there is a 'commitment to the individual'; at Sacré Coeur attention is given to the 'successful and personal development of the individual student'; 'Geelong Grammar has always recognised the importance of catering for individual needs'; and at Korowa 'the individuality of each of our students is cherished and nurtured'.⁶¹ Emphasis is placed on ensuring that the special needs of students will be met, in contrast with schools' earlier promises to develop individuals as socially responsible citizens. As Plumb has noted, in relation to English schools in the late eighteenth century, 'every advertisement boasts it will instil virtues of sobriety, obedience, industry, thrift, benevolence, and compassion'.⁶² Similar qualities were identified in nineteenth century advertisements in Victoria: at the Carlton Grammar School, 'The moral training of the boys is carefully looked after, manliness, truthfulness, and industry being encouraged in every possible way'; Miss Ripling advertised that at her College House Establishment for the Education of Young Ladies, 'her system of imparting knowledge' would be 'combined with unremitting attention to moral training'; while at Park House 'a sound moral and religious training' was offered.⁶³

In an analysis of newspaper advertisements for South Australian schools offering the International Baccalaureate (IB), Kay Whitehead found that contemporary schools ignore the ideals of intercultural understanding and responsible citizenship; ideals which supposedly underlie the program. Instead the International Baccalaureate is represented as a commodity that enhances social

advantage ‘rather than a curriculum that might contribute to the preparation of responsible citizens who are committed to a socially just society’. Even schools that chose to declare their religious affiliation did not do so consistently, and with two exceptions, ‘there was no indication that Christian ideals informed their educational programmes’.⁶⁴ A similar observation can be made in regard to advertisements for Victorian schools where attention is only given to pupils’ success at the IB examination, not the values inherent to the program; as illustrated in an advertising feature for independent schools published in the *Age* in mid 2009 – ‘PLC’s IB Students Achieve Outstanding Results Again!’, and ‘MLC students continued to excel in their VCE, VCE VET and International Baccalaureate (IB) scores’.⁶⁵

While a few fee-charging Victorian schools, in particular those associated with the Catholic Church, refer to the development of social responsibility in their advertisements, such assertions are not widespread. They include: the claim by Xavier College to foster the development of young men ‘dedicated to serving others’; pupils at Siena College ‘engage with issues of social justice’; and a ‘sense of social justice’ is promoted at Firbank.⁶⁶ Some schools also refer directly to their religious connections, but again other than for Catholic schools, such acknowledgements are muted and mostly appear in connection with a school’s name. This lack of religious association is not surprising in light of research undertaken over 40 years ago by Ian Hansen, who found that in response to a questionnaire completed by sixth form students who attended six of the more prestigious Victorian schools (all Christian foundations), that the influence of Christianity in their schools was held to be in low esteem by most respondents: over two-thirds (68.3%) considered it to be weak or almost non-existent. When it is considered that the average was inflated by the positive response by students at Xavier College (84.3% considered it a strong factor), students from other schools reported very low levels of influence: from a high of 24.6% at Scotch College, to a low of 7.3% at the Geelong Grammar School.⁶⁷

According to Symes, the school marketing literature suggests that school uniforms are associated with ‘a tradition of schooling that emphasises discipline and sound behaviour principles’.⁶⁸ Certainly photographs of students wearing uniforms figure predominantly in promotional material. Yet uniforms do not form part of the ‘tradition’ of independent schools, and earlier photographs of pupils (of both sexes) show there certainly was no uniformity of dress. A common form of clothing was not adopted until the first decades of the twentieth century, followed by the introduction of rules requiring compulsory uniforms. Some opposed the imposition of compulsion on the grounds that it lessened opportunities for displaying individuality. Critics included Frances Fraser, lady superintendent at PLC, who observed ‘it seems so contradictory to be constantly endeavouring to cultivate the individual spirit and then set about destroying it by making girls adopt a uniform style of dress.’⁶⁹

The wearing of blazers evolved from the custom of wearing school colours and badges on caps at sporting events, followed by the wearing of especially coloured blazers by members of sporting teams. It was only much later that blazers were added to the uniforms worn by all students.⁷⁰ As Ailsa Zainu’din has observed, the green blazers worn by sports teams and the blue blazers worn by prefects at MLC ‘were not initially imposed from above but were *awarded* in recognition of service to the school’.⁷¹

Social differentiation

Although today schools may serve to reproduce status differentials, this is not readily acknowledged, and reference to social class and/or prestige only occurs implicitly in modern advertisements; often by the use of photographs of grand buildings, spacious grounds, and special facilities such as theatres, art studios, and swimming pools. Today class is not mentioned directly but an indication is given of the ‘type’ of pupil in attendance is demonstrated by their portrayal in photographs: typically all are smiling, well-groomed (boys with short hair and girls with hair tied back), and neatly dressed in the school uniform.

This contrasts to the explicit references to social standing found in nineteenth-century advertisements, when even the name of a school itself often provided some indication of its (claimed) social status, resulting in an abundance of ladies' colleges and schools, with the result that some contemporary schools have been left with a somewhat unfortunate legacy, often camouflaged with the use of acronyms.⁷²

Even so, schools in Victoria were less socially exclusive than those in England, where finely-differentiated notions of class abounded, and in general were open to all who could pay the requisite fees. While cost certainly may have excluded some Victorian students, there was no exclusion of certain groups, irrespective of whether parents were able to pay. For boys social exclusivity was of lesser importance, although in the middle years of the nineteenth century a number of advertisements made some reference to social class, as illustrated by those placed in the *Argus* in January 1850: Mr. Willmott conducted a 'Select School for Young Gentlemen'; at the Brighton Park School, John Macfarlane prepared 'young gentlemen' for the university and mercantile pursuits; while the Rev. H. Templeton's Collingwood Academy, was intended 'for a select class of pupils'.⁷³ Similar claims were still being made a decade later but had disappeared by the latter decades of the century.

Social selectivity of girls lasted longer, as parents were more likely to object to the mixing of social classes in relation to their daughters. At the Torrington House school 'for young gentlewomen', the course of instruction included 'every accomplishment requisite for a lady', while at Merton Hall, 'every requisite for refined and cultivated home life is provided'. Even early in the twentieth century, an advertisement for MLC reported a parent as saying, 'I wanted my girl to be brought up amongst lady-like companions'.⁷⁴

Cost

Another noticeable feature of contemporary advertisements is the all but complete absence of any mention of the cost associated with attendance at a particular school; a factor assumed to be of extreme importance to parents. Today it is usual for schools to indicate that a schedule of fees is available ‘on application’: this information is not available in school prospectuses, let alone advertisements. Any reference to the cost of schooling only appears indirectly, such as in advertisements by the few schools that claim to charge relatively lower fees – although these also are not specified. Such reticence is unusual when compared to advertisements for other goods and services, where lower costs are often considered as providing a competitive advantage.

In earlier advertisements and prospectuses, especially in the mid nineteenth century, schools provided itemised lists showing the fees of various types that parents would be required to pay and often this information comprised a substantial portion of an advertisement. At Oberwyl Ladies’ College, St Kilda, a prospectus indicated the ‘terms’ for ‘the English course, French, Latin, and Needlework’. These were (per quarter): resident boarders, over 13 years, 20 guineas; resident boarders under 13 years, 15 guineas; daily board 2½ guineas; day pupils over 13 years, 4 guineas; day pupils under 13 years, 3 guineas; day pupils under 10 years, 2 guineas; initiatory class, 1½ guineas; laundress, 1 guinea; church sittings, 7/6; school materials, copies, exam paper etc, 3/6 to 5/-. Pupils could also attend additional classes (selected from a list of 20); including, singing, matriculation musical theory, elocution, French conversation, dancing and callisthenics, painting, pyrography, scientific dressmaking, piano, violin, and zither, for each of which an extra fee (ranging from 10/6 to 5 guineas per quarter) was charged.⁷⁵ All fees were payable quarterly in advance.

Conclusion

Today schools, as they have in the past, seek to advertise their services to prospective clients (parents) in an attempt to persuade them to enrol their children at a particular establishment. Clearly the aspect of schooling that still continues to be emphasised in promotional material is the success of students at examinations held in the final year of schooling. While in the nineteenth century such academic success was achieved by only a few, now the 'leading' fee-charging schools promise it as something attainable by all, by offering a curriculum narrowly related to university selection. By promising high success rates at examinations, together with an enhanced possibility of subsequent university enrolment, these schools ensure a continuous and growing demand for custom. The additional 'services' promoted by the schools, including as the development of positive self-esteem, are posited as instrumental to such high academic success. Gone are the days when these schools prided themselves on character development as well as intellectual achievement, they now offer reproduction of social advantage in the marketplace.

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- ⁵ Meg Maquire, Stephen J. Ball, and Shiela Macrae, 'Promotion, persuasion and class-taste: marketing (in) the UK post-compulsory sector', *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, Vol. 20, No. 3, 1999, p. 299.
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- ⁷ Although the 1872 Act established 'free' state schools, fees were charged for those enrolled in Years 9 and above (those beyond the statutory age) until 1947. Subsequently higher subjects were taught as 'extras': outside the prescribed hours of instruction and on payment of an additional fee.
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- ⁹ Education Act, 1910, no. 2301, *Statutes of Victoria*.
- ¹⁰ Mark Peel and Janet McCalman, *Who Went Where in Who's Who 1988: The schooling of the Australian elite*, Melbourne University History Research Series, No. 1, History Department, University of Melbourne, 1992, p. 32.
- ¹¹ In the last quarter of the nineteenth century the denominations began to establish corporate girls' schools. Once the denominations (other than Catholic) were no longer responsible for numerous primary schools, following the 1872 Education Act, they were better able to finance secondary education. The Anglican Archbishop, Lowther Clarke, was instrumental in acquiring schools for his church, Burren, p. 52. Former private girls' schools that became Anglican schools include the Melbourne Church of England Girls' Grammar School, the Hermitage, Firbank, Tintern, and Korowa.
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- ¹⁴ Margaret Pawsey, *The Demon of Discord: tensions in the Catholic Church in Victoria*, Melbourne, MUP, 1982, p.67. St Patrick's College was later reopened by the Jesuit Fathers in 1865.
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- ¹⁷ Constance Tisdall, *Forerunners: the saga of a family of teachers*, Melbourne, Cheshire, 1961, p.188.
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- ²⁰ *Argus*, 20 December 1870; *Victorian Parliamentary Debates*, 1889, Vol. 6, 1 August 1889, p. 842.
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- ²⁵ John Roach, *A History of Secondary Education 1800-1870*, London, Longman, 1986, p. 265.
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- ³¹ Jeff Northfield, 'Evaluation of research, aspirations and impact: a four year story of the VCE', paper presented at the NZARE/AARE joint conference, Deakin University, 1992; Teese, *Australian Private Schools ...*, p. 244..

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- ³⁴ Teese, *Academic Success ...*, p. 210.
- ³⁵ 'Independent Schools', advertising feature, *Age* 18 June 2009, p. 8; *Age*, 10 February 2010.
- ³⁶ 'Sowing the seeds of the future', Independent Schools Guide 2010, *Melbourne Weekly Magazine*, 2010.
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