CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Just Add ‘Progressivism’ and Stir
How We Cook Up Literacy Crises in Australia

Wayne Sawyer

We must at all costs bring the achievements of science and scholarship into public debate, from which they are tragically absent – and in passing, call to order the prattling and incompetent essayists who fill newspaper columns and the airways of radio and television. (Pierre Bourdieu 2003, Firing Back: Against the Tyranny of the Market 2: 13).

Intelligence has disappeared and it can take eons to come back (Marie Lahaye 2003, The Barbarian Invasions)

Introduction
The two PISA (Program for International Student Assessment) studies which have been conducted in the first few years of this century suggest that Australia is a world leader in teaching literacy and that Australian teachers are achieving among the best results in the OECD. PISA 2000, for example, compared the reading, mathematical and scientific literacy performance of Australian 15-year-olds with the performance of 15-year-olds in 31 other countries, including the United States, Canada, Japan, Korea and many European nations such as the UK and Russia. Some 265,000 students took part in this first PISA survey. In Australia, 6,200 students from 231 government, Catholic and independent schools in all states and territories were involved.

The major focus of PISA 2000 was reading literacy. Only one country, Finland, performed significantly better statistically than Australia in this area. In fact, in reading literacy, Australia had one of the highest proportions of students of any country at the highest proficiency level (Level 5) and one of the lowest proportions of students at the lowest level (below Level 1). All Australian States and Territories performed at or above the OECD average (ACER nd).

PISA 2003 repeated these results. It compared achievement in 4 areas (reading, mathematical and scientific literacy and problem solving) across 41 countries and 276,000 students. Just over
12,500 students from 321 schools around Australia took part in PISA 2003. In reading literacy, once again, only Finland performed significantly better than Australia (ACER nd). Comparative results from Australian States and Territories were similar to 2000, with the only change being that the NT performed relatively better. ACT, NSW, WA and SA achieved statistically similar top mean results.

This last set of results was released in early 2005. Yet, despite these results, which indicate that Australian teachers of English and literacy ought to be lauded as among the world’s very best, 2005 saw one of the most sustained public campaigns of teacher bashing and crisis rhetoric around education that this country has ever seen – with the strongest focus on teachers of English and literacy. Teachers and others in the education field were attacked for many things, including:

- **a general decline in standards, or otherwise failing students** (Davies, 27/7/05; Devine, 11/12/05; Donnelly, 25/11/05; Gosch and Macnamara, 15/9/05; Lane, 19/10/05; Maiden, 28/9/05; Norrie, 29/11/05)

- **failing to teach reading “properly” through the use of phonics** (Davies, 27/7/05; Devine, 11/12/05; Donnelly, 19-20/11/05 and 9/12/05; Editorial, 9/12/05; Maiden, 11/11/05 and 8/12/05; Maiden and Hart, 9/12/05; Norrie, 15/8/05; Taylor, 24/8/05)

- **ignoring grammar, spelling and punctuation** (Donnelly, 15/9/05)

- **teaching critical literacy and the apparently associated “jargonistic” postmodern theory** (Donnelly, 26/7/05; Editorial, 30-31/7/2005; Golsby-Smith, 14/11/05; Hart, 28/7/05; MATP, 25/7/05; Rowbotham, 22/9/2005; Slattery, 23-24/7/05ii, 27/7/05, 30-31/7/05 and 6/8/05; Slattery and Taylor, 25/7/05 and 26/7/05)

- **teaching low-grade popular culture instead of the canon** (Devine, 11/8/05; Editorial, 25/11/05; Lane, 21/10/05; McIlroy, 10/2/05; Norrie, 6/8/05; Macnamara, 29-30/10/05; Rowbotham, 23/9/05)

- **developing trendy “new age” curricula** (Donnelly, 5/1/05, 28/9/05, 21/10/05; Gosch and Maiden, 28/9/05; Maiden, 28/9/05)

- **being leftwing ideologues** (Devine, 25/8/05; Editorial, 25/7/2005)

- **being anti-American** (Devine, 25/8/2005; ninemsn, 21/8/05).

Teacher education was also under attack (Maiden, 9/12/2005; 12/11/05; Norrie, 6/8/05; Rood, 3/12/05). Trainee teachers themselves were said to be illiterate (Maiden, 30/9/05; Norrie, 8/11/05, 29/11/05, 9/12/05) and - among the more disturbing of these attacks – implicit
connections were made to the promotion of terrorism (Devine, 25/8/05; Editorial, 26/7/05). The campaign was relentless – the populist press running the anti-teacher and general-educational-decline themes day after day over periods of weeks during the whole year. Government ministers, the Right-wing press, the usual “expert” pundits and the shock jocks – all mobilised and remained firmly “on message”. The education profession was demonised and Ministers and editorial writers were able to portray themselves as the saviours of the nation’s school children.

The Tyranny of Commonsense
Lumby argues that the media in this country engage in “simplistic ideological trench warfare… forged in the crucible of moral and political reactionism” (Lumby, 2005: 28). Certainly, anti-intellectualism is treated as a virtue, with many commentators taking pride in simply abusing academics, teachers and “elites” in general. The “elites” include classroom teachers, but not millionaire shock-jocks or neo-conservative media owners - a paradox that goes unnoticed. A sense of the derisory tone of such commentary can be gauged from a Miranda Devine piece attacking the anti-globalisation movement in which Devine took the opportunity to refer to a prominent activist as a “teacher, natch” (Devine, 4/9/05). This not only “natch-uralises” the conflation of “teachers”, “activists” and “left-wing loonies” for her readership, it also sends the additional message that teachers are fair game for abuse even when the topic is not education. It is noteworthy that Devine occupied a place on the Federal Minister’s Committee of Inquiry into the Teaching of Literacy. One must wonder whether this is despite, or because of, such anti-intellectualism.

That inquiry was itself a measure of the appeal to populist “commonsense” in educational policy. Initiated by the then Federal Minister in response to a letter from a number of cognitive psychologists whose focus appears to be on that small group of children reporting with specific reading difficulties, the inquiry was conducted against the background of a media feeding frenzy about: a) the centrality of phonics in reading and b) its neglect in schools (Nelson, 1/12/04. cf Cambourne, Ch.14, this volume). The massively expensive American project No Child Left Behind is held up as a model of government intervention in literacy policy. The program effectively creates through funding mechanisms a strong emphasis on phonics in reading instruction. Recent evaluation has shown that while “very slight” improvements in reading scores have occurred under No Child Left Behind, student growth scores -which measure the rate at which reading ability grows - have decreased, and this effect is especially marked among Hispanic, African American and Native American students, with these
differences in growth being “quite large”(Cronin, Kingsbury, McCAll & Bowe 2005). Many academics and teachers in the field of literacy recognise the value of what Krashen (nd) calls “basic” – as opposed to “intensive” – phonics and thus are not surprised at the relatively poor results from No Child Left Behind. Yet one looks in vain in the press for coverage of these evaluations. “Intensive” phonics has the appearance of commonsense – hence its appeal for politicians and shock jocks. Teachers, on the other hand, have a more nuanced understanding of the role of phonics in reading.

That nuanced understanding also holds for grammar. Along with cries for intensive phonics instruction, media pundits and politicians have also been calling for a “return to grammar” (cf. Howie and Sawyer, Ch 2, this volume). This again flies in the face of what a substantial body of research says about the value of such instruction for improving writing. Moffett’s (1968) argument about the lack of relationship between a conscious knowledge of grammar and actual correct usage was supported by research in the 20th Century (e.g. Harris, 1962, 1965) which consistently showed that "the training of formal grammar had no beneficial effect on children's written work" (Wilkinson, 1986: 23). And, as Mark Howie indicates (in Ch 2, this volume), a very recent analysis of the available evidence has again concluded that “there is no high quality evidence that the teaching of grammar, whether traditional or generative/transformational, is worth the time if the aim is the improvement of the quality and/or accuracy of written composition…the evidence base to justify the teaching of grammar in English to 5 to 16 year-olds in order to improve writing is very small”( Andrews, Torgerson, Beverton, Locke, Low, Robinson & Zhu 2004). This latter study was a systematic review conducted under the very conditions which neo-liberals and neo-conservatives portray as ‘scientific’ (see Delandsheire, Ch 6, this volume). English teachers in general see value in the study of grammar as part of studying language and in providing some of the language to talk about language. Yet the idea that one needs to be able to analyse language in order to construct it – as though one needs to be a mechanic in order to drive - has such commonsense appeal that, like phonics, it is tailor-made for simplistic populist slogans. Unsurprisingly, then, 2005 also saw a strong emphasis on grammar in the manufacture of the literacy crisis.

Why the Beat-Up? International Parallels
Historically, literacy crises have been used both in Australia and internationally as a way of leveraging some shift in control of educational policy. At the present moment the sense of
crisis in the (public) education system has provided a background to – even a rationale for – Commonwealth attempts to centralise control of school education, TAFE, the universities and, in particular, teacher education. In the realm of schools, “accountability” is always a vote-winning slogan, to be obtained through league tables and through a more “rigorous” assessment system – with the strategy being to deride state credentialing such as the NSW Higher School Certificate as being too easy because not enough students fail. In teacher education specifically, the main game appears to be control of the curriculum under the guise of removing the influence of left-wing academic theorists who are too interested in “education” and not enough in “training”. This would effectively give the Commonwealth full control over school education in this country – from control of what potential teachers themselves are taught to control of what they teach in schools.

The fact is that none of this is original policy. The international context contains identical examples of such ‘crisis’ mongering and its consequences for public schooling and education in general. England in the early 90s attempted to place teacher education into schools in a crude apprenticeship model that no one would dare to force on any other profession, but had to give it up as a complete disaster. Nevertheless, teacher education in England is today dominated by a compliance juggernaut. The curriculum of teacher education faculties (or, in the true spirit of economic rationalism, "ITT [Initial Teacher Training] providers") is predetermined and compliance is ensured through the mechanism of the OFSTED (Office of Standards in Education) inspection. Teachers who wish to be employed by state schools (the policies do not apply to teachers in the private system) after finishing their university ("ITT provider") training, undergo a series of additional "Qualified Teacher Status" (QTS) tests in order to achieve registration with the General Teaching Council (GTC) (registration is not required of private school teachers). Not surprisingly, the curriculum forced onto the universities ("ITT providers") is one that in its turn supports the National Curriculum.

The National Curriculum in turn is based on attainment targets, with national testing at each Key Stage. Once again, the National Curriculum is only compulsory in state schools, although most private schools do choose to follow it. School league tables report on the national testing. Currently in the UK each November, local education authorities publish each school's GCSE (General Certificate of Secondary Education: Year 10 equivalent) results in local papers. One recent example demonstrates the crudity and unfairness of the league table system. In a 2004 website article entitled the "The best and worst results", the
BBC News published the 2003 league tables for the GCSE naming a particular selective boys' grammar school in Buckinghamshire as the top school for the year and also naming "the worst state school" in the country (BBC News, 2004). These tables are not based on "value-added" measures, but on absolute results in the national tests (value-addedness was, in fact, only available for the first time in 2003, but this article did not use the measure).

What the article did not mention was that Amersham - where the “best” school is located – is in a County Council area which in 2002 boasted the third highest disposable household income per capita in the whole of the UK – 120% of the UK average and 167% of the poorest regions. It was the local area least reliant on social security in all of the UK (National Statistics Online, 2005). By comparison, the District of Thanet, in which the “worst” school is located had, in 2002, an unemployment rate in of 7% compared with the average for Kent (its County Council district) of 2.6% and a national figure of 3.1%. Indices of deprivation for 2000 showed that Thanet was ranked as easily the most deprived District in Kent and as the 60th most deprived District in the whole of England (out of 354 Districts) (Thanet Plan 3, 2002). The response of education authorities to these realities? The “worst” school was on notice to "improve or face possible closure" while its head teacher (Principal) ran formal competency procedures against 24 of the school's 37 teachers.

What has happened in England is that schools which originally began this measurement game with a successful, middle-class catchment area and did well in the GCSE soon became over-subscribed to the point where they are able today to actively select those students who will continue to achieve this sort of success for them. Less successful students are relegated to less successful schools and an increasingly downward spiral has set in for these latter schools. Interestingly, the number of students actively excluded from schools (i.e. students who detract from the school's public image) increased 2,000% in the UK between 1991 and 1993.

For teachers of English, the compliance mechanisms have led to a sense that they no longer recognise their subject, have lost a sense of professional identity and are riven by “anger, frustration, distress, and sadness” (Goodwyn, 2003: 125). More broadly, however, league tables in England (and it is worth noting that it is now only England – the other countries in the UK having withdrawn from the system as soon as devolution allowed) have led to a tiered public schooling system, in which some schools are able to select students because of demand for places based on their “success”, while other schools become “residualised” and
are engaged in a “race to the bottom”.

The beauty of league tables for governments is that they provide “transparency” and, hence, “choice” for parents. In turn, the rhetoric of choice allows governments to retreat from supporting public institutions, to pretend that choice (such as the choice of a private education) is equally available to all, and then to blame the poor for making the wrong choices by keeping their children within "under-performing" schools (cf, Apple, 2001: 60). Test results and literacy rates, then, become important instruments in the drive towards what Connell has called the "new feudalism" (Connell, 1997).

“Choice” rhetoric is equally central to US education policy. In his *Educating the "Right" Way*, Apple (2001) has documented how certain specific concepts have become clustered in US education debates in such a way as to become inseparable. These ideas revolve around "choice" - "markets", "privatisation" and "competition" provide choice and "testing" helps determine one’s choice. Apple also documents the way Christian religious values have become inextricably bound up with this policy agenda. One irony of choice rhetoric is that it implies differences between schools from which choices can be made. However, in England, centralised curriculum removes those differences. As outlined above, Bush in the US has also effectively made systematic, intensive phonics instruction a compulsory central criterion for the receipt of Federal school funding through the *No Child Left Behind* policy (US Dept of Education, nd). Thus, for schools dependent on public funding, there is no curriculum differentiation allowed in reading instruction. Choice, then, is rarely about genuine curriculum differences, but usually about the socio-economic circumstances which determine test scores.

**An Historical Perspective**

There is another sense in which the current Australian crisis of confidence in education and teachers is not original, in that literacy crises have periodically plagued Australian education. Rather than pursuing further parallels between the US, the UK and the current situation in Australia, I shall now explore how such literacy crises have been manufactured, including the way research is picked up by politicians and the media and given a particular spin. I shall do this by reviewing another set of debates, namely the alleged “literacy crisis” of the mid-late 1970s. This particular crisis was staged not only by the mainstream print media of the period, but also by the Australian Council for Educational Standards. Both sources blamed an alleged decline in literacy standards in NSW in particular, on, among
other things, the 1971 English Syllabus. By reviewing this “crisis”, I hope to provide an historical perspective on the present moment. This historical perspective is instructive, not just because it reminds us that literacy crises have always been with us, but also because it shows how the strategies of politicians and the media in creating such crises have remained constant over time. In Australia and internationally, the New Right in particular have developed a set of strategies, exercised in Australia and internationally, of creating a sense of crisis in schooling with specific political ends. Teachers and schools are typically accused of failing a generation of school students and denying them the skills needed to take their place in the workforce. A review of this particularly volatile literacy crisis of the mid-late 1970s can serve to highlight the socio-political nature of such crises. The pattern of public behaviour in which the 1970s crisis was played out became a precedent for the way the New Right in Australia was to construct and mediate such crises for the next thirty years.

Green, Hodgens and Luke characterise the period from 1972 in Australia as one in which "literacy had become a focal issue of media and public concern" (1994:Vol.II vi). The key theme in media coverage about literacy from 1972 to 1979 was a general sense of declining standards. Employers were claiming that schools were producing an unemployable generation and adult illiteracy began to become a public issue. The term "literacy" itself came into media prominence, though usually in the context of complaints about "illiteracy". The following selection of extracts from the NSW press reflects the general theme of declining standards in the national press generally:

More than 30,000 NSW high school students have a reading level of nine years and under, education experts said this week ("High school illiteracy", 17/3/1974)

In New South Wales, a survey involving 40 private high schools found that all had students at least a year behind in reading standard. At three of the schools, pupils with reading disabilities totalled between 45 and 50 per cent. (Bottom, 24/3/1974)

No thorough research has been done into the area, but various authorities estimate:

UP TO 20 PER CENT of first-year university students, fresh from school, have a low standard of literacy.
ABOVE 5 PER CENT of first-year university students have severe literacy problems.
MORE THAN 20 PER CENT of school-leavers attending trade courses at technical colleges are unable to cope with even fairly simple levels of reading and writing for their courses.
MORE THAN 10 PER CENT of school-leavers attempting management and commerce courses at techs cannot handle the reading and writing required.
UP TO 30 PER CENT of school-leavers seeking jobs as factory workers or labourers are virtually unable to read and fill in application forms for the jobs.
ALMOST ALL girls seeking secretarial work after leaving school are not sufficiently literate to take up the level of job they want to do.
All these figures refer to English-speaking people (not migrants among whom such difficulties might be expected). (Harper, 3/6/1975)

This year remedial classes in English expression are being conducted at Macquarie University. We are not the first Australian university to establish such classes; and it would appear, from the increasing number of complaints in the press about standards of written English, that we shall not be the last.
(Astley, Sept 29 to Oct 4, 1975.)

A recent study…indicated that one child in a classroom of 10-year-olds was virtually unable to read and one child in every three or four classrooms of 14-year-olds was still unable to read independently. The study also found low-performance levels in formal writing. (“Uni may insist…”, 20/10/1976)

A shock government report has shown that up to 5 per cent of metropolitan schoolchildren cannot cope with basic reading, writing and arithmetic.
(Goldman,23/11/1976)

More than 60,000 Australian 14-year-olds are unable to effectively read a paragraph of words, a survey has found. (“’Alarming’ illiteracy…”, 3/7/1977)

About 220,000 people in Sydney cannot read or write English well enough to survive in society, a survey has found. Of these 65,000 are Australian/English—born and 155,000 come from non-English speaking countries. (McKenzie, 8/5/1977)
It’s the problem that shouldn’t exist in the lucky country. It’s the tragedy that most people don’t know exists. But it is fact. Too many Australians can’t read or write as well as a 10-year-old school kid. (Murray, 24/9/1977.)

People reading this newspaper today may consider that activity as much a part of their daily routine as cleaning their teeth. But for 217,000 people in Sydney with average and above average intelligence, it is an impossibility. They are the "functionally illiterate," those who lack basic reading skills. (Parfitt, 12/9/1978)

Hundreds of thousands of young Australians now at school may find themselves unemployable - because they are grossly deficient in language skills. (Williams, 21/8/1979)

Two research studies in particular became the basis for claims about widespread illiteracy in this period and their treatment is a textbook case study of “spin” in relation to research findings and the literacy issue in this country. These were the Australian studies in school performance (Bourke and Keeves, 1977), carried out largely in 1975, and a study by Judith Goyen carried out over 1974-75.

**Bourke and Keeves/ Australian Studies in School Performance (ASSP) 1975**

In October, 1975, the Australian Council for Educational Research undertook sampling across Australia of approximately 6,000 students aged from 10 to 10.11 years, and another (approximately) 6,000 aged from 14 to 14.11 years. Students were drawn from government, Catholic and independent systems. Being tested was "the attainment of skills in literacy...that were regarded as being essential for continuing with education beyond the most elementary level and for living in Australian society" (Bourke and Keeves, 1977: 6).

Students were given a reading test designed to test a variety of reading skills and a writing test designed to test the ability to write in a range of forms. (A number of the reading comprehension tasks were taken from a previous study by the International Education Association [IEA], in order to enable cross-national comparisons on those tasks). Results were to be reported item-by-item simply in terms of the number of students who completed the task successfully. This was regarded as a fairer representation of the aims of the research than any "global" score of achievement. However, in order to compare the performances of groups, a cut-off score for reading "mastery" was determined. This score was 80%.
Results were as follows -

in reading:

• 3% of 10-year-olds and 0.8% of 14-year-olds were unable to read simple sentences
• 14-year-olds were more competent at reading newspapers than 10-year-olds
• on every item, 10-year-old girls scored higher than 10 year-old boys
• on the great majority of items, 14-year-old girls scored higher than 14 year-old boys
• in general, for 14-year-olds, students from an English-speaking background scored higher than students from a non-English-speaking background (NESB)
• among 10-year-olds, NESB students scored significantly worse than their English-background peers
• for 10 year-olds, scores for different categories of reading-skills ranged from 27% achieving "mastery" to 84% achieving "mastery". Mastery of the whole test was achieved by 53% of 10-year-olds and by 41% of 10-year-olds from NESB
• for 14-year-olds, scores for different categories of reading-skills ranged from 64% achieving "mastery" to 92% achieving "mastery". Mastery of the whole test was achieved by 72% of 14-year-olds, and by 57% of 14-year-olds from NESB
• sub-groups of students with higher absences from school had smaller proportions of students achieving mastery of reading
• the performance of Aboriginal students was much lower than Australian students overall

and in writing:

• the performance of 14-year-olds was much higher than that of 10-year-olds
• the writing of formal letters was "poorly done", with 50% of 14-year-olds unable to meet the requirements of a letter applying for employment
• 14-year-old students made far fewer spelling errors in proportion to the amount written than did 10-year-old students
• female students out-performed males at both age levels on every task except giving directions
• there was compelling evidence of a clear relationship between performance in reading and performance in writing
The report concluded that in reading, "(t)here was little evidence... to disparage the work of Australian schools and the general level of achievement in reading within those schools...performance levels for some reading tasks would appear to be relatively high...Nevertheless, there was a small but significant proportion of students in our schools at both the 10 and 14-year-old age levels who were clearly having difficulty in mastering the skills of reading" (Bourke and Keeves, 1977:11).

With respect to writing, though it was more difficult to present general results, the researchers' overall impression was that, "while some students were clearly having difficulties with their writing, the level of performance was generally satisfactory"(Bourke and Keeves, 1977:11). The researchers further believed that the numbers "handicapped" in writing were greater than those who had difficulties in reading.

The study included a comparison of reading comprehension with a number of English-speaking countries who had participated in a 1970 International Education Association (IEA) study of reading comprehension. This was possible because a number of test items in the 1975 ASSP study were taken from the 1970 IEA study. This showed for 1975 that "Australian 10 year-old students are little different in performance on a reading comprehension from their coevals in England and Scotland, and perhaps slightly superior to their age mates in the United States" (Bourke and Keeves, 1977: 297).

For 14-year-olds, the study concluded that "the Australian students...have performed on a par with students in Britain but were marginally below the students in New Zealand". (They were also slightly below the USA, but this was not regarded as statistically significant). New Zealand itself was consistently higher across the whole 14-year-old test than anywhere else in the English-speaking world (Bourke and Keeves, 1977: 297).

It needs to be remembered that in reading “mastery” was a score of 80% or greater and that therefore the 72% of 14-year-olds who achieved mastery scored over 80% on tests of reading comprehension. Thus, 28% of students scored less than 80% on such tests. This figure was to be interpreted by the media as widespread “illiteracy” and to be used to blame schools, teachers, teacher education institutions and English Syllabuses for the “decline”.

Goyen’s Study, 1974-75
In 1974-75, Judith Goyen of Macquarie University surveyed the literacy levels of almost 1000 adults in Sydney. An adult was defined as someone over 16 years. The tests were tests of "survival" literacy: respondents were to answer questions based on reading telephone dialling instructions, classified housing ads, classified employment ads and an application form. "Illiteracy" on this test was defined as scoring less than 75%.

Results were as follows:
• the mean score for all respondents was 39.4 out of 44, ie most respondents obtained near maximum scores
• among Australian/English-born adults, illiteracy was 3.7% overall
• among Australian/English-born adults, illiteracy was 1.6% among the under 30s, and 11.9% among the over 60s
• among migrants of NESB, 59.4% were classed as "illiterate"
• of these "illiterate" NESB migrants, 95.1% had been wholly educated in a non-English-speaking country; 72.1% were unskilled manual workers and 49.2% had not been educated beyond primary school

One could conclude from these results that the more recently one was educated, the greater one's chances of being literate in Goyen’s terms and also that one's home language was the most crucial factor in literacy success in the dominant language.

**Media Responses to These Two Studies**

For those who read the results, both studies showed Australian education systems – and recency of education in those systems - in a positive light. Access to recent education in Australia was highly correlated with success. Nevertheless, specific groups were clearly in a worse position than others, especially boys, those from NESB, Indigenous students and working class students. This particular set of patterns has remained consistent in such large-scale testing since the 1970s (see Sawyer, 1997, 1998, 1999) and obviously argues strongly for literacy “success” having a strong socio-cultural basis. However, it was not these groups in particular that gained the headlines. These two studies, despite the caution with which they were presented, and despite the fact that Australian schools were reported as performing at least comparably to those of other nations, received strong negative media attention. Headlines on their release included:
• for the 1975 ASSP study:

Australia's Education Scandal: We're turning out millions of dunces
_The Bulletin_

Australia's $2,000 million-a-year education system is turning out a generation of idiots
_Sydney Mirror_

Australia's school system is producing a crop of illiterates
_Newcastle Sun_

‘Alarming’ illiteracy at age of 14
_Sunday Telegraph, 3/7/77_

Illiteracy - the Crisis in our Classrooms: The forgotten art of the Three Rs
_The Australian, 18/5/77_

Australia's Faltering Children
_The Age, 14/3/78_

• for Goyen’s study:

A Nation of Illiterates: 225,000 adults cannot read this headline
_The Australian, 26/6/76_

220,000 in Sydney Illiterate, Says Survey
_Sunday Telegraph, 8/5/77_

217,000 Illiterate People in Sydney
_The Sydney Morning Herald, 12/9/78_

**Who Is to Blame?**

These headlines bore virtually no relation to the results of the studies themselves (one might also note the distance in time between the studies and some of the reports). Simply ignoring the facts set a trend for a theory of decline and a rhetoric of crisis that was to continue as a strategy into this century. In 2005, for example, given the success of Australia in PISA, one might expect the proponents of decline theory to have to discredit the tests, but, on the whole, the teacher bashing has proceeded as if these results simply did not exist vii.
Blame for the alleged decline in reading skills in the 1970s was placed on many factors. One was the influence of television (Astley, Sept 29 to Oct 4, 1975:13; Harper, 5/6/1975; King, 2/8/1976; Murray, 24/9/1977:16-17). However, other areas of blame set in train a pattern of response that was to remain consistent until today. The following list of sins for which teachers and schooling were to blame should now appear eerily familiar if comparison is made with the similar list that began this chapter. Among the foremost culprits in the ’70s were “progressive” educators, both in schools and in teacher education:

The tone of very many submissions has been highly critical of teacher education and there is a good deal of concurrence in their demands for more time and effort in teacher education courses to be directed to acquiring basic competence in teaching the skills of literacy and numeracy (L’Estrange, 10/7/1980)

There’s too much emphasis on 'self-creativity' copied from the American education system—too much play, action and drama and not enough reading and writing, too many kids leaving school semi-literate who needn't be (“High school illiteracy”, 17/3/1974)

I find that many teachers themselves have doubts on this score. In teacher training institutions the amount of time given over to teaching students how to teach seems to be falling off. It is certainly inadequate.

The teacher colleges have gone overboard on options. They have changed the emphasis from teacher training to teacher education. I am not saying the teachers should not be educated people. I am saying they must also be trained people. (Cole-Adams, 28/4/1976)

There has also been a move away from proper testing and examination procedures and a lack of adequate training of teachers in the three basic areas.(“Illiterates turned out…”, 3/3/1975)

It is not part of the basic training of primary teachers to learn how to teach reading. (Harper, 5/6/1975)
One progressive teacher with whom I was speaking recently announced with a fearful joy that none of her pupils would know what a noun was (Astley, Sept 29 to Oct 4, 1975).

Mickey Mouse approach to education (Headline, O'Donnell, 29/6/1978)

Hotchpotch education (Headline, Editorial, 29/6/1978)

The solutions called for by the media also have a familiar ring to them. Calls for reform tended to centre not only on making changes that would reform those agents who were to blame, but, above all, on the need for national testing (“2 years behind…”, 10/4/1975; Cole-Adams 28/4/1976; King, 2/8/1976; “All-out search…”, 29/6/1978; Colless, 15/1/1980). National testing was to remain a key plank in the agenda of decline theorists, particularly beloved of politicians, since it can be constructed as “teacher accountability”, thus moving the spotlight away from political accountability.

The above media quotations are taken partly from the primary material supplied in Green, Hodgens and Luke (1994, Vol I), whose work shows that literacy crises in this country consistently appear to act out social fears about wider moral and social values. They demonstrate that "literacy" has become a code word for many things, including: allegiance to the Crown and Commonwealth; Protestant religious values; discipline and obedience to authority; mastery of British "proper speech"; innate intellectual gifts; monocultural Anglo/Australian nationalism; scientific and technological competitiveness; mental and physical health and employability and job competence. On the other hand, "illiteracy" has operated as a stand-in for negative values that include: delinquency; revolutionary or subversive ideologies; sexual immorality and moral decay; barbarity; technological incompetence; American cultural influence; mental and physical handicap; republicanism; socio-economic disadvantage and inadequate assimilation into Anglo/Australian culture (Green, Hodgens and Luke, 1994).

One of the things, however, which Green, Hodgens and Luke do not stress, since theirs is a national study, is the degree to which in NSW, the new English Syllabus of 1971 was also blamed for the alleged decline. Such criticism tied in strongly with the blame on progressive education:
Amusingly, in comparison with the English secondary syllabus, the mathematics syllabus for first-year high school students loads the 13-year-old with at least 50 technical terms and the manner of their application. The English syllabus requires none. (Astley, Sept 29 to Oct 4, 1975)

Prescriptive courses are out, and the only guidelines teachers have are the broad ones laid down in the English primary schools' language curriculum and in the English syllabus for secondary schools. These are so general that, as one teacher put it, "every teacher can go his own way and do his own thing."(Williams, 21/8/1979)

He claimed illiteracy has been helped by the new English syllabus of 1971. The syllabus meant teachers were supposed to stress the four skills of reading, writing, listening and speech—in that order.

"Whereas what has actually happened is the order has been reversed and reading and writing are very often ignored."

He said the problem could be traced back to a theory endorsed 10 years ago by a chairman of the English Syllabus Committee. (“High school illiteracy”, 17/3/1974)

I don’t think the problem lies in class sizes or school’s physical resources, but in changes in school syllabuses which were not sufficiently tested before they were introduced. (“Illiterates turned out…”, 3/3/1975)

Ironically, however, study of the actual classroom implementation of the 1971 Syllabus, carried out after the ASSP and Goyen reports were released, and published as late as 1978, concluded that actual implementation of the Syllabus was not, in fact, widespread (Watson, 1978). Thus, even if the crisis rhetoric had had any basis in reality, it would have been highly inappropriate to lay the blame for such decline in NSW on the Syllabus itself. Nevertheless, another key plank was laid down for decline theory: the image of the “trendy” Syllabus, which by 2005 was to become the “jargonistic” “postmodern” Syllabus (cf earlier references from the 2005 press).

ACES Review
Not all of the decline theory of the 1970s was developed in the popular media. One group claiming academic expertise, and, indeed, comprising a number of prominent academic figures, which also "fed" the decline theory strongly, was the Australian Council for Educational Standards - an alliance of business figures, conservative politicians and culturally conservative academics. The members of this group were relentless throughout the 70s in their attack on educational standards and on levels of literacy through their journal, *ACES Review*. Davis and Watson, in fact, place primary responsibility onto the "back to basics" movement, as led by the Australian Council for Educational Standards, for the merely partial implementation of the spirit of the "new English" Syllabuses in Australia in the period (Davis and Watson, 1990: 162).

*ACES Review* presented reading abilities as straightforwardly and unproblematically in decline (Badcock, 1974; Boyson, 1975a, 1975b; Hasluck, 1974; Hunt, 1976; Just, 1974a ; Rees, 1974) as was writing ability (Badcock, 1974; Boyson, 1975b; Hasluck, 1974; Hunt, 1976; Just, 1974a; Kramer, 1976; Rees, 1974). There were also falling standards in spoken English (Badcock, 1974; Firkins, 1977; Hasluck, 1974; Just, 1974a) as well as in spelling, punctuation and even handwriting (Akhurst, 1978; Bailey, 1976; Boyson, 1975b; Firkins, 1977).

Above all, the decline of literacy standards could be traced to the alleged neglect of grammatical study (Akhurst,1977, 1978; Badcock, 1974; Bailey, 1976; Dunn, 1975; Firkins, 1977; Hasluck, 1974; Just, 1974a; Overman, 1978). Green and Hodgens (1996) have argued that “grammar” in the history of English has become code for a set of “manners and morals”. A tight nexus of “literacy, grammar and power” has operated to create a discourse in literacy debates of “us” in relation to “them”, of “our” proficiency in relation to “their” “deficiency” (p.211). In late-Thatcherite Britain, for example, the Kingman Report firmly put grammar back on the agenda and in what Cameron has called an “extremely divided and unstable society” (in Green and Hodgens: 211), grammar became imbued with highly charged social meanings and “anxieties about grammar (were) at some deeper level anxieties about the breakdown of order and tradition, not just in language but in society at large” (Cameron and Bourne in Green and Hodgens: 211). Grammar is Wilkinson’s “disciplining of the flesh…punishing of the rebellious spirit, and the ultimate guarantee of a stable society” (Wilkinson,1986:34; see also Ch2, this volume). Arguments over the place of grammar in English become, in effect, arguments over a particular view of society.
Some (very) few of these writers (Bailey, 1976; Dunn, 1975; Just, 1974a) were aware of the research of those such as Harris (1962, 1965) quoted earlier which showed no relationship between training in grammar and improvement in writing, but this research was simply dismissed. A consistent theme in discussions of the neglect of grammar was that too much emphasis was being placed on "self-expression" (Badcock, 1974; Hasluck, 1974) and, hence, partial blame for decline was placed on "creative writing" (Badcock, 1974; Boyson, 1975b; Just, 1974a).

In what was to become the strongest of trends in the rhetoric of crisis, failure in reading was blamed on the neglect of phonics and on the alleged advocacy of "whole word" or "look-and-say" (often parodied as "look-and-guess") approaches (Just, 1974b; Williams, 1977). Over time, intensive phonics approaches were to become identified with “science”, especially in the US, and any mixed approaches automatically “un-scientific” (see Delandshere, Ch 6 and Cambourne, Ch 13, this volume).

Above all else, however, just as in the mainstream media, for ACES contributors, the enemies of "standards" were seen as progressivism and Romanticism. Rousseau and Dewey (or others’ mis-readings of Dewey) were seen as the seed-beds of "inquiry methods" or "discovery learning", which had done so much to contribute to declining standards (Akhurst, 1978; Badcock, 1974; Boyson, 1975b; Conway, 1974; Hackett, 1976; Just, 1974a, 1974b; Scott, 1977; Williams, 1977). Alongside these complaints was a continuing theme that great literature was being neglected and replaced in classrooms by mediocre "popular" texts, all in the name of "relevance" (Hunt, 1977a; Hunt, 1977b; Hunt, 1978; Kramer, 1976).

Other scapegoats also gained a consistent run in ACES Review. These included complaints about the crowded curriculum, which was tending to push out room for the "basics" (Akhurst, 1978; Boyson, 1975b; Williams, 1977) and the poor quality of the teaching service itself - a result of either the low academic standards of those entering the service, or of poor training (Boyson, 1975a; Dunn, 1975; Firkins, 1977; Just, 1974b; Kramer, 1976; O'Donnell, 1977; Scott, 1977; Williams, 1977)ix.
Equally importantly, just as in the mainstream media again, in NSW, the Syllabuses in English, both the 1971 Years 7-10 Syllabus, and the newer Primary Language Syllabus, were often directly blamed for the decline:

English teaching restricted to self-imposed personal writing and literature...is leaving significant gaps in the required skills of a large school population (Badcock, 1974: 6-8)

the subject still called English has degenerated into a mess of pop culture, filmmaking and the examination of topical (that is to say ephemeral) journalism. Pop song lyrics of repetitive banality and the comments of columnists provide the comfort of the familiar, but neither the sustaining nourishment nor the challenge and example of best writing.

How can one expect a discriminating use of language from students who are increasingly being required to read and discuss material limited in itself and therefore bound to stunt their linguistic and mental development? (Kramer, 1976: 7).

The general effect of (the 1974 NSW Primary Language Curriculum) is one of sugar-coated shallowness ...Children are now reaching Year 6 who have never heard of a noun or a verb. Punctuation is an unsolved mystery (Akhurst, 1977: 5-7).

Grammar is now the dirtiest seven letter word in the language...in comparison with the (NSW) English secondary syllabus, the mathematics syllabus for first year high school students loads the thirteen year old with at least fifty technical terms and the manner of their application. The English syllabus requires none. (Thea Astley, quoted in Akhurst, 1977: 7)

the statement in the new English Syllabus for New South Wales Primary Schools on the inadvisability of teaching grammar must be treated with extreme caution (Dunn, 1975: 1).

One wonders, as with the complaints of 2005, how civilisation managed to remain intact.
Marginson characterises the role and interaction of ACES and the media in the standards debate in these terms:

Beginning in the mid-1970s, The Bulletin and The Australian allowed themselves to function as the Black Papers of Australia...the standards debate was hardly a debate at all...it took the form of a binary interaction between the media as the 'primary definers', a select group of institutional heads, university experts, industry leaders and politicians led by the culturally conservative educators in the Australian Council of Educational Standards...The primary definers used the media to legitimate their position, while the media used their statements to frame the debate. The same primary definers were regularly reported, using common arguments, terms and slogans. They used ‘circular referencing’, citing media reports of each other’s statements as evidence and authority. In this manner the primary definers and media pre-constructed a consensus, and appealed to that consensus as the standard...Their definition of the issues was rendered universal (Marginson, 1997:131)

The tendency to circular referencing, to relentlessly remaining “on message” despite the facts, and hence creating a “common-sense” consensus, remains a powerful strategy in the rhetoric of crisis and certainly characterised the teacher-bashing of 2005.

**The international context in the 1970s**

As with contemporary policy, so in the 1970s, decline theory in Australia did not exist in isolation. The period under discussion involved widespread international attacks on education and on standards of literacy. In the US, it was the time “back to basics”. Newsweek magazine typified the rise of the movement with its statement that “Willy-nilly, the American educational system is spawning a generation of semi-literates” (Sheils, 1975:58), prompting Judy’s contemporaneous research into the history of decline theory in the US. Judy was able to show that decline theory was, in fact, historically endemic in American discussions of education:

Hundreds graduate from our common schools with no well-defined ideas of the construction of our language (County superintendent of schools, USA, 1841).
Bad spelling, incorrectness as well as inelegance of expression in writing, ignorance of the simplest rules of punctuation, and almost entire want of familiarity with English literature are far from rare among young men of eighteen otherwise well prepared for college studies (Charles William Eliot, President, Harvard College, 1871).

From every college in the country goes up the cry, 'Our freshmen can't spell, can't punctuate.' Every high school is in despair because its pupils are so ignorant of the merest rudiments (C.H.Ward, Taft School, Connecticut, 1917). (Judy, 1980: 33-34)

In Britain, the Tories’ Black Papers linked Britain's economic decline with literacy standards. Academic decline was linked to politically motivated teaching - particularly in English – and to standards of behaviour and discipline. “Progressivism” was linked with egalitarianism, trade unionism, student radicalism, sexual permissiveness, the decline of the family and general moral decay (Ball, 1987: 24-28; Ball, Kenny and Gardiner, 1990: 63ff). Eventually, the Thatcher government had such success in establishing a sense of crisis in public education that they achieved the "effective dismantling of a comprehensive, publicly funded education system" (Traves, 1988) in which market rhetoric around “choice” was a key plank. Parental choice of schools was aided by forcing the publication of league tables with the results discussed above.

Within Australia, Marginson characterises this period as that of the “anti-citizen”, in which public programs began to fall away (1997: 71ff). Above all else, in education, it was the discourse of decline as an unquestioned “given” which drove the agenda:

For cultural conservatives, market liberals and employers, the basic skills issue was too useful to ignore. It had strong public resonances that could be used to set off a range of other issues….Statements about improvements in standards, accompanied by substantial evidence, had no news value. Claims about declining standards, whether proven or not, drew maximum publicity. ‘Declining standards’ was a narrative and symbolism too strongly entrenched to be negated with logic, surveys, and numbers (Marginson, 1997: 133).
The strategy has remained unchanged over thirty years and remains successful today.

**Equality and opportunity**

Internationally, the driving forces around decline theory in the 1970s were social, political and economic. Again, Marginson traces the international influence of New Right economists like Friedman and Hayek to argue that what occurred in this period internationally was a turn away from the notion that equality of educational opportunity should even be considered a positive good. Friedman and Hayek claimed that governments should not be supporting equality of opportunity because “(t)here are few greater dangers to political stability than the existence of an intellectual proletariat who find no outlet for their learning” (Hayek in Marginson, 1997:123).

Indeed, in the UK, Keith Joseph, later Minister for Education under Thatcher, was to argue in the *Black Papers* that successful public education was a threat to social order:

> The distinctive feature of English social mobility since the war has been that even men of relatively modest ability….have been able to put their class origins behind them and have been carried to economic expansion through the hierarchy of large companies to positions that would once have been occupied by men of equally modest ability but rather higher social status…men do not like observing that higher incomes are being earned by men of their kind…For when two men are being compared, the superiority of one is the measure of the other’s mediocrity (Joseph & Sumption in Marginson, 1997: 124)

Lest this be thought a peculiarly British set of attitudes, the argument that standards were being sacrificed at the altar of equal opportunity was also run by ACES in Australia (Boyson, 1975b; Firkins, 1977; Hunt, 1977b; Russell, 1979). Prime Minister Gough Whitlam, in fact, was moved to remind an audience of teachers in 1974 of RH Tawney’s words that “it is not sufficient for conservatives that their children should have a good education. Other children should have a worse one.” (Whitlam, 1974). And lest these also be thought to be attitudes from the past only, Apple argues that in the US today the twin neoliberal policies of the marketisation of schooling and the emphasis on tougher standards are “part of an attempt by the middle class to alter the rules of competition in education in
light of the increased insecurities their children face. ‘By changing the process of selection to schools, middle class parents can raise the stakes in creating stronger mechanisms of exclusion for blue-collar and post-colonial peoples in their struggle for equality of opportunity’” (2001: 78). And already in Australia, there are those questioning whether the 2005 education panic was not also “designed to restrict profound learning to certain groups in our society” (Hooley, 2005: 4).

Today, where Australia does not fare well in international testing is around this very notion of equity. In the PISA results quoted at the beginning of this chapter, there are areas of concern. In PISA 2000 the ACT consistently achieved the highest results and the NT the lowest. There was a large difference between the ACT and the NT in the reading proficiency levels attained. While there was no significant difference between Australian boys' and girls' performance in mathematical and scientific literacy, girls performed significantly better than boys in reading literacy, as they did in every country participating in PISA. Indigenous students performed at a lower level than non-Indigenous students. The mean socio-economic status (SES) of Indigenous students was lower than that of non-Indigenous students and the former’s results were below the OECD mean.

In addition,

- the relationship between SES and achievement in reading is high in Australia;
- apart from gender in relation to reading literacy, the most important student background variable in relation to achievement in Australia was SES, based on parents' occupations;
- variance in achievement between schools in Australia is largely explained by differences in SES at both student and school levels;
- the SES of a school’s student population was a stronger predictor of student performance than individual background;
- school related variables that were associated with student achievement were also dominated by SES;
- results suggested that the impact of educational experiences on student performance is probably greatest for students from lower SES.

In PISA 2003 gender differences in reading literacy were again large and larger than the OECD average: 19% of Australian females and 11% of males performed at the highest Level (5), while 7% of Australian females and 17% of males performed below proficiency Level 2. Indigenous students again scored lower than non-Indigenous students.
Barry McGaw, an Australian and Director of Education for the OECD, shows that, based on PISA terms, Australia is a "high quality, low equity" country educationally - we do extremely well on the tests in general, but the gap between our highest and lowest scorers puts us among inequitable nations. With respect to the 2000 PISA, for example, McGaw argues that Australia is highly stratified educationally - certainly as stratified as the US and UK - and that such countries can be guilty of conveying educational advantage where social advantage already exists (McGaw, 2004b). In the case of Australia, McGaw shows, the rate of payoff in increased literacy from increased social advantage is even greater at higher levels of social advantage (McGaw, 2004b) - in other words, the more you already have, the more education in this country adds to your advantages. There is, of course, a link between SES and literacy achievement in all countries. Nevertheless, there are countries who appear in the PISA results as both ‘high-quality' and 'high equity’. The existence of such countries demonstrates that there is no necessary trade off between quality and equity in educational provision. It is possible to achieve both together. Australia is not among these countries. In other words, Australia has an education system in which social background has a significantly greater influence on educational achievement than in the OECD as a whole. Students from disadvantaged backgrounds are much better provided for by the education systems of other high performing countries like Finland, Korea, Japan, Canada and Ireland. In Australia, says McGaw, we have "ignored equity" (McGaw, 2004b).

Moreover, argues McGaw (2004b), PISA results show that early stratification into schools of different types, while it might be intended to provide in the most appropriate way for individual differences, tends to exacerbate differences among students, to produce low average performances and to reproduce the existing social arrangements with the socially disadvantaged placed in low-status schools where they achieve low-level results.

McGaw argues for systematic research into “what works” in education, especially research which involves teachers in themselves examining their practices. This is clearly the case in Finland, where teachers have played a front-stage role in that country’s success. Teaching is a high-status profession there. Entry to teacher education is highly competitive, all teachers graduate with Master’s degrees, and they are given considerable freedom to innovate in their professional practice (McGaw 2004a). Given the level of teacher-bashing that has
characterised Australia in 2005, it is worth noting such a correlation of teacher professionalism with PISA results.

Finally, it is worth remembering that the groups shown to be consistently disadvantaged in Australian literacy testing are: boys relative to girls; students from low SES backgrounds relative to students from high SES backgrounds, NESB students and Indigenous students relative to the rest of the population. The current government has made the education of boys a research funding priority, but, as we have seen above, postcode (and its international equivalents) is always a decisive factor in literacy results. This was true in Australia in 1975, is true today and is true internationally. However, in some countries, such as Finland, governments set out to address educational inequality. Yet, in Australia, governmental retreat from supporting public institutions since the rise of monetarism has exacerbated the relative disadvantage of low SES groups. It is public policy, not teachers, which creates relative disadvantage and makes Australia a low equity country. Rather than bashing teachers who are already doing a good job, it is public policy around lost notions of equity that need to be addressed if Australia is to turn around its real areas of need in literacy.

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"Uni may insist on literacy exams". *Daily Mirror*, 20/10/1976.
Articles from *ACES Review*


Williams, J.K. (1977). "Imparting basic skills". *ACES Review*, 4:1 pp.8-10
In the following list, some articles mount the attacks, while others simply report them as coming from politicians and others.

As a glance at the reference list shows, Slattery was particularly volatile on the weekend of 23-14 July. One attack was mainly directed at the teaching resource, *From picture book to literary theory* edited by Ken Watson and John Stephens. One wonders if this attack – published in *The Australian* – was an embarrassment to the newspaper proprietors, as the book received a Special Commendation in *The Australian*’s own awards for Educational Publishing in 1994. Not only did Slattery take 11 years to criticise the book, he appeared to have forgotten that he is listed as one of the 1994 award judges.

Interestingly enough, Ken Rowe, chair of Minister Nelson’s own 2005 Literacy Inquiry (see Cambourne, Ch. 9, this volume), has referred to “Australian politicians … advocating the publication of such performance information in the form of ‘league tables’ (as) naively, and in typical fashion, stomping around in an uninformed epistemopathological fog” (2000b: 46) and he has detailed the “prevailing social and political atmosphere of blame, recrimination and retribution” (2000a: 76) that has accompanied league table publication in Britain. Rowe lists among the impact of ‘league tables’:

- Political and media ‘bashing’ of schools and teachers
- A test-dominated curriculum
- Overt lobbying of the government by principals of non-selective schools to ‘select’ up to twenty per cent of their school enrolments in an attempt to improve their schools’ rankings on the ‘league tables’, with direct refusals to enrol ‘low-achievers’ - and schools concentrating their efforts on those students considered capable of improving their average examination and test scores, while giving less attention to those perceived less likely to improve.
- Parents ‘voting with their feet’ on the basis of ‘league table’ rankings (Rowe, 2000a: 76)

“Value-addedness” – a nicely economic rationalist term – measures the difference in scores between one test and another, so that schools with low scoring students on a first test might still show up well with strong positive differences on a second test. “Absolute” scores score only actual results.

In fact, periodic literacy crises have become so regular in Australia that one might be tempted to problematise the whole notion of “crisis” as any kind of decisive turning point. Nevertheless, particular historical key moments are identifiable and the “crisis” of the mid-1970s was particularly volatile in the way it played out in the media, thus providing a good parallel to the relentlessness of 2005.

The reader should note that pages in Green, Hodgens and Luke (1994) are not numbered.
The only exception to this is Donnelly’s attempts to discredit the tests on the rather odd grounds that tests of reading comprehension did not take account of spelling. Given that PISA is a comparative study, test conditions need to be the same for all countries, so that, even if the spelling criterion were relevant, unless it could be proven that Australian students were actually worse than other students – which Donnelly does not do – all comparative scores still apply. See Donnelly, 25/11/2005.

To be fair, Dunn’s rejection of research such as Harris’ was based on his own research conducted on students at a CAE (Dunn, 1975).

One writer even blamed "the very narrow lives teachers experience in relation to the rest of the community" (Firkins, 1977: 5).