

THE HISTORY OF EDUCATION  
IN NEW SOUTH WALES  
IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

Day? →  
Time?

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CLASS: AUSTRALIAN HISTORY  
LECTURER: MS M HENRY

Used,

The educational system of New South Wales grew out of the social conditions of a pioneering country. The harsh environment and shortage of labour encouraged state intervention to assist with development. The lack of leisure in the busy pioneering years resulted in 'brief schooling attendance'. The first schools, in Sydney and Parramatta, were built six years after arrival of the British. The 1800's still saw irregular attendance, short schooling hours and a limited variety of subjects. By the early 1900's some attempt was made to improve the academic level of education. School fees were abolished, scholarships were established and universities expanded as more students took up higher education. By 1950 advanced education became significantly important for economic development and there was a tendency to stay on longer at school. From the 1950's to the present there has been an increase in adult education due to economic unrest, high unemployment and because the majority of employers require employees to have attained higher educational qualifications<sup>2</sup>

In 1911 High School fees were abolished and more scholarships became available under the Bursary Endowment Act of 1912.<sup>3</sup> Bursaries of £30 a year enabled children to attend a District School for two years, transferring to a High School for another two years where they were finally able to sit for the Leaving Certificate examination, enabling them to enter University.

The Bursary Act of 1912 broadened the road to

<sup>1</sup> Dept of Public Instruction, Three Years of Education, Sydney, 1913, p 5

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p 7

higher education.<sup>4</sup>

The first Leaving Certificate examination was held in November 1912 and marked the completion of four years of study. If subjects taken were those required by a University, the Leaving Certificate was held to be the equivalent of matriculation<sup>5</sup>. In addition to this, the Leaving Certificate gave pupils entrance to a Teachers' College and was accepted by commercial houses as the equivalent of the Chamber of Commerce, Bankers Institute, and Insurance Examinations.<sup>6</sup>

In 1913 Evening Continuation Schools began operation and were largely attended by pupils, about the age of 14, who were engaged in employment during the day.<sup>7</sup> The courses provided for women included cookery, art and home decoration, child care, dressmaking, millinery and home management. Among the things the women learnt in these classes were the proper way to clean cutlery and how to fold a table napkin artistically.<sup>8</sup> A small fee was charged for these classes but was refunded at the end of the year to those pupils whose attendance and conduct were considered satisfactory<sup>9</sup>

In 1916 compulsory attendance at primary schools was made effective by the Public Instruction Act. It was the parents responsibility to send children aged between seven and 14 years to school. Attendance officers were given the right to stop children found in the streets during school hours and fines were given to parents.<sup>10</sup> By 1921 there were high schools in most country towns and rural schools offered courses for girls in horticulture

<sup>4</sup> *ibid*, p 8

<sup>5</sup> *ibid*, p 9

<sup>7</sup> *ibid*, p 17

<sup>8</sup> *ibid*, p 19

<sup>9</sup> *ibid*, p 19

and domestic science."

In the 1920's vocational opportunities for women in the professions widened and more girls aspired to a university education.<sup>12</sup> The Depression of the 30's saw pupils staying on longer at school. There was a rise in University enrolments and in some faculties there were fears of overcrowding of particular professions. Arts was the major faculty and women normally outnumbered men.<sup>13</sup> The lack of men during World War II produced a shortage of teachers and as a wartime emergency married women teachers returned to teach. The entry of male students during the war years was restricted.<sup>14</sup> When the war ended educational development occurred in higher education. The University, technical colleges and teachers' colleges rapidly expanded. Student numbers increased after the war and restricted enrolments declined. The Fifties saw a rapid increase in student numbers in Technical Education Colleges and Teachers' Colleges, brought about by the war with its need for qualified technicians and teachers.<sup>15</sup>

In the early 40's compulsory attendance from six to 15 years was introduced and by the 1950's rising enrolments began to affect all levels of schooling. Immigration, a sharp rise in birthrates, and students staying on in school for a higher education created an increase in numbers. Pupils were inclined to stay on because of the growing demand by employers for people with higher qualifications.<sup>16</sup> The Education Act of 1961

<sup>11</sup> A Barcan, A Short History of Education in NSW, Sydney, 1965, p 228

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*, p 234

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*, p 248

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*, p 250

implemented a further two years of study and pupils sat for the first Higher School Certificate examinations in 1967.<sup>17</sup>

The mid sixties saw a significant rise in enrolments in W.E.A. courses and other adult education courses. Advanced education increased in popularity and Australians were becoming more interested in learning and the possibility of furthering their career prospects.<sup>18</sup> Today, in the 1980's, the importance and popularity of further education is even more prominent due to economic instability, technological advancement and the decline in unskilled labour. Interest in special entry and mature-age matriculation had increased in the seventies and the University of Newcastle responded to this demand. In 1975 the University of Newcastle announced in the press that the Open Foundation Course would begin operation which brought rapid and substantial response from the public.<sup>19</sup>

In the first year of the course, forty-five from the original eighty enrolled, completed the course, and of these, forty-one matriculated. The following year saw 160 people enrolled and thereafter increased every year to reach 400 students in 1988. The course offers a range of subjects of which students are required to complete two. The course enables students entry into an Arts, Commerce or Architecture course. The Open Foundation Course, an introduction to University life which is offered to a wide spectrum of people, has proved successful.<sup>20</sup> The course gives students the opportunity to re-direct their

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, p 300

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, p 305

<sup>19</sup> B Smith, Mature-Age Matriculation Programme, University of Newcastle, 1987, p 4

lives and society gains a considerable pool of talent that had been lost by the system.<sup>21</sup> The possibility of transferring from an Arts degree to a Medicine degree, providing the student has shown high academic ability, has given people with no formal high school qualifications the chance to embark on a career which would normally be closed to them elsewhere in Australia.<sup>22</sup>

Education in Australia is finally having an impact on not only school-aged people but also older people. More women are embarking on a University career which will ultimately enhance their lives and the overall quality of life for the community. The Open Foundation course has provided students with a vast amount of valuable information, given them a sense of achievement and pride, and also given them the opportunity to meet a lot of interesting people. The door to a better education, particularly for mature-age students has been opened by the introduction of the Newcastle University's Open Foundation Course.

21 Ibid, p. 39

22 Ibid, p. 38

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OPEN FOUNDATION HISTORY PROJECT

Early Education and Open Foundation Studies - Women's Education

Mrs Mildred Storer, B.A.

Cathy Abra

Wednesday Night Class

Lecturer: Ms M HENRY



Mildred Storer was born Mildred Irene Deason in Melbourne in 1914. She had two sisters whom she was very close to. Her parents, who were keen naturalists, introduced her to nature and took her on many gold fossicking trips.

Mildred's father gained his gold mining engineers ticket from the Ballarat School of Mines. It has been recorded in history that Mildred's great grandfather found the largest gold nugget in the world although the family story is that her grandfather found it when he was nine years old. Both sides of her parents' families had a gold mining background.

Mildred's mother did not pursue an academic education but was told by her stepfather that housekeeping, sewing, cooking and cleaning was the only education a woman needed.

Mildred found school life mundane. One aspect of primary school she did enjoy was nature studies. Every morning the children were asked what they had observed in the way of nature on their way to school. She feels this lack of awareness of nature is missing in modern education. Mildred did the qualifying certificate at East Malvern School and then went on to Gardner Central School which offered a diverse range of subjects. She was not encouraged to go on at school because her father thought this was enough education for her. Mildred was given lessons in singing, music, ballroom dancing, elocution and cooking to prepare her for married life. She worked as a piano teacher and dressmaker before marrying in Hay at the age of 24.

Mildred and her husband were living in Newcastle at the time of the war. As a mother of three young children the lack of transport, shopping facilities and home services during the war made life hard. Her house, with its raised verandah, served as an air-raid shelter for her neighbours. Mildred's dressmaking experience was put to good use and she often swapped clothing and drapery coupons with other people for tea and butter coupons.

She held a position at Lysaghts Pty Ltd in Mayfield where she was editor

of the Lysaght Gazette and later became the female employment officer. Her duties included interviewing employees and photographing the damage caused by the floods in 1955. She also helped with problems the women in the plant were experiencing especially those who were afraid to admit they were pregnant for fear of losing their job or being relegated to lighter and lower paying duties.

Mildred travelled overseas and returned to work at the Royal Prince Alfred Hospital in Sydney for over eleven years. She retired in Newcastle and entered the Open Foundation course in 1981. Mildred studied Philosophy which was completely new and very challenging to her, and English which she found a sheer delight.

Mildred went on to University to do a Bachelor of Arts degree studying English, History, Drama and Classics over a six year period. She found Classics an eye-opener and received encouragement and support from the Department. She enjoyed the tutorials and exchanging ideas with her fellow students in Stan's Bar.

Mildred believes more career opportunities are available to the women of today but feels they should follow their own instincts and not feel they have to copy men to achieve success. Her advice to new students is to give their heart and soul to their studies and to broaden their interests by joining some of the groups on campus.

Mildred qualified for her degree in 1987 and attended the graduation ceremony held in April the following year. Sheer hard work and support from family, friends and academic staff helped her achieve her goal.

As a student about to embark on a University education it was a delight and inspiration to make her acquaintance.

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OPEN FOUNDATION COURSE

1988

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Date 31st July, 1988

Interviewer Cathy Abra