

20th Century Australian History Education

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## 20th Century Australian History Education

The Australian educational system has undergone many changes over the past 250 years.<sup>1</sup> In order to show how far Australia has come in education, it is important to reflect back on the historical journey that will move one across the barriers of age and gender, time and space, and race and wealth. In order to witness the evolution of the Australian education system, it is significant to travel back throughout Australia's history.

The beginning of the twentieth century in Australia was marked by international wars in conjunction with an increase in internal stresses and conflicts among racial, social, and ideological groups.<sup>2</sup> These factors led to drastic effects on Australian education. Some of the changes, which resulted into far reaching effects, included the fast spreading prosperity with the effect of widening gaps between the poor and the rich, the massive growth in the world population but a decreasing birth rate in Australia, the growth of large scale industry and its reliance on human labor and advancements in science and technology, the rapidly increasing power of international business and organized labor, and the immense influence of both socio-psychological and technical advances in communication, majorly in the mass media.<sup>3</sup>

Other noticeable pivotal changes were different challenges to accepted values, such as the ones supported by religion, and alterations in social relations, mainly towards the types of

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<sup>1</sup> Bessant B., and Spaul, A.D., *Politics of Schooling* (Melbourne: Pitman Australia, 1976).

<sup>2</sup> Simon Marginson, *Educating Australia: Government, Economy and Citizen since 1960* (Cambridge University Press, 1997).

<sup>3</sup> Craig Campbell and Helen Proctor, *A History of Australian Schooling* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2013).

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individual and group equality.<sup>4</sup> Besides all these changes, there was an explosion of knowledge that influenced standards and particular information. These changes led to the period of political and social swings in Australia.<sup>5</sup> These challenges were geared towards a less categorical and more dynamic resolution. The institutional ways of dealing with this tentative world was accepting more diversity while relying on management proficiency to ensure practical educational outcomes.

The end of the twentieth century in Australia was marked by inclusivism and the idea of education for all.<sup>6</sup> By 1910, kindergartens were introduced in the majority of public school programs. In addition, the state started to control free public education. Moreover, school attendance became mandatory. In other words, education became universal. Parochial schools as well as other private leaning institutions emerged as viable educational options. As a result, public schools stopped forcing parents to take their children to those schools. Education continuation also improved further thanks to the fact that all racial, ethnic, and religious groups in Australia were allowed to have access to similar types of education and in similar types of setting. This encouraged many learners to continue their studying. Because of these changes in the education sphere, education in the early preschool years improved as well. The number of programs for early childhood development increased. On the other end of the field, higher education after completion of high school became more attainable to a bigger number of individuals.

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<sup>4</sup> Craig Campbell and Geoffrey Sherington, *The Comprehensive Public High School: Historical Perspectives, Secondary Education in a Changing World* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).

<sup>5</sup> Pavla Miller, *Long Division: State Schooling in South Australian Society* (Adelaide: Wakefield Press, 1986).

<sup>6</sup> Campbell and Sherington. *The Comprehensive Public High School*.

Between 1900 and 1996, the percentage of teenagers that cleared high school rose from approximately 6 percent to around 45 percent.<sup>7</sup> By the end of the twentieth century, Australia took a more active regulatory role in comparison with the past. Firstly, it consolidated district schools into larger entities with common procedures. By 1940, more than 116,000 district schools were registered in Australia.<sup>8</sup> By 1990, this number increased to over 117,000. Additionally, the state became more accountable for financing education. In the early twentieth century, local property taxes sponsored 68 percent of public school expenses, whereas the state sponsored only 25 percent. By 1990, the state and local districts contributed forty six percent each.<sup>9</sup> The federal government funded most of the remaining amount.

By the 1920s, schools were consolidated into larger districts by the state because of the invention of the automobile.<sup>10</sup> School busses gave room for the growth of the public school system. This was achieved through transportation of students who lived in the rural areas to schools. The very first school buses were driven by horses. Later on in the 1950s, modern school buses emerged.<sup>11</sup> These incentives allowed students to have a motivational surge to continue with their education after graduating from high schools. In the mid 1920s, the Supreme Court ruling was made. This ruling barred the state from compelling children to join public schools. Instead, children could join private schools. Instruction was also to be provided for different

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<sup>7</sup> Julie McLeod and Lyn Yates, *Making Modern Lives: Subjectivity, Schooling and Social Change* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2006).

<sup>8</sup> David Kirk, *Schooling Bodies: School Practice and Public Discourse, 1880–1950*. (Leicester Educational Research, 1993).

<sup>9</sup> Kirk, *Schooling Bodies*.

<sup>10</sup> Kirk, *Schooling Bodies*.

<sup>11</sup> Campbell and Sherington, *The Comprehensive Public High School*.

religious denominations.<sup>12</sup> Better still, education was to be offered to both the poor and the wealthy. These initiatives served as alternatives for those students who found the initial education forms unsatisfactory. From 1924 to the 1970s, the bureau of Australian affairs controlled education.<sup>13</sup> Afterwards, communities ran reservation schools under local education departments. To further enroll many learners and ensure continuity in education, a task force was formed to investigate the problems related to school dropout rates.

It is worthy to mention that the government also passed the secondary and elementary school act. This act sought to assist disadvantaged children to realize higher standards in education. The act offered new educational support to poor students who were willing to study but were unable to continue their education. Moreover, many schools implemented bilingual programs of education. In 1975, the Supreme Court passed a ruling that prohibited schools to discriminate non-English speakers.<sup>14</sup> The ruling maintained that such students had the rights to equal educational opportunities, their teachers' respectful attitude, and sufficient special instruction.

With the increased number of students enrolling in various learning institutions, there was a demand for larger schools and more teachers. As a result, the integration started becoming a nationwide standard making the number of public learning institutions increase dramatically. Various well-wishers also allocated significant amounts of funds to break the poverty cycle.<sup>15</sup> In addition, education became one of the sectors of the Australian economy that received more

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<sup>12</sup> Marginson, *Educating Australia*.

<sup>13</sup> Kirk, *Schooling Bodies*.

<sup>14</sup> Campbell and Sherington, *The Comprehensive Public High School*.

<sup>15</sup> McLeod and Yates. *Making Modern Lives*.

allocation of funds. The government also introduced various programs to offer subsidized school lunches. In the mid 1970s, a law that advocated for education for handicapped children was passed.<sup>16</sup> According to the law, such children had to be educated as far as they could learn. In addition, they had personalized educational plans created to fit their individual needs. In the same year, an act that demanded that access to educational programs was not to be made based on gender was formed.<sup>17</sup> Before the implementation of this law, females had limited chances of taking part in school sports, since the funding was not equal and favored males instead. All these factors played key roles in motivating Australian young people to continue their education.

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<sup>16</sup> Bessant and Spaul, *Politics of Schooling*.

<sup>17</sup> Campbell and Proctor, *A History of Australian Schooling*.

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