Films with students, teachers and schooling

Australia, 1920-2010

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Australian films have depicted schools, teachers and school students at least from the 1920s. The films listed here are not documentaries, nor are they the films usually produced by state education departments for school use.

The representations of schools, teachers and students in these feature films derive from a range of sources that include the creative imaginations of the writers, directors and actors, among many others, who made them. Very few of these films would have involved historians in their making although aspects of these films such as decisions about costuming and settings often were historically informed.

Nevertheless the representations of schooling in films such as those listed below may be a guide to both common and uncommon understandings about how schooling operated historically. In some cases, popular films, such as the seminal Picnic at Hanging Rock (1975) and The Devil's Playground (1976) may have had an enduring and powerful effect on the ways that film audiences respectively imagine private girls’ schooling in the late nineteenth century, or Catholic boys’ schooling in the middle of the twentieth century. Such films are historical artefacts of cultural significance in their own right, but their relationship to the results of scholarly research in Australian educational history are variable.

The following list is not exhaustive. Information given includes the title of the film, its year of release, its director and a very brief description of its themes or plot as it relates to schools, teachers and school students. Films considered by the author of this entry to be of most interest to historians of education are marked with an asterisk.

Before 1970

- The Man from Kangaroo, dir. Wilfred Lucas, 1920. A priest teaches boys to box and demonstrates other athletic skills.
- Around the Boree Log, dir. Phil K. Walsh, 1925. In a one teacher Catholic bush school, a male teacher works with boys and girls. From poems of the 1870s set in rural NSW.
- The Adventures of Dot, dir. Cyril Sharpe and others, 1927. Young female teacher and a wide variety of real school children in each of the towns.
- Dad Rudd, dir. Ken G. Hall, 1940. One of the characters, Ann Rudd is a school teacher.
- ‘Jedda’, dir. Charles Chauvel, 1955. An Aboriginal girl raised by a white family, including her ‘home schooling’. She is taught as if a white girl to separate her from her people.
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1970-1979

- Sunstruck, dir James Gilbert, 1972. A shy Welsh immigrant is posted to a one teacher school in Kookaburra Springs. Film was inspired by a NSW government poster to attract UK teachers to Australia.
• **The Great McCarthy**, dir. David Baker, 1975. A football recruit into the city has an affair with his night school teacher, among others.
• *The Devil’s Playground*, dir. Fred Schepisi, 1976. A boy is introduced to oppressive culture of a Catholic all male boarding school run by brothers, set in the middle of the twentieth century.
• **Storm Boy**, dir. Henri Sanfran, 1976. Film includes primary school scene, teachers and students and classroom, probably set in the 1960s.
• **Summerfield**, dir. Ken Hannan, 1977. Teacher as sleuth in a small country town following the mysterious disappearance of the teacher he replaced.
• *My Brilliant Career*, dir. Gillian Armstrong, 1979. The heroine is educated towards her natural destiny, a wife and mother, and property. The destiny is resisted. Sybilla spends some time teaching the children of an isolated rural family. Based on Miles Franklin’s novel of the same name.
• **Maybe this time**, dir. Chris McGill, 1979 A female assistant to a university professor explores life. One character is a country school teacher.

1980-1989

• **Moving Out**, dir. Michael Pattinson, 1982. A teenager of Italian background comes to terms with school, friendships, and his shame about his Italian heritage.
• **Fighting Back**, dir. Michael Caulfield, 1982. Young, idealistic and progressive Special Education teacher helps a disturbed boy from a broken and abusive home to find himself. In the process he must leave the jaded and unhelpful state school system.
• **Careful He Might Hear You**, dir. Carl Schultz, 1983. As part of his transition to the home of his wealthy aunt, the boy is enrolled in an upper class boys school. Set in 1930s Sydney.
• **Annie’s Coming Out**, dir. Gil Brealey, 1984. A young woman with cerebral palsy and her teacher’s fight for her to be released from an institution.
• **Slate, Wyn and Me**, dir. Don McLennan, 1986. A female primary school teacher in a small town, witness to a murder, is kidnapped by then perpetrators.
• *The Fringe Dwellers*, dir. Bruce Beresford, 1986. Members of an Aboriginal family seek a different and better life. Education might provide a way. Scenes with students, classrooms, teachers and schools.
• **Mull (aka Mullaway)**, dir. Don McLennan, 1988. A teenage girl is forced to leave school and care for her family when her mother is diagnosed with a terminal disease.
• *Flirting*, dir. John Duigan, 1989. All-boys boarding school setting in rural New South Wales with school students, teachers and classroom scenes. Set in the 1960s. The hero falls in love with a girl from a nearby single sex girls school.

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1990-1999

- **You Can’t Push the River**, dir. Leslie Oliver, 1992. A new student appears in school. The ecology of rivers is part of the story as the teacher has an impact on the hero, Tony.
- **Love in Limbo**, dir. David Elphick, 1993. Set in Perth in 1957, the 16 year old hero is very interested in sex. He goes to school until he is expelled for selling girlie pictures to his classmates.
- **The Heartbreak Kid**, dir. Michael Jenkins, 1993. Greek-Australian school teacher and student are attracted to one another. School and classroom settings.
- **Girl**, dir. Peter Thompson, 1996. The story of three best girl friends while in Year 8 at school.
- **Love and Other Catastrophes**, dir. Emma-Kate Grogan, 1996. 24 hours of student life at University: students and teachers at Melbourne University.
- **Shine**, dir. Scott Hicks, 1996. Some scenes with music students and their teachers.
- **Dead Heart**, dir. Nick Parsons, 1996. An Aboriginal teacher’s aide has an affair with the white schoolteacher’s wife. Law and indigenous culture clash. Set in the outback.

2000-2010

- **“Looking for Alibrandi**,** dir. Kate Woods, 2000. Enrolled in an exclusive Catholic school, the girl learns about life from fellow students and teachers. She meets up with a boy from a public high school. Social class and schooling the theme as well as public and private, Anglo- and non-Anglo Australian backgrounds.
- **My Mother Frank**, dir. Mark Lamprell, 2000. A mature age female university student negotiates other students (including her son) and a university professor.
- **Blurred**, dir. Evan Clary, 2002. Groups of school leavers travel to ‘schoolies week’ on the Gold Coast in Queensland for a ‘party’ to end their schooldays.
- **“Hating Alison Ashby**,** dir. Geoff Bennett, 2005. State secondary school. Erika with fantasies of stardom feels intense rivalry for a new girl, Alison Ashley, who appears to have it all.
- **Like Minds**, dir Gregory J. Read, 2006. A psychologist seeks to determine whether a not a minor should face murder charges for killing his schoolmate.
- **“2.37**, dir. Murakl K. Thaluri, 2006. A day at school for several teenagers. Some of the issues raised include bulimia, gay sexuality and youth suicide.
- **Bran Nue Dae**, dir. Rachel Perkins, 2009. Set in the late 1960s, an Aboriginal youth is sent away from home for schooling. Filmed at Clontarf Aboriginal College in Western Australia.
- **“Wasted on the Young**,** dir. Ben C. Lucas, 2010. A female student at an elite private school is raped in group of jocks at the school. The step brother of one of the rapists searches for justice.

**Note:**
This list was compiled from a multitude of sources as cited in Josephine May, *Reel Schools: Schooling and the Nation in Australian Cinema* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2013). There are full lists of Australian feature films, a grid from Moviemen Australia (first accessed 26/11/09 not now available) and the “inclusive list of Australasian feature films” by Gary Gillard at [http://ozcin.net/filmsoz.html](http://ozcin.net/filmsoz.html) and the anonymous entry at...
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Australian_films. The Internet Movie Database http://www.imdb.com/ was also used.

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Citation of this entry


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