

# Films with students, teachers and schooling

## Australia, 1920-2010

Josephine May PhD  
University of Newcastle

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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.
- **Grandad Rudd**, dir. Ken G. Hall, 1935. Scenes with schoolmaster.
- **Seven Little Australians**, dir. Arthur Grenville Collins, 1939. School-aged children and a boarding school for the eldest.
- **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.
- **\*Smiley**, dir. Anthony Kimmins, 1956. The boy Smiley attends a bush public school. Classroom scenes, teachers and Sunday school.
- **Smiley Gets a Gun**, dir. Anthony Kimmins, 1958. Smiley at his bush school with fellow students, and teachers.

### 1970-1979

- **Jack and Jill: A Postscript**, dir. Phillip Adams & Brian Robinson, 1970. Jill is a kindergarten teacher and Jack is a motorbike riding delinquent.
- **Walkabout**, dir. Nicolas Roeg, 1971. Brother and sister lost in the bush, meeting up with an Aboriginal boy. School uniforms signify the return to civilisation. Coming-of-age, sexuality and family.
- **\*Wake in Fright**, dir. Ted Kotcheff, 1971. Government bonded teacher takes up his position in an outback town. He is brutalized by the male ('ocker') culture he finds there.
- **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.

- **Petersen**, dir. Tim Burstall, 1974. University students and their teachers. A social drama.
- **\*Picnic at Hanging Rock**, dir. Peter Weir, 1975. Girls and their teachers in a private girls boarding school in the countryside, set in late nineteenth century. Romance and mystery.
- **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, students and classroom, probably set in the 1960s.
- **The Mango Tree**, dir. Kevin Dobson, 1977. Set in a Queensland town in World War I, includes scenes with students, teachers and classrooms.
- **\*The Getting of Wisdom**, dir. Bruce Beresford, 1977. Much of the film set in a middle and ruling class girls church school based on Presbyterian Ladies College, Melbourne. From Henry Handel Richardson's novel of the same name.
- **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

- **Puberty Blues**, dir. Bruce Beresford, 1981. High school girls. Scenes with students, teachers and classrooms. Set in 1970s.
- **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.
- **The Winds of Jarrah**, dir. Mark Egerton, 1984. An English woman is teacher and governess to the three children of a timber merchant. Set in the 1940s. Romantic melodrama.
- **\*Fast Talking**, dir. Ken Cameron, 1984. Realist teen drama with teachers and high school. Shot in Sydney.
- **\*Fortress**, dir. Arch Nicholson, 1985. From a single-teacher bush school, children are kidnapped by masked gunmen. The film is loosely based on the 1972 Faraday School kidnapping.
- **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.
- **For Love Alone**, dir. Stephen Wallace, 1986. A female public school teacher looks to the university and her tutor for a life beyond school teaching. Set in the 1930s. Based on Christina Stead's novel of the same name.
- **\*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.
- **The Bit Part**, dir. Brendan Maher, 1986. A school careers counsellor yearns to become a successful actor.
- **\*The Year My Voice Broke**, dir. John Duigan, 1987. A growing up story, a boy in a small town 1962 goes to high school and experiences unrequited love.
- **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.
- **The Everlasting Secret Family**, dir. Michael Thornhill, 1988. Old boys of "St Michael's School for Boys", teachers and students are engaged in a homosexual network and conspiracy.
- **Grievous Bodily Harm**, dir. Mark Joffe, 1988. A deranged school teacher, a murderer, is tracked down.
- **\*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.

## 1990-1999

- **Bloodmoon**, dir. Alec Mills, 1990. Teen slasher film set between a Catholic girls, and a comprehensive public school.
- **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.
- **\*No Worries**, dir. David Elfick, 1992. Features male and female primary teachers; a bush school and an inner city public school. Multicultural and city versus the bush themes.
- **Love in Limbo**, dir. David Elphick, 1993. Set in Perth in 1957, the 16 year old hero is very interested 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.
- **\*Only the Brave**, dir. Ana Kokkinos, 1994. Two girls growing up and their sexual emergence. Scenes with secondary school teachers in a multicultural urban setting.
- **Mary: The Inspiring Life of Mary MacKillop**, dir. Kay Pavlou, 1995. Story of Australia's first saint, Sister Mary MacKillop, founder of the teaching order, the Sisters of Saint Joseph.
- **Mary MacKillop: That Very Troublesome Woman**, dir. John Mabey, 1996. Julian Tenison Woods met Mary MacKillop in 1860, when she was 19. They established the Sisterhood of St Joseph, nuns devoted to bring an education to Catholics.
- **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.
- **\*Kick**, dir. Lynda Heys, 1998. School rugby player, dux and school captain at "Lawley Grammar School" in Sydney, really wants to be a ballet dancer.

## 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.
- **Travelling Light**, dir. Kathryn Millard, 2003. Set in Adelaide in the early 1970s. Bored teenagers, trainee teacher, practicum, school students, teachers and classrooms.
- **\*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. Murali K. Thalluri, 2006. A day at school for several teenagers. Some of the issues raised include bulimia, gay sexuality and youth suicide.
- **\*Hey, Hey, It's Esther Blueburger**, dir. Cathy Randall, 2008. Filmed on locations that included three Adelaide schools. Jewish 13-year-old Esther, an outcast at her exclusive school meets a nonconformist from the local public school.
- **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 by a 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 Moviemenu 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> and the anonymous entry at

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_Australian\\_films](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Australian_films). The Internet Movie Database <http://www.imdb.com/> was also used.

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