Seen but not Heard: Schoolteachers in the News

A historical analysis of *The West Australian* newspaper's perspectives on teachers in its coverage from 1987 to 2007

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ABSTRACT

Teachers in Australia and internationally have expressed frustration at a perceived negative focus in news media coverage of education and teachers. They have also reported that news media coverage about teachers and schooling can affect their relationships with families, friends and the community. Despite this, few studies have examined the nature of news coverage relating to teachers. This thesis aimed to make a significant contribution to the field by providing a detailed analysis of a major newspaper’s coverage of teachers over a 20-year period, and comparing that to the dominant images of teachers in the educational research literature, popular culture and other news media.

The thesis examined the portrayal of public school teachers in news articles and editorials published in The West Australian newspaper between 1987 and 2007, focusing on the depiction of teachers in the newspaper’s reporting of five education-related topics which were the subject of sustained coverage during years. These topics are: Unit Curriculum (1987-1988), Industrial Action (1995), The Introduction of Standardised Testing (1997-2001); Teacher Shortage (1999-2007); and Outcomes-Based Education (2005-2007). Each of the topics is the basis of a chapter in which relevant background and contextual information is also provided.

The analysis of the reporting of each of the five topics led to the development of a series of propositions about the newspaper’s portrayal of teachers. These are outlined in detail in the relevant chapters, and subsequently allowed for three key representations of teachers to be identified. These can be described as negative representations, sympathetic representations and positive representations. The negative representations
refer to coverage which is overtly critical of teachers such as reporting which condemns teachers for taking industrial action, the sympathetic representations relate to reporting which typically presents teachers as stressed, overburdened and powerless, and the positive representations show teachers as valued by the community and devoted to their students and work.

The central argument of the thesis is that The West Australian’s coverage was dominated by both negative and sympathetic representations of schoolteachers, while positive representations were relatively rare. Overall, the coverage presented a less flattering image of teachers than that which emerges from the educational research literature, yet it provided a more balanced presentation of teachers than the extremes of “hero” and “villain” which tend to dominate popular culture. Its portrayal of teachers was generally consistent with that of other news media, with a movement towards a more sympathetic treatment in recent reporting reflecting a trend also identified in contemporary British newspaper coverage.

Although the sympathetic coverage did recognise the challenges facing teachers, it did not present teaching as a profession in a favourable light. Indeed, the vast majority of the newspaper coverage analysed was critical of the nature of teachers’ working conditions. Across the coverage there was an almost total absence of voices defending teaching, or presenting it as an attractive career option. Also, comments of any type from individual teachers were extremely rare, while frequently reported statements from teacher unions, intent on protecting the interests of their members, ironically added to the image of teaching as a difficult and lowly-paid job.
The West Australian devoted significant attention to teachers and educational issues over the time period analysed yet the coverage ultimately conveyed a message that teachers were powerless and were not being heard. Given the issues with teacher recruitment and retention facing many developed countries, these conclusions are illuminative, having the potential to inform and guide governments, teacher organisations, journalists and journalism educators.
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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Introduction

Over the past three decades, numerous educational researchers\(^1\) in various parts of the English-speaking world have noted a decline in the status of teachers. This has, according to some, led to a “crisis in professional confidence and authority for teachers”\(^2\). The news media, with its influential agenda-setting function,\(^3\) has been seen to have contributed to this perceived crisis.\(^4\) In particular, it has been claimed that media coverage has led to greater scrutiny and criticism of the teaching profession than heretofore, with educators increasingly having to explain and justify their work.


In Australia, teachers have reported perceiving news media coverage as important in shaping public opinion and education policy, as well as affecting their relationships with families, friends and the community. They have also expressed frustration at what they have perceived as a negative focus in coverage. Recognising the influence of media coverage on education and teachers, the (Australian) Schools Council undertook an analysis of 84 articles about education which had been published in newspapers and concluded as follows:

The overall impression to be gained from the print media analysed for this project is that education in Australia is in a state of crisis … There is also a very strong implication that while teachers are underpaid and the profession is suffering from low morale, it is largely the profession’s (and the unions’) fault. This conclusion was reinforced in a subsequent (Australian) Senate Inquiry into the status of the teaching profession, which found that media coverage of teachers was “negative, misleading and ill-informed” and that it influenced parents’ and students’ perceptions of teachers.

Other research has pointed to the growing influence of media coverage on education policy. In a special edition of the Journal of Education Policy in 2004 devoted to exploring the issue, Thomson described education policy and media coverage as

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5 J. Blackmore and S. Thorpe, "Media/ting change: The print media's role in mediating education policy in a period of radical reform in Victoria, Australia," *Journal of Education Policy* 18, no. 6 (2003), 582.
“irrevocably inter-connected”. In the same issue, Lingard and Rawolle contended that media coverage was becoming important in all areas of education policy-making and that in some educational domains media coverage of potential policy areas could serve almost as a “de facto policy”. Research in the area has also indicated that newspaper coverage of educational issues can be particularly influential. Regarding Australia, for example, Snyder, after reviewing media coverage about national literacy standards, concluded that the press “played a critical role in informing and influencing public debate and policy about reading”.

Concurrently, newspaper coverage of education and teaching has been growing. This has been demonstrated in the Australian and British print media, with many newspapers employing dedicated education reporters and publishing education supplements. Editors perceive education issues to be of great interest to their readership and, hence, likely to boost circulation figures.

Given the scenario portrayed so far, it is not surprising that the relationship between education and the media has been the focus of researchers. For some, the interest has been purely sociological. Others have been interested in understanding developments better so that any suggestions for action can be informed by a scholarly body of knowledge. As they have increasingly recognised the influence that the news

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media can have on policy and teaching methods, they have also called for more attention to be devoted to this area of study. In particular, they have called for studies on perspectives on teachers that have been constructed in newspapers. For example, in 2007, Hargreaves et al noted that “while numerous studies have examined the portrayal of teachers in film and other entertainment media content...there have been surprisingly few longitudinal studies of that most prominent and politically important genre of media content: news”. The study reported in this thesis aims to make a significant contribution to this neglected field by providing a detailed analysis of a major Australian newspaper’s coverage of schoolteachers over a 20-year period, and comparing that to the dominant images of teachers found in the educational research literature, popular culture and other news media.

The study focuses specifically on The West Australian newspaper, the only local metropolitan daily newspaper servicing the state of Western Australia. Research has shown that newspapers of this type which have a state-wide circulation can wield influence in a variety of fields, including education. This suggests a wide range of research areas worthy of investigation. What is reported here is a historical analysis of The West Australian newspaper’s perspectives on teachers in its coverage from 1987 to

2007. The focus is on state school teachers. Interestingly, however, this also means that
it dealt with the great majority of the coverage as the analysis indicated the newspaper’s
own focus was primarily directed at this cohort of teachers, rather than those in the non-
government sector.

Five topics were identified as being the subject of sustained coverage in the
newspaper during this period: Unit Curriculum (1987-1989); Industrial Dispute (1995);
The Introduction of Standardised Testing (1998-2001); Teacher Shortage (1999-2007);
and Outcomes-Based Education (2005-2007). A detailed analysis was conducted of the
newspaper’s coverage of each of those topics and was guided by four principal research
questions:

1. What intentions did The West Australian portray as being those which teachers
should have in relation to their work and what reasons were given as to why they
should have these intentions?;

2. What strategies did The West Australian portray as being those which teachers
should adopt in realising such intentions and what reasons were given as to why
they should adopt these strategies?;

3. What significance did The West Australian portray as being that which teachers
should attach to their work and what reasons were given as to why this should be
the case?;

4. What outcomes did The West Australian portray as those which teachers should
expect from their work and what reasons were given as to why they should expect
these outcomes?
Adopting such a research approach differs from the ‘narrative tradition’ in historical research in which arguments about causation are implicit for the most part.\textsuperscript{18} Rather, a ‘social science history’ tradition, where theories, assumptions and methods of analyses are explicit, was deemed more appropriate.

The study accords with the ‘social science history’ tradition in two senses. It will be recalled that the central aim of the study was to provide a historical analysis of \textit{The West Australian} newspaper’s perspectives on teachers in its coverage from 1987 to 2007. To use ‘perspectives’ in this way was to locate it within the interpretivist paradigm. The concept of ‘perspectives’ within this paradigm is viewed as having four main interrelated components, namely, ‘intentions’, ‘strategies’, ‘significance’ and ‘expected’ outcomes.\textsuperscript{19} Accordingly, these components influenced the construction of the guiding questions outlined above. The study also has a social science orientation in the sense that a grounded theory approach was used to analyse the relevant sources.\textsuperscript{20} This approach, as with the research guiding questions, is consistent with the interpretivist paradigm.

The central argument of the thesis is that \textit{The West Australian}’s coverage was dominated both by negative and sympathetic representations of schoolteachers, while positive representations were relatively rare. Overall, the coverage presented a less flattering image of teachers than that which emerges from the educational research literature, yet it provided a more balanced presentation of teachers than the extremes of “hero” and “villain” which tend to dominate popular culture. Its portrayal of teachers

was generally consistent with that of other news media, with a movement towards a more sympathetic treatment in recent reporting reflecting a trend also identified in contemporary British newspaper coverage.

While the sympathetic coverage did recognise the challenges facing teachers, it did not present teaching as a profession in a favourable light. Indeed, the vast majority of the newspaper coverage analysed was either critical of teachers, or of the nature of their work. Across the coverage there was an almost total absence of voices defending teaching, or presenting it as an attractive career option. Also, comments of any type from individual teachers were extremely rare, while frequently reported statements from teacher union representatives, intent on protecting the interests of their members, ironically added to the image of teaching as a difficult and lowly-paid job.

*The West Australian* devoted significant attention to teachers and educational issues over the time period analysed yet the coverage ultimately conveyed a message that teachers are powerless and are not being heard. Given the issues with teacher recruitment and retention facing many developed countries, these conclusions are illuminative, having the potential to inform and guide teachers, teacher organisations, journalists, journalism educators and governments.

The remainder of this introductory chapter is divided into five sections. The first section provides a brief history of public education in Western Australia from its origins in the 1800s to the 1980s, the latter being the starting point of the 20-year period which was the focus of the study. The second section introduces *The West Australian* newspaper and explains its unique position of influence within the State of Western Australia. The third section locates the study within the existing corpus of research
relating to representations of teachers in various domains. In the fourth section, the topics chosen from *The West Australian’s* coverage for analysis are identified and the reasons for their inclusion are outlined. The chapter closes with an explanation of the methodology.

A Brief History of Education in Western Australia

A British penal colony was established in Australia in 1788, when Captain Arthur Phillip and his group of soldiers, sailors and convicts landed where Sydney is today.\textsuperscript{21} After the colony of New South Wales was established, six colonies emerged across Australia, with the government and administration of each being based in the capital cities. By the time the British Government ceased transporting convicts to Australia the white settlers had come to expect the colonial governments would provide public services such as education. By 1850 educational provision was typically a combination of government enterprise, occasional voluntary effort and state assistance to denominational schools in the form of grants being paid to religious schools as contribution to teachers’ salaries and building costs. This situation arose after the Anglican, Presbyterian and Catholic Churches argued that the control of teaching was their responsibility, as education and moral training were inseparable. The situation was to not to last, however. A growth in government preference for non-denominational education between 1872 and 1893 led to the abolition of financial aid to denominational schools in each colony. By Federation, in 1901, each Australian state including Western

\textsuperscript{21} The remainder of this paragraph is based on the account in T.A. Donoghue, *Upholding the Faith: The Process of Education in Catholic Schools in Australia, 1922-65* (New York: Peter Lang, 2001), 1-2.
Australia had developed a system of primary schools providing free compulsory and secular primary education under the control of government departments.

In Western Australia the first school opened in 1830. It was not until 1847, however, that the public school system formally became a State responsibility and a Central Board of Education was established. Initially, the government limited its financial support to non-sectarian schools but that assistance was extended to schools of Christian denomination on a number of occasions between 1849 and 1895. The Central Board was replaced by the (Western Australian State) Education Department in 1893. This coincided with a time of significant growth in the state as its population swelled with the Gold Rush of the 1880s and 1890s. The number of schools grew from 60 in 1872 to 218 by 1900. Cyril Jackson, appointed Head of the Education Department in 1896, oversaw much of this development and was to have a lasting influence on education in the state. Under his direction, the Claremont Teachers’ Training College was opened in February 1902, in an effort to address ongoing issues of primary school teacher recruitment and training.

Cecil Andrews, who in 1903 succeeded Jackson as the Head of the Education Department, also significantly shaped Western Australian education in his 26 years in the role. During that time, the State’s first government secondary school, Perth Modern

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22 D. Mossenson, *State Education in Western Australia* (Perth: The University of Western Australia Press, 1972), 2.
24 D. Mossenson, *State Education in Western Australia* (Perth: The University of Western Australia Press, 1972), 36.
26 D. Mossenson, *State Education in Western Australia* (Perth: The University of Western Australia Press, 1972), 106.
School, opened in 1911. In the same year The University of Western Australia was incorporated and endowed by an Act of State legislature. Three years later, in 1914, the Junior and Leaving Certificate examinations were introduced for secondary school students. District High Schools were established in major country towns during World War I, and a focus on rural education was maintained throughout the 1920s. By 1929 the number of government schools had grown to 839 catering for some 60,000 students.

During the same period several schools were founded by priests and nuns of various Catholic religious orders who had travelled to Western Australia with the aim to staff churches and schools in the growing colony. Father John Brady, who had been sent by Bishop Polding of Sydney to establish the Catholic Church in Perth, opened the first Catholic primary school in December 1843. This was followed by the opening of a Catholic school for girls, established by the Sisters of Mercy, led by Sister Ursula Frayne.

The period 1871 to 1895 was one of “remarkable expansion” for the Catholic school system in Western Australia. During that period five Catholic religious orders came to Western Australia to set up schools, including the Irish Christian Brothers order, which was to have a significant influence on education in Western Australia. Many more orders arrived in Western Australia from the late 1800s until the Depression

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28 D. Mossenson, *State Education in Western Australia* (Perth: The University of Western Australia Press, 1972), 132.
29 P.D. Tannock, "Catholic education in Western Australia, 1829-1979," in *Education in Western Australia*, ed. W. D. Neal (Nedlands: The University of Western Australia Press, 1979), 144.
30 Ibid., 135.
era. Between 1896 and 1929 the number of Catholic schools grew from 21 to 86, and enrolments grew from 3190 to 9083.\textsuperscript{31}

From the early 20\textsuperscript{th} century, a growing number of other independent schools were also established. Guildford Grammar School, which opened as a private school in 1895, was subsequently bought by the Anglican Church in 1911. The private Scotch College (then Alexander Scotch College) opened in 1897, followed by the Anglican girls’ school, Perth College, in 1902. The period of greatest development in non-Catholic schools occurred between 1907 and 1917, a decade which saw the opening of the first Seventh Day Adventist school, Methodist Ladies College, Presbyterian Ladies College and the Girls Grammar School in Bunbury.\textsuperscript{32} By the 1920s the number of independent schools had grown to also include St Mary’s Church of England Girls’ School and Wesley College for boys.

Returning to the State education system, the 1930s and 1940s were particularly difficult decades, with many schools becoming run down and severely overcrowded.\textsuperscript{33} On the other hand, the 1950s saw much improvement in State education through a major building program, an increase in student attendance and a reorganisation of secondary schools. It was during this period that the co-educational, comprehensive high school became the model for state secondary school education.\textsuperscript{34}

The 1960s witnessed a focus on curriculum development in both government and non-government schools. In Western Australia the curriculum used in these schools

\textsuperscript{31} \textit{Ibid.}, 140-144.
\textsuperscript{32} D. Leinster-Mackay and D. Adams, "The independent schools of the twentieth century," in \textit{Education in Western Australia}, ed. W. D. Neal (Perth: The University of Western Australia Press, 1979), 183-84.
\textsuperscript{33} D. Mossenson, \textit{State Education in Western Australia} (Perth: The University of Western Australia Press, 1972), 138-43.
\textsuperscript{34} M.H. Helm, "The democratization of state secondary education," in \textit{Education in Western Australia}, ed. W. D. Neal (Nedlands: The University of Western Australia Press, 1979), 224.
had changed little from the beginning of the twentieth century. Following a series of investigations into secondary school education, a number of curriculum-related initiatives were introduced. Of these, a 1964 decision to raise the school leaving age to 15 years, was to have lasting implications for the role of secondary schools.\(^{35}\)

The Dettman Report\(^{36}\) of 1969 made a series of recommendations relating to secondary schools. These came into effect during a period of strong growth in the sector, with the number of state senior high schools increasing from 22 to 53 between 1965 and 1975.\(^{37}\) The two most significant outcomes of the Dettman Report were the introduction of internal school assessment of high school students to replace the former system of external examinations, and the establishment of the Board of Secondary Education (the Board) in 1969. The Board included representatives from the Education Department, non-government secondary schools, universities, the State School Teachers’ Union of Western Australia and the general public. According to Helm, it guided the “broad lines of development in secondary school education in Western Australia”.\(^{38}\) The Board was replaced by the Secondary Education Authority of Western Australia in 1985 and later became the Western Australian Department of the Curriculum Council.

In contrast to the state government sector, Catholic schooling in Western Australia suffered during the 1950s and 1960s. The system came under pressure due to a significant increase in class sizes, while many of the facilities became run-down and overcrowded. At the same time, the Church was struggling to find teachers from the

\(^{35}\) Ibid., 226.
\(^{36}\) Committee of Inquiry into Secondary Education, *Secondary Education in Western Australia* (Perth: Education Department of Western Australia, 1969).
\(^{38}\) Ibid., 228.
religious orders. The reintroduction of State Government aid in 1955 served to address some of the problems. The introduction of Federal Government funding from 1963 further strengthened Catholic schooling. This was followed by a “massive injection of resources” from the Commonwealth and State Governments in the 1970s. Catholic and other non-government schools prospered under these new funding arrangements. Hence, by the late 1970s there were more than 140 Catholic schools in Western Australia, plus some 17 independent secondary schools, 11 primary schools, and 10 combined primary and secondary schools.

The account so far has to be viewed against a backdrop where the management of education in Western Australia was originally envisaged as a decentralised system. The 1871 Education Act established a “dual system” of government and assisted schools, all operating under decentralised district councils. However, after the Education Department was established in 1893 the system evolved into a highly centralised bureaucracy, with teams of inspectors, also known as superintendents, reporting to senior department officers. So entrenched was this approach that the structure and management practices of the State education system altered little until the 1980s. The system was to undergo radical change, however, with the election of the Burke Labor government in 1983. These changes were shaped both by Labor party ideology and an international policy trend towards economic rationalism.

39 P.D. Tannock, "Catholic education in Western Australia, 1829-1979," in Education in Western Australia, ed. W. D. Neal (Nedlands: The University of Western Australia Press, 1979), 159.
40 Ibid., 164.
41 Ibid., 179-182.
42 D. Leinster-Mackay and D. Adams, "The independent schools of the twentieth century," in Education in Western Australia, ed. W. D. Neal (Perth: The University of Western Australia Press, 1979), 185.
Immediately after coming to power, the new Burke government announced a wide-ranging inquiry into education, to be chaired by the Honorable Kim Beazley, with a specific focus on lower secondary school education. The ensuing report,\textsuperscript{44} which was officially accepted by the Western Australian government in July 1984, argued that there was a need for more relevant and accessible education. Unit Curriculum,\textsuperscript{45} which would see the prescriptive lower secondary curriculum replaced with a more flexible and technically-based choice of subjects, was a key outcome of the report.\textsuperscript{46}

In 1987, when Unit Curriculum was trialled in seven Western Australian high schools, another pivotal education report was released. Entitled \textit{Better Schools in Western Australia: A Program for Improvement}\textsuperscript{47} (‘Better Schools’), it promoted the concept of the “self-determining” school. In accordance with this, the Education Department was replaced by a Ministry of Education. A reduction in the number of office staff eventually led to a halving of senior public service positions within the Ministry, which was now responsible for three areas: ‘schools’, ‘policy and resources’, and ‘technical and further education’. The role of subject superintendent was disbanded and 29 education districts were established. Schools were to be more accountable,

\textsuperscript{44}K.E. Beazley, \textit{Report of the Committee of Inquiry into Education in Western Australia} (Perth: Ministry of Education, 1984).

\textsuperscript{45}As D. Goddard, "Ideology and the Management of Change in Education: Developments in Western Australian State Education - 1983 to 1989" (Doctoral thesis, University of Western Australia, 1992), 180, explains, lower secondary school education until this time was structured so that students in Years 8, 9 and 10 undertook subjects applicable only to their specific year level. These subjects, four being compulsory and, theoretically, five being optional, were undertaken for the entire school year. This was called horizontal timetabling. Unit Curriculum saw the introduction of so-called vertical timetabling whereby students could select subject units each term or semester, within or outside their normal year levels, based on their interests and ability and the offerings at their school.

\textsuperscript{46}Ibid., 180

\textsuperscript{47}R.J. Pearce, \textit{Better Schools: A Programme for Improvement in Western Australian Government Schools} (Perth: Western Australian Government Printer, 1987).
manage some of their own finances, and take responsibility for planning.\textsuperscript{48} According to Angus, the ramifications of these changes were profound; “In a system of 750 schools, spread over a third of the continent and with a history of highly centralized decision making, the reforms proposed for Western Australia in the ‘Better Schools’ report were the most radical of this century”\textsuperscript{49}

Prior to the release of the ‘Better Schools’ report, the Education Department had been the subject of a review aimed at significantly reducing expenditure in the sector. The government chose not to release the report of this earlier review, instead preparing and releasing the much shorter ‘Better Schools’ report. At a time when there was much distrust of the Department by teachers, ‘Better Schools’, which was produced without consultation with the State School Teachers’ Union of Western Australia (SSTU), was not well-received. Chadbourne, who interviewed district superintendents about the associated restructure, reported:

...when ‘Better Schools’ was released, many people in the education system felt ambushed and violated….school staff were incensed by what they saw as the politicalisation and corporatisation of their system, the hypocrisy of introducing bottom-up reforms by top-down edicts, and the imposition of new duties without the provision of adequate resources.\textsuperscript{50}

The hostility and resistance to the ‘Better Schools’ reforms were to cause significant delays to their implementation. By 1990 the system had been restructured and legislation created to enable the operation of school-based decision making groups, but

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{chadbourne} R. Chadbourne, \textit{Issues Facing and Shaping the Role of District Superintendents During a Period of Radical Change} (Perth: International Institute for Policy and Administration Studies, Western Australian College of Advanced Education, 1990), 59.
\end{thebibliography}
not before significant adjustments had been made to the original proposals to appease the State School Teachers’ Union.  

The year 1987, which witnessed the publication of the ‘Better Schools’ report, was chosen as the starting point for the analysis of how State school teachers were represented in The West Australian newspaper. This was because it was a year that signalled a paradigm shift in education, with the new emphasis on devolution and restructuring. The analysis extends to developments over the next two decades following this time of change. Over the period, Western Australia was to see a return to Liberal government in 1993, before Labor was re-elected in 2001. Key developments in education in this period included a year-long industrial dispute, the introduction of nation-wide literacy and numeracy tests, a severe teacher shortage, and another major curriculum change, namely, the introduction of an Outcomes-Based Education system. Each of those developments was the subject of extensive coverage in The West Australian, and brief history of the newspaper is now outlined to further contextualise the study.

**The West Australian Newspaper**

First published in 1833, The West Australian is one of the oldest newspapers in Australia. Originally known as The Perth Gazette and Western Australian Journal, it appeared under its present name as a bi-weekly in 1879, and has been a daily publication since 1885.  

As the only local metropolitan daily newspaper servicing Western Australia, it has no direct competition. It is a dominant source of news for residents of

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Western Australia and the primary source of daily print news. Categorised internationally as a “newspaper of record”,\textsuperscript{53} The West Australian has a weekday readership of 589,000 and a Saturday readership of 904,000.\textsuperscript{54} This represents an extensive reach over a state with a total population of about 2.3 million.

The West Australian claims it has the strongest market penetration of any newspaper in Australia. Influence is more difficult to quantify, but research has indicated that the media can wield influence regarding educational issues\textsuperscript{55} and that The West Australian is a particularly powerful publication.\textsuperscript{56} The paper’s lack of competition and unique position of influence within Western Australia make it a valuable source for analysis. Sercombe makes this point as follows:

The West Australian’s monopoly position makes the paper particularly valuable as a site for social inquiry. For one thing, it removes to a substantial degree the need to cover a range of newspapers catering for specialist or sectional markets...There are other media – radio and television are critically important within the Western Australian social and political framework, as they are elsewhere, but as a social institution concerned with the presentation of news, The West Australian has no equal.\textsuperscript{57}

The paper has long wielded significant influence in Western Australia, specifically in regard to educational issues. Mossenson described it as having been the “colony’s most

\textsuperscript{53} S. Martin and K. Hansen, Newspapers of Record in a Digital age: From Hot Type to Hot Link (Westport: Praeger, 1998), 1.
\textsuperscript{57} H. Sercombe, "Naming Youth: The Construction of the Youth Category" (Doctoral thesis, Murdoch University, 1996), 21.
In the 1890s it ran a strong campaign against the dual funding system, whereby the state government provided financial support to both public and religious schools. According to Mossenson, the paper’s then editor, John Winthrop Hackett, was the central figure and *The West Australian* was “the chief instrument in the destruction of the dual system”. Subsequently, during the early 1900s, the newspaper strongly opposed the proposed introduction of a State Government high school, with an editorial published at the time having been judged a “blistering personal attack” on the then Director of Education, Cecil Andrews. Since then, it has devoted extensive coverage to a range of educational issues, strongly supporting some proposals, such as the push for a Western Australian State university, while opposing others such as the more recent shift to Outcomes-Based Education.

*The West Australian* aims to set the news agenda and frequently ‘breaks’ stories, or publishes ‘exclusives’, which are picked up by other news outlets, including radio and television. It has run overt campaigns relating to politicians and policy, some of which have proven highly influential. For example, the former State Education Minister, Ljiljanna Ravlich, was removed from the education portfolio after a period of sustained criticism in *The West Australian*.

To recap, the study reported in this thesis is an analysis of how state school teachers have been represented in *The West Australian* from 1987 to 2007. The decision

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58 D. Mossenson, *State Education in Western Australia* (Perth: The University of Western Australia Press, 1972), 80.
59 Ibid., 81.
61 Ibid., 21.
to focus on this print news publication, as opposed to radio or television, was dictated partly by the relative permanence of newspapers making the medium a more legitimate vehicle for analysis. On this, research about the agenda-setting function of the media, to be discussed in more detail later in this chapter, shows newspapers to be superior to radio, or television, as agenda-setters.\(^6^3\) Also, education tends to get more coverage in newspapers than in broadcast media as the issues are often complex and difficult to convey in pictures. Indeed, in Australia, newspapers have been recognised as the primary source of education news.\(^6^4\)

**The Existing Corpus of Research**

A detailed exposition on the particular body of existing research literature to which the study reported in this thesis contributes will be presented in the next chapter. At this point, however, by way of locating the work from the outset it is necessary to present a more general overview. This summary demonstrates that teachers have been constructed in various ways in the academic literature. It also shows that while a significant body of research exists on how education has been reported in various ways in the news media, and particularly in the press, there has hardly been any focus on how teachers have been constructed by such media. In addressing this deficit it is recognised that the study is idiographic in nature, being focused on the unique Western Australian situation. However, the reportage on the selected topics from *The West Australian* also relates to


universal and perennial issues in education which have had an effect in many countries. These include curriculum change, industrial disputes, the recruitment and retention of teachers, and the assessment of school children. Thus, it is hoped that this study also makes a contribution to nomothetic analyses in that it adds to a small, but growing, body of studies of a similar nature in other contexts.

 Teachers in the educational research literature

For many years research about teachers’ lives and careers received little attention in the academic literature. In the 1970s, in the United States, Lortie\textsuperscript{65} noted that although much research had been dedicated to teaching, very few studies had considered teachers themselves. In Britain, some advances were made in the 1980s by Lyons\textsuperscript{66} and Woods,\textsuperscript{67} who considered the motivations, experiences and strategies teachers used in their work.

Around the same time, educational historians in the United States of America\textsuperscript{68} began to explore the lives of teachers in government schools. More recently, researchers such as Troen and Boles\textsuperscript{69} and Cohn and Kottkamp\textsuperscript{70} have attempted to provide a more detailed description of the profession and have reported that teachers in the United States are increasingly feeling overworked and under pressure.

\textsuperscript{69} V. Troen and K.C. Boles, \textit{Who's Teaching Your Children?} (New Haven (Conn); London: Yale University Press, 2003).
In the United Kingdom during the early 1990s, Ball and Goodson\textsuperscript{71} and Goodson\textsuperscript{72} turned their attention to teachers’ lives and their careers. Nevertheless, by 1997 teachers in the United Kingdom were still considered an occupational group whose lives were under-researched.\textsuperscript{73} It is only more recently, with work like that of Day et al,\textsuperscript{74} Galton and MacBeath,\textsuperscript{75} Robinson,\textsuperscript{76} and Cunningham and Gardner,\textsuperscript{77} that the situation has begun to be addressed. Like their counterparts in the United States, British researchers have found that teaching has changed significantly in recent decades and that the role of a teacher is more complex, demanding and difficult than it used to be.

In Australia, the early research of Spaull and colleagues\textsuperscript{78} on teaching and teacher unionisation revealed the pressures under which teachers worked at the time, while feminist historians\textsuperscript{79} such as Whitehead\textsuperscript{80} have made significant contributions regarding the gendered nature of teaching. Further insights into the lives and work of Australian teachers are provided by a body of research which has portrayed the


\textsuperscript{75} M.J. Galton and J. MacBeath, Teachers Under Pressure (London: Sage, 2008).

\textsuperscript{76} W. Robinson, Pupil Teachers and their Professional Training in Pupil-Teacher Centres in England and Wales, 1870-1914 (Lewiston, New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 2002).


\textsuperscript{80} K. Whitehead, The New Women Teachers Come Along (Sydney: ANZHES Monograph Series, 2003).
economic, social and cultural contexts of teachers’ everyday working environments.\textsuperscript{81}

The most recent research in this area suggests that Australian teachers, like teachers in the United States of America and the United Kingdom, are struggling with high workloads and stress.\textsuperscript{82}

**Teachers in popular culture**

The portrayal of teachers in popular culture has been the subject of numerous studies, particularly in the past two decades, as scholars have noted the prevalence of negative images of teachers within the domain. Recent research in the area has concentrated on images of teacher characters in television and film, concluding that they are often depicted in terms of extremes – as either heroes or villains.\textsuperscript{83} Others have pointed to the relatively recent phenomenon of the “teacher as failure” character.\textsuperscript{84} Related research includes an analysis of images of schools, teachers and teaching in rock and pop culture.

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music. Mitchell and Weber, who have compared children’s drawings of teachers to popular portrayals of them in television, films, books and other forms of media, have also contributed to the field.

Teachers and education in the news media

A significant body of research has considered the relationship between education and the news media. Interest in this area has been strong in recent years, with four education journals dedicating special issues to the topic since 2004: *The Journal of Education Policy* 2004, 19 (3), *The Canadian Journal of Education*, 2006, 29 (1), *Policy Futures in Education*, 2007, (1), and *The Peabody Journal of Education*, 2007, 82 (1). Most of the international studies in this field have focused on the way educational issues, particularly issues relating to policy, have been portrayed in the news media. Many of these have been critical of the way educational issues are reported, claiming the coverage is superficial and simplistic. Berliner and Biddle have gone so far as to say that the news media in the United States of America has “manufactured” a crisis.

85 K. Brehony, "I used to get mad at my school: Representations of schooling in rock and pop music," *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 19, no. 1 (1998), 113-34.
regarding the American government school system. Australian studies\(^\text{90}\) have also identified weaknesses in news coverage of educational issues.

Findings about how teachers are depicted in the media have tended to be absent from, or peripheral to, research about news coverage of education. Some researchers in the area, however, have made strong statements about the reportage on teachers. In his analysis of British newspaper and television current-affairs coverage of an educational issue, Baker concluded that in some of the British middle-class tabloids “the message of denigration of schools and teachers is unwavering”.\(^\text{91}\) Similarly, in her analysis of one Australian newspaper’s coverage of a review of the Queensland school curriculum, Thomas\(^\text{92}\) found teachers were often positioned negatively.

**Teachers in the press**

Studies about the portrayal of teachers in print media are scarce. Furthermore, with a few exceptions,\(^\text{93}\) they are largely confined to the United Kingdom and Australia. Cunningham,\(^\text{94}\) who considered coverage in British tabloid and broadsheet newspapers from 1950 to 1990, found that the coverage relating to teachers was mixed, with

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portrayals of “demonology” being balanced by references to “golden hearted” professionals. Furthermore, Zemke, in an analysis of the reportage of teachers in the British press during the 1990s, noted that newspapers exaggerated both the positive and negative characteristics of teachers. More recently, Hargreaves et al concluded that national and regional newspapers in England had increasingly recognised the difficult and demanding nature of contemporary teaching and were portraying teachers in a more sympathetic light.

Research which has considered newspaper coverage of teachers in the United States of America and Australia in the past decade has found that teachers have consistently been presented as overworked and stressed. Another finding to emerge from a study of coverage in a major North American newspaper between 2006 and 2007 was that teachers were being blamed for inadequate educational standards.

The Topics for Analysis

The aim of this study is to provide a historical analysis of The West Australian newspaper’s perspectives on state school teachers in its coverage from 1987 to 2007. During the 20 year time period which was the focus of the analysis, thousands of items relating to education and teachers were published. Indeed it is likely that every edition

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of *The West Australian* during that time included references to teachers and education, whether in the form of news articles, editorials, or letters to the editor. It was deemed not feasible to analyse all such material due to the sheer volume involved. This however, was not the principle reasons for restricting the focus of analysis. Rather ‘agenda-setting theory’ suggested that the most appropriate approach to take was to focus on those articles and editorials relating to educational topics which were the subject of prolonged coverage.

‘Agenda-setting theory’ relates to the media’s ability to “establish the topics of conversation and concern for the public” and has been confirmed in numerous studies. According to Chyi and McCombs, the central focus of associated ‘agenda-setting’ research is object salience, which refers to the relative importance of an object. In other words, an underlying assumption of ‘agenda-setting theory’ is that “once an object appears on the media agenda, the volume of cumulative news coverage increases its salience”. Hence, the public learns the relative importance of issues from the amount of coverage given to them in news media. As Wanta, Golan and Lee explain, the nature and extent of the coverage signal to readers how much attention an issue

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deserves. Specifically, according to Dearing and Rogers, the “number of news stories measures the relative salience of an issue of study on the media agenda”.\textsuperscript{104} Furthermore, issues must be the subject of sustained media attention for agenda-setting to occur.\textsuperscript{105}

In accordance with this view, all the topics chosen for analysis were the subject of extensive coverage in \textit{The West Australian} both in terms of the number of articles published and the duration of coverage; each topic was the subject of at least 50 articles published over a year or more. To narrow the choice of topics for analysis, numerous searches of \textit{The West Australian}’s electronic database were undertaken to ascertain the amount of coverage devoted to key developments in education affecting education in Western Australia (and in some cases, Australia and the world) during the time period considered. The topics selected through this process were those which received the most attention and were the most prominent of the major education-related issues published in \textit{The West Australian} over the time studied. The nature and extent of the newspaper coverage of these issues means they were more likely to have attracted the attention of readers and permeated the public consciousness than single, random articles pertaining to education and teachers. Five topics in all were identified. These are as follows: Unit Curriculum (1987-1988); Industrial Dispute (1995); The Introduction of Standardised Testing (1997-2001); Teacher Shortage (1999-2007); and Outcomes-Based Education (2005-2007).

Regarding Unit Curriculum, \textit{The West Australian} began publishing articles on this topic in September 1987, thus introducing the public to the new curriculum structure.

\textsuperscript{105} M.B. Salwen, "Effect of accumulation of coverage on issue salience in agenda setting," \textit{Journalism Quarterly} 65, no. 1 (1988), 106.
for the first three years of high school which was then being trialled in seven schools. The coverage continued into April 1989, a period during which the trial was extended to all high schools in the State. With its emphasis on choice and diversity, and a focus on promoting technical subjects more than heretofore, Unit Curriculum was a marked departure from the traditional lower secondary school curriculum.

Regarding Industrial Dispute, The West Australian published a series of articles pertaining to an ongoing industrial campaign by state school teachers over the course of 1995. The campaign action began with a ban on the involvement of teachers in after-school activities in February and later included a half-day stop-work meeting, a series of two-hour rolling strikes and a full day strike in September 1995. Negotiations led to a resolution of most of the issues by the end of the year.

Regarding the Introduction of Standardised Testing, reporting was stimulated by national numeracy and literacy tests which were introduced in Australia for Year 3 students in 1998, Year 5 students in 1999 and Year 7 students in 2001. The State School Teachers’ Union of Western Australia opposed the introduction of these tests and initially refused to administer them, claiming the results would be used to rank schools and unfairly target them for shaming. The West Australian published 106 articles about the ongoing opposition to the tests and the results of testing between 1997 and 2001. Some of these articles also referred to State and Federal government measures to improve literacy and numeracy standards among Australian school children.

Regarding Teacher Shortage, The West Australian first ran an article in August 1996 foreshadowing such an eventuality. Coverage of this topic took place in earnest in 1999 and was returned to more intensively in 2007. The articles from 2007 were the
primary focus of analysis as this was when the coverage was most sustained. During 2007, details about the various incentives to boost teacher numbers and schemes to manage the staff shortage were also outlined.

Finally, regarding Outcomes-Based Education, the Western Australian State Government moved to an outcomes-based learning model when it adopted a new Curriculum Framework from primary and secondary schools in 1998. However, Outcomes-Based Education received little attention in The West Australian until April 2005, when secondary schools were preparing to make associated changes to their Year 11 and 12 courses. From then onwards, the newspaper has published hundreds of articles about Outcomes-Based Education. During the period which is the subject of analysis there was sustained teacher opposition to the new curriculum, a parliamentary committee was established to investigate associated issues and the State government came under increasing pressure to address concerns.

In the case of each of the topics the analysis was focused on the newspaper articles, including the headlines and the accompanying text, and not on any photographs or cartoons which may have accompanied them. Most of the articles analysed were published in the news section of The West Australian but, in some instances, the topic was also the subject of a longer feature article, or articles. The analysis devotes particular attention to editorials and to comment pieces written by staff reporters which are intended to be subjective and clearly articulate the newspaper’s position on an issue, whereas news articles are intended to be more objective and to portray a range of perspectives from relevant stakeholders.
Methodology

The study was conducted within the interpretivist paradigm, thus giving it the ‘social science history’ orientation mentioned already. This paradigm places primary importance on the social meanings people attach to the world around them, and how they respond to them. Thus, the perspective one has on each thing, rather than being fixed, can be constantly adjusted and shaped as a result of experience.

The latter position had direct applicability for the analysis undertaken on The West Australian newspaper’s perspectives on teachers in its reporting of each of the five topics outlined above. In particular, the assumption was made that the perspectives presented in the reports were ‘constructed’, as opposed to having some ‘objective’ reality of their own. Also, it embraced Blackledge and Hunt’s\textsuperscript{106} position that perspectives can display a certain amount of stability over a period of time. At the same time, such stability does not necessarily manifest itself indefinitely. Rather, perspectives can change as a result of the responses of others to them. Thus, the approach undertaken in the analysis assumed that the initial perspectives on teachers in the newspaper on each of the topics selected could have remained relatively homogenous throughout the period of coverage as a result of responses to the coverage, but, for the same reason, could also have changed over the period of coverage.

The meaning of the concept of ‘perspectives’ which is central to the study also needs clarification. Perspectives, within interpretivist theory, are defined as the “frameworks through which people make sense of the world”\textsuperscript{107}. As O’Donoghue\textsuperscript{108}

points out, these frameworks, in turn, can be seen as having the following major interrelated strands: Intentions (so it can be asked what the view is on what an individual should aim to do in a particular situation); strategies regarding what an individual should do to achieve these intentions; a view on the significance attached to the intentions and strategies by the individual; and a view on what the individual should expect as a particular set of the outcomes from the pursuit of the intentions and strategies. Finally, there is the idea that one can give reasons for what one has to say on these intentions, strategies, significance and expected outcomes.

It is these four strands (intentions, strategies, significance and expected outcomes) which led to the generation of the guiding questions outlined previously, and which, it will be recalled, were as follows:

1. What intentions did *The West Australian* portray as being those which teachers should have in relation to their work and what reasons were given as to why they should have these intentions?;

2. What strategies did *The West Australian* portray as being those which teachers should adopt in realising such intentions and what reasons were given as to why they should adopt these strategies?;

3. What significance did *The West Australian* portray as being that which teachers should attach to their work and what reasons were given as to why this should be the case?;

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4. What outcomes did *The West Australian* portray as those which teachers should expect from their work and what reasons were given as to why they should expect these outcomes?

As guiding questions they were not specific questions to be answered. Rather, they were questions which suggested themselves from the particular social science position underpinning the study as being the most productive guides to generate data pertinent to the overall aim. Each of the guiding questions was brought to bear on each of the five topics identified. In doing so, stability and change in perspectives over time, both within and across topics, were also examined.

It is also important to clarify the parameters of the study. It is recognised that it is one of only a number of studies that need to be conducted on the general area of interest. The claim is that commencing with the focus adopted here provides the foundation for such further studies. These would need to deal with the forces which operated to bring about changes in the reporting on the topics identified and should involve interviewing key participants, including reporters, editors and managers of newspapers. The point, however, is that it would be very difficult to develop a meaningful framework for constructing questions to pose to such personnel without the analysis provided by the study here.

**Data Analysis**

Zemke\(^{109}\) is the only researcher identified within the small body of literature relating to teachers and the print media who used a modified grounded theory approach in data

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analysis. The same approach was used in this study, largely because, as O’Donoghue explains, it is consistent with the interpretivist paradigm. It involves the use of a systematic set of procedures to develop understanding through induction (specific→general). However, there is also a deductive (general→specific) aspect because in one’s thinking a researcher must move back and forth to examine generalisations and give them specific meaning throughout the analytic process.

A full grounded theory approach involves three processes, open coding, axial coding and selective coding. However, because a modified grounded theory approach was used for the analysis in this study, only the first of these process was used, namely open coding. This process involved first reading the collection of articles on each topic in its entirety several times. The articles were then examined line by line to “define the actions and events” within them. The intention was to “interact with and pose questions to the data,” as described by Charmaz, while at the same time making constant comparisons. Building on this process, various patterns and themes were identified, as was change over time. Memos, the “running logs of analytic thinking,” were also used to explore ideas emerging from the data, which in turn led to the development of a series of propositions about The West Australian’s portrayal of teachers in its coverage of each of the educational topics. In the case of each topic, the

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113 Ibid., 258.
propositions were then encapsulated in a “storyline”,\textsuperscript{116} a descriptive story about the central phenomenon to emerge from the data.

Trustworthiness of the Study

As this study was conducted within the interpretivist paradigm it should be evaluated in terms of ‘trustworthiness’, as opposed to the more positivist criteria of validity and reliability. The components of trustworthiness are credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability.\textsuperscript{117} Credibility is enhanced when strategies are put into place that check on the inquiry process and that allow the direct testing of findings and interpretations from the original sources.\textsuperscript{118} To this end the reader can consult the original newspaper accounts. Transferability to other contexts, in a strict sense, is not possible in an ideographic study like this. However, logical and concise generalisations accompanied by relevant samples from the sources, together with descriptions of the time and context in which they are found to hold, have been developed. These can provide the reader with a framework which allows him or her to consider the extent to which similar perspectives on teachers were constructed in other newspapers and in other times and places.

Finally, the development of an ‘audit trail’ is an accepted strategy for ensuring both dependability and confirmability.\textsuperscript{119} In this regard, the present author has kept detailed records of the analysis. These include coding, memos and diagrams, and drafts

of generalisations and propositions. Examples illustrating the coding process are provided in an appendix.

The remainder of the thesis is in seven chapters. Chapter Two provides a more detailed exposition on the relevant literature. Chapter Three is concerned with Unit Curriculum. Chapter Four outlines the industrial dispute between teachers and the Government of Western Australia which took place in 1995. Chapter Five is concerned with the introduction of standardised testing in the State. Chapter Six relates to the teacher shortage which affected Western Australia between 1999 and 2007. Chapter Seven considers the reporting of the move to Outcomes-Based Education in Western Australian schools. Chapter Eight consists of a discussion of the findings of the analyses. Finally, Chapter Nine presents a conclusion.
CHAPTER TWO
IMAGES OF TEACHERS

Introduction
This chapter contextualises the analysis offered in the remaining chapters by locating it in relation to the research on representations of schoolteachers across four domains. The first section considers the dominant images of teachers that appear throughout the educational research literature about teachers’ lives and work. The second section examines the portrayal of teachers in various forms of popular culture, as described in the relevant literature. The third section turns to the coverage of education and teachers in the news media, and details the findings of research which has focused on such reportage. The final section describes the relatively few studies that have concentrated on representations of teachers in the press. Overall, through using these four domains as a guide, a comprehensive, multi-dimensional summary of the most pervasive images of teachers in the public sphere is provided.

The Dominant Images of Teachers in the Educational Research Literature
This section outlines the dominant representations of schoolteachers to emerge in a range of educational research literature published between 1970 and the present. It focuses primarily on scholarly research from North America, the United Kingdom and Australia mainly concerned with teachers’ work and lives, as opposed to the literature relating to such issues as pedagogy and policy. There has been an increase in this type of research about teachers over the past two decades, in part motivated by concerns about teacher shortages affecting many developed countries. Traditionally, however, teachers
have been relatively under-represented in the academic literature.¹ Writing in 1982, Selleck and Sullivan claimed that there had been “little historical discussion of the lives and professional experience of ordinary teachers”,² and that the teachers of the nineteenth century had been particularly neglected. More than 20 years later, in 2004, Cunningham and Gardner came to a similar conclusion, stating that although teachers seemed familiar, they remained “substantially unknown”.³ Indeed, they argued that people’s knowledge and understanding of teachers had come from “generalised representations, whether literary, scholarly or popular, drawing overwhelmingly on a narrow range of pedagogical stereotypes”⁴ rather than from empirical studies.

Lortie’s 1975 text, Schoolteacher,⁵ was one of the first major empirical attempts to understand teachers’ roles, characterisations and motivations. Although the nature of teaching has changed significantly in the three decades which have since passed, the contemporary educational research literature indicates that many of Lortie’s findings about teachers continue to resonate. He made the point, for example, that teaching is marked by “easy entry”,⁶ a statement which has since been repeated in numerous related texts. Many of these texts have also argued that the ease of entry into teaching has

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⁴ Ibid.
⁶ Ibid., 23.

Overall, the academic literature suggests that teachers are ‘ordinary’; they perform a relatively common job, are not particularly well-paid and, although being generally liked, are not afforded any special status in society. According to Selleck and Sullivan, this image of teachers is derived from their everyday contact with the community:

Because everybody has had some contact with teachers their day-to-day activities seem to be without particular mystery. Teachers cannot easily claim to be guardians of a mysterious and subtle body of knowledge, and, as they are so plentiful, they do not constitute an exclusive elite. Thus, unlike doctors and lawyers, they cannot shroud themselves with the mystique which surrounds those who are thought to have access to hidden and powerful secrets.\footnote{8}{R.J.W. Selleck and M.G. Sullivan, "Preface," in \textit{Not So Eminent Victorians}, ed. R. J. W. Selleck and M. Sullivan (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1982), ix.}

Some authors also argue that the lack of status afforded to teachers relates to the fact that teaching is considered predominantly women’s work\footnote{9}{S. Groundwater-Smith, R. Cusworth, and R. Le Cornu, \textit{Teaching: Challenges and Dilemmas}, 3rd ed. (Sydney: Harcourt Brace, 2007), 48-49; V. Troen and K.C. Boles, \textit{Who's Teaching Your Children?} (New Haven (Conn); London: Yale University Press, 2003), 28; D. Warren, "Messages from the inside," \textit{International Journal of Educational Research} 13 (1989), 386.} and, as such, is not believed to be as prestigious, or as important, as certain traditionally masculine professions.


Hence, another potent message to emerge about teachers from the educational research literature is that...
they are typically female. It seems that the wider community may also perceive teachers to be typically female. For example, in a study in which school children and university students were asked to draw a teacher, almost all of the participants drew a white woman in front of a desk, or blackboard.11

The literature suggests that teachers are not primarily motivated by money, or prestige, and that the attraction of the role usually relates to the opportunity to engage with, and help, children. Teachers are frequently portrayed as dedicated to their students and as seeing their job as fulfilling a moral obligation. Lortie identified this as “the service theme”12 and claimed that there was a belief among teachers that teaching was a “valuable service of special moral worth”.13 He also referred to the so-called “psychic rewards”14 of teaching; the sense of having reached students and enabled them to learn. This image of teachers as altruistic has been promoted by a number of other researchers15 and continues to be in recent related literature. Writing in 2003, for example, Troen and Boles said that teachers are “dedicated, hard-working people who are drawn to their vocation through a sense of high purpose and social conscience”.16 Five years later, in 2008, Galton and MacBeath argued that while teaching may be more

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13 Ibid.
14 Ibid., 109.
challenging than it used to be, the “satisfaction derived from watching children learn” remains its “primary reward”.  

Traditionally, it appears that teaching was considered a relatively easy job. It was seen as not particularly difficult, or demanding, and it offered more holidays than any other occupation. However, this idea of teaching as an agreeable occupation began to disappear from the educational research literature in the 1980s, and from the 1990s a far less favourable image emerged. In other words, the trend in the literature published over the past two decades has been to depict teaching as demanding and challenging, with teachers being consistently portrayed as overworked and under pressure.

Numerous researchers have also claimed that teachers’ work has intensified significantly since the 1980s and 1990s, as governments in many developed countries began to exert more control over education and impose stronger accountability measures than previously. The role of the teacher has become much more complex, it has been argued, and now comprises factors that include “learning new information and skills, keeping abreast of technological innovations and dealing with students, parents and the

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community”. Also, according to researchers such as Cohn and Kottkamp, teachers have had to cope with “rapid, almost ceaseless change”.

It has been claimed that teachers are increasingly being forced to also play the role of social worker, caring for children from dysfunctional families and dealing with serious behavioural problems. Meanwhile, according to the literature, the expectations placed upon teachers continue to grow and they are working long hours. They are subject to increased scrutiny of their work, are being made accountable through initiatives such as the introduction of standardised testing, and are relatively powerless to stop, or even influence, educational change.

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spending more time on paperwork and administrative tasks than in the past, and are reporting high levels of stress and burn-out.

The educational research literature further indicates that teachers are keenly aware of the drawbacks associated with their jobs. There are repeated references in the research to low morale and to claims that feelings of anxiety and guilt are common. Hence, teachers are generally portrayed as discontented. A sense that they are disillusioned and unhappy is reinforced by studies which have found that an increasing number of teachers in many developed countries are choosing to leave the profession.

Contemporary research suggests that teacher dissatisfaction has increased in recent decades and that negative aspects of the job are starting to outweigh the positive in many teachers’ minds. After interviewing teachers in the 1990s, Cohn and Kottkamp concluded that the “psychic rewards” of the job, as identified by Lortie in 1975, had

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declined.\textsuperscript{34} The following decade, in 2005, Pillay and Wilss reported that many of the Australian teachers they had surveyed felt that the effort they were putting into their work was not compensated for by the rewards.\textsuperscript{35} Also, current research indicates that many teachers believe their efforts are not recognised by the wider community.\textsuperscript{36} Indeed, some scholars have gone so far as to claim that teachers are regularly subjected to criticism and condemnation.\textsuperscript{37} The literature indicates that this negativity, whether perceived or real, weighs heavily on teachers, and contributes to an overall sense of feeling unhappy and aggrieved.\textsuperscript{38}

By contrast, some research on public perceptions of schoolteachers has found that they tend to “underestimate public respect for their profession”.\textsuperscript{39} Indeed, numerous surveys of the public have indicated that teachers are more valued, respected and trusted by the wider community than the literature relating to teachers would suggest.\textsuperscript{40} This is one of a number of contradictions which seem to characterise the images of teachers and

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teaching. The situation seems to be that while teachers are not afforded high status, or respect, most people consider the teachers that they know to be dedicated and hard-working.\textsuperscript{41} In a similar vein, studies have also shown that people generally believe that teachers perform an extremely important role in society.\textsuperscript{42}

A number of researchers have made reference to the prevalence of these seemingly opposing images of teachers and teaching.\textsuperscript{43} These include Lortie, who described the “status anomalies”\textsuperscript{44} of the profession as follows:

It is honored and disdained, praised as ‘dedicated service’ and lampooned as ‘easy work’. It is permeated with the rhetoric of professionalism, yet features incomes below those earned by workers with considerably less education. It is middle class work in which more and more participants use bargaining strategies developed by wage-earners in factories…The services performed by teachers have usually been seen as above the run of everyday work, and the occupation has the aura of a special mission honored by society. But social ambiguity has stalked those who undertook the mission, for the real regard shown those who taught has never matched the professed regard.\textsuperscript{45}

Others have taken this idea further, claiming that there is little middle ground in terms of images of teachers, who are typically portrayed as either saints, or villains.\textsuperscript{46} As

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{41} V. Troen and K.C. Boles, \textit{Who's Teaching Your Children?} (New Haven (Conn); London: Yale University Press, 2003), 32.
\bibitem{45} \textit{Ibid.}
\end{thebibliography}
subsequent sections of this chapter will show, this is a recurring theme in the literature relating to representations of schoolteachers.

The Portrayal of Teachers in Various Forms of Popular Culture

Again in relation primarily to North America, the United Kingdom and Australia, numerous researchers have pointed to the popularity of teacher characters across all forms of popular culture.\(^\text{47}\) According to Keroes, this has always been the case, with teachers appearing in many classic novels, plays and films.\(^\text{48}\) In recent decades, however, teachers have figured even more prominently in popular culture than in the past,\(^\text{49}\) and the way in which they have been presented has changed. Once commonly depicted as purposeful, moral, learned and good,\(^\text{50}\) teachers are now more likely to be shown as stupid, incompetent and pathetic.\(^\text{51}\) It is not surprising then that research about the portrayal of teachers in popular culture has grown significantly in the past 20 years. Many scholars working in this area have also recognised the powerful influence popular culture can have on societal perceptions of teachers. Among these are Mitchell and Weber, who have described the cultural text of ‘teacher’ as “a massive work in progress


\(^{48}\) J. Keroes, Tales Out of School (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1999), 4.


\(^{50}\) G. Gerbner, "Images across cultures: Teachers in mass media fiction and drama," The School Review 74, no. 2 (1966), 226.

\(^{51}\) R. Fisher, A. Harris, and C. Jarvis, Education in Popular Culture: Telling Tales on Teachers and Learners (Oxon: Routledge, 2008), 47.
that embraces the sub-texts and counter-texts of generations of paintings, memoirs, novels, songs, toys, movies, software, stories, photos, and television”.

Connell has argued that teacher characters appear as frequently as they do in popular culture because they typically work with young people and “stories about young people growing up are one of the great imaginative genres of our culture”. As a result, teacher characters are often strongly influenced by their relationships with their students and their ability to help and guide them. Typically, teacher characters have been depicted in terms of extremes. They are either exceptional, or terrible. The ‘ordinary’ teachers evident in the academic literature are mostly absent from popular culture. Instead, according to Mitchell and Weber, teacher characters are drawn “with bold and dramatic strokes that make them stand out from real life; the mean teachers are meaner, the kind ones are kinder, the brave ones are braver, and the inept are even more so”.

The most common teacher characters fall into one of three categories. They are either ‘heroes’, ‘villains’, or, particularly in more recent portrayals, ‘failures’. Each of these will now be discussed in turn.

Some of the best known teacher characters in popular culture can be described as heroic, or even saintly, figures. One of these, mentioned repeatedly in the related literature, is the character of Mark Thackeray (played by Sidney Poitier) in the 1967

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film, *To Sir With Love*. Another frequently cited example is that of John Keating (played by Robin Williams) in the 1989 film *Dead Poets’ Society*. Female teacher heroes are relatively rare, but the character of LouAnne Johnson (played by Michelle Pfeiffer) in the 1992 movie, *Dangerous Minds*, also fits the mould. Teachers like Thackeray, Keating and Johnson epitomise the best qualities of their profession. These charismatic figures are compassionate and extraordinarily dedicated to their work, to the point of having hardly any personal life. They share a “commitment to a higher calling and devotion to their vocation”. Researchers, however, have argued that such depictions of teaching are romanticised and idealised, and seldom reflect the reality of the job.

Hero teachers are often also portrayed as renegades, or mavericks, who defy convention and tradition to serve the best interests of their students. The Keating character from *Dead Poets Society* is one example. The figure of such maverick teachers sends the message that education in the traditional sense is flawed; that good teachers do not need to follow the conventions of curriculum and assessment. Fisher, Harris and Jarvis have described the situation thus:

> These marvelous teachers in popular culture do not acquire their talents through their training or by meeting the standards set down by the state. In many cases, they seem able to do their job only by acting in opposition to all such

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expectations, resisting authority and ignoring the frameworks within which they should be working. 60

To summarise, the good teachers in popular culture are born, not made, and teaching is frequently presented as an innate skill, not one which can be learned, or which requires specialist knowledge.61

Notwithstanding that what has been said so far has centred on teacher characters in popular culture who have been heroes, negative images of teachers tend to dominate the domain.62 Often, the ‘bad’ teachers represented are in direct contrast to the saintly teachers already considered. They are shown as being vindictive, cruel and unjust,63 or intimidating and repressive.64 Examples cited in the research include the bullying, sarcastic and narrow-minded Herr Kantorek in the novel, All Quiet on the Western Front,65 the controlling and sadistic Principal Snyder in the television series, Buffy the Vampire Slayer,66 and the snide and selfish Mr Vernon in the 1980s film, The Breakfast Club.67 Portrayals of such ‘bad’ teachers range from the relatively common image of the authoritative and rigid figure, evident, for example, in many popular songs of the 1960s

60 R. Fisher, A. Harris, and C. Jarvis, Education in Popular Culture: Telling Tales on Teachers and Learners (Oxon: Routledge, 2008), 169.
63 R. Fisher, A. Harris, and C. Jarvis, Education in Popular Culture: Telling Tales on Teachers and Learners (Oxon: Routledge, 2008), 63.
67 Ibid., 61.
and 1970s,\textsuperscript{68} through to monstrous murderers, as seen in some teen horror movies.\textsuperscript{69} Dalton has argued that even those teacher characters who are not killers in the literal sense are often depicted as “killing” their students’ spirits.\textsuperscript{70} It has been suggested that, overall, teachers are often presented in a negative manner because “everyone has a school memory of being unfairly criticised, ignored or belittled”,\textsuperscript{71} by a teacher. According to Fisher, Harris and Jarvis, the popularity of the teacher-as-villain character reflects “a deep-seated social mistrust of the profession”.\textsuperscript{72}

Traditionally, the teachers represented in popular culture engendered a sense of fear and a certain amount of respect, but more recent teacher incarnations have been more likely to inspire ridicule. This brings us to the third type of teacher category, the ‘failure’. The trend in such characterisation emerged with the “teacher as buffoon” image in the 1980s and 1990s, and continues to the present day. Examples cited in the literature include the hapless Principal Rooney in the 1986 movie, \textit{Ferris Bueller’s Day Off},\textsuperscript{73} the “ignoramus”\textsuperscript{74} Mr Garrison in the animated television series, \textit{South Park}, and the ineffectual “head dag” ‘Headmaster’\textsuperscript{75} from the 1981 Australian film, \textit{Puberty Blues}. Such characters fall within the category of “failure teachers” and are typically portrayed as incompetent, uncaring, or stupid. Often, such teachers in popular culture are shown as

\textsuperscript{68} K. Brehony, "I used to get mad at my school: Representations of schooling in rock and pop music," \textit{British Journal of Sociology of Education} 19, no. 1 (1998), 122.
\textsuperscript{69} M. Dalton, \textit{The Hollywood Curriculum: Teachers in the Movies} (New York: Peter Lang, 2004), 70.
\textsuperscript{70} \textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{71} R. Fisher, A. Harris, and C. Jarvis, \textit{Education in Popular Culture: Telling Tales on Teachers and Learners} (Oxon: Routledge, 2008), 170.
\textsuperscript{72} \textit{Ibid.}, 45.
\textsuperscript{73} M. Dalton, \textit{The Hollywood Curriculum: Teachers in the Movies} (New York: Peter Lang, 2004), 126.
\textsuperscript{74} R. Fisher, A. Harris, and C. Jarvis, \textit{Education in Popular Culture: Telling Tales on Teachers and Learners} (Oxon: Routledge, 2008), 64.
\textsuperscript{75} J. May, "\textit{Puberty Blues} and the representation of an Australian comprehensive high school," \textit{History of Education Review} 37, no. 2 (2008), 65.
people who really wanted to be something different, such as sportsman or musician, or whose main career is over. On this, Fisher, Harris and Jarvis, go on to say:

This is particularly true of male teachers in popular culture. They are frequently presented as pompous individuals of limited ability who are working with children because they have an authority and status in that situation that they could never achieve in the adult world.\(^6\)

The teacher as failure figure reflects poorly on teaching as a profession, suggesting that it is not attractive, or enjoyable. It also sends out the message that teaching requires little training, or commitment, and that “anyone can teach”.\(^7\) The relatively recent popularity of this characterisation also appears to confirm claims that the status of teaching has fallen significantly since the 1960s and 1970s.

One of the most enduring and popular television programs in contemporary popular culture, *The Simpsons*, includes two regular ‘failure’ characters in the form of Principal Seymour Skinner and fourth-grade teacher, Edna Krabappel. Skinner fits within the mould of the hapless teacher - ineffectual and unable to maintain order,\(^8\) while Krabappel is lazy, uninspired and “condescending toward students….casual toward her work”.\(^9\) Kantor et al, who have studied *The Simpsons*’ satirical depiction of schooling, note that while the show has most often portrayed teachers as objects of ridicule, the regular teacher characters have, at times, been treated more

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sympathetically. Skinner and Krabappel may not be good teachers, but they are not inherently bad people. *The Simpsons*, however, does present one teacher who, in stark contrast to the regular characters, excels at his job. This is the substitute teacher, Mr Bergstrom, who appears in only one episode, but has all the qualities of the good teachers identified earlier. Caring, committed and innovative, this character shows the transformative role teachers can play in their students’ lives, yet also highlights the contradictory nature of the teacher images that dominate popular culture.

**Coverage of Education and Teachers in the News Media**

The news media’s coverage of education has been the focus of numerous studies. This has been particularly so in recent decades, with many researchers also noting that the coverage has tended to be negative in nature. Some scholars have considered news media coverage of schools and schooling in relatively broad terms, while others have examined the reportage of specific topical educational issues, such as discipline in schools, literacy, and standardised testing. The media coverage relating to educational policy has also been the focus of a number of studies, with particular

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80 Ibid., 199.
81 Ibid., 190.
83 B. Fields, "School discipline coverage in Australian newspapers: Impact on public perceptions, educational decisions and policy" (paper presented at the Australian Association for Research in Education Conference, Parramatta, 2005).
researchers claiming that the news media can strongly influence the direction of
government policy pertaining to schools and teaching.⁸⁷

With a few exceptions,⁸⁸ literature in the area has tended to argue that news
media coverage of education is superficial and inadequate,⁹⁰ negative,⁹⁰ and
preoccupied with ‘standards’.⁹¹ Generally, the studies within this body of literature have
concentrated on reportage relating to schools and schooling. However, a relatively small
number of researchers have also investigated the media’s treatment of teachers as part of
their consideration of media coverage of education. These findings will now be
considered in more detail.

Like the media coverage of education generally, reportage relating to school
teachers has tended to be negative. Researchers have noted that teachers are regularly
the subject of criticism in the news media, and that this so-called “teacher-bashing” has

⁸⁷ P. Thomson, "Introduction," Journal of Education Policy 19, no. 3 (2004); B. Lingard and S. Rawolle,
"Mediatizing educational policy: the journalistic field, science policy, and cross-field effects," Journal of
Education Policy 19, no. 3 (2004), 363.
⁸⁸ M. Gore, "The Role of the Media in Establishing Values Education in the Western Australian
Curriculum Framework" (Masters thesis, The University of Western Australia, 1999), 223; M. Pettigrew
and M. MacLure, "The press, public knowledge and the grant maintained schools policy," British Journal
of Educational Studies 45, no. 4 (1997), 403.
⁸⁹ M. Baker, "Media coverage of education," British Journal of Educational Studies 42, no. 3 (1994), 293;
D. Berliner and B. Biddle, "The lamentable alliance between the media and school critics," The School
Administrator 55, no. 8 (1998), 14; O. Lee and M. Salwen, "New York Times coverage of educational
reform," in Schooling in the Light of Popular Culture, ed. P. Farber, E. Provenzo, and G. Holm (Albany:
⁹⁰ L. Ogle and P. Dabbs, "The media's mixed record in reporting test results," in Imaging Education: The
Media and Schools in America, ed. G. Maeroff (New York: Teachers College Press, 1998), 96; S.
Thomas, "The trouble with our schools: A media construction of public discourses on Queensland
schools," Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education 24, no. 1 (2003), 19; M. Wallace,
"Discourse of derision: The role of the mass media within the education policy process," Journal of
schools: A media construction of public discourses on Queensland schools," Discourse: Studies in the
Cultural Politics of Education 24, no. 1 (2003), 24-25; P. Warmington and R. Murphy, "Could do better?
Media depictions of UK educational assessment results," Journal of Education Policy 19, no. 3 (2004),
285-91.
become particularly pronounced over the past three decades.\textsuperscript{92} This was highlighted in a study undertaken by Lee and Salwen,\textsuperscript{93} who compared the\textit{New York Times’} coverage of an “education crisis” from the 1950s, to its reportage of another so-called crisis in the sector during the 1980s. They found that the most striking difference between the coverage of the two issues was the “attention given to teachers and teaching during the 1980s”,\textsuperscript{94} whereby they were presented as “central, contributing figures in the education crisis”.\textsuperscript{95} Whereas much of the concern expressed throughout the 1950s coverage was about the nature and shortcoming of the American educational system, the 1980s coverage focused on teacher recruitment and retention, teacher training and quality, and teacher status and pay.\textsuperscript{96}

Similar research, which has examined news media coverage of educational issues since the 1980s, has found that the media has increasingly reported that inadequate teachers and teaching are to blame for many of the problems in education, including a perceived decline in standards.\textsuperscript{97} For example, Berliner and Biddle, who have written at length about news coverage of schooling in the United States, argue that

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{Ibid1} \textit{Ibid.}, 140.
\bibitem{Ibid2} \textit{Ibid.}, 141
\bibitem{Ibid3} \textit{Ibid.}
\end{thebibliography}
the media consistently claims that teachers have little ability and are poorly trained.\footnote{D. Berliner and B. Biddle, *The Manufactured Crisis: Myths, Fraud, and the Attack on America's Public Schools* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley 1995), 102.} In the United Kingdom, Baker found that the “message of denigration of schools and teachers” was “unwavering”,\footnote{M. Baker, "Media coverage of education," *British Journal of Educational Studies* 42, no. 3 (1994), 293.} after reviewing tabloid newspaper coverage of an annual teacher union conference in 1993. More recent research in Britain has indicated that while “unruly” and “loutish” students had become the focus of negative education coverage, at least in tabloid newspapers, teachers were still being frequently depicted as “incompetent”, “lax” and “third-class”.\footnote{K. MacMillan, "Narratives of social disruption: Education news in the British tabloid press," *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education* 23, no. 1 (2002), 30-35.}

Research undertaken in Australia has also noted the media’s tendency to criticise teachers. For example, an examination of news coverage during a period of educational reform in the Australian state of Victoria during the mid-1990s, found that a comment made by the Minister of Education that the State’s schools contained numbers of teachers who were “sitting around on their backsides all day doing nothing”\footnote{J. Blackmore and S. Thorpe, "Media/ting change: The print media's role in mediating education policy in a period of radical reform in Victoria, Australia," *Journal of Education Policy* 18, no. 6 (2003), 588.} received extensive press, radio and television coverage. Consequently the large numbers of teachers labeled as “surplus” provided “evidence” for a massive media campaign about the “bludgers” in schools who were “idling away taxpayers’ dollars”.\footnote{Ibid.}

Another Australian study,\footnote{S. Thomas, *Education Policy in the Media: Public Discourses on Education* (Teneriffe: Post Pressed, 2006).} which considered media coverage relating to a review of the Queensland school curriculum in 1994, examined in detail the mainstream newspapers’ positioning of teachers. The author found that the coverage conveyed the
message that incompetent teachers and poor teaching methods were to blame for declining standards in education. Teachers were portrayed as being “untrustworthy,” and “intransigent and needing increased regulation”. They were also “presented as using inappropriate methods and failing to identify students needing assistance”. The coverage also questioned teachers’ morality and motivations. For example, an editorial “depicted teachers, and all educators, as people who would neglect their students for monetary gain or career advancement”.

The Queensland newspapers’ presentation of teachers, however, was not all negative. Although much of the coverage was found to “diminish teachers’ professional knowledge”, it did include statements from various interest groups which presented them as authoritative and competent, and acknowledged that quality schooling was dependent on adequate funding. Overall, it was concluded as follows that the media coverage relating to teachers was contradictory and ambiguous:

Teachers were depicted positively in that their expertise was valued and that their work was to be given support in the form of extra resources. However, teachers were also depicted as the practitioners of either poor, or incorrect, teaching methods and thus, the cause of the problem.

Rarely quoted in the coverage analysed, teachers were effectively marginalised and denied an authoritative voice in curriculum review. Other groups, including newspaper editors, university lecturers and parents were privileged above teachers as experts on

educational matters. Teachers were positioned as “deliverers of curriculum,” but not as contributors to the related decision-making process.

**Representations of Teachers in the Press**

A 2007 review of the research relating to images of the teaching profession found that while the portrayal of teachers in various forms of popular culture had attracted the attention of numerous scholars, there had been “surprisingly few longitudinal studies of that most prominent and politically important genre of media content: news”. A search of the literature confirmed this claim, identifying less than 10 studies over the time period 1983 to 2010. All focusing on the portrayal of teachers in newspapers, these studies include analyses of relevant press coverage in the United States of America, Britain and Australia. Although relatively rare, this research is valuable, finding that newspapers have increasingly focused on teachers when reporting educational issues over the past three decades. It has also pointed to the dominance of stereotypical and often unfavourable images of teachers in the press, as well as indicating that the nature of the coverage may have changed in recent years.

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Like the teachers of popular culture, teachers in the press were frequently presented as either saints, or demons. For example, analyses of press coverage relating to head teachers and principals found they were often “positioned as saviours”\textsuperscript{115} in North American, Australian and British newspapers. Cunningham, who compared British newspaper coverage of teachers from the 1950s, 1970s and 1990s, noted a prevalence of articles about “golden-hearted”\textsuperscript{116} teachers, while another study of the British press concluded that teachers, particularly in recent times, were frequently cast as heroes, “fighting against extraordinary outside pressures on them, the education system and on students”.\textsuperscript{117}

Teachers were commonly depicted as extremely dedicated to their work, at times to the detriment of their own health. Blackmore and Thomson, who considered images of head teachers in the Australian and English print media, found that they were portrayed as “doing good but feeling bad, of working too hard and rarely playing, of looking after other people’s children and not their own”.\textsuperscript{118} Similarly, Cohen, after reviewing a Chicago newspaper’s coverage of education in 2006 and 2007, concluded that reportage about individual teachers portrayed them as exhibiting a “deep personal commitment to the work and to the students, even to the point of personal exhaustion”.\textsuperscript{119} Other studies found that press coverage conveyed a strong related


message that teachers were expected to be highly committed to their important role in
society. According to White, who analysed Australian newspaper coverage of a
teachers’ strike during the 1980s, those teachers who did not fit this mould were
portrayed as “denying a fundamental professional characteristic - that of the dedicated
provision of a service to the community above all else”.
Zemke, who examined
British press coverage of teachers during the 1990s, also found that teachers were
subject to high expectations and that the newspapers “came down hard” on those of
them who deviated from moral norms.

Teachers who had sexually or physically abused, or mistreated, children came
under extremely strong criticism and were depicted as demons, villains, or deviants.
Such behaviour was considered very newsworthy and warranted significant attention,
particularly in the British press, which focused on “scandals” involving teachers and
students. However, coverage of this nature was typically associated with individuals
and did not suggest that these negative characteristics could be assigned to teachers
overall.

Another feature of newspaper reporting relating to teachers, according to other
studies, was an emphasis on accountability. Teachers, it was argued, should be

121 E. Zemke, "Embracing complexity: Findings from a comparative analysis of representations of
teachers in the British press and research literature," Education Research and Perspectives 34, no. 1
(2007), 40.
122 A. Hansen, "Researching 'teachers in the news': The portrayal of teachers in the British national and
regional press," Education 3-13 37, no. 4 (2009), 345.
1 (1992), 54.
124 A. Hansen, "Researching 'teachers in the news': The portrayal of teachers in the British national and
regional press," Education 3-13 37, no. 4 (2009), 345.
“fundamentally accountable to the market, consumer demands and the nation”, 125 and they were frequently blamed for perceived declining standards of education. The issue of accountability dominated the education reportage in a major metropolitan newspaper in the United States during 2006 and 2007, and was given precedence over the “caring” role of teachers. 126 Teachers were shown as being responsible for poor outcomes when the newspaper reported how schools had performed in standardised tests, and teachers were “associated with failure”. 127

Newspapers were also found to devote significant coverage to industrial action involving teachers, and frequently presented them as unionists and/or militants. This was a pronounced trend in British newspaper reporting during the late 1960s and 1970s, when numerous teacher strikes took place. 128 In rare cases, press reportage of such industrial disputes was in support of teachers, 129 but the vast majority of coverage was critical and negative. The overriding message, from analyses of both Australian and British newspapers, was that teachers should be responsible, dedicated and caring, and that taking industrial action was selfish and irresponsible. 130

White, who undertook an analysis of five Sydney-based newspapers’ coverage of an industrial dispute in 1981, found that striking was presented as “uncharacteristic

127 Ibid., 111.
129 Ibid.
behaviour” for teachers, and that the reporting emphasised the consequences of such action and the “unreasonable” attitude of teachers. The coverage referred to teachers having “tantrums,” and they were described as defiant, angry, confrontationist and belligerent. They were also portrayed as the active party in the disagreement while the State government was shown as having to respond to teacher union demands. Young, who considered newspaper reporting of teacher strikes in the Australian state of Victoria between 1966 and 1980, reported similar findings, with strike action by teachers being presented as harmful to themselves, their students and the “prestige of the service”. Teachers who went on strike were portrayed as “petulant”, “stubborn”, “callous” and “militant”. However, Young also found that the critical tone which characterised the 1960s reporting had been replaced by more “straightforward” reporting of teacher strike action by 1980.

Studies of more recent press coverage of teachers suggest the focus on teacher disputes and industrial action may have shifted to issues such as the declining status of the profession and the difficult nature of the job. This appears to be at least partly related to the teacher shortages which have affected many developed countries since the 1990s and which have been the subject of significant media attention. In exploring the causes of that problem, newspapers have increasingly appeared to recognise that teachers have been undervalued, underpaid and overburdened. Cunningham noticed this change when comparing articles about teachers published in the 1950s and 1970s, to articles

131 Ibid., 16.
132 Ibid., 10.
133 Ibid., 10-15.
135 Ibid., 17, 39.
136 Ibid., 43.
published in the 1990s, finding that the latter coverage devoted extensive space to teacher concerns about pay, overwork and a perceived lack of respect. Hargreaves et al, who carried out an extensive study of British newspaper coverage published between 1991-1992, and 2003-2005, relating to teachers, also found that repeated attention was given to the “general plight of teachers as a beleaguered profession”, particularly in the more recent reportage. They concluded:

The problems included, inter alia, teacher shortages/recruitment/retention, pay, workloads and hours, problems of discipline and violence, lack of appropriate powers to exclude disruptive pupils and enforce discipline, intimidation by parents, stress, safety and teacher liability on school outings, pension shortfalls, etc.

Similarly, newspaper articles about the shortage of school principals in the United States were found to highlight that the work involved “long hours at weekends and nights, high stress, pressure, dealing with conflicting demands and being pulled from one activity to another at a frenetic pace”, while articles about head teachers in Australia and Britain were characterised by a “discourse of crisis, of stress, and poor if not dangerous lifestyle”.

In Britain, this new focus on the difficult working conditions associated with teaching was accompanied by a more favourable portrayal of teachers. Cunningham concluded that “public support for teachers and a benign perception of their role was

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once again ascendant”\(^{141}\) in newspaper coverage from the 1990s, while Hargreaves et al claimed there was “a noticeable change towards a more sympathetic and supportive tone of coverage”\(^{142}\) in the more recent reportage relating to teachers. They went on to say:

Contrary to teachers’ almost unanimous perceptions, there was much explicitly supportive or positive reporting of teachers and the image of the teaching profession had moved from the negative ‘teacher-bashing’ of the early 1990s, to portraying teachers as dedicated and committed professionals struggling against a broad range of serious problems and pressures.\(^{143}\)

Hargreaves et al also found that the newspapers’ positioning of teachers changed considerably over the time period analysed. Initially, teachers were almost always portrayed as relatively passive; as an object, or target, of the government, or other groups. However, they increasingly came to be presented as active parties, as the subject/agent of various actions, in more recent coverage. This, it has been argued, conveyed a clear change in the image of teachers, “from a position of less respect (and perhaps ‘status’) in the sense of showing what was done to/said about teachers, to one where…teachers were given a ‘voice’ and what was reported was – if not exclusively, then – what teachers say/demand/ask for/call for/claim/ do etc”.\(^{144}\) In contrast, another, albeit smaller, study, conducted in the United States of America around the same time, found that teachers were effectively voiceless throughout the coverage at the time, particularly that which related to standards and accountability.\(^{145}\) Unlike the British newspaper coverage, there was little support, or sympathy, evident for teachers in the


\(^{143}\) *Ibid.*, 5.

\(^{144}\) *Ibid.*, 55.

Chicago newspaper coverage analysed. Rather, teachers were typically blamed for problems in education. The most recent comparable Australian research has made similar findings. For example, an Australian study of a 2002 newspaper report about a Government plan to offer financial incentives to encourage “underperforming” teachers to resign, found that the article conveyed the message that many teachers were “sub-standard” and incompetent.\textsuperscript{146}

### Conclusion

The review of the literature presented in this chapter has identified the most dominant and persistent images of schoolteachers in the public sphere. The first section considered how teachers have been represented in the educational research literature, with a focus on research from the 1970s to the present day. The next section described how teachers have been typically portrayed in popular culture including film, books and television. The third section outlined the work of researchers who have investigated the coverage of education in the news media, particularly those who have focused on the way teachers have been depicted in such reporting. Finally, research which has concentrated on the way teachers have been presented in the press was considered. Overall, certain common key images of teachers can be identified across the four domains considered, but there are also some critical differences.

In addition to outlining the relevant literature, this chapter has also pointed to various gaps in the research. For example, it has indicated that although research about the lives and work of teachers has grown in recent decades, it remains a relatively under-

explored area. Also, it would appear that while many scholars have considered how teachers have been represented in film and television, studies about teacher characters in novels, plays and music are rare.

As has been previously discussed, research focusing on the way teachers have been portrayed in newspapers is limited and has been largely confined to the United Kingdom. Although some Australian studies have considered the treatment of teachers in the press, there has been no large-scale, historical study of any one Australian newspaper’s reportage of teachers. The study presented here, which considers *The West Australian* newspaper’s perspectives on school teachers in its coverage over 20 years, is intended to address this gap in the literature and make a significant contribution to what is a very under-researched area. The analysis proper in this regard begins in the next chapter in the thesis, the first of five dealing with *The West Australian*’s reportage of teachers from the time period spanning 1987 to 2007.
CHAPTER THREE

Introduction

This chapter is concerned with an analysis of newspaper coverage of the first of the education-related topics chosen. This topic is Unit Curriculum and it is examined for the years 1987 and 1988. Unit Curriculum refers to a new lower secondary school curriculum approach introduced in Western Australian public high schools in 1988. The chapter begins by providing the broad historical background to secondary school education in Western Australia so that the initiative can be seen as one of a series over the previous century. The more specific background to the introduction of Unit Curriculum is then detailed. This is followed by the presentation of an analysis of the reporting of the initiative in *The West Australian*.

The Historical Background to the Introduction of Unit Curriculum

In light of the fact that Unit Curriculum related to lower secondary school education, it is apposite to provide a brief overview on the history of secondary schooling in Western Australia over the previous century. The first secondary school in Western Australia was opened by the Roman Catholic order, the Sisters of Mercy, in 1849. For many years, this girls’ school was to educate the children of Perth’s “leading colonists”,¹ both Catholic and Protestant. Secondary education was expanded with the opening of an Anglican boys’ school in 1858. The first Government secondary school in Western Australia was to open only after the passing of the Perth High School Act of 1876, which allowed for

¹ P.D. Tannock, "Catholic education in Western Australia, 1829-1979," in *Education in Western Australia*, ed. W. D. Neal (Nedlands: The University of Western Australia Press, 1979), 127.
the provision of higher education for boys. Perth High School, which opened in 1878 with 20 students, grew to accommodate about 60 students within the first decade of its existence. Being an exclusive school catering for “the establishment”, it failed to meet the growing demand from the suburban middle-class for post-primary education. Recognising this deficit, the State Government provided free education for students aged from six to 14 from 1898 and began developing central schools to cater for older students from 1908. By the following year, eight central schools had been established.

The first government co-educational secondary school in Western Australia, Perth Modern School, opened in 1911. The school offered a four-year course (this was later extended to five years) and any child in the State who had completed a number of previous years of primary schooling to a satisfactory level was eligible to attend. Demand for places was such that the then Director of Education, Cecil Andrews, was forced to change the initial admissions policy and introduce competitive entry, whereby prospective students sat an examination before being offered a place at the school. Perth Modern School was to remain a selective school until 1961. From 1911 to 1952 it was the only five-year State high school servicing the metropolitan area.

Between 1916 and 1929, five district high schools were opened to cater for students from rural and regional areas of Western Australia. Over the next two decades, however, there was little further growth in secondary school education in the State. The effects of World War I, the Great Depression and World War II all served to hamper development of the sector, and it was not until the late 1940s that it began to recover. The 1950s, on the other hand, was a time of rapid expansion due to increases in student

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3 Ibid., 96.
numbers and major building programs. During this decade, the Director General of Education, T.L. Robertson, made the reorganisation of secondary schooling a priority. Several new country high schools were established and the number of high schools in the metropolitan area was also increased to cater for the growth in student numbers. Enrolments in government secondary schools almost quadrupled between 1950 and 1968.4

At this time, all Australian states were attempting to deal with major demographic and social changes affecting public education. According to Campbell and Sherington, by the mid-1950s there were reports of a “growing crisis”5 in Australian secondary schools as a result of a projection that student numbers were about to expand by one-third within a decade. In Western Australia, education officials responded to these changes by setting up a number of inquiries. Between 1952 and 1968, four committees examined various aspects of secondary school education and made a series of recommendations for change. One of the most significant of these led to the adoption of ‘the comprehensive schools policy’ in 1958. This new policy reflected an international trend towards the comprehensive schooling model which had originated in the United States of America in the years following World War II. Under the United States’ model, high schools went from being relatively selective organisations geared to prepare students for college, to mass institutions whose prime rationale, according to Franklin and McCulloch, was to educate pupils “of all abilities and aptitudes”.6

4 M.H. Helm, "The democratization of state secondary education," in Education in Western Australia, ed. W. D. Neal (Nedlands: The University of Western Australia Press, 1979), 190.
Western Australia, the adoption of the comprehensive schools policy saw the closure of all single sex, elitist and specialised schools and a move to what was described as “multilateral comprehensives”.\(^7\)

During this period, the afore-mentioned Director-General of Education in Western Australia, T.L Robertson, called for the school leaving age to be increased to the end of the year in which students turned 15 years of age. Robertson recognised that this would broaden the cross-section of students in high schools because many of those who, up until then would have left school to find work on the grounds that they were not ‘academically inclined’, would be remaining on. This situation, he argued would create a need for a more diverse curriculum.\(^8\) Hence, the ‘Secondary Schools’ Curriculum Committee’ (Curriculum Committee) was established to review the existing curriculum and make recommendations for improvements.

Because the secondary school curriculum at the time was focused on academic subjects, it was deemed inflexible and limited by those favouring a broader set of offerings. They also questioned the process by which students were assessed via examinations at the end of the year. Robertson, in particular, was a champion of alternative approaches. After travelling to Canada and the United States of America in 1956, he came to the conclusion that Western Australia should adopt a more liberal curriculum. He believed there should be more focus on social education, and wanted topics as diverse as sexual education and learning how to drive a car included.\(^9\) This sort of thinking was evident in the Curriculum Committee’s recommendations. It identified

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five broad curriculum areas to be addressed: ‘health and physical education’, ‘intellectual development and basic skills’, ‘personal and group relations’, ‘responsibility for moral choices’ and ‘environmental factors and forces’. However, it was to take more than 10 years for the proposed curriculum reforms to be implemented.

**The More Specific Background to the Introduction of Unit Curriculum**

Robertson’s plan to increase the school leaving age faced some initial opposition and was not introduced until 1964. This change, in turn, was to raise serious questions regarding curriculum, administration, school organisation and teaching. In response, the ‘Committee of Inquiry into Secondary Education’, chaired by H.W. Dettman, was established in 1967. Two years later, this committee made a series of further recommendations relating to Western Australian secondary schools. These were introduced during another period of strong growth in the sector, with the number of senior high schools increasing from 22 to 53 between 1965 and 1975.

The most significant outcomes of the ‘Dettman Report’, as it became known, were the establishment of the ‘Board of Secondary Education’ to guide development in secondary schooling, the abolition of the ‘Junior Examination’, and the introduction of internal school assessment of students, culminating in the ‘Achievement Certificate’ set at the end of Year 10. The curriculum was amended such that the emphasis was on four core subjects (English, Science, Mathematics and Social Studies), plus a limited number

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of options. Academic streaming, whereby classes were classified as basic, intermediate or advanced, was introduced.\textsuperscript{14} This system was to continue until 1988, when it was replaced by Unit Curriculum.

Although it was intended to be flexible, the curriculum introduced by the ‘Dettman Report’ came under criticism as early as the mid-1970s for being too prescriptive.\textsuperscript{15} According to Porter, Knight and Lingard, significant social changes and issues such as youth unemployment meant that the secondary school system in Western Australia, and particularly the lower secondary curriculum, were under pressure and ripe for reform by the early 1980s. As they put it:

The growing number of students staying on for Year 11 and 12, many of whom were not university-bound, meant that curriculum, achievement levels, organizational and discipline issues right across the secondary school were high on the internal bureaucratic agenda.\textsuperscript{16}

Given this situation, it was not surprising when education reform emerged as a key priority of the Burke Labor government elected in 1983. Immediately after coming to power the new government announced a wide-ranging inquiry into education to be chaired by the Honorable Kim Beazley, with a specific focus on lower secondary school education.

\textsuperscript{14} This in some way reflected the thinking behind the tripartite system of education in the United Kingdom, whereby, from 1944 to 1963, secondary schooling was divided into grammar schools (for the academically-minded students), secondary modern schools (for the practically-minded students) and technical schools (for the technically-minded students).
\textsuperscript{15} Western Australian High School Principals' Association and Association of Independent Schools of Western Australia, \textit{Curriculum Student Assessment and Certification in Secondary Schools} (Perth: Western Australian High School Principals' Association, Association of Independent Schools of Western Australia, 1985), 6-10.
The ensuing ‘Beazley Report’ included 272 recommendations, chief among them being the abolition of the Achievement Certificate system which, according to Burnside, was perceived to have significant shortcomings:

The main objections to the Achievement Certificate...were that it was not able to meet the needs of all students in the light of rapid technological and social change, that ‘option’ subjects were downgraded and the system tended to limit the scope of the school programme, that the labeling of students as ‘Basic’, ‘Intermediate’ or ‘Advanced’ had an adverse effect on students motivation while the classification ‘Basic’, in particular, had become a term of ridicule, and finally, that the original intention that students should be free to move between the different levels had failed to materialize in practice.


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18 M.B. Burnside, "Restructuring of Secondary Education in Western Australia: A Case Study of 'Devolution' at Work in a Senior High School" (Masters thesis, The University of Queensland, 1992), 11.
skills'. The report also recommended that each topic be presented as a unit of one term’s duration.

Unit Curriculum was created by an Education Department committee established to implement the ‘Beazley Report’. It was intended to “eliminate the adverse social effects of academic streaming, while still catering for the multiplicity of student interests, talents and abilities”. Such a system, the ‘Beazley Report’ had recognised, while significantly increasing flexibility, would also make curriculum planning much more complex than it had been to date.

Unit Curriculum proved to be a complicated system and its introduction in 1988 was fraught with problems. Students were able to choose their own units and, theoretically, could progress at their own pace. However, their choices were limited to those units on offer at their school, and what constituted these units, at least initially, was determined by the individual schools. Also, there were no prescribed core units. According to Burnside, this situation prevailed so that schools could embrace their new freedom and tailor their offerings to their local communities. They could choose to offer term-long, semester-long, or year-long units, as well as the order in which they were to be studied, and what should and should not be compulsory. The results, however, were not always deemed to be in the best interests of students:

Some schools made decisions to, for example, set minima of only two units of science and technology in year 10 (which could consist of electronics or computing options); some smaller District High schools, because of an

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unwillingness to teach grouped classes, decided to offer such a restricted range of mathematics units as to preclude any students who attended that school for his or her first three years of secondary education from qualifying to attempt the most demanding upper school mathematics courses.  

Eventually, the Ministry of Education was forced to intervene to deal with such issues and inconsistencies. In July 1988, six months after Unit Curriculum was introduced, the then Education Minister, Carmen Lawrence, set minimum requirements for each student’s timetable so that it included 160 hours each of mathematics and English over the course of a year.

The complexity of Unit Curriculum was not the only reason for its poor reception. The unpopularity of the new system also related to the timing of its introduction, which coincided with the distribution of a report which was to radically change Western Australian public education. Released in 1987, when Unit Curriculum was being trialled in seven Western Australian high schools, *Better Schools in Western Australia: A Program for Improvement*  

('Better Schools') set out a plan for restructure based on the concept of the ‘self-determining’ school. The notion was that the centralised control which had traditionally characterised the management of Western Australian public education would be abolished. As part of the process, the Education Department was replaced by a Ministry of Education. Under this new structure the Department was transformed, with organisational levels being cut from seven to two and a line-management system being introduced. The education system was divided into three sectors – ‘Schools’, ‘Policy and Resources’, and ‘Technical and Further

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Education’. The role of subject superintendent was disbanded and 29 districts were established. Underpinning this change was the expectation that schools were to be more accountable, would manage some of their own finances and would take responsibility for planning.\textsuperscript{24}

At this time a similar trend towards such decentralisation and devolution was being witnessed in a variety of Western countries.\textsuperscript{25} This was part of the move to a corporate managerialist model of education which saw a shift from education being seen as a service provided for the greater good, to an emphasis on education being perceived as an economic investment, with expected returns. Policies like ‘Better Schools’ had already been introduced in other parts of Australia, including Victoria and the Australian Capital Territory.\textsuperscript{26}

In Western Australia, the shift to devolution was to have a profound impact on public schooling and cause major upheaval for the system and its staff.\textsuperscript{27} Although teachers had long criticised the centralised system and asked for more autonomy, they did not welcome ‘Better Schools’. Instead, according to Chadbourne, many school staff treated the proposed reforms with “cynicism, antagonism and resistance”.\textsuperscript{28} Unit Curriculum, which was implemented at the same time, had, as has already been pointed out, originated from a different, much earlier publication (the ‘Beazley Report’), but its

\textsuperscript{24} D. Goddard, "Ideology and the Management of Change in Education: Developments in Western Australian State Education - 1983 to 1989" (Doctoral thesis, The University of Western Australia, 1992), 176-77.
\textsuperscript{27} R. Chadbourne, Managing Change in Schools: A Review of the Western Australian Project (Perth: International Institute for Policy and Administrative Studies, Edith Cowan University, 1991), 1.
\textsuperscript{28} Ibid., 2.
“fate was to be inevitably tied up with the later ‘Better Schools’ restructuring and the cumulative effects of change”.29

The State School Teachers’ Union of Western Australian (Teachers’ Union) and teachers criticised Unit Curriculum during its trial in 1987, and continued to voice strong opposition throughout 1988. Waugh and Godfrey, who interviewed 450 teachers about the initiative after it was introduced, found that there were “strong and widespread objections to the Unit Curriculum system”.30 The consensus was that Unit Curriculum had been introduced too hastily, without sufficient resourcing and guidance. Also, under the restructured educational system, curriculum development was to occur at the school level instead of, as had been the case in the past, at the central Education Department level. Teachers complained that this created an unacceptable workload for them and put them under intense pressure. The Education Minister at that time, Bob Pearce, acknowledged these difficulties in an interview the following year.

Many teachers (but not all) felt it was all too much, coming close on the heels of the Beazley implementation which was changing everything inside the school; this would now change everything outside the school and they don’t have a feeling of a secure point anywhere.31

These, combined with the uncertainty surrounding devolution and financial constraints across the public sector, meant that Unit Curriculum encountered significant implementation problems.

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The strong opposition to Unit Curriculum and ‘Better Schools’ created a conflict-rich environment which attracted significant media attention, particularly in *The West Australian*. The remainder of this chapter now turns to the coverage of Unit Curriculum by *The West Australian* which began in September 1987, ran throughout the months leading up to the full implementation of the initiative, continued throughout 1988 when the initiative was introduced across the State, and ended in April 1989 when various associated problems appeared to be resolving. Most of the coverage was in 1988, with the majority of the 64 articles published being relatively short items in the news section of the newspaper. However, coverage also included 12 longer feature articles and two editorials.

**Analysis of *The West Australian’s* Coverage of Unit Curriculum from 1987 to 1988**

In *The West Australian’s* coverage of Unit Curriculum, which, it will be recalled, extended over a period of 20 months, teachers were portrayed as functionaries, competent at carrying out well-established tasks and roles. At the same time, the portrayal was also one of practitioners lacking in competence to deal with major curriculum change. Furthermore, this portrayal remained largely consistent throughout the period. These properties of the teacher which were portrayed in *The West Australian* in its reporting of Unit Curriculum can be stated in the form of the following “story line”:\(^32\)

\(^32\) The notion of “story line” being used here is that of A. Strauss and J. Corbin, *Basics of Qualitative Research: Grounded Theory Procedures and Techniques*, Newbury Park, California: Sage Publications, 1990, p. 119, when they state that the story line is the “conceptualization of a descriptive story about the central phenomenon of the story”.

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In *The West Australian*’s articles on Unit Curriculum, teachers were portrayed as being unable to cope with the changes Unit Curriculum had brought to their usual work environment because they were accustomed to certain established, prescribed and traditional roles. Teachers were depicted as hard-working and willing to devote significant time to their work. Equally, they were portrayed as reacting strongly to perceived unfavourable workplace change by threatening and taking industrial action and, in doing so, forcing some concessions. However, they were not able to exert influence over major decisions affecting the education system.

This story line can be stated as four propositions about *The West Australian*’s portrayal of teachers in its coverage of Unit Curriculum. These are: i) teachers cannot deal with major curriculum change; ii) teachers prefer to teach within established and prescribed systems relating to resourcing, class sizes, staffing and support; iii) teachers devote significant time and effort to their work; iv) teachers react strongly to unfavourable workplace change but are unable to exercise power over major decisions affecting public education. Each of these propositions will now be considered in turn.

**Teachers cannot deal with major curriculum change**

A view that teachers could not deal with associated changes was highlighted in *The West Australian*’s first article on Unit Curriculum published in September 1987, and continued throughout the coverage. This first article quoted the head of the Teachers’ Union, Jeff Bateman, as saying that schools could face significant staffing problems and that there was a widespread feeling the move to Unit Curriculum had been too rushed. Teachers were also frequently portrayed as needing more help and guidance to deal with...

33 ‘Warning on school staff’, *The West Australian*, 7 September, 1987, 42.
the new system. An article published in the early stages of the coverage referred to a letter written by teachers in which they asked the Education Minister, Bob Pearce, to “come and show us how it should be done”. The same article further quoted the letter as saying: “Administrators and teachers in schools have been at their wits’ end to try to implement the Unit Curriculum and still cater for present students”. According to the letter, the issues associated with Unit Curriculum made the job of preparing for the next year “almost impossible”.

This reference to a lack of support for teachers in implementing Unit Curriculum was revisited many times throughout the coverage. It continued even after the Ministry of Education introduced guidelines, six months after the introduction of Unit Curriculum, to assist teachers in its implementation. At that stage, *The West Australian* reported that the Teachers’ Union believed the guidelines to be inadequate as teachers were “looking for something more specific in terms of what they should be doing with the Unit Curriculum”.

By repeatedly describing teachers as being fearful and concerned, the newspaper reinforced this idea that they could not cope with major curriculum change. On this, an article published in February 1988 reported that teachers were “struggling with day one of the controversial Unit Curriculum”, while subsequent articles described them as being angry, unhappy and distressed about the innovation. Also, teachers were depicted as devoting many hours to their work, yet still not coping. This was reinforced by repeated descriptions of teachers as “overworked” and “overburdened”.

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34 ‘Show us how, say teachers’, *The West Australian*, 14 September, 1987, 34.
The sense of teachers not managing their increased workload was strengthened with the reporting by *The West Australian* of an independent evaluation of Unit Curriculum carried out by Murdoch University in Perth in 1988. Summarising this evaluation, the newspaper said that 80 per cent of teachers surveyed reported that Unit Curriculum had increased their workload and that 74 per cent felt the Education Ministry had not provided helpful advice on specific units. Further, 42 per cent of teachers believed their extra workload was causing problems in their personal life and social life.39

In other articles, State Opposition politicians claimed teachers were under “appalling stress”,40 that teachers and principals were “leaving in droves”,41 and that the teaching profession and the education system were under “enormous pressure”.42 Another less overtly party-political source, the President of The Secondary Principals’ Association, John Nolan, echoed such sentiments, saying that teachers “have come to the start of the school year much more exhausted, and probably not as confident as they have been in the past”.43

Descriptions of the schooling system as “chaotic”, “in disarray” and “in crisis” were of such a nature that the implication was the situation was due to the teachers’ inability to cope with curriculum change. Indeed, these terms were used in a number of articles published in February 1988, which outlined the initial reaction to the full

41 *Ibid*
43 ‘Unit curriculum makes slow progress’, *The West Australian*, 10 May, 1988, 11.
implementation of Unit Curriculum. Teachers were described as being confused about the new system, not understanding how it worked and not having the skills necessary to implement it without encountering problems. They were also portrayed as being unfamiliar with the principles of curriculum development.

Reporting of comments from education academics also depicted teachers as struggling to deal with the curriculum changes. In one article, an academic from a university education faculty said that teachers lacked a “basic understanding” of school curricula. A later article quoted another academic, who said that teachers were struggling to develop Unit Curriculum as they did not have curriculum planning skills. The quoting of views of other stakeholders reinforced this message. Most notable was when the new Education Minister, Carmen Lawrence, said that the rate of change had become “something that some teachers, particularly, and some administrators, found a bit difficult to manage”. Similarly, the Opposition education spokesperson, Norman Moore, repeatedly claimed that the introduction of Unit Curriculum had resulted in teachers being under high levels of stress and the education system being in crisis.

**Teachers prefer to work within established and prescribed systems relating to resourcing, class sizes, staffing and support**

In *The West Australian*’s coverage of Unit Curriculum teachers were presented as being competent at carrying out their duties under the system which existed prior to the introduction of Unit Curriculum. According to the newspaper reports, they were

47 ‘New minister will try to mend fences’, *The West Australian*, 3 March, 1988, 32.
creatures of habit, accustomed to working within an established and prescriptive system. They were also depicted as traditionalist and resistant to change, particularly change which might increase their workloads and responsibilities. On this, the reporting indicated teachers were used to being governed by certain rules and formulas and felt most comfortable working within well-established parameters.

The newspaper articles created a sense that teachers were managing their workloads comfortably before Unit Curriculum was introduced. For example, a teacher from a senior high school was quoted as saying: “We have never had this problem on this scale before or experienced it in core subjects”.48 The coverage depicted teachers as being uncomfortable and unfamiliar with the requirements of Unit Curriculum. Prior to this, much of the administrative work associated with curriculum planning had been done by Ministry of Education staff. This situation, according to an academic from a university education faculty, resulted in teachers lacking an understanding of curriculum planning,49 a prerequisite for the successful introduction of Unit Curriculum. Further, teachers were portrayed as being unable to take on new tasks and roles without guidance and help from education administrators. In this regard, several articles reported teachers calling for help and expressing a need for more guidance and support. Quotes from teachers themselves also suggested they lacked initiative and were highly dependent on the Ministry of Education for assistance with issues which arose outside their usual roles. This was illustrated in an article in which a senior high school teacher was quoted as saying the school had told education officials about its problems with Unit

Curriculum, but had received no help. “We were told to implement it but we were not told how to,” the teacher said.\textsuperscript{50}

From the outset, it was reported that teachers were concerned about the effects that Unit Curriculum would have on staffing. Teachers were quoted as saying the existing staffing formula did not allow for the provision of the necessary staff to implement the changes associated with the new system and to deal with the additional administrative demands. One of the early articles reported that staff from a senior high school had “reached a stalemate because it was virtually impossible to timetable specialised classes without more staff”.\textsuperscript{51} This message that teachers were highly affected by staffing changes was repeated in several other articles published subsequently, one of which reported as follows:

…teachers said it was impossible to timetable specialised classes and provide proper student counselling without more staff. Long hours of overtime were needed from teachers, deputy principals and principals to organise timetables and resources for the new subjects.\textsuperscript{52}

In a similar vein, teachers were portrayed as resistant to teaching students in classes beyond the union-prescribed limit of 32, even though the structure of Unit Curriculum necessitated the construction of some larger classes.

\textbf{Teachers devote significant time and effort to their work}

According to \textit{The West Australian’s} coverage of Unit Curriculum, teachers were hard-working and willing to devote significant time and effort to their work. This coverage included numerous references to teachers working long hours. One of the first articles

\textsuperscript{50} ‘Teachers frustrated on new curriculum’, \textit{The West Australian}, 17 December, 1987, 14.
\textsuperscript{51} ‘Schools call for more help over new format’, \textit{The West Australian}, 17 December, 1987, 15.
\textsuperscript{52} ‘Unit curriculum makes slow progress’, \textit{The West Australian}, 10 May, 1988, 11.
reported teachers had been “spending a lot of time”\textsuperscript{53} helping students to choose units to be offered under the new system. Later that month a senior high school teacher was quoted as saying colleagues had “spent hundreds of hours writing units and counselling students about the changes”.\textsuperscript{54} Another article presented as fact the claim that “long hours of overtime were needed from teachers, deputy principals and principals to organise timetables and resources for the new subjects”.\textsuperscript{55} In that same article, the President of the Secondary Principals’ Association, John Nolan, highlighted the diligence of teachers, saying: “Many of these programmes had to be developed from scratch, without much resourcing and teachers worked very hard to do that”.\textsuperscript{56}

In general, teachers were constructed as being dedicated to their work and to their students, while also trying hard to manage the transition to Unit Curriculum, albeit with difficulty. This depiction of teachers was strengthened with the reporting of comments made by the Education Minister, Carmen Lawrence. In an article published a week after she was named the new minister, Dr Lawrence said she recognised teachers were implementing Unit Curriculum without any extra staffing support and that she was “amazed at the number of hours teachers have put into it”.\textsuperscript{57} The newspaper acknowledged such efforts by teachers, but indicated that despite these efforts, they were not effectively managing the changes associated with Unit Curriculum and the extra workload entailed.

\textsuperscript{53} ‘Students in oval sit-in’, \textit{The West Australian}, 5 December, 1987, 3.
\textsuperscript{55} ‘Unit curriculum makes slow progress’, \textit{The West Australian}, 10 May, 1988, 11.
\textsuperscript{56} \textit{Ibid}.
\textsuperscript{57} ‘New minister will try to mend fences’, \textit{The West Australian}, 3 March, 1988, 7.
Teachers react strongly to unfavourable workplace change, but are unable to exercise power over major decisions affecting public education

While the general nature of the reporting was that teachers were not coping with the introduction of Unit Curriculum and wished for a return to the previous familiar and well-established system, it also indicated that they were vocal in their opposition, especially via the Teachers’ Union. Indeed, the union voiced concern about the implications of Unit Curriculum in the first article on the subject published in September 1987.58 And in the next article a group of teachers “challenged” the Education Minister, Bob Pearce, to come and show them how the new initiative should be implemented.59 Also, in later articles, teachers were reported as disputing Ministry of Education claims that Unit Curriculum was proceeding smoothly.

It was not long until teachers, via the union, threatened industrial action. The newspaper focused on this, indicating that teachers had the potential to disrupt thousands of school students. This was evident in several articles about the industrial action which took place at the beginning of the 1988 school year. One article published at the beginning of the 1988 school year said:

Thousands of students at about 50 schools face major class disruption today because of industrial action by teachers protesting at oversized classes. Students at Safety Bay, Cannington, Balcatta, Wanneroo, Armadale and Belmont high schools could miss classes for several days because of the dispute. More than 40 other primary and high schools around the State may also be affected.60

A subsequent article described in more detail the decision by some teachers to ensure class numbers did not exceed the prescribed quota:

58 ‘Warning on school staff’, The West Australian, 7 September, 1987, 42.
59 ‘Show us how, say teachers’, The West Australian, 14 September, 1987, 34.
60 ‘50 Schools face classroom chaos’, The West Australian, 15 February, 1988, 1.
State education became a raffle yesterday when more than 200 high school students were balloted out of their classrooms because of industrial action by teachers over class sizes. The situation reached farcical proportions at 10 schools where teachers resorted to drawing out names to choose which students would miss the day’s lesson.61

Overall, in the reporting of the industrial action, teachers were constructed as being quite ruthless and determined to get the outcome they wanted even if their actions were not always in the best interest of students.

*The West Australian*’s coverage depicted the action of teachers in response to Unit Curriculum as yielding some of their desired outcomes. While not being able to force the government to abandon Unit Curriculum, they were successful in winning some concessions and receiving some curriculum planning support. The Education Minister, Carmen Lawrence, announced a review of the school staffing formula and Unit Curriculum in March 1988,62 one month after industrial action commenced. The following month, in April 1988, the government announced a plan to give computers to state schools and set up a special timetable-assistance bureau to ease administrative workloads for teachers.63

The Education Minister announced further changes to Unit Curriculum in June 1988, while also releasing guidelines to help teachers to make the necessary adjustments. According to *The West Australian*, the Teachers’ Union was not satisfied with these measures and threatened further industrial action in June.64 One month later the paper reported that the union, the State Government and the Ministry of Education, had signed an agreement to work together on a number of issues including teachers’

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63 ‘Computers for school staff’, *The West Australian*, 16 April, 1988, 27.
workloads and functions, teacher support, career opportunities, and local control over allocating resources.\textsuperscript{65} Hence, teachers were shown as being strongly reactive to workplace change they considered undesirable as they were able to pressure the government to address some of their concerns, and as being successful in achieving some concessions. They were not, however, portrayed as proactive, or as having a say in the decision-making which led to the introduction of Unit Curriculum.

From the outset, the coverage indicated teachers were not pleased about the introduction of Unit Curriculum and had strong concerns about the effects it would have on their workloads. Hence, \textit{The West Australian} articles made it clear that Unit Curriculum was not an initiative that had come from teachers, or from the Teachers’ Union. On this, one article quoted from a letter from a group of teachers in which they indicated that Unit Curriculum had been “imposed”\textsuperscript{66} upon them. Another report referred to teachers “being forced”\textsuperscript{67} to work outside their areas of expertise due to the problems associated with the initiative. This message was reinforced when the president of the Teachers’ Union, Jeff Bateman, said Minister Pearce had tried to “bulldoze”\textsuperscript{68} his ideas through without consulting teachers, and recurred in an article in which the Opposition education spokesperson, Norman Moore, complained about the disorganised way that Unit Curriculum had been “imposed on our schools”.\textsuperscript{69}

While teachers and principals working within the government school system had decisions forced upon them, their counterparts in private schools were able to choose whether or not to introduce Unit Curriculum. Several articles published at the beginning

\textsuperscript{66} ‘Show us how, say teachers’, \textit{The West Australian}, 14 September, 1987, 34.
\textsuperscript{68} ‘Battle goes on for the union’, \textit{The West Australian}, 3 March, 1988, 33.
of the coverage on this issue referred to private school teachers voicing concerns about Unit Curriculum, and ultimately rejecting the State Government’s initiative by refusing to implement the new system in 1988. One such article stated:

Several big private schools, including Scotch, Wesley and Guildford Grammar, have rejected the WA Government’s controversial unit curriculum for the 1988 academic year. They will not implement the curriculum in lower school next year, though it is compulsory in State schools.70

The authority and independence of teachers and principals from these private schools highlighted the relative powerlessness of teachers in the public system.

The coverage also indicated that teachers were not consulted about Unit Curriculum before it was introduced and were not given an opportunity to reject, or accept, the new system. The decision-making that led to Unit Curriculum occurred at a level above school-based teachers and principals. The reporting reflected this, portraying teachers as servants of the State or, as mentioned previously, functionaries. Their job was to carry out the instructions of more senior decision-makers. In this sense, teachers had no power to affect decisions about significant changes to the public education system.

Conclusion

This chapter provided a broad historical background to secondary school education in Western Australia before detailing the events that led to the introduction of Unit Curriculum in 1988. It then presented an analysis of The West Australian’s coverage of Unit Curriculum and, in doing so, elaborated on a series of propositions about the newspaper’s portrayal of school teachers. These are as follows: teachers cannot deal

with major curriculum change; teachers prefer to work within established and prescribed systems relating to resourcing, class sizes, staffing and support; teachers devote significant time and effort to their work; and teachers react strongly to unfavourable workplace change, but are unable to exercise power over major decisions affecting public education.

Some of these propositions align closely with the findings of other studies about teachers, as outlined in Chapter Two. The image of teachers as hard-working and dedicated which emerged from The West Australian’s coverage also features strongly in the educational research literature on teachers’ work and lives, while the newspaper’s message that teachers react strongly to unfavourable workplace change is consistent with research which has considered how teachers have been portrayed in the news media. In some ways, however, The West Australian’s coverage is at odds with other research. For example, the notion that teachers are unable to cope with curriculum change, articulated throughout the coverage, does not emerge strongly from the educational research literature or the research on teacher characters in popular culture. These and other comparisons between The West Australian’s coverage and related research about teachers will be explored in more detail in Chapter Eight. Attention now, however, is turned to Chapter Four which is concerned with The West Australian’s reporting of the 1995 industrial dispute between Western Australian public school teachers and the State Government.
CHAPTER FOUR
INDUSTRIAL DISPUTE: 1995

Introduction

Unit Curriculum, which was the subject of the last chapter, continued to shape the curriculum of lower secondary school education in Western Australia until it began to be replaced gradually by the new outcomes-based ‘Curriculum Framework’ from the late 1990s. However, as was indicated in the last chapter, The West Australian’s interest in Unit Curriculum had waned by April 1989, when it appeared that most of the associated problems were being resolved. Over the next five years various other educational issues were reported in the newspaper. These included the Western Australian school teacher strike of July 1989, the development and subsequent rejection of a national curriculum in the early 1990s (the subject of further discussion in Chapter Seven), and the increasing devolution of schools under the Western Australian Liberal/National Coalition Government from 1993. However, it was not until 1995 that intense and sustained coverage of an issue emerged once again. This time the focus was on the industrial dispute between Western Australian government school teachers and the State Government.

The campaign, in which most government school teachers in Western Australia took part, included bans on certain work, stop-work meetings, rolling strikes and a state-wide full-day strike in September 1995. This chapter analyses the reporting of the industrial dispute from December 1994 to December 1995. It is in four parts. The first three parts contextualise the industrial campaign. In the first part, the origins of the State School Teachers’ Union of Western Australia are outlined. A brief overview of the
The Origins of the State School Teachers’ Union of Western Australia

The State School Teachers’ Union of Western Australia (Teachers’ Union) was formed in 1898. Initially called the Public School Teachers’ Association of WA, the name was changed at the annual conference in April 1899. The new union was led by teachers known as “imports”,¹ who had moved to Western Australia from other Australian states and the United Kingdom during the Gold Rush of the 1890s. All of the executive positions on the Teachers’ Union were initially filled by personnel of such background, who, according to Horner, showed “ability for collective bargaining hitherto unknown amongst teachers in the colony”.² The Teachers’ Union’s only competition came from the Country Teachers’ Association, which was formed in 1908 by teachers in the Hills districts surrounding Perth, to represent teachers in small rural schools.

At the time, it was generally recognised that teachers’ salaries were low and that many teachers, particularly in remote areas, were working in difficult conditions with inadequate support. The Teachers’ Union aimed to advance the interests of teachers as

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¹ V. Horner, "The Influence of the State School Teachers’ Union of Western Australian on the Policies of the State Education Department of Western Australia 1898-1960" (Masters thesis, The University of Western Australia, 1961), 11.
² Ibid., 27.
well as assist the State Education Department to improve educational standards. During its early years it experienced some fluctuations in membership, along with internal conflict. However, after the Country Teachers’ Association was made a branch of the larger Teachers’ Union in December 1910, the organisation began to flourish. By 1914, it was well-established, representing more than 800 of the 1300 government school teachers in Western Australia.

Although teachers in Western Australia have generally been less involved in industrial unrest than their counterparts in other Australian states, they pioneered the use of militant industrial action four decades before teachers in any other state, being the first teachers in the nation to go on strike. In doing so, they took part in the longest continuous strike of teachers in Australia’s history, in July 1920. The industrial action in question arose after successive State governments withheld increment payments due to teachers throughout the duration of World War I. Despite attempts at negotiation, the situation had not been resolved by 1919. At that point the Teachers’ Union decided to survey its members to determine how to proceed. The result, according to Mossenson, was “an overwhelming vote of confidence in the leadership, and approval of strike action if necessary”.

At a mass meeting on 10 July, 1920, thousands of teachers voted to stop work. The strike lasted 20 days and almost all of the teachers employed by the State took part. The action was a resounding success. Teachers were granted immediate interim pay

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3 Ibid., 26.
4 D. Mossenson, *State Education in Western Australia* (Perth: The University of Western Australia Press, 1972), 126.
6 D. Mossenson, *State Education in Western Australia* (Perth: The University of Western Australia Press, 1972), 130.
rises and legislation was introduced to establish a Public Service Appeals Board, which resulted in substantial salary increases for teachers.\(^7\) According to Mossenson, the strike also served to cement the place of the Teachers’ Union, “establishing the organisation as a force whose influence in public education could no longer be ignored”.\(^8\)

The Teachers’ Union flourished in the years following the strike, as teachers’ salaries continued to increase. However, the advent of The Great Depression years resulted in severe hardships for teachers and prompted further industrial action. After closing the State’s only teacher training college in 1930, the Western Australian Government proceeded to reduce the number of teachers it employed, increase class sizes and cut all funding for school maintenance. Teachers’ salaries and leave entitlements were reduced.

During those years, teachers felt their treatment was “sectional and unfair”.\(^9\) Consequently, in May 1934, they voted to start what was to become known as the ‘Regulations Strike’. They did not stop work. Instead, they refused to carry out any duties not strictly required of them. This meant no involvement in school concerts, dances and after-school sports. Although the public strongly opposed the campaign, the industrial action did prompt the Government to address many of the teachers’ concerns. Amongst the successes were the re-opening of the teachers’ college, the announcement of funding for a new girls’ school, and the gradual restoration of salary and leave entitlements to previous levels.

\(^8\) D. Mossenson, *State Education in Western Australia* (Perth: The University of Western Australia Press, 1972), 130.
The Emergence of Teacher Militancy Internationally, in Australia, and in Western Australia

The industrial action undertaken by Western Australian teachers in 1920 and 1934 was highly unusual for its time. Although most of the teacher unions in Australia and overseas were formed in the late 1800s and early 1900s, teacher militancy in the form of work stoppages, work restrictions and strikes did not become a prominent feature until the 1950s. Writing in 1971, Bessant and Spaull noted that teacher strikes had become a world-wide phenomenon over the previous 20 years. From 1955 to the 1980s, teacher strikes occurred regularly in non-communist countries, including the United States of America, France, England, Japan, Italy and Peru. According to Cooper, most of this early industrial action arose from a growing recognition by teachers that they were poorly-paid relative to other white-collar workers. This dissatisfaction with wages was most pronounced in the United States of America, where 500 teacher work stoppages were recorded between 1960 and 1970. The peak period for strike activity in that country was from 1965 to the late 1970s. In the United Kingdom, teacher strikes were common from the late 1960s through to the late 1980s. Two national teacher strikes occurred during this era; one in 1969, and another in 1985. Numerous local episodes of industrial action also took place throughout the 1970s and 1980s.

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10 B. Bessant and A. Spaull, Teachers in Conflict (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1972), 53.
13 B. Bessant and A. Spaull, Teachers in Conflict (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1972), 53.
In Australia, the incidence of teacher strikes peaked in the two decades between 1965 and 1985. Teachers in the two most highly-populated states, New South Wales and Victoria, contemplated going on strike in the 1940s but on each occasion the action was averted. In the 1960s and 1970s, by contrast, Victorian teachers used strike action so frequently that it became difficult for later researchers to compile a list of the strikes which had occurred,\(^\text{16}\) some of which were limited to certain sections of the teaching force, districts, or schools. In New South Wales, strike action was less frequent, but tended to involve all state school teachers. The first state-wide strike occurred in 1968. Teachers in other states started taking strike action from the 1970s, with Queensland experiencing teacher stoppages in 1974 and 1976.\(^\text{17}\)

From the late 1970s, teacher militancy gathered momentum across Australia. Western Australian teachers started a campaign of rolling strikes in 1978 and imposed work bans in 1981. Victorian teachers took strike action again in 1980. The following year, South Australian and Tasmanian teachers went on strike for the first time. New South Wales experienced teacher strikes in 1981, 1982 and 1983, while teachers from Queensland and the Australian Capital Territory went on strike in 1982.\(^\text{18}\) Brown described the nationwide unrest among teachers at the time as follows:

> Teachers were experiencing similar problems across Australia regarding industrial relations processes and in particular, negotiations with employers concerning levels of educational funding.\(^\text{19}\)

\(^\text{18}\) Ibid.
\(^\text{19}\) A. Brown, "Industrial Relations in State School Teaching in Western Australia 1950-1988" (Doctoral thesis, The University of Western Australia, 1990), 176.
Teachers were also dealing with widespread unemployment, significant restructuring of education, changes in work practices and expectations, increased work complexity and a decline in the status of their profession. A number of researchers\textsuperscript{20} have noted that all of these elements contributed to the trend to militancy during the period. And, according to White, these engendered “solidarity among teachers seldom seen in the history of Australian education”.\textsuperscript{21}

For Western Australian teachers, the late 1970s signalled the beginning of a new era in which the Teachers’ Union was to take a much more combative role than it had taken since the 1930s. Relations between the Teachers’ Union and the State Government, which had been generally co-operative for decades, became “hostile and conflictual”\textsuperscript{22} from around 1976. This led to industrial action in 1978, 1981 and 1988. The 1978 action, which involved rolling strikes over six weeks, came about after the State Education Minister of the time moved to alter the school holidays without full consultation with the Teachers’ Union. The 1981 campaign, on the other hand, was in protest at proposed cuts in State education funding and ended only when the State Government agreed to return to the status quo. Seven years of relative harmony prevailed, but came to an end in 1988 when the Teachers’ Union began a campaign in protest at the new Unit Curriculum system which was the focus of consideration in the previous chapter. The action was confined to the lower secondary schooling system. The union, which claimed the timetabling changes associated with Unit Curriculum had been


\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., 277.

\textsuperscript{22} A. Brown, "Industrial Relations in State School Teaching in Western Australia 1950-1988" (Doctoral thesis, The University of Western Australia, 1990), 4.
introduced without adequate consultation, staffing or support, directed teachers to refuse to teach classes of more than 32 students. It took six weeks until a settlement was negotiated with the Western Australian Education Minister, Bob Pearce. Soon after, a new minister, Carmen Lawrence, was appointed to the education portfolio. Her conciliatory approach led to the signing of a historic industrial agreement between teachers and the State Government in late 1988, and the development of an improved relationship between the minister and the union. This was to continue for several years, during which time Lawrence became the Premier of Western Australia.

The Immediate Background to the 1995 Industrial Dispute
A general election was held in Western Australia in 1993. The resulting formation of the conservative Liberal Party/National Party coalition Government led by Richard Court signalled another turning point in the history of the Teachers’ Union. The new Government was intent on introducing individual workplace agreements for employees, a move strongly opposed by the State’s unionists who saw the individual agreements as a direct threat to the previously dominant ‘award’ system whereby employment conditions and salaries were typically negotiated via collective bargaining. Those in several sectors of the public service, including railway workers, nurses and police, took industrial action in 1995 in response to this move and an associated initiative to have pay rises linked to productivity. The most significant industrial dispute was between the State Government and public school teachers. Also, it was more prolonged, intense and

24 The relationship between the State Government and the Teachers’ Union was generally good during this period; however, the union did stage a one-day state-wide strike, and selected day district strikes, in July 1989, after the Education Department refused its claim for a 15 per cent wage increase.
hostile than the previous teacher industrial actions of 1978, 1981 and 1988. Teachers imposed work bans for most of the school year and took part in stop-work meetings, rolling strikes and a State-wide full day strike. The Education Department and the State Government retaliated by trying to stop the automatic deduction of union fees from teachers’ wages and attempting to deregister the union. According to Spaull, the 1995 dispute proved to be “one of the fiercest industrial contests seen in Australian education”. 25

The dispute actually began in late 1994 when the Teachers’ Union signalled it would start industrial action the following year if the Education Department offered school teachers workplace agreements, as it had already done to TAFE (Technical and Further Education) teachers. At that stage, it also indicated it would be seeking a 20 per cent pay rise for school teachers. Then, in late December 1994, the Teachers’ Union said that school teachers would refuse to work overtime, or take part in any extracurricular activities, from the start of the 1995 school year. The threatened work ban came into effect as planned and stayed in place until October of that year. That action led to protests and strikes by students from several secondary schools during February and March. Responding, the Education Department offered teachers a five per cent pay rise in April, but the union rejected this and threatened to intensify the industrial action.

At this point, the Education Department also asked the State Industrial Relations Commission to intervene. Undaunted, school teachers and TAFE teachers then held a half-day stop-work meeting in late May 1995, at which they resolved to take further industrial action if the Education Department did not meet their demands. In June, the

Industrial Relations Commission ordered teachers to lift the work bans, but cancelled the directive later that month. The following month teachers voted to start rolling, education district-by-education district, two-hour strikes. Soon after that, the Education Department announced it would dock a full-day’s pay from the salaries of teachers who took part in such two-hour strikes. In early September, the Teachers’ Union initially offered to suspend all stop-work action but then decided to increase its industrial action after the State Government tried to stop the deduction of union fees from teachers’ salaries and to deregister the Union. Plans for a state-wide full-day strike on September 21 were implemented, although not all members of the Union executive favoured this action. According to *The West Australian*, about 10,000 of the State’s 18,000 government school teachers took part in the strike.²⁶ The next month, in October, 1995, the union applied to the Australian Industrial Relations Commission for interim federal award coverage. After appearing before the Commission, the Teachers’ Union and the Education Department agreed to negotiate, and the industrial action ceased on 20 October, 1995. Although the union had some concerns about the subsequent offer from the Education Department, which included a 15 per cent pay rise, the dispute was resolved by the start of the 1996 school year.

### Analysis of *The West Australian*’s Coverage of the 1995 Industrial Dispute

The teachers’ industrial action was the subject of significant media attention in 1995, with *The West Australian* newspaper publishing 183 articles about the conflict over the course of a year. Most of these articles were news stories, but the coverage also included nine editorials. In general, teachers were portrayed as militants, strongly committed to

their cause and willing to take aggressive action to achieve the desired outcomes. In the same vein, they were depicted as angry, threatening, determined, stubborn, and indifferent to the effects of industrial action on their students. Yet, the portrayal of teachers was not all negative, with the reporting throughout much of the dispute indicating that the community, including parents and some students, supported the teachers in their campaign for better pay and conditions.

In its editorials, the newspaper also took the stance that teachers deserved a pay rise. However, it was highly critical of their tactics. In particular, the introduction of work bans and the taking of strike action were strongly condemned.

Overall, the properties of teachers which were portrayed in The West Australian in its coverage of the 1995 industrial dispute, and which have been identified above, can be stated in the form of the following story line:

Throughout the entire dispute The West Australian reported that teachers were not satisfied with their pay or working conditions. While it also recognised that teachers were concerned about the quality of education, the more dominant message given was that the teachers’ industrial campaign was damaging their students. Initially the newspaper also reported that parents and the wider community were sympathetic to the teachers’ demands. However, as the dispute progressed, the view that it was having a negative effect on students was accompanied by one that it was also proving detrimental to parents and the community, and that the support of both groups for the teachers was diminishing. Furthermore, throughout the entire dispute it was reported that the majority of teachers would aggressively pursue their cause, and not back down. Also, while the reporting indicated solidarity among the teachers in the early stages of the
dispute, it was made clear in the latter stages that there was certain dissension by minority groups.

This storyline can be restated as six propositions about The West Australian’s portrayal of teachers in its coverage of the 1995 industrial dispute. These are as follows: i) teachers are not satisfied with their pay and conditions, ii) teachers will take action detrimental to their students to achieve their goals, iii) teachers have the support of the community, iv) teachers’ actions can affect schools and the wider community, v) teachers will aggressively pursue their cause and will not back down, and vii) teachers display some disunity with the intensification of industrial action. Each of these propositions will now be considered in turn.

Teachers are not satisfied with their pay, or working conditions

Early in December 1994, it was reported that the Teachers’ Union would be seeking a 20 per cent pay rise for its members.27 Not long after, the union president, Brian Lindberg, was quoted as saying that teachers were not happy about recent workplace changes.28 By early 1995, the union was portraying the teachers’ situation as grave. For example, Mr Lindberg was quoted as saying that Western Australian teachers were the lowest paid in the country.29 This message was reinforced with the reporting of comments made by another union official, Peter Quinn, who urged students not to become teachers, stating:

...the hours were long and teaching involved a lot of voluntary work and often meant being cramped in inadequate facilities with up to 32 students.... “If you want to be a teacher – and I’m going to suggest you don’t – you go to university

27 ‘Teachers threaten to strike over deal’, The West Australian, 5 December, 1994, 11.
for up to four years (then) you start at $26,000 a year but it takes you nine or 10 years to get to $38,000 a year,” he said. Compared with an accountant or architect, that was a terrible wage.\textsuperscript{30}

The next month Mr Quinn was further quoted as saying teachers were fed-up and morale was bad,\textsuperscript{31} while Mr Lindberg was reported as saying that changes to professional and employment practices were causing “heartaches”\textsuperscript{32} for teachers.

As the dispute intensified, various articles elaborated on the aspects of teachers’ working conditions that were causing dissatisfaction. These related to school maintenance, class sizes, transfers and student misbehaviour. It was also made clear that the union had calculated the financial cost of rectifying the situation. For example, in summarising the Teachers’ Union submission for the State budget, \textit{The West Australian} quoted Mr Lindberg as saying that a minimum 20 per cent pay rise was needed to cover extra duties taken on by teachers since 1991, and a total of $430 million was needed to raise the standard of public education.\textsuperscript{33} The teachers’ decision to start rolling strikes when only a minimal financial increase was allocated for education in the State budget indicated the seriousness they attached to their position. These messages about teachers’ dissatisfaction with pay and working conditions continued to be reported throughout the year-long coverage.\textsuperscript{34}

\textsuperscript{31} ‘Teachers row may grow’, \textit{The West Australian}, 3 March, 1995, 11.
\textsuperscript{32} ‘Teachers consider stepping up action’, \textit{The West Australian}, 5 April, 1995, 7.
\textsuperscript{33} ‘Teachers threats ignored’, \textit{The West Australian}, 1 June, 1995, 5.
Teachers will take action detrimental to their students to achieve their goals

Within the series of articles about the industrial dispute there were a small number of references to teachers being concerned about educational standards. For example, in one article a secondary school principal praised his staff for “taking a stand for the quality of education”.35 However, this image of teachers was undermined by the much more dominant message that they were willing to disrupt students’ education to achieve their industrial goals. This construction of teachers as ruthless and uncaring was evident from the first reports of the dispute in late 1994 until October 1995, when the Teachers’ Union lifted the work bans which had been in place all that year.

The image of teachers as indifferent to their students’ suffering was one of the strongest to emerge from the coverage. Their campaign was described as damaging, disruptive, unfair and irresponsible, with students being portrayed as the innocent victims, the “pawns”36 in an industrial war. This image was presented via interviews with students and parents, and in several strongly-worded editorials.

Numerous articles published in the first months of the 1995 school year reported that students were complaining about the effects of the teachers’ ban on extra-curricular work. In one such article, the newspaper quoted from a letter signed by 150 high school students which said that the teachers’ ban was disrupting their lives and affecting their chances of achieving success in their chosen after-school activities.37 Another article reported that student leaders from a different high school had told The West Australian that the teacher bans were denying students the opportunity to participate in excursions.

and camps, and disrupting their studies.\textsuperscript{38} In yet another article a high school student was reported as saying learning did not only happen in class, but also in after-school activities. It went on to quote her as saying: “Students miss their dance classes, school productions and sporting carnivals. They are important to us”.\textsuperscript{39}

The newspaper reports indicated that the responses from students, as well as subsequent student protests and public marches, did not sway the teachers at all. The most disapproving statements about their attitude towards their students can be seen in the newspaper’s editorials about the industrial action. Although \textit{The West Australian} supported the teachers’ case for better pay, it was highly critical of them for imposing the work bans and subsequently taking strike action. The first of these editorials claimed that many students were being “deprived” of learning opportunities because “the protagonists in the dispute are more interested in scoring points against each other than in treating the welfare of school children as their prime responsibility”.\textsuperscript{40} This demonising of teachers continued to dominate editorials as the industrial dispute wore on. For example, an editorial published in April 1995 described students as the “casualties” in the war between the Education Minister and the teachers, and went on to say:

If teachers wanted to show how much the education system relies on their out-of-school-hours contributions, they have made their point with graphic effectiveness. By needlessly continuing to make it, they continue to deny their students a wide range of activities that are necessary for a rounded education.\textsuperscript{41}

\textsuperscript{38} ‘More students boycott classes’, \textit{The West Australian}, 1 March, 1995, 5.
\textsuperscript{39} ‘Parents may fill gaps in school’, \textit{The West Australian}, 2 March, 1995, 7.
\textsuperscript{40} ‘Students caught in the crossfire’, \textit{The West Australian}, 24 February, 1995, 12.
\textsuperscript{41} ‘Students deprived in phoney war’, \textit{The West Australian}, 5 April, 1995, 12.
A later editorial accused the teachers of betraying “the people whose interests they are supposed to serve – school children”,42 while another referred to students as “the forgotten victims” who had “been denied their right to a rounded education by union bans on activities led by teachers out of school time”.43

The newspaper saved its harshest criticism of teachers for the editorials published in response to the full-day strike in September 1995. The editorial published the day after the strike began: “Yesterday will be remembered as a day of shame for WA education. It was the day on which thousands of teachers abandoned their obligations to students for no particular reason”.44 The sense that teachers were indifferent to the suffering of their students was reinforced when the same editorial claimed the strike would have had a particular impact on Year 12 students preparing for their end-of-year tertiary entrance examinations. This message was repeated in the next editorial published two weeks later, which denounced teachers for allowing students to start their school holidays with “an unacceptable cloud of confusion hanging over their schooling next term”. The editorial continued:

The disruption and feuding that have blighted the education system through this school year have affected all those at government schools – but the effects on year 12 students have been particularly pernicious. Students who have had to cope with the anxieties of preparing for examinations that will shape their future have had to contend with bans, strikes and the tensions of industrial conflict around them.45

Such reporting suggested that teachers felt no obligation to their students if they were willing to take action which disadvantaged the Year 12 students who most needed them.

Although the teachers ceased their industrial action as of 20 October, 1995, the newspaper reported the threat of further industrial action remained. The final editorial in the series of articles about the 1995 industrial action was published on 23 October, three days after industrial action ceased. Although welcoming the “lull in hostilities”, it made the point that the teachers’ protestations of concerns for students rang hollow after the bans, strikes and threats of that year.46

**Teachers have the support of the community**

While *The West Australian*’s editorials strongly criticised teachers for taking industrial action which affected students’ learning, many of the newspaper’s initial news articles indicated that the wider community was generally sympathetic to the teachers’ campaign. Indeed, up until about nine months into the dispute most of the parents and other community members quoted in news articles were shown to support the teachers. The head of one high school parents’ group was reported as saying members were “firmly behind the teachers”.47 Such support continued even up until the teachers started rolling strikes in July, with *The West Australian* quoting a parent defending the teachers’ decision to strike as follows: “It is an inconvenience but everyone has a right to strike – just like the rights of freedom of speech – and because they are teachers does not make a difference”.48 The academic community was also shown to back the campaign. In one of the earlier articles, the Dean of Education at Murdoch University, Ralph Straton, defended the teachers, saying they would not have implemented the work

bans unless “this highly professional and committed workforce was clearly feeling at the end of its tether”.49

The strong community support for teachers was acknowledged in the initial editorials about the industrial dispute. An editorial published about four months into the coverage said that the campaign had “given many parents a better understanding of the scope of teachers’ work and sympathy for their claim for better pay and conditions”.

Another editorial published two months later, said that the teachers’ cause had attracted “solid support and sympathy from many parents and students alike”.51 It then went on to recognise the importance of good teachers, while warning that the community support might not last:

Many people recognise that the best interests of schoolchildren lie in raising education standards. Competent, motivated and suitably paid teachers are central to that aim. But the community backing that teachers have had so far is likely to evaporate quickly if the union turns to punitive action against any members who defy the union leadership and sign individual agreements.52

Soon after this editorial was published the reporting shifted to indicate that teachers were no longer enjoying a very high level of support among the community. In fact, from late July 1995, seven months into the campaign, the newspaper reported that some parents believed the action had gone on too long. The head of a parents’ group was quoted as saying that the students were “suffering”,53 and another a parent warned that strike action affecting Year 12 students would prompt anger, stating:

It is tough enough for the Year 12s without adding to their worries with rolling strikes every week. I feel they have dragged it out for too long, they should not

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52 Ibid.
be resorting to strike action when the provision is available to talk through a dispute.54

A parent interviewed for a subsequent article said that students should not be used as pawns in the dispute, and that he had kept his children away from school for a full day in protest at the August two-hour strike. “It is not helping kids what is going on,” he said. “If you want to prove a point, don’t use the kids”.55

The sense that teachers were losing community support was reinforced in further editorials about the industrial dispute. One of these referred to “increasing signs of impatience among parents”.56 Another, published the day after the State-wide strike in September, said that teachers had “squandered an enormous amount of public sympathy and support through a campaign that hits hardest at the most vulnerable – their students”.57 Ultimately, according to the newspaper, “the teachers’ irresponsible series of bans and strikes achieved nothing other than alienating community support”.58 Hence, although the newspaper indicated that teachers initially had the backing of the public, it claimed they later lost that support by taking their industrial campaign too far.

Teacher industrial action can have a negative effect on schools and the wider community

The message that teacher industrial action could have a negative effect not only on students, but also on schools and the broader community, was evident from the start of The West Australian's coverage. In the second article about the industrial action, the newspaper reported that teachers intended to introduce a ban on extra-curricular work in
1995, while the next article reported that the work ban was already having serious repercussions. According to the newspaper, this ban had forced schools to cancel camps and sports competitions and had led to the postponement of parent-teacher interviews. The negative implications extended beyond schools to the world of business.  

Reports stated that privately-run camps and popular school-excursion destinations were losing custom, while private bus companies were “losing thousands of dollars a week as State schools affected by the teachers’ industrial action cancel day trips and other excursions”.  

A further repercussion of the teachers’ ban on extra-curricular work was highlighted in the reporting of several student protests which took place in early 1995. According to the newspaper, students at a number of schools had chosen to go on strike, or to make some form of protest, in response to the teacher work bans. One article, published in March, said that students at Maddington Senior High School had “boycotted their morning classes” in protest at the industrial action, following the lead of students from four other Perth senior high schools who had already taken strike action. Such reporting promoted a view that the student action was adding to the disruption already affecting government schools and creating chaos.

According to the newspaper, the teachers’ action was shown to also be affecting planning for the future of schools. The bans on extra-curricular work, reports stated, had frustrated the implementation of a devolution process across the school system because teachers were not attending associated after-school meetings with parent bodies to

61 Such student action eventually spilled into the wider community with students marching on Parliament House, and taking part in a protest through the Perth central business district in March 1995.
discuss the changes. In the early stages of the dispute it was also stated that teachers had “become preoccupied with industrial issues” and were not “focused on decisions which affect their schools’ futures”.63 The WA Council of State School Organisations’ president, Anne Spencer, was quoted on this, saying: “Schools should be meeting in first term to discuss things like policy writing and dress codes but the strike is making it impossible”.64 A later report claimed that teachers had “jeopardised school planning for 1996 with eight months of bans on after-school activities”,65 and an editorial published in July warned of “worrying signs about the future health and effectiveness of State schools”.66 By September, a notion that schools had reached crisis point was being aired, with the Education Department Director-General, Greg Black, being quoted as saying that “unless there is a deal done soon there is going to be great damage to government schools”.67

Throughout its coverage of the industrial dispute, The West Australian depicted the teachers’ campaign as being a burden on parents. In the early stages, reports claimed that parents were not able to meet teachers outside of class hours because of the ban on extra-curricular activities. As well, the newspaper stated that the Education Department was considering asking parents to take on activities which would normally be supervised by teachers in after-school hours.68 These effects were depicted as intensifying as the industrial action escalated. One editorial, for example, condemned the teachers for taking part in a half-day stop work meeting in May, saying:

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64 Ibid.
68 Ibid.
Thousands of youngsters will have their lessons interrupted and many parents will be forced to make special arrangements to look after their children during normal teaching hours as the impact of the long-running pay dispute sweeps through schools.69

In subsequent articles about the strikes the newspaper quoted several parents describing the impact of such action. A notable example is the description given of the significant implications for a father and small business owner of the state-wide strike in September:

The unexpected break is one that Mr Rummer, who runs a fish processing factory in Fremantle, can ill afford. Two of his seven employees have also taken a day off to look after children. “It couldn’t have come at a worse time,” he said. “It is the hardest time of the year for me and certainly a day off is going to hurt”.70

Such reporting portrayed the teachers’ industrial campaign as not only inconveniencing parents, but also causing some to lose income.

**Teachers will aggressively pursue their cause and will not back down**

From the first article foreshadowing the industrial dispute, published in early December 1994, through to the final articles in this series published one year later, teachers were depicted as being willing to take strong actions to improve their pay and working conditions. The initial article, which referred to “teachers’ threats of industrial action”,71 was the first of many references to teachers and the Teachers’ Union threatening the State Government. Another article, published later that month, reinforced this message, with the Education Minister, Norman Moore, claiming that the union constantly resorted to “threats and intimidation”.72

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71 ‘Teachers threaten to strike over deal’, *The West Australian*, 5 December, 1994, 11.  
The West Australian’s coverage also conveyed a view that teachers were quick and decisive in following through on their threats. In December 1994 it reported that the union would introduce a ban on extra-curricular work from the start of the following school year. This ban, when implemented across the government school system in February 1995, had immediate repercussions for students and the wider community, according to the newspaper. In particular, teachers were portrayed as having a certain amount of power in that actions had a negative effect on students, parents and the wider community. Their ability to impose work bans without suffering pay cuts was a “potent weapon”, with the Education Minister, Norman Moore, quoted as saying that he could not negotiate while the Teachers’ Union was “holding a gun” to the back of his head.

As the coverage continued, teachers were consistently depicted as assertive and active. When the work bans failed to get the desired response from the State Government, the newspaper reported that teachers, via the union, had threatened to intensify the industrial action. The determination to be assertive and aggressive was conveyed in the use of such strong terminology as “teachers rejected an initial pay offer from the government”, “teachers sought guarantees”, “teachers set deadlines”, and “teachers retaliated with stronger action”. The sense of a determination to achieve at all costs was also made apparent in the reporting of a stop-work meeting in June 1995, attended by some 7500 teachers, when the Teachers’ Union president, Brian Lindberg, was quoted as saying: “We mean business and we want money in the Budget, and if it is not there, they can expect further industrial trouble”.

74 ‘Moore’s offer unlikely to end dispute’, The West Australian, 29 March 1995, 10.
Aggressive language continued to be used to describe teachers and their actions throughout the coverage. They were repeatedly constructed as being angry and frustrated about their working conditions, and about the government’s response to their demands. When the State budget delivered only a very small increase in funding to education, *The West Australian* reported that the “angry teachers may “retaliate”. They did so the following month when they voted to start rolling strikes across each of the Western Australian school districts. The article reporting this development quoted the union president, Brian Lindberg, as follows:

Teachers were angry about the offer, angry about the state of schools, about inadequate funding in the State Budget and about the Government trying to entice teachers to sign individual workplace agreements. And they wanted to show it. The article concluded with Mr Lindberg saying that teachers were keen to take stronger action.

War metaphors were common throughout the coverage. The militant teachers were often described as being “at war” with the State Government and the Education Department. Schools were termed “war-zones” and “battlefields” and students were the” innocent victims” of an “industrial war”. The view of teachers as adopting an aggressive stance was maintained as the dispute continued. In September, the newspaper announced that the teachers had voted in favour of a full-day strike later that month, and subsequently it reported that the majority of teachers took part in that strike. When the teachers called off their industrial action the following month, the newspaper did not laud that development, choosing instead to focus on the union’s threat of further strikes.

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77 ‘Teachers happy to strike for a better deal’, *The West Australian*, 28 July 1995, 8.
Throughout the year-long coverage of the industrial dispute teachers were also presented as extremely determined and stubborn, unmoved by threats from, or actions by, the State Government, or the Education Department. This portrayal can be seen most clearly in the editorials in which the teachers’ unwillingness to back down was typically described in negative and critical language. The first editorial, published in February 1995, described teachers as “intransigent”, a word which was to be continue to be applied to teachers and the Teachers’ Union many times. For example, it was repeated in a subsequent editorial in which teachers were also accused of “blind obstinacy”, “perverse conduct” and the “bloody-minded pursuit of an industrial relations ascendency”.79 By July, the newspaper, in another editorial, claimed that the “incapacity” of the teachers and the State Government to resolve their differences over such a long period of time was “becoming scandalous”.80 In other editorials teachers and their union were also accused of “militant inflexibility” and “bloody-minded intransigence”.82

The depiction of teachers as uncompromising in their approach was reinforced by the reporting in many of the news articles published throughout the year-long dispute. Teachers, it was claimed, refused to lift work bans and defied orders from the State Government and the State Industrial Relations Commission. They were also shown to reject several unsatisfactory offers from the State Government, being shown to appear unmoved by its growing anger and frustration, and by the problems the industrial action was creating for students. This perceived intransigence was captured seven months into

the dispute when the head of the Teachers’ Union was quoted as saying that teachers were “prepared to maintain the action as long as necessary”.83

**Teachers display some disunity with the intensification of industrial action**

Throughout most of the reporting of the 1995 industrial dispute, teachers were shown to be united in their support for the campaign and associated industrial action. From the beginning, *The West Australian* reported that there was “overwhelming support”84 among teachers for the bans on extra-curricular work and that the vast majority of teachers were unwilling to accept the State Government’s initial pay offer in April 1995.85 This image of teacher solidarity continued, with the newspaper reporting the high turnout at a stop-work meeting in the Perth central business district in June, where several motions were passed unanimously. It was also reported that 95 per cent of teachers in rural centres had attended stop-work meetings.86 This explicit and implicit acknowledgement that the teachers were united regardless of their geographical location appeared again in an editorial published in late-June. The Education Minister’s handling of the dispute, it was claimed, had pushed the Teachers’ Union to take more militant action and it was backed by the “overwhelming majority”87 of its members.

About ten months into the dispute the contention that teachers were united and supported industrial action came into question as the newspaper reported that the Teachers’ Union officers were split over the most recent government pay offer to

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85 ‘Teachers consider stepping up action’, *The West Australian*, 5 April, 1995, 7.
teachers. It subsequently reported that significant divisions were emerging within the union and that political infighting was compromising the teachers’ campaign. One of the candidates in the union’s upcoming presidential election was quoted as saying the union was “self-destructing” and that the proposed full-day strike was likely to be unpopular, particularly among country teachers. In response to this development, The West Australian published a comment-piece by a staff reporter which claimed that union solidarity had “exploded into a million shards”. The article went on to say the situation was “a long way from the heady days of May, when an emotional Mr Lindberg received a standing ovation from more than 7500 teachers”.

Reports about the full-day strike, which went ahead on 21 September, reinforced the message that teachers were no longer completely united in their support for the industrial action. One article said that teachers from 40 schools had urged the union to cancel the strike, and that four of the eleven people on the union executive had voted against it. The newspaper also reported that the number of teachers who took part in the strike was less than the number who walked off the job for a stop-work meeting earlier in the year. About 10,000 of 18,000 teachers took part in the September strike, the article said, compared to about 14,000 who had stopped work in June. While it acknowledged that the Teachers’ Union still had its supporters, reporting that those who attended the stop-work meeting voted unanimously to censure the government for its attacks, the article also pointed out that “more than 35 per cent of the State teachers, including a third of the union’s members, ignored the directive to strike and went to

88 ‘Union threatens to strike despite split’, The West Australian, 16 September, 1995, 4.
90 ‘Teachers sink into a shambles’, The West Australian, 19 September, 1995, 3.
91 Ibid.
school”.93 Hence, in the final months of the year-long coverage of the dispute, *The West Australian* conveyed the view that while the majority of teachers were willing to maintain the industrial campaign, some were resisting the union’s official line, and support among teachers for strike action was decreasing.

**Conclusion**

This chapter opened with a broad overview on the history of the State School Teachers’ Union of Western Australia and on teacher militancy internationally, in Australia, and in Western Australia. It also detailed the events leading to the Western Australian teachers’ industrial campaign of 1995, before going on to present an analysis of *The West Australian*’s coverage of the dispute. The latter analysis led to the development of a series of propositions about the newspaper’s representation of teachers. These are as follows: teachers are not satisfied with their pay, or working conditions; teachers will take action detrimental to their students to achieve their goals; teachers have the support of the community; teacher industrial action can have a negative effect on schools and the wider community; teachers will aggressively pursue their cause and will not back down, and teachers display some disunity with the intensification of industrial action.

Some of these propositions are consistent with the images of teachers that have emerged from other domains. For example, the message that teachers are not satisfied with their pay and working conditions also features in the educational research literature;94 while the claim that teacher industrial action can negatively impact on schools and the wider community has arisen frequently in other news media, according

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to relevant studies. However, not all of the elements of *The West Australian’s* coverage align with the findings of research on teachers. For example, the newspaper’s depiction of teachers as being willing to take action detrimental to their students to achieve their goals is in contrast to the image of teachers as extremely devoted to their students which dominates the educational research literature. These and other comparisons will be addressed in more detail in Chapter Eight. Attention now, however, will be turned to Chapter Five, which is concerned with *The West Australian’s* reporting of the introduction of standardised testing in Western Australia between 1997 and 2001.

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CHAPTER FIVE


Introduction

The industrial dispute between Western Australian public school teachers and the State Government was resolved by the start of 1996 and The West Australian ceased reporting on the issue. Soon, however, another educational development was brought to the forefront for consideration by the public. This development, the standardised\(^1\) testing of school children, was to become the subject of significant and sustained coverage in newspapers across Australia, including in The West Australian. In 1996 the Federal Government commissioned the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) to test a cross-section of some 8000 Year 3 and Year 5 students against reading and writing benchmarks for their age levels. Not satisfied with the results, which indicated that about 30 per cent of the children tested did not have the desired literacy skills, Education Ministers from all Australian states resolved in 1997 to develop rigorous state-based annual literacy and numeracy assessments for all students in years 3, 5 and 7 to be phased in from 1998. Out of this grew the standardised testing development which is the concern of this chapter.

The main focus of this chapter is The West Australian newspaper’s coverage of the introduction of standardised testing in Western Australian schools from 1997 to 2001. The chapter is in three parts. First, the general arguments that have been put forward by academics in recent years with regard to the advantages and disadvantages

\(^1\) This study uses the Australian spelling of standardised, only adopting the American spelling, ‘standardized’, when quoting directly from an American source.
of standardised testing in education are briefly detailed. Secondly, by way of further contextual background, the use of standardised testing internationally, and in the United States of America and England and Wales (countries that typically influence thinking about education in Australia) more specifically is outlined. The final, and central, section is an analysis of The West Australian’s coverage of the introduction of standardised testing in Western Australian schools between 1997 and 2001.

The General Arguments that Have Been Put Forward by Academics in Recent Years Regarding the Advantages and Disadvantages of Standardised Testing

Standardised testing of school students has been, over the past 20 to 30 years, a dominant, and often contentious, issue in education. As part of a world-wide push for accountability and assessment in education, most developed countries introduced large-scale standardised testing of school children at some time during that period. This recent movement began in the United States of America, when the use of state-wide assessment of school children started in Texas in 1984. Testing has also become popular in the United Kingdom, where nationally prescribed tests were introduced in 1991. In Australia, it will be recalled, each state agreed to introduce state-devised annual literacy and numeracy assessments from 1998. Ten years later that was replaced by a national system of testing.

Despite the widespread use of standardised testing, research about its effectiveness in promoting the raising of educational standards is far from conclusive. The evidence in favour of standardised testing includes the findings of Carnoy and

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Loeb, who analysed the effect of accountability, in the form of standardised tests, against the results of the North American National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) mathematics tests across 50 states from 1996 to 2000. The results indicated a “positive and significant relationship between the strength of the states’ accountability systems and math achievement gains at the 8th grade level across racial-ethnic groups”. Hanushek and Raymond also found positive correlations between school accountability systems and improved student performance after analysing data from across North American states between 1993 and 2002. Comparing NAEP mathematics and English results against the introduction of high-stakes testing, they concluded that the accountability systems had a “significantly positive” effect on achievement. However, this impact was found to only apply to states which attached consequences to performance. Thus, the researchers supported the move to link consequences to accountability systems, as recommended in the ‘No Child Left Behind Act’ of 2001.

Others scholars have made even stronger claims in support of testing. In a review of the literature about its effectiveness, Cizek argued that research had “demonstrated conclusively” its value. Further, he reported that “decades of evidence have been amassed to support the contention that the quality of teacher-made tests pales compared

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4 Ibid., 320.
6 Ibid., 321.
7 Signed into law in 2002 by then United States President, George Bush, ‘No Child Left Behind’ recommended the testing of all public school children in grades 3 to 8 in reading and mathematics from 2005/2006, and in science from 2007/2008.
to more rigorously developed, large-scale counterparts”.\textsuperscript{9} While acknowledging that testing had come under strong and repeated criticism, Cizek concluded that solid research evidence was available to refute common claims made against it.\textsuperscript{10}

In contrast, other research has shown that testing does not improve student outcomes and may actually be detrimental to learning. As early as 1987, Cannell\textsuperscript{11} found that essentially all states and most districts in the United States of America were reporting that their students were scoring above the national norm on NAEP tests. Based on his review, he claimed that “standardized, nationally normed achievement tests give children, parents, school systems, legislatures, and the press inflated and misleading reports on achievement levels”.\textsuperscript{12} More than two decades later, British researchers arrived at the same conclusion after assessing the relevant literature on testing as part the Cambridge Primary Review,\textsuperscript{13} an independent inquiry into the present condition of, and future prospects for, primary school education in England. In summarising its position on standardised testing, the Review was unequivocal:

It is often claimed that national tests raise standards. At best their impact is oblique....High stakes testing leads to “teaching to the test” and even parents concentrate their attention on the areas being tested. It is the intensity of the focus, and anxiety about the results and their consequences, which make the initial difference to test scores. But it does not last; for it is not testing which raises standards but good teaching.\textsuperscript{14}

Others have found no benefits in testing. For example, Nichols, Glass and Berliner, after conducting an examination of high-stakes testing pressure across 25 North American

\textsuperscript{9} Ibid., 41.
\textsuperscript{10} Ibid., 30.
\textsuperscript{11} J.J. Cannell, \textit{Nationally Normed Elementary Achievement Testing in America's Public Schools: How all 50 States are Above the National Average}, 2nd ed. (Daniels, WV: Friends of Education, 1987).
\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., 3.
\textsuperscript{13} Cambridge Primary Review, \textit{Introduction to the Cambridge Primary Review} (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Faculty of Education, October 2009).
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 30.
states, reported that there was no “consistent evidence that high-stakes testing works to increase achievement”.\textsuperscript{15} Another review of student achievement results following the introduction of the ‘No Child Left Behind Act’ of 2001, found that the testing measures recommended by the Act had not had a significant impact on reading and mathematics achievement.\textsuperscript{16}

Some researchers argue that testing is not only ineffective, but is also detrimental to students and teachers. Luke and Woods have described the extensive “collateral effects” of testing as follows:

...test-preparation sessions, school and district-level test administration and test-score manipulation, loss of experienced teachers, inadequate funding for professional development, lack of support for English language learners and students with special needs, increased teacher utilisation of packaged materials without ‘scientific’ backing, and, significantly, a narrowing of the overall curriculum.\textsuperscript{17}

Similarly, McNeil\textsuperscript{18} has argued that standardised testing reduces the quality and quantity of what is taught in schools and diminishes the role of teachers. In the long term, she says, it can also widen the learning gap between privileged and minority students.

Implicit in the focus on standardised testing is the notion that inadequate educational standards are directly linked to teaching. The perceived deficit in education, according to Zimmerman and Dibenedetto, “has been attributed (often unfairly) to teachers who are poorly trained or unmotivated, classroom or school environments that

\textsuperscript{15}S. Nichols, G. Glass, and D. Berliner, "High-stakes testing and student achievement: Does accountability pressure increase student learning?," \textit{Education Policy Analysis Archives} 14, no. 1 (2006), 6.

\textsuperscript{16} J. Lee, \textit{Tracking Achievement Gaps and Assessing the Impact of NCLB on the Gaps: An In-Depth Look into National and State Reading and Maths Outcomes} (Cambridge, MA: Civil Rights Project at Harvard University, June 2006), 56.


do promote academic learning, and school administrators with little incentive to improve”. 19 Hence, much of the blame for a perceived decline in standards, and the onus for improvement, has fallen on teachers and schools. This may, in part, explain why standardised testing has come under sustained criticism from teachers and teachers’ unions.

Teachers in Australia, the United States of America, and England and Wales, have generally rejected moves to introduce standardised testing. For example, in 1993, teacher unions in England and Wales directed teachers to boycott the national tests based on the perceived extra associated workload. This was followed by another union boycott in 1994, due to dissatisfaction with the quality of the tests and the valuing of external tests over teacher assessment. 20 In the United States of America, the largest teacher union, the National Education Association, sought a moratorium on standardised tests from the early 1970s on the grounds that they were inappropriate and potentially damaging to students. Such opposition to testing continued throughout the 1980s and into the late 1990s. 21 In Australia, teacher unions opposed the introduction of testing and have consistently threatened to boycott annual tests. Specifically in Western Australia, the State School Teachers’ Union (Teachers’ Union) directed members to boycott the administration and marking of such tests in 1998, 1999, 2000 and 2001.

The Use of Standardised Testing Internationally, and in the United States of America and England and Wales

Testing, in the form of oral assessment, appears to be as old as schooling itself.\textsuperscript{22} However, standardised testing, in the form of written assessment that presents all students with the same tasks and requires the same responses, was not introduced until the early part of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century. Writing in America, in 1918, Monroe\textsuperscript{23} reported that the number of tests used to measure the abilities of school students had grown dramatically in the past decade, and particularly in the previous five years. He identified 109 such tests. The same year, Ayres\textsuperscript{24} wrote that while standardised testing was initially used sparsely in England, Germany and France, it was now popular throughout the world, with growth most marked in the United States of America, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and India.

The use of standardised testing in education became more widespread in the years following World War II, despite some strong opposition,\textsuperscript{25} but it was not until the early 1980s that it was implemented on a large scale as part of the so-called “standards” and “accountability” movements. Usage increased significantly during the following decade, to the extent that the 1990s was termed “the age of accountability”.\textsuperscript{26} This increase can be attributed to several developments. The late 1970s and the 1980s saw the emergence in many Western countries of a market model of education, with a new focus on accountability and value for money. At the same time, governments were

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{22} Ibid., 23.
  \item \textsuperscript{24} L.P. Ayres, "History and present status of educational measurements," in The Measurement of Educational Products, ed. G. M. Whipple (Bloomington, IL: Public School Publishing, 1918).
  \item \textsuperscript{25} G. Giordano, How Testing Came to Dominate American Schools (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2005), 191.
  \item \textsuperscript{26} E. Hanushek and M. Raymond, "Does school accountability lead to improved student performance?," Journal of Policy Analysis and Management 24, no. 2 (2005), 306.
\end{itemize}
beginning to exert more control over education and schools.\(^{27}\) This was partially motivated by a public perception that educational standards were declining and that school students were not being taught the fundamentals skills of reading, writing and mathematics.\(^{28}\) This view of education was reinforced by the news media, particularly the press, which frequently reported that students were not meeting literacy and numeracy benchmarks.\(^{29}\)

By introducing standardised testing, governments could be seen to be acting to raise educational standards, as well as monitoring results and imposing accountability. As Linn explains, testing appeals to policy-makers for a number of reasons:

Firstly, tests and assessments are relatively inexpensive. Compared to changes that involve increasing instructional time, reducing class size, attracting more able people teaching, hiring teacher aides, or implementing programmatic changes that involve substantial professional development for teachers, assessment is cheap. Second, testing and assessment can be externally mandated. It is far easier to mandate testing and assessment requirements at the state or district level than it is to take actions that involve actual change in what happens inside the classroom. Third, testing and assessment changes can be rapidly implemented. Importantly, new test or assessment requirements can be implemented within the term of office of elected officials. Fourth, results are visible. Test results can be reported to the press.\(^{30}\)


Testing is also popular with the general public; opinion polls have consistently indicated that the majority of parents and the wider community support testing of students and want comparative information about schools. Test results are now not only reported in the media, but are also published on government websites in the United States of America, England and Wales, and Australia. This is justified on the basis that it allows parents to make informed choices about their child’s education. It also serves another purpose, according to O’Donoghue and Clarke, who argue that the publishing of test results allows governments to “shift the blame for poor performance” away from their own inability to resolve the issue, and on to teachers and schools.

In the United States of America, the NAEP test has been in place since the late 1960s, but was initially given only to a small sample of students, and state results were not compared. The more recent use of large-scale standardised testing in the United States of America can be traced back to the 1983 government-commissioned report, *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform* (‘A Nation at Risk’). Although a number of reports about the American education system were released around that time, ‘A Nation at Risk’ was to have a particularly strong impact. According to Giordano, the report “would eclipse all other proposals from that year, that decade and that quarter of the century”. Using low academic scores as evidence of severe problems in American education, ‘A Nation at Risk’ called for extensive school reforms and prompted a flood of studies and proposals for change. Among these was a push for

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more standardised testing. Within nine years of the release of the report, 42 American
states had introduced some form of prescribed educational standardised testing, with
Texas, under the governance of George Bush, leading the way in 1984.

Testing in the United States of America was expanded with the ‘No Child Left
Behind Act’ of 2001 introduced by the then President, George Bush. Signed into law in
2002, the Act recommended the testing of all public school children in grades 3 to 8 in
reading and maths from 2005/2006, and in science from 2007/2008. The tests were to be
devised by each state and had to be aligned with state academic standards. The Federal
goal was for all students to score by 2013/2014 at, or above, grade-level proficiency
according to state standards. The Act also stipulated that a sample of 4th and 8th grade
students from each state had to take part in the NAEP testing program each year to
provide comparison data. In addition, the Act proposed that both positive and negative
consequences be attached to test results. Under such a system, schools which did not
meet required standards might be penalised through reductions in funding, or even
through closure, while those who exceeded expectations might be rewarded with extra
funding, or resources. This approach, adopted by numerous North American states, led
to the emergence of the term “high-stakes testing” to describe tests to which significant
consequences are attached.

In England and Wales, the establishment of the Assessment of Performance Unit
in 1974, marked the first attempt to systematically monitor national standards among 11

35 S.B. Nolen, T.M. Haladyna, and N.S. Haas, "Uses and abuses of achievement test scores," Educational
36 B. Zimmerman and M. Dibenedetto, "Mastery learning and assessment: Implications for students and
teachers in an era of high-stakes testing," Psychology in the Schools 45, no. 3 (2008), 212.
37 G. Cizek, "High-stakes testing: Contexts, characteristics, critiques, and consequences," in Defending
and 14-year-old school students in a range of subjects, but it wasn’t until the ‘Education Reform Act’ of 1988 was introduced that testing commenced on a large scale. The Act represented a turning point in education as, prior to 1988, government intervention in education in England and Wales was minimal.\textsuperscript{38} Under the new system, schools were required to follow a national curriculum which was aligned with externally-set national tests for students aged 7, 11 and 14 in English and mathematics, and for students aged 11 and 14 in science. The implementation of these tests, known as standard assessment tasks (SATs), took place in 1991. Annual national testing has continued to date, albeit with some modifications. The results are made available to the public in England and Wales and are published in a range of national and regional newspapers.

The ‘Children’s Plan’ of 2007 set new targets for education and softened the government line on testing.\textsuperscript{39} Nevertheless, the 2009 ‘Cambridge Primary Review’ was highly critical of the still-prevailing focus on testing, concluding that “national tests and tables are narrowing the curriculum, limiting children’s learning and failing to provide sufficiently broad and reliable information about individual children, schools or the primary sector as a whole”.\textsuperscript{40} It called for a thorough reform of the national assessment system and recommended that testing only take place at the end of primary schooling. The Review also suggested that monitoring of the performance of schools and the education system more widely should take place through minimally disruptive sample testing.

\textsuperscript{38} Cambridge Primary Review, \textit{Introduction to the Cambridge Primary Review} (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Faculty of Education, October 2009), 11.
\textsuperscript{39} Ibid., 11.
\textsuperscript{40} Ibid., 30.
In Australia, concerns about literacy standards among school children arose in the 1970s. Indeed, according to Green, Hodgens and Luke, who analysed topics relating to literacy, reading and writing in Australian newspaper articles, ministerial press releases, legislation, parliamentary debates, teachers’ guidelines and educational literature from 1945 to the early 1990s, the word literacy has only been in common use in Australia since the mid-to-late 1970s. By then, governments in Australia and other Western countries were seeking to expand access to education for migrants, indigenous people, adults and others. The research undertaken by Green, Hodgens and Luke found that, concurrently, literacy and illiteracy “became front-page news with near hysteria about the social, medical and cultural consequences of illiteracy, which was almost always framed up in terms of individual deficit and social advantage”.

Literacy continued to be an issue during the 1980s. The shift towards economic rationalism in education, however, led to a change in the way it was defined:

The aim became production of productive workers, skilled in new technologies and adapted to a flexible, post-Fordist economy. Most recently, this has led to literacy being redefined in terms of measurable, occupationally valuable ‘competencies’. Here the focus has been less on moral content and more on debates about instructional and assessment theories and methods, and over the ‘accountability’ of teachers and systems for producing quantifiable educational results.

As in the United States of America and England and Wales, the influence of this new economic approach to education would ultimately lead to the testing of Australian school children, though at a later date.

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42 Ibid, 20.
43 Ibid, 21.
In 1990, the Australian Federal Government released a discussion paper about a proposed literacy and language policy for the 1990s. This was followed, in 1991, by ‘Australia’s Language: The Australian Literacy and Language Policy’, which was intended to raise language and literacy skills throughout the nation. Four years later, in 1996, the Federal Government commissioned the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) to test some 8000 Year 3 and Year 5 students across the nation against reading and writing benchmarks for their age levels. Although about 70 per cent of the students tested met the performance standards, the then Federal Education Minister, David Kemp, described the results as a “national disgrace” when releasing them to a television current affairs program in 1997. The focus was on the 30 per cent of students who did not have the desired literacy skills. The news media seized on the results and repeatedly claimed that Australia was in the midst of a literacy crisis, and that Australian educational standards were far below those of other developed countries.

By now, most Australian state governments had introduced some form of standardised testing. Later, in 1997, this situation was formalised and expanded when each state agreed to implement a newly-developed ‘National Literacy and Numeracy Plan’. Under the plan, the states supported the development of agreed literacy and numeracy benchmarks for years 3, 5 and 7, which would be measured using rigorous annual state-based assessment procedures. Compulsory testing of Year 3 school students

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began in 1998, followed by Year 5 students in 1999 and Year 7 students in 2001. That system continued until 2007, at which point Education Ministers from each state agreed to work together to conduct national literacy and numeracy testing for years 3, 5, 7 and 9. The following year, all Australian students in those year levels were assessed, for the first time, on the same tests in literacy and numeracy. These tests are known as National Assessment Program Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) assessments. NAPLAN results are now made public and are used to rank and compare schools on a Federal Government website entitled ‘MySchool’, which was launched in 2010.

**Analysis of The West Australian’s Coverage of the Introduction of Standardised Testing from 1997 to 2001**

The introduction of standardised testing was the focus of 106 articles in *The West Australian* between 1997 and 2001. The focus ceased after 2001, at which stage standardised testing was established for the desired age groups across the school system. It remained in place until 2008, when Australian Federal and State Governments decided to introduce nationally-prescribed NAPLAN tests.

Coverage began in *The West Australian* in March 1997, when the Federal Education Minister, David Kemp, called for the introduction of standardised assessment across Australian schools. Later that month, all of the state Education Ministers agreed to introduce state-devised standardised testing for Australian students in Year 3 and Year 5. Most of the reportage in *The West Australian* throughout that year, which included 26 news articles and two opinion pieces, described the reaction to the introduction of this testing and outlined the political and financial implications of the initiative.

47 www.myschool.edu.au
The West Australian continued to devote significant attention to the introduction of testing throughout the following year, publishing 25 news articles and two opinion pieces on the subject. Much of that coverage was about the testing of Year 3 students, which took place for the first time in August 1998. The 18 news articles and two opinion pieces published in 1999 charted the expansion of the system to include the testing of Year 5 students and included the reporting of the initial test results.

In 2000, the newspaper published 16 news articles and three opinion pieces about the testing. The coverage decreased again in 2001, as the issue began to lose currency. That year the paper published 11 news articles and one opinion piece about the testing, which included coverage of the first testing of Year 7 students in August.

In general, The West Australian’s coverage of the introduction of standardised testing portrayed teachers as subversives, resistant to accountability measures, opposed to standardised testing, and willing to undermine its introduction. These properties of teachers can be stated in the following storyline:

While The West Australian’s coverage of the introduction of standardised testing initially conveyed the impression that the educational standards of Western Australian school students were sound, the more dominant message to emerge was that they were declining and that teachers and schools were to blame. From mid-way through the coverage, the newspaper argued that it was a fundamental right of parents and the wider community to know how schools were performing, and condemned teachers and the teachers’ union for consistently opposing the release of individual school results. The reporting suggested that teachers resisted the introduction of accountability measures such as standardised testing because they feared the comparisons that might
arise from such testing, and that they would undermine the process if testing was enforced. The newspaper acknowledged that teachers were under pressure, which was increased by testing. However, it also argued that teachers legitimated their opposition, not on the grounds of the pressure they were experiencing, but on the grounds that the testing had no educational value.

Five propositions about The West Australian’s portrayal of teachers in its coverage of the introduction of standardised testing can be identified within the storyline. These are as follows: i) teachers and schools are to blame for declining educational standards, ii) teachers resist accountability measures aimed at improving educational standards because they fear being compared, iii) teachers are under pressure and testing aimed at improving educational standards increases that pressure, iv) teachers will undermine the testing process if testing is enforced, and v) teachers legitimate their opposition to standardised testing by claiming that it has no educational value. Each of these propositions will now be discussed in turn.

Teachers and schools are to blame for declining educational standards

While some of the reporting indicated that schools and teachers were doing a good job, the coverage overall conveyed the message that educational standards were declining due to inadequate teaching. For example, one of the initial articles referred to a study which had found a significant proportion of Australian adults had some literacy problems. It quoted the then Australian Prime Minister, John Howard, saying that the
results of the study cast doubt on contemporary “faddish”48 teaching approaches, and calling for a return to back-to-basics in education. An opinion piece written by a staff reporter, which was published in The West Australian the following day, supported these assertions, stating:

School systems have tended to fall prey to educational fads, which had led to silly practices such as not correcting spelling and grammatical errors. A concerted campaign is needed in schools to improve students’ English. This means that all teachers should be teachers of English and all should help children to reach better standards.49

Another article reported that “teachers are falling into the trap of assuming illiteracy is an individual student problem rather than a problem which affects specific groups”.50

The claim was based on an interview with an academic within a university education studies department who argued that teachers needed to change their “assumptions” about teaching literacy.

The reporting of test results also claimed that teachers were not adequately fulfilling their role. When detailing the results of the first standardised tests, The West Australian claimed that one-in-five Year 3 students had “failed to make the grade in reading, writing and spelling in a State-wide literacy test”.51 When the newspaper received additional information about the test results the ensuing coverage was even more damning. A page-one article entitled ‘Literacy shock: 120 schools fail the tests’ said that the majority of the Year 3 students in 120 of 595 primary schools had failed either the reading, writing, or spelling, components of the previous year’s tests.52 The next day the newspaper published an opinion piece by a staff reporter which said that

49 ‘Renewed focus on literacy needed’, The West Australian, 10 September, 1997, 14.
52 ‘Literacy shock: 120 schools fail the test’, The West Australian, 8 April, 1999, 1.
the test results raised “questions about the capacity of schools to help these children to achieve the literacy levels at which they should be achieving”.53

The sense that schools and teachers were under-performing continued in 2000 and 2001, with several articles referring to a need for improvement. In one such article the newspaper quoted the Western Australian Education Minister, Colin Barnett, as saying that the government planned to focus on a “clear improvement in education standards”,54 which would be achieved through such measures as the annual literacy and numeracy tests. Another article outlined the findings of a Federal Government report which claimed that 20 per cent of schoolchildren had inadequate literacy and numeracy skills and needed special attention. It implied that this was due to poor teaching, saying that teachers “needed to pay more attention to parents’ concerns”.55 It went on to claim that one woman was told by teachers that her daughter was progressing normally for three consecutive years, only to later discover that she had a learning disability. The newspaper also portrayed a negative image of public schooling and teaching in reporting that many parents were being “forced” to pay for private tuition for their children. Private literacy centres, it was held, were being inundated by parents “desperate for an alternative to the government school system”.56

The message that teachers and schools were to blame for declining educational standards was a dominant theme in the coverage. However, The West Australian did publish some articles within the early part of the coverage in 1997 and 1998, which presented a more positive picture. In one such article an academic at Curtin University

54 ‘School mix to bring out the best: Barnett’, The West Australian, 15 March, 2000, 42.
in Perth described teachers as “very practical people trained to identify what strategies best suited each child”.\footnote{Flexibility key to literacy: experts', \textit{The West Australian}, 17 September, 1997, 8.} In another, the head of the principals’ association was quoted as saying that the results of an international maths and science study showed WA schools were going a good job.\footnote{Study wins school cheers’, \textit{The West Australian}, 9 October, 1997, 28.} An article in which the Education Minister, Colin Barnett, referred to Western Australian students’ strong performance in international maths and science surveys also suggested the government had faith in teachers and schools. Mr Barnett was quoted as saying: “We rightly feel very confident about our performance in this State in numeracy and I think that is to the great credit of students, their teachers and the programs operating in WA schools”.\footnote{‘High marks for mathematics’, \textit{The West Australian}, 1 January, 1998, 23.} Such praise for teachers, however, was rare. The majority of the coverage indicated that teachers and schools were to blame for declining literacy and numeracy standards.

**Teachers resist accountability measures aimed at improving educational standards because they fear being compared**

From 1998 the coverage began to indicate that teachers would resist accountability measures because they feared being compared to one another and to standardised criteria. That message continued throughout 1999 as \textit{The West Australian} campaigned strongly for the right to publish full details of the testing results. The first reference to teachers being concerned about comparisons arising from test results was published in July 1998, when the newspaper quoted the president of the School Teachers’ Union of Western Australia (Teachers’ Union), Brian Lindberg, as saying that “teachers were worried that the national tests...would result in unfair comparisons between teachers,
students and schools”.

The message was reiterated later that month when the union’s vice-president, Pat Byrne, was reported as saying teachers were concerned the results would be obtained by the media and used to rank schools.

It arose again when the newspaper reported that the Teachers’ Union had threatened to boycott the first tests unless the Education Department could guarantee students’ results would not be made public, and during the week of the first Year 3 tests in 1998, when Mr Lindberg was quoted as saying that teachers were concerned the results would be used to rank schools and that “this would be unfair for those schools whose students had not performed well”.

This depiction was confirmed in the reporting of a survey of teachers which had found that many opposed the potential comparison of test results.

On several occasions teachers’ fears of comparisons were linked by The West Australian to a lack of accountability on their part. For example, an opinion piece, published around the time of the first tests in 1998, referred to the “traditional reluctance of sections of education to accept the principles of public accountability, particularly the State School Teachers Union”.

This overt criticism of teachers and the Teachers’ Union continued in the publishing of comments by the newspaper’s editor, Paul Murray, who claimed that the union had “a vested interest in teachers not being seen to fail”. An opinion piece written by a staff reporter further condemned the Teachers’ Union for

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64 ‘Staff fear test stress’, The West Australian, 15 September, 1999, 12.
66 ‘Barnett threatens ban if schools are named’, The West Australian, 9 April, 1999, 5.
The article continued:

Once more, the SSTU is thumbing its nose at the demand for some accountability of educational standards....If the SSTU became involved positively with the literacy tests, it would do more good for education than sniping from the sidelines....It would also help refute the suspicion that the root of the union’s opposition to the tests was a fear that poor results would reflect poorly on the competence of its members.

The coverage of the introduction of standardised testing did not include any articles in which teachers were seen to welcome the comparisons which might arise from the publication of test results. Also, it did not include any articles in which teachers, or the union, were shown to endorse increased accountability for the education sector.

**Teachers are under pressure and testing aimed at improving educational standards increases that pressure**

A sense that teachers were under pressure was conveyed by *The West Australian* from the start of its coverage on the introduction of standardised testing. One of the first articles claimed that teachers often found themselves in circumstances that called for training in social work, or psychology, because of the challenging social circumstances of some of their pupils. In the same article, an academic from the education studies department at Murdoch University in Perth was quoted as saying that classroom teachers had “heavy workloads” and were constantly faced with change. In another example, Teachers’ Union president, Brian Lindberg, said that teachers were simply unable to meet the extra needs of struggling students. This message was further reinforced with the reporting of comments made by the Western Australian Opposition education

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69 *Ibid*.
spokesman, Alan Carpenter, who said that teachers were “already under enormous pressure” and lacked the support needed to help children with literacy and numeracy problems.\(^71\)

On several occasions the reporting indicated that the introduction of standardised testing had increased the pressure on teachers. This included the publishing of comments made by an academic from the education studies department at Curtin University who claimed the tests would place teachers under “incredible pressure”.\(^72\) The Teachers’ Union was of the same opinion, according to the newspaper, which reported its officials as saying that the tests put unwarranted pressure on teachers to ensure their students performed well, and that teachers needed more support due to increased workloads associated with literacy and numeracy testing.\(^73\) Several articles also referred to the increased pressure on teachers associated with the possible publication of test results.

**Teachers will undermine the testing process if testing is enforced**

Throughout the coverage of its introduction, *The West Australian* reported that teachers opposed standardised testing. Also, from mid-1998 to the end of the coverage, the newspaper made it clear that teachers would take steps to undermine the testing process. From 1998 to 2001 it reported that the Teachers’ Union had directed its members to boycott the tests. In one of the earlier reports of this nature, union vice-president, Pat Byrne, said that teachers would probably “refuse to co-operate”\(^74\) in delivering the tests.

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\(^71\) ‘The questions are samples from last year’s year 3 tests’, *The West Australian*, 8 August, 2000, 6.


\(^73\) ‘School mix to bring out the best: Barnett’, *The West Australian*, 15 March, 2000, 42.

Later that month she was quoted as saying teachers would “likely refuse” to administer the tests. Another article predicted that the tests would “likely be thrown into chaos” if teachers proceeded with the plan of opposition. Subsequently it was reported that some teachers and principals had followed through on the threat to boycott, forcing the Education Department to call on staff from district offices to administer some of the tests. Other articles, published in 1999, 2000 and 2001, referred to the continued Teachers’ Union boycott of tests with one quoting the Federal Education Minister, David Kemp, describing the Western Australian teachers’ action as “obstruction which undermines the standards of education”.

The coverage also indicated that teachers would undermine the testing process by ‘teaching-to-the-test’ to improve their students’ results. In other words, it articulated a vague notion that teachers would find a way to achieve required test outcomes through providing students with mechanical formula without necessarily promoting understanding and internalising their learning. This emerged in March 1998 when the newspaper reported that the Teachers’ Union had warned of a situation whereby “teachers would teach to satisfy test requirements and not student requirements”. This was reiterated in a later article which said the union had claimed that teachers would “end up teaching to the test and not the curriculum to improve their students’ chances of performing well”. The newspaper continued to report the union’s warnings about teachers ‘teaching-to-the-test’ throughout 1999 when the president, Brian Lindberg, was quoted as saying that teachers “are so scared about their kids being exposed to public

76 ‘Reading a lot into the future’, The West Australian, 20 August, 1998, 1.
criticism; they will just start teaching to the test”.\(^\text{80}\) It also reported him stating that some teachers were so concerned that they had opened the confidential packages of test papers a week before the tests to see the questions and to start preparing their students.\(^\text{81}\)

An article published the following month appeared to verify the union’s claims, reporting that more than two-thirds of teachers who had taken part in a survey believed that testing could lead to staff being guided in their teaching primarily by the demands of the test rather than the requirements of the curriculum.\(^\text{82}\) A similar claim was made by the head of the Western Australian Council of State School Organisations, Dianne Guise, who was quoted as saying she had been told teachers were conducting practice tests to help their students perform well. According to the article, Ms Guise claimed she had “always feared teachers would end up teaching to the test instead of concentrating on the curriculum”.\(^\text{83}\)

At the same time, not all were reported as taking this view. For example, the Western Australian Education Minister, Colin Barnett, defended teachers, saying that he did not believe they would “behave unprofessionally and corrupt the testing process”.\(^\text{84}\) The reporting of this view, however, was an exception, with none of the articles reporting comments by individual teachers, or teacher organisations, refuting claims about teachers ‘teaching-to-the-test’.

\(^\text{80}\) ‘Class tests face boycott’, \textit{The West Australian}, 7 August, 1999, 8.
\(^\text{81}\) ‘Tears over primary tests’, \textit{The West Australian}, 17 August, 1999, 4.
\(^\text{82}\) ‘Staff fear test stress’, \textit{The West Australian}, 15 September, 1999, 12.
\(^\text{84}\) ‘Tears over primary tests’, \textit{The West Australian}, 17 August, 1999, 4.
Teachers legitimate their opposition to standardised testing by claiming that it has no educational value

Teacher reaction to standardised testing published in The West Australian was almost entirely confined to responses from union representatives, who consistently claimed their members opposed standardised testing on the grounds that it had no educational value. One of the initial articles reported the view of the national teachers’ union, The Australian Education Union, quoting its president, Sharan Burrow, as saying that the national tests were opposed by educators on “education grounds”. “We don’t believe,” she claimed, that “they are a good educational tool and we’re appalled to think that results may be used to allocate school funding”.85 Almost all of the other teacher comments about the introduction of standardised testing came from the State School Teachers’ Union of Western Australia, which was shown to be strongly opposed to the testing from the outset, claiming that it was a political stunt that would rob schools of resources needed to help students at risk.86

The coverage in The West Australian outlining the responses from teachers and the union to standardised testing was very repetitive, frequently using the same phrases to describe their stance. For example, an article which revealed the results of the first Year 3 tests said that teacher groups believed the results “did not show anything that they did not know and vindicated their position that the tests were a waste of money which could have been better spent on remedial programs”.87 The same message was repeated when the newspaper later reported that the union believed “the test results told

teachers and parents nothing they did not already know”.  

Reports published in 2000 and 2001 indicated that the union’s stance on testing remained unchanged. In April 2000, the then union vice-president, Mike Keely, was quoted as saying that test results were of more use to politicians than teachers, or parents. The article went on to quote him as saying that “the tests were extremely limited and even the people administering them did not have much faith in them”. The newspaper also reported statements from union officials claiming that the tests were unfair, too stressful for students, politically motivated and a waste of time and money. Furthermore, it said the union believed the tests were not necessary because schools had adequate assessment and reporting practices to inform parents of their child’s progress.

The message about teacher opposition to testing continued through to the end of reporting on the issue. In February 2001 Mr Keely was quoted as saying that the Teachers’ Union hoped national testing would be dropped because it was not “educationally sound”. Later that year it was reported that the union claimed the tests were “inaccurate, out of date and misrepresentative”. Mr Keely was one again quoted, this time saying that the “biggest problem with the national testing is that it is a one-shot test that claims to be an accurate assessment. Literacy is not something you can measure by giving students one test”. 

An article reporting the results of a national survey of teachers further reinforced the sense that they were against testing. It indicated that more than half of the Year 3

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89 ‘Reading results’, *The West Australian*, 1 April, 2000, 7.
teachers surveyed believed their students were stressed leading up to, and during, the 1998 literacy and numeracy tests. The article concluded by saying that same proportion of teachers believed the tests were too difficult and students had not enjoyed taking them.  

One of the few articles in which an individual teacher commented on testing reiterated this position. This was based on an interview with a principal from a remote Western Australian school, who, in line with the union position, was opposed to the tests because they were politically motivated and had “little educational value”. The newspaper reported that the principal in question, who was at the Tjukurla Remote Community School in the Western Australian desert, had applied for, and was granted, an exemption from the testing for the indigenous students in his school.

Only rarely was there any indication that some teachers did not oppose testing. Exceptions were two articles published in August and September 2000, at a time when the newspaper’s own position changed to overt support for testing. The first of these quoted the president of the WA Primary Principals’ Association, Rudy Rybarczyk, refuting the union’s claim that the tests were a political tool for the Federal Government. Mr Rybarczyk, it was reported, believed that the tests’ results were valuable in helping to improve learning. In the other example, a school teacher who had helped to mark the literacy and numeracy assessments also praised testing. She said she was initially opposed to the tests but had changed her mind. “I did not,” she stated:

.... believe in the tests because I thought the data was already available in schools and the tests were just more stress for the kids. But I can see these tests can give

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93 ‘Staff fear test stress’, The West Australian, 15 September, 1999, 12.
95 ‘The questions are samples from last year’s year 3 tests’, The West Australian, 8 August, 2000, 6.
us more accuracy and we can avoid doubling up. This experience has been the best professional development I have had.96

These, however, were the only two articles amongst the total body of coverage which suggested some teacher support for testing.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has provided an overview of the perceived advantages and disadvantages of standardised testing in education. It has also provided a general outline of the use of standardised testing in the United States of America, England and Wales, and Australia, before moving to an analysis of *The West Australian* newspaper’s coverage of the introduction of such testing to Western Australian schools between 1997 and 2001. A series of propositions about the newspaper’s portrayal of teachers were explored. These are as follows: teachers and schools are to blame for declining educational standards; teachers resist accountability measures aimed at improving educational standards because they fear being compared; teachers are under pressure and testing aimed at improving educational standards increases that pressure; teachers will undermine the testing process if testing is enforced; and teachers legitimate their opposition to standardised testing by claiming that it has no educational value.

Some of these propositions align closely with the dominant images of teachers from other domains, as already detailed in Chapter Two. The portrayal of teachers as being under pressure, for example, is consistent with their presentation in the educational research literature, the contemporary news media and in some forms of popular culture. *The West Australian*’s claim that teachers are to blame for declining

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96 ‘Teacher gives tests 10 out of 10’, *The West Australian*, 1 September, 2000, 5.
standards in education also parallels messages about teachers to have emerged from other news media and popular culture. That message, however, is not a feature of the educational research literature. Such similarities and differences between the representations of teachers across the various domains will be considered in more detail in Chapter Eight. Attention now, however, will be turned to Chapter Six, which is concerned with *The West Australian*’s coverage of teacher shortage between 1999 and 2007.

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CHAPTER SIX
TEACHER SHORTAGE: 1997-2007

Introduction
In 1997, when The West Australian began publishing articles about the introduction of standardised testing it also started to report projections which indicated that Western Australia was facing a major shortage of school teachers. Over the next decade, the teacher shortage issue was repeatedly the subject of coverage in the newspaper. The majority of this coverage was published in 1999 and again in 2007, two years when the shortfall of teachers in the State was most acute.

This chapter considers The West Australian’s coverage of teacher shortage between 1997 and 2007. It is in three parts. The first section, by way of general background, details some of the factors which scholars in various countries have identified as influencing the supply of, and demands for, teachers in school systems. The second section, which is offered in order to provide a more specific context, outlines a brief history of teacher supply and demand issues, with particular reference to the situation in Western Australia. The central, and final, part of the chapter is the analysis of The West Australian’s coverage of teacher shortage between 1997 and 2007.

Factors Which Can Influence the Supply of, and Demand for, Teachers
The issue of teacher shortage began to achieve prominence in the educational research literature in the 1980s. It became even more prominent from the late 1990s, as researchers in many developed countries started to generate formal projections about teacher supply-and-demand. As early as 1984, American researcher, Darling-
Hammond,\(^1\) warned of an impending teacher shortage in the United States of America. Fifteen years later, in 1999, the issue achieved national importance with the publication of Hussar’s\(^2\) study which reported that the United States of America would need to hire at least two million teachers between 1998 and 2008. Similar projections were also being made in other parts of the world.\(^3\)

Initially, the shortage of teaching staff in many developed countries was attributed to increases in student enrolments combined with an ageing teaching workforce, with many teachers retiring, or being due to retire. However, after surveying American teachers, Ingersoll\(^4\) argued that attributing the situation to such factors only, was simplistic and inaccurate. He demonstrated that although demand for teachers had increased, the United States of America produced more than enough prospective teachers each year to meet it. His claim was that the shortage of teachers was actually a result of attrition, which could be attributed to family and personal factors, along with job dissatisfaction. He stated:

\[ \ldots \text{the data suggest that school staffing problems are to a large extent a result of a} \]
\[ \ldots \text{“revolving door” – where large numbers of teachers depart teaching for reasons} \]
\[ \ldots \text{other than retirement .... recruiting more teachers will not solve the teacher crisis} \]
\[ \ldots \text{if 40 to 50 per cent of such teachers then leave within five years.} \]

The image that came to mind, he concluded, was that of a bucket rapidly losing water due to holes in the bottom.

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\(^1\) L. Darling-Hammond, *Beyond the Commission Reports. The Coming Crisis in Teaching* (Santa Monica: Rand Corporation, 1984).
\(^4\) R.M. Ingersoll, *Is There Really a Teacher Shortage?* (Seattle: Centre for the Study of Teaching and Policy, University of Washington, 2003), 17.
The problem was not unique to the United States of America. In 2002, it was reported that in the United Kingdom 40 per cent of teachers left the profession within the first three years.6 A similar situation existed in Australia, with 25 per cent of new teachers (and up to 40 per cent in some states) stating that they planned to leave the profession within five years.7

Teacher attrition, which is relatively unpredictable, has been identified as one of the reasons why teacher supply-and-demand forecasting can be problematic. According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), such variables as “economic policy, population, education funding, class size, teaching technology, organisation of schools, education market mechanisms, partnerships and teacher training and certification”8 can affect the number of teachers produced and the number required. Also, Preston9 has argued that teacher shortages are never evenly spread; some schools, for example, can experience chronic staffing problems, while at the same time more desirable schools may not be affected at all. Galbraith,10 who used a mathematics systems’ approach to examine teacher supply-and-demand in the Australian state of Queensland, also stressed the difficulty of making projections, explaining that variables in the supply-demand model can move in opposite directions at different times. For example, a surplus of teachers could lead to a shortage of teachers

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6 C. Stoel and C. Thant, Teachers' Professional Lives - A View from Nine Industrialized Countries (Washington, D.C.: Council for Basic Education, March 2002), 14. Here it was also reported that in the United States of America, about 30 percent of teachers nationally, and 50 percent of teachers in urban areas, were leaving the school system within five years.


10 P. Galbraith, Forecasting Teacher Supply and Demand: Searching for Shangri-la or Chasing Rainbows? (Flaxton: Post Pressed, 1999), 67.
because the surplus can reduce the attractiveness of teaching in terms of future employment prospects. Conversely, a shortage can lead to an eventual surplus if an excessively high number of students enter university teaching courses. To conclude, while the forecasting of teacher supply-and-demand has become more common than it used to be, the accuracy of predictions can be undermined by many variables and by the cyclical nature of the supply-demand model. Nevertheless, governments and education agencies continue to seek to generate projections to try to plan for the future and minimise the effects of teacher supply and demand fluctuations.

A Brief History of Teacher Supply and Demand Issues

Teacher shortages have been experienced in the public education system in Western Australia since its origins in the 1840s.\textsuperscript{11} The State’s General Board of Education, which oversaw public education from the 1840s to 1893, was “perpetually harassed by recruitment worries”.\textsuperscript{12} Western Australia’s size, isolation and relatively high number of rural and remote schools all contributed to this problem. It became acute between 1856 and 1869, a time when the school system was expanded. Supplying an adequate number of teachers continued to be a major problem in rural districts between 1872 and 1895. Another State-wide shortage came about in 1896 and 1897. This led to the first of several interstate recruitment campaigns, which eventually saw many teachers from other Australian states being lured to Western Australia during the prosperous years of

\textsuperscript{11} D. Mossenson, \textit{State Education in Western Australia} (Perth: The University of Western Australia Press, 1972), 28.

\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., 28.
the State’s Gold Rush. In 1902, Western Australia’s first teacher training school, the Claremont Teacher Training College, was opened with the aim of producing locally trained teachers to address recruitment issues. Nevertheless, the State was to continue to experience teacher shortages on several occasions throughout the 1900s. By contrast, the State Government closed the afore-mentioned teachers’ college during the Depression years of the 1930s, fearing a surplus of teachers. This decision was to prove costly since a significant teacher shortage arose within three years. Another major teacher shortage occurred during the 1950s, as the public education system grew significantly in the post-World War II years. Recognising the problem, the Director of Education, T.L. Robertson, embarked on a campaign to increase teachers’ salaries and encourage more university students to contemplate becoming teachers. His efforts proved successful, with the number of teachers employed by the Education Department increasing from 2597 in 1951, to 4097 in 1960.

Continued growth in school enrolments meant that teacher supply issues were not resolved for long. By the mid-to-late 1960s there was a teacher shortage not just in Western Australia, but across the nation, as well as in the United Kingdom, the United States of America and Canada. The Australian shortage was made worse by the fact that many young Australian teachers responded to overseas recruitment campaigns, travelling to other countries to take up work. One such teacher, Dave Sewell, who

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13 Ibid., 27-28, 98.
14 Ibid., 154.
taught in Canada in the mid-1960s, recalled that the Western Australian Education Department was still desperately trying to fill teacher positions when he returned home later in the decade:

When we returned to Australia, I went into the Education Department in Perth to inquire about a teaching job. The staff clerk came out with an empty Wheaties box containing pieces of pasteboard, each with a job written on them, and asked me to choose a job, any job. I knew I was home.16

By now, Australia was following the lead of other countries in recruiting many teachers from overseas; by the mid-1970s more than 20 per cent of new teachers in Australia were recruited via overseas campaigns.17

Moves to increase the number of students enrolled in teaching courses across Australia in the early 1970s eventually led to a surplus of teachers later in the decade. One of the early teacher supply-and-demand forecasting reports, published by the Australian Education Council Working Party in 1978, warned of a potential significant oversupply of teachers across Australia by the early-to-mid 1980s.18 While this projection was to prove accurate, demand for teachers in Australia19 had risen again by the late 1980s, only to be reduced during the recession of the early 1990s.

By the mid-1990s, the number of teachers being hired began to rise again and demand was being met.20 Nevertheless, in 1997, the Australian Council of Deans of Education released a report,21 which made projections for the next six years. It

16 Ibid., 160.
concluded that Australia would experience a national shortfall of 7000 teachers by 2003, with most states experiencing moderate-to-severe teacher shortages in the interim. This reflected trends elsewhere; New Zealand was already experiencing a shortfall of teachers and the United Kingdom was facing a looming teacher shortage.22 Two years later, in August 1999, the National Centre for Education Statistics in the United States of America warned that at least two million teachers would need to be hired there over the next 10 years to address a major shortage of staff.23 Then, in 2002, a review of teaching in nine industrialised countries also found that France and Germany were facing acute shortages of teachers, or shortages in certain fields of teaching,24 while an OECD report published the same year reported that there was a “widespread belief that several countries in the OECD suffer from shortages of teachers in particular subject areas, grade levels, or regions of the country”.25

The Australian teacher supply and demand projections released in 200026 have been credited with providing the stimulus which resulted in the issue being given national prominence in the minds of a “seemingly unaware public, including government”,27 for the first time. Until that point the term ‘teacher shortage’ had not

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22 Ibid.
been widely used across the nation and public awareness of the issue had been limited. Nevertheless, in Western Australia, *The West Australian* had begun to pave the way as it had started reporting on the issue in January 1997. The remainder of this chapter now considers the newspaper’s depiction of teachers through its coverage of teacher shortage from that year until 2007.

**Analysis of The West Australian’s Coverage of Teacher Shortage from 1997 to 2007**

The *West Australian*’s coverage of teacher shortage during the time period under consideration began with the reporting of the teacher supply-and-demand projections released in 1997. Attention to the issue was minimal in 1998 but increased again in 1999 when the State experienced a shortage of up to 70 teachers across rural areas. In that same year, teacher shortage was the subject of 17 articles. The spotlight moved away from teacher shortage between 2002 and 2005, with the few articles which appeared reporting that most teaching jobs were filled. In 2006, however, reports of a lack of teachers in the country, and of an imminent bigger teacher shortage crisis began to appear. Also, in late 2006, the newspaper claimed that applications from individuals to enrol in teacher preparation programs had declined dramatically and that the State Government had begun a recruitment campaign to try to attract teachers from other countries to Western Australia.

Of the 125 pieces about teacher shortage which appeared between 1997 and 2007, 83 of them (75 news articles and eight editorials) were published in 2007. In January, the newspaper reported that there was a shortfall of 264 teachers to meet the needs of government schools across the State, with two-thirds of the vacancies being in
rural schools. The following month, the State Government established a task force to identify solutions. By August, the government was considering a plan for unqualified teachers to work with “master teachers” in large classes. The next month *The West Australian* reported that the teacher shortage was also affecting private schools in rural areas. To ameliorate teachers, the government, as reported in the newspaper, announced a pay increase for teachers separate to a further pay rise due later in the year as a result of a new Enterprise Bargaining Agreement. Not long after this it was also reported that the government would create a new ‘executive teacher’ level for elite teachers, as well as launch a new advertising campaign, to try to tackle the teacher shortage.

Only nine articles about the shortage were published in 2008. By 2009, the issue appeared to be effectively resolved since it received minimal media attention. In contrast, the newspaper reported in October 2009 that Western Australia was facing a potential glut of teachers in 2010 due to changes in school entrance ages.

Overall, *The West Australian*’s coverage of teacher shortage between 1997 and 2007 portrayed teachers as commodities, in the sense of being necessary and important, yet not strongly valued, or respected. This portrayal is captured in the following story line:

*Teachers play a vital role in the community and a lack of teachers is of concern to the community and government. Consequently, they are in high demand when there are not enough of them to cover teacher vacancies, and government will work hard to address the shortage. Despite this, teachers are not respected, or valued, by the wider community and the status of teaching is low. This is due to a belief that teachers work under difficult and demanding conditions, are poorly paid, are not adequately trained,*
and lack opportunities to advance their careers. For these reasons, many teachers are dissatisfied with their jobs, and are disillusioned with teaching as a career.

Five propositions can be identified within the above storyline. These are as follows: i) teachers are important, ii) teachers are not respected by the wider community, iii) teachers work under difficult conditions, iv) teachers are not adequately trained and v) teachers are dissatisfied with their jobs. Each of these will now be discussed in turn.

**Teachers are important**

The reporting of teacher shortage repeatedly presented teachers as important and in demand. This was evident in the way in which the topic was treated, the language used and the attention it warranted. Indeed, even the possibility of a teacher shortage was given significant coverage when first predicted in 1997, and again when the issue arose in the years leading up to the main shortage in 2007. After the rural teacher shortage of 1999 *The West Australian* reported annually, at the start of each school year, the extent to which teacher vacancies in the State school system had been filled. Equally, when the Education Department was unable to fill teacher positions in 1999, and again in 2007, the newspaper used strong and evocative language in its coverage of the issue, repeatedly referring to a staffing “crisis”, and describing the situation as “urgent” and “desperate”.

The day after the publication of *The West Australian’s* first article about the predicted teacher shortage in January 1997,28 two related news articles appeared, each reinforcing the significance of a possible lack of teachers. One of these stated that a Federal Government Senate Inquiry had been established to investigate claims of a

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future teacher shortage\textsuperscript{29} while the latter reported the following strong response to the predicted teacher shortage from the WA Council of State School Organisations (WACSSO):

The WA Council of State School Organisations called on the State Government yesterday to do everything in its power to promote teaching as a career and encourage young people to make it their first preference at university. The call from the combined body of WA parent and teacher groups came after figures released this week predicted a massive nationwide teacher shortage in the next six years.\textsuperscript{30}

The article went on to report that any teacher shortage would be a “crisis” and warned that fewer teachers could lead to larger class sizes.

The message that teachers are extremely important was repeated in 1999 when Western Australia experienced a shortage of teachers in rural schools, with the word ‘crisis’ appearing in many of the 19 articles published over the course of the year. One example, a page-one article published in January 1999, referred to the “education staffing crisis”\textsuperscript{31} in rural parts of the State. Another quoted the president of WACSSO as saying the teacher shortfall needed to be addressed “urgently” as children’s education was suffering.\textsuperscript{32} Underlining the seriousness of the problem, the newspaper also reported that the Education Minister, Colin Barnett, and senior members of this department were under significant public pressure to resolve the staffing shortage as soon as possible.\textsuperscript{33}

The coverage of the later teacher shortage, in 2007, also portrayed teachers as important and in demand. After reporting that there was a shortfall of 264 teachers in the

\textsuperscript{29} ‘Senate to examine shortage’, \textit{The West Australian}, 29 January, 1997, 4.
\textsuperscript{32} ‘Teacher shortage in country worsens’, \textit{The West Australian}, 21 April, 1999, 9.
government system at the start of the school year, The West Australian warned of a potential education “meltdown”. Subsequent articles repeatedly claimed that urgent action was required. For example, one article quoted an Education Department report which warned that unless “drastic” action was taken public schools would “find it increasingly difficult to attract teachers, leading to bigger classes, potentially poorer educational outcomes and lower staff morale”. An editorial published the following day also recognised the significance of the issue, referring to the teacher shortage as “potentially crippling”, while another subsequent editorial argued that without a rapid increase in teacher numbers, there was a “real prospect of shortages having a significant impact on the quality of education in this State”.

In 2007, the newspaper also published several articles which indicated that the Education Department was working very hard to recruit more teachers. One of these said that the department was using “increasingly desperate measures” to keep enough teachers in classrooms and that the Director-General of Education was “trying everything” to boost teacher numbers in public schools. Additionally, the newspaper reported that the State Government had set up a “high-level” task force, led by former Curtin University Vice-Chancellor Lance Twomey, to try to identify solutions to the teacher shortage. Such articles reinforced the message that teachers were necessary, important and in demand.

Teachers are not respected by the wider community

While *The West Australian’s* coverage of the teacher shortage indicated that teachers are important and in demand, it also conveyed the message that teachers are not respected by the wider community. Many articles referred to the low status of teaching, poor teacher pay rates, negative community attitudes towards teaching and the lack of interest in teaching as a career.

Representatives from the State School Teachers’ Union of Western Australia (Teachers’ Union) were repeatedly quoted as claiming that the low status of teaching was one of the main reasons for the teacher shortage. For example, in January 1997, union president, Brian Lindberg, stated that the teacher crisis could be averted if “the status of teaching as a career option was raised in the eyes of young people”.41 The newspaper reported a similar message from the union in 2000 when the deputy president, Mike Keely, said that high school students were unlikely to choose teaching as a career option because they were well aware that teachers worked under difficult conditions.42 Another article, published in 2007, quoted the union’s general secretary, David Kelly, as saying that “teaching is no longer considered a serious career option for young people”.43

The sense that teachers and teaching are not respected, or valued, by the wider community was also evident in comments made by other key stakeholders. The WACSSO president, Dianne Guise, told *The West Australian* she believed that there was a need for the “whole community to place more value on the role of teachers”,44 while

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the State Opposition education spokesman, Peter Collier, was quoted as saying that “few university students viewed teaching as an attractive career option”. The latter claim was reiterated when the State Education Minister, Mark McGowan, said that a national campaign was necessary to improve the status of the teaching profession. Editorials championed this view, with one claiming that teachers were “dismayed by the diminishing status of their profession and of government schooling”. Another editorial, in a similar view, argued that paying teachers more would “reinforce the public perception of the importance of what they do and improve their standing”.

This issue of teacher salaries arose frequently throughout the coverage of teacher shortage. The Teachers’ Union, politicians, parent groups, academics and *The West Australian* itself, through its editorials, repeatedly claimed that teachers were poorly paid relative to other professionals. Implicit in this was the message that teachers are not respected, or valued, by the community. This claim was supported through the reporting of research which found that teachers’ salaries nationally had lagged behind increases for other professions at the rate of 11 per cent for women and 17 per cent for men between 1983 and 2003.

The claim that there was a lack of community respect for teaching was also evident in the tone of articles which focused on the decline in the number of applications made in Western Australia for places in teacher preparation programs at the State’s universities. For example, in late 2006, the newspaper reported that applications to enter

48 ‘All power to Bishop’s arm on teacher pay’, *The West Australian*, 12 June, 2007, 16.
teacher preparation programs had dropped by 30 per cent and that “poor relative pay rates and lack of public respect for the profession were turning graduates away from teaching”. A later article said that applications to study secondary teaching had “plunged by as much as 50 per cent” and included a quote from an academic at a university education studies department as saying students had been “turned off” teaching. Other articles referred to the low tertiary entrance score required by some universities for entry to teacher preparation programs as opposed to the score needed for a number of other professional degree programs. This, it was claimed, was “damaging the morale and status of the [teaching] profession”, and educators were concerned about “the negative image of teachers the low scores were presenting to the public”.

**Teachers work under difficult conditions**

In reporting teacher shortage for the period under consideration, *The West Australian* consistently characterised teaching as a challenging and unattractive job, and portrayed teachers as having to endure difficult working conditions. This was evident both in articles published prior to, and during, the principal year of shortage in 2007. In particular, the coverage indicated that teaching was difficult due to heavy workloads, stress, rude and abusive children, unpleasant working environments, and an uncaring bureaucracy in the form of the Education Department.

Specifically, with regard to heavy workloads, the newspaper repeatedly quoted representatives from the Teachers’ Union claiming that the teacher shortage would not be resolved until they were lightened. For example, just prior to the 2007 shortage,

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union president, Mike Keely, was quoted as saying members were “teaching way above their workloads”. By the middle of the following year he was claiming that workloads were driving teachers “crazy”. This was also the theme of the reporting of an Australian Education Union study, which concluded that almost half of new teachers in Western Australia planned to leave the profession within five years because of heavy workloads. The alarm was sounded again six month later, with the reporting of the results of a survey by the WA College of Teaching (WACOT) which had found that “teacher workloads had increased to unmanageable levels”.

By September 2007 it became clear that the Education Department was attempting to address the issue, with *The West Australian* reporting the position of the newly-appointed Education Department director-general, Sharyn O’Neill as thus:

> A top priority would be reducing the squeeze on teachers who were expected to juggle the immediate demands of their students with other demands imposed by the system, such as compliance paperwork and assessment requirements.

It also stated that Professor Lance Twomey, the chair of the taskforce set up to investigate the teacher shortage, said that submissions had shown teachers were battling heavy workloads. He was further quoted as saying that most teachers “work quite a long week and they’re doing an awful lot of jobs that aren’t teaching”.

Professor Twomey himself also raised the matter of teacher working conditions in articles in *The West Australian*. In one case he was quoted as saying the quality of housing in remote towns had emerged as a big issue and that “teachers were often last

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54 ‘Plan to lure 100 retired teachers is desperate’, *The West Australian*, 6 July, 2007, 10.
behind other public servants when government housing was allocated in country towns”. Several other articles took up the same point, namely, that teachers, particularly those assigned to rural and remote schools, often have to work and live in undesirable conditions. The previously mentioned WACOT survey was also quoted in this regard with the highlighting of such teachers comments as: “I work under disgusting conditions, often teaching in cupboards and bug-infested demountables with no access to running water or toilet facilities”.60

The coverage indicated that student misbehaviour and student abuse of teachers was significant. Quoting again from the results of the WACOT survey, the newspaper said that some teachers were “concerned about being sworn at, spat on or threatened by students and the expectation that they should accept that behaviour”. The West Australian also reported that five British teachers who had been recruited to alleviate the teacher shortage had quit their jobs due to the bad behaviour of students.61 The seriousness of the situation was further underlined with the publication of official statistics showing that there had been 70 assaults on teachers in Western Australian public schools in one year, and the response from a local politician who argued that “few other university-educated professionals risk being assaulted when they turn up to work”.62

Various work-related issues facing teachers, which have already been considered, were compounded by a poor relationship with the Education Department,
according to *The West Australian*. Several articles claimed that teachers believed their employer did not provide enough support, and that they were fed-up with dealing with its bureaucratic approaches. The WACOT survey was quoted again, this time claiming that more than half the comments from teachers related to their dissatisfaction with a “seemingly uncaring and unresponsive bureaucracy at the Education Department”63. Other articles took up the same refrain, referring to “problems with a monolithic bureaucracy”64 and the “disconnect between teachers and the department”.65

A further factor reported as contributing to teachers’ difficult working conditions was highlighted during the latter part of the coverage (which in total, it will be recalled, stretched from 1997 to 2007), when *The West Australian* published several articles indicating that teachers lacked opportunities for career advancement. In particular, in 2007, it claimed that it was very difficult for teachers to get promoted to level three, the highest level in the Western Australian Government education system, with the Opposition education spokesman, Peter Collier, being quoted as saying that “less than a third of applicants that apply for level three status annually get it... teachers don’t even bother applying for it because it’s virtually impossible to get”.66 In a subsequent article Mr Collier claimed that the lack of promotion and advancement opportunities was one of the fundamental reasons for the teacher shortage.67 The newspaper reported similar comments from Professor Twomey, who said that career progression for teachers was

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65 ‘Office staff ordered back to classrooms’, *The West Australian*, 3 December, 2007, 1. The claim that teachers were not supported or valued by the Education Department was repeated in editorials, with one claiming that the Education Department treated its employees “like rubbish”. See ‘Teacher threat reflects bad management’, *The West Australian*, 29 September, 2007.
limited, and that a “more comprehensive career structure” was needed to “encourage ambitious teachers to remain in the classroom”.

**Teachers are not adequately trained**

A strong claim in the coverage of the teacher shortage was also that the standard of teacher preparation was inadequate. It included the overt questioning of teacher preparation standards as well as repeated references to “unqualified” teachers. The issue first emerged in 1997 when one of the initial articles on teacher shortage reported that a Federal Government Senate inquiry had been established to investigate the matter, and that the “decline in teacher training in universities” would be a key part of the investigation. The following year, the Director-General of the Education Department, Cheryl Vardon, was quoted in *The West Australian* saying that university education faculties needed to react more quickly to the rapidly changing skills required of modern-day teachers. “It seems to me that the basic training that our teachers have had over the years has been good,” she said. “But too often they have to learn too much on the job when they get their first posting”.

The quality of teaching provided by graduates in the classroom was also questioned. Numerous articles said teachers were teaching in areas outside of their expertise, or that they were being forced to take classes in areas in which they had no qualifications. For example, the reporting of a survey of secondary schools claimed that more than one-third of Western Australian schools had unqualified teachers taking up to

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five classes a day in subjects such as mathematics, science and English. In another article, the Opposition education spokesman, Peter Collier, said that “the quality of education in terms of the services provided at the senior secondary level is seriously questionable...because of the lack of specialist teachers”. The Teachers’ Union appeared to agree. *The West Australian* quoted the president, Pat Byrne, as saying that “teachers do their very best but there is a perception, especially in rural communities, that the teaching is somehow lacking”.

Other articles also pointed to inadequate teacher preparation by claiming that the quality of contemporary teaching was inferior to the teaching standards which had prevailed in the past. For example, one article reported that an Australian National University study had found that the literacy and numeracy standards of teachers were far lower than they were in the early 1980s, and that their academic abilities had also fallen in the same time. Another reported on the possibility that a program to improve teachers’ skills in English, maths, science and history would be introduced nationally. Concurrently, the newspaper revealed in several articles that the Federal Government was considering introducing a performance-based pay system for teachers in order to improve pedagogical practices in schools. *The West Australian* went on to overtly support a plan in five separate editorials, one of which claimed:

One of the marks of a profession is that its members progress according to their ability, competence and effectiveness. Professionals, by and large, have to accept continuing judgement of their merit based on the quality of the services they

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provide. They also accept that their pays vary significantly as a result of such judgements.77 Overall, the message being conveyed in such articles and editorials was that teacher preparation and teaching standards were inadequate, and that improvement was needed.

Teachers are dissatisfied with their jobs

The fifth and final area of coverage by The West Australian on teacher shortage from 1997 to 2007 relates to teacher job dissatisfaction. At various times during the early part of the coverage the newspaper made the claim that teachers were not satisfied with their working conditions, workloads and salaries, but it was not until the teacher shortage of 2007 that the issue received sustained attention.

In June 2007 The West Australian published statistics released in the Western Australian Parliament which showed that more than 20 per cent of new teachers had left the State Government system in 2006 after working there for just one year.78 Also, representatives from the Teachers’ Union were quoted on several occasions as saying that many teachers wanted to leave teaching because they were not happy with their pay or working conditions. In one such article, union secretary, David Kelly, predicted a “massive exodus”79 of teachers from the profession later that year. The newspaper subsequently reported that the union president, Mike Keely, believed many secondary school teachers were poised to leave teaching because they were “burnt out”. The article

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79 ‘Teachers in ban threat on staff woes’, The West Australian, 17 April, 2007, 6.
went on to quote him as saying that “the consequence of a failure to look after these people is that more of them won’t come back next year”.

The coverage by *The West Australian* conveyed the strong impression that a major factor contributing to teacher dissatisfaction was inadequate pay. This was highlighted in a number of articles which referred to low teacher salaries. The issue was also raised in an editorial published in 2007 which claimed that teachers were leaving the profession to get “better-paying jobs elsewhere”.

Other editorials showed the newspaper itself clearly believed that dissatisfaction among teachers was rife. For example, an editorial published in October 2007 claimed that many teachers were “disillusioned with the education bureaucracy and dismayed by the diminishing status of their profession and of government schooling”. A later editorial made an even stronger statement, arguing that “disenchantment with teaching as a career has been building for years, exacerbated by low pay in comparison with other professions, confusion over outcomes-based education, increasing workloads and poor student behaviour”. The newspaper returned to this message when it described teachers’ “dissatisfaction with education bureaucrats” and referred to a “wider disaffection among teachers about the system and how it is run”. In publishing such claims, the newspaper conveyed the message that teachers were well-aware of the flaws and limitations of their profession, and that they were not satisfied with multiple aspects of their jobs.

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Conclusion

This chapter has detailed some of the factors which can affect the supply of, and demand for, schoolteachers. It also provided a brief history of the teacher supply and demand issues with a focus on the situation in Western Australia. This was followed by an analysis of *The West Australian’s* coverage of teacher shortage from 1997 to 2007. From this, the following propositions about the newspaper’s portrayal of teachers were generated: teachers are important; teachers are not respected by the wider community; teachers work under difficult conditions; teachers are not adequately trained; and teachers are dissatisfied with their jobs.

Some of the propositions outlined are consistent with the ways in which teachers have been depicted in other domains. For example, the message that teachers work under difficult conditions also features strongly in the educational research literature and in studies of contemporary news media coverage of educational issues. Other propositions, such as the claim that teachers are important, appear rarely in the research on teacher representations in other domains. These and other outcomes will be explored further in the Chapter Eight. The focus now, however, will turn to Chapter Seven which is concerned with *The West Australian’s* reporting of Outcomes-Based Education from 2005 to 2007.
CHAPTER SEVEN
OUTCOMES-BASED EDUCATION: 2005-2007

Introduction

During the latter part of its coverage of teacher shortage in Western Australia, The West Australian also began to turn its attention to another development in education in the State, namely, the introduction of Outcomes-Based Education¹ to upper secondary schooling. This attention, which began in April 2005, developed to the extent that it became the source of significant, almost daily, coverage in the newspaper in 2006 and 2007. The coverage is the main focus of this chapter, which is in four parts. The first part provides a brief explanation of the origins of Outcomes-Based Education. By way of further contextual background, a summary of the advantages and disadvantages of Outcomes-Based Education as argued in the academic literature is then detailed. The third part outlines the adoption of Outcomes-Based Education in Australia, with particular reference to Western Australia. The final, and central, part of the chapter is an analysis of The West Australian’s coverage of Outcomes-Based Education from 2005 to 2007.

A Brief Explanation of the Origins of Outcomes-Based Education

Although the term ‘Outcome-Based Education’² did not emerge until the late 1980s, the outcomes approach can be traced back to the American ‘behavioural objectives’ movement of the early twentieth century. The emergence of this movement, in turn, had

¹ The term Outcomes-Based Education is derived from William Spady’s ‘Outcome-Based Education’ which emerged in 1988. More recently, it has become known as Outcomes-Based Education and this is how it is known in Western Australia.
its foundation to some extent in the work of the educationist, Franklin Bobbitt, who argued that curriculum reform was the key to increasing efficiency in education. He described curriculum planning as a series of discrete steps specifying “numerous, definite, and particularised” objectives and outcomes. Later on, Bobbitt and other ‘educational efficiency’ proponents such as Joseph Rice and Ellwood Cubberly were to strongly influence Ralph Tyler, who, in 1949, generated his ‘objectives’ or ‘behavioural’ model of curriculum planning. This included a four-step framework on how to construct a school curriculum based on achieving clearly identified and measurable outcomes.4 Tyler’s student, Benjamin Bloom, was to further develop this behavioural objectives approach, emphasising mastery of the objectives and arguing that students should not move ahead until they had achieved a complete understanding of the necessary prerequisite learning.5

The notion of Outcome-Based Education, coined by William Spady in 1988, was essentially an extension of the aforementioned theories. According to Brandt, Spady’s approach was “the latest, though perhaps the most sophisticated” version of Tyler and Bloom’s philosophy that “planning for curriculum and instruction has to start with what students are expected to be able to do”.6 Spady challenged the prevalent educational paradigm of that era, whereby the school curriculum in the United States of America tended, in various situations, to be organised in terms of the allocation of particular sets of content to be covered at certain times of the year. In his alternative model, the

outcomes were to be pursued until they were achieved regardless of the school calendar.\(^7\) Spady described his theory thus:

Outcome-Based Education (OBE) means organizing for results: basing what we do instructionally on the outcomes we want to achieve, whether in specific parts of the curriculum or in the schooling process as a whole. Outcome-based practitioners start by determining the knowledge, competencies, and qualities they want students to be able to demonstrate when they finish school and face the challenges and opportunities of the adult world. Then, with these “exit outcomes” clearly in mind, they deliberately design curriculums and instructional systems with the intent that all students will ultimately be able to demonstrate them successfully. OBE, therefore, is not a “program” but a way of designing, developing, delivering, and documenting instruction in terms of its intended goals and outcomes.\(^8\)

A few years later, with his colleague, Kit Marshall, he identified three different types of Outcome-Based Education, namely, Transformational Outcome-Based Education, Transitional Outcome-Based Education and Traditional Outcome-Based Education. Spady and Marshall argued that the traditional approach was constrained by unit and course outcomes, and was not consistent with a more overarching outcomes approach. Transformational Outcomes-Based Education, on the other hand, they claimed was the superior model, because it represented the highest evolution of the concept, with a guiding vision of the student as a competent future citizen. Transitional Outcome-Based Education was described as a way of moving from a traditional approach to a transformational one.\(^9\)

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\(^7\) W.G. Spady, "Organizing for results: The basis of authentic restructuring and reform," *Educational Leadership* 46, no. 2 (1988), 4-8.

\(^8\) Ibid., 5.

With its clearly articulated targets, Outcome-Based Education was seen to complement the new focus on efficiency and standards shaping educational policy in various developed countries from the 1980s. Adopted in the United States of America from the 1980s, it was “growing at an astounding rate” throughout North America by 1991. It is also an approach that strongly influenced the development of the National Curriculum introduced in England and Wales in 1988, and also guided curriculum development in such countries as New Zealand, Hong Kong, South Africa, Singapore, Malaysia and Australia.

A Summary of the Advantages and Disadvantages of Outcomes-Based Education as Evident in the Academic Literature

Outcomes-Based Education has been praised for strengthening curricula and removing ambiguities in learning by identifying clear goals for students and teachers. Also, supporters have argued that because Outcomes-Based Education is not concerned with the process by which learning is achieved, it offers more flexibility than traditional curriculum models. According to Alderson and Martin, the seemingly common-sense philosophy underpinning the approach is difficult to refute. As they put it, it is “hard to take exception to the notion of schools and teachers focusing efforts on what students learn and on what they achieve”. Furthermore, they argued, it offers numerous advantages for teaching and learning:

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10 Ibid., 67.
11 A. Alderson and M. Martin, "Outcomes based education: Where has it come from and where is it going?," Issues in Educational Research 17, no. 2 (2007), 179; T. O'Donoghue and S. Clarke, Leading Learning (London: Routledge, 2010), 139.
13 A. Alderson and M. Martin, "Outcomes based education: Where has it come from and where is it going?," Issues in Educational Research 17, no. 2 (2007), 163.
[OBE] fundamentally challenges teachers to re-examine what they do as teachers and the way they do it. For those teachers who embrace it, it is liberating. It affirms what many teachers have previously struggled to do individually in the privacy of their classrooms, often against the prescriptions of school systems.\textsuperscript{14} They concluded by saying that “it says that all students are capable of learning and worthy of teachers’ support”.\textsuperscript{15}

The outcomes approach has also been seen to be more equitable than traditional academic-focused learning where the emphasis is on the content to be imparted rather than the goals to be achieved. Spady’s premise that all students would eventually be able to demonstrate the desired outcomes was advocated as being more inclusive than approaches underpinning other curriculum models, and effectively eliminated failure, as students who would not reach a target would be deemed to have not completed the outcome, rather than have failed. This particular feature of Outcomes-Based Education, however, as will be considered later, was to ultimately prove problematic in a number of contexts.

Teachers in North America and England and Wales initially supported Outcomes-Based Education, but this was to dissipate as many struggled with the onerous preparation and assessment tasks dictated by the associated curricula.\textsuperscript{16} Also, opponents argued that the outcomes approach did not foster, or accommodate, creativity and was particularly unsuited to subjects such as art, literature and music. Another perceived disadvantage was that Outcomes-Based Education was seen to favour

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 179.
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., 179.
performance, rather than knowledge, or understanding. According to McKernan, it trivialised knowledge by reducing it to facts:

The ‘means-ends’ OBE stance treats knowledge as instrumental, a position that violates the epistemology of the structure of certain subjects and disciplines. Some activities or educational encounters are worth doing for reasons other than serving some instrumental purpose as means to a predetermined outcome, aim, or objective. They may be either intrinsically rewarding, as in the case of understanding concepts like tragedy from a reading of Macbeth, or extrinsically worthwhile, as in the case of being able to create or solve problems as a result of inductive reasoning.

The outcomes approach was also criticised for being too prescriptive and limiting the autonomy of both teachers and students, and it was increasingly seen as another technique by which governments could control education while disempowering teachers.

Others claimed that the approach was theoretically weak. A damning observation, according to Lee, was the “overwhelming absence of a theoretically rigorous (and arguably psychometric) research base regarding the benefits to students and teachers of arranging the curriculum in terms of sequential outcome statements”.

The fact that students could not ‘fail’ under such a system also proved problematic, particularly for parents who lamented the loss of clear indicators of their child’s performance in relation to other students. Related to this, teachers also reported that an

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18 Ibid., 345.
outcomes style of reporting which removed an emphasis on competition was de-
motivating for students.\textsuperscript{21}

The perceived shortcomings of the outcomes model saw it abandoned in various
parts of the United States of America from the mid-1990s in favour of the ‘standards’
approach. Compared to Outcomes-Based Education, the standards model placed more
emphasis on academic content and the curriculum descriptors provided were more
specific and measurable.\textsuperscript{22} The standards model was also more consistent with the
standardised testing which had come to dominate North American education by that
time. In England and Wales, an outcomes focus continued to influence the curriculum,
but the initial system was revised in response to considerable opposition from teachers,
who complained the National Curriculum was creating much more work, restricting
their autonomy and not serving students well.\textsuperscript{23} More recently, in January 2011, it was
announced that the existing National Curriculum would be reviewed and a new National
Curriculum developed.

\textbf{The Adoption of Outcomes-Based Education in Australia, with
Particular Reference to Western Australia}

Although some of the criticisms of Outcomes-Based Education had begun to achieve
prominence internationally by the late 1980s when Australia was beginning to review its
school curricula, the outcomes approach was to strongly influence reforms which began

\textsuperscript{21} J. Griffiths, L. Vidovich, and A. Chapman, "Outcomes approaches to assessment: Comparing non-
government and government case-study schools in Western Australia," \textit{Curriculum Journal} 19, no. 3
(2008), 166-67.
\textsuperscript{22} K. Donnelly, "Australia's adoption of outcomes based education: A critique," \textit{Issues in Educational
Research} 17, no. 2 (2007), 186.
\textsuperscript{23} R. Alexander, C. Doddington, J. Gray, L. Hargreaves, and R. Kershner, eds., \textit{The Cambridge Primary
Review Research Surveys} (Oxon: Routledge, 2010), 796-800; C. Day, "Stories of change and professional
at the urging of John Dawkins, the Federal Minister for Education. Dawkins wanted to replace the Australian system of individual State curricula with a national curriculum. Initial support for his plan saw the Australian Education Council (AEC) being funded to oversee collaborative work in order to create “a centralised outcomes-focused national curriculum framework”. After two years, the AEC, in discussion with the states, had created a draft Years 1-10 curriculum framework based on national curriculum statements and profiles of student outcomes across eight attainment levels for eight key learning areas. In June 1992, national statements for the key learning areas were finalised and released. However, just over a year later at a meeting of education leaders in Perth, ministers from the states that had Liberal governments voiced strong opposition to the plan. The outcome of a vote was that the states should each be allowed to devise their own frameworks from the nationally developed statements and profiles.

These nationally-based outcomes-based policies were to influence the development of subsequent curriculum development in all Australian states. Western Australia was to adopt the ‘purest’ form of Outcomes-Based Education. It was also in that State that the new curriculum was to prove most controversial.

Teachers in Western Australia were told they would have the opportunity to examine and modify the outcomes statements before they were implemented in Western Australian schools, but that the outcomes-focused premise of the proposed new

25 Ibid.
curriculum was non-negotiable. On that basis, the Secretariat of the Interim Curriculum Council was formed in December 1995 to oversee the development and implementation of a new curriculum for the State. The drafting of the so-called Curriculum Framework began in April 1996. It was released for public consultation in July 1997, and officially adopted in June 1998. From July 1998 schools commenced planning for the phased implementation of the new framework and the State Government mandated that all schools comply with it for students in kindergarten through to Year 10 by 2004.

The development of the new Curriculum Framework was reported in numerous articles in *The West Australian* from 1996 to 1998. Unlike the predominantly negative coverage which was to later characterise the reporting about the introduction of Outcomes-Based Education to upper secondary schools, the coverage relating to the Curriculum Framework was uniformly positive. Gore, who investigated the role of the media in establishing the framework, found that “from the first announcement of the development of the Curriculum Framework, the news was nothing but ‘good news’ and positive press”. *The West Australian* supported the new curriculum on the grounds that it was promoted as a move to ‘values education’. The newspaper seized on the announcement that five core values were to be made explicit in the Curriculum Framework and it quoted prominent individuals, including the Governor General, Michael Jeffrey, as endorsing this focus on values. At this point it needs to be

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29 M. Gore, "The Role of the Media in Establishing Values Education in the Western Australian Curriculum Framework" (Masters thesis, The University of Western Australia, 1999), 223.
30 Ibid., 165.
emphasised that while the policy documents indicated that the framework had an “outcomes approach” they did not specifically refer to Outcomes-Based Education. The latter term was not to appear in The West Australian until 2005, seven years after the Curriculum Framework was endorsed.

Analysis of The West Australian’s Coverage of Outcomes-Based Education from 2005 to 2007

Although Outcomes-Based Education had been phased in to Western Australian primary and lower secondary schools from 1998 through the Curriculum Framework, The West Australian only began reporting on the development when planning for its expansion into upper secondary schooling was taking place. A few articles published in 2004 referred to the curriculum changes for Years 11 and 12 due to start taking place the following year. The term Outcomes-Based Education, however, did not appear in the newspaper until the following April. From that time until the end of 2007, Outcomes-Based Education was the dominant education issue reported in The West Australian, with 377 articles published about it over that period. The West Australian covered it so persistently that the newspaper’s former editor and senior columnist, Paul Murray, wrote in June 2006 that he could not remember another issue that had been “pursued so relentlessly, and with so much passion”.31

The first reference to Outcomes-Based Education appeared in a feature article published in The West Australian on 9 April, 2005. This article, which claimed that the new curriculum for Years 11 and 12 was a “dangerous and expensive gamble that could jeopardise students’ education”,32 set the tone for the rest of the coverage which was

31 ‘Premier’s press attack just the same old story’, The West Australian, 6 June, 2006, 18.
32 ‘Senior school reforms fail test of confidence’, The West Australian, 9 April, 2005, 58.
almost entirely critical of Outcomes-Based Education. From April, *The West Australian* covered the issue throughout 2005, publishing 51 news articles, one feature article, eight editorials and two staff opinion pieces. These focused on teacher reaction to the phased implementation of Outcomes-Based Education, and reported calls from teacher groups and other stakeholders for its introduction to be delayed. During this time, a local mathematics teacher, Greg Williams, formed the lobby group, People Lobbying Against Teaching Outcomes (PLATO), which was to feature prominently in subsequent coverage.

As the debate gathered momentum, *The West Australian* began to publish articles about Outcomes-Based Education almost every day. In the first six months of 2006 the newspaper published 121 articles on the issue, including 107 news articles, 11 editorials and three opinion pieces. During that period, the State Government agreed to make significant changes to the new curriculum, and the Education Minister, Ljiljanna Ravlich, declared that Outcomes-Based Education had been replaced by ‘outcomes and standards education’. *The West Australian* ignored this attempt to reduce criticism by simply changing the rhetoric and continued to refer to it as Outcomes-Based Education, or OBE, throughout its coverage.

The newspaper’s interest in the issue remained strong through the second half of 2006, during which time it reported that Ravlich had been “sacked”33 from the Education portfolio, and that the State Government had agreed to delay the introduction of 13 Outcomes-Based Education courses. Throughout this time it published a further 81 articles, including 64 new articles, 12 editorials and four opinion pieces, bringing the total number of articles published in 2006 to 202. The interest continued throughout

2007, with the newspaper publishing 111 articles on the issue. These included 89 news articles, 19 editorials and three opinion pieces. Teachers, it was reported, had been invited to contribute to the process of introducing Outcomes-Based Education through specially appointed “teacher juries” and the State Government had agreed to delay the introduction of some of the new outcomes-focused courses.

Overall, The West Australian’s coverage of Outcomes-Based Education between 2005 and 2007 portrayed teachers as heroes who were courageously taking a stand against the State Government to protect educational standards.

The properties of teachers can be stated in the following storyline:

In The West Australian’s coverage teachers were shown to oppose Outcomes-Based Education primarily because it was detrimental to education and students. They were also portrayed as feeling confused about the introduction of Outcomes-Based Education and inadequately prepared to teach the associated new curriculum. The coverage conveyed the strong message that teachers were overworked, and that the introduction of Outcomes-Based Education was making the situation worse. As a consequence of teachers feeling overburdened many were choosing to leave their profession. It was made clear that teachers were angry about the introduction of Outcomes-Based Education and were determined to resist its implementation. As the coverage continued, teachers were shown to exert an increasing amount of influence regarding the introduction of Outcomes-Based Education and were eventually able to force the State Government to make significant amendments to the new curriculum in order to appease them.
Five propositions can be identified within the storyline. Furthermore, the ordering of these propositions reflects the changing emphasis in the reporting on the issue. This order is as follows: i) teachers oppose Outcomes-Based Education because it is not educationally sound, ii) teachers are confused about what is involved in the new Outcomes-Based Education curriculum and don’t feel ready to teach it, iii) teachers are courageous and will strongly fight Outcomes-Based Education iv) teachers are overworked and the introduction of Outcomes-Based Education is exacerbating the situation, resulting in many leaving the profession and v) teachers are listened to and are able to force the State Government to address some of their concerns about Outcomes-Based Education.

**Teachers oppose Outcomes-Based Education because it is not educationally sound**

From the first article published about Outcomes-Based Education in April 2005, through to the stories that appeared in November 2007, *The West Australian* indicated that the majority of teachers were against it. This teacher opposition, according to the newspaper coverage, stemmed primarily from concerns that the proposed new approach would lead to a decline in educational standards and would be detrimental to students. A teacher quoted in the first article in the coverage said the new system was “lunacy” and would lower the standard of education.\(^{34}\) He was also quoted as saying that 90 per cent of secondary teachers within the State were opposed to Outcomes-Based Education.\(^{35}\) A follow-up article published the next month suggested that teachers’ concerns about the new system were growing. It claimed that the newspaper had been “inundated with calls

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\(^{34}\) ‘Senior school reforms fail test of confidence’, *The West Australian*, 9 April, 2005, 58.

\(^{35}\) Ibid.
and letters from teachers saying they have long-held concerns about what impact the new approach will have on students”.36

In later coverage The West Australian reported that a teacher who had been hired to write the new Years 11 and 12 outcomes-based physics courses had quit because the program that he had to develop was “rubbish”.37 The article claimed that the teacher had told the Curriculum Council (the organisation responsible for overseeing the change) that the outcomes prescribed for the subject were far too broad and did not give direction in how to teach and assess students. He believed, it was reported, that “it would leave students with massive knowledge gaps because the broad outcome statements allowed teachers who did not understand something to avoid teaching it, the sources said”.38 Such criticism accusing the new approach of being vague arose again when a subsequent article quoted an economics teacher as saying that students undertaking outcomes-based courses were “floating through the education system while failing to acquire a basic set of skills that they could apply in later life”.39 The newspaper also aired concerns raised by music teachers, who were quoted as saying that their proposed new course potentially encouraged a “mediocre, shallow and flippant approach to the study of music”.40 It was highlighted, for example, that students performing their own rap songs could potentially be awarded higher marks than students with years of classical training playing a difficult Mozart concerto. In another article, a senior school mathematics teacher also warned about the effect on standards. “Under

36 ‘Teacher pressure holds up reforms’, The West Australian, 2 May, 2005, 1.
38 Ibid.
40 ‘OBE rap music to beat the classics’, The West Australian, 15 October, 2005, 1.
OBE we will be reverting to a lower base level in calculus than when we were in 1990. We will be winding back the clock 15 to 20 years,”41 he was quoted as saying.

The sense that teachers opposed the outcomes-based approach because it was not educationally sound was reinforced with the reporting of comments from a school principal who argued that the philosophy of Outcomes-Based Education was questionable and that it needed some empirical data to support the claims being made for its value.42 A later article, which referred to the results of a survey of teachers undertaken by the State School Teachers’ Union (Teachers’ Union), suggested that this belief was widespread, claiming that 46 per cent of teachers “did not support the OBE philosophy”.43 By that stage, The West Australian had repeatedly reported as fact that “teachers believed Outcomes-Based Education was dumbing down Western Australian students”.44

As the coverage continued, it included an increasing number of comments from teachers who had experienced working under the outcomes-based system. In an article published in July 2006, the newspaper claimed that teachers who had already implemented Outcomes-Based Education in grades 8 to 10 said the system was flawed and should be scrapped. It continued: “Many teachers of Years 8 to 10 say they have grappled for years with lack of prescribed content and heavy assessment workloads that require them to ‘level’ students against jargon-filled outcome statements”.45 The newspaper also reported that teachers of aviation studies, who were the first group to implement an Outcomes-Based Education course in upper secondary school, had

“handed down a damning verdict on the controversial system describing some parts of it as unworkable”. Teachers of English were also quoted as expressing concerns about the Year 11 outcomes-based course which had been introduced in 2006. Those at one senior high school had voted unanimously to delay the introduction of the Year 12 outcomes-based English course after encountering “huge problems” with the Year 11 course, according to the newspaper. In another article, a teacher was quoted as saying that the new course was so full of jargon and ideology that it would “kill students’ love of literature”.

*The West Australian* continued to quote teachers condemning aspects of the outcomes-based courses in articles published up until the end of 2007, at which point teachers from several disciplines criticised the final exams produced for some of the new courses. However, it also published some comments from teachers who supported the new system, although these were typically included at the end of articles and thus were not likely to have the same impact on the reader. For example, in July 2005 it quoted the president of the Western Australian English Teachers’ Association as saying she supported Outcomes-Based Education because it taught children to be independent learners. In the same article, the president of the Western Australian Science Teachers’ Association also endorsed Outcomes-Based Education, saying that the new courses would “suit a range of kids, those who are more academic and those who are not academic”.

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46 ‘OBE flying course has crashed, say its teachers’, *The West Australian*, 15 September, 2006, 5.
48 ‘OBE literature course runs from Bard to verse’, *The West Australian*, 2 December, 2006, 2.
been a groundswell of opposition to Outcomes-Based Education, saying that two-thirds of teachers at her school would not teach any other way.\textsuperscript{52} The newspaper later reported the comments of another principal who claimed Outcomes-Based Education gave his teachers more flexibility to teach topics they knew would interest students at their school.\textsuperscript{53} Such comments, however, were rare, particularly during the later stages of the coverage.

**Teachers are confused about the new Outcomes-Based Education curriculum and don’t feel ready to teach it**

In its coverage of Outcomes-Based Education, *The West Australian* consistently portrayed teachers as confused about the proposed new system. The first article, published in April 2005, quoted the president of the WA Secondary Schools Executives’ Association as saying that “everyone is saying they are concerned and they feel uncertain and they don’t really know enough about it yet”.\textsuperscript{54} It was followed by repeated references to teachers feeling “confused” and “anxious” about the introduction of outcomes-based courses. This continued in June 2006 when the State Government bowed to pressure from teachers to make changes to the initial Outcomes-Based Education model. For example, the newspaper claimed around that time that, under the amended system, which included elements of the traditional curriculum and elements of Outcomes-Based Education, teachers were feeling more confused than ever.\textsuperscript{55} This message that the majority of teachers were uncertain about Outcomes-Based Education continued through to the end of the coverage in November 2007, when *The West*

\textsuperscript{52} ‘Principal calls a crisis meeting on OBE discord’, *The West Australian*, 20 July, 2005, 5.
\textsuperscript{54} ‘Senior school reforms fail test of confidence’, *The West Australian*, 9 April, 2005, 58.
\textsuperscript{55} ‘It’s OBE D:Day: and it’s ‘no’’, *The West Australian*, 17 June, 2006, 1.
Australian reported that mathematics teachers had voted to defer the introduction of the new outcomes-based course for another year. According to the article, the head of the Curriculum Council had acknowledged that many mathematics teachers were still “anxious” about the new course.  

The coverage conveyed the message that, due to confusion and anxiety about the new system, teachers felt unprepared to start teaching the outcomes-based courses. This was made clear from the first article published in 2005 which reported that many teachers believed they were “not adequately prepared” to teach the new curriculum, and it was echoed in an editorial later that month which claimed that many teachers “believe they are not prepared” for the introduction of Outcomes-Based Education. Similar statements were promoted as ‘fact’ in several subsequent news articles.  

By May 2006, the newspaper was arguing that it was “glaringly obvious” that teachers were not ready for the new courses. The reporting of direct quotes from teachers and teacher representatives appeared to support this contention. In one article, an economics teacher was quoted as saying that many teachers were struggling to understand the Outcomes-Based Education assessment criteria, and in another, a chemistry teacher said he and his colleagues were “woefully unprepared” to teach their new course. Also, the reporting of the findings of a survey of teachers conveyed the sense that such concerns were commonplace, with the article in question claiming that

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56 ‘OBE blow for Ravlich as teachers stall maths’, The West Australian, 26 October, 2006, 1.  
57 ‘Senior school reforms fail test of confidence’, The West Australian, 9 April, 2005, 58.  
58 ‘Case for change in schools has not been made’, The West Australian, 27 April, 2005, 16.  
more than half of state school teachers did not feel that they would be prepared to teach the proposed Year 11 and 12 outcomes-based courses.\textsuperscript{63}

Later, the Teachers’ Union president, Mike Keely, was quoted as saying that, despite recent training sessions, teachers still felt confused and concerned and that they did not have the information, nor the resources, to “confidently start teaching new courses in February”.\textsuperscript{64} On another occasion, the newspaper reported that Mr Keely believed that a significant number of schools and teachers were not ready to implement Outcomes-Based Education.\textsuperscript{65} The only comments that contradicted this regular portrayal of teachers as being unprepared to teach the new courses came from State Government politicians or Education Department bureaucrats. There was no reporting of statements from teachers claiming that they were ready.

**Teachers are courageous and will strongly fight Outcomes-Based Education**

The sense that teachers would strongly resist Outcomes-Based Education and its associated curriculum changes was evident from the early stages of *The West Australian*’s coverage of the issue, but was most pronounced in May and June 2006, when it was reported that teachers had threatened to refuse to teach the new Year 11 and 12 courses due to be introduced in 2007. One way in which the newspaper showed teacher resistance to Outcomes-Based Education was through the reporting of union action aimed at undermining and delaying the introduction of these new courses. According to an article published in June 2005, a union stop-work order would “halt the

\textsuperscript{63} ‘Teachers ‘not ready for OBE’’, *The West Australian*, 3 March, 2006, 10.
\textsuperscript{64} ‘Teachers demand OBE meeting’, *The West Australian*, 8 May, 2006.
\textsuperscript{65} ‘Teachers set deadline for OBE courses’, *The West Australian*, 22 May, 2006, 12.
design of new lessons and professional training” until the Education Department met “a string of teachers’ demands”.66 In another example the newspaper reported that teachers were threatening to “scuttle the controversial Outcomes-Based Education system by refusing to implement the scheme for Years 11 and 12 students next year”.67 This was followed by several more articles which referred to teacher bans on teaching Outcomes-Based Education.

The depiction of teachers as willing to take action to fight Outcomes-Based Education was also conveyed in the newspaper’s reporting of the creation and subsequent success of the teacher lobby group, PLATO. After reporting in June 200568 that PLATO had been established by a disgruntled teacher, Greg Williams, The West Australian claimed in July that colleagues had “flocked” to join the group.69 An article published the following year said that the group had become a major player in the debate about Outcomes-Based Education and its website had “fanned the flames of grassroots dissent”.70

In the coverage, numerous articles referred to “resistance”, “dissent” and “fierce opposition” by teachers and they were repeatedly described as “angry” and “furious”. By May 2006, the newspaper was reporting that teacher action regarding Outcomes-Based Education was amounting to “widespread revolt”.71 It also claimed that the Western Australian education system was “on the brink of anarchy” after teachers had “blatantly refused” to implement the State Government’s Outcomes-Based Education

68 ‘New stage in battle over Years 11 and 12’, The West Australian, 14 June, 2005, 11.
71 ‘High school starts at grade 7 under new education plan’, The West Australian, 10 May, 2006, 1,
plan. Later, the Opposition education spokesman, Peter Collier, was quoted as saying that the “trickle of [teacher] dissent from 12 months ago has now evolved into a tidal wave of dissent”. This was followed by an editorial which warned that Outcomes-Based Education was becoming a “wholesale disaster as a result of dissent and resistance by teachers in schools”.

Despite its use of strong language to describe teacher opposition to Outcomes-Based Education, *The West Australian* did not condemn the teacher resistance. Indeed, from March 2006 the tone of the coverage was such that it indicated clear support for teachers in their resistance to the curriculum changes. In one editorial published at the time the newspaper argued that “teachers and parents want just one thing – the best for their students”. Such defence of teachers continued in an editorial published the following month which said that they were not “impetuous rebels or thoughtless opponents of change”, but “responsible professionals who should be respected for their credentials and experience in education, not ignored”. Subsequent editorials maintained this stance, praising teachers for their “courage” in fighting Outcomes-Based Education, with one claiming that they had “risked vindictive reprisals in protecting the interests of their students”. In contrast, teachers of English, who had initially welcomed Outcomes-Based Education, were described as “sycophantic” with the newspaper claiming that if they had displayed the “courage” of other teachers who had

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74 ‘Key question is: Who would lose in OBE delay?’, *The West Australian*, 1 June, 2006, 16.
stood up against Outcomes-Based Education they would not have to “crawl to the authorities for similar treatment”.79

**Teachers are overworked and Outcomes-Based Education is exacerbating the situation, resulting in many leaving the profession**

Throughout *The West Australian’s* coverage of Outcomes-Based Education teachers were depicted as overworked, and the shift to the new curriculum was shown to be the cause of much of the problem. Several teachers were quoted as making comments to this effect. For example, one said that the new system would “send teachers’ workloads through the roof”,80 while teachers of aviation studies were reportedly “buckling under the pressure of the extra workload”.81 *The West Australian* also claimed that it had been contacted by many teachers who had complained that Outcomes-Based Education doubled their assessment workload,82 and it quoted from a letter from a teacher which said that she and her colleagues had “very little time to teach as we spend all our time trying to understand levels, find resources that don’t exist to attain those verbose levels, or being dragged out of class to attend useless professional development”.83

As the coverage continued, the situation was depicted as one which was deteriorating. In March 2007, the newspaper reported that a study by the Curriculum Council had found 88 per cent of teachers believed their workloads had increased as a direct result of Outcomes-Based Education.84 Again, in June 2007, an article claimed that it was impossible to find relief staff for the teaching of English because everyone

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was burnt-out. “It’s the worst situation I’ve seen in 40 years of teaching,” a teacher of English was quoted as saying.\(^8^5\) Such comments were reinforced with the reporting of views expressed by non-Government politicians voicing concern about teacher workloads. For example, Independent MP, Elizabeth Constable, was quoted as saying that Outcomes-Based Education was a “huge amount of extra work” for teachers.\(^8^6\) The Opposition education spokesperson, Simon O’Brien, was also reported as having raised the issue on several occasions and was quoted as describing the assessment procedures for teachers under the new outcomes-based system as “diabolically crippling”.\(^8^7\)

*The West Australian* also began to focus on the repercussions of the reported work burdens, increasingly claiming that the pressures were resulting in many teachers leaving the profession. This claim was first made in an editorial published in August 2005, which said that teachers were “leaving in worrying numbers”.\(^8^8\) It was then made repeatedly in various articles published from November 2006, when the newspaper began to warn of a “looming teacher shortage”.\(^8^9\) An article published early the following year said that there was a shortfall of 260 teachers for government school positions and that “heavy workload associated with the implementation of Outcomes-Based Education” had been a factor affecting teacher retention.\(^9^0\) This claim was repeated in a later article which quoted PLATO president, Marko Vojkovic, as saying that many teachers had left, or planned to retire, because of Outcomes-Based Education.\(^9^1\)

\(^8^5\) ‘OBE teachers demand more money’, *The West Australian*, 23 June, 2007, 79.
\(^8^6\) ‘Drop OBE, it’s a dead issue’, *The West Australian*, 2 February, 2006, 9.
\(^9^0\) ‘Combined classes a last-ditch bid to cope’, *The West Australian*, 31 January, 2007, 9.
\(^9^1\) ‘Hundreds of teachers caught in red tape’, *The West Australian*, 7 April, 2007, 5.
The following month, *The West Australian* quoted from a report by a recruitment firm which had found that dissatisfaction with Outcomes-Based Education and workload were among the five top reasons teachers gave for resigning from their teaching positions.\(^9^2\) This was reinforced with the reporting of comments from a teacher who had left the profession after 15 years to take up a job driving a front-end loader in a mining town. The article claimed that a “combination of stress, heavy workloads, poor pay, badly behaved students, mismanagement and outcomes-based education” had driven many teachers out of the workforce.\(^9^3\)

**Teachers are listened to and are able to force the Government to address some of their concerns about Outcomes-Based Education**

*The West Australian’s* coverage of Outcomes-Based Education portrayed teachers not only as vocal in their opposition to the new system, but also as listened to, and successful, in forcing the State Government to make certain concessions. The sense that teachers were exerting influence over the State Government’s decisions regarding Outcomes-Based Education became more pronounced as the coverage continued and was a particularly strong theme in the reporting between June 2006 and late 2007.

From mid-2005 the newspaper started reporting that the Government was responding to teacher “pressures” and “concerns” by taking measures such as delaying the implementation of some of the new courses,\(^9^4\) calling a parliamentary inquiry into the proposed changes,\(^9^5\) and setting up a task force to help resolve uncertainties.\(^9^6\)

Around the same time, in June 2005, it also claimed that the State Government had been

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\(^9^4\) ‘Teacher pressure holds up reforms’, *The West Australian*, 2 May, 2005, 1.
\(^9^6\) ‘New stage in battle over Years 11 and 12’, *The West Australian*, 14 June, 2006, 11.
“forced to water down significantly its controversial Outcomes-Based Education system in the face of opposition from disaffected teachers”.97

As the coverage went on teachers were depicted as exerting an increasing amount of power. For example, in May 2006, it was reported that the Teachers’ Union had “told” the Curriculum Council it must ask every school subject department if their teachers believed they would be ready to implement the new courses for 2007. According to the article, education authorities “had to prove” that schools were ready to introduce the courses the following year or “risk a union-led boycott of the controversial new system”.98 The next month the newspaper claimed that the Premier, Alan Carpenter, had made significant concessions and compromises in “the battle over Outcomes-Based Education” to “win over teachers”,99 while the president of the Teachers’ Union was quoted as saying the government had been forced to listen to teachers.100

The reporting of the State Government’s decision in June 2006 to introduce a hybrid model, which would combine elements of Outcomes-Based Education with elements of the traditional curriculum, was shown as an another attempt to pacify teachers. According to the related article, the State Government had been “forced to ditch some of the more controversial aspects of OBE” to try to “defuse a looming teacher revolt”.101 Soon after, the newspaper said that the State Government had effectively cancelled the further rollout of outcomes-based courses for the following

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98 ‘Teachers set deadline for OBE courses’, *The West Australian*, 22 May, 2006, 12
100 Ibid.
year in what amounted to an “almost total backdown”.\textsuperscript{102} Within a few months, \textit{The West Australian} was claiming that the government also planned to abolish the unpopular outcomes-based ‘levels’ marking system in what was described as a “significant about-face”.\textsuperscript{103}

According to the newspaper coverage, teachers played a critical role in the demise of the Education Minister, Ljiljanna Ravlich, who was removed from that portfolio in late 2006. Although a combination of factors was likely to have contributed to Ms Ravlich losing the role, \textit{The West Australian} reported that pressure from teachers was the sole reason for the change. Ms Ravlich, it claimed, had been “sacked from the Education and Training portfolio after her handling of Outcomes-Based Education culminated in the State School Teachers’ Union demanding Mr Carpenter sack her last month”.\textsuperscript{104}

When the State Government announced the creation of “teacher juries” in early 2007 the newspaper reported that teachers had been given a formal say in the decision-making process regarding the extension of Outcomes-Based Education to other subjects. Later coverage indicated that these juries had returned “numerous negative verdicts” about the proposed courses.\textsuperscript{105} The claim was that teachers had rejected more than half of the courses due to be phased in the following year,\textsuperscript{106} and that the government had promised not to implement any of the courses rejected by the juries until 2009.

The sense that teachers were having a say and were forcing the State Government to make concessions to the outcomes-based courses was maintained in the

\textsuperscript{102} ‘Ravlich backdown over OBE rollout’, \textit{The West Australian}, 3 July, 2006, 1.
\textsuperscript{103} ‘Minister to dump key part of OBE’, \textit{The West Australian}, 23 January, 2007, 16.
\textsuperscript{104} ‘No new blood in Ravlich reshuffle’, \textit{The West Australian}, 14 December, 2006, 1.
\textsuperscript{105} ‘More delays as teachers reject new OBE courses’, \textit{The West Australian}, 2 May, 2007, 5.
\textsuperscript{106} ‘Teacher juries’ damming verdicts put 20 OBE courses on hold’, \textit{The West Australian}, 4 May, 2007, 1.
coverage until the end of 2007, when it was reported that 1700 teachers had been asked to approve the 12 new senior school courses which had been altered significantly after criticism from the teacher juries. According to the article, four of the proposed courses did not receive the required 75 per cent support from teachers to constitute approval and would not be implemented in 2009 without teacher agreement.107

Conclusion

This chapter has provided a brief explanation of Outcomes-Based Education and a summary of the advantages and disadvantages of that educational approach, as outlined in the academic literature. It also detailed the adoption of Outcomes-Based Education in Australia and Western Australia. An analysis of The West Australian’s coverage of Outcomes-Based Education between 2004 and 2007 was then presented and a series of propositions about the newspaper’s portrayal of teachers generated. These were as follows: teachers oppose Outcomes-Based Education because it is not educationally sound; teachers are confused about what is involved in the new Outcomes-Based Education curriculum and don’t feel ready to teach it; teachers are courageous and will strongly fight Outcomes-Based Education; teachers are overworked and the introduction of Outcomes-Based Education is exacerbating the situation, resulting in many leaving the profession; and teachers are listened to and are able to force the State Government to address some of their concerns about Outcomes-Based Education.

In regards to certain propositions, The West Australian’s coverage is consistent with other research on teachers. The messages that teachers are overworked and choosing to leave the profession, for example, are present in the educational research.

literature as well as the research on the portrayal of teachers in the news media. The image of teachers as courageous too, can be seen in certain representations of teachers in popular culture. However, other propositions, such as the claim that teachers are listened to and are able to force change, are at odds with the depiction of teachers as generally powerless and voiceless which features strongly in the educational research literature. These and other findings will be the subject of further discussion in the next chapter.
CHAPTER EIGHT

DISCUSSION

Introduction

The previous five chapters have considered *The West Australian* newspaper’s portrayal of teachers in its reporting of various educational topics over the time period 1987 to 2007. The topics, it will be recalled, were as followed: Unit Curriculum 1987-1988, Industrial Dispute 1995, The Introduction of Standardised Testing 1997-2001, Teacher Shortage 1997-2007 and Outcomes-Based Education 2005-2007. In each case, the reporting was analysed and a series of propositions relating to the newspaper’s portrayal of teachers developed. Three major representations of teachers were generated, namely, negative representations, sympathetic representations and positive representations. The negative representations were the most dominant of the three, followed by the sympathetic representations. The least prominent, albeit still very discernible, were the positive representations of teachers. Each of these representations will now be considered in light of both the portrayal of schoolteachers by academics in the educational research literature and of the depiction of teachers in popular culture and in the news media, as described by researchers.

The Negative Representations of Teachers

The negative representations of schoolteachers, as evident in *The West Australian’s* reporting, are captured in the following storyline:

*Teachers are conservative and generally resistant to change. This is negative because, in most cases, change improves the education system and is beneficial to students.*
Teachers will aggressively fight workplace change they oppose, to the extent of taking industrial action. By resisting and trying to undermine change they cause delays and disruption and disadvantage their students. Teachers also resist measures to make them more accountable even though such measures have the potential to strengthen an education system that is in decline due to inadequate and poorly trained teachers.

The elements of the storyline will now be considered in more detail.

Teachers are conservative and resistant to change

The message that teachers were conservative and resistant to change was a particularly strong feature of *The West Australian’s* reporting of Unit Curriculum, the new curriculum framework for lower secondary schooling introduced in Western Australia in 1988. Teachers were depicted as creatures of habit, accustomed to working within an established and prescriptive system. They were also portrayed as traditionalist and resistant to change, particularly when it came to innovations that might increase their workloads and responsibilities. Furthermore, teachers were repeatedly described as fearful and concerned, and shown as not being able to cope with curriculum change.

The overall tone of the coverage about Unit Curriculum was negative towards teachers because their views were in opposition to those of *The West Australian*. The newspaper overtly supported Unit Curriculum, lauding it in an editorial as a “bold and imaginative step”.¹ Hence, it was critical of teachers who were shown to complain about, and be stubbornly resistant to, the move to the new system.

Teacher resistance to change was also shown in a negative light in the reporting on the introduction of standardised testing, another initiative the newspaper supported.

The coverage made it clear that *The West Australian* believed that the introduction of stronger accountability measures for teachers would be an important step towards arresting a perceived decline in educational standards. In opposing the introduction of standardised testing, teachers were again portrayed as resistant to, and fearful of, change. The same message was conveyed in the coverage of Outcomes-Based Education, where teachers were again shown to oppose a proposed change to the school system. In that case, however, the tone of the reporting was much more favourable to teachers because *The West Australian* was on their side. Like the majority of teachers quoted, the newspaper was firmly against Outcomes-Based Education, describing it as a “confused mess” and “fatally flawed”. Hence, the coverage indicated that teachers’ concerns and resistance were legitimate in that case.

This overall image portrayed in *The West Australian* of teachers as conservative and resistant to change is not largely reflective of the research on teacher characters in popular culture, or of the studies pertaining to representations of teachers in the news media. Nevertheless, there are some references in both quarters to teachers having these traits. For example, it has been noted that some, often unlikeable, teacher characters in popular culture are portrayed as old-fashioned and rigid,2 while teachers have also been depicted in the news media as stubborn3 and intransigent.4


References to the tendency of some teachers to resist change can also be found in the educational research literature. Lortie, for example, described teachers as “implicitly conservative”,\(^5\) saying that what they considered desirable could be summed up as “more of the same”.\(^6\) Overall, though, the message that teachers are highly conservative is not a major theme to emerge from the research on teachers’ work and lives.

**Teachers will aggressively fight workplace change they oppose**

Another element of the negative representation of teachers by *The West Australian* was its focus on their response to workplace change they opposed. Teachers were shown to oppose workplace change in the reporting of Unit Curriculum, the industrial dispute of 1995, the introduction of standardised testing, and Outcomes-Based Education. Generally, such resistance was condemned by the newspaper, which repeatedly described teachers as aggressive, defiant, uncompromising and stubborn.

The coverage took on a particularly critical tone when teachers introduced work-bans, or went on strike, which occurred in response to changes associated with Unit Curriculum and in relation to the proposed introduction of workplace agreements in 1995. Such action was shown to be extremely disruptive for students, parents and even the wider community. For example, when reporting on the teacher work bans imposed when Unit Curriculum was introduced, the newspaper continuously emphasised the “chaos” caused.

Overall, teachers who took part in industrial action were depicted as ruthless and indifferent to their students’ needs. This was made clear in an editorial published during the industrial dispute of 1995, which accused teachers of betraying “the people whose

\(^6\) *Ibid.*
interests they are supposed to serve – school children”. Another editorial published in response to the strike which took place later that year said that it would be remembered as “a day of shame for WA education”; a day in which thousands of teachers “abandoned their obligations to students for no particular reason”.8

Other studies on the portrayal of teachers in the news media arrived at similar conclusions. Several researchers have noted that newspapers tend to devote significant attention to teachers taking industrial action,9 and that they are almost always critical of them for doing so.10 Strikes, which are inherently newsworthy,11 are made more so when teachers are involved. Teachers are seen as providing an essential service and as having a responsibility to their students and the wider community. Hence, teacher industrial action is invariably portrayed as a betrayal of public trust. As White argues, the “use of dualities such as ‘teacher responsibility’ versus ‘holding children to ransom’, ‘the intrinsic benefits of a helping profession’ versus ‘greedy workers’, and so on are proliferated by politicians and newspaper editors and writers alike”.12

The portrayal of teachers as militant in their response to workplace change is not one of the key images to emerge from research on popular culture, which tends to focus on teachers’ interaction with students. Nor is it a dominant feature of the educational

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research literature which, instead, emphasises teachers’ dedication to students and their sense of moral responsibility. Nevertheless, the educational research literature does acknowledge that teachers in most developed countries have, at various times, gone on strike in protest at salary levels, working conditions, and proposed work changes. It indicates that strike action by teachers peaked during the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, and has subsided significantly in recent decades. The image of the teacher as a militant is not a feature of the more contemporary literature in this area, although it does indicate that teachers have continued to oppose certain changes and express dissatisfaction about their working conditions.

Teachers resist measures to make them more accountable

As well as portraying teachers as being aggressive and stubborn, The West Australian conveyed the message that they would resist measures to make them more accountable. It was shown in a negative light because the newspaper supported the introduction of such measures, arguing that they would improve the public education system. This element of the coverage was most pronounced in the reporting of the introduction of...
standardised testing, which stressed teacher opposition to the initiative in numerous articles published over five years.

The newspaper was particularly scathing of the State School Teachers’ Union of Western Australia (Teachers’ Union) for opposing the tests and directing its members to boycott the administering and marking of them. For example, an opinion piece written by a staff reporter referred to the “traditional reluctance of sections of education to accept the principles of public accountability, particularly the State School Teachers’ Union”.17 This overt criticism was continued in an article by the newspaper’s editor, which claimed that the union had “a vested interest in teachers not being seen to fail”,18 while another opinion piece further condemned the union for “thumbing its nose at the demand for some accountability of educational standards”.19

While the issue of accountability does not feature in the research about teacher representations in popular culture, it has been identified as a significant factor in studies on the treatment of teachers in the news media. Like The West Australian, most other media outlets analysed have been in favour of increased accountability measures for teachers, and have indicated that such steps are important and necessary. For example, an analysis of British newspaper coverage relating to teachers from the 1990s, found that teachers were expected to be “fundamentally accountable to the market, consumer demands and the nation”.20 Another study, which considered reports about teachers in a North American metropolitan newspaper, concluded that the issue of accountability

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17 ‘Public has interest in literacy test’, The West Australian, 20 August, 1998, 12.
18 ‘Barnett threatens ban if schools are named’, The West Australian, 9 April, 1999, 5.
dominated the coverage. In Australia, teachers were portrayed as untrustworthy and in need of further regulation, according to a study which considered a Queensland newspaper’s coverage of a major curriculum review.

Accountability is also recognised as an issue in the educational research literature. However, in that domain teachers are typically portrayed as justified in their opposition to such measures such as standardised testing. They are shown to be generally resistant to them because they are considered to be ineffective, disruptive and intrusive. According to the literature, teachers also believe that testing causes anxiety amongst their students. Teachers have also reported finding the testing process stressful and have said that the publication of test results in the news media creates shame and embarrassment. The use of accountability measures is seen to reflect poorly on them, sending a message that they can’t be trusted and that they need instruction from outside sources to perform their jobs properly.

Teachers are to blame for a decline in educational standards

The final element of The West Australian’s negative representation of teachers is the claim that inadequate and poorly trained teachers are to blame for a decline in educational standards. This was most evident in the reporting relating to teacher shortage, when the newspaper repeatedly indicated that the standard of teacher

23 Ibid., 299.
26 Ibid., 11.
preparation in Australia was below standard. This included derogatory comments about teacher preparation, as well as repeated references to “unqualified teachers”. Numerous articles said that teachers were being forced to take classes in areas in which they had no qualifications. The quality of teaching provided by recent graduates also came under criticism. Other articles pointed to poor teaching by claiming that the quality of contemporary teaching was inferior to the standards which had prevailed in the past.

The competence and knowledge of teachers was also questioned in the reporting on Unit Curriculum. This included the reporting of comments from various university academics who indicated that teachers did not have the necessary skills to cope with the new system. In one such article, teachers were said to lack a “basic understanding” of school curriculums. A later article claimed that teachers were struggling to develop Unit Curriculum because they did not have curriculum planning skills.

Other studies which have considered how teachers have been portrayed in the news media have arrived at similar findings. For example, Thomas found that the coverage in a Queensland newspaper conveyed the message that teachers were using inappropriate methods and were failing to identify students who needed help. It also suggested that inadequate teaching was to blame for a perceived decline in educational standards. The tendency of the news media to assign blame to teachers has been noted by researchers in the United States of America too, with teachers often shown as being

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responsible for poor outcomes in coverage about schools which have performed badly in standardised tests.30

This unfavourable image of teachers can also be found in popular culture, where researchers have described the “teacher as failure” character. These failure teachers may be shown as hapless, stupid, casual about their work, or simply uncaring.31 They reflect poorly on their profession, it is argued, and send a message that their job requires little training, or commitment, and that “anyone can teach”.32

In contrast, the educational research literature typically argues that teachers are used as scapegoats by the news media, and generally portrays them as doing their best under difficult and challenging circumstances.33 Nevertheless, the research does indicate that teachers themselves have some concerns about the quality of teacher preparation.34 Furthermore, it has been recognised that teacher preparation is a particularly significant factor affecting student achievement.35 And some researchers argue that it does need to

33 M.E. Rosenthal, Reality 101. What it's really like to be a teacher...And teach too (Lanham, Maryland: The Scarecrow Press, 2003), 123; V. Troen and K.C. Boles, Who's Teaching Your Children? (New Haven (Conn); London: Yale University Press, 2003), 16.
be improved to address ongoing issues, such as staffing shortages and the low status of
the profession.  

The Sympathetic Representations of Teachers

Although *The West Australian’s* coverage was dominated, overall, by negative
representations of school teachers, it also included reportage which showed teachers in a
more sympathetic light. The following storyline details the sympathetic representations
of teachers:

*Teachers are not valued or respected by the wider community. This is reflected in their
low pay and lack of power. They are overworked and under pressure. As a result, they
are dissatisfied with their work.*

Each of the elements of the storyline will now be considered in turn.

**Teachers are not valued or respected by the wider community**

The sense that teachers were not valued or respected emerged strongly in *The West
Australian’s* reporting of teacher shortage. Many of the articles referred to the low status
of teaching, poor teacher pay rates, negative community attitudes towards teaching, and
a lack of interest in teaching as a career. Representatives from the Teachers’ Union were
repeatedly quoted claiming that the low status of teaching was one of the main reasons
for the staffing shortage, and other stakeholders, such as parent groups, were shown to
express similar concerns. Several articles referred to the low tertiary entrance scores
required by some Western Australian universities for entry to teacher preparation
programs as opposed to the scores needed for a number of other professional degree

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36 *Ibid.*, 9; T. Lovat, *The Role of the 'Teacher': Coming of Age?* (Bundoora: Australian Council of Deans
programs. This, it was claimed, was “damaging the morale and status of the [teaching] profession”, and educators were concerned about “the negative image of teachers the low scores were presenting to the public”.37

This issue has also been raised repeatedly in the educational research literature, with numerous scholars38 claiming that the status of teaching has declined significantly over the past three decades. In addition to this, contemporary research indicates that many teachers believe their efforts are not recognised by the wider community.39 Instead, according to some scholars, teachers are regularly subjected to criticism and condemnation.40 This can be seen in popular culture, where some teacher characters have been portrayed as lacking the respect of their students and the public, or have even been cast as figures of ridicule.41

According to the relevant literature, the treatment of teachers in the news media has been more even-handed. While some reporting has been found to “diminish

teachers’ professional knowledge”, other coverage has presented teachers as authoritative and competent. Furthermore, regardless of the tone of the coverage, the news media generally has recognised that teachers themselves are concerned about a perceived lack of status and respect, and the issue has been the subject of significant coverage.

**Teachers are underpaid**

The message that teachers in Western Australia were underpaid was most pronounced in the reporting of teacher shortage and the industrial dispute of 1995. Throughout the coverage of those two developments representatives from the Teachers’ Union were repeatedly quoted in *The West Australian* as claiming that teachers were poorly paid relative to other professionals. This was supported by the reporting of research which found that teachers’ salaries nationally had lagged behind increases for other professions at the rate of 11 per cent for women and 17 per cent for men between 1983 and 2003. Also, the view that teachers were underpaid was not confined to the union; politicians, parent groups, academics and *The West Australian* itself, through its editorials, all made claims to the same effect throughout the reporting of teacher shortage.

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43 Ibid.
The image of teachers as lowly paid can also be seen in the educational research literature and in popular culture. Numerous researchers have made the claim that the relatively low salaries paid to teachers contribute to recruitment and retention problems. Others have implied that teachers are not well-paid by claiming that they are not motivated by money, but rather by the opportunity to engage with and help their students. The hero teachers of popular culture typically fit this mould, and are portrayed as rich in dedication, but poor in terms of material possessions.

The news media too has been found to present teachers as poorly paid. In some cases this has been through reporting that teachers’ salaries are lower than that of other professions. In other cases, it has been implied in the detailed coverage given to teacher industrial campaigns, which, in many instances, relate to remuneration.

Teachers are powerless

Aside from some of the final stages of the reporting relating to Outcomes-Based Education, *The West Australian*’s coverage from 1987 to 2007 depicted teachers as relatively powerless within the education system. It indicated that teachers had little


input into potential changes to the system, and that they were unable to force education authorities to abandon initiatives they opposed. This was most clearly articulated in the coverage relating to Unit Curriculum and the introduction of standardised testing – both of which were strongly resisted by teachers. Regarding Unit Curriculum, the newspaper reported that teachers were not consulted before it was introduced, and that it had been “imposed”\(^{49}\) upon them. The decision-making that led to it being introduced occurred at a level above that of school-based teachers and principals. Teachers, according to the newspaper, were ignored again when the State and Federal Governments chose to introduce standardised testing. This was also a situation over which the Teachers’ Union was not able to exert any influence even after its members were directed to boycott the administering and marking of tests.

Teacher characters in popular culture are often similarly limited in terms of influence and control. Burbach and Figgins identified the “powerlessness theme” when considering teachers in film. This image, they argued, came from “a long history of portraying teachers as generally passive individuals who exert very little control over their professional lives”.\(^{50}\) They went on to say they were unable to find “a single instance in which a teacher had a voice in resolving a school policy, nor could we unearth even one case in which a teacher’s opinion was seriously sought, or considered, in matters related to the work environment”.\(^{51}\) The educational research literature tends to be in agreement, claiming that teachers have effectively been marginalised and

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\(^{49}\) ‘Show us how, say teachers’, *The West Australian*, 14 September, 1987, 34.


\(^{51}\) *Ibid.*
silenced in recent decades as governments in many developed countries have sought to exert control over public education.\textsuperscript{52}

The trend to depict teachers as powerless also extends to the news media. For example, when considering an Australian newspaper’s treatment of teachers, Thomas found that they were denied an authoritative voice and were positioned as “deliverers of curriculum”,\textsuperscript{53} but not as contributors to the related decision-making process. Similarly, in a review of British newspaper coverage, Zemke concluded that teachers were “required to co-operate in, not affect, change” and were labeled as pawns; powerless functionaries of the state.\textsuperscript{54} However, according to Hargreaves \textit{et al}, this is not always the case. Comparing British newspaper reports about teachers from the early 1990s to the early 2000s, they found that teachers were increasingly portrayed as exerting some control and influence over educational matters in the latter part of the coverage analysed.\textsuperscript{55}

Teachers are overworked and under pressure

The image of teachers as overworked and under pressure was one of the strongest themes to emerge from the analysis. \textit{The West Australian} consistently depicted teachers as overburdened, stressed and struggling. This was particularly pronounced in the reporting of teacher shortage. For example, in 2007, the president of the Teachers’  

Union, Mike Keely, was quoted as saying that workloads were driving teachers “crazy”.56

Teachers were also depicted as overworked throughout the coverage of Outcomes-Based Education. The West Australian claimed that it had been contacted by many teachers who had complained that Outcomes-Based Education had doubled their assessment workload,57 and it quoted part of a letter from a teacher which said that she and her colleagues had “very little time to teach as we spend all our time trying to understand levels, find resources that don’t exist to attain those verbose levels, or being dragged out of class to attend useless professional development”.58 Similarly, when reporting Unit Curriculum, the newspaper said that 80 per cent of teachers believed the new system had increased their workload, and 42 per cent thought the extra workload was causing problems in their personal life and social life.59 According to the coverage the workload pressure on teachers also increased in response to the introduction of standardised tests. Quotes from the Teachers’ Union, academics and politicians were included, all making claims to that effect.

The claim that teachers are stressed and overburdened due to excessive work and demands has also been well-documented in the educational research literature.60 For example, after conducting interviews with 300 teachers over four years (2001-2005),

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56 ‘Plan to lure 100 retired teachers is desperate’, The West Australian, 6 July, 2007, 10.
Day et al found that teachers identified the main negatives of their job to be “the eternal burdens placed upon them and the accompanying workload”. Numerous researchers have pointed to working conditions as another particularly significant concern. On this, Troen and Boles have gone so far as to say that teaching is “dangerous, unhealthy and unpleasant” and that teachers endure the worst working conditions of any professionals.

These issues have come to the attention of other media outlets too, with teachers typically portrayed in the news as overworked, stressed and exhausted. According to Hargreaves et al, the focus on the difficult nature of teaching has been pronounced in more recent reporting which has identified a range of problems, including workloads and hours, discipline and violence, intimidation by parents, stress and safety. Popular culture also has tended to concentrate on the challenging aspects of the job, with teacher characters frequently depicted as being overburdened with work and as having to deal with rude, demanding and sometimes abusive students.

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62 V. Troen and K.C. Boles, Who's Teaching Your Children? (New Haven (Conn); London: Yale University Press, 2003), 64.
63 Ibid., 63.
Teachers are dissatisfied

The sense that teachers were dissatisfied with their jobs was most clearly articulated in the reporting of teacher shortage, which explored the reasons behind the recruitment and retention issues affecting the Western Australian public education system at the time. Throughout the coverage, *The West Australian* claimed that teachers were not satisfied with numerous aspects of their work. For example, an editorial published in October 2007, claimed that many teachers were “disillusioned with the education bureaucracy and dismayed by the diminishing status of their profession and of government schooling”.  

A later editorial made an even stronger statement to this effect, arguing that “disenchantment with teaching as a career has been building for years, exacerbated by low pay in comparison with other professions, confusion over Outcomes-Based Education, increasing workloads and poor student behaviour”.  

The reporting of teacher shortage indicated teacher dissatisfaction related in part to the difficult conditions in which they had to work. For example, one teacher was quoted as saying that she worked “under disgusting conditions”. Misbehaviour and abuse from students were also shown to be significant workplace issues for teachers, who were “concerned about being sworn at, spat on or threatened by students and the expectation that they should accept that behaviour”. One teacher was even quoted as saying: “If I had wanted to work with people like that, I would have chosen to become a prison guard”.  

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70 Ibid.  
The message that teachers were unhappy was also implied in sections of the reporting relating to the industrial action of 1995, the introduction of standardised testing, and Outcomes-Based Education.

The educational research literature also tends to portray teachers as dissatisfied with their work. There are repeated references to low morale and anxiety and guilt among teachers, and the contemporary research in particular conveys the impression that teachers are unhappy and aggrieved. The literature suggests that teachers are keenly aware of the negative aspects of their profession. This is supported by studies which have found that an increasing number are choosing to leave the profession. The same message is reinforced in popular culture, whereby the teacher as failure character is typically portrayed as working in education only because they have no other choice.

The trend to depict teachers as unhappy has also been identified in news media coverage. Several researchers have noted that news organisations have increasingly legitimised teacher concerns about their work in coverage from the 1990s and 2000s.

76 R. Fisher, A. Harris, and C. Jarvis, Education in Popular Culture: Telling Tales on Teachers and Learners (Oxon: Routledge, 2008), 169.
In focusing on the “plight of teachers as a beleaguered profession”, coverage of this nature sends a strong message that teachers are dissatisfied.

The Positive Representations of Teachers

Although the majority of The West Australian’s coverage portrayed teachers either negatively or sympathetically, it did occasionally present a more positive image of teachers. The following storyline describes the positive representations:

*Teachers are dedicated to their students and devote significant time and effort to their work. Teachers play an important role in society, and this is recognised by the wider community which generally supports teachers in their campaigns for better pay and working conditions. Teachers will courageously fight workplace change that they believe will disadvantage their students. In doing so, they are able to exert some influence and pressure the relevant authorities to address some of their concerns.*

The elements of the storyline will now be considered in turn.

**Teachers are dedicated and hard-working**

In addition to depicting teachers as overworked, as previously discussed, The West Australian at times also showed teachers to be dedicated and diligent. This image of teachers was most prominent during the reporting of Unit Curriculum, which included numerous references to teachers working long hours to help and counsel their students.

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78 Ibid.
The coverage of Unit Curriculum also included comments from school principals praising teachers for working hard to implement the new initiative.\(^8^0\)

Notwithstanding such positive comments, these direct references to teachers being hard-working and dedicated were still relatively scarce in *The West Australian*. This is unlike the educational research literature where teachers are typically presented as thoroughly committed to their work.\(^8^1\) Indeed, some researchers have argued that many teachers are driven to perfectionism.\(^8^2\) Generally, teachers are shown to be extraordinarily devoted to their students and as being intent on protecting them at all costs.\(^8^3\) On this, Ballet *et al* point to several studies which show that “teachers are willing to do anything to safeguard and continue the personal and caring relationships with their students”.\(^8^4\)

In popular culture teachers are not consistently portrayed as hard-working and dedicated to their students, with research pointing to numerous lazy and cruel teacher characters. Yet, the positive qualities outlined above can be attributed to the many compassionate teacher “heroes”, who are dedicated to their work to the point of having no personal life.\(^8^5\) A similar image of teachers, according to some research,\(^8^6\) can be

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\(^8^0\) See for example ‘Unit curriculum makes slow progress’, *The West Australian*, 10 May, 1988, 11.


\(^8^5\) J. Trier, "The cinematic representation of the personal and professional lives of teachers," *Teacher Education Quarterly* 28, no. 3 (2001), 132.
found in the news media. For example, Cohen concluded that individual teachers were often portrayed as exhibiting a “deep personal commitment to the work and to the students, even to the point of personal exhaustion”. However, this was overshadowed by a stronger message, also identified by other scholars, that teachers were to blame for a decline in educational standards.

Teachers are important

The positive representation was also evident in some of the coverage relating to teacher shortage, with The West Australian portraying teachers as playing an extremely important role in society and as providing an essential service. This was evident in the way in which the issue was treated, the language used and the attention it warranted. Even the possibility of a teacher shortage was given significant coverage when first predicted in 1997, and again when the issue arose in the years leading up to the main shortage in 2007. The newspaper indicated that a lack of teachers would have very serious repercussions, repeatedly referring to a “crisis,” and describing the situation as “urgent” and “desperate”. When there was a severe shortfall of teachers at the start of the 2007 school year, it warned of a potential education “meltdown”. Subsequent articles repeatedly claimed that urgent action was required to address the situation. An editorial published in July 2007, referred to the staffing shortage as “potentially

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crippling, while another later editorial argued that without a rapid increase in teacher numbers, there was a “real prospect of shortages having a significant impact on the quality of education in this State”.

At times, the newspaper also indicated that the community recognised the important work carried out by teachers. This was particularly evident in the reporting of the 1995 industrial dispute, which suggested that community support for teachers was strong throughout much of the year-long campaign. For example, the head of one high school parents group was reported as saying that its members were “firmly behind the teachers”. This was also acknowledged in an editorial which said that teachers had attracted “solid support and sympathy from many parents and students alike”.

While the sense that teachers are important does not emerge strongly from studies of either popular culture, or other news media, it is an underlying theme in the educational research literature. In that domain teachers are generally portrayed as performing an extremely important role in society. Researchers claim that this is recognised by the general public, even though teachers themselves often believe that they are not valued, or appreciated.

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Teachers are courageous

Generally, teacher resistance to educational change was characterised as negative in *The West Australian*. The exception to this was in the coverage of Outcomes-Based Education, an initiative opposed both by the newspaper and by many teachers. In that case, teachers were portrayed as courageous in their fight against the proposed new system. The newspaper indicated that teachers were against Outcomes-Based Education on the basis that it would lead to a decline in educational standards and would be detrimental to students.\(^{97}\) Numerous teachers were quoted making comments to that effect. *The West Australian* also claimed to have been “inundated with calls and letters from teachers saying they have long-held concerns about what impact the new approach will have on students”.\(^{98}\)

The newspaper’s overt support for the teachers’ case against Outcomes-Based Education was articulated in several editorials, one of which argued that “teachers and parents want just one thing – the best for their students”.\(^{99}\) It continued to defend teachers in a later editorial which said that they were not “impetuous rebels or thoughtless opponents of change”, but “responsible professionals who should be respected for their credentials and experience in education, not ignored”.\(^{100}\) A subsequent editorial praised teachers for their “courage” in fighting Outcomes-Based Education.\(^{101}\) In contrast, teachers of English, who had initially welcomed Outcomes-Based Education, were “sycophantic”, according to the newspaper, which claimed that

\(^{98}\) 'Teacher pressure holds up reforms', *The West Australian*, 2 May, 2005, 1.
\(^{100}\) 'Power politics crushes public interest on OBE', *The West Australian*, 3 June, 2006, 18.
that if they had displayed the “courage” of other teachers who had stood up against Outcomes-Based Education they would not have to “crawl to the authorities for similar treatment”.102

The image of teachers as courageous does not feature strongly in the educational research literature, but investigators do tend to recognise that they will stand up to education authorities when it comes to educational change they consider unfavourable.103 This quality appears even more pronounced in certain teacher characters in popular culture, with studies finding that “hero” teachers often defy their superiors, or convention, to help, or protect, their students.104 According to Hargreaves et al, who analysed British newspaper reporting from the 1990s and 2000s, similar traits have been attributed to teachers by the news media. They concluded that teachers, particularly in recent times, have frequently been cast as heroes, “fighting against extraordinary outside pressures on them, the education system and on students”.105 At the same time, however, a review of the related research suggests this depiction of teachers is relatively uncommon, with teacher resistance typically being represented in a more critical light.

Teachers have some influence

While *The West Australian* generally portrayed teachers as relatively powerless within the education system, it did present them as having some influence and as being able to effect some change during the reporting of Outcomes-Based Education. In that case, the newspaper indicated that the teachers’ campaign against the introduction of the new system had achieved some success, and that they were able to force the State Government to address some of their concerns. For example, it reported that the government was responding to teacher “pressures” and “concerns” by taking such measures as delaying the implementation of some of the new courses,\(^{106}\) calling for a parliamentary inquiry into the proposed changes,\(^{107}\) and setting up a task force to help resolve uncertainties.\(^{108}\)

As the coverage went on, teachers were depicted as exerting an increasing amount of influence. The newspaper claimed that the Premier, Alan Carpenter, had made significant concessions and compromises in “the battle over Outcomes-Based Education” to “win over teachers”,\(^{109}\) while the president of the Teachers’ Union was quoted as saying that the government had been forced to listen to teachers.\(^{110}\) When the State Government announced the creation of “teacher juries” in early 2007, it was reported that teachers had been given a formal say in the decision-making process regarding the extension of Outcomes-Based Education to other subjects.

As previously discussed, the educational research literature generally presents teachers as quite powerless to influence decision-making, or to effect change. Hence,

\(^{106}\) ‘Teacher pressure holds up reforms’, *The West Australian*, 2 May, 2005, 1.
\(^{108}\) ‘New stage in battle over Years 11 and 12’, *The West Australian*, 14 June, 2006, 11.
\(^{110}\) Ibid.
The West Australian’s representation of teachers as having some influence is at odds with the research on teachers’ work and lives. Nevertheless, this image of teachers is consistent with some teacher characters in popular culture who have been shown to emerge victorious from battles with education authorities, and to effect change, particularly that which of is benefit to their students.111

Overall, research about the treatment of teachers in the news media suggests that teachers are generally portrayed as having little power or influence over educational decision-making. This may be changing, however, according to Hargreaves et al, who found that the British newspapers’ positioning of teachers altered considerably from the 1990s to the 2000s. While teachers were almost always initially portrayed as relatively passive, they increasingly came to be presented as active parties. This, according to the researchers, conveyed a clear change in the image of teachers, “from a position of less respect (and perhaps ‘status’) in the sense of showing what was done to/said about teachers, to one where...teachers were given a ‘voice’ and what was reported was – if not exclusively, then – what teachers say/demand/ask for/call for/claim/ do etc”.112

CHAPTER NINE

CONCLUSION

News media coverage has been shown to influence educational policy\(^1\) and to affect and concern teachers,\(^2\) yet research examining how teachers have been represented in the news is scarce. The study reported in this thesis aimed to make a contribution to this neglected field by providing an analysis of a major Australian newspaper’s coverage of schoolteachers over a 20-year period. The news media, according to Warburton and Saunders, plays a “uniquely important role in shaping public opinion about teachers”\(^3\). This has been recognised by teachers who themselves perceive news coverage to affect their public image and to have an impact on their relationships with families, friends and the wider community.\(^4\) Noting the lack of large-scale studies in the area, scholars have called for more research to specifically consider the portrayal of teachers in the press.\(^5\)

Focusing on a range of metropolitan newspapers such as that studied here is one avenue


\(^3\) T. Warburton and M. Saunders, "Representing teachers' professional culture through cartoons," *British Journal of Educational Studies* 44, no. 3 (1996), 308.


to be pursued in this regard. This thesis, which is one step along the avenue, provides the only large-scale historical analysis of an Australian newspaper’s coverage of schoolteachers.

The aim of the study reported in this thesis was to provide a historical analysis of *The West Australian* newspaper’s depiction of public sector schoolteachers in its reporting of five education-related topics, each of which was the subject of sustained coverage at various times between 1987 and 2007. The intention was to arrive at generalisations about *The West Australian*’s portrayal of teachers and to then compare those findings to the existing research on how teachers have been represented in the educational research literature, popular culture, news media generally, and the press specifically.

Using a modified grounded theory approach to data analysis, a series of propositions about the newspaper’s representation of teachers was developed. This involved ‘open coding’, which is described as ‘the breaking open of data’ to identify concepts, and involves the asking of constant questions about the data and the making of constant comparisons between them.\(^6\) Building on this process, various themes were identified as was change over time. Memos in the form of detailed notes of ideas about the data and coded categories were also used to assist in the analytic process.

Although the research approach adopted was deemed the most appropriate choice for the study, various other methodologies could have been adopted, including social semiotics, discourse analysis, quantitative content analysis, along with other qualitative approaches incorporating such data analysis technology as Nvivo. Equally,

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the study could have examined photographs and cartoons published in *The West Australian* instead of articles, and focused on different topics or different periods of time. For reasons of focus and manageability, however, the decision was made to concentrate on the text of the articles produced in relation to the five central topics identified which were each the subject of prolonged coverage over the time period considered. This approach was consistent with ‘agenda-setting theory’, which contends that the public learns the relative importance of issues from the amount of coverage given to them in the news media.

Turning now to the general outcomes of the study, a number of key themes relating to *The West Australian*’s portrayal of schoolteachers were identified. Before moving to a summary of these, however, it is appropriate to discuss the nature of the coverage overall. In analysing the reporting of the five topics it was deemed that the newspaper content was generally superficial and was typically focused on the events of each day. It rarely presented detailed explanations or explorations of issues, and even relevant contextual information was kept to a minimum. This can be illustrated in the newspaper’s approach to Outcomes-Based Education, one of the more complex of the issues considered. Although *The West Australian* published almost 400 articles about Outcomes-Based Education between 2005 and 2007, only two of those attempted to explain the system in any detail. One of those articles, published in April 2005, provided this by the way of a statement on historical origins: “The system originated in the United States and quickly caught on around the world. It is a system in which students must

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fulfill broad outcome statements in order to be assessed”. The West Australian, 9 April, 2005, 58. Another, published in August 2005, included a more thorough definition, provided by the Western Australian Curriculum Council and a few subsequent articles described it as a system whereby students were assessed “on broad outcomes rather than specific academic content”. The vast majority of the coverage, however, did not provide even such brief explanations. This tendency to simplistic and superficial content, which was evident throughout the coverage analysed, has also been identified in numerous other studies which have considered the reporting of educational issues in various forms of news media, and has implications for practice which will be discussed further in more detail later in this chapter.

Returning to the newspaper’s portrayal of schoolteachers, the study concluded that The West Australian presented numerous conflicting descriptions of teachers in its coverage. As has been outlined in the previous chapter, the newspaper’s reporting of teachers included both overtly negative and strongly positive depictions of teachers. For example, teachers were at times shown as important and as providing an essential service, but at other times were presented as not valued or respected by the community. In some instances teachers were portrayed as hard-working and dedicated, while on other occasions they were shown to be selfish and resistant to measures that would make them more accountable. Although they were frequently depicted as conservative and

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8 ‘Senior school reforms fail test of confidence’, The West Australian, 9 April, 2005, 58.
resistant to change, they were also at times characterised as rebellious and courageous. Such anomalies are consistent with the findings of other research which has pointed to the prevalence of seemingly opposing images of teachers and teaching.¹¹

Overall, The West Australian’s coverage presented a less flattering image of teachers than that which emerges from the educational research literature. On the other hand, it provided a more balanced presentation of teachers than the extremes of “hero” and “villain” which tend to dominate popular culture. In general, its portrayal of teachers was largely consistent with that of other news media, with a movement in recent years towards more sympathetic treatment reflecting a trend also identified in contemporary British newspaper coverage.

The newspaper’s negative coverage included descriptions of teachers as conservative, uncaring, inflexible, militant, stubborn and resistant to accountability measures. Direct praise for teachers was rare throughout, and while The West Australian did at times portray teachers as dedicated and caring, the “hero” teacher often found in popular culture and also identified in contemporary British press reporting, was not a key feature of the coverage. This could reflect a particularly Australian attitude according to May, who arrived at the following conclusion in relation to teacher characters in Australian films:

What is noticeably deficient in Australian cinema compared to the many Hollywood representations in school films, is the figure of the hero-teacher, featured in such films as Goodbye Mr Chips (1939), The Corn is Green (1945), To Sir with Love (1967), Up The Downstaircase (1968), Conrack (1974), Stand

and Deliver (1997), Dead Poets Society (1986), Lean on Me (1989), Mr Holland’s Opus (1995), Dangerous Minds (1995) and so on. Indeed so far I find that Australian teachers in feature films are ambivalent characters at best, and subjects of high anxiety at worst, and this occurs across the representations of both sexes.\textsuperscript{12}

It is true that \textit{The West Australian} did depict teachers as courageous in its coverage of Outcomes-Based Education. This, however, was the exception within the reporting analysed. Generally, the newspaper emphasised teacher resistance and expressed support for measures intended to make teachers more accountable and improve the public education system. Coverage of this nature conveyed the sense that teachers could not be trusted to do their jobs effectively without external monitoring and implied that inadequate teaching had led to a decline in educational standards.

A significant portion of the coverage was more sympathetic to teachers in that it concentrated on the demands, burdens and challenges facing them. This trend to more sympathetic reporting was particularly noticeable in the more contemporary coverage, especially during the latter stages of the reporting of teacher shortage (1999-2007) and in relation to Outcomes Based Education (2005-2007). This echoes a similar finding by Hargreaves \textit{et al}, who compared British press coverage of teachers from 1991-1992 to coverage from 2003-2005 and concluded that there was a noticeable trend to more “sympathetic and supportive”\textsuperscript{13} tone in the more recent reportage.

In the case of the coverage by the British press, teachers were increasingly portrayed as “dedicated and committed professionals struggling against a broad range of


serious problems and pressures”.14 Such a focus on teachers as dedicated and caring was not as pronounced in *The West Australian* which, instead, devoted the majority of coverage of this nature to describing the pitfalls of teaching. Ironically this was most evident in the reporting of teacher shortage, when the Western Australian Government was desperately trying to attract more people into teaching. The reporting of that issue repeatedly made reference to the low status, inadequate pay, terrible work environments and stress associated with teaching. While this coverage acknowledged the difficulties facing teachers, it ultimately presented a negative image of teaching as a profession.

In many cases, the negative messages came from teacher union representatives. Indeed, the majority of statements attributed to teacher union representatives across the coverage portrayed teaching negatively. In one sense, this is not surprising given that unions typically want to raise public awareness about the problems facing their members. However, in consistently emphasising the more challenging aspects of teaching, the unions may also be damaging the status and appeal of the profession. This point has been raised in other recent Australian research which has questioned the value of teacher union contributions to debates in the news media. For example, Keogh and Garrick, who analysed a Queensland daily metropolitan newspaper’s reporting of a State Government proposal to pay “incompetent” teachers $50,000 to resign, found that statements made by a teacher union representative seemed to be “colluding in the notion state schools were possibly full of incompetent teachers who were in need of encouragement to leave”. 15 Although the teacher union comments published in *The


*West Australian* were not so overtly unfavourable to teachers, they nevertheless suggested that teachers were struggling to cope with the demands placed on them and that teaching as a job was neither well-paid nor rewarding.

Union representatives were among a core group of officials quoted in *The West Australian* throughout the coverage considered. Although the main stakeholders in terms of education are, arguably, students, parents and teachers, those most frequently quoted in *The West Australian* on educational issues were politicians, union representatives, bureaucrats and academics. The reliance on such ‘official’ groups by the news media has been well-documented in research by scholars such as Hall *et al.*,16 who described institutional, accredited spokespeople such as politicians, employers and trade union leaders as the “primary definers”17 of news. Significantly, in the case of *The West Australian*’s coverage, the majority of statements about teachers and teaching from all of these official groups were negative. Like the union representatives, the other officials routinely emphasised the challenges facing teachers. The reporting included very few examples of statements from any of these groups praising educational standards, or teachers, or highlighting the advantages and benefits of being a teacher.

In contrast, individual teachers were generally voiceless throughout the coverage. Cases of individual teachers contributing to the debate in the newspaper were rare throughout the reporting and were usually limited to senior teacher administrators such as principals or teachers who were representatives of various formal groups such as

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17 Ibid., 57.
the Western Australian Science Teachers’ Organisation. The absence of teacher comments was particularly pronounced in the reporting of the industrial dispute of 1995, the introduction of standardised testing, and teacher shortage. This is consistent with other research which has found that teachers are rarely shown as having a say in regards to educational matters.\(^\text{18}\) Thomas, for example, found that teachers were effectively marginalised and denied an authoritative voice in Australian news coverage relating to a curriculum review, while groups including newspaper editors, university lecturers and parents were positioned above teachers as experts on educational matters.\(^\text{19}\) In the United States of America, Cohen found that the marginalisation of teachers in the news media occurred even in news reporting about them, concluding that teacher professional identity was constructed in media discourse most often by “those talking about teachers, rather than teachers themselves”.\(^\text{20}\)

The *West Australian*’s coverage on Unit Curriculum did include some comments from individual teachers. This may be because when that development occurred in 1987 and 1988, there were fewer restrictions on state school teachers speaking to the news media. In more recent years, all media inquiries relating to public school education have been directed to the Education Department. Despite this, the most comments from individual teachers appeared the coverage of the most recent topic, Outcomes-Based Education (although several of the teachers were not identified). This may reflect an increased desire for individual teachers to speak to the news media on that issue and/or

\(^{18}\) Ibid., 65.


particularly strong efforts by *The West Australian* to seek comments from teachers about Outcomes-Based Education.

In addition to being voiceless, schoolteachers were typically shown as powerless within the education system. *The West Australian’s* coverage indicated that widespread teacher concern in relation to both Unit Curriculum and the introduction of standardised testing was effectively ignored by the State Government and the Education Department. Only during the reporting of Outcomes-Based Education were teachers shown as having significant influence over decisions regarding education. In reality, however, the power lay with the newspaper. It was the intense, critical and prolonged coverage it devoted to Outcomes-Based Education that influenced the political decision-making relating to the new system, and not the teacher opposition. The newspaper bestowed the influence on teachers, it is argued, because it wanted the public to believe that teachers themselves were driving the campaign against the initiative.

Turning now to the limitations of this study, it is necessary to first point to the focus on a single metropolitan newspaper. Some related studies have considered multiple newspapers in a metropolitan area,21 or have analysed both metropolitan and regional newspapers,22 and in doing so have been able to arrive at conclusions about press coverage which apply more broadly. The study presented here is idiographic, being specific to the situation in Western Australia. At the same time, however, *The

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*West Australian* is recognised as a particularly influential newspaper, and the coverage analysed relates to universal and perennial issues in education.

The decision to restrict the analysis to the reporting of five selected topics over a specific 20-year period has also necessarily limited the scope of the research. A complementary study focused on all the education-related articles published between 1987 and 2007 could also have been undertaken. Such a study would range widely, focusing, amongst others, on references to cases of sexual relationships between teachers and students, in line with other comparable research which has found allegations of sexual misconduct among teachers have received significant media attention, as well as studies of popular culture which have pointed to the frequent sexualisation of teacher characters. Coverage of that nature was not evident in the reporting of the topics chosen, nor was it the subject of sustained coverage during the period analysed. However it may have been that the newspaper did publish articles on such issues and it would be valuable for others to now follow up such complementary lines of enquiry.

It is recognised that the present thesis is one of only a number of studies that need to be conducted on the general area of interest. The claim is that commencing with the focus adopted here provides the foundation for such further studies. These further studies would need to deal with the forces which operated to bring about changes in the reporting on the topics identified and should involve interviewing key participants, including reporters, editors and managers of newspapers. The point, however, is that it

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would be very difficult to develop a meaningful framework for constructing questions to pose to such personnel without the analysis provided by the study here.

As well as the potential for other related studies such as those outlined above, there are many opportunities for future research in the area. It would be valuable, for example, to analyse the reporting relating to schoolteachers in other mainstream Australian newspapers, as well as other forms of news media, including television, radio and online. The coverage of schoolteachers in alternative forms of media including independent, niche and in-house publications, could also be examined. Another potential area of study would be an analysis of advertising relating to teachers. Further insights could be gleaned from study of letters-to-the-editor in newspapers.

The literature suggests that while several researchers in Britain have considered teacher representations in the news media, very few studies of this nature have been undertaken in the United States of America. Future studies could aim to address this gap in the research and might allow for comparisons to be made regarding the press coverage of teachers in various developed countries.

There is a need for future research to also consider teachers other than those employed by state governments, especially those from faith-based schools, including Roman Catholic schools, Protestant schools of various denominations, Jewish schools and Islamic schools. Equally there is a need to consider teachers associated with alternative schooling including teachers in Montessori, Froebel and Waldorf (Rudolf Steiner) schools. Another group yet again is those parents who act as teachers in home school settings.
The thesis began by explaining that news media coverage has been seen to have contributed to a decline in the status of the teaching profession, and that teachers are frustrated at what they have perceived as a negative focus in coverage.\textsuperscript{24} The outcomes of the study would suggest such concerns are justified, and point to certain implications for journalism education and journalism practice. For example, the study has the potential to inform journalism preparation at the tertiary level as well as in newsrooms. Such preparation could aim to increase awareness among students and journalists of the tendency to negative reporting of education, teaching and teachers. It could also point to the reliance on certain official groups in education and suggest alternative people and organisations to approach for interviews. Furthermore, it could advise that the reporting of educational issues often lacks the necessary explanation and analysis of the often complex issues involved. Such information and direction could possibly be incorporated in a series of guidelines for journalists on the reporting of education and teaching.

At the same time, while a media outlet such as \textit{The West Australian} must take responsibility for its choice of interview subjects and the placement of articles and illustrations, it cannot control what those interviewed say on any particular issue. Hence, the key interviewees in education, such as teacher union representatives, politicians, academics and education bureaucrats, need to consider what messages they want to send regarding teachers and teaching, and to shape their media comments accordingly. Efforts to recognise and praise the essential and valuable work of teachers in the news

media have the potential to raise the public image of the profession and ease ongoing recruitment and retention problems.

Further to this, it would be beneficial if teachers were encouraged to play a more active role in contributing to news media coverage about education. While education and teachers feature prominently in newspaper coverage, the majority of research in the area, including this study, has found that teachers themselves are typically excluded from news coverage. They are seen in the news media, but they are not heard. However, this doesn’t have to be the case. In Britain, where researchers have noted a shift to “explicitly positive and supportive reporting” in newspaper coverage over the past decade, teachers are said to enjoy “remarkably high visibility as a key voice in the public debate”.

Although news media coverage may sometimes suggest otherwise, research has shown that teachers are generally valued, respected and trusted by the wider community. Teachers are legitimate stakeholders and are entitled to a greater say on educational matters. They can also play a valuable role in improving public perceptions of their profession by making statements to the news media which emphasise the benefits, importance and rewards of teaching.

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## APPENDIX

## CODING EXAMPLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Extract of article from <em>The West Australian</em></th>
<th>Coding</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>‘Confusion in schools’, January 30, 1988</strong></td>
<td>Chaos, disorder in schools</td>
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<td>Unit curriculum is in a state of disarray only days before school resumes, a phone poll on education has revealed. The Opposition spokesman on Education, Norman Moore, said a major concern of the 300-400 callers was confusion among teachers and parents of the unit curriculum system. He said specialist teachers were being forced to take classes in areas completely outside their expertise. One senior school had not finalised its timetable.</td>
<td>Teachers’ confused</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Teachers forced (powerless) Schools and teachers not ready for UC</td>
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<td><strong>‘Step-up bans, say teachers’, April 18, 1995</strong></td>
<td>Teacher action disruptive Teachers will not back down Teachers support aggressive action Working conditions and pay inadequate Teachers don’t care about the implications for students</td>
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<td>Ninety-five per cent of WA teachers want to continue disruptive bans on after-hours and voluntary school work next term, according to a union survey. And more than 600 responses to the survey indicated that many teachers wanted to step up the bans to force Government action on their claims for better resourcing, work conditions, consultation and pay. State School Teachers’ Union president Brian Lindberg said teachers were pleased with the effect of the bans, which disrupted extracurricular sport, social and camping activities in the first term.</td>
<td></td>
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<td><strong>‘Staff fear test stress’, September 15, 1999</strong></td>
<td>Teachers believe testing is bad for students Tests too hard No-confidence in teachers Fear of comparisons</td>
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<td>More than half of Year 3 teachers believed their students were stressed leading up and during last year’s controversial literacy tests, according to an Education Department survey. The same proportion of teachers said the tests were too hard and students had not enjoyed completing the work. The survey also found that many staff perceived the tests as a vote of no-confidence in their professional integrity. And the potential to compare the results of students, teachers and schools was considered a breach of confidentiality. But their views were in stark contrast to most of the parents surveyed, who believed performance comparisons were a positive aspect of the literacy assessments.</td>
<td>Parents support tests (teachers and schools should be accountable)</td>
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<tr>
<td>‘Plan to lure 1000 retired teachers is desperate’, July 6, 2007</td>
<td>Need to attract more teachers (teachers are important)</td>
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<tr>
<td>A State Government plan to lure retired teachers back with big pay packages and superannuation incentives has been labelled by the Oppositions as a desperate last-gasp measure that will only temporarily fix the teacher shortage. Education Minister Mark McGowan said yesterday the package would focus initially on 1000 retired teachers with promises of salaries from $75,000 to $90,000 to work at severely understaffed country schools and flexible job arrangements, including part-time work and the option to put all pay into superannuation. State School Teachers’ Union president Mike Keely said: “This is not in any sense a long-term fix; it isn’t even a medium-term fix. The things that will keep people working longer are better salary and cutting down the workload which is driving people crazy.”</td>
<td>Need for better pay and working conditions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Need for better pay and working conditions |
| Not enough |
| Poor pay |
| Workloads too high |
| Teachers not coping |

| ‘30pc more teachers quit as OBE looms’, January 20, 2006 | Increase in teachers leaving OBE to blame |
| Fears that WA’s controversial outcomes-based education system is forcing teachers out of the profession are backed by Education Department figures revealing a jump of nearly 30 per cent in the number of State school teachers who retired or resigned in 2005 compared to 2004. And the department’s annual report shows teachers’ stress-related claims also increased 30 per cent, rising from 81 in 2003-2004 to 105 in the last financial year. Teacher lobby group founder Marko Vojkovic said: “I know some of the teachers who retired last year...They were at the top of their tree in the teaching profession but felt they were not being listened to.” | Teachers’ more stressed |

| Increase in teachers leaving OBE to blame |
| Not being listened to |