

## Emeritus Professor William Fraser Connell OBE

The degree of Doctor of Letters in Education (honoris causa) was conferred upon Emeritus Professor William Fraser Connell OBE at the Education ceremony held on 21 March 2000.

### Citation

Chancellor, I have the honour to present to you William Fraser Connell for admission to the degree of Doctor of Letters in Education, honoris causa.

Bill Connell became Professor of Education at the University of Sydney in 1955, and guided the University's Department of Education during a period of great growth. He established this department as a major centre of teacher education and as Australia's most important centre of educational research and thought, at a period of tremendous growth and change in the Australian educational system. An outstanding teacher, he inspired many careers in teaching and education studies - being a clear and humorous lecturer, a tolerant and stimulating tutor, and an engaged supervisor, who urged students at all levels to reflect on the nature and purposes of education.

Originally a classics scholar, Bill Connell has been a major figure in research on the history of education. His work ranges from the fine detail of his doctoral thesis on Matthew Arnold and his *Reshaping Australian Education 1960-1985*, to the vast scale of his *History of Education in the Twentieth Century World*, which shows a grasp of world patterns in education which few scholars in any country could match. His passion to help educators understand their own history comes close to home. Staff and students here will profit from his work as co-author of the official history of the University of Sydney, *Australia's First*.

However, Bill Connell's research interests go beyond writing history. He was one of the first Australian researchers to wrestle with the problem of social inequality in education. But the area where he perhaps had most impact is youth research. With the rapid expansion of Australian secondary education, Bill Connell saw the need for teachers to understand their new mass clientele. In the early 1950s he launched the first large-scale Australian study of adolescence and youth culture - *Growing Up in an Australian City*. Seeing youth and its circumstances change in the 1960s, he put together another research team and produced a second major study, *12 to 20*. Twenty-five years after the latter was published, these remain the most comprehensive youth studies ever done in Australia.

Thinking it was important for high school teachers and administrators to reflect on all aspects of their business, he published in 1961 a book on the *Foundations of Secondary Education*, combining educational theory, pedagogy, and sociology. Some think this is his finest work. Better known, however, is the jointly written teacher education textbook, *The Foundations of Education*. This "blue bible", an enormously successful text remembered by generations of Dip Ed students, tried to bring together the full range of sciences and practical knowledge with which a beginning teacher needed to be acquainted.

Bill Connell's role in Australian education went far beyond his own department. He worked hard to stimulate educational scholarship, and rigorous thinking, in what had previously been a marginal academic field. He was the first editor of Australia's most significant academic periodical in his field, the *Australian Journal of Education*, which recently celebrated its 40th anniversary.

He had a close relationship over many decades with the Australian Council for Educational Research, eventually writing the official history of the ACER.

He also worked hard to open international perspectives for Australian education. He studied and taught in the United States, and created a long-term link with the University of Illinois, a world centre of educational studies. The University of Illinois has taken the rare step of creating a "W.F. Connell Fellowship" to honour his role.

In 1947 Bill Connell was an Australian delegate to the inaugural 6 week long conference arranged by UNESCO, at Sevres in France, and he continued in later decades to work for UNESCO and promote multilateral contacts. With his encouragement a constant stream of visitors from Asia as well as Europe and North America began to flow through the Sydney department. He headed the first group of Australian teachers to visit revolutionary China, and edited a book on their experiences. He encouraged a pioneering

"Teaching English as a Foreign Language" program, and brought the first generation of overseas students in Education to Sydney - in the days when teaching overseas students was considered a way of aiding other countries.

Bill Connell's concern to find new sources of ideas for Australian education, and to promote new ideas in practice as well as theory, has been constant since, as a young man, he went to the 1937 conferences organized by the New Education Fellowship. In the 1970s he chaired a national committee that sponsored a wave of new thinking on social science curricula for Australian schools. After his retirement, he chaired an enquiry into the state of Tasmanian education, ranging from primary curriculum to tertiary teacher education, and chaired the Accreditation Board in Victoria for Colleges of Advanced Education.

In Bill Connell's long and active career his work is mingled with that of many others - colleagues and students, and above all his wife Margaret Connell, whose share in all this accomplishment is widely known. In his fundamental campaign to invigorate educational studies as an intellectual field, and gain recognition for education as a social activity of transcendent importance, he has had formidable success.

Chancellor, I present William Fraser Connell for admission to the degree of Doctor of Letters in Education, *honoris causa* and I invite you to confer the degree upon him.