



**TASA** The Australian  
Sociological Association

## Applied Sociology Contact Email for April 2017

On the ABC's AM program Dr John Hewson said: "Politicians are getting away with flagrant dishonesty as a shift from fact to opinion colours the political debate around climate change. There's a lack of evidence in public debate. Politicians either ignore climate change or attempt to use the issue to score points, and Australia has reached a point where facts are of lesser value than opinions. I think science is probably more useful and more relevant to society today than it's ever been. But there's been a widening gap between science and the public."

Widen it from the climate issue. Take out 'science' put in 'sociology' and we have the same problem. I have just finished an article for the Coffs Harbour Museum about a local man who probably flew before the Wright brothers. At the time neither people nor the media were particularly interested in flying, as David Craddock said in his Presidential Address to the Royal Society of New South Wales, *9th April 2003*, entitled "Publish and Perish", that often when you publish the truth, all you get is opposition or disinterest. One occasion, he cites is that the media had no real interest in the Wright brothers' flight. It took prodding by Lawrence Hargrave before an article about the flight was published, on page 9 of the Sydney Daily Telegraph, 2 months after the event. So a flight by a potato farmer in remote outback NSW in the late 1800's would be of interest to no one. Just another crank.

Many years ago now, I ran a conference at Melbourne University, on the subject of getting your research to the public. The conference attracted people from science, social science and humanities, as well as members of the ABC Science Show. I had people from each academic area to present a paper, and I got Graham Perkin, the famous editor of the Melbourne Age, to sit through the papers, then take the last session and say how publishable they were. I, as the Chairman, introduced him and then said, "Now what would you publish?" His answer was: "Nothing!". The silence was palpable. He then went on to say that, "if you want me understand what you are getting at, you have got to put it in my language. A lot of what was said was gibberish to me. You do your research and then deliver it to people in academia who have the same background as you. If you want the world to know what you are doing you have got to learn how to make them understand, only then will you make a mark in the world."

Politicians and others can deny the value of science and social science because they know that a large proportion of the voting public have no background in science or social science. You will know this if you have ever tried to get an employer to employ a sociologist when they have never heard of it. Sociology? What's that? They will also be thinking: "How will that improve my budget?" As I have said before, Sociology stayed in universities. It didn't want a large organisation of community based sociologists, who might want to do things differently, as economics and psychology have done, because it was safe in universities, you didn't have to talk to people who didn't understand. Unless we can get out there and get sociology understood I don't see much future for us.

Now for the Terry Pratchett lovers, there are two new books you may not have heard about. "Seriously Funny, the Endlessly Quotable Terry Pratchett", Penguin, 2016. and "Philosophy & Terry Pratchett", Palgrave MacMillan, 2014.

*Alan Scott*, Continuing Education Officer