Australia's Science Literacy Falls

Written by Administrator Wednesday, 31 July 2013 06:53 -

"Australia's science literacy falls" claims the Australian Academy of Science, who carried out a survey of "science literacy" in 1,515 Australian adults of varying ages and educational backgrounds in July 2013, and then compared it to a similar survey done in 2010. They were disappointed to find "the proportion of 18-24 year-olds who correctly answered that it takes one year for the Earth to orbit the sun fell to 62%, from 74%", but they were encouraged to find there was "a small increase in the number of people who know that the earliest humans did not live at the same time as dinosaurs – 73% compared with 70% - and the number of Australians who believe that evolution is occurring was steady at 70% compared with 71% in 2010".

However, the steady belief in evolution was not all good news for the Academy who admitted there were "tentative, but less significant falls in the proportion of 18-24 year olds who believe that evolution is occurring or that humans are influencing the evolution of other species".

According to the Academy the survey showed "knowledge levels amongst young people have dropped more than other groups over the last 3 years". Australian Academy of Science Secretary for Science Policy, Professor Les Field, commented: "It's a worrying wake-up call to see scientific literacy declining among young adults, and to a lesser degree among the broader Australian adult population".

Other questions included in the survey were: "What percentage of the earth's surface is covered by water?" and "What percentage of the earth's water is fresh water?" 39% of those surveyed gave the correct answer for the earth's surface and only 9% for the freshwater question – a decrease from 13% in the 2010 survey.

Australian Academy of Science, Survey Results PDF

Editorial Comment: So you didn't know the answers to the two water questions either? According to the academy, the correct answers are: Approximately 70% of the earth is under water, but only 3% of earth's water is fresh.

However, the survey is most revealing about the Academy's ignorance of what science actually is. There were seven questions in this survey, but only three can be classified as about

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observable scientific facts, i.e. the one about the earth's orbit and the two on earth's water. The other four questions were:

Is the following statement true or false? The earliest humans lived at the same time as dinosaurs.

Do you think that evolution is occurring?

Do you think that humans are influencing the evolution of other species? In your opinion, how important is science education to the Australian economy?

The dinosaur question is actually about history, and can therefore only be answered on the basis of records of those who were there at the time. The other questions are about personal beliefs. As such, this survey hardly counts as a good test of scientific literacy of Australians. It is interesting to see that the constant claim in the popular media that evolution is a fact combined with the brain-numbing repetition in school courses, and the use of the word "evolution" to describe all biological processes, has still not increased to the number of believers, especially among young people, and is correlated directly to an increase in those who don't know how long a year is.

As to the people who reject evolution, one high school science teacher said; "You guys must be having an impact!" Keep supporting us ...we need to make a bigger impact yet both on evolution and on the right answers about the world God made! Donations can be given here . (Ref. statistics, education, philosophy)

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