Addressing some of the major issues plaguing education, particularly the scandal of illiteracy and growing mediocrity in academic performance, David Solway argues that the current state of affairs in education is the result not simply of poor training in elementary school or the disappearance of grammatical study from the overall curriculum but of a larger cultural problem.

Solway explains that the current generation of students, raised in a non-historical and iconic environment, do not live in time as an emergent, continuous medium in which the complexities of experience are parsed and organized. Their psychological world is largely devoid of syntax – of causal, differential, and temporal relations between events. The result is precisely what we see about us: a cultural world characterized by a vast subpopulation of young (and not so young) people for whom the past is an unsubstantiated rumour and the future an unacknowledged responsibility. Solway claims that contemporary educators have become cultural speculators who disregard a basic truth about how the mind develops: that it needs to be grounded in reality and time. But in education, as in almost every other cultural institution, the sense of reality and the dynamic of time have “virtually” disappeared, leading to the deep disconnectedness we experience on every level of “human grammar,” from the organization of the community to the organization of the sentence.

Lying about the Wolf is not only an analysis of current pedagogical issues but also, and perhaps primarily, a cultural analysis for which the subject of education is really a pretext. Solway argues that we cannot hope to solve the educational problem unless we are prepared to deal with the larger cultural predicament.

DAVID SOLWAY is a poet and professor of English literature, John Abbott College. His previous nonfiction books are Education Lost and The Anatomy of Arcadia.
For Professors Wayne Shute and Clark Webb,
for Monsignor Dan Dever,
and for Frank Smith,
who each in his own way helped me to look the wolf in the eye.