

Introducing the Tertiary History Educators Australasia (THEA)

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The Tertiary History Educators Australasia (THEA) began in 2018 and was launched at a Symposium hosted and funded by the University of Newcastle. It brought together 11 history educators from across Australia to present research on key ideas of pedagogy and curriculum related to history education and pre-service teacher programs in Australia, including the Pacific.

Hosted in association with the HERMES research group, the Symposium was launched by patrons Adjunct Professor Tony Taylor and Professor Marnie Hughes-Warrington

Our aim was to investigate those pedagogies that are effective in the teaching of history across a range of contexts, including, but not limited to: teaching the school subject, History; historical representations and commemorations; public education such as those found in exhibitions and guided tours of museums and other cultural institutions.

Our long-term objective from this initial symposium, is for an association to work towards external grants, edited publications, consultative forum about history education, and to provide an academic voice in the field of history education at the tertiary and school contexts. This Association will develop a network of interested tertiary history educators across Australia and the Pacific in order to create a community of practice of academics and to provide a conduit to history teachers at the coal face in both primary and secondary schools.

This special issue is our first collaborative output from the Symposium.

The Symposium explored ideas of broadening the scope of history education in the Australian context to include aspects of what is commonly considered public history, such as the role of museums and other experiential learning opportunities. Public history is defined as the study of how the past works in culture and society. In particular, public history considers the ethics and issues associated with the representation, consumption, and enactment of the past in museums, public life, memorials, films, novels, computer games, replicas and in virtual reality experiences. These public history learning objects communicate versions of history, and create popular historiography that connects learners to the past in powerful ways and is part of their lifeworlds beyond school. The Symposium examined the intersections between public and school histories, as contemporary historical representations with the potential to demonstrate the nature of the discipline.

This special issue is a key output from the concluding plenary session as a way of sustaining the conversations initiated at the Symposium. We start with a provocation by Adjunct Professor Tony Taylor, who has played an influential role in the development of the

Australian Curriculum. He was Director of the Australian Government National Inquiry into the Teaching and Learning of History in 1999. Tony was also Director of the National Centre for History Education. Since that time has worked as a consultant including in framing the Australian Curriculum: History. In his piece he surveys the field of history education policies and politics in an international context. He challenges the reader to consider how history has been and can be an “agent for political influence” by drawing on exemplars from historic and current world socio-political contexts.

Dr Bryan Smith from James Cook University follows on with his article on epistemic inheritance of historical thinking, providing a theoretical argument that codifies history education, highlighting and problematising disciplined knowledge as a distinctly Western frame. He cautions that although important, historical thinking should not be seen as completely overtaking our notions of the past.

In examining historical consciousness with Australian school students, Dr Kay Carroll from Western Sydney University, uses a survey to identify various levels of historical consciousness in students with a focus on concepts such as empathy, significance, contestability, perspective, causation and agency. She argues that these students are capable of constructing divergent ideas about the past based on evidence and rejecting the modernist paradigm of history as a fixed set of events.

Taking an applied research approach, Dr Alison Bedford from the University of Southern Queensland investigates the use of the Harkness Method as a student-centred pedagogical approach in History classrooms. Teaching 21st century skills is the focus to equip students with skills required of active citizenship into the future. Dr Bedford connects this with recent prescriptions of the Queensland Senior Secondary Syllabus and curriculum and finds that this applied pedagogical approach, enhances the development of critical literacy, empathy, active and informed citizenship, and independent learning.

Dr Samantha Owen from Curtin University examines historical perspective and empathy using a major work of leading New Zealand Māori video and installation artist, Lisa Reihana. This artwork reimagines the voyages and death of Captain James Cook and Dr Owens examines shifts in perspectives between the explorers and inhabitants. The article concludes an analysis of how empathic devices might be used to build pluricultural History “learning spaces in which all can listen and all can speak to be heard.”

Dr Louise Zarmati from the University of Tasmania’s contribution validates that museum educators use historical inquiry to actively teach history to their audiences. This contradicts the dominant discourse of museum education research which focuses almost learning *in* and *from* museums. The paper provides case studies that offer applied examples of how historical inquiry can be used to teach history in museums and heritage sites.

Debra Donnelly and Heather Sharp’s article on historical empathy introduces a new analytical tool that analyses student activities according to the disciplinary concept of historical empathy and cognitive complexities as set out in the Structure of Observed Learning Outcomes (SOLO) Taxonomy. We examine activities in key History textbooks designed for the Australian Curriculum: History to find what levels of historical empathy students are expected to demonstrate on successful completion of activities. The data analysed shows that the majority of historical empathy tasks require only low-level empathetic responses and cognitive complexity.