



## Editorial: History education in changing and challenging times

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## Editorial: History education in changing and challenging times

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It is now some years since history education was 'challenged' by the emergence of postmodernism as an influential intellectual phenomenon. To at least some extent, such concerns have receded (see, for example, Evans, 2002; Seixas, 2012).

But in a rapidly changing world, new challenges to history education have emerged, and history education has responded to these developments in divergent ways (Cajani *et al.*, 2019; Carretero *et al.*, 2017). In many European countries, school history pays increasing heed to the cultivation and development of students' historical thinking, historical consciousness and understanding of historical culture. There is also a move in some countries towards the inclusion in the history curriculum of attention to issues of human survival in the face of current and developing threats to human well-being, and the sustainability of the natural, social and political infrastructure that sustains twenty-first-century civilization. In other countries, policymakers have clung tenaciously to a 'national' model of history teaching, based on a positive and celebratory rendering of the national story, and an emphasis on the primacy of substantial historical knowledge, with much less attention given to global and transnational issues.

The past decade has seen significant changes in the way that people access information about the past, with a huge increase in the amount of information about the past (and the present) accessed via social media outlets, and via new technology platforms, unmediated by the history teacher or the professional historian (Haydn and Ribbens, 2017). In 2002, the British historian Eric Hobsbawm warned that 'History is being invented in vast quantities ... the world is today full of people inventing histories and lying about history (Hunt, 2002). If this was the case in 2002, the prevalence of what Niall Ferguson (2019) has termed 'pseudo-history' is even more problematic today, in what has been termed 'the post-truth era' (D'Ancona, 2017; Keyes, 2004; McIntyre, 2018). Several commentators have written about the role of these developments in assisting populist and authoritarian movements and parties, and their serious consequences for the health and vitality of liberal democracies (see, for example, Levitsky and Ziblatt, 2018; Lewis, 2018; Pomerantsev, 2019; Runciman, 2018).

Wineburg's (2018) recent research on the ability of young people and adults (including history graduates and professional historians) to competently assess the reliability of information from websites revealed quite startling deficits in their digital literacy. Given the extent to which people now access information about history from the internet and various forms of social media, this raises important questions for history educators. How should they respond intelligently to these developments?

Perhaps, like cigarettes and alcohol, history should come with a health warning. As Denis Shemilt (2011: 73) pointed out, 'at their most potent and malignant, selective, partial and mythical histories transmitted outside the classroom have nursed religious, ethnic and national hatreds, scratched the scabs of victimhood and breathed new life into old grievances'.

We would argue that in the light of the developments briefly outlined above, it is the responsibility of all those involved in history education to challenge these threats to the integrity and utility of history education, and in the words of Eric Hobsbawm (2005), 'to re-establish the coalition of those who believe in history as a rational inquiry into the course of human transformations, against those who distort history for political purposes'.

The papers in this issue of the journal are wide ranging in their focus, and this is not a themed special issue, but we believe that they all, in their different ways, offer intelligent and useful responses to the challenges outlined above.

Maren Tribukait considers the important differences between both national and international policy frameworks relating to history and citizenship education and digital literacy, with the reality of school and teacher practice, while Catriona Pennell and Mark Sheehan examine problematic and important issues in the field of war remembrance. Heidi Knudsen's paper looks at the perhaps under-researched field of how students construct meaning in the history classroom, in relation to the texts and tasks they are given in their history lessons, and their dialogic interactions with their history teachers. Joakim Wendell provides a useful overview of the use of counterfactuals in the teaching of history, together with an examination of how students actually deal with and make use of counterfactual exercises in their exposure to them. Sebastian Barsch analyses the use and impact of moving image resources in the history classroom, and how 'digital storytelling' shapes students' historical consciousness and understanding with what is an increasingly prevalent teaching resource in history education. Eleni Apostolidou and Gloria Solé compare the ideas of Greek and Portuguese students about national identity and citizenship, at a time in which issues of identity have assumed a very high-profile role in debates about history education in many countries. Yosanne Vella's study of how teachers approach the challenging task of educating their students about 'bias' in historical sources provides insights into a problematic facet of history education for teachers in all countries. Finally, in her paper, Debra Donnelly brings together research, theory and teacher practice to explore how history teachers can make the most effective use of the moving image.

The selection of papers for this issue was difficult, as there were many interesting and impressive submissions, and it was not possible to publish all the high-quality submissions in this issue of the journal, but several of the submissions may appear in the next issue of HERJ.

We believe that all of the papers selected for publication in this issue make important contributions to current debates about the teaching of history. We hope that you find them interesting and useful.

## Articles in this issue of HERJ

- Apostolidou, E. and Solé, G. (2020) 'National–European identity and notions of citizenship: A comparative study between Portuguese and Greek university student teachers'. *History Education Research Journal*, 17 (1), 81–98.
- Barsch, S. (2020) 'Does experience with digital storytelling help students to critically evaluate educational videos about history?'. *History Education Research Journal*, 17 (1), 67–80.
- Donnelly, D. (2020) 'Using films in the development of historical consciousness: Research, theory and teacher practice'. *History Education Research Journal*, 17 (1), 114–31.
- Knudsen, H.E. (2020) 'History teaching as a designed meaning-making process: Teacher facilitation of student–subject relationships'. *History Education Research Journal*, 17 (1), 36–49.
- Pennell, C. and Sheehan, M. (2020) 'But what do they really think? Methodological challenges of investigating young people's perspectives of war remembrance'. *History Education Research Journal*, 17 (1), 21–35.

- Tribukait, M. (2020) 'Digital learning in European history education: Political visions, the logics of schools and teaching practices'. *History Education Research Journal*, 17 (1), 4–20.
- Vella, Y. (2020) 'Teaching bias in history lessons: An example using Maltese history'. *History Education Research Journal*, 17 (1), 99–113.
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- Pomerantsev, P. (2019) *This is Not Propaganda: Adventures in the war against reality*. London: Faber and Faber.
- Runciman, D. (2018) *How Democracy Ends*. London: Profile Books.
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