

Editorial

What is the *History Education Research Journal*, HERJ?

Editors

Jon Nichol* – *History Educators International Research Network*
Arthur Chapman – *UCL Institute of Education, UK*
Hilary Cooper – *University of Cumbria, UK*

We are delighted to introduce this first issue of the *History Education Research Journal* (HERJ), published open access out of the UCL Institute of Education. Known until now as the *International Journal of Historical Learning, Teaching and Research* (IJHLTR), the journal was first published in 2000 by the University of Exeter. More recently, it has been hosted by the Historical Association of Great Britain as a benefit of membership, and the Association will continue to provide access via its website (www.history.org.uk). Both the Historical Association and the UCL Institute of Education value the integration of theory, research, scholarship and pedagogy, which this journal provides.

HERJ has an increasingly wide international readership and attracts submissions from leading academics in its field from every continent except Antarctica. The international reach of the journal is, of course, not unrelated to its links, since 2004, with the annual conferences of the History Educators International Research Network (HEIRNET), which are organized by the editors of the journal and HEIRNET's conference committee. Conferences have been held in Russia, South Africa, Brazil, Turkey, Cyprus and New York, as well as in countries across Europe. Many papers presented at conferences are subsequently submitted for publication in the journal. Under the aegis of UCL IOE, we look forward to an increasingly vibrant and, we hope, influential future in the field of history education and related curricular areas.

History education is a very powerful subject, as is well understood by philosophers and politicians: 'Historians are dangerous people. They are capable of upsetting everything' (Nikita Khrushchev, leader of the USSR 1958–64). The aims and purposes of history education are conceived very differently by different constituencies and stakeholders in a society and, like history, change as societies and the world change. Crucial are questions about who controls history education and the purpose of learning history, and whether history is taught as a single, static narrative that aims to promote social cohesion, or as a discipline that encompasses many different perspectives and is dynamic, promoting critical thinking, debate and a recognition that often there is no single right answer.

This is important for students' social and emotional, as well as cognitive, development. Teaching history as a discipline involves questions of identity and historical consciousness, ethnicity, cultures, values, the open and the hidden past, and the relationship between past, present and future. History education involves making links between history and pedagogy. Pedagogy involves both theories of practice and

of how children learn, and the strategies that best support their learning. And it requires decisions about the scope of history: social, economic, cultural, political. What is the relationship between local, national and international dimensions, between family histories, school history, and heritage and media history? History education raises many questions for debate within and across classrooms, countries and continents. But to have practical applications, enquiry must lead to empirical research, if the debates are to have an impact on practice. This is the rationale for HERJ.

The aim of the journal is to facilitate the exchange of pedagogic theorizing and robust empirical research between and across international boundaries and didactical traditions. It has been surprising how little we all know of the work that has gone on in each other's countries. The open access to HERJ and all previous issues of *IJHLTR* will be a tremendous advantage in facilitating this process.

HERJ, vol. 15, no. 2

Continuing with the international content that is familiar to readers of *IJHLTR*, this issue of HERJ has perspectives on history education from around the world: from colleagues in Singapore, Crete, China, Australia, Ghana, the United States of America, Denmark, Cyprus, Germany, the Republic of Ireland, Portugal, Malta and Spain. They consider all of the key questions above, which often arise across several papers.

Who controls history education?

For many years, the aim and purpose of history teaching was to promote national identity and shared values. History remains a politically powerful subject, which groups across the political spectrum want to control, although this may be more or less explicit. Claus Haas argues that the history curriculum imposed on primary and secondary schools by the Danish government appears to be inclusive but is in fact restrictive, as a defence against increasing cultural and religious diversity arising from immigration. Melanie Innes and Heather Sharp explore the ways in which historical consciousness informs the collective memory of Australian high-school students when discussing the Gallipoli campaign; they found that nationalistic narratives remain evident in the public sphere and in common culture. Myria Constantinidou analyses the myths that are part of the new Greek-Cypriot history curriculum for primary schools, and finds that they appear to be inclusive, yet exclude discussion of the foreign, 'the other' and of dominant female figures. In some cases, teachers may have a sound theoretical understanding of the ways in which literacy can enhance historical understanding, but Joshua Kenna, William Russell and Bonnie Bittman found that examination requirements prevent them putting their understanding into practice. Textbooks are often employed to control what is taught. When he examined history textbooks published in the Republic of Ireland between the 1920s and 1960s, Colm Mac Gearailt found that they focused on the same 'great men' and events. Nevertheless, the emphases placed on them depended on the political, social and religious orientation of the author.

Teaching history as a discipline

Teaching history as a discipline in which students can actively learn how to construct accounts of the past, and so understand why interpretations may differ but be equally valid, has been seen as an alternative to teaching a master narrative. Since the 1970s – if not before – there have been attempts to find ways in which history could be taught to children from the very beginning in ways that embryonically reflect the processes

of historical enquiry used by historians. In anglophone contexts, for example, these approaches were prompted by the constructivist learning theories of Jerome Bruner, Lev Vygotsky and their successors. Thus, in the case of England, they were initially applied to learning history by, for example, Coltham and Fines, in their seminal Historical Association of Great Britain 1971 publication *Educational Objectives for the Study of History: A suggested framework*, and later by other researchers. Such constructivist approaches informed the creation of the English National Curriculum for History from 1989 to 1991. It requires that historical content must be learned through the processes of historical enquiry, in increasingly complex ways for 5- to 14-year-olds. This approach has been developed and refined through subsequent revisions of the curriculum.

It is heartening to see that Charles Adabo Oppong describes a case study in which student teachers are introduced to the concept of history as a discipline, and to strategies of active learning, in Ghana. Andrea Becher and Eva Gläser describe a project in Germany investigating young children's use of sources and understanding of interpretation. Andreas Körber writes about the importance of developing historical competences in order for students to understand different perspectives, especially cultural differences and 'the other'. And Cynthia Wallace-Casey demonstrates how history is dynamic, and changes as societies change. Interestingly, Mark Baildon, Suhaimi Afandi, Sandra Bott and Chelva Rajah describe research in which students, learning about the past in an environment where history teaching is strictly controlled, were nevertheless able to learn how different interpretations are constructed by discussing excerpts from the work of academic historians who have a range of perspectives.

The concern of Anthony Hourdak, Pella Calogiannakis and Tien-Hui Chiang is that rather than passively memorizing a historical ethnocentric narrative, students should learn about global history and other cultures in order to understand both themselves through interconnectedness and about all humanity. They suggest that this should be done across the whole curriculum, and that in history this requires developing, at their appropriate level, the characteristics and ethos of modern, historical thinking. By contrast, in the research described by Helena Pinto and Alex Ibañez-Etxeberria, students are supported in developing historical thinking skills in the context of sources in their locality, then making links with national and global history. Christian Mathis and Kristine Gollin describe similar ways in which students can be supported in understanding a complex local memorial, and Alexander Cutajar investigates ways in which moving images can be a way for engaging students in developing historical understanding through classroom talk in a dialogic context and in assessment.

It is striking that these papers have in common a recognition of a tension between nationalism and globalism, and that teaching children the procedures of historical thinking and the rationale for different perspectives may ameliorate this tension.