

## Editorial

Jon Nichol\* – *History Educators International Research Network, UK*  
Hilary Cooper\* – *University of Cumbria, UK*

A week is a long time in politics ... 18 years a lifetime in the creation, development and running of an academic journal. Nature abhors a vacuum; one such vacuum became apparent in the late 1990s: the need for an international medium for the publication of academic papers, reports and information on research and developments in history education, and in related areas, in particular citizenship education. To fill the vacuum, the University of Exeter founded in 2001 the *International Journal of Historical Learning, Teaching and Research*, IJHLTR (2001–18, RIP), thanks to the generous support of the university's School of Education, and subsequently that of the University of Cumbria. From 2010, the Historical Association of Great Britain hosted IJHLTR on its website, a kindness that raised its profile, and that we hope was mutually beneficial. The final development has occurred over the last three years, during which UCL Press, via its Institute of Education Press imprint, has taken on the major role in the publication of IJHLTR, renamed and relaunched in 2018 as the professionally produced *History Education Research Journal* (HERJ):

... an international, open-access, peer-reviewed journal that focuses on the global significance and impact of history education. It covers all aspects of history education theory, scholarship, and pure and applied research. Articles illuminate contemporary issues, concerns, policies and practice, drawing upon the eclectic research methodologies of history education. (UCL IOE Press, n.d.)

HERJ has a symbiotic relationship with the History Educators International Research Network (HEIRNET), an organization that annually facilitates the meeting of history educators from around the world to present academic reports and papers on history education (<https://heirnetonline.com>). HERJ's current editors, Hilary Cooper and Jon Nichol, created HEIRNET in 2003. HEIRNET has met annually ever since, in locations ranging from Brazil to South Africa to Russia. Delegates to HEIRNET's conferences enjoy a rich medium for the history education discourse, involving the presentation of papers and reports, seminars and workshops, discussion, debate and the sharing of ideas – a discourse reflected in the editions of IJHLTR and HERJ that draw upon the worldwide community of history educators. Nevertheless, the constituency of HERJ readers and contributors has expanded to be far wider than participants in the HEIRNET conferences.

The commonality of issues and concerns that all history (and citizenship and social science) educators face and, paradoxically, our relative isolation from each other, are major themes that have emerged since 2001 from the three hundred or so IJHLTR and HERJ papers, reports, reviews and reflections. Commonality is crystal clear; at no time has it been greater than the present, with the international populist wave of yahoo, xenophobic nationalism, feeding off dog-whistle racism, fake news, paranoia, ignorance, myth, rumour and rancour. This is spectacularly apparent in HERJ's home country, Britain, where the political nation has suffered a collective nervous breakdown

when swamped by the Brexit tsunami, and is now facing a de facto *coup d'état* by a group of right-wing politicians. Yet the commonality of issues and concerns in HERJ reveals a remarkable phenomenon: the relative – even almost total – international isolation of national and regional history educators, often working on identical areas and topics of history and its cultural, citizenship, educational and curricular roles. The editors of HERJ use the term ‘silos’ to reflect this phenomenon: we all beaver away in our own silo without peeping over the edge to scan the surrounding landscape and the distant horizon so as to realize that we are in one of many similar silos.

A key example of this is the almost total international ignorance of many history educator communities of the radical, revolutionary changes in history education in England from the late 1960s, a revolution that aimed to educate and train students to think historically (Phillips, 2002), and to build curricula and syllabuses around the disciplinary structure of history as an academic subject. Here, historical thinking – ‘doing history’ – was never considered a natural act; it was something that had to be systemically and systematically taught from an early age. The flagship project of the history education revolution was the English-government-funded Schools Council 13–16 History Project, 1972–4 (SCHP), which over two decades transformed the discourse and understanding of what history education meant, did and was for. Significantly, the project’s introductory course for 13 year olds, *Why History?*, had five units built around students learning to think historically as cognitive history apprentices – with, axiomatically, teacher guidance and support:

Unit 1: *People in the past* – introducing history as a study of people in the past within a ‘chronological framework’.

Unit 2: *Detective work* – ‘three detective exercises, one contemporary and two historical’, to involve the pupil in ‘historical detective work by studying archaeological finds and clues relating to Tollund Man and the Sutton Hoo ship burial.’

Unit 3: *Looking at evidence* – on classical Greece and medieval knights ‘leads pupils to consider the evidence for the historian which modern Britain offers.’

Unit 4: *Problems of evidence* – two case studies, each ‘of which forms a case study of the evidence for an historical topic which is in some ways problematic or controversial’, one on ‘Richard III and the missing princes in the Tower’, and the other on the ‘1913 suffragette Derby’, at which a suffragette fatally threw herself under the King of England’s horse as it entered the home straight.

Unit 5: *Asking questions* – ‘This unit consists of one booklet designed to introduce pupils to the kinds of questions which historians ask about causation and motivation. It begins with three simulation exercises dealing with contemporary people and events. The second part deals with an historical situation – the Voyages of Discovery and the motives of the explorers involved.’ (Schools History Project, 1976: 21–2)

The SCHP reflected a wider pattern of British history curriculum reform and development, including new examination syllabuses based on historical skills, processes, procedures and protocols that became known in the 1970s as ‘The New History’. Remarkably, in 1973/4 Britain’s largest examination body, the Associated Examining Board (AEB), introduced the radical A level syllabus 673/- that required 16–19 year olds to write

history dissertations of about five thousand words on topics of their own choice, and to take an examination paper both on studying historians and on the evaluation and interpretation of unseen historical sources as historical evidence.

By the mid-1980s, the success of the SCHP led to the reform of history education in England. From 1988, examination boards implemented government-directed wholesale statutory revision of English national history curricula and examination syllabuses for the 14–16 age range, with syllabuses incorporating the ‘doing history’ aims and objectives of the examination syllabus of the SCHP. This meant that all English 14–16-year-old history examination students were taught to *think historically*. The 14–16 history examination reform meant that the English examination boards recognized an urgent need to ensure progression for 16–19-year-old students taking the national history examinations known as Advanced Levels.

To meet this challenge, the AEB piloted an A level history syllabus with ‘doing history’ as its rationale, including a coursework section (40 per cent of the marks) and students producing a personal study, a historical dissertation (20 per cent), based on the syllabus 673/- model (Fines and Nichol, 1994). The pilot A level:

coursework assignments will relate to a variety of historical learning experiences provided during the course. Each assignment will be an enquiry-based individually produced piece of work, in which individual or group initiative is demonstrated in handling a task and resolving an historical enquiry. (AEB, 1990: 12)

The coursework section included an examination paper based upon: ‘the ability to handle historical sources ... and the ability to demonstrate historical understanding and explanation’. The personal study of about four thousand words was ‘a piece of work arising from the result of an investigation independently chosen and undertaken by the student ... with appropriate supervision from the teacher’ (ibid.).

The revolution in English history education reached a triumphant conclusion in 1992 with the implementation of the English National Curriculum for History (ENCH) for all 5–14-year-old state-educated students (DES, 1991). The ENCH consisted of two complementary elements: substantive or propositional ‘know that’ knowledge of history, the curriculum’s prescribed factual and conceptual content, and the ‘know how’ syntactic or procedural knowledge of the skills, processes, procedures, protocols and disciplinary concepts of history that students learned through ‘doing history’ as proto-historians (Rogers, 1979). The goal of the ENCH was to empower students through thinking historically to both verify ‘know that’ factual and substantive conceptual historical knowledge and to also undertake their own historical enquiries, drawing upon procedural and syntactic ‘know how’ knowledge based on questions and questioning, the investigation of sources, hypothesizing and reaching evidentially based conclusions in an appropriate genre. A major goal of such historical thinking was to equip students with the transferable skills crucially important for citizenship in a liberal democratic society.

HERJ 16.2 again illuminates how many countries are developing curricula that aim to teach students, often from the beginning of their education, to learn history through engaging with the processes of historical enquiry, and so learn that history involves supporting arguments with reasoning based on interpreting sources; that history is dynamic, changing as new evidence is discovered, and can be studied from many perspectives; and that there is a relationship between the past, present and future. Finding out about the past is relevant and important to everyone. Above all, it depends on critical thinking and understanding of why beliefs, values and attitudes

change over time, and the crucial dimension of 'historical consciousness' – that is, a temporal framework of personal identity for each of us, a three-dimensional semantic network with substantive and syntactic nodes connecting its filaments within a chronological matrix (Minsky, 1975). There are no 'safe places' in history. Yet, for many reasons, countries aim to put these processes into practice in different ways, and research and analyse the efficacy of their curricula using different methodologies, which are reported in HERJ.

Although HERJ publishes papers from every continent, some issues have a focus on the kinds of questions, issues and research methods being explored in a particular country or area. Issue 16.1 had a focus on German-speaking countries. Issue 16.2 focuses on Greece and Scandinavia. In future, different members of the Editorial Board will take turns in editing HERJ. We are certain that HERJ will become an increasingly important journal, and hope that new editors will enjoy working with their readers and contributors as much as we have.

## References

- AEB (Associated Examining Board) (1990) *AEB History (ETHOS) Pilot Syllabus*. Associated Examining Board.
- DES (Department for Education and Science) (1991) *History in the National Curriculum (England)*. London: Department for Education and Science.
- Fines, J. and Nichol, J. (1994) *Doing History 16–19: A case study in curriculum innovation and change*. London: Historical Association.
- Minsky, M. (1975) 'A framework for representing knowledge'. In Winston, P.H. (ed.) *The Psychology of Computer Vision*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 211–77.
- Phillips, R. (2002) *Reflective Teaching of History, 11–18*. London: Continuum.
- Rogers, P.J. (1979) *The New History: Theory into practice*. London: Historical Association.
- Schools History Project (1976) *A New Look at History: Schools history 13–16 project*. Edinburgh: Homes McDougall. Online. [www.schoolshistoryproject.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/NewLookAtHistory.pdf](http://www.schoolshistoryproject.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/NewLookAtHistory.pdf) (accessed 22 July 2019).
- UCL IOE Press (n.d.) 'Journals from UCL IOE Press'. Online. [www.ucl-ioe-press.com/journals/page/](http://www.ucl-ioe-press.com/journals/page/) (accessed 15 July 2019).