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## **‘The Sacred Spark of Wonder’: Local Museums, Australian Curriculum History, and Pre-Service Primary Teacher Education: A Tasmanian Case Study**

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*Abstract: This article explores the intersections between museum learning in a distinctive Tasmanian setting, the possibilities of a new national History curriculum, and the evolving views and professional practices of pre-service primary teachers at one Australian university. Following a brief overview of the framework for local and Australian history that is embedded in the Australian Curriculum in history (ACH), the relevant literature around museum education, and the specific museum context, the article draws upon a survey of second year pre-service primary teachers’ views towards history, museums, and a pedagogical planning task and analyses features of students’ work. It concludes with some wider reflections on the value of teacher education engaging in community partnerships with cultural institutions such as museums.*

### **Introduction**

Local museums have the potential to help young Australians appreciate how and why history matters. But that potential needs to be unlocked by teachers and museum educators. The Australian Curriculum in history (ACH) assumes that ‘students’ interest and enjoyment of history can be enhanced through a variety of approaches such as the use of artefacts, museums, historical sites and hands-on activities’. A central aim of the history curriculum is to ‘enable teachers to engage students in meaningful, challenging and interesting ways to tap into their innate curiosity about the world’ (Australian Curriculum and Reporting Authority [ACARA], 2009, 15-16).

Unfortunately, there is recent evidence that many Australian children are not interested in, or are disengaged from, their experience of school history (Clark, 2008, 113-117). Some may have been following unconscious cues from their teachers. Few teachers of history in Australia – even at secondary level - are subject specialists (Taylor, 2000). Consequently, as in the United States and Canada, there has tended to be an over-emphasis upon facts and chronology, an uncontested view of historical events, an overuse of unengaging textbooks, and didactic classrooms that are overly textbook- centred (Yarema, 2002; Levstik and Barton, 2008).

The purpose of this paper is to explore the intersections between museum learning, in a distinctive Tasmanian setting, the possibilities for a new national history curriculum, and the evolving views and professional practices of pre-service primary teachers towards History and museums at one Australian university. Specifically, the paper investigates pre-service teachers’ (PSTs’) use of museum resources to teach primary-aged children and their capacity to create effective learning links to the emerging ACH.

The international literature indicates that museums can fulfil an important educational role in helping young people to make meaning from artefacts (e.g. Hein, 1998, Dierking, 2002; Hooper-Greenhill, 2006; Van Boxtel, Klein & Snoep, 2011), explore their identity (Rounds, 2006) and promote learning conversations (Leinhardt, Crowley, and Knutson, 2002). Museums can engage young people in a participatory process of historical interpretation (Bedford, 2009; Fritsch, 2011) and also serve as key sites of critical pedagogical practice (Mayo, 2013). However, the research literature in this area also indicates that teachers tend not to integrate museum experiences into classroom learning, set ill-defined educational objectives and sometimes focus more on the acquisition of information rather than higher order learning (Hooper-Greenhill, 2007). As a consequence, in teacher

education there is value in seeking to promote both a positive mindset and a critical engagement with curriculum policy articulations in the context of the planning of fieldwork experiences such as museum visits (Johnston, 2007).

The first section of this paper explores the framework for local and Australian history that is embedded in the ACH. It contends that the ACH provides a foundation for rich and experiential engagement by children with local history and State and national historical narratives, which nevertheless needs to be mediated by thoughtful professional decision-making that promotes key aspects of historical literacy. The second section introduces the distinctive museum context of the Pioneer Village Museum in Burnie (recently re-named the Burnie Regional Museum). The third section analyses the views of a group of second year pre-service primary teachers' toward history, museums and a pedagogical planning task that asked them to plan a sequence of lessons around a museum visit. It draws on a survey of the students' thinking about history and museums. The fourth section describes the features of the work which the Burnie-based PSTs produced, highlighting both strengths and areas for development. The strands are brought together to seek to address the research question, 'How can pre-service teachers best use regional museums to enable primary children to construct historical meaning and deepen their appreciation of local and national Australian history?' The paper concludes with some wider reflections on the value of teacher education engaging in community partnerships with cultural institutions such as museums.

### **The Curriculum Context: Opportunities and Pitfalls**

The most recent national inquiry into history teaching in Australia (Taylor, 2000: 33) concluded that 'there is more room for active and productive collaboration between history teachers and professional historians, including museum staff [and] heritage site staff'. And a number of Australian museum educators have drawn attention to the opportunity that the arrival of a national history curriculum provides for reinvigorating links with schools (Zarmati, 2009; Molloy, 2010; Arnold, 2012). The large Australian national and State museums, with their diverse collections and in-house technological capacity, are well placed to respond to the demand for digital content for use in schools (McShane, 2005). This can enhance the preparation and follow-up to a visit or even on occasion replace the physical visit. The high-quality 'virtual' and on-line material available from resources such as the National Museum of Australia, Museum Victoria, the Western Australian Museum or the Melbourne and Adelaide immigration museums provide excellent learning resources and models for pedagogic practice.

This paper focuses upon the potential for linking teachers to smaller local and regional museums rather than the big players. There are more than a thousand museums operating in Australia and three quarters of them can be categorised broadly as social history museums (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2010). These smaller museums need educational allies and partners. A 'Declaration of the Value of Museums to Education' noted that,

"Museums are essential places of learning. They enable and support young Australians to become confident and creative individuals, successful lifelong learners and active and informed citizens through unique and authentic learning experiences" (Museums Australia, 2009, 1).

But this statement represents more of an aspiration than a reality beyond the major metropolitan and big city museums. A report by Museums Australia (2012, 29) refers to 'the long history of lamentable neglect of the museums sector at the local community level across Australia'. Regional museums tend to exist on a hand-to-mouth financial basis, often relying on volunteer staffing, and are subject to continual budgetary pressures and constrained resources. They struggle to undertake educational work and develop relevant curricular resources.

Attracting and engaging children is a challenge for all museums. History for young children should be a combination of visual extravaganza, soap opera, puzzle and detective story. Artefacts and objects can intrigue children, develop their powers of observation and explanation, help them to make meanings and connections, allow them to develop questioning skills, stimulate their historical imagination, and foster a degree of empathy with the people to whom the objects and artefacts are connected. The new ACH refers explicitly to each of these dimensions. The shaping document informs teachers that history 'introduces us to a variety of human experience, enables us to see the

world through the eyes of others, and enriches our appreciation of the nature of change' (ACARA, 2010, 2.7). Through 'examining artefacts such as photos and objects', students will be helped to 'distinguish between past and present ways of living' (ACARA, 2010, 5.4.1). When taught in ways that allow for emotional engagement and which are personally relevant to children, historical empathy can help students overcome a contemporary mindset by placing past beliefs and practices within their local and social context (Barton and Levstik, 2004; Yilmaz, 2008).

The new history curriculum also underlines a requirement for all Australian children to understand their local, regional, and national history through sequenced and thematic study in primary school. In Year 1, there are opportunities to explore past family life and one of the key inquiry questions is, 'How can we show that the present is different from or similar to the past?' The Year 2 curriculum has a specific focus on local history and the relationship between the past and the present. Key inquiry questions include, 'What aspects of the past can you see today?' 'What do they tell us?' 'What remains of the past are important to the local community?' 'Why?' The Year 3 curriculum also explores local identity in the context of the theme of 'Community and Remembrance'. Children have the opportunity to investigate 'the importance today of a [local] historical site of cultural or spiritual significance; for example, a community building, a landmark, [or] a war memorial'. Examples of other possible questions for investigation include 'Who lived here first and how do we know?' and 'How has our community changed?' The Year 4 to Year 6 curriculum follows Australian history from first contacts, through the process of settlement and colonisation in the Nineteenth Century to Australia's development as a nation in the twentieth century.

Although the local dimensions of modern Australian history are less explicitly foregrounded in the Years 4-6 curriculum, most teachers are likely to emphasise, for example, local dimensions of first contacts between Aboriginal people and Europeans and regional case studies of exploration and the opening up of Australia (Year 4). The Year 5 curriculum provides an opportunity to explore how a specific Australian colony developed over time and why. And the children are also able to investigate the role of a locally-significant individual or group in shaping colonial settlement (in Tasmania this could include Van Diemen's Land Company leaders, colonial governors, explorers, farmers or miners). The Year 6 key question 'Why and how did Australia become a nation?' is clearly central to an understanding of Australian national identity – past and present. Local and regional museums are essential resources to enable exploration of many of these themes.

But if museums and the new history curriculum provide significant opportunities for primary teachers in terms of both content and the development of conceptual historical understanding and historical skills, there are also plenty of potential pitfalls. The point of learning needs to be the development of historical literacy and historical consciousness and not the passive receipt of historical knowledge (Taylor, 2003; Seixas, 2006). The children will usually need help from their teachers to enable them to make connections between the potentially desiccated or de-contextualised 'comprehension, analysis, interpretation, and evaluation of historical sources and artefacts' (ACARA, 2010, 5.3) and access to more humanising and imaginable local settings. Moreover, there is recent Australian research evidence that suggests 'teachers frequently find themselves out of their depth and feel inadequate, even frightened, when conducting excursions' (Griffin, 2011, 4). Successful museum visits require effective preparation and what has been aptly described as an 'entrance narrative' to shape the on-site experience (Doering & Pekanki, 1996). The visit itself also needs focus and planning – with an appropriate balance achieved between pre-determined, structured activities and some element of 'open' and 'opportunistic' learning. And there needs to be a clear sense of the follow-up and end-goal or outcomes of a museum visit – the experience should lead somewhere (Noel & Colopy, 2006). Rarely do these elements come together. The research literature indicates that the relationship between museums and schools is 'problematic' (Mathewson & McKeon, 2002, 1). There is thus a good case for incorporating work with museums into pre-service teacher education.

### **The Museum Context**

The story of Burnie, a regional town located on the north west coast of Tasmania, and the ebbs and flows of the town's fortunes from the 1870s through to the twenty-first century, is an interesting one that is worth learning about. Before 1870 Burnie was a straggling seashore village with a few buildings scattered 'amidst stumps and bracken, which were only cart tracks' (Mercer,

1965: 43). Early settlers had to carve their homes and farms out of dense eucalypt and myrtle forests. Burnie's Pioneer Village Museum opened in 1971 and was ground-breaking at the time of its inception. It features a reconstructed street scene of Burnie, re-imagined as it was between 1890 and 1910, and fashioned in a warehouse setting opposite the town's civic centre. It was the first indoor historic village museum built in Australia and took its inspiration from the Castle Museum streetscape in York, England. In 1977 the Pioneer Village Museum featured on a set of Australian stamps and related postcards released by Australia Post and in 1985 it received the Australian Museum of the Year award. It has a claim to housing one of Australia's most extensive and important regional collections of social history items from the turn of the Nineteenth Century. Additionally, the museum holds collections from most of the major institutional players in Burnie's history, including the Van Diemen's Land Company, the Emu Bay Railway Company, the Burnie Port Authority and the Australian Paper and Pulp Manufacturers' organisation. There is an excellent original archive of source material of Burnie's history from 1840 to 1890, including private correspondence from colonial, business, and civic leaders. And there is an important local photographic archive with more than 100,000 items going back to the 1900s (the Winter collection). A recent significance assessment identified the Museum's collection as strong and unusually well documented, allowing for a range of interpretive possibilities (Paterson, 2006). So despite its deceptively small-scale and unassuming urban setting in an apparent cultural backwater of regional Australia, and despite operating on a shoestring for most of its existence, the museum constitutes a key element of the cultural heritage of both Tasmania and the nation.

The Pioneer Village Museum resulted from the personal vision, drive and achievement of its founder and first director, Peter Mercer. Mercer recorded the story of its genesis, birth-pains, and management through the last three decades of the Twentieth Century in an emotional and detailed autobiographical account, based upon his diaries: *The Power of Purpose: The Story of the Pioneer Village Museum, Burnie, Tasmania 1942-2002* (Mercer, 2003). A sense of struggle and frustration dominates his narrative: 'What I tried to do was probably at the wrong time, the wrong place and in the wrong state' (Mercer, 2003, 2). He had established the Pet Falls Museum in 1956 (at the time the largest private museum in Tasmania) when only a teenager. From the late 1950s he started to give serious attention to gathering a collection of social history material that related to the rural, domestic and retail aspects of life in north-west Tasmania. His small museum doubled in size by 1963. He built up an eclectic collection of unwanted domestic equipment from farm clearing sales and local tips. He also received bequests from the estates of deceased community members. Mercer turned down a purchase offer of \$20,000 for his collection from a Sydney-based auction house and sold the museum's collection to Burnie City Council in 1971 for what he regarded as a knock-down price of \$9,200 following an independent valuation. More than 100,000 people had visited the museum by the end of 1975, with visitor numbers peaking at 35,000 in 1974/5. The Pigott Report into Museums across Australia in 1975 welcomed the expansion of interest in the 'everyday life of the past', albeit generalising in a rather patronising tone:

"A brave rattle-taggle little museum can dominate tourism because of a lack of serious competitors...the tour operator or bus-driver can unload his passengers at the museum door and relax for an hour" (Pigott, 1975, 21).

The Report recommended that museums be places where the daily life of past generations could be experienced at first hand.

The Pioneer Village Museum has had to battle for most of its existence, partly against the elements such as cold, dampness, and fire, but mainly for acceptance. Peter Mercer outlined the civic parsimony in the early 1970s once the Museum opened. The political decision to buy Mercer's collection had only passed by seven votes to five and a significant faction of councillors ('people with no interest or vision', according to Mercer (2003, 157) continued to regard the Pioneer Village Museum as a drain on the public purse over the next forty years rather than as a cultural asset. No funding was provided by the State Government and the Burnie Council was very cost-conscious. In the mid-1990s, a \$90,000 upgrade included a new entrance, toilets, staff offices and the incorporation of a travel and information centre. There was further internal extension work to increase storage space on a mezzanine level four years later, but funds never allowed for an expansion of exhibition space or the installation of audio-visual equipment or computer technology – mainstay expectations of modern museums.

Mercer's successors as museum supervisors maintained the streetscape as he left it - a long-term static display. A recent community consultation report on the museum was thus only partially exaggerating when it claimed that, 'nothing has been spent on the Museum for 35 years....It's almost as though the operation is being wound down' (Hollister, 2006). By 1996 annual visitor numbers were only 6,500 and the annual deficit/subsidy had reached \$80,000. Numbers did not improve in the first decade of the twenty-first century. The Pioneer Village Museum was closed from March to November 2009 following the retirement of a long-serving supervisor and the building of a new multi-million dollar 'Maker's Centre' in the town (*The Advocate*, 11 February 2009). It was nominated by the National Trust of Australia (Tasmania) 'Our Heritage at Risk' program and only saved by a vigorous local campaign. A new young curator was appointed and there were successful applications for State and Federal grants to re-vitalise the enterprise.

The Burnie museum is thus a fascinating construct and interpretation with its own feisty biography. Baron (2010) argued that historic sites and museums should be considered by teachers as constructions or 'readings'. Teachers were advised to integrate them into the curriculum as sources in their own right - and thereby promote more sophisticated forms of historical understanding. As Paterson (2006, 4) noted in relation to the museum, 'the streetscape display itself is fast becoming an artefact within the museum's local history collection'. What kind of interpretation does the streetscape present? Each of the units features a trade or profession important to the functioning of a pioneer society. The streetscape is made up of a stage coach depot and stables, a blacksmith/wheelwright's forge, a saddler/bootmaker, a post office store, a carpenter's shop, a wash house, a kitchen parlour, a dentist, a butter factory and an inn. A printery and photographer's shop were later additions. There is also a hotel/coffee shop frontage. Peter Mercer strove for authenticity in the streetscape. The scaled buildings were constructed with salvaged wooden materials from the late nineteenth century. They represented the kind of vernacular commercial architecture prevalent on the north-west coast around 1900. The muted colours and signage were as true to life as possible. And the named proprietors on the shop fronts represented real retailers from the time. By the 1990s when the shop displays were becoming over-populated with generous donations, Mercer supported 'removal of objects that do not belong in the hard-working and frugal pioneer community the Village represents, or that are not in the spirit of the times' (Mercer, 2003, 255).

Thus the exhibits are as genuine as they could possibly be. But the streetscape was nonetheless a skilful construct and a conceit, pitched to evoke interest and nostalgia. Moreover, the museum never attempted to tell the full story of Burnie. Peter Mercer lobbied unsuccessfully for 'The presentation of displays on heritage themes, particularly concerning the experience of pioneering on the Coast and the highlighting of landmark events that forged the destiny of Burnie and caused it to develop the way it has' (Mercer, 2003, 256). He regarded the museum as a work in progress. He had sought a larger building and more investment in extending the size and scope of the streetscape and the formal display galleries. His vision in 1970 was for a north-west regional museum 'on an equal footing and status to the two main museums in the State [in Hobart and Launceston]' (Mercer, 2003.). A 2006 significance assessment recommended that an interpretation plan was 'something that still needs to be done' (Paterson, 2006, 20). Only very recently have limited federal funds been released to achieve this end.

Australian young people (and their teachers) can usefully gain a critical appreciation of the nature of heritage interpretations and constructions of the past. The 'h' word has been on the receiving end of some effective and powerful polemics and the argument that 'through the filter of nostalgia we change the past' (Hewison, 1987: 11. Also Lowenthal, 1995). Heritage interpretations can be inauthentic, pastiche, or a technologically 'improved' version of a past that never was. However, it would be unfair to level these criticisms at the Pioneer Village Museum - Mercer was a relative purist for whom history trumped heritage. Yet it is true to say that the Museum evidences a 'reverence for what is durable, handmade or unique' signposting an 'underlying distaste for the culture of mass production': 'To the locals [it] provides tangible evidence of the community's better days; to the visitors [it] offers a pleasant respite from the visual monotony of twentieth century architecture' (Davison, 2000, 115, 117). It is precisely for their constructed components that heritage sites can make such effective educational resources.

Teachers can seek to re-establish an active, critical relationship between young people and the 'heritage industry'. Heritage can be defined as the act of transmitting the past from one generation to another. It assigns significance and value to physical objects in the present. But the process of creating

historic environments is inevitably artificial and selective and excludes of some alternative points of view (the Pioneer Village Museum was quiet, for example, in relation to the presence of Aboriginal people in the Burnie area before colonial settlement and also on the role of women in pioneering, frontier communities). It is important that young people see the information sheets and boards at museums as interpretations, rather than the authoritative last word on a subject.

The streetscape offers a stimulating context for children to try to understand the day-to-day circumstances of the mentalities, actions and intentions of shop-owners, small business proprietors, and their customers as revealed through the range of 1890-1910 artefacts. Peter Mercer referred to the collection's educational value in his letter to the Burnie Council in August 1969 offering it for sale, but limited attention was paid to the school market. For example, there is only one lonely reference to the promotion of the museum for educational purposes in the Pioneer Village Museum Advisory Committee Minutes for 1987-1995. A memorandum from December 1987 noted that 'Resources such as the Pioneer Museum stimulate young people to enquire about their own origins and history, and thereby encourages their educational development'. There was a call for comments and advice to be sought from the State's Department of Education and to 'obtain information about the present curriculum with a view to arranging displays to fill subject areas not at present represented'. There was even talk of preparing 'a pathway for securing the seconded services of a part-time teacher at the museum' (Burnie Regional Museum Archives). But there is no evidence that these avenues were pursued. Current school parties often use a tired, old-fashioned, fact-grubbing museum worksheet to structure the children's exploration of the streetscape.

### **Pre-service Teachers' Attitudes to History and Museums**

John Dewey set the bar for the quality of teachers work at historical sites such as museums more than a century ago:

"To keep alive the sacred spark of wonder and to fan the flame that already glows...To protect the spirit of inquiry to keep it from becoming blasé from over-excitement, wooden from routine, fossilized through dogmatic instruction, or dissipated by random exercise upon trivial things" (Dewey, 1910, 34).

Dewey exhorted teachers to harness the three natural resources of curiosity, suggestion and orderliness, in support of the development of young critical thinkers. Dewey also insisted that students should actively experience subject matter and engage in inquiry. Thus he emphasised the importance of 'learning by doing' (Dewey, 1900, 120). How effectively did the Tasmanian PSTs respond to the stimulus of a museum visit, and planning learning experiences that achieved the pedagogic objectives painted in broad strokes by Dewey?

The PSTs undertook a variety of activities in preparation for their museum work. The academic unit introducing humanities and social sciences education in the primary school engaged with the beliefs, attitudes, expectations and perceptions that the PSTs brought with them prior to their teacher education programmes (Pajares, 1992). Thus the students reflected upon their own experiences of learning history at school, which was often passive, heavy upon factual knowledge, and of little reference to their own lives. They interrogated the emerging Australian Curriculum requirements not only in relation to History, but also Geography, Civics and Citizenship education and Education for Sustainability. They discussed the key components of historical literacy introduced in their unit core texts (Ruth Reynolds, *Teaching History, Geography & SOSE in the Primary School* (2012) and Tony Taylor et al., *Place and Time: Explorations in Teaching Geography and History* (2012). Active learning methods, enquiry-led approaches, critical thinking, and the promotion of conceptual understanding and subject-specific skills were emphasised as representing good practice. Tutors encouraged the PSTs to see museums as places where children could make connections and actively construct learning. We advised them to avoid a teacher-directed, or 'tour-guide' model of fieldwork (Biggs & Moore, 1993) and focus instead upon capturing the children's attention, shaping and structuring some preparatory research, and the development of higher-order, procedural elements of historical thinking such as change over time, empathy, and rich, deep investigation of sources. We also advocated backward-planning through thinking about the final outcome of the area of study and

then working backward from this point. The top-line message to the PSTs was that they should be looking to make learning meaningful and memorable.

PSTs are a heterogeneous group of individuals. In this case, of the 240 (204 female) students studying the unit in 2012, 144 were taught via a distance/on-line mode of study, 72 at Launceston and 24 at Burnie. Of the on-line students around half were based in Tasmania and half were studying in other States. Just over half of the group were aged over 26 years. When we surveyed students eight months after completing the unit, we received responses from 40 – a relatively typical response rate for this kind of survey. Although the results are necessarily limited by the study's setting within one regional university and by the sample size, the survey findings nonetheless have some implications for how teacher educators might go about introducing PSTs to the use of museum resources in teaching about the past. The subsequent qualitative commentary on student assignments refers solely to the work of the 24 Burnie-based students.

### Survey Findings

Our survey asked PSTs a range of predominantly Likert-scale questions about their prior experience of history, their confidence levels in teaching different aspects of the primary history curriculum, their views toward museums, their response to the value of an assessment task within an academic unit of study, and their qualitative conclusions as to the value of what they had experienced and learned (details of the survey questions and responses are available from the author on request). Only 35 per cent of the sample respondents had enjoyed History at school and only 15% had found learning about local and Tasmanian history at school either interesting or memorable. Moreover, a significant minority (29 per cent) had unhappy memories of their school visits to museums as children. However, the PSTs reported highly positive attitudes toward the inclusion of museums and heritage education in the primary school curriculum at the completion of their unit: 91 per cent of respondents felt that museums were a crucial resource to enhance historical learning at the primary school level and 94 per cent agreed or agreed strongly with the statement 'I definitely hope to use museums as part of my teaching in my first teaching post'. One enthusiastic PST commented that:

"Visiting the museum and talking to the people who work there really helped deepen my understanding about how to use this kind of learning in the classroom and being able to hold artefacts and share ideas was particularly valuable"

The PSTs certainly considered museum resources as educationally valuable and wanted to use such resources in their teaching.

There was evidence that the PSTs continued to find some elements of teaching history challenging and were aware of ongoing professional learning challenges. In relation to subject knowledge, there was a marked difference between teachers' confidence levels in relation to the early years' and the upper primary curricula. Three quarters felt confident or very confident about teaching the Foundation to Year 2 History curriculum, whereas 58 per cent of respondents expressed only limited or moderate confidence in teaching colonial Australia in the 1800s (Year 5) and Australia as a nation since 1900 (Year 6). A typical comment here was:

"I am less confident in teaching the concepts in the upper primary levels as they involve a lot of prior knowledge of the topic that I probably do not have. Therefore before teaching it I would have to do a lot of my own research and preparation"

This honest PST is unlikely to be alone. As Ruth Reynolds has observed:

"The curriculum itself is discipline-specific and is quite complex. It expects teachers to negotiate broad concepts and historical content topics and to be able to develop skills, and inquiry questions as well as the general capabilities and perspectives...There are currently few primary teachers who have sufficient discipline knowledge to teach 18th to 20th century Australian history with a local, state, and national focus as required. Moreover, there are few resources available to assist this process...The professional development of primary teachers...will be a huge challenge" [Reynolds, 2011, 82].



In some ways it was encouraging that the PSTs were not sanguine about the challenges in some of the more difficult areas of history pedagogy. Sixty-one per cent of respondents continued to express low, limited, or moderate levels of confidence when it came to helping primary students interpret museum artefacts (leading us to place more emphasis upon this aspect of learning in subsequent iterations of this unit). And there were also relatively low levels of confidence where it came to teaching about historical interpretations – 49 per cent expressed limited or moderate confidence in this area (see James, 2008). Given that Tasmania's past continues to be contested and subject to historical revisionism this is probably unsurprising (see, for example Breen, 2001; MacFarlane, 2008; Reynolds, 2011) but it does present formidable challenges for teacher education to give non-subject specialist beginning teachers some kind of a handle on the sources and debates involved and how the contestation might be translated into classroom contexts.

Overall, however, the survey respondents were very positive about how the museum visit and subsequent planning task had moved their understanding of good practice pedagogy in this area forward. Ninety per cent of respondents agreed or agreed strongly that 'I feel that I deepened my understanding of how to plan an effective sequence of lessons for primary children' and 90 per cent agreed that 'I improved my ability to translate *Australian Curriculum History* objectives into learning outcomes'. Encouragingly, 77 per cent of respondents were either confident or very confident that they could teach about continuity and change in history; 64 per cent reported a similar scale of confidence in teaching about historical significance, while 61 per cent expressed a comparable level of self-confidence in addressing aspects of historical empathy.

These findings seemed to support the approach that lecturers and tutors had taken in seeking to foreground some of the central concepts of historical literacy. When it came to reporting their confidence levels in linking the teaching of history to the General Capabilities of the Australian Curriculum including Literacy, ICT, and Critical and Creative Thinking – 23 per cent of respondents reported as being very confident, 37 per cent confident, and 40 per cent moderately confident. Comments from individual students included:

- "It made me look for purposeful learning opportunities within the local community and how field trips can become engaging learning experiences";
- "It was a practical assignment that we are able to use in the future when teaching history lessons. It gave us practice in developing unit plans. It gave us an insight into how to integrate excursions into teaching";
- "My confidence has been boosted...The unit provided very practical and engaging ways to learn about the past and how that connects to the present. I hope to provide such confidence to my students!"

### **Strengths and Areas for Development in the Units of Work Planned Around Burnie Regional Museum**

The PSTs successfully designed lessons that extended beyond solely object-based learning. They asked children to make hypotheses and deductions about individual museum artefacts but they also used the artefacts as a jumping-off point for stimulating broader conceptual understanding. The beginning teachers also set their planning effectively within the Australian Curriculum: History context, particularly the Year 2 curriculum focusing on 'Past and Present'. Five out of the six sequences of learning focused upon developing work for Year 2 students, while one group developed work to support the Year 5 curriculum. Through several of the planned lessons children were encouraged to 'shift boundaries between the past and the present' (Marsh, 2008: 271) which gave them the opportunity to, for example, identify, sequence, explore and recognise communication artefacts and how they looked in the past by comparison with the present. One group centred discussion on three communication-related artefacts: an ink pot, typewriter and telephone. They took high-quality photographs – an excellent resource for preparatory or follow up work. They also asked some good 'big questions': for example, 'How do you think people communicated with each other 100 years ago?' [Other resources at the museum that provided some answers included images of a printing press, a telegram machine, a Morse code machine, a photograph of an early Burnie Post Office, a newspaper, a horse and cart and a telephone operator's switchboard].

The most successful realisations of ‘deep’ exploration of change and continuity occurred when students narrowed the focus : thus two groups who chose telephones and cameras respectively achieved very effective results. The first group demonstrated sound planning for past, present, and future thinking, with civics and citizenship and ICT learning outcomes foregrounded as well as history. There was some good open-ended and speculative questioning: Do you think everyone had a telephone in their home in the 1930s? Why? Why not? What are some major differences between the design of these phones and phones you have at home? Why do you think this design was changed? ICT was incorporated through a YouTube clip displaying pictures of telephones from 1910 to 2012 - for the purpose of introducing the topic in an engaging way and for the children to research and communicate their responses. A range of questioning strategies was deployed to scaffold students’ thinking in identifying the similarities and differences between various telephones and the implications of technological changes. Students were also able to demonstrate empathy, by thinking about how technological changes to telephones affected people’s everyday lives at different points in the past one hundred years. Creative thinking skills were applied in a later lesson in which students were asked to draw what they thought telephones would look like in the future.

The group that planned a unit of work around changes in camera technology and related artefacts in the museum’s collection created two well-focused key questions to focus their sequence of lessons:

- How helpful is photography in assisting us to understand Burnie in the past and present?; and
- What significance has the Winter family had in recording the history of Burnie?

They utilised some vivid early twentieth century photographs from the Winter collection archive to reflect upon the purposes of photography (past and present). They compared family photographs from the past and present (framing, dress, facial expressions, degree of formality). Photographs were uploaded onto a SMART board and through a Y chart ‘See, Think, Wonder’ strategy students made careful observations and thoughtful interpretations, that had the potential to stimulate curiosity and set the platform for inquiry-based learning. There was a structured research activity about the Winter family and opportunities to select and present information in different ways (for example PowerPoint presentation or poster). Photography and photographic choices became a central theme of the museum visit as children made creative choices about what to photograph and how to represent it most effectively. The group asked some excellent open and interpretive questions: ‘How do we know that the streets in Burnie once looked like this?’ and ‘How did the museum know to design the streetscape like this?’. On a linked visit to the surviving family shop, the children were asked, ‘What is sold in camera shops now, that you cannot see in Winter’s shop from the past?’. The children also had opportunities later in the unit to make predictions about future advances in photographic technology.

The PSTs were only at the beginning of their professional learning journey and teacher education. Inevitably some groups made less effective planning choices or did not grasp fully the potential of the ACH. Perhaps the single most noteworthy – but probably unsurprising – weakness across the whole cohort was that the PSTs tended to pay lip-service to critical thinking. Feedback comments on assignments included:

“When you refer to higher order thinking and deep learning [with Year 2 children] it is good to be more specific about teaching and assessment strategies”; and

“It would have been good to read more about how you might really pin down Year 5 learning relating to change over time and informed empathy via your questioning and assessment tasks”.

The evidence from the PSTs’ lesson plans suggested that they sometimes favoured the asking of unproblematic questions that were unlikely to lead to contestation or disagreement. It takes deep specific history pedagogical content knowledge and experience of where children are ‘at’ developmentally to venture beyond surface learning.

Overall, however, the evidence was that this was a unit and assignment that developed significantly the PSTs’ confidence in professional decision making around interpreting the ACH and translating its ambition into meaningful learning opportunities for children. The PSTs were keen to create ‘authentic’ and relevant learning contexts that linked to children’s contemporary interests and experiences. Engaging and insightful use was made of primary artefacts and photographic source material and the museum to explore people’s lives in the past – for example, a Year 5 learning

sequence exploring how occupations, roles and technology had changed over time included a blacksmith's forge and branding instruments; various butter churning artefacts; a candle mould; a printing press typesetting machine; a metal iron; a washboard; a horse-delivered mail service; bullocks pulling heavy lifting equipment to clear paddocks; and horse-drawn potato wagons.

It was good to see the planning of teacher questioning strategies and possible interventions to consolidate learning not only at the beginning of lessons but also at transition points in the middle of lessons and in plenary sessions at the end, which aimed to draw learning together. Some of the lessons also sought to encourage selectivity and asked the children to justify their opinions: for example, 'If you were only allowed to choose one artefact, what would it be and why?'. And some groups were starting to think more creatively about assessment activities, for example peer-assessed oral presentations or imaginative ICT-based communication of ideas. Planning was generally undertaken in teams of four and there was evidence that the collaborative dimension of the assignment had generally worked well. One group commented:

"Using group environments and online tools such as wikis and blogs supported collaborative creation of our history lesson sequence as well as providing the ability to share our existing ideas".

Finally, the real-life dimension to the students' planning enhanced their motivation: they had agreed to their work being used by the museum and local teachers as additional learning resources to augment the museum's existing support materials. Thus they were engaged in more than an artificial academic exercise – children would get to road-test the learning activities that they had designed.

## Conclusion

Collins, Curtis, Curtis, and Stevenson (2007) identified community engagement as a cornerstone of learning, teaching, and research in a post-modern world and teacher education partnerships with museums can be an effective and practical way of putting community engagement into practice. Universities are increasingly seeing themselves acting as 'sites of citizenship' contributing to community social and cultural infrastructure (Winter, Wiseman, and Muirhead, 2006. Also Allison & Eversole, 2008; Butcher et.al, 2003) and faculties of education need to appreciate the contribution which they are able to make within this space. The year after this project was undertaken in Burnie, a successful joint bid was submitted by the Tasmanian National Trust and the faculty of education at the University of Tasmania to a State Community Fund to develop educational resources based upon Home Hill, the family home of Joseph and Dame Enid Lyons, in the town of Devonport, thereby sustaining clear linkage between local museums/heritage sites, educational resources and interpretations, and the involvement of pre-service teachers in an authentic developmental enterprise.

Museums are rich educational institutions that play an important role within the local community as they offer many promising and engaging opportunities for schools to stimulate children's learning (Suda & Molloy, 2008). Regional museums across Australia are often able to present young people with a visual and tangible historical overview of the changes that have occurred within their local communities over two hundred years of Australian history and can provide rich artefacts and resources for students to explore (Griffin, 2004; Marcus, Stoddard & Woodward, 2012). The project outlined here certainly helped University of Tasmania PSTs develop their knowledge and confidence in the effective use of museums and artefacts - thereby strengthening their capacity to enrich the learning of primary children. Moreover, the developmental work undertaken significantly enhanced the PSTs professional development by sharpening their planning skills. Museums can foster an emotional attachment to the past that makes learning enjoyable and memorable. If beginning teachers can experience this enjoyment they will be more inclined to want to pass it on to their own students.

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