

Honest History questions (via Mr David Stephens):

Three questions (though the first one really has two parts):

(1) If we can't give children the full story on war the first time it is presented to them should we wait till they are old enough to take it all in? (By the full story we mean, for example, honest descriptions of the circumstances of deaths in war rather than euphemisms like 'fallen', 'made the supreme sacrifice'.) If we give them a sanitised or heroic version when they are younger is there a risk that this will colour their later perceptions, as is suggested by people like David Turnoy

(<http://honesthistory.net.au/wp/teaching-children-about-war-2014/> reference to Turnoy at 27 June update) and Brian Lewis (<http://honesthistory.net.au/wp/anzac-treasures-follows-a-well-worn-track/> quote from Lewis in second last paragraph)?

(2) We understand there is a desire at the Memorial to have children 'connect' with soldiers, including dead ones. We have heard this said about the Roll of Honour Soundscape project and the Commemorative Crosses project. Is there a similar motivation behind the Hands on History invitation to try on uniforms, handle real items, hear incredible stories? Why is connection seen as important?

(3) Is there scope for the Memorial to educate children about the impacts of war on other children? This would cover, for example, the experiences of children who lose parents and family members in war, including the experiences of children in countries other than Australia.

Response from Robyn Siers, acting Manager of Education, Australian War Memorial:

Education programming at the Memorial, both onsite and outreach (incorporating online resources and the Memorial Box program) is deliberately linked to content and learning statements in the Australian curricula, most often those of History, and Civics and Citizenship. These statements identify age-appropriate capabilities, and are approved by the Australian Curriculum, Assessment, and Reporting Authority (ACARA).

From the Foundation year (the old Kindergarten), through to Year Ten, the historical knowledge and understanding content in the *Australian curriculum: History* provides opportunities to introduce and progressively develop understanding through key concepts including sources and evidence, continuity and change, cause and effect, perspectives, empathy and significance, and contestability.

According to educational developmental psychology, and learning theory, (Piaget, Erickson, etc.), children move through various developmental stages in their learning, from the concrete to the conceptual. The Memorial's education programs reflect the notion of age appropriate capabilities, drawing on concrete items and stories relevant to young students' experiences to meet curriculum requirements. Within these guidelines, there is a need to be sensitive to a young learner's ability to understand the conceptual notions of war and conflict, and the associated outcomes of cost in death and destruction. This is not an attempt to sanitise history, but rather following developmental and curriculum guidelines. Turnoy employs not dissimilar methods in his 'time travelling couch', "transporting students back into the past". This too is an attempt, via the imagination, to actively develop empathy in young learners for historical figures and events of the past; to "become critical thinkers and questioners" and to see other points of view.

The impact of war on all Australians, including children and families, is included in interpretive programs at the Memorial. The Roll of Honour in the Commemorative Area is a stark reminder of the cost of war at a very personal level. This is part of the commemorative aspect of our programs, and often forms part of discussions aimed at developing empathy. Family members of those who have died at war are not infrequent visitors, and they are afforded the respect and sensitivity that they deserve when they visit this site. Many schools are now choosing to stay on for the Last Post Ceremony held each evening, where the story of one name from the Roll is told, including quite “honest descriptions of the circumstances of death”.

So then, the teaching and learning pedagogy at the Memorial employs strategies and methods that best meet curriculum requirements in an informal, museum learning environment. For example, in the primary school years, content moves from being quite ego-centric in young children - personal and family histories, families from the past and the present, and significant community events (including commemorative), through to an examination of nation building and the development of values in Australia, by the end of Year 6.

The connection with ‘soldiers, including the dead ones’ and in fact, the connection to all of the Memorial’s content comes largely through enquiry learning method. This includes asking questions, looking for meaning, discovering answers, developing empathy from the stories, objects, images in the Memorial’s collection about Australians from the past and the present-who they were, what they did, where they went, and why. This is not ‘text-book learning’ but rather hands-on, and very much related to real objects and stories of real people. In this process, opportunities are provided to develop historical understanding and skills which are added to and deepened as students mature. By high school years nine and 10, students are encouraged to engage with major world conflicts like the first and second world wars at a deeper level, investigating concepts including the impact of European imperial expansion, the emergence of significant social and political ideas, major movements for rights and freedoms, and an examination of Australia’s’ place in the Asia Pacific and Australia as a global citizen.

Interpretive gallery programs for the public during school holidays, largely developed and delivered with a family audience in mind, include Hands on history trolleys, gallery talks, holiday workshops, and live museum theatre performances. Again, these are tailored to be age-appropriate for the audience which includes young learners. There are also talks and seminars or symposiums of a more sophisticated, academic nature for a mature audience delivered throughout the year.

The Roll of Honour Soundscape project and the Commemorative Crosses project are broader, Anzac centenary focussed, corporate activities that sit outside the delivery of specific Education learning programs at the Memorial.