

## HEIRNET: HISTORY AND MEMORY – FACING THE PAST, FACING THE FUTURE

The 2<sup>nd</sup> HEIRNET [HISTORY EDUCATORS INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH NETWORK] conference took place at the University of Cape Town, South Africa, from 25-27<sup>th</sup> April 2006. Rob Siebörger hosted the conference with the support of the education department and a group of enthusiastic colleagues. HEIRNET's conception of history as a dynamic, relevant and central concern for the political community was at the centre of the 2006 conference on '*History Educators and History Education: The Research Agenda for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Classrooms, History and the Curriculum – Teaching, Learning and Identity*'. Full conference details, including abstracts and papers can be accessed on the HEIRNET website, [www.heirnet.org](http://www.heirnet.org). The conference papers will be published after full refereeing in the *International Journal of Historical Learning, Teaching and Research*. This edition will be dedicated to the memory of the late Henry Macintosh who passed away during the conference.

HEIRNET is an informal association of experts on the theory and practice of History Education who come together annually in a conference or seminar to exchange ideas and findings and to discuss and debate History Education in the context of its role in society in general and education in particular. The group sees History Education as sitting at the interface between History academia, politics, education and issues and concerns that are central to citizenship. Members are concerned about grounding HEIRNET's views in an academic discourse that has research at its heart; research that is eclectic, varied and spans the qualitative and quantitative spectrum as well as drawing upon established disciplines in the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences

**The conference attendees** reflected the overall HEIRNET rationale with thirty colleagues present. The group was drawn from HEIs in Belgium, England, Finland, New Zealand and the USA; South African education authority advisers and teachers working as practitioner researchers in schools. While the contributions were extremely varied they all focused upon the central conference theme of *Teaching, Learning, Memory and Identity*. The programme was coherent and developmental. Its six sessions incorporated a range of modes of presentation and engagement, i.e. lectures, workshops, visits, discussion groups. As such, the conference was extremely refreshing and invigorating. There was, as with all HEIRNET meetings, a full social programme to support recovery from the academic demands of the sessions.

The conference's first three papers addressed **crucial issues for History Educators – pupil perceptions of their own multi-faceted identity and the role that education can play** in challenging stereotypes and developing in young citizens an orientation that enables plural societies to be functional, effective, humane and humanitarian through embedding democratic, liberal values and the rule of law. Jackie Dean's opening paper raised the whole issue of racial stereotypes embedded in cultural norms and perceptions that arise from their familial and social contexts. Education's role is not only to challenge these stereotypes but also to produce alternative models for affirming individual identity that is egalitarian. Dylan Wray outlined the professional development programme that the *Facing the Past: Transforming our Future* project has initiated. Here the emphasis is upon the personal and emotional awareness of teachers so that they can professionally cope with teaching issues of racism, conflict and identity in post-apartheid South Africa. The course addresses the issues that implementing the new South African Curriculum in schools raises. As such, its focus is upon professional development

with an emphasis upon learning and teaching. The relevance of this was reflected in Terry Epstein's American research into racial stereotyping. Her research involved groups of black and white urban working class students sorting a set of historical images into categories. They had to justify their choices for their categorisation. The students' commentaries revealed highly divisive polarised racist views of their identity as American citizens. Terry's paper highlighted the issue of an impoverished pedagogy grounded in a transmission, didactic model.

**The question of pedagogy** as the crucial transformative medium for educating children was the key element in session 2. The presenter, Nigel Worden, is an academic historian who has produced a comprehensive collection of documents on slavery, the *Trials of Slavery* (2005). The documents are drawn from court records of cases involving slaves and slavery. The conference members worked in groups of four upon a selected document, their task was to turn them into a teaching resource for year 7 or year 10 pupils, using the South African's learning outcomes guidelines for History. The activity was highly illuminating, illustrating the process of transforming academic subject knowledge into pedagogic knowledge. Feedback revealed a concern with active learning that involved teacher's working intensively with students in developing understanding of key concepts and issues.

**The issue of teaching in schools** was picked up in the third session's contrasting paper. Nicola Hills had researched the collapse of history as a subject that 14-16 year olds choose to study in South Africa. The evidence is that this is a complex problem but there is a unifying element: the failure of history pedagogy to map on the perceptions of students as to what meets their needs in modern South Africa. Rob Sieborger *Turning Points* history curriculum addresses this particular concern: it is a highly interactive, progressive programme that engages pupils in a Thinking Skills agenda that emphasises conceptual concerns that are germane to all young citizens sense of identity. Rob had identified as seminal the education and training of teachers via the advisory service. The conference discussed the nature and impact of the training programme his team had developed.

**District 6 Museum - Memory, Museums and the Past** was the theme for session 4 – a visit to the world famous District 6 Museum. Crain Soudin led the seminar – he was a key figure in the creation of the museum and its subsequent development and direction. District 6 was a vibrant, multi-ethnic district of Cape Town that was a breeding ground for resistance to segregation as well as the apartheid regime and all that it stood for. The Apartheid government used its draconian legislation to implement a regime for the destruction of District 6 and the forcible movement of its population to new settlements. The museum immerses the attendee in a host of experiences as evidence of the apartheid past. A map of District 6 covers the whole floor space of the converted church with the names of the residents inked in – the floor is covered with transparent plastic. The museum's contents link oral, visual, documentary, artifactual and auditory testimony in a powerful, moving monument to oppression and subsequent reconciliation. And, central to the whole experience is the issue of memory and identity.

**Pedagogy, Memory and Identity was the focus of the four papers in the fifth session.** Jon Nichol gave a paper on developing pupil thinking through an intervention strategy based upon the Nuffield Primary History Project's principles and Cognitive Acceleration's Thinking Skills criteria. A key factor is restoring narrative as a central element in pupil learning through the use of *Magic History Mystery* readers written in a register that draws upon genres that pupils' know and love. Robert Guyver analysed factors that the New Zealand government are considering in revising its History Education policy to accommodate fully the multi-ethnic nature of

modern New Zealand. The role of history and memory in a wider picture of education for society was central to Sigi Howe's explanation of the work of the Cape Town Centre for conservation education. Fascinating was the role of topic work that not only drew upon the whole curriculum but which shifted the locus of study from the original perceptions of the centre's teaching staff. This she illustrated through a programme of study on the humble bee that moved its locus from biology to technology and business studies! Kate Hawkey ended the session with addressing the role of narrative in the teaching of history to 11-14 year olds. The research findings were disturbing, painting a picture of a fragmented, disconnected learning experience that would do more to confuse than enlighten.

**Models of Expert Teaching – a training video** The conference had consistently raised issues and concerns that addressed the nature and quality of pupil learning in a curriculum that was created to aid the transition from the social trauma of Apartheid to a multi-ethnic society at peace with itself. A training video *'Doing History A teacher's guide to history teaching the revised National Curriculum'* showed a highly dynamic pedagogy that drew upon and developed a range of sophisticated teaching protocols. The pedagogy was grounded in a curriculum research and development project that involved S. African teachers in the development of teaching approaches and styles that drew upon the best theory and practice available in the United Kingdom. The video was shot in South African classrooms and showed a number of South African teachers teaching engaging, gripping lessons that fully involved pupils in a demanding and rewarding learning. Accompanying the video is comprehensive supporting documentation.

**The final session returned to the bigger picture – memory, identity and education in societies emerging from social trauma or genocide.** Gail Weldon reported on research in progress on an investigation of memory, identity and the curricula in two contrasting yet complementary societies: South Africa and Rwanda. A theme of her research is the role that memory, mediated via the school curriculum and broader perceptions, not only underpins the social trauma of Apartheid and the Genocide of Rwanda, but can also play a crucial, central role in the subsequent healing process in the emergent polities. The same theme was central to the work of the holocaust centre in Cape Town, here with the parallels being drawn between the racism of Nazi Germany and apartheid South Africa. Sofie Geschier delivered a remarkable paper linking the holocaust to the memories of the generation who had experienced its full horrors. The focus is upon heritage sites such as Cape Town's Holocaust Centre that mediate with the public the record of the traumatic or genocidal past in a form that helps shape current awareness and toleration.

**A survey of participants** revealed that the conference was considered to be a great success. The success arose from the overlapping of complementary interests and expertises of three communities: HEI academics, Local Authority advisers and teachers. Each contributed equally and effectively to the processes of practitioner curriculum research and development which relied and drew upon the expertise of colleagues in HEIs and Local government.

Jon Nichol