

**Australian High School Students on Commemorating the Gallipoli Campaign:  
“It baffles me” and “It’s a bit weird.”**

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**Abstract:**

Australia’s involvement in World War I, currently in its centenary years of commemoration, continues to capture the public’s imagination in a way that arguably surpasses all other historical events in Australia’s history. This is particularly in terms of popular culture representations such as advertising, film, and television; children’s literature; popular and academic history publications; and educational resources at primary, secondary, and tertiary levels. So pervasive is the public’s awareness of Australia’s first major military campaign, Gallipoli, that by the time high school students in year 9 study the unit on Australia’s involvement in WWI, they are already familiar with the common tropes of narratives surrounding this event, however inaccurate they may be. This paper reports on research conducted in three Australian high schools that provided students with a collection of five sources and a series of questions to answer about the Gallipoli campaign as a historical and commemorative event. The research is interested in understanding how the Gallipoli campaign is perceived at the time of its 100-year anniversary and to see whether or how students reflect collective memory and official history in their own narratives of the nation.

**Key words:** World War I, history, Australia, collective memory, nationalism, historical consciousness.

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**Introduction**

With the centenary years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century’s first major international war, World War I (WWI), currently nearing its conclusion, significant attention is being paid to its legacies. Political

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ramifications are arguably still reverberating in consideration of issues of colonization, border security, alliances of nations, national militaries, and cultural impacts resulting from this war. Governments, researchers, the media, educational institutions, and the general public remain interested and intrigued by the importance of WWI. In Australia, a significant amount of funding, reported to be over \$552 million, has accompanied this interest and has been distributed by all levels of government for heritage-type history projects (see, for example, projects made possible by the Australian government-funded Anzac Centenary Local Grants Program<sup>1</sup>).

In light of this sustained interest in the centenary commemorations of WWI, a research project was conducted in high schools in New South Wales (NSW) in 2015 during the early phase of the roll-out of official commemorative events. At that time, the focus of commemorative events was on the Gallipoli military campaign. The aim of this research was to understand how high school students think about remembrance of the Gallipoli campaign in the year of its centenary commemorative events. Participants were provided with a five-page work booklet designed specifically for the project and invited to answer a few brief biographical questions followed by three questions about remembrance of Gallipoli within a 45-minute timeframe. In total, 82 students participated in the research, 66 males and 16 females, across three high schools including an all-boys' high school, an all-girls' high school, and a co-ed (mixed sex) high school. Participants in the research included 21 students from year 8, 21 students from year 9, eight students from year 10, one student from year 11, and 29 students from year 12, the final year of schooling in Australia. This paper focuses on student responses that highlight public and personal complexities—including the students' own understanding and historical consciousness as self-reported in their responses—surrounding the commemoration of Gallipoli.

### **Background**

The Australian and New Zealand Army Corps (ANZAC or Anzac), fighting on the side of the British Empire against the Ottoman Empire, landed at a small cove on the Gallipoli peninsula in Turkey on April 25, 1915. Allied troops evacuated from the peninsula just eight months later beginning

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<sup>1</sup> Anzac Day is held annually on April 25. The Australian War Memorial describes it as "... probably Australia's most important national occasion. It marks the anniversary of the first major military action fought by Australian and New Zealand forces during the First World War. ANZAC stands for Australian and New Zealand Army Corps... Although the Gallipoli campaign failed in its military objectives of capturing Constantinople and knocking Turkey out of the war, the Australian and New Zealand actions during the campaign bequeathed an intangible but powerful legacy. The creation of what became known as the 'ANZAC legend' became an important part of the national identity of both nations. This shaped the ways they viewed both their past and future" (Australian War Memorial, 2009, paragraph 1, 3).

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on December 18, 1915, which resulted in victory for the Central Powers in this theatre of war. The Gallipoli campaign has become a defining feature of national historical narratives, often touted as the “birth of the nation” as the young country of Australia was called upon to support the British Empire in its invasion. A significant aspect of Anzac Day celebrations in Australia is drawn from the creation of what is known as the “Anzac legend,” which denotes the perceived typical qualities of the Anzac soldier: “resourceful and courageous, with a dislike of authority, a sense of humour and a strong sense of ‘mateship’” (Lawless & Bulgu, 2016, p. 223).

Arguably, the celebratory tone of Anzac Day in Australia may be considered unusual (although not unique) as a prominent national holiday because it commemorates a defeat rather than a victory. The significance of Anzac Day in Australia is evident in the high-profile nature of the public holiday, including large televised dawn services and marches in major cities, with many speeches from political figures and other important public figures. Notably, thousands of Australian tourists attend the dawn service at Anzac Cove in Turkey, the site of the landing, which has become an important aspect of 21<sup>st</sup> century national commemoration (Sheehan & Taylor, 2016). However, it should be noted that Anzac Day and its significance in the national psyche has evolved over time. For instance, in the 1970s, lack of support for the Vietnam War was linked to low attendance of commemorative activities.

Official national commemoration or ritualized memorialization of events deemed historically significant can serve to determine what are acceptable and legitimate as commemoration customs. This national narrative is also susceptible to change over time, often in response to the political context (Apfelbaum, 2010). Official historical narratives of a nation-state can often be difficult to challenge when that narrative is supported and reproduced in social and political contexts, with an official narrative becoming “a pivotal conduit through which the nation-states’ collective memory passes” (VanSledright, 2008, p. 116).

### **Collective Memory: A Review of the Literature**

With a focus on student responses that identify the complexities of remembrance in the public sphere and in relation to their own personal perspectives about the commemoration<sup>2</sup> of Gallipoli,

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<sup>2</sup> Events, publications, documentaries, and other audio visual media such as television shows and even sporting matches that represent WWI to an Australian audience have been numerous in the years leading up to and during the centenary of WWI, so much so that, as Adorno and Horkheimer (1972) might describe, a cultural industry associated with the commemoration (with the assertion made here that these commemorations frequently have the attributes of a celebration) has been created, and “...the culture industry remains the entertainment business” (1972, p. 136).

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analysis of data was informed by the theory of collective and public memory in influencing individuals. The study of historical memory relates to ways that people *consume* history rather than a focus on the *creation* and *dissemination* of historical narratives (Glassberg, 1996). Létourneau and Moisan (2004) argue that individuals understand new historical information based on a narrative core that forms the basis of individual memory, and that the assimilation of new knowledge builds on elements that are recognizable in terms of what is already known. This branch of scholarship also recognizes a multiplicity of individual interpretations, acknowledging that audiences will interpret information differently based on their own social context (Glassberg, 1996).

The theory of collective memory emerged as a significant field of study in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, evolving from an increased popularity in genealogy and autobiography (Kerwin, 2000). Collective memory can be understood as a community's connection to the past, including the ways in which it engages in commemoration (Clark, 2014). Halbwachs's (1980) original and seminal work in this area investigated how our current ideas about the present shape our reconstruction of the past. Glassberg (1996) explained that collective memory forms a core component of nation building, thus the narrative history that is disseminated as an official historical version is politically motivated. This notion is evident in the Australian context with increasing political debate over official history surrounding the Anzac legend as a factor in national identity formation and commemoration of the Gallipoli campaign. Damousi (2010) argued that the emotional elements of this debate often elicit responses that appear not to be grounded in either historical or political engagement, suggesting that history is informed by numerous ideologies and intentions, dependent on its uses. Furthermore, and in the context of this research, recent studies have found that collective memory is not always representative of school curricula (see, e.g., Clark, 2014; Létourneau, 2006), suggesting the influence of public history in its numerous forms.

This research considers the social construction of collective memory and official national histories. Létourneau and Moisan (2004) argue that individuals understand new historical information based on a narrative core that forms the basis of individual memory, and that the assimilation of new knowledge will build on elements that are recognizable in terms of what is already known. Similarly, Halbwachs' (1980) consideration of collective memory for groups suggests that collective histories serve as a point of reference and indicator of what is important to each particular group. Moreover, Halbwachs suggested that individual memories and collective memory are interrelated through dialogue, whereby an individual's experiences are legitimized through consideration and evaluation of personal memories in relation to collective

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memory. In other words, “what is important in one group may well be unimportant in another, so that individual memory must, to a certain extent, adjust to the sometimes contradictory demands of the various groups to which the subject is affiliated” (Apfelbaum, 2010, p. 86).

Booth (2008) similarly touches on these concepts as “remembering” and “forgetting,” as bound to *duty* in acts of remembrance within a community. For example, this is taken to mean duty in the endurance of a community’s identity over time, ensuring justice through remembrance (the idea that silence, or *amnesia*, can also have an impact on identity) for those who have been marginalized in the past. Booth described collective memory as a “site of democratic contest, of vulnerability, power, resistance, and interest rather than a sovereign locale of legitimacy and identity” (p. 258). Thus, collective memory does not simply serve as a unifying force in the creation of a national character or values system; rather, in modern politics, memory is prominently debated and increasingly differentiated as the groups who were formally marginalized are able to publicly articulate their remembrance practices. The popular history idea of selective memory of certain historical events is also evident in the remembrance of the Gallipoli campaign. While other conflicts are frequently conveniently forgotten (for example, the Frontier Conflicts), the pervasive and often politically motivated memorialization of the Gallipoli campaign continues. The importance placed on Australia’s participation in WWI is frequently privileged over other conflicts, meaning that more Australians have ideas about the Gallipoli campaign than other theatres of war.

Regarding any impact on identity formation, Booth (2008) provides an explanation of memory as having a critical role in the formation of identity, both at a micro level through the example of the family, as well as at the macro level, looking at nationalism. Along with this idea, Booth argues that memory is tightly bound to community identities over time. Of particular interest in this context is the concept of *duty*, or obligatory acts that are required within a community such as the duty to remember significant events or individuals in community narratives. Furthermore, the persistence of these duties has a direct impact on identity. For example, in the Australian context, the heavy expectation of honoring Anzac Day is deeply tied to defining national character, and is annually on display in political rhetoric and sporting contexts. Damousi (2010) argued that there was a distinct shift in the historiography of Anzac sentiment in Australia, from critiquing political aspects of Australian involvement in conflicts prior to the 1990s to “sentimentalising wartime experience” (p. 201) in more recent decades. At the same time, military history has become central to many public understandings of Australia’s history (Damousi, 2010; Lake, 2010; Reynolds, 2016).

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Anna Clark's *History's Children: History Wars in the Classroom* (2008) explored Australian students', teachers', and officials' experiences and thoughts on Australian history. This large-scale project explored student conceptions of Australia's war history, specifically the significance of Anzac. She found that many students felt that they had a connection to the Anzac story, explaining:

It's a heroic Australian story that people can connect with, and they seem to be doing so in droves. The problem is that not everyone feels the same. Despite this groundswell of public and political interest in the Anzac story, a number of historians, teachers and even students worry about cultivating a pride in our national past that's automatic rather than analysed. (p. 62)

The uncritical acceptance of the Anzac story that Clark identified in schools extends to the greater public sphere, as explored in depth by Damousi (2008), focusing specifically on the emotions that surround Anzac mythology and why critical engagement with historical or political elements of commemoration can be characterized as unacceptable by the general public. Marilyn Lake (2010) argued that one element contributing to the recent resurgence in the Anzac legend is targeted government funding, specifically from the Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA), into teaching and learning resources aligned with the school curriculum and public institutions devoted to the commemoration of Australia's military history. In particular, this highlights the intense politicization of Anzac mythology that receives bi-partisan support, mobilizing the Anzac narrative as a tool for national cohesion and nation building. Historical narratives may be used to reinforce a particular view of the past that forms a basis for the collective identity (Létourneau, 2006). At the same time, historical writings have been swept up in the emotional elements of Anzac, with many more recent works focusing on sentimental elements of commemoration of military history (Damousi, 2008).

Donoghue and Tranter (2013), drawing on a nationally representative survey of Australians, found that Australian soldiers, known as "Anzacs," are widely acknowledged as national heroes. Significantly, the soldiers are viewed as a collective entity rather than recognizable individuals. The representation of the Anzacs as heroes in a mythological sense is evident in their portrayal in Australian art and media. Over time, their deeds have been embellished and enhanced as the historical narrative surrounding them has been utilized as a tool to promote national cohesion and perceived national values that should be passed on to future generations (Tranter & Donoghue, 2007). Specifically, the Anzac legend has become politicized as a means of promoting patriotism and national values, as Holbrook (2014) observed:

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In a settler nation that is conspicuously short of unifying mythologies, the Anzac legend is uniquely powerful. It is not surprising that politicians seek to harness that power in their own ends – by adjusting the legend for political emphasis, by connecting the Anzac legend with current foreign policies and even with military missions, and by being photographed and filmed in the company of Australian soldiers. (p. 206)

Australia's first national curriculum was implemented in 2011 after a period of ongoing high profile history and culture debates that included the status of school education. The *Australian Curriculum: History* is unique in the explicit inclusion of *contestability* as one of the seven historical thinking concepts underpinning the secondary history curriculum (Sheehan & Taylor, 2016). While this initially seems a welcome inclusion, the mandatory study of Australian experiences of WWI may become complicated as students deal with cultural understandings of the Anzac spirit, so often a large feature of commemorative events, and considerations of the myths of the Anzac legend and historical remembrance. Holbrook (2016) notes that the Anzac legend itself has evolved over time, particularly as this event has been touted as a significant aspect of the politically driven national historical narrative. The study of Gallipoli by students is further complicated as successive governments have spent millions of dollars to commemorate WWI. Moreover, popular culture representations of Gallipoli have a distinctive nationalistic tone, as well as the apparent surge in media attention surrounding Anzac Day, in what Sheehan and Taylor (2016) describe as "Anzac season, throughout April in the lead up to the 25 April" (p. 242). Studies of Australian school textbook materials reveal a strong emphasis placed on Gallipoli in the study of World War I (Lawless & Bulgu, 2016; Parkes & Sharp, 2014). While the current Australian curriculum also requires the consideration of different historical perspectives, it is unknown to what degree a meaningful study of the Turkish perspective (as the defenders from an Allied invasion) is undertaken in classrooms (Lawless & Bulgu, 2016).

Recently, Clark (2016) has explored the Australian obsession with the Anzac myth as its profile continues to increase in the public sphere and is less likely to be critiqued or questioned outside of academic circles. Indeed, it has grown in such a way that any apparent criticism of Anzac is often attributed to being un-Australian, a perceived attack on Australian values. Through extensive interviews with a diverse group of Australians about their connections to the past, Clark (2017) found that despite the significance of Anzac stories in national collective memory, the historical consciousness of Australians concerning Anzac was far from a sure acceptance. Moreover, public commemorations and traditions surrounding Anzac Day combine personal connections to history with national collective memory, with individuals connecting their

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personal experiences to historical narratives in the broader public history. How and if this is reflected in the responses of students who participated in the research project is of interest in this paper.

### **Methodology**

In consideration of the schooling context, Apple's (2004) official knowledge, and notions of collective and public memory, data were analyzed using the knowledge types of Habermas (1987), through a close reading of the students' responses, and drawing on ideas of citizenship developed for the schooling context by Gilbert (2003). On a topic as pervasive in the school curriculum as Anzac Day, the incorporation of Apple's (2004) ideas on the official curriculum is important in order to frame the discussion within a clear context. The influence on schooling must be considered for a topic that is covered so extensively in both public discourses and in the classroom. On the topic of the polarization caused by the history/culture wars and the recognition of the complexity of history, Australian writer Tom Keneally has stated: "you have to choose celebration or lamentation, triumphalism or black grief, but it's possible for it to be two things at once (Hope, 2006, p. 27). In many ways, this can be seen as a dilemma of teaching Australia's involvement in WWI: For a conflict that killed so many of the nation's young, irrevocably changing the social fabric of many communities across the continent, it is difficult to reconcile the remembering of this event, which has turned almost celebratory, with the binary option of not remembering at all, and for the waste of human life to be in complete vain. Sheehan and Taylor (2016) note how the Australian curriculum holds the potential to broaden students' understandings of the nature of the Anzac legend:

Fortunately, the Australian curriculum's emphasis on contestability as well as the gradual shift in professional historical and media commentary towards a more closely examined view of the Anzac legend provides history teachers and students with the opportunity to broaden the scope of their historical understanding of the topic and arrive at their own, rather than any government-auspiced, set of conclusions about Anzac's place in Australian and world history. (p. 243)

In consideration of this idea, this research is interested in how young people reconcile the complexities of remembrance surrounding the Gallipoli campaign.

Students were asked to respond to the following questions<sup>3</sup> while considering five sources. These questions were:

- 1) Is Gallipoli a significant event for us to remember today? Why or why not?
- 2) How should Gallipoli be remembered today?
- 3) Describe any perspectives/viewpoints about Gallipoli that you feel are missing from Sources A to E.

The sources included a black and white photograph of wounded troops on the beach at Anzac Cove, a promotional poster for the “Anzac Girls” television miniseries, a soldier’s diary extract, a photograph of an Army cadet at a cenotaph on Anzac Day, and a 2013 photograph of a crowd of Australians and New Zealanders at the official Anzac Day ceremony at Gallipoli, Turkey (Figure 1). Each of the five sources are typical of materials students are exposed to both in and outside of the classroom. Many feature regularly as public artefacts in and around the annual Anzac Day public holiday. They are representative of cultural and scholastic ways of knowing about Gallipoli. Students’ experiences of public remembrance of WWI include (in addition to schooling) multiple contexts such as popular film and TV, media reports and advertising, and published history books; these influence their historical understanding and historical consciousness surrounding why they then see the continued remembrance of Gallipoli as important. What follows is an analysis of student responses, of those that identified the contradictions and/or complexities of the ongoing commemoration of the Gallipoli campaign.

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<sup>3</sup> The wording of the questions is arguably imprecise as the term *Gallipoli* is conflated with *the Gallipoli campaign*. However, the authors assert that this did not cause any confusion for the student participants nor complexities for comprehension for the school student participants as they completed this activity in the History classroom, their regular class teacher was able to answer any questions, and the five sources clearly show that the intention was for students to refer to the Gallipoli military campaign of WWI, not Gallipoli, a geographical area in modern-day Turkey. Student responses further indicate that they were not at all confused by the intention of the question. Colloquially, the campaign is frequently referred to as simply *Gallipoli*, particularly after the release of the 1981 film of the same name.

*Figure 1. Sources provided to student participants*

**Sources A to E**

**Source A:** Wounded troops on the beach at Anzac Cove on April 25, 1915. Men of the AAMC are treating some of the wounded. *Reference:* Australian War Memorial PS1659



**Source B:** “Anzac Girls” TV miniseries promotional poster. *Reference:* <http://www.screencastingnz.com/news/antonia-prebble-in-anzac-girls>



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**Source C:** Monday, 24 May 1915: Diary (extract) of HV Reynolds (Soldier at Gallipoli)

*Reference:* Diary of an Anzac. <https://www.awm.gov.au/blog/category/diary-anzac/>

*"We were turned out early this morning and told that an armistice would be observed between 8am to 4.30pm when hostilities would cease to allow the dead to be buried in no mans land. The day broke very dull and about 7am a thick misty rain began to fall which continued till about 11am when it cleared up and helped to take the gruesome task of burying a little less offensive to those engaged in that work. I was thankful that we were not called upon to take part in that work, what we saw of it was more than enough. In most cases a grave was dug alongside the corpse which was then rolled into the hole and covered up. The whole affair was awful to the extreme as some of the dead has been lying there from the landing and the number to be buried made it impossible to do little more than cover them with earth."*

**Source D:** Cadet at a commemorative service at Fairholme College, Toowoomba.

*Reference:* Cadets. <http://www.fairholme.qld.edu.au/learn/co-curricular-extra-curricular-activities/cadets.html>



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**Source E: The pilgrimage of young New Zealanders and Australians to Gallipoli**

Some of the 5,200 New Zealanders and Australians who travelled to Gallipoli, Turkey, waiting for the ceremony to begin on April 25, 2013. *Reference:* Picture: John Ferguson; Source: The Australian



Of the 82 high school students (from school years 8-12) who participated in the broader research project from which this data is drawn, this article reports on 17 responses that can be categorized as highlighting the complexities of Gallipoli remembrance. These responses include the ideas of contradictions of remembrance and the struggle the students themselves experience between the emotional connection to WWI and its annual commemoration and to the historical facts of the event. Here, the affective and effective domains of learning collide as the students seek to explain the contradictions, seemingly both to themselves and in their written responses. What also makes this topic interesting is that students were not asked questions that sought to uncover any contradictions within their understanding of the remembrance and commemoration of Gallipoli, but such is its focus in the historical consciousness of the students that a significant percentage of students (almost 21%) included this in their responses without prompting.

**Findings: Competing Ideas of Remembrance**

The students' responses that included notions of contradictions of remembrance were found to generally be at a higher cognitive level, frequently including analysis and critical reflections. There is potential overlap in the way the students' responses could be themed, so the focus has been on determining the initial idea expressed by the student and using that as the stem from which to categorize their response. The complexity of remembrance surrounding WWI that students identified will be reported here, particularly emphasizing the cognitive dissonance experienced

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by students regarding their personal views on Gallipoli and what they have learned in the History classroom.

Indicating the engagement students have with the complexities, contradictions, and idiosyncrasies surrounding Australia's remembrance of Gallipoli, a number of students clearly articulated their understandings either as the complexities of public memory and memorialization, their own personal struggle with the remembrance of Gallipoli, or a combination of the two. This section details students' responses and analyzes them with a view to how the school curriculum and their teachers' interpretation of the official curriculum has shaped or provided a transformative pedagogical experience for them in their understanding of Australia's complex relationship with the public memorialization of this significant event.

### *Nationalism in defeat*

Some students recognize that the Gallipoli campaign was a military defeat but argue that Australia won a moral victory in terms of how nationalism was developed and continues to this day. For example, MHS3 writes, "Gallipoli was a failure and yet brought out the best of Australia's nationalism." While he acknowledges that Gallipoli was a military defeat, he also asserts that it was an example of "the best" nationalism. He then goes on to write that the "boys" who fought in the war should be remembered, but not as "implements of devices to fuel a huge mistake."

WC40 acknowledges the complexities surrounding the significance of Gallipoli and its associated remembrance, and in doing so also demonstrates a not uncommon contradiction of perspective, with the second half of his response discussing "courage and spirit." He also demonstrates skill in using primary sources to respond to questions:

To Australians, Gallipoli is the battle that is remembered in relation to World War One. Source D and E show how significant Gallipoli is to both Australians and New Zealanders in terms of remembering the war. However, there is also other opinions from other historians that suggest that it is of bad significance as it symbolises Australian death for a pointless cause.

Linking his response to the idea of courage in the first half of his response, WC40 discusses the differences in views about remembering Gallipoli, citing historians as well as the general public's perspectives in this response, and then in the second half of his response, WC40 looks to Gallipoli as being an event to remember as it represents "courage and spirit." He writes, "However, Gallipoli should be remembered by today's generations as it represents Australian courage and

spirit. This is why Gallipoli is considered a significant part of Australian history and pride.” Here, he is also implying that Gallipoli is generationally dependent; WC40 is saying that Australians today should see Gallipoli as a representation of Australian “courage and spirit” (interestingly, there is no mention of Australia’s partner, New Zealand).

In using the provided sources to articulate his response, and recognizing that the sources provided are incomplete, WC44 wonders how the Turkish people remember Gallipoli: “A lack of Turkish perspective sources results in an unclear view of how the Turkish people remember Gallipoli today.” He concludes his response by writing, “Gallipoli should be remembered proudly by the Australian and New Zealand citizens today, as the campaign showed a tremendous amount of bravery by the Anzacs.” When read in full, the complexities of WC44’s response become clearer:

Gallipoli today should be remembered as a significant, brave and somewhat unfortunate event. Thousands of men lost their lives on the first day of the Gallipoli campaign, as shown in Source C, a diary extract of HV Reynolds, a soldier present at Gallipoli. The Gallipoli campaign should never be celebrated, but remembered proudly, as shown in Source E. A lack of Turkish perspective sources results in an unclear view of how the Turkish people remember Gallipoli today. The remembrance of Gallipoli has expanded into the modern day society and technology. As shown in source B, an Australian broadcasting service has aired a miniseries called “Anzac Girls.” Source D also provides a useful, yet still an Australian perspective of how Gallipoli is remembered today. Gallipoli should be remembered proudly by the Australian and New Zealand citizens today, as the campaign showed a tremendous amount of bravery by the Anzacs.

Contradictory views towards Australia’s involvement in Gallipoli also surface in some students’ responses. For example, WC45, in addition to writing about “British arrogance and the exploitation of the Anzacs both in Gallipoli and the western front” and that “Gallipoli in this day and age is remembered as a significant event as we see the soldiers that partook in this war of affiliation to be ‘Heroes’ and that they sacrificed themselves for the wellbeing of a nation,” also notes that “Gallipoli should in part be remembered for heroism but instead should be reminded of humanities worst for us.” This last sentence, in consideration of the remainder of his response, is a clear indication of the competing ideas students feel towards the remembrance of Gallipoli as a historical event of national importance. Students in later school years seem to be able to deal with this type of cognitive dissonance in a more sophisticated way than those in lower years, arguably demonstrating the ability to think through complex historical issues and realize that

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there are no clear cut, black-and-white answers to the case of Gallipoli being special in the emotional consciousness of Australians. This indicates that their understanding of the nature of history is well developed.

Similarly, WC46 acknowledges the complexities of how Gallipoli is commonly remembered; his response then continues in a way that identifies the contradictions of the commemoration, or general remembrance of Gallipoli, writing that it “is a bit weird” to commemorate a military defeat:

Gallipoli is quite a significant event for the people of Australia and New Zealand. As it pays tribute to the sacrifice those soldiers made for the country. Clearly many New Zealanders and Australians feel they owe it to the soldiers that day to remember and be thankful for what they did for our country... I feel that the fact Gallipoli was chosen as the day to remember is a bit weird as Gallipoli is where Australia suffered their greatest losses on the battlefield. The fact that we remember and “celebrate” bloodshed comes across as a weird day to commemorate.

WC48, in possibly one of the most explicit responses about Gallipoli being a military conflict and not being a significant event to remember, writes that it “baffles” him why it is considered such as significant event to remember given its defeat. WC48 uses Source E (an image depicting young Australians and New Zealanders who have travelled to Gallipoli for Anzac Day ceremonies) to support his perspective of the annual Gallipoli commemorations, and while he acknowledges that “it does deserve commemoration,” other military campaigns such as Tobruk and Long Tan are more deserving of recognition:

Gallipoli is significant as a major defeat for Australia but not much else. It baffles me how we put one of Australia’s worst defeats on a pedestal and say it is the birth of the ANZAC legend. It baffles me even more how we treat Gallipoli as some sort of pilgrimage in Source E for Aussies and New Zealanders. We treat Gallipoli as the Mecca of Australian bravery and honour. And while I think it does deserve commemoration, other events in Australia’s military history such as Tobruk or Kokoda or Long Tan should be celebrated as much if not more than we do Gallipoli.

#### *Glorification of a military defeat*

The contradictions of how some students (and Australians in the wider community), as discussed by Clark (2017) and Lake (2010), feel about whether or not Gallipoli is a significant event to

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remember is summed up by WC49, who writes in the vernacular: “No, well yes, but not as the heroic actions of colonial nations fighting their ‘masters’ enemies. Gallipoli should be remembered for the losses, sure, but more so for the massive tactical oversights leading to many thousands of Anzac troop deaths.” Similarly, WC53 understands the complexities and contradictions of the significance Gallipoli has today when he comments in response to Question 1: “Yes and no, every battle that involved Australians and/or Kiwis is significant and therefore I don’t understand why this battle/campaign takes precedence over other campaigns.”

Linked to the actions of soldiers, AGHS1 demonstrates the complexities in the remembrance and commemoration of Gallipoli in her response: “I do believe that the people involved showed great courage in the face of adversity but I think that as a whole the loss encountered in war far outbalances the bravery that we remember.” Here, she is implying that the courage of soldiers cannot be seen in isolation from the immense casualties of the conflict. The opinion that it was an Anzac victory at Gallipoli is not an uncommon one among ill-informed Australians; it is difficult to blame them given the hype and sensationalism surrounding this military campaign. It is rare for a nation to so fervently celebrate—for there is frequently a spirit of celebration rather than commemoration or solemn remembrance—an unequivocal defeat. This is the position that AGHS6 found herself in. While the first half of AGHS6’s response to the question is presented as a factual statement, she explains why she disagrees with many public portrayals of the Gallipoli campaign as an event to be celebrated. For instance, she writes, “Gallipoli should be remembered as a mass slaughter. The soldiers who fought at Gallipoli were condemned to injury and death when they signed up.” AGHS6 displays a critical interpretation of the ways in which Gallipoli is remembered; for instance, she responds to Question 2 thusly: “Unfortunately, Gallipoli is celebrated and wrongly depicted. If someone were to have no knowledge of the true events of Gallipoli, they would potentially see a glorified version of the war.” Feeling that Gallipoli is often portrayed in a misleading manner, she describes how an individual without historical knowledge of the campaign may view a “glorified version of events” through popular culture and public history. She goes on to explain her personal educative experience, which also highlights the internal contradictions that students experience: “Without knowledge of what happened in Gallipoli, I originally believed that Gallipoli was a success. Gallipoli should be remembered as a mass slaughter.” This response is significant as it highlights the potential for transformative education in history as students challenge pre-conceived ideas about the past.

The difficulty students have in reconciling respect and remembrance for soldiers and not glorifying war, especially a disastrous defeat, is exemplified in AGHS9’s response. She offers a

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critical understanding of the events of Gallipoli and highlights the many contradictions in commemoration of the Gallipoli campaign. Her response to Question 2 reads:

The soldiers who fought certainly showed courage and resilience, and I believe those virtues should be respected- but I also think that it should be remembered primarily as a tragedy. I do not think that we should be proud of what happened at Gallipoli. Such pride often leads to romanticisation and a wide social acceptance of militarism as brave, noble, and necessary.

This answer suggests that there is a need to be more critical of the campaign and Australia's involvement; however, the soldiers' actions and/or motives should be revered, or their involvement understood, as "a result of immense social pressure and ignorance of the reality of war and the reality of death." AGHS9 concludes her response with a suggestion that Gallipoli should be remembered as "a tragic military error which killed thousands and demonstrated the effects of social pressure at the time of World War I." Her response also highlights the strong influence of popular culture, whereby she makes reference to "an example of poor communication and terrible military strategy," an attitude popular in the Australian psyche despite being historically inaccurate. Moreover, although she critiques the commemoration of Gallipoli in her first response, here she states, "The soldiers who fought certainly showed courage and resilience, and I believe those virtues should be respected." It is as though the military campaign itself can be critiqued, but not soldiers' actions or motives. She communicates the contradictions of how Gallipoli could be remembered today—an example of higher order thinking and the contradictions of the commemoration of this historical event.

*Complexities of an international conflict*

MHS7 suggests that remembrance of Gallipoli should not just focus on the Australian perspective, citing the British perspective as also important to remember. MHS7 suggests that he considers remembrance of the deceased as an important factor in remembering Gallipoli today: "...even if the morals of the battle weren't just, we all must remember the young and the old that had laid down their lives for their family and for their country." MHS7 offers an interesting perspective: He mentions that Gallipoli is an event that should be remembered because "we should remember the events of both British and Aussie forces," but he goes on to say that this is not due to any inherent "goodness" of the cause. MHS7 finishes his responses within a discourse of soldier sacrifice, writing that "we all must remember the young and the old that had laid down their lives for their family and for their country." While arguably adhering to a discourse citing

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individual sacrifice for the nation, he acknowledges that there are contradictions in the current remembrance of Gallipoli, in particular highlighting the moral aspect of the conflict.

MHS9 feels that Gallipoli is important to remember in Australian history for several reasons, including international relations and war experiences. In response to Question 1, she cites the need to remember Gallipoli from an “ethical perspective,” explaining that, “Though many disagree with the concept/execution of war, it is particularly important to recognise and respect the soldiers and their experiences. In terms of Australia’s history, it’s helpful to review the reasons we participated and how this could potentially prevent war again.” She is able to articulate her perspective that war is rather futile while acknowledging the efforts of those who fought. Like other students, she is optimistic that understanding this will prevent future wars, writing, “In terms of Australia’s history, it’s helpful to review the reasons we participated and how this could potentially prevent war again.”

In a demonstration of his ability to understand the contradictions of the remembrance of Gallipoli and the significance it has to Australians today, WC45 discusses the “heroic glory,” “glorified battle,” “bloody war,” “young men that unwittingly were bribed into participating,” and “wasting young lives for a pointless battle that ultimately failed.” In doing so, he places blame on authorities, particularly Great Britain (popularly blamed, including in the 1981 Australian feature film *Gallipoli*), for the military disaster. Yet he still understands that Gallipoli is viewed with reverence, and that it has been “glorified in a sense...to believe it as a glorified battle in which British and Australian infantry troops bravely sacrificed their lives.” However, WC45 thinks it should be taught “in the true form that it took place a bloody war of affiliation that cost countless numbers of young lives all to gain new kilometres on the battlefield.” WC45 adopts a clear anti-British sentiment, writing that “Gallipoli, while a significant event, was a perfect example of British arrogance and the exploitation of the ‘Anzacs’ both in Gallipoli and the western front” and that “Many Australians lack a [word illegible] perspective on Gallipoli, seeing it as a heroic charge by Australian troops when in fact we were the ones invading a country and destroying land that does not belong to the commonwealth.”

#### *Emotional nationalism linked to contradictions*

There are examples of students who contradict themselves, seemingly unaware that they are doing so—such is the deep emotional attachment they feel to Gallipoli. One such example is AGHS8, who provides a description of how traditional forms of remembrance show an appreciation of those who served in the Gallipoli campaign. In her response to Question 2, AGHS8

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provides reasoning for her belief that these traditions should continue, evoking discourses often used in ascribing Australian national identity and official narratives of remembrance. It seems as though AGHS8 is unaware of her contradictory statements. In her response to Question 1, she discusses the commemoration of Gallipoli from a factual, historical perspective, stating, “We remember and thank them for their service at Gallipoli, despite their loss in taking over Turkish land. This is because we like to justify their loss of life to war through our appreciation of their dedication and service to Australia and New Zealand.” In this statement, she acknowledges the service of soldiers without falling into the familiar trope of gushing about sacrifice and courage; there is no romanticization of soldier service. However, in her response to Question 2, she writes:

Gallipoli would benefit more significantly through our remembrance of those who served our country at this war due to their dedication. We should remember this historical event through representing the Anzacs as people who bravely fought for our country at Gallipoli. This appreciation should be dedicated to those who served our country in Gallipoli through keeping the tradition of having Remembrance Day once a year within war memorials or other symbols of remembrance toward those who served our country at Gallipoli.

By including terms such as “those who served *our* country...due to their *dedication*,” and “*bravely* fought for *our* country,” she sees the actions of the soldiers as being part of the Anzac myth, which can be seen when coupled with her response about Remembrance Day, war memorials, and “other symbols of remembrance” as important ways to remember soldiers.

### **Analysis and Discussion**

A popular idea in the general discourse of Australia’s recognition and commemoration of WWI is the view that Australian soldiers are unique, heroes, and seemingly invincible. This view is now applied by default to other major wars, conflicts, and peace-keeping operations that Australia participates in: World War II, Korea, Vietnam, East Timor, Iraq, and other Middle Eastern theatres of war and war-like conditions. The nationalistic sentimentality in the public sphere regarding Australian soldiers in the lead up to Anzac Day is pervasive. This type of perspective about soldiers has been widely reported in academic and popular publications, including critiques of the infallible soldier discourse (Stockings, 2010). In the findings for this research, students frequently used terms such as “sacrifice” and “they died for us” in their responses, reflecting broader public discourses.

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It is a historical fact that the Gallipoli campaign was a colossal military failure for the Allies. Recognizing that the Gallipoli campaign was a military defeat can sometimes be lost on students who see the hype surrounding commemorations of this campaign as evidence of a victory for the Allies. Some students saw the military failure of the Gallipoli campaign as a source of pride, a concept that is unfamiliar to many nations, but has become so normalized in the Australian context that it is “natural” to feel this connection to nationhood borne out of a military defeat. Here, Michael Apple’s (2004) idea of official knowledge, usually used in the school context, can be applied to the public pedagogical influences on students’ understandings of Australia’s participation in WWI. The concept of official knowledge theorizes the way in which dominant values are communicated to students as a type of non-overt way of inculcating students to view the world in particular ways. It is argued that dominant values are those usually viewed in society as being “normal,” “just,” or “right” and broadly accepted to be “true.” In a sense, they have been repeated so many times that they become naturalized as a way of understanding the world, becoming part of the hegemonic practice of schooling students (see, e.g., the understanding of hegemony offered by Luke, 1995-1996). Hall (1988) explains how this concept is practiced:

The social distribution of knowledge *is* skewed. And since the social institutions most directly implicated in its formation and transmission—the family/school/media triplet—are grounded in and structured by the class relations that surround them, the distribution of the available codes with which to decode or unscramble the meaning of events in the world, and the languages we use to construct interests, are bound to reflect the unequal relations of power that obtain in the area of symbolic production as in other spheres... the circle of dominant ideas *does* accumulate the symbolic power to map or classify the world for others... It becomes the horizon of the taken-for-granted: what the world is and how it works, for all practical purposes. (p. 44)

Following Apple’s (2004) and Hall’s (1988) ideas of the relationship between topics broached in the school context and those topics in the public sphere (also acknowledging the influence of family, which is not insignificant), the responses from students are part of the messiness of how people develop their understanding of particular topics. Therefore, students’ responses can be read as a response to their schooling as well as to the influence of public discourses, the intersections of which are not always clearly delineated.

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## **Conclusion**

The pervasiveness of World War I commemoration and memorialization in schools and in the public sphere means that the history of Anzac is kept well and truly alive. As historian Tom Griffiths wrote in *The Art of Time Travel* (2017), “The American writer William Faulkner famously said that ‘The past is never dead. It’s not even past.’ This simple, powerful quote declares what we know to be true, that the past is never gone or left behind; we are never free of its burden or is inspiration” (p. 8).

With such a prominent place in the school curriculum and in public remembrance, the history of Gallipoli, WWI, and Australia’s involvement in international conflicts remains an important topic for researchers to pursue, and one that is still very much alive and present. Holding a unique place in Australia’s list of annual public holidays, Anzac Day is one that remains influential for shaping citizens’ ideas about what it means to be Australian. The students who participated in this project are, by and large, acutely aware of this influence and the complexities and contradictions associated with the remembrance of Gallipoli.

For educators, this is a reminder that the influence of public and popular discourses cannot be ignored and that students bring knowledge about important national issues and events with them to the classroom. This provides an opportunity to work with students, assisting them to understand historical approaches to understanding the present, to explicitly discuss issues of historical consciousness.

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