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# But what do they really think? Methodological challenges of investigating young people's perspectives of war remembrance

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## Abstract

This article contributes to discussions surrounding the development of 'analytical tools' sensitive to the fluid nature of collective memory and all its 'varieties, contradictions, and dynamism' (Olick, 2008: 159). It explores the methodological challenges of investigating how young people in New Zealand and the United Kingdom negotiate processes and practices of war remembrance and how, as researchers, we can begin to decipher the diverse responses young people have in recalling and making sense of their society's violent past. Examples from earlier research projects in the UK and New Zealand, led by each co-author, are used to problematize the methodological challenges in our respective projects with the aim to encourage discussion around developing youth-centred, inclusive and participatory methodologies that unpack the cultural memories of war and situate young people's voices prominently in the research process.

**Keywords:** methodology; First World War; remembrance; youth; Britain; New Zealand

## Introduction

In his seminal essay, 'From collective memory to the sociology of mnemonic practices and products', sociologist Jeffrey K. Olick (2008: 159) emphasized that the ever-changing nature of collective memory demanded 'analytical tools sensitive to its varieties, contradictions, and dynamism'. This article contributes to the development of such 'analytical tools' by exploring the methodological challenges of investigating how young people in New Zealand and the United Kingdom negotiate processes and practices of war remembrance and how, as researchers, we can begin to decipher the diverse responses young people have in recalling and making sense of their society's violent past. It is informed by the Teaching and Learning War Research Network (<http://teachlearnwar.exeter.ac.uk>) – a transdisciplinary, international project funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) that ran from 2017 to 2020 and involved researchers and educators from the fields of history, education, literature and politics – and draws on the authors' individual research projects examining young people's perceptions of war remembrance and commemoration.

In this article, we explore how several different research methodologies (both qualitative and quantitative) can be used to investigate the phenomenon of youth engagement in First World War commemoration. As scholars in social geography have demonstrated, it is useful for researchers to make space to think critically about what underpins a research project when focus can, all too often, be subsumed by a drive

to analyse and discuss the results they produce (Hopkins, 2007b). We draw upon our experiences working on two research projects in the UK and New Zealand (Pennell, 2016, 2018b; Sheehan and Davison, 2017) in order to reflect critically upon the negotiation of methodological challenges in practice. Our earlier publications, with their attention to detailed interrogation of the results of our data sets, offer little space to do this, beyond an introductory overview of the methodologies employed in the course of our research. This article, therefore, offers a much-needed meta-methodological reflection designed to encourage researchers in history and education to consider the utility and adequacy of the research instruments they employ when engaging with young people. Our aim is to invite scholars to think about how research instruments designed by adults, with adults in mind, can serve to distort the richness of children's responses so that the prediction that children's remembrance is simplistic and unreflexive becomes something of a self-fulfilling prophecy. As a result, we contribute to discussions around developing youth-centred, inclusive and participatory methodologies that unpack the cultural memories of war and situate young people's voices prominently in the research process.

While we are cognizant of the ongoing and necessary reflection on ethics in research with and for children and young people, championed by Elsbeth Robson (2018) and as part of a significant special edition of *Children's Geographies* (Volume 16, Number 5), the limits of space mean the focus of this article remains solely on methodological approaches. We state this early in the article as an acknowledgement that each methodological approach discussed creates its own set of ethical challenges that must be engaged with as part of a robust and rigorous research project.

## Young people and remembrance of the First World War

War remembrance has intensified in recent years (McCartney, 2014), but the way young people engage with the cultural messages about the world wars is largely unexplored, even though 'many of the unconscious attitudes that young people have about the past' (especially in regard to seminal historical events that are aligned with notions of identity) are traceable to elements of 'the educational process' (Roediger and Wertsch, 2008: 14). The commemoration of the First World War has built on the 'memory boom' of the last twenty years (Evans and Lunn, 1997). Evident prior to 2014, but heightened during the centenary anniversaries of the First World War, young people in New Zealand, Australia and the UK play a prominent role in commemorative activities and are encouraged to participate in practices of remembrance that keep particular cultural memories of the war alive. They are seen as crucial participants in this process 'for it is they who have to bear the burden of memory in order to pass it onto subsequent generations' (Pennell, 2016: 38), exacerbated by the fact that there are now no living veterans of the First World War.

Young people are often at the centre of official commemorative practice, conveying particular memory messages about appropriate ways to remember the First World War (for example, wearing the medals of their great-grandparents at Remembrance Day services and/or marching/standing silently during commemorative events). However, they have limited agency in how they participate in rituals of remembrance and are discouraged, within the confines of official public remembrance activities, from considering the purpose of war, military involvement in contemporary society, or which narratives of war are being commemorated at the expense of others (Pennell, 2016; Sheehan, 2017). There are rare, if any, opportunities for them to challenge the powerful national narratives associated with the First World War and

to ask: why should we do things just because we have always done them? Rather, young people are socialized into an established set of protocols that are framed by a 'symbolic repertoire' promoted by the state to maintain 'a collective national identity' (Ashplant *et al.*, 2000: 7). Protocols are adhered to that aim to foster in young people an adherence to a set of 'invented traditions' created by the nation state, both generating a sense of 'continuity with the past' (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983: 1) and reinforcing the emotional ties of belonging that are framed by the fixed boundaries of 'imagined' communities (Anderson, 1991: 49).

In this context, conceptualizing how young people make sense of their participation in remembrance activities is methodologically challenging, given their closely circumscribed role and the expectation that they demonstrate an empathic, reverential demeanour that respectfully acknowledges the experience of war and those who died in it. This is further complicated as the nature of remembrance changes from generation to generation (Winter, 2006); in the case of the First World War, it has become a mediated or second-hand reality that is part of powerful national myths about identity. Furthermore, certainly in public official forums, questioning and critique is, in large part, neither encouraged nor welcomed. These contextual restraints are exacerbated by the eclectic interdisciplinary nature of the field of cultural memory studies, which suffers from 'a conceptual disjointedness' (Erll and Nünning, 2008: 1). There is, therefore, some way to go in designing effective methodologies that illuminate young people's complex viewpoints of the dominant cultural memories of war. To expand this discussion further, we problematize methodologies of two research projects that we have individually completed that sought to unpack young people's perceptions of the First World War.

## New Zealand

In New Zealand, the focus of war remembrance is Anzac (Australian and New Zealand Army Corps) Day (25 April), which commemorates the country's part in the unsuccessful attempt by the Anzacs to invade the Gallipoli peninsula in 1915. When young people engage in commemorative Anzac Day activities, this is typically characterized by a sanctification of First World War cultural memory messages that discourage other perspectives beyond an unquestioning reverence for those who served. Students' perceptions of this event (and the First World War) are largely bounded by experiences of the nation state – rather than seeing the war as a global event – and in this they reflect international notions of remembrance of the First World War that have seen each belligerent nation construct a distinct narrative about what the Great War means for them (Reynolds, 2013). Even Australians and New Zealanders (whose war experiences in the First World War were largely similar) have interpreted the meaning of this conflict differently over the last hundred years (Sheehan and Taylor, 2016). Owing to the centrality of the 'Anzac spirit' to New Zealand identity (Slade, 2003), the commemoration of the centenary of the First World War (2014–18) was encouraged and supported by various New Zealand government departments, including the Ministry of Education (McKenna, 2014).

In the wider context of commemoration of the First World War in New Zealand, a study was set up to explore the extent to which young people shared the core assumptions that underpin official contemporary notions of the Anzac/Gallipoli narrative (Sheehan and Davison, 2017). In particular, we were interested to see if young people were being socialized to uncritically accept the official cultural memory messages about the First World War, or whether they shared a wider range of perspectives than

appears in the public arena. The aim was to find out if young people were passively receiving memory messages (for example, seeing war through the lens of sacrifice and heroism as they are expected to do) or if they were aware of wider perspectives of the First World War, such as its global nature, conscientious objectors and deserters, thus going beyond the parameters of the dominant official narrative.

The first part of the study involved uncovering data deductively through a survey questionnaire that aimed to examine young people's attitudes to the significance of Gallipoli. Questionnaires give the impression of being unbiased (our personal involvement with the respondents was minimal), and this method allowed us collect information from a large number of young people (aged 13 and 14 years) that was reasonably representative (n=1,453, from 12 purposively sampled schools). The survey asked two questions. First, *Is Gallipoli a significant event for us to remember?* Second, *If so what aspects of Gallipoli are most important for us to remember?* The survey respondents overwhelmingly ascribed significance to the 1915 Gallipoli campaign: 97 per cent of respondents said that Gallipoli is a significant event for New Zealanders to remember, with the majority of the answers ascribing significance to this event because 'soldiers had lost or sacrificed their lives for the future and for us' (Sheehan and Davison, 2017). Participants connected the loss of life in 1915 to the idea of a debt that present-day New Zealanders owed to historical characters from the past; commemorating Anzac Day on 25 April each year was seen as an annual reminder of what is owed. However, very few students showed a grasp of accurate historical details. The survey findings suggest that for the respondents, the Gallipoli campaign was a significant event that required a debt of gratitude for a sacrifice made, but that they had very little knowledge of the exact nature of that sacrifice. In short, loss and sacrifice were the dominant way of making meaning about this event, but this was not based on historical evidence.

While the findings did identify some broad themes, there was something unsatisfying about the results of this survey. The findings appeared to reinforce the popular view that young people today do not know enough about the past, especially in regard to significant events such as the two world wars. The *Daily Mail* is not alone in lamenting that 'Two-thirds of young people don't know the year the Great War ended ...' (Sharma, 2012); even scholars of the calibre of Professor Margaret MacMillan claim young people have limited understanding of the First World War, beyond trenches and war poetry (Moss, 2014). Using a questionnaire had not told us how well-equipped young people were to consider the complexity of war remembrance, or the extent to which young people are passive in responding to dominant cultural memory messages (which was our aim). Our questions reflected what we thought was important; while participants were invited to write an explanation for their answer, we had no way of knowing if respondents shared our understanding of the question or whether they had simply told us what they thought we wanted to hear. Similar concerns are raised by Mark McKenna and Stuart Ward (2007) in their critique of Bruce Scates's approach to analysing the responses of battlefield tourists at Gallipoli in *Return to Gallipoli: Walking the battlefields of the Great War* (2006).

The survey had told us that the vast majority of participants saw Gallipoli as significant and, in this respect, they reflected the dominant Anzac narrative. To some extent, this was not unexpected. In New Zealand, the First World War is closely aligned with notions of national identity, and critique and/or dissent is discouraged. In this context, therefore, it is not surprising that young people mirrored the hegemonic public view of Gallipoli and saw this event primarily through the lens of sacrifice, duty and heroism (and repeated the claim that the war had guaranteed freedom for young

people today). These are not only the views promoted in official rituals of remembrance but are also dominant in the wider community. For example, at Te Papa Tongarewa in Wellington (the national museum of New Zealand), over 2.5 million visitors have visited the exhibition *Gallipoli: The Scale of Our War* since it opened in April 2015. It presents a story of the campaign using huge life-like figures (2.4 times human size) that represent selected participants, with the focus of the exhibition on New Zealand's role at Gallipoli. There is little attempt to present the campaign as part of a global experience of the First World War or to include – in any great detail – other participants (including the Turks). Nearby is the *Great War Exhibition*, which also opened in 2015. It was the initiative of Sir Peter Jackson and commemorates the role played by New Zealand in the First World War with movie-like depictions of the war, weaponry (including a 10-tonne tank and 11-tonne artillery piece) and 5,000 tiny hand-painted figurines that 're-enact' the battle of Chunuk Bair. Like *Gallipoli: The Scale of Our War*, the focus is on New Zealand. The global dimension of the war is largely ignored and there is little detail on other participants.

One option to dig deeper into young New Zealanders' understanding of Anzac Day commemorations and the history of Gallipoli was through interviews and focus groups, techniques that bring memory into view as 'something ... we do, not something ... we have' (Olick, 2008: 159). Both are established and widely used qualitative research methods, but in this particular case they exposed some initial problems. We did not know the participants; young people operating in focus groups with unfamiliar researchers are unlikely to share sensitive information (Hopkins, 2007a). Also, the quality of information can be variable as 'not all participants have either the background or the inclination to engage in extended, abstract verbal exchanges' (Barton, 2015: 181). Furthermore, focus groups and interviews provide more powerful insights only when they are located within a large body of data that has identified a strong theme. In regard to our survey, this was not the case. Consequently, we decided to use an elicitation task to inductively unpack what young people were thinking. Elicitation techniques refer to research tasks that use visual, verbal or written stimuli to encourage people to share their ideas, and they are especially useful in finding out about participants' thinking when social, cultural or psychological barriers make it difficult to talk about a topic (Barton, 2015). They have the advantage of displacing the focus of researchers onto external stimuli and changing the power balance between researchers and participants to gather rich data on an area that it is challenging to get young people to talk about (ibid.).

We administered an elicitation task to young people in one of the 12 secondary schools that participated in the survey (n=343; 13 and 14 years old). The school was selected because its student population is broadly representative of New Zealand's growing diversity (and the demographic of the original survey). Participants were asked to view six images of the First World War and rank three of these in order of importance. We selected images that provided alternative perspectives on the dominant First World War narrative of sacrifice and duty: the experience of women (as nurses), children (as school cadets), conscientious objectors and indigenous Maori soldiers, as well as wounded servicemen and scenes of combat. The elicitation task generated a different response than the survey. When prompted with a range of images, a substantial number of young people prioritized alternative accounts that complicated the dominant narratives of Anzac/Gallipoli and provided multiple perspectives that undermined the sense of a single story of this event being correct. The methodologies employed made a difference to the insights gained.

What emerged from the elicitation task is that when given the opportunity to do so, young people were able to engage critically with the production of cultural memory messages about war remembrance. While they seldom have the opportunity to question the purpose of war (or to consider which narratives of the war are being commemorated at the expense of others), young people are not as passive in this process as they appear when they engage with official commemorative activities. Far from being passive consumers of national narratives about Anzac, the ways that these young New Zealanders made meaning of war remembrance was complex, nuanced and critical.

## UK

On 11 October 2012, at Imperial War Museums, London, UK Prime Minister David Cameron unveiled the UK government's plans to mark the centenary of the First World War. He highlighted that it was an opportunity to 'provide the foundations upon which to build an enduring cultural and educational legacy' putting 'young people front and centre in our commemoration' in order 'to ensure that the sacrifice and service of a hundred years ago is still remembered in a hundred years' time' (Cameron, 2012). The cornerstone of this youth-focused commemorative activity, at a cost of £5.3 million, was the First World War Centenary Battlefield Tours Programme (FWWCBTP), delivered by UCL Institute of Education (UCL IOE) and Equity, a specialist provider of group tours for schools, colleges and other educational institutions, and designed to give the opportunity for at least two students and one teacher from every state-funded secondary school in England to visit the battlefields on the Western Front between 2014 and 2019.

Between 2015 and 2017, co-author Pennell undertook extensive investigations into student responses to the content and experience of the tours as part of her role as Academic Advisory Board member in charge of student evaluation (Pennell, 2018b). The aim was to interrogate what ideas about the First World War and its remembrance young people were being exposed to on the tours and what they took away from that. The approach was influenced by methodologies established in the fields of history, critical heritage studies, cultural and historical geography, and, where relevant, tourism research (Baldwin and Sharpley, 2009; Dunkley *et al.*, 2011; Iles, 2006, 2008; Miles, 2013; Scates, 2006; Seaton, 2000, 2002; Winter, 2009, 2011). A 34-question paper survey was distributed to the students, between 10 and 18 years old, who travelled to France and Belgium as part of the FWWCPTP spring tours 2015 and 2017 (reduced to 33 questions in 2017). Out of the 952 students who participated in these two tours, 822 completed the survey, a rate of 86 per cent. Embedded ethnographical observation took place during three tours in February 2015, 2016 and 2017, allowing the researcher the opportunity to speak informally to students, teachers, battlefield tour guides and serving army personnel accompanying the tour groups. A series of focus groups and follow-up group interviews were hosted with student participants in July 2015 and July 2017 to explore their responses to the survey and the issues it raised in more depth.

To ensure the highest completion rate possible, the survey was distributed in hard copy while participants were still 'captive', rather than after the tour had ended, when the researcher would be reliant on overworked schoolteachers to disseminate the online link. Completing the survey immediately at the end of the tour would also ensure fresh responses, with focus group interviews scheduled for five months later incorporating a greater degree of reflection. The high completion rate of over 80 per cent was tempered by the knowledge that students were filling in their surveys

in close proximity to their peers and teacher, tired and probably emotionally drained, after an intense three-day field trip sleeping in shared dormitories.

The questions for the survey were compiled in consultation with the FWWCBTP Academic Advisory Board and UCL IOE team. Through a mixture of tick-box and free-text answers, young people were asked about their experiences of war commemoration both before and during the tour, whether they thought it was important to remember the First World War and why, as well as questions specified by the UCL IOE team, who wanted feedback on tour logistics, such as educational content, food and accommodation. As a result, the survey became unwieldy in length and served as a reminder of the sensitivities of undertaking partnership research with an external stakeholder. The target group of young people could only be reached thanks to the cooperation and support of the UCL IOE team; the resulting research findings had to be as useful to them as they were to the researcher. Collaborative and cooperative research – understood in the UK context as ‘co-production, or “research with, by and for communities”’ is at once laudable, expected by funders and universities, and complex (Lloyd and Moore, 2015: 235).

To some degree, the high completion rate masks the number of surveys that were completed as briefly as possible (that is, answering only the tick-box questions), as well as a small number of surveys where the student felt compelled to record their resentment at having to complete ‘homework’ at the end of the tour (although the number of rich free-text answers demonstrate the high level of engagement the young people had with both the tour itself and the feedback survey). The survey length also exacerbated the difficulty of incorporating young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) into this aspect of the research. In those cases, the surveys were either completed by their accompanying teacher in collaboration with the student (thus risking a sense of ‘expected’ answer), or not done at all.

The results of the survey echoed the overarching themes revealed by the New Zealand survey. The vast majority of survey responses, both in 2015 and 2017, emphasized an uncritical engagement with the First World War, ascribing significance to it because of notions of respect and duty to the sacrifice of fallen servicemen. In 2015, around 92 per cent of survey respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement ‘I don’t think it is important to remember the First World War’ as a result of being on the tour; this increased to 95 per cent in 2017. In both 2015 and 2017, 82 per cent agreed or strongly agreed that remembering the First World War was important because ‘it would be disrespectful not to’. As with the Gallipoli research project, the survey identified that relatively well-trodden and national areas of First World War understanding had been developed by participating in the tour (major battles on the Western Front, scale of casualties, trench systems and dugouts), as opposed to more global aspects of the conflict and/or non-combatant experiences. Overall, while providing an interesting foundation for further research – and meeting the key requirement of the partnership agreement with the UCL IOE team (to quantify student satisfaction with the tours for an intelligible report to funders) – there were serious limits to the methodology of a mass survey. As identified by McKenna and Ward (2007: 143, footnote 7), the sheer volume of responses made it difficult to gain a ‘deeper sense of personal histories, experiences and assumptions’ that the survey respondents brought with them on the tour.

A series of focus groups held approximately four to five months after the tour (depending on which coach students departed on) were therefore hosted in order to enable a greater interrogation of the survey results and the students’ experiences on the tour. Focus groups are a well-known qualitative approach to gathering data



and are increasingly being used with young people, particularly in health education and health psychology (Gibson, 2007). As a number of methodological reflections on the use of focus groups identify, there is the potential to draw rich data produced from the interaction between group members that is impossible to replicate in one-to-one interviews (Bagnoli and Clark, 2010; Gibson, 2007; Hopkins, 2010; Kennedy *et al.*, 2001). They also help young people to feel comfortable because they are among their peers. Finally, they allowed the opportunity for SEND students to be more involved, as focus groups free children from the data-gathering limitations imposed by literacy that plague quantitative methods using self-report.

Just as with the original tour, all students attended the focus group in pairs from their school. While they may not have known everyone in the focus group, they had a known peer from school who could act as a potential source of reassurance. In 2015, two focus groups were held to ensure numbers were kept low (ten and four members respectively) in order to engender lively discussion and manageable activity. Each group was made up of a mixture of gender and regional location, but age groups were kept relatively similar (14 to 16 years) in order to facilitate discussion. Each group included two students from SEND schools. The focus groups were held in a university seminar room with lunch and ice-breaker activities preceding the formal discussion. Information about what was involved and the types of questions up for discussion were circulated to participating students and their parents/guardians and teachers in advance of the focus group.

The focus groups created space for the young people to elaborate on their survey responses, providing much deeper and richer reflections. The intention was always for students to 'tell [their] story in the way [they] thought best' (Scates, 2007: 313). In particular, a clearer picture of a sense of serious responsibility felt by the young people on the tours emerged. Many of the focus group participants spoke of a sense of duty in carrying the memory of the First World War forward and 'passing on' their knowledge of the battlefield cemeteries to their friends. A Year 11 student felt a great sense of responsibility – equating it with the (assumed) duty felt by soldiers who volunteered to fight in the British army during the war: 'these men gave their lives in service of their country. It's our duty to keep the memory alive'.

Amid this reverence for both the act of remembrance and the soldiers who fought and died during the First World War, the focus groups also sparked an interesting discussion about the implications of serving soldiers accompanying students on the tour and the impact this might have on critical reflection. When asked about aspects of the tour they would seek to change, two Year 11 students immediately responded with 'the presence of our military'. When asked to develop this point, they talked about how it continued a sense of 'us' versus 'them', with Britain being victorious over Germany. They enquired whether the FWWCBTP might consider having serving German soldiers accompany future tours. Another student felt that the presence of the military closed down the space for critical reflection and asking questions. In their view, no one was going to respond to the enquiry question 'should we remember?' at Tyne Cot in the negative if a serving soldier was within earshot. The focus groups proved effective in teasing out complex and highly thoughtful responses.

The final technique employed in the UK case study was participant observation. Participant observation has a long tradition in sociology as a way of understanding symbolic meanings and discursive practices within micro-groups and brief encounters (Bogdan, 1972; Kluckhohn, 1940; McCall and Simmons, 1969). Eric Cohen's (1988) work on authenticity in tourism research emphasizes that one cannot understand authentic engagement with a site through simply reading a list of motivations off a list based

on a priori inferences and categories. At its heart, understanding how young people interact with the cultural memory of the First World War is about personal meaning; to understand that, you need to be in a position to observe reactions and interactions in specific situated contexts. Quantitative surveys (and, to some extent, structured interviews) can potentially 'flatten' understanding of authentic responses because they are done outside the settings of 'natural life' (Seaton, 2002). Participant observation is therefore an important way of trying to capture the meanings and purpose of battlefield visits for these young people as it happened, rather than 'trying to assess motivation outside the context of the behaviour under scrutiny' (ibid.: 310). This method perhaps provided the greatest degree of access to thinking about questions of what meaning young people make of war remembrance. Yet it should be qualified by an acknowledgement that students were being observed in unfamiliar, highly ritualized and quasi-sacred environments, within the context of a formal government-funded trip that participants knew they were lucky to be on. To some extent, their behaviour was conditioned from the moment the students stepped on the tour bus.

Participant observation involved four days of touring amounting to approximately 38 hours of contact at the accommodation, on the coach and at sites. Interactions between the researcher and the students took place during the day at cemeteries, memorial sites and museums, as well as socially over meals and during evening activities. Recording was made via a field diary, with notes being written throughout the working day/evening, as well as using a Dictaphone to record thoughts and reflections in situations where writing was impeded. On occasion, the young people were stopped for a more formal interview recorded on a Dictaphone (with their permission). I also eavesdropped on conversations and responses to sites that I observed, noting these impressions in my field diary.

Despite this privileged position of being able to observe and listen, I remained an outsider. I was introduced as a member of the Academic Advisory Board responsible for evaluating student responses to the tours, rather than as someone officially involved in conducting the tour (in the same way as the Battlefield Tour Guide or the Programme Lead). The boundaries between myself and the young people were always very apparent, exacerbated by age difference and the position of power I held as part of the tour's organizational structure. Some felt able to talk to me quite openly about their responses to the tour; others gave formal responses that perhaps best honoured their role of 'ambassador' for the school and the programme.

The key benefit of this aspect of the research methodology was witnessing 'in the moment' responses to interactions with the sites, people and objects that the students encountered on the tours. These snatches, glimpses and insights of conversation and behaviour are impossible to recapture in a survey or focus group, and they reveal a great deal about the complex ways young people interact with the cultural memory of modern war. During one of the pre-departure object-handling sessions, two Year 9 students – exploring the fuse of a First World War artillery shell – were overheard saying: 'I love the way we learn about such a sad thing in such a cheery way – it's great!', at once capturing the tensions and contradictions between the assumed sombre tone of a battlefield tour and the enjoyment of kinaesthetic learning. In the same session, across all three observations, it was striking the number of young people who started taking 'selfies' of themselves and their friends wearing the uniform artefacts (helmets) or pointing a bayonet, ready to upload to a social media account such as Facebook or Instagram. This echoes other investigations into battlefield visits by Baldwin and Sharpley (2009) and Scates (2006), whereby young people have a 'hybrid experience' that is at once student, pilgrim and tourist (Pennell, 2018a).

Yet at the same time, another register of emotions was being experienced on the same tour. On the Western Front, at the cemeteries and memorials to dead men whom the young people had never met, many were moved to tears. One Year 12 student laid a wreath at the headstone of a soldier who had attended their school who was killed in action during the war. The student had researched the life story of this individual before the tour. When asked how he felt after he had laid the wreath, he said: 'It's really tough, actually. I feel a huge sense of closure. Here's someone, we followed his journey and now we're here, paying our respects'. Participant observation allowed the different changes in energy and emotion to be charted over the course of the tour, from the sobriety of the mood at memorial sites, to the excitement of going shopping for Belgian chocolate after the Last Post ceremony at the Menin Gate. Being able to talk to the young people immediately after they had seen or been involved in an aspect of the tour allowed a unique insight into their responses. For example, many students felt galvanized to increase remembrance activity in the UK after witnessing the Last Post ceremony at the Menin Gate. As with other empirical research into emotions and battlefield tourism, contradictory feelings – whether nationalist pride, sadness for lost combatants on all sides, disbelief at the senselessness of war, or a desire for peace – were felt all at once, sometimes by the same individual (McKay, 2013; Osbaldiston and Petray, 2011).

## Discussion

Like Scates's (2006) work on Australian battlefield tourism to Gallipoli, the research projects into young British and New Zealander responses to their participation in war remembrance during the centenary of the First World War highlight the complexity and range of views held simultaneously by a group of people often overlooked as immature and incapable of independent thought, and thus not worthy of study. It echoes Graeme Davison's (2003: 80) work on Australian commemorative traditions, which challenges any approach to the study of young people's opinion that treats them 'literally as suckers, ready to fill their inner emptiness with whatever mythology is on hand'. Instead, what we have witnessed in both the UK and New Zealand are young people who are not confined by the restrictive binaries of 'pro-' or 'anti-' war remembrance. Something more complex, nuanced, elastic and contradictory is going on that requires greater exploration and demands methodologies that allow us to 'untangle the diverse processes, products, and practices through which societies confront and represent aspects of their pasts' (Olick, 2008: 159).

Inspired in particular by the work of Peter E. Hopkins (2010), this article has attempted to highlight the benefits and drawbacks of various methodologies – surveys, focus groups, elicitation tasks and participant observation – used when researching young people's responses to, and engagement with, the commemoration of the First World War in the UK and New Zealand. Surveys have a number of advantages, enabling the collection of large numbers of responses in a format ready for straightforward data analysis, as well as securing anonymity and thus creating a space for young people who lack the confidence to speak in a focus group or interview to have their voices heard. In the UK case study, surveys also met a crucial objective of partnership working with the external stakeholder, who acted as gatekeeper to the cohort of young people. However, both case studies highlighted the limited nature of this method, in particular the two-dimensional and flattened responses surveys produced, with little sense of the context, motivations and perspectives that shaped individual responses and the

inherent risk that the survey respondents were providing answers to questions that only we, as researchers, found interesting and meaningful.

Participant observation in a closed-field setting, such as an organized battlefield tour, is an increasingly attractive methodology, advocated by researchers within tourism studies such as Seaton (2002). The UK case study demonstrated the potential value of this type of 'travelling laboratory', observing young people in a specific setting in an attempt to explore the meanings connected to the tour experience through both what they said and what they *did* at those sites. The young participants were treated as agents, rather than 'empty vessels', in the processes and practices of war remembrance. However, this methodology should not be assumed to be entirely 'authentic'; the young people were not being observed in their everyday lives but instead in a very specific and quasi-sacred environment with a number of variables (such as being selected by their teachers to act as ambassadors for their schools on a government-funded tour) conditioning their behaviour (Pennell, 2018b). Observation, as opposed to verbal approaches such as an interview or focus group, can lead to misinterpretation: a young person may look bored and disengaged at a particular site, when in fact they may be feeling deeply moved but are tired after a full day's schedule. There is also something exploitative about treating subjects as 'lab rats', which could be perceived as intrusive by the young people involved.

What unites the methodological advantages of both case studies is the rich and fruitful reflections that stemmed from the focus groups held with British participants and elicitation tasks with young people in New Zealand. These approaches allowed for a greater degree of reflection within a relatively neutral space not necessarily associated with war remembrance. The power balance between researchers and participants was shifted, so that these young people had more control over expressing their views. They also enabled the researchers to enquire more deeply about the types of responses the young people had and the language they employed (for example, by asking them to clarify what they meant by words such as sacrifice, heroism, closure and respect). It was within these settings that young people were able to offer more reflective and critical perspectives. In light of the debate between Scates (2006, 2007) and McKenna and Ward (2007) regarding the degree to which academics can ensure the 'independence and outspokenness' of the young people they are researching, it would seem that out of the approaches used, focus groups and elicitation tasks enabled young people to express themselves most clearly, with the added advantage of the researchers being able to dissect responses *in situ* for additional layers of meaning and clarification.

Moving forward, we have three reflections. First, whether discussing their understanding of Gallipoli in a classroom setting or visiting memorial sites on the Western Front, none of these young people were operating in a hermetically sealed space. The meaning young people associated with the processes and practices of remembrance explored in both case studies was not 'discovered' at the time of survey, interview or observation. All the young people involved, consciously or otherwise, brought some degree of understanding of their society's violent past with them and, in some cases, a profound sense of emotional investment. The task for future research, therefore, is to better understand how young people are 'schooled' in the types of meanings around war remembrance, whether formally (in the classroom, via textbooks or on field trips) or informally (through family stories, television, film, literature, computer games, social media, museum visits and holidays). There has to be an awareness of the breadth of cultural influences at play and the interconnectedness of these in shaping young people's understanding of modern war and commemoration.

Second, a project of this nature is going to require time, and not simply because of the breadth of cultural influences that would need exploring and dissecting. Time is required to build trust and acceptance between researchers and participants, as well as to observe young people's responses and interactions over periods of time. Alistair Thomson in *Anzac Memories: Living with the legend* (1994) spent several years with his subjects in order to examine the key influences on their patterns of remembering and forgetting – or what Thomson (1994: 12) terms a 'memory biography'. What is required is a long-term, large-scale research project modelled, perhaps, on Michael Apted's documentary, the *Up* series (1964 onwards), exploring the unique, shared and fluctuating experiences of a small sample group of young people as they interact with war remembrance over the course of their childhood (Thorne, 2009). Colleagues at Oxford Brookes and Brunel universities are undertaking a six-year project Remembrance in Schools (2013–19) investigating remembrance events on or around 11 November in schools in Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire. Although, as yet, there are no published results of this study beyond a guidance pamphlet for schools, its longitudinal framing makes it an important contribution to understandings of young people's participation in remembrance activities in the UK context (see ForcesWatch, 2018).

Finally, a research project of this scale and ambition will only succeed if young people are brought to its centre, where researchers, influenced by the philosophy and practices of participatory action research, work collaboratively *with* young people rather than *on* them (Hopkins, 2010; Kindon, 2005). This complements what Scates (2007: 321) calls a 'new kind of history, one prepared to examine emotion sympathetically and respect as well as critique the deeply subjective realms of personal and collective memory'. A youth-centred project would make room for individuality and non-conformity in ways that a researcher-driven approach is at risk of skewing or stifling. It would therefore meet Olick's (2008: 157–9) principles for exploring the 'diverse landscapes of memory', recognizing collective representations, deep cultural structures, social frameworks *and* individual memories in order to capture the highly complex process of collective remembering and its different contexts and inflections depending on which section of a society we are examining – in this case, its youngest members. Co-designing a collaborative research project with and for young people would be a serious challenge and could well lead to the focus of research evolving away from the research team's original vision. But it would establish, more than any other approach, what Michael Frisch (1990: xxii) has described as a 'shared or sharable authority' around the way young people, across the 'British world', engage with and constantly reconfigure their understanding of the history of modern war and associated remembrance practices.

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