



Moving beyond the Threshold: Investigating Digital Literacies and Historical Thinking in New Zealand Universities.

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Project dates: January 2014 to December 2015

Introduction: This project investigates how university students and new/early career teachers use digital media to support the acquisition and retention of disciplinary threshold concepts for transformative learning and improved student engagement in history-informed subjects. It involves an NZ-wide environmental survey, a MOOC-enabled workshop series, and the development, implementation and evaluation of digitally-mediated coursework.

Aims: The primary question guiding this research project is: what is the relationship between digital literacies, threshold concepts, and transformative learning outcomes in history-informed disciplines at New Zealand universities? Secondary questions are: how can digital literacy be used to improve student learning outcomes and promote transformative learning in history-informed subjects at the tertiary level; how might/could digital media be embraced and/or appropriated to shape the way university students and teachers think about the past; how can students become empowered in their own learning pathways through the introduction and sustained use of digital media and methodologies?

Five objectives focus our study:

- To ascertain how students and teachers currently use digital resources, tools, and e-pedagogy to acquire and retain threshold concepts of disciplinary thinking in history-informed university teaching/learning environments.
- To investigate how prior digital technology learning (both formal and informal) shapes digital literacies and impacts on students' and teachers' ability to engage with digital technology in history-informed teaching/learning environments.
- To identify particular digitally-mediated activities, assessment tasks, and approaches that can/might make a difference to students achieving threshold concepts in history-informed teaching/learning environments.

- To discover how/whether teachers align digital literacy skills with threshold concepts to support successful outcomes in history-informed teaching/learning environments.
- To disseminate findings and recommendations that will inform researchers and practitioners about how digital media can be used effectively to engage with and enhance threshold concepts of disciplinary thinking in history-informed and other teaching/learning environments more widely.

Why is this research important? Large-scale investment in educational resources and technology is based on the assumption that current and future students are or will become digitally literate and that they know how to use digital media effectively and efficiently in inquiry-led and autonomous learning. However, there is little evidence to prove that the 'net generation' grasp the disciplinary threshold concepts of historical thinking, attain successful learning outcomes through technology-mediated teaching, or achieve the key competencies of critical and creative thinking and citizenship that prepare them for future employment and social engagement. Teachers of history-informed subjects need robust research data and best practice evidence to understand and advance the relationship between digital technologies, curriculum planning, and historical thinking in order to effectively integrate digital literacies into the curriculum and to accurately evaluate their impact on student learning. Such evidence can be used to inform public policy about future funding strategies for digital learning practices at universities, addressing where gaps exist in students' access to resources by demographic, subject matter, ethnicity, and gender.



What we plan to do: Using a sequential mixed-methods approach informed by a grounded theory perspective, we begin by undertaking a nation-wide survey of tertiary teachers in history-informed disciplines to gather base-line data and identify new/early career teachers to participate in a massive open online course (MOOC)-enabled workshop. This workshop will explore threshold concepts and digital literacies and develop courses, modules or individual assessments for transformative learning rolled-out and evaluated using e-portfolios for student engagement and self-assessment. Concept mapping as well as textual and network analysis will be used to process the data. Preliminary findings will be subject to constant comparative and educational evaluation methods thus enabling recursive analysis and participatory model-building leading to an open-call Teaching and Learning Symposium. Innovative features of the project include the creation of a digital history portal for communication, project management, and dissemination, the development of a te ao-inflected MOOC workshop, and the use of e-portfolios as a research resource and reflective tool for teaching and learning.

Our partners: Our project team includes established, as well as new and early career teacher-researchers across a range of history-informed disciplines. This team is complemented by an educational technologist and research mentors with expertise in historical thinking, bicultural education, and e-pedagogies. Student and teacher participants, drawn from tertiary institutions across New Zealand, will bring diverse voices to a project dedicated to collaboration, facilitation, and mutual respect.

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Project Team from left: Lizzie Towl, Simone Gigliotti, Mark Sheehan, Rebecca Lenihan, Michael Dudding, André Geldenhuis, Rebecca Priestley, Matt Plummer, Irina Elgort, Sydney Shep.
Absent: Erin Helyard, Ocean Mercier, Rhian Salmon