

CFP

Indigenous and Western Epistemologies in History Education Tensions - Possibilities - Solutions

ed. by Christoph Kühberger/Bongani Shabangu

Every culture has a history. Different modes of dealing with the past and finding this knowledge offer different historical epistemologies and approaches to history. A dominant concept in the world – imposed by colonialism – is the Western idea of “history”, but we find a wide range of other autonomous concepts like the Hawaiian “mo’olelo o’okū’auhau”, the Zulu “Umlando” or the Lakǎóta “waníyetu wówapi”.

History Education, understood as an academic field concerned with the sites, forms, and practices of historical culture, has recently become the focus of intense public and scholarly debate worldwide. By examining how conceptions of the past are produced, mediated, and appropriated, it raises fundamental epistemological questions about the material and immaterial resources that shape the present. These issues stem from the accusation that history education mainly relies on universal Western epistemologies when dealing with the past, which, in turn, tend to suppress other ways of knowing, particularly Indigenous epistemologies. McGregor (2017: 17) notes “that Indigenous approaches to making meaning from the past differ from those of the discipline of history”, which, according to Seixas (2012), makes it nigh impossible to be taught. According to him, history teaching and learning should start and end with the disciplinary approach – meaning, there is no room for fluidity or recognition for multilayered ways of engaging and studying the past (Cutrara, 2018). Marker (2011) has attempted to demonstrate how the disciplinary approach to history teaching and learning can be brought into dialogue with Indigenous perspectives and practices. However, Peter Seixas has entirely rejected and dismissed the possibilities of that, arguing that historical consciousness, which is the cornerstone of Western Enlightenment epistemologies, is oxymoronic to Indigenous epistemologies (Cutrara, 2018; Maluleka, 2021). According to Fukuyama (1992), such an approach tends to conceal cultural aspects of engaging with the past. Shabangu (2024) describes it as a situation where the universal notion of history behaves as if there is a uniform and standard way of studying the past that applies to all cultures and is devoid of context. It may be more productive to momentarily suspend the term “history”

and instead speak of “dealing with the past”, so as to encourage an openness to reflection (Kühberger 2025).

At the heart of these debates are questions of whose epistemology counts? What counts as truth about the past, and how can it be reached in studying the past (Shabangu, 2026)? How to assess knowledge in a way that is not tied to the notions of universality and objectivity (Godsell et al., 2024)? The focus has been on transcending the dominance of Western epistemologies of history and reorienting away from it in diverse settler societies. Dei (2000) argues that the need for such a move comes from the fact that Indigenous epistemologies, including those dealing of the past (Shabangu, 2024), have been forgotten in society, but according to Hountondji (2002), it is not the case. He has argued that Indigenous knowledges have not been forgotten; it is widespread, though probably less than it used to be in the pre-contact period. These systems of knowledge are still operational and efficient, to the extent that even bearers of Western knowledge themselves refer to the practitioners of traditional knowledge as an alternative to their own ‘failures’ (Hountondji, 2002). Rather, the challenge has been the way in which Indigenous knowledge coexists alongside Western knowledge. In comparison to Western knowledge, Indigenous knowledges have been sidelined, pushed to the margins of academic discourse with no or little evidence of mutual exchange of methods, dialogue about intellectual procedures or central epistemic concepts. Therefore, there is a need to examine tensions, possibilities and solutions how Indigenous and Western Epistemologies in dealing with the past influence, and should influence, History Education. This examination is inseparable from the coloniality embedded in education systems, where Western ways of knowing have been normalised as objective and authoritative. To broaden history education means not only adding Indigenous perspectives but fundamentally questioning epistemic hierarchies and expanding what counts as legitimate knowledge about the past.

We welcome abstracts from different regions and political contexts across the world focusing on the following themes or related topics:

- To what extent do different solutions on Indigenous and Western epistemologies respond to the challenges and complexities involved? (i.e. integrating Indigenous and

Western Epistemologies of the Past; acquisitioning different epistemic systems, acknowledging independent forms as legitimate systems of Indigenous knowledge etc.).

- What are the tensions that exist between disciplinary Western-framed history and Indigenous epistemologies in dealing with the past?
- In what ways can we/ not combine the two to make history education at schools more relevant for all? How should different epistemological systems be related to one another?
- How can epistemic pluralism in history education contribute to social justice?
- How to reach different ways of knowing in history education?
- How does the land or locality in which Indigenous knowledge is activated for classroom teaching influence the development of new solutions for dealing with the past?
- What significance does this discourse carry for countries that were entangled in a colonial world system, although no Indigenous populations were historically located within their territories? How should—or must—they respond to it in order to ensure a representation of the world in its full (epistemic) diversity?
- What responsibilities arise for countries in postcolonial contexts that formerly governed colonies, or that continue to maintain successor formations (“overseas territories”) in which such Indigenous epistemologies remain active and articulated?

We welcome abstracts of approximately 700–1,000 words from various academic fields (History Education, History, Education/Pedagogy, Social Sciences, Indigenous Studies, Psychology, Philosophy etc.) engaging with history education. Proposals should be submitted together with a brief biographical note and publication list by 31st of May 2026 to the editors via email: christoph.kuehberger@plus.ac.at; bongani.shabangu@nwu.ac.za. The planned contributions, which are to be developed upon acceptance of the abstract, should have a length of 50,000-60,000 characters (including spaces) and must be submitted by 30th November 2026. The editors are currently planning to publish the edited volume with Routledge. A quality assurance process (double-blind peer review) is planned.

As editors, we – Christoph Kühberger and Bongani Shabangu – work as a team to guide this edited volume toward a strong and coherent outcome. Bongani Shabangu was born and raised in South Africa, in the rural community of Kamajika, located on the outskirts of Mpumalanga Province, where he was brought up by his grandparents. He has strong connections to indigenous ancestral forms of living and knowing, having been raised within an indigenous knowledge system. He speaks and understands several Indigenous South African languages, including siSwati, Xitsonga, isiZulu, Sesotho, among others. As a researcher at North-West University in the school of Commerce and Social Sciences in Education, Potchefstroom, South Africa, his work focuses on indigenous approaches to the teaching and learning of history, Indigenous Knowledge Systems, epistemology in history education, and inclusive education within the broader context of history and knowledge production. His research is deeply shaped by the colonial and apartheid epistemic injustices that continue to persist in South African school history education and in the education system more broadly.

Christoph Kühberger was born and raised in Salzburg (Austria) by white parents. He is Professor of History Education and Civic Education at the University of Salzburg (Austria), where his research focuses on historical thinking and historical culture. This work has also brought him into close engagement with Indigenous ways of relating to the past. Through research stays in Hawai'i and Aotearoa, he has deepened his knowledge of Indigenous knowledge systems and epistemologies. His work engages with Hawaiian forms of dealing with the past and the epistemological frameworks involved. Kühberger is committed to making Indigenous knowledge more visible in Central European contexts, with the aim of challenging universalizing tendencies within Western academia and critically examining the enduring influence of colonial modes of thought in European engagements with the past. A central goal of his work is to contribute to the decolonization of history education in Central Europe and to foster openness toward multiple epistemic systems in dealing with the past.