ANZHES Australian & New Zealand History of Education Society

CALL FOR PAPERS

Education & Democracy

Past, Present & Future

UNIVERSITY OF NEWCASTLE

Annual Conference

10-11 December 2026, University of Newcastle

Questions about the state of democracy are intensifying across the world, including concerns about democratic backsliding, the slow erosion or rapid collapse of democratic norms, and debates about how agonistic a democracy can be, or how much social cohesion it requires. Technological transformations and artificial intelligence have now entered these debates, threatening on some accounts to weaken critical thinking and the fabric of civic life. Education continues to be routinely cast as an enabler and protector of democracy. In his famous linking of democracy and education, John Dewey expressed a sense of democracy's fragility observing that 'Democracy has to be born anew every generation, and education is its midwife' (1916). Human rights advocate and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander man Thomas Mayo recently argued that democracy is 'not something inherited once and kept forever, but something built, repaired, and defended together every day. It rests on truth', he continues, and 'the Australian brand of it needs an honest settlement with the First Peoples of this land'. (2026).

Calls to mobilise education to defend or renew a fragile democracy, a democracy in crisis, also contend with histories of the well-documented harms, injustices and failures of democracy – with education fully implicated. In Aotearoa New Zealand, for example, current challenges to the Treaty of Waitangi, including how it is implemented in schools, underline threats to Māori sovereignty that are also advanced in the name of democracy. And as decades of research have shown, in settler colonial societies, the imposition of democracy was at best conditional if not damaging for Indigenous and minority peoples. Ann Curthoys and Jessie Mitchell's Taking Liberty (2018) brilliantly explored the ways in which 'the peaceful establishment of self-government and democracy' in Australia was inseparably and causally linked to the 'Aboriginal dispossession and displacement'.

This call for papers seeks to hold in clear view the 'double gestures' and complex history of the relationship between democracy and education. We invite participats to consider a range of questions. In what ways has education been or continues to be vital to sustaining democratic societies? Are older formulations of education as a protector or essential foundation for democracy still relevant? How do these histories shed light on current concerns about democratic erosion? How has education been harnessed towards undemocratic ends or been part of and sustained political projects of disenfranchisement, dispossession and marginalisation? How have the responsibilities of education to foster 'good citizens' been differently and differentially expressed and enacted; and who gets to count as a citizen? In what ways has education been mobilised to challenge exclusions from citizenship? What can we learn from earlier crises, challenges to and failures of democracy?

Abstracts are invited for a range of formats, including single papers, symposiums, roundtables and workshops. We welcome papers across a range of topics, including but not limited to:

- Education and democratic citizenship: historical formations and transformations
- Historical crises of democracy and educational responses
- The 'double gestures' of democracy and education
- Democracy, education and citizenship across Oceania
- Curriculum and democracy' citizenship and civics education
- Indigenous, settler-colonial and decolonial histories of education and democracy
- Relationships between schooling, civic life, and political participation and exclusion
- Education and social cohesion
- Feminist and gendered histories of citizenship, democracy and education
- Democracy and reparative histories of education
- Education and notions of the public, commons, and 'public good'
- Technology, media, and democracy
- Comparative and transnational perspectives on education, citizenship and democracy
- The legacies of key thinkers for contemporary debates

Please submit abstracts up to 350 words via this form.

Submissions close: **4 September 2026**

Outcomes: **18 September 2026**

Please email anzhesconference@gmail.com or visit the ANZHES website with any questions

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Scan for abstract submissions