INVESTIGATION 5

Why did some older students and teachers enlist directly from schools during the Great War?

Advice to teachers

This investigation explores the many reasons why some male older students and teachers enlisted directly from schools during the Great War.

1. You are encouraged to read the Background information as context before you commence work with students.

2. Provide your students with sources 5.1–5.12.

3. You may distribute the Source Analysis Worksheet on page 18 and ask students to make notes, or ask them to complete the Tuning in activities.

4. Discuss with students what they have learned from the sources and Tuning in activities along with their answers to the overall investigation question.

5. To help them answer the questions, you may choose to provide sources from other investigations in this resource or from the CD-ROM. You may also choose to provide the Background information, but this should be done only after students have formed conclusions based on analysis of the sources.

6. Students may undertake further research or explore personal values and attitudes through the questions and activities in Going further.
Background information

In some regards, the reasons why male older students and teachers chose to enlist directly from schools were no different to the reasons why other Australian men chose to do so: due to belief in the rightness of the cause and ‘duty’ to the Empire and Australia; for the ‘trip to see the world’; to escape the pressures, tedium or debts of home-life; and as a result of strong community pressures.

In particular, older male students and teachers had experienced more years and higher levels of schooling that often included the militarily desirable ‘Junior Cadets’, ‘Senior Cadets’ (achieving ranks in these) ‘Drill’, ‘Rifle-shooting’, ‘Physical Education’, ‘Swimming’ and ‘First Aid’. These skills were valued at recruitment depots, along with teachers’ abilities as leaders or trainers of others.

Government and private school students and teachers were more likely to have read or heard daily in school-time the high praise granted Australian men who had enlisted, been wounded, been declared missing in action or who had died, especially the honour accorded other students, teachers and former students who had enlisted. Aside from reading the usual reports of the war circulating in the wider community, the teachers and students read reports of the war in the literature expected to be read in schools, such as the school magazines. Early in the war, these reports included reminders of the proximity to Australia of German colonies and how Australia owed the Empire for privileges and protections bestowed. The same teachers managed Empire Day assemblies annually on 24 May and other events in their school and local communities, rich in the language that supported enlistment.

The Gallipoli campaign dominated school magazines from mid-1915 and, soon enough, the teachers, including those in Catholic schools, assumed responsibilities for organising and institutionalising Anzac Day commemorations annually on 25 April.

At education conferences and meetings, teachers in government and private schools received further pro-enlistment messages. Some teachers, because they were considered leaders in their communities, were asked by their school or local authorities to distribute pro-enlistment posters and other materials. They and older students observed and took part in the ‘farewells’ and ‘welcome home’ events in their schools or local communities. Because schools were also community meeting points, some teachers and older students hosted the recruitment rallies or marches as they passed through town. At the other end of the scale, teachers presided over the recording of names of past students and other teachers who had enlisted. Finally, some systems or individual schools offered teachers the incentives of salary increases and promotion whilst on active service, as if they had not left their schools. In short, there was little respite in the classroom or staffroom of many school communities, especially early in the war, from the pressures to enlist on able-bodied men of enlistment age.
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Learning activities

Tuning in

1. Read the following sources and complete a table listing the variety of reasons why some students and teachers enlisted directly from their schools. Some of the reasons are stated clearly in the sources, others can be inferred. Two examples have been given to start your thinking.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors that led students and teachers to enlist</th>
<th>Stated in sources</th>
<th>Can be inferred from sources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>schools were sometimes recruitment centres</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pressure from all the war-related readings</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. Can you think of other reasons not mentioned in the twelve sources that students or teachers may have given publicly or privately for enlisting? List these reasons and discuss your ideas with others.

3. The voices of teachers and students who opposed the war are largely missing from public and education archives. What could be possible explanations for this?

4. What reasons may someone have given privately to explain why they chose not to enlist?
Going further

1. a) Either write a poem, a letter, a speech or an article in the language of the time, or design a poster, postcard, photographic image or other item of the time, offering reasons why people should enlist.
   
b) Choose any one of the approaches above to offer reasons why people should not enlist.

2. What sorts of schools may have been less inclined to promote enlistment to their communities? Why?

3. Imagine you were an older student early in the war and receiving the various messages regarding enlistment through your schools or the wider community.
   a) If eligible to enlist, do you think you would have enlisted? Why or why not?
   b) How would you have reacted if a recruitment march passed through your community?
   c) Is it easy or difficult to imagine how and why people acted as they did 100 years ago? Explain your reasoning.

4. Research further why Australians supported or opposed enlistment and the divisive issue of conscription. Where possible, use local or school histories as well as resources recommended at the conclusion of this resource to discover the views and activities of organisations specific to your local community.
Source 5.1

‘Australia Will Be There’ postcard that was bought by Edith Dennis of Perth State School, Tasmania, during the Great War.

Private collection.

Source 5.2

‘For England!

The bugles of England were blowing o’er the sea,
As they called a thousand years, calling now to me;
They woke me from dreaming in the dawning of the day,
The bugles of England – and how could I stay?’

The poet, Corporal J.D. Burns, was formerly a pupil of Scotch College, Victoria. Killed at Gallipoli, his poem was circulated Australia-wide, being published after his death in a book of his poems and other writings, and twice for Victorian, Tasmanian and Western Australian government schools.


Source 5.3

‘Nobly to do, nobly to die. Their names,
Graven on memorial columns, are a song
Heard in the future.’


Source 5.4

Education Department, Victoria, Education Gazette and Teachers’ Aid, Oct. 1915, p. 59.
Source 5.5

‘Country schools were meeting places for many community activities. Recruitment marches often stopped at them on their way through to the recruitment depots in larger towns. The South Coast March to Freedom [New South Wales] is pictured here taking a break with teachers, children and other local community members.’

From the collections of the Wollongong City Library and the Illawarra Historical Society, New South Wales.

Source 5.6

‘Patriotism ran high and no one at the School, boys or masters, questioned the duty to fight for King, Country and Empire. As one pupil at the School during the war years recalled:

A wartime atmosphere prevailed throughout the School. It certainly reached down even as far as 3C [Year 9], the form of my earliest year, but its most important effects were higher up. Senior boys usually put aside, for the time being, thoughts about future university courses or business careers; for all hoped to serve their country first, and almost all intended to enlist for service overseas after leaving school and reaching the age of eighteen. Several eighteen-year-olds (we heard in 3C) had dropped out of form rooms and enlisted immediately.

In addition to the reporting in The Sydneian, the boys’ awareness of the war and of their future responsibilities was strongly promoted on special occasions at the school such as Empire Day, Anzac Day and Speech Day.’

Source 5.7

School children aboard a model of the HMAS Sydney for the St. Patrick’s Day parade, 17 March, in Chinchilla, Queensland, probably in 1915.

John Oxley Library, State Library of Queensland, image 4472.

Source 5.8

‘John Wesley Blacket, an old scholar and son of a Wesleyan clergyman, had joined the staff on leaving school. He was the coach of the football team in 1913–14, and trained the cadets when the unit won the 1913 cadet contest. He enlisted early in 1915, and was followed by George Davies, a school prefect and president of the Christian union in 1914, who enlisted after a term’s teaching at the College. Soon a student enlisted. Bruce Godfree, in the Fifth Form Commercial class and a member of the football team, volunteered on his eighteenth birthday and proceeded to Mitcham Camp. Before leaving for Egypt he was motored back to the College for a farewell. Fellow students gave him a fountain-pen and a belt inscribed with the signatures of his classmates, form master and headmaster. The school cheered as comrades carried him on their shoulders into a special assembly. The school captain added congratulations, wishing him success and a safe return to South Australia.’


Source 5.9

‘From Pte. Alex D. Kelso: “During our voyage over on the ‘Runic’ we had a photo taken of the M.H.S. boys aboard. As you see, we had a fair number; Sergeant Oxley was unfortunately absent from the group. All the Third Australian Division are in training on Salisbury Plains [England], and many old M.H.S boys are to be found there, so we have interesting chats.”’

Source 5.10

‘For all we have and are,
For all our children’s fate,
Stand up and meet the War.
The Hun is at the Gate!’

Education Department, Victoria, Tasmania and Western Australia, ‘For All We Have and All We Are’, School Paper, Grades V–VI, Dec. 1914, pp. 180–81 and Grades VII–VIII, May 1918, pp. 49–50.

Source 5.11

‘Our Bit’ milk jug cover to keep insects out of milk on a table, made by Edith Dennis at Perth State School, Tasmania, in 1916. Note that the pattern she and other schoolgirls followed did not include Tasmania.

Source 5.12

‘Brother Paulinus’s references to the war effort in the [1917] magazine [were] still as positive and nationalistic as the most ardent patriot could wish:

We rejoice to think that our College – young in years – has already sent forth men who have been considered worthy to stand shoulder to shoulder with their comrades, the immortal Anzacs, that glorious band of heroes which has emblazoned high on the scroll of fame the words Gallipoli and Pozières – names which will serve to guide Australian generations yet unborn along the paths of patriotism and valour.’