How did the Great War affect daily life in schools?

This investigation explores how the Great War changed daily life in schools for teachers and students.

Background information
Almost all students and teachers had family members or others they knew who had enlisted, including other teachers and former students. News of the death or wounding of a local soldier placed a heavy burden on school communities. Students and teachers sometimes absented themselves, but often only briefly, when their families experienced loss. Some students stayed away to ‘help with the harvest’ or to otherwise support the war effort. Grief and the absence of male role models led to a decline in school discipline. Children whose relatives had enlisted sometimes fought with those who had not. Fights also occurred between those who held different views about the war. Children with a surname of German origin could be bullied.

At a time when female teachers could only be employed while they were unmarried and with many male teachers enlisting, the war led to teacher shortages. Sometimes senior students taught and teacher training colleges fast-tracked their students. Married female ex-teachers were asked to return to the classroom, as were retirees. There were shortages of writing paper, ink and chalk. Recycling and repair were encouraged. School sports were moved to the weekend, becoming public entertainment.

The four years of war had a significant social, emotional and practical impact on life at school and at home. Many lives of the younger generation at the time were considerably and forever affected by the ramifications of the war.

Learning activities

Tuning in
1. How is daily life at school different if your teacher is away for a long time, or leaves mid-year and you are given a new teacher?
2. How would your learning at school be different if there were no supplies of:
   - paper or books
   - pencils or pens
   - computers or laptops
   Discuss each.
3. How does your school encourage you to use resources wisely and to re-use and recycle? Why is recycling encouraged? Discuss examples of each. Why do you think wise use of resources was necessary during the Great War?

Using the sources
1. Look at one of the Sources 30–36. Discuss the source and your ideas about the impact on school life. With your source and a copy of the worksheet ‘How did the Great War affect daily life in schools?’ on page 48, use scissors to cut up each of the twelve impacts and match one or more to your source.
2. Discuss your group’s response to each source and share with the class.
3. Discuss if your source describes a good or a bad impact. Draw a happy or an unhappy face on each of the twelve impacts. Were most impacts good or bad? What does that tell you about the Great War?

Going further
1. The Great War presented a difficult time for schools and the wider community. Has your school or community ever experienced challenging times?
   a. What were those challenges? Who was affected, and how?
   b. How did your school try to overcome the challenges? Did others help?
   c. Despite the challenges, were there any unexpected benefits from working through them? Explain.
2. With the information you have learned from this investigation, in small groups make up a short play to highlight some of the ways in which the war affected life in schools. Let the audience decide which impacts your group chose to include.
3. Discuss how hard it is for us to imagine what life was like in the 1910s considering that we live in the 2010s? How can we try to understand how people thought and felt one hundred years ago? Can we ever ‘imagine’ accurately?
**INVESTIGATION 4**

**How did the Great War affect daily life in schools?**

These are some of the impacts on schools during the Great War. Cut them out and match them to the sources on the following pages. Add an unhappy or a happy face on each to show if they were a good or bad impact, or a question mark if you cannot know for sure.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Impact</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teachers or their husbands or fiancés died or were wounded</td>
<td>Source 30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students misbehaved more at school</td>
<td>Source 30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students and teachers were sometimes sad and grief was common at school</td>
<td>Source 31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers enlisted and left the school</td>
<td>Source 31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Former students enlisted and then died or were wounded</td>
<td>Source 31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There were teacher shortages</td>
<td>Source 31</td>
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<tr>
<td>Some schools were closed</td>
<td>Source 31</td>
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<tr>
<td>Part-time teachers and more women were employed</td>
<td>Source 31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>German language was banned in some schools</td>
<td>Source 31</td>
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<tr>
<td>Paper was in short supply</td>
<td>Source 31</td>
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<tr>
<td>School sport was changed</td>
<td>Source 31</td>
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<tr>
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**Source 30**

“The teacher, Mrs Macintosh, after whom Macintosh House and the Honour Board Boarder’s Prize is named, was a bride in 1915 and was widowed by the end of 1916. Two teachers at Ascham lost their fiancés, killed in action in France.

“Miss Bailey read the lists out to us, and we were all saddened by the war news. Many girls lost fathers and brothers”, wrote a former-pupil.”


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**Source 31**

“Each boy would know of close relatives, or of men from his home town, or young men who had been at College in his time, who were overseas ... How shocked the boys must have been at the announcements of ... boys who had been killed at the front, especially when so young, such as Frank Bennett Hartley, who after having fought at Gallipoli and in France was still only 19 when killed.”

Source 32

‘As a consequence of the War there is a great shortage in the supplies of paper coming to hand, and particularly in the paper available for writing books ... Teachers should make the most careful use of existing stocks, and ... ask for as few books as possible ... Both sides of the paper should be used, and no spaces left on any page. In all subjects the books need only show answers to questions; the questions need not be written.’

Extract modified from:
J. Dawson, Chief Inspector, Shortage of Paper and Writing Books [Circular No. 81], in Education Gazette, New South Wales, September, 1916, p. 300.

Source 33

‘Almost all adult amateur sporting contests were suspended during the war ... Schoolboy sport became important as a crowd spectacle and a source of supply for future adult teams ... In 1916, the GPS headmasters decided to hold all rugby matches on Sundays and not mid-week as previously ... Whatever the reason, ‘sport for all’ became more prominent as an aim at Shore during the war and its aftermath.’


Source 34

‘There were more staff changes than ever before ... Only two masters were to remain throughout the war ... Twenty-four other teachers came and went, often to enlist, with thirteen staying a year or less. It was hard to find replacements ... There were attempts to overcome the shortages. Four boys joined the Staff from the Sixth Form (Year 12), but none remained for a year, as they too enlisted. Part-time teachers were also employed. In 1914, the staff had been all male. But during the war five women were employed.’

Extract modified from:

Victorian school students create the outline of Australia and spell out the word ‘ANZAC’ at the Melbourne Cricket Ground in December 1916.
Australian War Memorial H16097.

Edith Dennis was pupil at Perth State School, Tasmania, during the war. Private collection.
‘One effect of the war is the unsettled attitude of some of the boys towards their work. This is especially noticeable with some of the senior boys whose fathers are away at the Front. There is no doubt that some of the lads are missing the strictness of the home discipline that existed when the father was at home, and the school has therefore an extra duty – the duty of keeping these lads steady and upright.’

Extract modified from:

‘The Great War led to the closing of all German (Lutheran) schools in South Australia in 1917. In Victoria, Lutheran schools were not shut, although German language use was prohibited.’

Extract modified from:
What patriotic activities did many students perform at school or home, and why?

This investigation explores some of the many activities students performed on the home front, as school activities or in their own time. It explores why schools undertook these activities during the Great War.

Background information

Many school authorities declared that the best way for those at home to honour soldiers was to become immersed in fund-raising, comforts-making and letter-writing. Even opponents of the war separated their political views from people’s suffering. Appeals to honour the dead and support those still serving transcended social divisions over conscription and resulted in widespread support for these activities. Examples of dissenting teachers are rare. Some may have carefully avoided scrutiny, although the centralised education bureaucracy could provide ‘motivation’ through ‘punishing’ teachers who did not perform as requested. School histories, personal papers and the reminisces of teachers and students often reflect pride in their contribution to the war effort.

While some children may have felt exploited at having to do war related work or projects, many students and teachers had personal motivations. They knew teachers, former students, brothers, sisters, fathers or relatives of school friends on active service. Records show that many were proud to help people they knew and many schools received genuinely grateful letters from soldiers overseas or convalescing locally who had received gifts from Australian school communities.

Learning activities

Tuning in
1. What does your school do to encourage you to do your best work? Think of positive ‘encouragements’ you may receive such as certificates. Can you think of any ‘encouragements’ that may not be so positive for students?
2. Does your school hold concerts, special days or special displays? If so, when, and why?
3. Do you do any fund-raising activities for any special groups? What are the groups? Why do you do this?
4. How do you feel when you know you are helping others?
5. Discuss the words ‘patriotic’ and ‘patriotism’ and what they mean.

Using the sources
1. Work in a small group to look at one of the Sources 37–44. Discuss the seven questions on page 57. Look at the list of patriotic activities on page 56. Using scissors cut them out and match them to each of the sources. Read the information about the source. Does this add information to your answers? Share your findings with the class.

Going further
1. Look at each of the Sources 37–44 again. Some of the photographs have been ‘staged’ for the school magazine.
   a. What do you think ‘staged’ means? Which photographs do you think are staged?
   b. Some students look pleased with what they are doing. Select a student from one of the photographs who looks pleased about the activity. Write what the student might have been thinking at the time.
   c. Other students do not look so pleased. Find one and write what the student might have been thinking at the time.
2. Think of an individual or group whom you would like to assist. You may choose to assist a ‘cause’, or those suffering a loss, or an animal or environmental care group.
   a. Find out more about the person, group or cause.
   b. Plan what needs to be done and how you can help.
   c. Start your activity. Promote it. Report to others during and at the end of it.
3. With the information you have learned from this investigation, what range of feelings would students have had doing patriotic activities? Why do you think they may have felt this way?
INVESTIGATION 5
What patriotic activities did many students perform at school or home, and why?

These are some of many patriotic activities that were performed by students.
Cut them out and match them to the sources on the following pages.

Growing vegetables to eat or sell

Collecting or recycling

Making wooden projects as splints or chairs for injured soldiers

Donating food to send in gift packs to soldiers

Knitting socks for soldiers

Doing jobs in the community

Sewing bags to send overseas to be used as sandbags

Selling flowers, badges or tickets to raise money for injured soldiers

INVESTIGATION 5
What patriotic activities did many students perform at school or home, and why?

1. Look at the source and discuss it.
2. What is the activity that the students have undertaken?
3. Why did the students do this activity?
4. How was it seen as patriotic?
5. Who did it help?
6. Do you think the students enjoyed doing this activity?
7. Would you be prepared to do it? Why or why not?
Warm Socks from Warm Hearts in Australia

Knitting
This is a photograph of an unknown school in Sydney, New South Wales. During the war thousands of Australian school children gave up their spare time to knit socks for the men at the front. The knitted socks can been seen in the centre of the photograph.

Australian War Memorial H1581

Warm Socks from Warm Hearts in Australia was a poem written and included with knitted socks for the soldiers at Villers-Bretonneux by girls at the Methodist Girls’ Guild, Horsham, Victoria. This was a Sunday school run by the church.

Australian War Memorial PPPR00519

Papers of Private J Hardie.

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About Source 38

Woodwork
The photograph shows the proud teacher and students of California Gully Woodwork Center, Bendigo, Victoria, with their woodwork projects. There are fold-out chairs and splints which the students made. These were sent by the Education Department of Victoria to comfort wounded Australian soldiers in field hospitals overseas.

Image from Education Department, Victoria, The Education Department’s Record of War Service, 1914–1918, Albert J Mullet, Melbourne, Victoria, 1921, p. 211.
Mary Brew of Garfield North State School, Victoria, earned a First Class Certificate for good assistance, selling flowers, badges and tickets for Flower Day, 1918. The money she raised went towards the care of returned soldiers who were injured, sick and recovering.

Certificate courtesy of Margaret Pankhurst, daughter of Mary Brew.

Here are two fundraising badges that were commonly sold by school students for the war effort. The money raised was used to provide comfort to soldiers overseas or those recovering from their injuries in Australian hospitals.

Australian War Memorial REL 39134 and REL 39109

About Source 40

Food and comforts packs

Food parcels and comforts packs were sent to Australian soldiers overseas. This photograph shows the tins of food collected by the school children of New South Wales. Forty to fifty 45-kilogram boxes of sweets ‘intended as Christmas presents for our soldiers, and for the most part ... sent in by the school children of the State’, were prepared in one week alone in the spring of 1915.

Australian War Memorial H16132
Lieutenant Colonel Lorenzo who left South Australia in 1914 has written to thank the children of Heathfield Public School for the sandbags they made and sent to the front.

The men used the bags and, as they were filling them, noticed the names of the makers. The soldiers were cheered with the thought that the children were helping them to defeat the enemy.

The Colonel photographed the bags in position, and asked the Director to send the photograph to Heathfield School.

About Source 41
Sandbags from Heathfield School

As a school activity, the students stitched the hessian sandbags together and wrote their names on the outside of the bags.

During the war, trenches were dug to protect the men and the sandbags were placed along the top to make the trenches deeper and safer.

Extract modified from:

About Source 42
Young Gardeners

This photograph shows young children working hard in a small school garden plot. Schools in the city or the bush, or children with the smallest home garden, could grow vegetables to use, sell or send to hospitals to support soldiers who were recovering from injuries. This was seen as helping the war at home or ‘doing our bit’.

Students are seen here pulling a cart and collecting parcels to assist with the war effort. Children also collected scrap metal, paper, and animal bones during the war. Recycling was important to save resources during a time when there were limited resources and workers.

“At the Depot: Willing Workers”, Education Department, Victoria, The Education Department’s Record of War Service, 1914-1919, Albert J. Mullett, Melbourne, Victoria, 1921, p. 211.

Some school boys worked on the New South Wales railways cleaning locomotives in 1917.

State Records of New South Wales, T420-A014.