



## Keynote Speakers

Wednesday, August 29, 5:00 – 6:00

### **“Nature vs. Nurture. Historical Perspectives” Till Kössler (University of Bochum, Germany)**

During the Enlightenment, questions of equality and inequality became problematic in a new way. As birthright and inherited wealth lost their persuasive power in legitimizing differences in social status, social philosophers and political elites argued about the foundations of human differences and their political and social implications. While a majority of Enlightenment thinkers held that all men should have equal opportunities to succeed in life, only a small minority envisioned a society where social inequality would be eradicated altogether. Instead, most influential intellectuals turned to “nature” as a source for legitimizing inequality. Differences in status, wealth, and power appeared/emerged /arose just when they were rooted in “natural” differences in talents and personal effort. Over the following decades an intense debate developed about natural differences between people, their dimensions and implications. From the start, this debate was intimately intertwined with educational discourses. Were upbringing and education more powerful than inherited traits and dispositions? Did education possess the power to overcome natural differences? The answers to these questions were as varied as they were contested, and they shaped educational thinking and policies in an important way.

On the one hand, reform groups demanded access to higher education for all children regardless of their sex, race or class based on an understanding of a natural equality of all human beings. On the other hand, experts argued that talents were predominantly shaped by inheritance and therefore largely outside the reach of educational efforts. Influential thinkers even argued that talents were disproportionately distributed between social groups which therefore had to be treated differently in the educational sphere. In the 20th century these debates found a focus in the topic of intelligence as IQ measurement and its results became both highly contested and important arguments in educational debates.

Against this background, the presentation will trace some major developments of the nature-nurture debates and their interactions with educational discourses and practices. It will especially address the question whether a shift from nature to nurture can be discerned as a secular trend since the 20th century.

Till Kössler is full professor of History of Education at the University of Bochum (Germany). His research focus includes the history of modern Catholic pedagogy, the modernization of pedagogies, the reference to nature and naturalized concepts in educational discourses as well as the naturalization of social inequality.

Thursday, August 30, 5:30 – 6.30

**“Challenging the bifurcation of nature: women workers’ education through process philosophy”**

**Maria Tamboukou (University of East London, UK)**

The bifurcation of nature taken as a gap between the scientific conception and the subjective experience of the world is, according to Alfred North Whitehead, one of the major epistemic fallacies of modernity. In this conference, I draw on insights from Whitehead’s process philosophy to map some analytical trails that I have followed in my work on the archives of women workers’ education. There are three themes that have emerged from this archival research decisively challenging the bifurcation of nature: the power of associations, the coexistence of permanence and flux and amor mundi, love for the world. In this light, women workers’ education emerges as an assemblage of feelings, cognitive understandings, imaginative enactments and creative forces, wherein nature and culture are inextricably entangled.

Maria Tamboukou is Professor of Feminist Studies and works at the School of Social Sciences at the University of East London. Her research interests are in the philosophy of the social sciences, feminist theories, narrative and archival research method and on neo-materialism.

Friday, August 31, 2:00 – 3:00

**“‘Seeing the Elephant’: Learning about Nature in the Nineteenth-Century Menagerie”**

**Helen Cowie (University of York, UK)**

This presentation assesses the role of nineteenth-century zoological gardens and menageries as sites of education. In a period when popular science was becoming an increasingly crowded and lucrative marketplace, live zoological collections offered a potentially useful resource for disseminating knowledge about the natural world. Many authors advocated seeing exotic animals in the flesh as an ideal way of bringing to life the sometimes rather arid descriptions that appeared in books. This experiential approach was trumpeted loudly by showmen, whose advertisements emphasised the importance of visual forms of learning; an article on Wombwell’s Menagerie in the Hull Packet urged ‘parents and guardians’ to take the opportunity of visiting the show while it was in town, because menageries ‘can convey to the minds of their youthful charges far more lasting and vivid impressions of zoological science than would be afforded by years of text-book study’ (Hull Packet, August 5, 1870). Assessing the reality behind this rhetoric, the paper considers how successful zoos and menageries were in imparting zoological knowledge, and what tools they used to do this. To put the pedagogic function of zoological collections into context, I begin by situating menageries and gardens within a wider cultural movement of popular science and rational recreation. I then go on to explore the particular ways in which these establishments attempted to promote learning and, where possible, how visitors responded to their efforts. One young girl, Maria Brinning, a pupil at the Bristol Deaf and Dumb Institution, wrote a letter recalling a visit to Edmond’s menagerie in 1858, in which she described seeing ‘the intelligent elephant’, touching the thick-skinned rhinoceros and admiring the lofty giraffe, which was ‘as high as three men’ – an unusual and intriguing insight into the experiences on offer in the wild beast show (Bristol Mercury, February 6, 1858).

Helen Cowie, PhD, is a senior lecturer in modern history and a member of the Centre for Eighteenth Century Studies at the University of York (United Kingdom). Her research focuses on the cultural history of science with a particular focus on the history of animals.

Saturday, September 1, 11:00 – 12:00

**“Alexander von Humboldt's Influence on Women's Geography and Natural History Education in Nineteenth-Century North America”  
Kim Tolley (Notre Dame de Namur University, USA)**

Humboldt’s Lily, the Humboldt Formation, Humboldt Redwoods State Park, Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest, Humboldt Mountain, Humboldt Bay, the Humboldt River, Humboldt State University; four Humboldt counties, and thirteen Humboldt towns—the legacy of the Prussian naturalist Alexander von Humboldt (1769–1859) is everywhere in the United States. Humboldt sought to discover the underlying processes and structures of nature, leading him to develop the concept of ecosystems. He was among the first to write about the dangers of deforestation and cash crop agriculture, arguing that man's disruption of the environment might bring incalculable damage to the natural world. Today, Humboldt's theories appear prophetic, yet for nearly a century, he was largely forgotten in the English-speaking world. Anti-German sentiment after World War I and the rise of followers like Charles Lyell, Charles Darwin, Henry David Thoreau and John Muir gradually eclipsed Humboldt's legacy in the United States. This keynote address extends this body of work by illustrating how the theories of Alexander von Humboldt influenced the natural history and geography education available to young women in nineteenth-century America. Geography was a required core subject in female schools, starting with the publication of Jedidiah Morse's *Geography Made Easy* in 1784. Surviving schoolbooks reveal that the subject gradually evolved to incorporate new theories in natural history. Not only the geography textbooks available in female academies, but also many of the maps the students created reveal that starting in the early 1820s, females learned about the techniques of comparative geography introduced by Alexander von Humboldt. This development in female education coincided with women's growing interest in natural history during this period, an era marked by a nation-wide enthusiasm for all things Humboldt.

Kim Tolley is Professor in the School of Education and Leadership at Notre Dame de Namur University (California, USA). Her research interests include the sociology and culture of teaching and learning in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, the history of science and schooling, and the shift from chartered academies to publicly funded systems of schooling in the United States.