

Beyond Hero Worship: A Brunerian Framework for Guided Inquiry into Local Heroes in Indonesian History Education

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Abstract: Heroes are central to history education in Indonesia, yet classroom narratives tend to present them as models to emulate, a practice that slides easily into hero worship. Local heroes, though close to students' lives, are seldom taught, even though the current curriculum asks students to connect local, national, and global history. This article asks what a local hero is and how Bruner's learning theory can frame guided inquiry into local heroes. The study is conceptual and combines a typology approach with a theory-adaptation approach. It draws on literature on history education, local history, and discovery learning, on policy documents, and on sources about Soemitro Kolopaking of Banjarnegara as an illustrative case. The analysis yields two models of local heroes, three propositions linking local heroes to Bruner's theory, and a framework that maps Douch's local history models onto modes of discovery and representation. The discussion argues that guided inquiry suits secondary students best, because sources on local heroes require source criticism and because uncritical modelling reproduces hero worship at the local level. For practice, teachers can design inquiry tasks that ask students to judge why, and by whom, a figure is regarded as a hero. The framework still needs testing through classroom research.

Abstrak: Pahlawan menempati posisi penting dalam pendidikan sejarah di Indonesia, tetapi narasi di kelas cenderung menyajikannya sebagai teladan untuk ditiru, praktik yang mudah bergeser menjadi pengultusan. Pahlawan lokal, meskipun dekat dengan kehidupan siswa, jarang diajarkan di sekolah, padahal kurikulum meminta siswa menghubungkan sejarah lokal, nasional, dan global. Artikel ini menjawab pertanyaan tentang apa yang dimaksud dengan pahlawan lokal dan bagaimana teori belajar Bruner dapat membingkai inkuiri terbimbing tentang pahlawan lokal. Kajian ini bersifat konseptual dan memadukan pendekatan tipologi dengan pendekatan adaptasi teori. Sumber kajian meliputi literatur pendidikan sejarah, sejarah lokal, dan pembelajaran penemuan, dokumen kurikulum dan kebijakan, serta sumber tentang Soemitro Kolopaking dari Banjarnegara sebagai kasus ilustratif. Analisis menghasilkan dua model pahlawan lokal, tiga proposisi yang menghubungkan pahlawan lokal dengan teori Bruner, dan kerangka yang memetakan model pembelajaran sejarah lokal Douch terhadap mode penemuan dan bentuk representasi. Pembahasan menunjukkan bahwa inkuiri terbimbing paling sesuai bagi siswa sekolah menengah atas, karena sumber tentang pahlawan lokal menuntut kritik sumber dan peneladanan tanpa sikap kritis mereproduksi pengultusan di tingkat lokal. Secara praktis, guru dapat merancang tugas inkuiri yang meminta siswa menilai mengapa dan menurut siapa seorang tokoh dianggap pahlawan. Kerangka ini masih perlu diuji melalui penelitian tindakan kelas atau penelitian pengembangan.

INTRODUCTION

"A great nation is a nation that honours the services of its heroes." Sukarno's words on Heroes' Day in 1961 (Rahayu et al., 2010) still shape how Indonesia remembers its past, yet the question of whom the nation should honour remains contested. On 10 November 2025, the government named ten new national heroes, among them former president Soeharto, whose record of repression and corruption provoked fierce public debate (Utama, 2025). Utama argues that the controversy exposes long-standing problems in the national hero system: military and political elites from



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Java dominate the list, and designations have often served political expediency more than moral integrity. For history education, the debate raises a practical problem. When the state confers the title on contested figures, teachers cannot present heroes only as models to emulate; students need ways to examine why someone came to be called a hero. This article takes up that problem through the figures closest to students' lives, namely local heroes.

International scholarship shows that heroes occupy an important place in history education. Heroic figures are used to strengthen national identity and patriotism (Eriksonas, 2004; Hasan, 2012; Vähä, 2002), to serve as vehicles for values education (Sanchez, 1998) and as role models (Yazıcı & Aslan, 2011), and to provide an entry point for developing historical thinking (Perrotta, 2017). These functions appear in diverse settings: American history textbooks use Washington and Lincoln to renegotiate national identity (Hutchins, 2011), Atatürk is taught in Turkey as a figure worthy of children's emulation (Altıkulaç, 2016), and the memory of Imre Nagy in Hungary is cultivated as a symbol of resistance to Soviet domination (Benziger, 2000). In Indonesia, studies of heroes in history learning have generally focused on national figures such as Sukarno and Hatta (Amri, 2016; Gunawan, 2013). Pramono et al. (2024) mapped the position of national heroes in the 2013 Curriculum and the *Kurikulum Merdeka* and found that the role of local heroes had not been adequately examined. Studies that specifically address local heroes have also begun to emerge. Kurniawan et al. (2018) critiqued ideological hegemony in heroic narratives and argued for bringing local heroes into the history classroom, while Kurniawan (2019) showed how heroic imagery can foster historical empathy among students in Semarang. More recent studies extend this line of work. Sofiani et al. (2025) analysed the character values of RAA Kusumadinigrat, a Sundanese traditional leader, and proposed reactualising them in Phase F of the *Kurikulum Merdeka* through research projects, while Lionar et al. (2025) showed that project-based learning built on the biographies of West Sumatran figures improved junior high school students' historical literacy. Nelmawarni et al. (2025) reconstructed the career of Bahder Djohan, a Minangkabau physician and early Minister of Education and Culture, and noted that his legacy remains absent from the national curriculum. Beyond Indonesia, Perrotta (2017) and Wood and Samuel (2012) used local history research projects to train students to assess historical figures and to trace the histories of their own communities.

These studies explain why local heroes belong in the classroom. Those that address how, such as Lionar et al. (2025), rest on a particular instructional model; few offer teachers a learning-theory framework for bringing local heroes into the classroom.

The emergence of local heroes parallels the growth of local history as a field of study. Local history refers to the history of a village or group of villages, a small or medium-sized town (large ports and capital cities falling outside the local scope), or a geographical area no larger than a province (Goubert, 1971, p. 113). According to Bambang Purwanto, "local" may refer either to a particular community or administrative unit, such as a rural or urban area, or to a specific socio-cultural bond that constitutes a society (Miftahudin, 2020, p. 3). Local history is therefore understood as historical writing of limited scope that covers a particular locality (Widja, 1989, p. 13). It typically addresses the origins, growth, decline, and fall of a local social group or of a community within a neighbourhood. Taufik Abdullah defines local history as the history of ethno-cultural areas within a given locality. Because local history unfolds within a particular locality, it produces actors who drive history in that locality, and it is from these actors that the concept of the local hero arises.

From the perspective of learning materials, local history is not foreign content, since it is essentially an elaboration of history at the national level. When teaching about Islamic kingdoms, for instance, the material can be linked to the Islamisation of a particular region or to Islamic heritage in the students' surroundings. When teaching colonialism, it can be connected to the colonial impact on a specific locality. When discussing the war of independence, learning can be linked to the revolution at the local level, such as the Three Regions Affair (*Peristiwa Tiga Daerah*) around Tegal or the battles between Indonesian and Dutch forces in various regions.

The current curriculum gives local history a strong position. The latest learning outcomes (*Capaian Pembelajaran*), set out in Decree of the Head of BSKAP No. 046/H/KR/2025, state that one aim of the History subject is to develop an understanding of the spatial dimension, namely "connecting national, local, and global events" (BSKAP, 2025; author's translation). The subject is also designed to link Indonesian history at the national level with the local histories of the regions (BSKAP, 2025). In Phase E (Grade 10), history is taught within the Social Studies (IPS) subject, and students are expected to be able to "implement

historical research” on events at the local, national, and global levels (BSKAP, 2025; author’s translation). In Phase F (Grades 11 and 12), the targeted process skills include inquiry through heuristics and source criticism, empathy, and the identification of historical significance (BSKAP, 2025).

Pramono et al. (2024) compared the position of heroes in the 2013 Curriculum and the *Kurikulum Merdeka*. The 2013 Curriculum explicitly named the roles of national and regional figures in its basic competencies, whereas the *Kurikulum Merdeka* presents historical figures implicitly through historical events and places greater emphasis on critical and reflective thinking than on memorising names. This shift opens space for learning that positions students as investigators of historical figures in their own surroundings.

Local history learning covers several themes (Winarti, 2017): first, local figures and actors who contributed to history; second, family history and genealogy; third, historical objects such as monuments, artefacts, and buildings; fourth, local events in their various dimensions (political, economic, social, and cultural); and fifth, the condition of the local environment. Among these themes, local heroes are an integral part of local history learning.

Local heroes are historical actors and movers within a particular locality who have exerted significant influence on society, both within and beyond their communities (Kurniawan et al., 2018). Every region has figures who are regarded as heroes of that region and who drove the events that took place there. Their presence adds value to learning, because local figures from the students’ own region are more familiar and closer to the students’ everyday reality (Kurniawan, 2019, p. 20). This proximity also makes local heroes useful for character education.

Nevertheless, history learning has not given local heroes adequate attention. Kurniawan et al. (2018) show that collective memory of local heroes is fading, and they attribute the decline to the absence of these figures from public spaces, particularly from classrooms. This article addresses two questions: (1) what is meant by a local hero, and (2) how teachers can operationalise Bruner’s learning theory to bring local heroes into history learning. In answering them, it develops a Brunerian framework for guided inquiry that moves the teaching of local heroes beyond hero worship. After the method, the article distinguishes national from local heroes, examines the place of local heroes in history learning, and then develops the incorporation of Bruner’s theory, ending with a mapping of learning models

and a classroom example.

METHODS

This is a conceptual article. Following Jaakkola (2020), a conceptual article does not analyse new empirical data but builds an argument by systematically integrating theories and concepts from different fields. Of the four approaches Jaakkola proposes, namely theory synthesis, theory adaptation, typology, and model, this article combines two. A typology approach is used to define local heroes, and a theory adaptation approach is used to transfer Bruner’s learning theory to the domain of local hero learning. Bruner’s theory serves as the method theory, that is, the lens through which problems in the target domain, the teaching of local heroes in secondary schools, are reframed.

The sources fall into four groups. The first comprises history education literature on heroes, local history, and historical empathy. The second consists of Bruner’s theoretical works together with empirical studies and critiques of discovery learning. The third consists of policy documents, namely regulations on the national hero title and the History learning outcomes in Decree of the Head of BSKAP No. 046/H/KR/2025. The fourth consists of historical sources on Soemitro Kolopaking, including the minutes of the BPUPK sessions (Bahar et al., 1995) and secondary studies of the movement in Banjarnegara. The literature was selected purposively for its relevance to three key concepts, namely heroism, local history, and Bruner’s learning theory; the study is therefore not intended as a systematic review.

The analysis proceeded in three stages. The first was a conceptual analysis to distinguish national from local heroes and to formulate two models of local heroes. The second was theory adaptation, in which Bruner’s concepts (discovery learning and its modes, the three modes of representation, the spiral curriculum, and the narrative mode) were mapped onto the characteristics of local heroes, taking into account empirical evidence on discovery learning and the requirements of the learning outcomes. The results of this stage are presented as propositions and a mapping table. The third stage was a case illustration. Soemitro Kolopaking was selected purposively for three reasons: he was a local figure connected to national events, primary and secondary sources about him are available, and his varied roles allow students to make critical judgements. The case is illustrative and is not intended for generalisation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

National Heroes and Local Heroes

Hook (1945, p. 60) distinguishes two types of heroes: the *man of thought*, whose ideas prepare society to face change, and the *man of action*, who organises struggle through deeds. In Indonesia, “hero” is also an official state title governed by a series of regulations. Its initial basis was Presidential Decree No. 217 of 1957 on National Independence Heroes (Presiden RI, 1957), followed by Presidential Decree No. 241 of 1958 on the procedure for their designation (Presiden RI, 1958). In 1959, 10 November was established as Heroes’ Day through Presidential Decree No. 316 of 1959 on National Days that Are Not Public Holidays (Presiden RI, 1959). Presidential Regulation No. 33 of 1964 then extended the provisions on the designation, recognition, and support of heroes to those who had rendered service in defending the nation and the state (Presiden RI, 1964).

The regulation currently in force is Law No. 20 of 2009 on Titles, Decorations, and Honours. This law authorises the President to confer the title of national hero on two groups: those who fell or died in the struggle against colonialism in the territory that is now the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia, and those who, during their lifetime,

performed heroic acts or produced extraordinary achievements and works for the development of the nation (Republik Indonesia, 2009).

As of 2025, Indonesia has 216 national heroes (Utama, 2025). The most recent designation took place on 10 November 2025 and covered ten figures, including Abdurrahman Wahid, Soeharto, and Marsinah (Kementerian Sekretariat Negara Republik Indonesia, 2025). Only 18 of the 216 are women, and the revolutionary period of 1945–1950 is heavily represented (Utama, 2025). The earliest of these heroes is Ratu Kalinyamat (d. 1579), while Usman and Harun, two Indonesian marines (KKO) executed by the Singapore government in 1968, are among those who died youngest.

For the regions, the title of national hero carries symbolic meaning. The designation of a figure is read as state recognition of a region’s contribution to national history, which is why many regional governments actively nominate their own figures. Today almost every province has a national hero, but the distribution remains uneven. As of 2023, most national heroes came from Central Java (35), East Java (24), and Yogyakarta (21), making the historiography of heroism Java-centric; nominations from outside Java increased only after the Reformasi era, driven by the spirit of regional au-

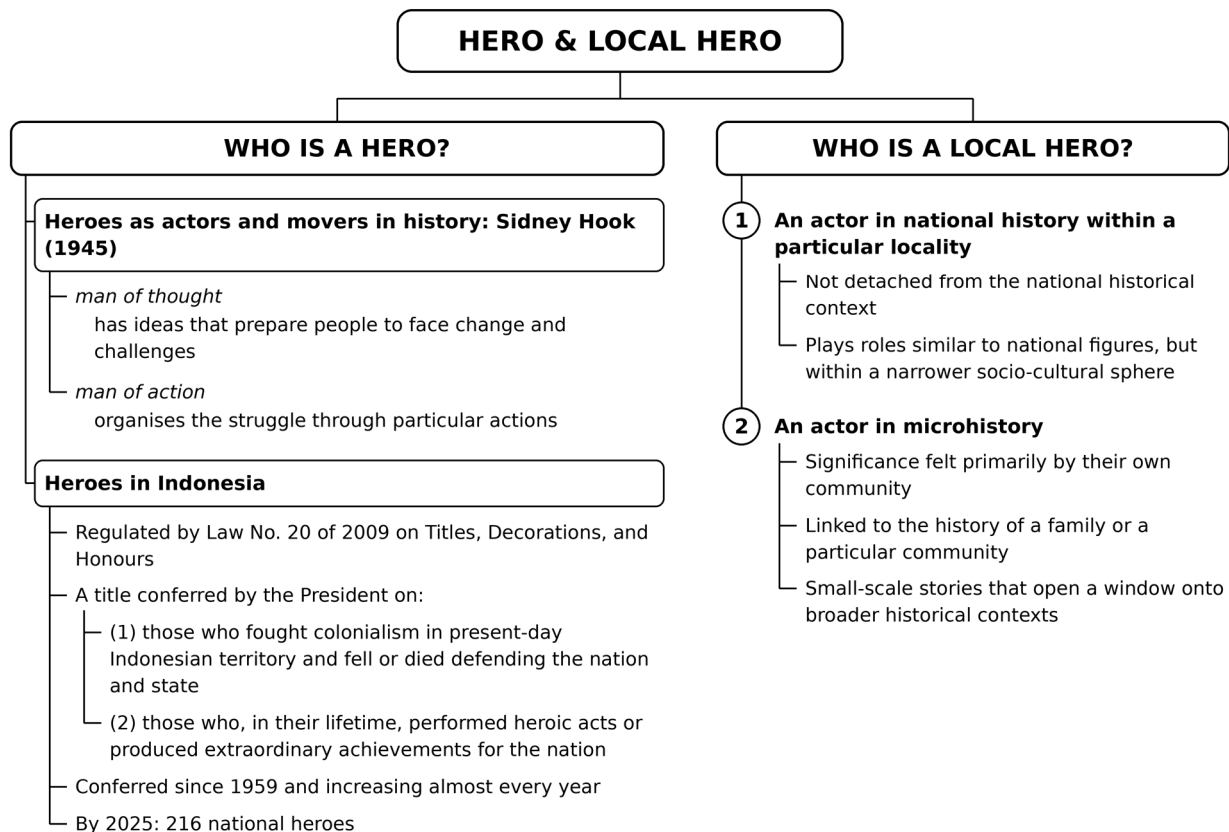


Figure 1 Defining heroes in Indonesia: National and Local Hero

tonomy (Pramono et al., 2024). Designations have also not been entirely free from political interests, as in the appointment of communist figures under Sukarno to support his Nasakom doctrine (Pramono et al., 2024). Utama (2025) offers a telling case. Three generals, Basuki Rahmat, M. Jusuf, and Amir Mahmud, were believed to have helped secure the 11 March 1966 Order, yet only Basuki Rahmat became a national hero, in 1969; Jusuf and Mahmud, who later criticised Soeharto, never received the title.

Beyond the national heroes designated by the President, there are many historical actors at the local level, known as local heroes. Local heroes existed long before the idea of Indonesia was born. They first developed in the collective memory of communities and took form in oral traditions and traditional historiography. Traditional Indonesian historiography is local in character: its authors, its social milieu confined to particular ethnic communities, and its subject matter are all bound to specific places. Its genres, such as *babad*, *serat*, and *hikayat*, are literary works, and traditional local history is often shrouded in myth. This strong mythologisation means that traditional local heroes are frequently enveloped in legend, and their very existence is sometimes contested. The truth of traditional local heroes is thus normative rather than empirical.

With the rise of critical approaches to local history, local heroes have become part of a critical-analytical local historiography, which takes several forms (Widja, 1989): first, event-based studies focusing on a particular occurrence; second, structural studies of local history (social stratification and cultural orientation); third, thematic studies tracing the development of a particular aspect over a specific period, including studies of local figures; and fourth, general local histories describing the development of a particular area, such as a city, regency, or province, over time.

Two models can be proposed for understanding the position of local heroes. In the first, local heroes are actors in national history whose work unfolded within a particular locality. They are not detached from the national historical context; local heroes often played roles similar to those of national figures, albeit within a narrower socio-cultural sphere. An example is Soemitro Kolopaking (1887–1976) of Banjarnegara. Although he was a local figure, his career is often linked to events at the national level. Bahder Djohan of West Sumatra offers a comparable case: a physician active in the youth movement and in women's emancipation

who later served as Minister of Education and Culture, yet whose legacy is still missing from national curricula (Nelmawarni et al., 2025).

Soemitro occupied a distinctive position in the national movement (Ahmad, 2018). He was born in Papringan, Banyumas, on 14 June 1887 into an aristocratic family; his father was a Regent (*Bupati*) of Banjarnegara. According to Poeze (2008), he did not follow his father's wishes and chose instead to enrol at the HBS in Batavia. At the age of 19 he travelled to Europe as a fourth-class passenger and supported himself by working as a shepherd and as a miner in Germany. In the Netherlands he studied Indology (*Indologie*), and as a student he was a founding board member of the *Indische Vereeniging* (Indies Association), established in 1908 at the encouragement of Abendanon and Casajangan. This association of Indies students in the Netherlands later became the *Perhimpunan Indonesia* (Indonesian Association).

He served as the association's secretary. In that capacity he was summoned by the local court in Leiden to explain why he used the term *indier* rather than *inlanders* (natives) (Poeze, 2008). After returning from the Netherlands in 1914, Soemitro worked at the Pandjang tea factory and cinchona plantation in Pangrango and then attended police training in Batavia. He was appointed a police officer in Bandung in 1919 and in 1922 became *Gewestelijk Leider der Veldpolitie* (regional head of the field police) for the Priangan Residency, based in Bandung.

In the same year he joined the *vrijmetselarij* (Freemasonry). He then returned to Banyumas to serve as district head (*wedana*) of Sumpiuh from 1925 to 1927, before being appointed Regent of Banjarnegara in 1927. Within Freemasonry, he was later installed as the first Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Indonesia, inaugurated on 7 April 1955 (Pramudya, 2012; Stevens, 2004).

As regent, he served under three regimes: the Dutch East Indies, the Japanese occupation, and independent Indonesia. During his tenure, the Syarikat Islam held several important events in Banjarnegara, including the first congress of SIAP, an Islamic scouting organisation, in 1928, and the 1934 national congress of the PSII, the last attended by Tjokroaminoto. He was regarded as a figure who made Banjarnegara a favourable place for the movement to develop, and he was often seen as a mediator between the Syarikat Islam, the followers of Kiai Sadrach, and the Chinese community of Banjarnegara. He is also said to have admired Sadrach's principles (Humaedi, 2004).

Towards the end of the Japanese occupation, the BPUPK (Investigating Committee for Preparatory Work for Independence) was established. Soemitro Kolopaking was a member and actively contributed to the preparations for independence, urging that independence be pursued as quickly as possible (Bahar et al., 1995). Within the BPUPK, he was among those, together with Mohammad Hatta, Soepomo, Wongsonagoro, Radjiman Wediodiningrat, and J. Latuharhary, who supported the separation of religious affairs from affairs of state.

After independence, Soemitro was elected to the House of Representatives (DPR) in the 1955 general election, representing the Association of Supporters of Indonesian Independence (*Persatuan Pendukung Kemerdekaan Indonesia*) for the Central Java constituency (Parlaungan, 1956). In recognition of his dedication and standing in society, he was awarded the *Bintang Mahaputra Utama* on 12 August 1992 under Presidential Decree No. 048/TK/1992. He had earlier received the *Satyalancana Peringatan Perjuangan Kemerdekaan* (No. Skep. 288 of 1961) and the *Satyalancana Karya Satya* (No. 228 of 1961) (Bahar et al., 1995).

Soemitro's career combines roles that students are likely to judge differently. He was an activist of the *Indische Vereeniging* and a member of the BPUPK, but also a colonial police officer, a district head and regent under the Dutch East Indies government and the Japanese occupation, and a Freemason. Teachers need not hide this ambivalence. They can use it to ask students what makes someone a hero, according to whom, and in what context.

The question of heroes according to whom also arises for figures already designated as national heroes. Pramono et al. (2024) cite the case of Sultan Hasanuddin, recognised as a national hero, while Arung Palakka, who is regarded as having allied with a European power against Hasanuddin, is remembered favourably by the people of Bone. Ratu Kalinyamat of Jepara, likewise, had strained relations with figures revered in Demak and Kudus. Such cases show that the designation of heroes can evoke negative collective memories from the standpoint of other communities. Utama (2025) adds that Soeharto's designation sharpens these tensions, because teachers are now expected to present a figure many Indonesians associate with repression and corruption as a model of heroism. Teachers who present heroes, local or national, therefore need to situate each figure in its time and choose their words with care.

In the second model, local heroes are actors

in a micro-historical context. Here, a figure's significance is felt primarily by their community and is not necessarily recorded in national historical narratives. Microhistory is a branch of social history that examines phenomena at a microscopic scale. Burke (2003, pp. 59–60) describes it as a trend that focuses on micro-social analysis; in simple terms, it is historical inquiry that concentrates on narrow units of analysis such as particular events, rural communities, families, and individuals. Muir (2006, p. 619) explains that microhistory focuses on individuals or small groups over relatively short periods and on sudden changes, and its narrow scope allows for in-depth analysis. Ginzburg (1993) and Levi (1991) stress, however, that microhistorians reduce the scale of observation in order to reveal structures, norms, and processes that larger-scale studies miss. In this sense, local heroes may be linked to the history of particular families or communities, for example the founder of a village school, a village religious leader, or a community leader who served their surroundings. Their stories matter to their communities and can also show students how wider historical processes played out locally.

Local Heroes in History Learning

At least two theoretical foundations explain why heroes matter in history learning. The first derives from Albert Bandura's social learning theory, according to which individuals learn behaviour by observing and imitating models, and influential figures, including heroes, are among the most imitated models (Nabavi, 2012). Modelling works through observing, identifying with, and internalising the model's behaviour, so that heroic stories can engage students' emotional and affective dimensions. Modelling, however, also inherits the biases of the available narratives. Because Indonesian heroic narratives are dominated by political and military figures, students tend to understand heroes narrowly as politicians or soldiers. Recent studies of regional figures point to a wider definition. Sofiani et al. (2025) argue that local heroes need not be defined by confrontation, and they locate Kusumadinigrat's significance in his role as a traditional Sundanese leader, while Nelmawarni et al. (2025) trace Bahder Djohan's contributions to health, gender equality, and education. This tendency is consistent with the findings of Eriksonas (2004), Vähä (2002), and Benziger (2000) on the strength of political and militaristic narratives in hero teaching across countries, rooted in the tradition of the Great Man Theory (Carlyle et al., 2013).

The second foundation is the conceptual link between heroes and values. A person is recognised as a hero because of the values they embody, such as responsibility and sacrifice for society. Sanchez argues that the moral character of heroes is universal while also reflecting the values of their society (Sanchez, 1998, 2000). In the Indonesian context, this claim of universality needs to be tested, because school narratives of heroes are often bound to the ideological interests of the state (Kurniawan et al., 2018). Without room for critical thinking, modelling risks producing a narrow and uniform understanding of heroes.

In history teaching practice, historical figures are a primary vehicle for character education. Historical narratives present protagonists who serve as role models and antagonists, such as colonisers, who underscore the importance of particular values (Ahmad, 2014). Empirical evidence suggests that this strategy can work. Julaeha's (2012) quasi-experimental study at SMA Negeri 8 Bandung found that modelling based on heroes' biographies improved all 18 character indicators examined, with the largest gain in responsibility. Other studies likewise affirm the role of heroic narratives in character formation (Colby, 2008; Perrotta, 2017; Pramono et al., 2019; Sanchez, 1998, 2000).

This potential, however, has not been fully realised. Latif (2014) observes that history lessons have been reduced to memorising dates, wars, and royal genealogies, so that the moral messages of historical figures are lost. Ahmad (2014) identifies obstacles to value internalisation in teachers' understanding, student behaviour, the conduct of learning, and school culture. A further problem is unequal representation: government textbooks mention only 69 national heroes and other textbooks 78 (Pramono et al., 2019), far fewer than the number of heroes designated. Utama (2025) observes that the sheer number of heroes makes it difficult for educators to decide whom to prioritise, all the more so when local perspectives diverge from national narratives. Concentrating the narrative on a handful of figures, such as Sukarno, is also pedagogically unsound, since every figure has limitations. Other figures, including local figures whose influence is still felt in society, are needed as counterbalancing narratives.

Local figures receive the least attention of all. Yet local history helps students understand the geographical and cultural context in which they live (Goksu & Somen, 2019), so local figures make learning more contextual. In Semarang, for example, teachers have not integrated local figures into

learning, even though these figures could build students' historical empathy (Kurniawan, 2019). They stand outside the official narrative, but teachers can still bring them into the classroom for students to read about and discuss.

A survey of senior high school students in Semarang by Pramono et al. (2024) reinforces this picture. Sukarno and Sudirman were the most popular figures, textbooks were students' main source of knowledge about heroes, and teachers seldom used alternative sources. Students found lessons about heroes monotonous because the same names had been repeated since primary school, and explanations drawing on myth were still common. The students themselves asked for more discussion and alternative sources. Pramono et al. (2024) conclude that history learning has reached only the stage of "learning about heroes" and has yet to enable students to "learn from heroes" or "learn to be heroes".

Local heroes have the potential to bring history closer to readers who live in particular social and cultural settings. Narratives of local heroes are often cultural in character, blending cultural assumptions with scientific reasoning (Kurniawan et al., 2018). Local heroes can foster historical empathy, understood as students' cognitive and affective engagement with historical figures in order to better understand and contextualise their life experiences, decisions, or actions. Historical empathy involves understanding how people in the past thought, felt, made decisions, acted, and faced consequences within particular historical and social contexts (Endacott & Brooks, 2018).

These two foundations pull in different directions. A modelling approach treats heroes as models whose values are fixed in advance and simply to be emulated. The discovery approach proposed here casts students as investigators who may uncover unheroic sides of a figure. This article takes the position that teachers should bring local heroes into learning so that students understand how and why someone came to be regarded as a hero. Seixas and Morton (2013) place this ability within the concept of *historical significance*: the capacity to judge why a figure or event is considered important, by whom, and for what purpose. This capacity matters because official narratives are themselves contested: as the Ministry of Culture prepared a new national history in 2025, critics argued that its draft outline sanitised Soeharto's legacy (Utama, 2025). Students still learn heroic values, but they reach them by weighing evidence.

Incorporating Bruner's Learning Theory

Learning about local heroes is part of local history learning, for which Douch (1967) developed three models (Hafid, 2019). In the first, the teacher draws on local events as examples to illustrate national or world history more vividly. In the second, learning takes the form of exploring the environment. In the third, students undertake special studies of historical aspects of their surroundings, following procedures similar to those of professional researchers, from choosing a topic and planning to analysing data and writing a report.

This view accords with the author's argument that local history can function both as an elaborative-comparative object and as a participatory subject. As an elaborative-comparative object, local history is presented as part of the national narrative as it unfolded in a specific context. Teachers use examples from the local context to explain particular events in national history, so that local history becomes both an elaboration of and a point of comparison with the national narrative. Students thereby learn to see history from a broad perspective and from one close to their own lives.

As a participatory subject, local history positions students as participants who discover and reconstruct the past of a particular locality. Local history learning of this kind applies *resource-based learning*, in which students trace and construct the narratives they encounter in specific social and cultural settings, especially in the communities where they live.

Using locality as a means of fostering student participation in discovering and constructing knowledge about history and local heroes is consistent with the learning theory of Jerome S. Bruner (1915–2016). From the early 1950s, Bruner was an influential psychologist in cognitive studies and constructivism. He held that any subject can be taught to any child, provided it is presented in a form appropriate to the child's stage of development (Bruner, 1960). For Bruner, the main purpose of cognitive development is to provide individuals with models of the world and of truth. He emphasised the importance of learning with social and cultural content and the role of the social environment in children's development (Ozdem-Yilmaz & Bilican, 2020, p. 180).

Bruner held that learning involves three processes: (1) the acquisition of knowledge, in which learners ask, "Does this confirm or refine my previous knowledge?" or "Does this challenge my previous knowledge?"; (2) the transformation of knowledge, in which learners ask, "What else can

this knowledge now do?"; and (3) the evaluation of knowledge, in which learners ask, "Is this knowledge relevant?" and "Is it adequate for the task at hand?" He also argued that mature thinkers must acquire three main ways of representing the world: (1) enactive, the direct knowledge of how to do something; (2) iconic, knowledge represented by internal images of an idea; and (3) symbolic, more abstract and flexible thought, with language as the main tool of reflective thinking (Jordan et al., 2008, p. 58). These three modes of representation are elaborated in Bruner's (1966) *Toward a Theory of Instruction*.

For Bruner, the aim of education is to develop a child's thinking and problem-solving skills so that they can be transferred to a variety of situations. The central premise of *The Process of Education* (Bruner, 1960) is that students are active learners who construct their own knowledge. They select information, form hypotheses, and make decisions in order to integrate new experiences into existing mental structures. In this view, learning is a cognitive construction that gives meaning, builds experience, and allows information to cross the boundaries of the information given (Ozdem-Yilmaz & Bilican, 2020, p. 180).

The principles of Bruner's theory can be summarised as follows: (1) education should provide experiences that make students willing and open to learn; (2) it should be structured so that students can grasp it easily (the spiral configuration); and (3) it should be designed to facilitate the use of acquired knowledge in different situations (Ozdem-Yilmaz & Bilican, 2020, p. 181).

In educational practice, Bruner made several recommendations. First, education works best when learning is participatory, provocative, communal, and collaborative, and when learning is understood as the construction of meaning rather than its reception. Second, he suggested that the role of the teacher, rather than the system, matters most; formal structures such as the curriculum are less important than the teacher and the actual activities and interactions in the classroom (Takaya, 2008, pp. 15–16).

Bruner argued that, to improve the coding systems that support better thinking, students should be provided with learning environments for discovery. *Discovery learning* is a form of learning in which students construct their own knowledge by experimenting with a domain and inferring rules from the results. Its basic premise is that learners can design activities to build their own knowledge (Ozdem-Yilmaz & Bilican, 2020, p. 181). Discovery

learning requires students to identify problems, pose questions, formulate hypotheses, design and conduct investigations, and draw conclusions to solve problems.

Bruner emphasised that discovery encourages learners to become constructivists and that practice in discovering teaches learners how best to acquire information so that it becomes more readily available. In his view, the act of discovery requires practice in order to be valuable. Bruner (1961) also cautioned that the learner's mind must be prepared for discovery, and that discovery does not always involve acquiring new information. More often, he claimed, discovery results from a learner gaining insight that transforms their knowledge base through new ways of organising previously learned information (Alfieri et al., 2011, p. 13).

Bruner's later work also bears on learning about heroes. Bruner (1986) distinguished two modes of thought: the paradigmatic mode, which works through logic and proof, and the narrative mode, which works through stories of human action, intention, and consequence. In *The Culture of Education*, Bruner (1996) argued that humans construct meaning and identity chiefly through narrative, so education should help students understand and compose narratives. Because heroic stories are narratives, Bruner's narrative mode links the stories of local heroes to students' own meaning-making: students compose and compare different versions of the same figure's story instead of receiving a single account.

Discovery learning has several characteristics: (1) students are active learners who participate directly in problem-solving activities; (2) a focus on process rather than product enhances the mastery and application of skills; (3) opportunities to learn from failure increase motivation to develop solutions; (4) discovery learning supports natural human curiosity and interest in learning; and (5) feedback, collaboration, and discussion are essential to discovery learning and promote deeper understanding (Ozdem-Yilmaz & Bilican, 2020, p. 182).

There are several modes of discovery learning (Ozdem-Yilmaz & Bilican, 2020). In guided discovery, the teacher determines the content and direction of problem solving; teacher involvement is greatest in this mode. In modified discovery, the teacher sets the task, but students determine and design the procedure for solving it. In open, unassisted, or pure discovery, students decide both the content to be learned and the problem-solving procedure, conducting their own inquiries and drawing conclusions from them. In this mode, teacher in-

volvement is minimal and student autonomy is greatest; students are expected to discover new content with little or no assistance.

The choice of discovery mode should take empirical evidence into account. The meta-analysis by Alfieri et al. (2011) found that unassisted discovery is generally no more effective than explicit instruction, whereas discovery enhanced with guidance, feedback, and elicited explanations yields better outcomes. Similar critiques have been advanced by Mayer (2004) and by Kirschner, Sweller, and Clark (2006), who argue that minimal guidance is ineffective for novice learners. These findings are relevant to learning about local heroes, whose sources often consist of oral traditions, *babad*, or community memory that require source criticism. The most suitable modes for secondary school students are therefore guided and modified discovery, with the teacher supporting students in formulating questions and assessing sources. In this article, guided inquiry refers to this combination of guided and modified discovery, in which students investigate heroic figures critically while the teacher structures questions and sources.

An application of Bruner's approach through discovery pedagogy is presented in "History as Community-Based Research and the Pedagogy of Discovery: Teaching Racial Inequality, Documenting Local History, and Building Links Between Students and Communities in Mississippi and Tennessee" (Wood & Samuel, 2012). That study proposed discovery pedagogy to address learning about racial and ethnic issues. Students were guided to learn through experience, reading, discussion, and writing, and the learning connected them with local community actors. Bruner identified four benefits of discovery learning: increased intellectual potency, intrinsic motivation, learning the heuristics of discovery, and improved memory (Ozdem-Yilmaz & Bilican, 2020, p. 184). Discovery learning also fosters students' curiosity and enthusiasm for learning.

The fit between Bruner's theory and learning about local heroes can be formulated in three propositions. First, the traces of local heroes are physically present in students' surroundings, in the form of sites, buildings, graves, street names, or witnesses and descendants. This availability makes enactive representation possible in a way that is difficult for national figures whose traces lie far from students' environment. Second, narratives about local heroes are often not yet standardised in textbooks. Students can therefore build a narrative from diverse and sometimes conflicting sources instead of con-

Table 1. Mapping of Local History Learning Models, Modes of Discovery, and Bruner's Modes of Representation

Douch's model and position of local history	Mode of discovery and teacher's role	Dominant representation	Example activity: Soemitro Kolopaking	Link to learning outcomes
Local illustration within national content (elaborative-comparative object)	Guided: the teacher sets the problem and sources	Iconic and symbolic	When teaching the national movement and the BPUPK, the teacher presents photographs and excerpts from the session minutes; students compare Soemitro's stance with that of national figures	Phase F: the national movement and the Japanese occupation; connecting local and national events
Environmental exploration	Modified: the teacher sets the task, students design the procedure	Enactive and iconic	Students plan a visit to local sites or archives in Banjarnegara related to Soemitro and the Syarikat Islam, then map and photograph the traces	Phase F: gathering sources through document/archival study, interviews, and observation
Special study (participatory subject)	Open with support: students formulate questions, the teacher supports source criticism	Symbolic	Students investigate whether Soemitro deserves to be called a hero, according to whom, and by what criteria, then write an argumentative essay	Phase F: source criticism, empathy, and identifying historical significance

firming an official one. Third, the social and cultural proximity of local heroes to students facilitates a spiral curriculum, since the same figure can be revisited as students study the national movement, the Japanese occupation, or the independence period.

In discovery learning, students can undertake independent exploration that encourages them to conduct their own research on local heroes, for instance through visits to museums and historical sites or interviews with community figures. Such exploration takes the form of discovery-based projects in which students find information, gather data, and present their findings about local heroes in different modes of representation (enactive, iconic, and symbolic): (1) enactive activities, such as visiting sites associated with a local hero to trace their historical footprints, or staging a drama or *role-play* of key events in the hero's life, so that students experience history directly; (2) iconic visualisation, using maps, pictures, photographs, and videos to help students visualise the stories and historical context of local heroes; and (3) symbolic representation, encouraging students to write essays or reports, or to prepare presentations that interpret and construct the meaning of local heroes' stories. Empirical evidence supports such projects. Lionar et al. (2025) found that junior high school students who worked on projects about the biographies of West Sumatran figures gained historical knowledge, analysed and discussed historical sources more ably, and wrote and presented history in creative forms.

To strengthen students' understanding of local heroes, teachers should prioritise a spiral ap-

proach that builds understanding in layers. Teachers begin with basic concepts about local heroes and their history and gradually introduce more complex and deeper aspects over time. They then revisit and enrich the material, inviting students to return to the same topic with new perspectives and richer information, so that students develop a deeper understanding of the heroes and the values they embody.

Douch's three models of local history learning, the position of local history as an elaborative-comparative object and a participatory subject, and Bruner's modes of discovery and representation can be mapped as shown in Table 1. The mapping shows that the greater the students' autonomy, the greater the demand for source criticism and the more dominant symbolic representation becomes.

For example, a unit on Soemitro Kolopaking could be designed as three to four lessons in Grade 11 following a spiral sequence. In the first lesson, while teaching the national movement, the teacher introduces Soemitro as a local illustration of the *Indische Vereeniging* and the BPUPK and asks students to compare his stance with that of national figures (guided discovery). In the second lesson, students plan an exploration of local sites or archives related to Soemitro and the Syarikat Islam in Banjarnegara and document their findings in maps and photographs (modified discovery). In the third and fourth lessons, students investigate whether Soemitro deserves to be called a hero, according to whom, and by what criteria. They read excerpts from primary and secondary sources, weigh his roles as a colonial official and as a BPUPK member,

and present their conclusions in an argumentative essay. The teacher assesses how students use sources and build their arguments, and accepts any well-supported conclusion about Soemitro's heroism. Sofiani et al. (2025) propose a comparable research project for Phase F built around RAA Kusumadinigrat, which suggests that the design can be adapted to local heroes in other regions.

Bruner's theory gives teachers of local heroes several tools. In discovery learning, students take an active part, develop a deeper understanding of local history, and practise analysing information and drawing their own conclusions. These gains depend on the teacher's guidance in source criticism. Without it, students may simply reproduce the version of the story their community has already canonised. With it, lessons on local heroes become more interactive and reflective, and students learn to weigh the values in these stories before they adopt them.

CONCLUSION

Heroes play a central role in values education within history learning. Indonesia has national heroes designated by the President and local heroes recognised in their own regions, either as actors in national history within a local sphere or as actors whose significance is communal. Schools have long taught national heroes, while local heroes, who are closer to students' everyday lives, receive little attention. Introducing and discussing local heroes can foster students' historical empathy. This article proposes a Brunerian framework for guided inquiry into local heroes, built on guided discovery, enactive-iconic-symbolic representation, the spiral curriculum, and the narrative mode. Through discovery, students learn about the heroes of their own communities and also learn to judge why someone is regarded as a hero. Learning thereby moves beyond hero worship, from "learning about heroes" towards "learning from heroes", as Pramono et al. (2024) advocate. As a conceptual study, this framework still needs empirical testing, for example through classroom action research or design-based research, to establish whether it develops students' historical thinking and historical empathy.

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