

Education Letter

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Teaching of History

MESSAGE FROM THE EDITOR

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Teaching of History

Beyond the Bubble: A New Generation of History Assessments 4

Developing Historical Literacy 7

Historical Thinking in Schools in Canada 11

Get Thee to the Archive: The Teaching of History and the Doing of History 15

Bringing the Community into the Classroom 18

This issue aims to call attention to the relevance of History in students' development as critical thinkers and ultimately as good citizens. There are two main questions addressed in these essays. One concerns itself with how to teach history in a way that enables educators to develop in students the intellectual habits of mind that help them to become literate in history and have inquisitive dispositions and concern with evidence, warrants, and argumentation. The other question deals with how to assess and track students' growth as historical thinkers and their historical literacy. The latter raises another important matter, the need to pay sustained attention to the aims of education against which students' accomplishments are evaluated and to the notion of excellence informing both aims and assessment (Bruno-Jofre & Hills, 2011). The members of the Stanford History Education Group, Breakstone, Smith, and Wineburg as well as S. Levesque, Director of the Virtual History Lab at the University of Ottawa, Peter Seixas, Director of the Centre for Historical Consciousness at the University of British Columbia, and K. Ercikan share with the readers of the *Education Letter* their current research in relation to life in the classroom and the assessment of students' growth as historical thinkers.



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Item # V28

NOTES

¹ See Ewa Domńska (1998), Introduction, pp. 1-12. Domńska interviewed some of the most distinguished protagonists of the debate.

² Leading books include Peter Seixas, *Theorizing Historical Consciousness* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press 2004); Sam Wineburg, *Historical Thinking and Other Unnatural Acts. Charting the Future of Teaching the Past* (Philadelphia, US: Temple University Press, 2001); P. Stearns, P. Seixas, and S. Weinburg, *Knowing, Teaching, and Learning History: National and International Perspectives* (New York University Press, 2000); Robert Martineau *L'histoire à l'école: Matière à penser* (Paris, France, 1999); L'Harmattan.; Stéphane Levesque *Thinking Historically: Educating Students for the 21st Century* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008).

³ The development of historical mindedness would include detachment from immediate pressures, readiness to subject emotions to reason; a sense of understanding that there is more than one perspective and that issues are such because there is more than one conception of what is right or necessary; ability to weigh forces of change and continuity, and awareness that institutions and values can change over time.

Theodore Christou addresses the limitations of the textbook as an adequate instrument in the history class and takes us to the time of Duncan McArthur, deputy minister and later minister of education in Ontario, who in the late thirties, imbued pedagogical progressive ideas, set aside textbooks, and even examinations. Joseph Stafford, a history teacher, demonstrates the practical efforts which bring the community and the classroom together in the study of history.

The task of the history teacher is not an easy one. The crisis of modern historiography in the 1980s and the ensuing debates, prompted by the linguistic turn in metahistory and a preoccupation with the language of representation, centered on scepticism of the possibility of historical knowledge. Those who emphasized the rhetorical dimension, also referred to as the aesthetic dimension, argued that the historical experience cannot be captured in language. The issues of validity and significance were at stake, although a sense of its continuing importance was kept.¹ To an important extent it was a presentist conception of history; making history an extension or reflection of the present through the historian (the present of the historian). History has indeed a reflexive character but doing and teaching history cannot be subservient to presentist agendas at the expense of evidence and method. Other philosophers of history advocated a delicate balance; as Fay said, the point is that “the Rhetorical Attitude and the Scientific Attitude need one another for their continued viability” (Fay, 1998, p7). An interesting tension developed between the historical statement that had to be warranted or validated while the overall historical account could not be true or false or even fallible. It went beyond the critique of the limits and deficiencies of modernist objectivity (without differentiating objectivity from neutrality), and the necessary incorporation of a post-positivistic view of scientific knowledge, to question the possibility of rational historical inquiry. This approach, placing a blurred line between the historical narrative and fiction within a constructivist notion of history, was for some time part of an interesting debate among philosophers of history. Lorenz (1999), for example, argued convincingly that “constructing” is not identical to fictionalizing, but is in fact a legitimate and necessary cognitive activity. Our students were not alien to the public image of the state of the discipline, and bring a simplistic relativism to class, often with a self-referential slant nourished by a well placed global interest in memory which is sometimes confounded with history without discriminatory conceptual thinking. The culture of memory, aside from its ethical implications, has captured the imagination of writers but often blurred the distinction between ideas and belief developed through informal means coupled with intuition and a more warranted approach that would challenge those ideas.

The debate that became inclusive of other historiological issues (approaches, themes, and concepts underlying the study of history) went along an emergent pluralism of themes, ideas, voices, experiences of everyday life, identity issues, an intersection with ethnicity, gender, class, and a focus on culture that, of necessity, opened new considerations on the interdisciplinarity of the historical enterprise. It

created great opportunities for research and understanding. But also, on occasion, led to vulgar forms of relativism that reached the teacher education classroom particularly when students had limited exposure to history classes. More recently, there has been a shift from the relativist challenge to why it is important to know about the past and the need for historians to have a public presence in a democratic society. I am thinking of books published in 2008 such as John Tosh's *Why History Matters*, Jeremy Black's *The Curse of History*, David Cannadine's *Making History Now and Then*, or Peter C. Hoffer's *The Historians' Paradox*. However, the call made by German historian Jörn Rüsen (2006) for a new theory of history, a post-postmodern one, may be more appealing.

In spite of the sometimes fierce, sometimes flamboyant exchanges on the nature of the discipline, history educators² articulated educational models that aimed at actively engaging students with historical sources and materials, developing and testing possible scenarios respecting past events, setting out the warrants in support of the provisional accounts advanced, justifying the judgments those accounts and warrants entail, exposing various perspectives and identifying the explanations and legitimate grounds for those perspectives. These are a secure but not infallible basis for claims of explicit historical connection (Bruno-Jofré and Schiralli, 2002). When working within an inquiry model the notion of judgement is of central importance. We judge in the absence of conclusive evidentiary bases, but a judgment here - even a judgment that ultimately turns out to be mistaken - is not an arbitrary matter of subjective impression. There are processes and rules (like the jurisprudential rules of evidence) that increase the likelihood that a given judgment may be sound or unsound - even in the absence of certainty (Bruno-Jofré and Schiralli, 2002).

Karin Steiner and I (2007) placed the development of the historical mindedness of the student at the core of educational aims in history teaching. Historical mindedness, a concept put forward by the American Historical Association's Committee of Seven in 1899 and rescued by Ken Osborne (2001), can be characterized as a disposition and an outlook, a way to see the world or a way of living, a way to situate oneself in the temporal and spacial dimensions, that are desirable in a literate and democratically-minded person. Historical mindedness would be realizable through the development of skills and attitudes related to historical thinking qualities.³ As Levesque clearly explains the development of general literacy cultivating higher-order skills is not enough or adequate to develop an understanding of history. Furthermore, I would add, while those skills are suitable for workplace purposes and general functionality, limiting historical literacy to generic thinking skills can inhibit agency and encourage the development of a citizenry deprived of the bases on which to question not only their reality but the way politicians and interest groups portray major political decisions. This issue brings research findings of the most distinguished leaders in history education whose work set new directions in scholarship and in teaching and learning, the gratifying effort of a well known history teacher in our region who is involved in critical teaching and learning history, and the reflections of a young scholar who writes history of education and educates future teachers in the teaching of history and social studies.

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Beyond the Bubble: A New Generation of History Assessments

JOEL BREAKSTONE, MARK SMITH, SAM WINEBURG,
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When conducting professional development workshops on using primary sources in the classroom, we hear a common refrain from teachers: “Great stuff, but *where* are the tests that go with it?” “If learning to read primary sources is so important,” teachers want to know, “how can we assess whether kids are actually getting better at it?”

These teachers have adeptly recognized the poverty of imagination that plagues history testing in the United States. History teachers are presented with only two disparate models for history testing: the much maligned multiple-choice question and the full-blown, ten-source document-based question (DBQ) of the College Board’s Advanced Placement Program.

As history teachers, we want students to think critically, contend with competing interpretations, and use evidence to support arguments. Yet, the vast majority of history exams in the United States use but a single tool to assess historical knowledge: the multiple-choice test. This homegrown American invention — indeed, in England it is dubbed “the American method” — rarely measures the historical thinking skills teachers seek to nurture in their students. Multiple-choice questions are fine for assessing factual knowledge, but leave no more than a shaded bubble as evidence of student learning.

DBQs are great if your students can already cope with the complexity of fragmentary and contradictory multiple sources. But what are we to do if they are not there yet? Telling a history teacher that these are the only two options is like telling a carpenter that the only tools for building a house are a hammer and a pneumatic nail gun. What about all of the possibilities in between?

This was our challenge and our opportunity. With support from the United States’ Library of Congress Teaching with Primary Sources Program¹, we set out to marshal the forces of the digital revolution to improve history teaching. How could we use the resources of the world’s largest library — its digital collection of photos, paintings, speeches, radio broadcasts, film clips, not to mention government documents and presidential papers — to help teachers track students’ growth as historical thinkers? How could we use digital sources to build realistic, classroom-friendly assessments that truly inform instruction?

We are currently crafting and validating short document-based assessments that gauge a variety of historical thinking skills and building a website to get them in the hands of teachers. Some of our assessments include brief responses that can be done in less than five minutes. Others require a bit more time, but far less than a full-fledged DBQ. Our belief is that when students engage in legitimate historical tasks and provide short written rationales for their responses, teachers can see far deeper into student thinking and thus gain a clearer sense of whether their students truly understand the material.

Consider the following image from the Library's collection², a 1932 painting by J.L.G. Ferris, titled "The first Thanksgiving 1621," depicting a meal between Puritan settlers and Wampanoag Indians in Plymouth, Massachusetts. We built an assessment that asked students, "Is this painting a useful resource for historians who wish to understand the relationship between the Wampanoag and the Puritan settlers in 1621?" Although we ourselves had ideas about how students might respond, we knew that a group of former history teachers thinks very differently than a group of 16-year-olds. We went to a local high school and had 100 students take the assessment.



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¹United States' Library of Congress Teaching with Primary Sources Program. Retrieved on December 06, 2010 from <http://www.loc.gov/teachers/tps/>

²United States' Library of Congress. Retrieved on December 06, 2010 from <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2001699850/>

Several patterns emerged. One of the most common responses was from students who agreed that the painting would be useful to a historian. One student wrote: "You can see how they are interacting with each other. Without any picture, you couldn't really see how Wampanoag Indians and the Puritans acted."

We refer to this as a "matching" response. Students reason that this painting is a good source for historians because it matches what they themselves believe about the first Thanksgiving. If students believe that the first Thanksgiving was a positive affair, with Puritans and Native Americans amicably breaking bread, then the source is deemed good.

Other students were more critical. For example, one, who felt the painting would not be a useful resource, wrote, "As soon as the settlers arrived, there was mass curiosity which turned into violence and hatred. There was never such a 'party' between the two peoples. They couldn't even understand each other."

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...continued from page 5

RESOURCES

The Stanford History Education Group (SHEG, <http://sheg.stanford.edu>) is an award-winning research and development group comprised of Stanford faculty, graduate students, post-docs and visiting scholars. In 2011 SHEG will launch a new document-based assessment website.

On the face of it, this student has done something commendable. He has accessed prior knowledge and brought it to bear on the document. However, while this student's response is critical of the source, it is not what we would consider *critical thinking*. Like the first student's response, this one also engages in a matching process, comparing the image to prior beliefs about this historical event. In both cases, students have disregarded a fundamental precept of historical thinking: the consideration of when a source was created when evaluating its probity.

Several students amply demonstrated this understanding. Consider this young woman's response, "Disregarding the accuracy of the portrait – and I'm not sure if Wampanoag is the right tribe – it would be pretty ridiculous for alleged historians to try and study the 1600s from a portrait painted in 1932." The student brackets the accuracy of the depiction and puts her finger on a crucial issue in assessing the source's usefulness: its date. What is gained by forcing students to justify their answers? We believe that these brief responses give us insight into students' thinking, not just about this event, but how they conceptualize historical evidence in general. It is this kind of information – not a blackened bubble – that provides clues about student thinking and gives direction to teachers for improving classroom instruction.



DORIS MCCARTHY

Developing Historical Literacy

STÉPHANE LÉVESQUE, *Associate Professor, Director, Virtual History Lab, University of Ottawa*

What should history students know when they graduate from high school? The *Ontario Teachers' Manual for History* of 1915 indicates that "history is usually called a 'memory' subject, and is accordingly often taught as a mere memorizing of facts, names, and dates."¹ Surely, for most educators today memorizing content knowledge is no longer an adequate answer to this fundamental question. Nowadays, there is widespread talk about "critical thinking," "skills" and "literacy" as overarching goals of social science education. Yet, there is not always agreement as to what these mean in practice.

In fact, much of what is currently available on "cross-curricular literacy" only serves to obscure fundamental differences in disciplinary expertise. To claim, for instance, that learning to read in mathematics reinforces the ability to read history suggests very naive epistemological distinctions between domains of knowledge and also flawed assumptions about text meaning.² As Sam Wineburg observes, "in our zeal to arrive at overarching models of reading, we often ignore qualities of the text that give it shape and meaning."³ Although sharing some common symbol systems, understanding in history and understanding in mathematics or in other domains pose radically different challenges to the mind.

The process of disciplinary homogenization, which leads teachers to use a common *parlance* and set of strategies across subjects, prevents students from taking advantage of the disciplines. Here it is important to differentiate between "subjects" and "disciplines." Subjects are organized departments of knowledge devised for structuring schedules and assessing learning outcomes. Disciplines consist of "approaches devised by scholars over the centuries in order to address essential questions, issues, and phenomena drawn from the natural and human worlds."⁴ They include distinctive methods of inquiry, networks of concepts and ideas, symbol systems and modes of representations. History, with all of these refinements, is that discipline which seeks to make sense of the past. History is not the past, rather it is the process and the result of making meaning out of bits and fragments of the past.

Literacy and disciplinary expertise

Literacy is the ability to read, write, and think critically about a range of media including print texts, images, and electronic texts. It is a cognitive and social practice, an "essential tool for personal growth and active participation in a democratic society."⁵ Becoming literate is critical in this information age and it is no surprise that education systems place great emphasis on early literacy instruction.

Yet despite significant progress in students' performance in standard literacy tests (e.g., Education Quality and Accountability Office results), there is still no clear evidence of improvement in students' ability to read, write, or think critically in history. Part of

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¹ Ontario Teachers' Manuals, *History* (Toronto: The Copp, Clark Company, 1915), 38.

² As an example of this literacy trend, see the introduction of Ontario Ministry of Education, *Think Literacy: Cross-Curricular Approaches – Grades 7-12* (Toronto: Queen's Printer for Ontario, 2003), 1-5.

³ Sam Wineburg, *Historical Thinking and Other Unnatural Acts: Charting the Future of Teaching the Past*. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001), 79.

⁴ Howard Garner & Veronica Boix-Mansilla, "Teaching for Understanding in the Disciplines – And Beyond," in *The Development and Education of the Mind*, ed. Howard Garner (New York: Routledge, 2006), 147. Original work published in 1994.

⁵ Ontario Ministry of Education, *Literacy for Learning: Report of the Expert Panel on Literacy in Grades 4 to 6 in Ontario*, 2004, 5. See also Barbara Moss, "Making a case and a place for effective content area literacy instruction in the elementary grades," *The Reading Teacher*, 59 (2005), 46-55.

⁶ Tony Taylor, "From History Horror Stories to Historical Literacy," *Monash Magazine* (2004), 2. Retrieved on May 5, 2010 from <http://www.monash.edu.au/pubs/monmag/issue14-2004/news/history.html>

⁷ See Howard Gardner, *The Unschooled Mind: How Children Think and How Schools Should Teach* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 172-175.

⁸ Peter Seixas, "Schweigen! Die Kinder! Or, Does Postmodern History Have a Place in the Schools?," in *Knowing, Teaching, and Learning History: National and International Perspectives*, ed. Peter Stearns, Peter Seixas & Sam Wineburg (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 25.

⁹ Peter Lee, "Putting Principles into Practice: Understanding History," in *How Students Learn: History, Mathematics, and Science in the Classroom*, ed. M. Suzanne Donovan & John D. Bransford (Washington DC: National Academies Press, 2005), 32.

¹⁰ The Benchmarks of Historical Thinking (www.historic.ca/benchmarks) is a Canadian initiative looking at key concepts in history (and set of related questions) as well as the ways of making progression in historical thinking.

¹¹ For a study of students' ideas about these questions, see Peter Lee, "Historical Literacy: Theory and Research," *International Journal of Historical Learning, Teaching and Research*, 5 (2005), 29-40.

¹² Howard Garner & Veronica Boix-Mansilla, "Teaching for Understanding in the Disciplines – And Beyond," 151. On the proto-disciplinary knowledge developed by students in history, see Sam Wineburg and Jack Schneider, "Was Bloom's Taxonomy Pointed in the Wrong Direction?," *Phi Delta Kappa*, 91 (December 2009/January 2010), 56-61.

¹³ On parallel challenges facing students in the U.S. curriculum, see Sam Wineburg, *Historical Thinking and Other Unnatural Acts: Charting the Future of Teaching the Past*, 79-80.

¹⁴ Stéphane Lévesque, *Thinking Historically: Educating Students for the 21st century* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008).

¹⁵ Sam Wineburg, "Unnatural and Essential: The Nature of Historical Thinking," *Teaching History*, 129 (2007), 6

the problem has been our inability to teach "historical literacy." For Tony Taylor, becoming literate in history necessitates "a range of abilities and understandings required to grasp the nature of history."⁶ Decades of research in the field has shown that expertise in history – disciplinary competence – is counter-intuitive, best cultivated when students (1) understand history and (2) understand the nature of history.

Students come to school with powerful beliefs and stories about the past. These so-called "common-sense" ideas acquired at home or in everyday life experiences are gradually challenged in higher learning by some more complex and scientific ones.⁷ But does public education really challenge learners to replace these intuitive ideas with more warranted ones as produced by historians? A central principle of history education continues to be that students need a firm ground of knowledge about the past (around the community, the nation, etc.) to be competent and ultimately "good" citizens.

But historical understanding is more complex than mastering stagnant pieces of facts about the past. As Peter Seixas contends, students are exposed to a variety of conflicting accounts (inside and outside the school) and "need the means to assess the relative strengths and weaknesses of these interpretations."⁸ Transforming students' intuitive ideas and equipping them with the tools to make sense of the past necessitate what Peter Lee calls "metahistorical" knowledge.⁹ Unlike the substance of the past, this knowledge shapes the way we go about doing history. What makes historians experts is not only, or so much, their vast knowledge of historical periods but their sophisticated beliefs about history and critical use of key concepts like evidence, historical empathy, and narrative.¹⁰ Instead of naively asking "what is the best story to know?" historians face the complexity of the past with such fundamental questions as "How do we know about the past?" "Why did it happen?" "What was it like back then?"¹¹ Questions of this sort engage historians in a research process of investigating past events and producing evidence-based accounts. This disciplinary enterprise is dynamic and never complete, subject to debate and revision.

From "cross-curricular" to "historical" literacy

The strategies to develop cross-curricular literacy are useful in helping students develop everyday skills to read, write, and interpret a range of media. Because of the kind of habits of mind it develops, cross-curricular literacy promotes what might be called "proto-disciplinary" knowledge, that is knowledge extending beyond common sense to include general features of higher-order thinking.¹² At this level, for instance, students can read a variety of texts and make a distinction between "facts" and "opinions." But this type of literacy is largely inadequate to sophisticated understanding in history because it does not originate from the texts and methods of the discipline. One cannot read the development of the BNA Act (British North America

Act) in the same way as the development of DNA.¹³

Developing historical literacy necessitates a particular mode of engaging with history. When students are challenged to think like historians they must tackle a series of essential questions that cannot be answered with classroom texts and cross-curricular literacy skills. Defining contextualized historical reading, writing, and thinking is more complicated than simply outlining a set of heuristics as so much depends on the questions, the texts, and the context. Still, it is possible to outline some of the questions that historians bring to the task:

1. Use of inquiry: How do we know about the Holocaust?
2. Need of significance: Why is it important to study the War of 1812? The Canadian contribution to it?
3. Role of self/identity: How does my identity shape the way I engage with the past?
4. Sense of empathy: What was it like to be soldiers back in 1812?
5. Use of evidence: What evidence do we have that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction?
6. Importance of causation: What are the causes and effects of the War on Terror?
7. Connection to the present: In what ways does the present shape the way we make sense of the past? How is the present in continuity with the past?
8. Role of judgment: Why should I believe in the argument presented by officials? With what reservation?
9. Language of history: How do we use and deal with the language of the past? How do we represent it?
10. Use of historical narrative: What is the organization and structure of a convincing story? How are historical narratives different from/similar to historical novels?

Helping our students learn to answer these (and many other such) questions provides one, perhaps the most effective way of introducing them to the power and limits of historical thinking.¹⁴ Schools are in a privileged position to challenge popular, intuitive ideas about the past with “an orientation to the past informed by disciplinary canons of evidence and rules of argument.”¹⁵ Of course, very few students will ever grow into historians but introducing them to the “rules of the game” helps novices develop more sophisticated ideas and stories than provided by popular culture and other sites of memory. Faced with unfamiliar documents or conflicting accounts, students who have developed historical literacy are better equipped to read and question them and judge their merit than those who rely on the affordances of everyday life.

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RESOURCES

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...continued from page 9

Table 1: General distinctions between cross-curricular and historical literacy

Cross-curricular literacy (proto-disciplinary knowledge)	Historical literacy (disciplinary knowledge)
What are the different types of texts?	What is a historical narrative? How is it constructed?
What are the features of the text? (main idea, facts, opinions, information, details)	What is the argument of the author? Is it convincing? How is it supported by historical evidence derived from sources?
What process, event or subject is being explained?	What is the sequence of events? What are the causes/consequences? What historical period is considered?
What “good guess” can you make from this text/passage?	What does the evidence tell you about the events? When was it produced? What are the subtexts of the source? How is the evidence corroborated with other sources?
What do you know about the topic?	How is the past different from the present? What was it like to be there?
What do you think of the text? Why?	What story should you believe in? On what grounds? With what reservation?

Historical Thinking in Schools in Canada

PETER SEIXAS AND KADRIYE ERCIKAN¹, *University of British Columbia*

Investigating historical thinking in Canadian schools

Why teach it? We need to help students not only “learn the facts,” but also be able to think about the nature of historical interpretation, the relationship of the past to the present, and the uses of the past, as citizens, in making decisions about the future. The Benchmarks Project is a pan-Canadian project whose aim is to promote historical thinking in Canadian classrooms. It is framed around six historical thinking concepts: historical significance, evidence, continuity & change, cause & consequence, historical perspectives, ethical dimension (www.historybenchmarks.ca). We are interested in knowing whether “The Benchmarks Project” has an impact in schools.

In this article, we are reporting some results from a validation study, a piece of the preparation for a large-scale, measure of change in history education, which we hope to conduct over the next five years. The validation study yielded some interesting results in its own right. We had a teacher sample of 56 teachers and 196 students in 10 of those teachers’ classrooms. We are going to focus on teachers and their classrooms (not on students’ thinking), and specifically, on two questions about their classroom activities (question 9) and goals (question 10).

Questions About Classroom Activities

We sought to include a range of pedagogical strategies that we thought would be common in history and social studies classrooms, ranging from those which *prima facie* cast the students as passive receivers of historical information (a, b) and, in contrast, those which probably demanded more active engagement with interpretive demands of history, i.e., historical thinking (c, d, g, h). We included two activities (e and f) that we assumed were common in classrooms, but that might or might not stimulate active historical thinking, depending on their specific application.

How often do the following activities take place in your history classes? (Very Seldom, Seldom, Sometimes, Often, Very Often)

- a. The students listen to my stories about the past
- b. They are told what was good or bad, right or wrong in history
- c. They discuss different explanations of what happened in the past
- d. They study historical sources, e.g. documents, pictures or maps
- e. They watch historical videos and films
- f. They use the textbook and/or worksheets
- g. They use a range of activities, e.g. role play, local projects or visiting museums/sites
- h. They retell and reinterpret history themselves

NOTES

¹ The authors benefited from the research assistance of Emily Doman, Juliette Lyons-Thomas and Tom Morton.

RESOURCES

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Questions About Goals for History Learning

We also wanted to know what goals teachers had for their students in history classes. Again, an understanding of history teaching as the transmission of information is *prima facie* suggested by some (a, g) while the demands of active historical thinking are *prima facie* suggested by others (b, c, d, j). In this list, there are also a number of goals which look to the present-day uses of the study of history (e, f, i). The latter might or might not, we hypothesized, involve active *historical* thinking, but would probably necessitate critical thinking of some kind. We also included one purely preservationist goal (h).

To what extent do you concentrate on the following goals in your history classes? (Very little, Little, Some, Much, Very Much)

- a. I want my students to acquire knowledge about the major facts in history
- b. I want them to be able to judge historical events according to ideas about human and civil rights
- c. I want them to imagine what it might have been like for people in the past, taking account of all viewpoints
- d. I want them to understand the behaviour of past people by reconstructing the special situations and thinking of the period when they lived
- e. I want them to use history to understand the situation in the world today
- f. I want them to see their own lives in a much larger historical context
- g. I want them to value the traditions and identity of our nation
- h. I want them to value the preservation of historical sites and old buildings
- i. I want them to internalize basic democratic values
- j. I want them to be able to judge various historical sources critically

Results

Figure 1. Teachers' and students' perceptions of class activities

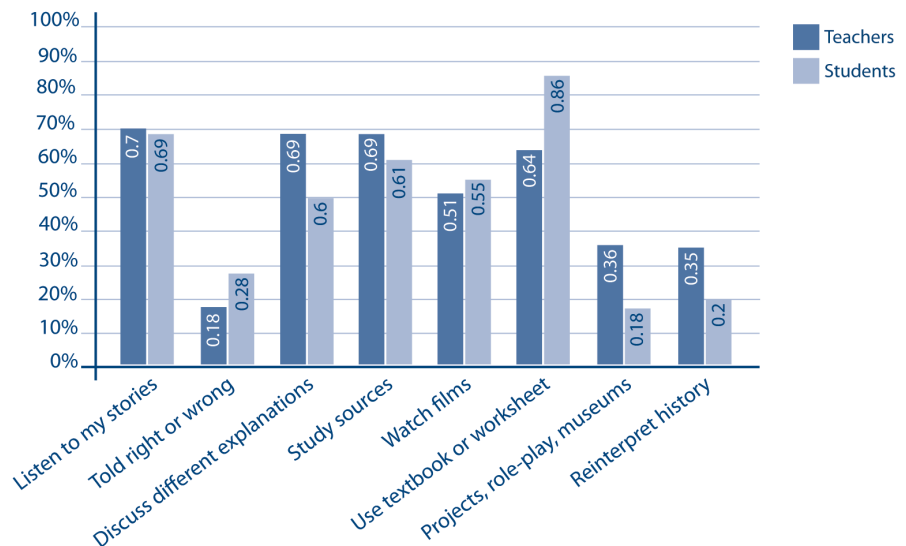


Figure 2. Teachers' and students' perceptions of goals of history classes

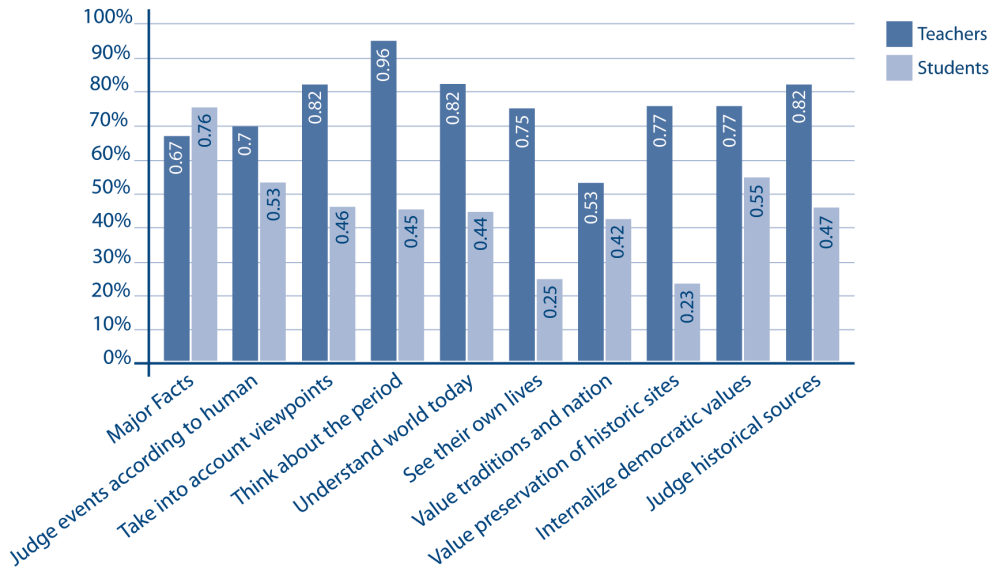
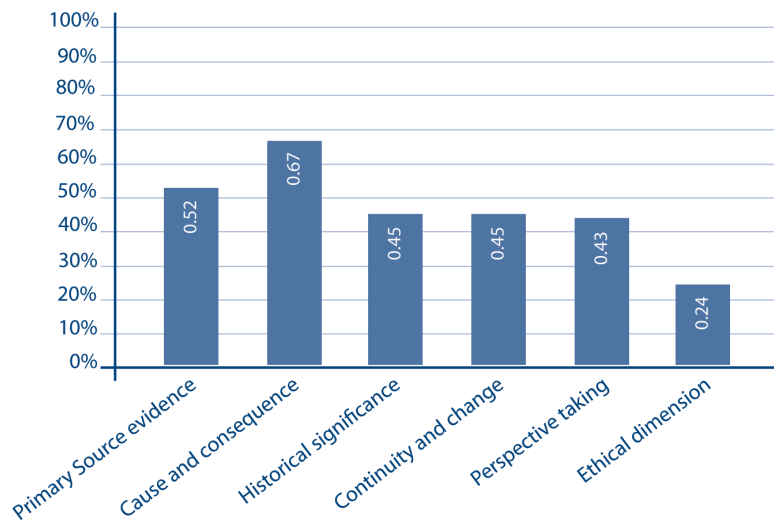


Figure 3. Teachers who think the six historical thinking concepts are important or very important, teach them at least monthly and are included in assignments and tests



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...continued from page 13

Discussion

A few things stand out from these graphs. Figure 1 shows teachers' and students' reported perceptions of what goes on in history classes. In general, they are fairly well aligned. In one instance, they are clearly not: students perceive much more than their teachers, time spent on "textbooks and worksheets," the iconic "boRING" way to spend time in a history classroom. In contrast, the teachers estimate more time than their students being spent on the more creative "projects, role-plays.", and "reinterpretations" of history.

In Figure 2, what stands out is the difference across almost all of the history education goals between teachers and their students: the students simply did not understand their classes in terms of almost *any* learning goals as strongly as their teachers. The only goal which was an exception to this pattern was "learning the major facts" which students, more than teachers, perceived as a goal in their classes.

A summative measure of orientation towards historical thinking

After compiling and analyzing responses to the individual questions, we put the responses from the teacher questionnaire together, in order to construct a composite scale of *orientation towards historical thinking* in teachers' classroom goals and activities. To do this, we selected those questions that were *prima facie* more directly related to historical thinking. These were:

Question 9 ("often" or "very often" for c, d, g, or h)

Question 10 ("much" or "very much" for b, c, d, j)

Questions 11-16 (believe teaching six historical thinking concepts are important or very important, teach them at least monthly and are included in assignments and tests. See figure 3 for a summary of their answers to these questions).

Taking all these (26 items) together, there was evidence of a high degree of internal consistency in teachers' responses (statistically expressed as a Cronbach's alpha of .937). Such a high level of internal consistency among the questions allows the assignment of a single numerical score as an indicator of orientation towards historical thinking.

The student questionnaire that we designed did NOT achieve such a level of consistency, so we will have to go back to the drawing boards and try again with students.

What good is this?

While a single number provides no picture of what actually goes on in classrooms (as interviews and observations can), it can provide the researchers with a useful tool for large scale change over time. For example, in provinces (like Ontario and Manitoba) which are bringing (or have recently brought) in curriculum revision to incorporate the Benchmarks of Historical Thinking, we will be able to see whether those changes actually make a difference at the classroom level. This will enable ministries to know whether they are supplying adequate levels of materials and professional development to support the promotion of historical thinking.

Get Thee to the Archive: The Teaching of History and the Doing of History

THEODORE CHRISTOU, *University of New Brunswick*

The teaching of history is a matter always under debate. This is in large part due to the fact that the meaning of history as a discipline is far from clear. History is contentious; I find that promising. It means that history matters. Despite various, sometimes preposterous, attacks upon history levied by postmodern scholars preoccupied with what we now call the 'linguistic turn', history has not lost its power to evoke, challenge, elucidate, and inform. At its best, history shares with storytelling a strong interest in sharing compelling narratives that pertain to character, setting, and plot. Where it deviates from fiction is primarily in that it requires warrants, or evidence, to support each made claim; a historian, unlike an author, must provide evidence for each claim made and for each proffered turn.

Again, I find it encouraging that history is a, sometimes, litigious subject. As in democracy, debate is a promise of vitality and health in a robust discipline. Historians debate, and they quarrel. They review each other's conclusions and warrants fastidiously. They take into consideration both primary and secondary sources that any particular historical account uses as warrants to underpin claims. As a consequence of peer review and debate, our understanding of the past broadens and enriches.

No historical narrative or interpretation shall ever be total, complete, or free of perspective. Each is infinitely revisable and improvable. This does not mean that all interpretations are equally credible. The credibility of historical facts and sources is independent of that of our interpretations and the latter are judged by their relationship to the former. No one historical study can encapsulate the horrors of Holocaust. Historians inch closer to truth without posturing that they have ever finally and conclusively told the full tale. Study upon study, our understanding of the past becomes broader in scope, richer in resources examined, more reflective of bias, and more inclusive of perspectives.

I argue that Shirley Engle, commenting on the social studies, identified the fundamental problems we face in the teaching of history:

For reasons I have never fully understood, most history professors completely change their colors when they step out of their role as research scholars and take on the mantle of "herr" professor. As scholars, they hold truth in great tenuosness; they are not all of one mind; their disciplines are hotbeds of controversy; they are forever correcting one another's errors. But once they have laid aside their research eyeshades and donned the teaching robes, they become authorities whose mission is considered to be the transmission of their superior knowledge to students. Teachers, and this includes many college professors, either find it too arduous a task, or possibly inappropriate, to share with students the problems and questions in the field. Teachers are poorly prepared by their own education to confront the controversy and uncertainty that is the real bone and sinew of scholarship.¹

...continues on page 16

NOTES

¹ Shirley H. Engle, "Late Night Thoughts about the New Social Studies," in *Social Education* (1986), 50 (1): 21.

² See, for example, "New School Course to Discourage Exams, Abolish Homework," *Toronto Daily Star*, September 14, 1937: 1. This front-page article in the newspaper summarized the spirit of the 164-page curriculum document as leading to "less stress on factual type of teaching."

³ Duncan McArthur, "Education for Citizenship," *The School* (December 1934): 286.

⁴ Robin S. Harris, *Quiet Evolution: A Study of the Educational System of Ontario* (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 1967). The high school entrance examinations were not withdrawn until 1949.

⁵ Duncan McArthur, "Education for Citizenship," 288.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 288.

⁷ *Ibid.* McArthur explained the relationship between examinations and textbooks as follows: "The presumed necessities of examinations, again, encourage the teacher to attempt to satisfy the requirements of education by demanding that the pupil make himself [sic] familiar with the information contained within the authorized text. Instruction in such cases is degraded to the mere reciting of facts set forth on the pages of the text. Such a process, by no stretch of the imagination, can be found to have any relation to education," 288.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 288.

There it is, laid bare: a) History is not merely the transmission of knowledge; b) It is entirely appropriate, if not essential, to introduce students to problems and questions; and c) Teachers must guide students into the bogs of controversy and uncertainty, and proffer strategies, resources, materials, and means that will lead the learners out.

Textbooks are, at best, mediocre resources for teaching and learning in history. Because I agree with his assessment, I have to quote my colleague at the University of New Brunswick, Alan Sears, who refers to textbooks in our field as *superficial*, *banal*, and *inaccurate*. This is all the more interesting because he has written a textbook in our field. While textbooks, which are fundamentally authoritative, may introduce questions or topics that are of interest historically and even reproduce primary source documents to be considered by the learner, they can never replicate the experience of seeking sources, questions, and possible answers in a local archive or library.

Duncan McArthur, historian, educator, former Minister of Education, and namesake of Queen's University's Duncan McArthur Hall, transformed schooling in Ontario by marshalling in a bold and progressive vision of teaching and learning. While he, too, had authored a history textbook years earlier, McArthur—perhaps in part due to his having worked for years at the National Archives of Canada—admonished the authorization of standard textbooks in schools. What united both the revised curriculum documents that were introduced in Ontario in 1937 and 1938 and McArthur's broad vision for progressivist reform of schools was a desire to transform a course of studies seen as overly concerned with the inculcation of academic knowledge. Such knowledge was seen as bearing little or no relevance to contemporary life, social activity, or democratic citizenship. It is for this reason that the revised course of study refused to authorize a standardized textbook or reader for



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each subject and discouraged the use of examinations as the sole measures of progress.² McArthur, shortly after his appointment within the Department (now Ministry) of Education, had advised Ontario's educationists in 1934 that "the relaxation of the examination system may prove to be of definite encouragement to teachers to promote reading beyond the limits of prescribed texts."³ Indeed, by 1940, only the Departmental examinations for high school entrance remained.⁴ Textbook learning, McArthur continued, was not only narrow, but also its mandate compelled teachers to push through textbooks at the peril of ignoring broad student interest, activity, and exploration:

The system of authorizing special text-books for courses of study has likewise led to the encouragement of the formation of habits of mind which cannot be regarded as otherwise than undesirable. The authorizing of a particular book as a text gives to the printed word within the book a literal inspiration. It becomes easy for the student to assume that all of the truth relating to a subject is contained within the covers of the book.⁵

Further, the facts and figures contained within textbooks, once "committed to memory are soon forgotten. The information temporarily acquired is seldom related to the structure of knowledge or experience possessed by the pupil."⁶ Standardized departmental examinations were as ill-suited to progressivist thinking as was the authorization of any single textbook for a subject because both reinforced a passive, acquisitive model of learning.⁷ Consequently, McArthur explained, "the relaxation of the examination system may prove to be of definite encouragement to teachers to promote reading beyond the limits of prescribed texts."⁸

McArthur understood that history's fundamental purpose rests not with the memorization and recall of facts, figures, and dates. The fundamental purpose of historical study, like all humanistic approaches to understanding, must concern our wondering about how to live well and ethically. History is a means of engagement with who we are – individually, collectively, culturally, diversely – on this planet. Ultimately, to teach history, we must *do* history. Toss the textbooks—unless these are the primary sources you are examining, that is—get out of the classroom, explore the archives, and put on your detective hats. This is sometimes messy, often tentative, secretly delightful, and wonderfully exciting.

Bringing the Community into the Classroom

JOSEPH STAFFORD, *History Teacher, St. Theresa Catholic Secondary School, Algonquin and Lakeshore Catholic District School Board*

In most communities local organizations are eager to be invited into schools. This is especially true of museums, archives, and historical societies whose members do not have much opportunity to interact with young people. At our school, Saint Theresa Catholic Secondary School, in Belleville, Ontario, we began two initiatives that brought the community and the classroom together: a student history club and student conferences.

Our history club, the Renaissance Society, consists of some twenty-five students who enjoy organizing activities that engage the public in history and make it come alive! We therefore established a website, www.canadianhistorylive.com on which we have links to different historical sites. Our newsletters are posted here as well. We began a petition campaign to make Canadian history mandatory at the grade 12 level. After collecting over 2,000 signatures and some 30 letters of support, including letters from John Ralston Saul and Charlotte Gray, it is now possible to sign the petition online at our website. Our greatest supporters have been various historical organizations from across the province.

We began to organize conferences in an effort to make Canadian history more relevant to students. Our first conference, held in May 2006, focused on Canadian military history because of Canada's involvement in Afghanistan. Entitled "The Spirit of Vimy: the Role of the Canadian Army, Past, Present, and Future", the conference examined Canada's military achievements, connecting them with the war in Afghanistan. Different organizations were invited to participate by providing guest speakers, workshops and display tables. Students also prepared projects which were displayed alongside those of the different organizations. The entire student body, as well as the public, was invited to visit the displays and to ask questions.

Support from the community was impressive. Two organizations were eager to attend, the Hastings County Historical Society and the Armouries of the Prince Edward-Hastings Regiment. A veteran from the regiment appeared in an authentic World War One uniform, explaining different artefacts to the students. Not only was the historical society willing to be involved, its president invited the students to use the archives for their own research. Instead of having all of their tables manned by historical society members, students performed this task. Our guest speakers were also from the region, one a professor-major from the Royal Military College, Canada's prestigious military academy, and the other, a master warrant officer just returned from duty in Afghanistan. The local newspaper, *The Intelligencer*, covered the event.

We continue to hold a student conference each year. What has most impressed me is the level of student enthusiasm and dedication, not only from the members of the history club, but from the students who present their projects at the conferences. The quality of their work is superb because they know that they have an "audience". As a teacher I have learned the importance of organizing authentic performance tasks.

An excellent working relationship with the Hastings County Historical Society (HCHS) has also continued. One member attended a meeting of the Renaissance Society to explain how to trace family histories. Some club members joined the HCHS, attending their monthly meetings. Students have participated in the annual HCHS banquet. At one such dinner, dedicated to the 50th anniversary of the HCHS, students dressed in 1950's "garb" and "rocked around the clock". Last year, on behalf of the HCHS, the students re-enacted an infamous 19th century trial, which received extensive coverage from the regional magazine, *Country Roads*. One of the founding members of the HCHS, Gerry Boyce, commented on the enthusiasm and dedication of the students: "It was a pleasure to work with a group of students who were so interested in understanding and interpreting the history of their community. Their re-enactment of the trial made history come alive."

In the process of establishing a history club and organizing conferences, the students have come to understand that learning is a life-long process, and that the study of history extends beyond the classroom. As Carson Murphy, a long time member of the Renaissance Society, and now a student at Queen's, commented, "History is an important part of our lives. It is important to know where we come from and where we are going, and it is fun to come across and rediscover those interesting stories. Our local history is some of our most important history." As we prepare for our sixth conference, *Honouring Our Aboriginal Roots, Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow*, the students are well aware that historical organizations are eager to be involved in school activities and in student learning. The students have also gained a new perspective on history, that it is "everywhere", especially in their own backyard.



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Doris McCarthy

C.M., O.O., F.O.C.A.& D., L.L.D., R.C.A., O.S.A., C.S.P.W.C.

Doris McCarthy was a great painter and a distinguished Canadian. She touched others through her art, through her teaching and through her personal interaction. McCarthy's contributions to Canadian art are impressive. She produced an unparalleled body of work, was the first woman President of the Ontario Society of Artists, and has taught some of Canada's most distinguished creative people. As an art history teacher in the mid-1900s, McCarthy traveled the world to photograph and sketch its many wonders for her students (this was critical as there were neither glossy books nor internet images available). For her contributions to Canada's artistic community, Doris McCarthy received The Order of Canada; The Order of Ontario; 5 Honorary Doctorates and an Honorary Fellowship to The Ontario College of Art and Design. In November 1999, McCarthy was named the first Artist of Honour at the McMichael Canadian Art Collection. On March 11, 2004 the University of Toronto, Scarborough Campus opened the Doris McCarthy Gallery.