

Let's Talk History! **A Dialogue about Doing History**

February 17, 2011
University of New Brunswick, Fredericton

On February 17, 2011, students on the University of New Brunswick campus came together to talk history. This was an activity planned by members of the Faculty of Education as well as the History Department, in recognition of New Brunswick Heritage Week. It was a pragmatic occasion, designed to provide participants with an informal setting where they could pause and reflect upon how historians think historically.



As a key part of *Let's Talk History*, history graduate students were invited to participate in a dialogue with education students from Ian Andrews' *Teaching Canadian Studies* class. This involved matching ten history students with Andrews' fifteen social studies students, so that the latter could gain first-hand pedagogical content knowledge about history education. The Benchmarks of Historical Thinking provided a framework for their discussions.



As each history student talked about their research question, their method of inquiry, and epistemological lens, it became evident that there were many factors motivating their thoughts about the past. The history students spoke of their long-view perspective on continuity and change, of how history is a human experience, and how they are challenged towards thinking beyond the parameters of presentist ideologies.

For their part, the education students were able to quickly identify elements of the Benchmarks of Historical Thinking in the explanations. They also witnessed the passion and motivation that historians hold for their research topics. History, for these students, is not (to borrow a phrase from Thomas Holt) "what somebody else already knows"; history is an act of intellectual exploration that empowers each individual to reach beyond the framework of what is already known.





Let's Talk History was an excellent example of how the next generation of social studies teachers can learn to integrate the historian's craft into classroom instruction. It also gave students an opportunity to network, dialogue, make friends, and share across disciplines. Given the positive response received by participants in this pilot project, I would recommend that it be duplicated on campuses across Canada in 2012.



Report prepared by:
Cynthia Wallace-Casey
March 3, 2011.