

Visiting Doctoral Program Report

David Scott
PhD candidate, University of Calgary
Joseph-Armand Bombardier Canada Doctoral Fellow



As part of the THEN/HiER Visiting Doctoral Student Program, from March 23-April 6, 2013, I was fortunate to study in Québec City with Dr. Jocelyn Létourneau, who is a holder of a Canada Research Chair in Contemporary Political History and Economy at Laval Université. Dr. Létourneau's research examining the ways

Canadians interacts with the past, and how this influences identity formations, has long interested me. Inspired by a series of studies exploring the ways young Franco-Québécois story a national past (Létourneau, 2004, 2007), my doctoral research involves a parallel study examining how adolescents in Western Canada tell the story of Canada. Specifically, I am interested in the extent to which the narrative structure underpinning their recounting of the historical experience of Canada is collectively held, and the ways particular narratives shape their historical consciousness in terms of how they see the past, understand the present, and anticipate the future.

In light of my research focus, I came to Laval seeking insights into the following sets of questions:

- Would my study offer a relevant addition to the literature and would it in fact, as I was assuming, be the first of its kind in English Canada?
- How did Dr. Létourneau and his research team collect and code their data set and what particular methodological approaches did they use in their studies?
- To what extent have scholars in the field of history education theorized the pedagogical implications of various collective memory studies that have occurred in Québec and elsewhere (see, for example, VanSledright (2008) in the US and Wertsch (2004) in Russia)?
- Would it be possible to collaborate and write with other scholars in Québec whose research parallels mine?

Thanks to the warm welcome and ongoing mentorship of Dr. Létourneau during my sojourn in Québec City, along with the continued conversations I had with other

graduate students there, I have gained great insights into my research concerns. In the first instance, it seems that similar research on Anglophone understandings of the past has been documented within Québec. However, this work has focussed on how adolescents tell the story of Quebec and not specifically that of Canada. Given this, through a Skype conversation with Dr. Stéphane Lévesque at the University of Ottawa, I learned that he plans to undertake a similar study in English Canada sometime in the not too distant future. We are now discussing possibilities as to how I might be able to collaborate with him around our mutual research interests.



In terms of my methodological concerns, through many meetings with Dr. Létourneau and his research assistants Jean-Francois Conroy and Raphaël Gani (pictured here), I was given access to their corpus of work and sat in on several sessions where they explained the data gathering and coding process. In this regard ongoing conversations and insights from Raphaël have been a tremendous source of aid in helping me both better appreciate issues of methodology as well as the scholarly terrain of emerging work in the field of historical consciousness.

In relation to how emerging studies in memory studies might inform new curricular and pedagogical possibilities for history education, it seems that this is a fairly open field for inquiry. Here, I speak of further pushing forward an approach to history education that, drawing on Létourneau's (2004, 2007) work, moves way from seeing students as empty vessels deficient in knowledge and skills, but rather makes the narrative structures that inhabit students' vision of the past a central object of historical inquiry. Within this frame teachers would enter students' basic matrixes of understanding, first pointing out limitations and then proposing different narrative referents for storying a national past that might offer new pathways of thinking to emerge. This will no doubt raise debates in the field, as teaching history through narrative has long been out of favour with scholars in both the disciplinary and critical post-modern paradigms. However, I continue to believe that narrative is central to how all people make sense of history, and by ignoring how young people story the past and further failing to offer new narrative possibilities, we are failing to engage their primary engine of historical consciousness that informs how young people orientate themselves in the world. This to me provides an important area for further theorizing.

Beyond gaining these insights, I was able to reacquaint myself with listening to and speaking French by attending one of Dr. Létourneau's undergraduate classes as well as taking in a lecture by Dr. Philippe Dubé who was involved in creating a multi-media presentation on Québec history. During my stay, I also had opportunities to

visit an incredible range of cultural attractions including the Musée de la Civilisation and vieux Québec. In the coming months I look forward to continuing the conversations I started with Dr. Létourneau and further collaborating on a research paper for AERA with Raphaël Gani.

I would like to thank Dr. Létourneau along with THEN/HiER in providing me with this invaluable opportunity.

References:

- Létourneau, J. (2004). Young people's assimilation of a collective historical memory: A case study of Quebeckers of French-Canadian heritage. In P. Seixas, (Ed.), *Theorizing historical consciousness* (pp. 109-128). Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press.
- Létourneau, J. (2007). Remembering our past: An examination of the historical memory of young Québécois. In R. M. Sandwell (Ed.), *To the past: History education, public memory and citizenship in Canada* (pp. 70-87). Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press.
- VanSledright, B. (2008). Narratives of nation-state, historical knowledge, and school history education. *Review of Research in Education*, 32(1), 109-146.
- Wertstch, J. (2004). Specific narratives and schematic narrative templates. In P. Seixas, (Eds.), *Theorizing historical consciousness* (pp. 49-62). Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press.