

Our monthly e-Bulletin provides quick updates on activities of THEN/HiER and its partners.



What's new with THEN/HiER?

* **Penney Clark, Jocelyn Létourneau, and Stéphane Lévesque** participated in the *Canadian History at the Crossroads* symposium at the Canadian Museum of History from September 18 to 19. Dr. Clark presented the keynote address, "Clio in the Curriculum: Where Have We Been, Where Are We Now, and Where Do We Want to Go?" The title of the talk by Drs. Létourneau and Lévesque was "Representations of the Past from Ontario and Quebec Students." The conference, funded mainly by a SSHRC Connection grant, was organized by *Making History/Faire de l'histoire* at the University of Ottawa, led by THEN/HiER member Lorna McLean.

Université d'Ottawa | University of Ottawa
Education Research Unit: *Faire l'histoire / Making History*
Canadian History at the Crossroads

* **Alan Sears** is the domain lead for citizenship in a five-year project initiated by People for Education in Ontario. *Measuring What Matters* will work with partners from Canada and the world to develop a set of tools that are easy to understand, practical to administer, and that answer the question: Are we providing our students with the education they need for long-term success?



* **Margaret Conrad, Peter Seixas, and THEN/HiER member Gerald Friesen** presented a roundtable on the *Canadians and Their Pasts* project on September 26 at the University of Manitoba. They discussed the role history plays among the public and differences between public and academic perceptions of Canada's past.

* **Jan Haskings-Winner** co-facilitated a joint Ontario History and Social Studies Teachers' Association (OHASSTA) and Ontario Teachers' Federation Summer Institute with Rachel Collishaw and Leigh MacDonald in Ottawa from July 29 to August 1. *Disciplinary Thinking (History/Civics) in Your Classroom* focused on using historical and political/civic thinking concepts in History/Civics courses which effectively reflect revised curriculum documents. Teachers had the opportunity to investigate how to embed the concepts into learning and assessment.

THEN/HiER Book Series



We are extremely pleased that the third title in the THEN/HiER book series, *Becoming a History Teacher: Sustaining Practices in Historical Thinking and Knowing* (University of Toronto Press, 2014), edited by **Ruth Sandwell** and **Amy von Heyking**, is now available. Several THEN/HiER members contributed chapters to the collection which has three main sections dealing with "before, during, and after" teacher education programs: Nurturing Historical Thinking Before Entering Teacher Education Program, History and Social Studies' Teacher Education Programs in Canada, and Boundary Work: Sustaining Communities of Practice. Each section includes two different kinds of chapters: research or research-based reflections on learning and teaching historical thinking and knowing, followed by chapters that illustrate specific strategies, practices, or activities that can create and sustain new environments of teaching and learning historical thinking.

Approaching the Past (ATP)

Planning is underway for the *Approaching the Past* 2014/15 series in both Toronto and Vancouver. Tentative plans for Toronto include partnering with *HerstoriesCafe*, an award-winning series of events focused on women's history, and an online event including archivists, historians, and educators talking about their approaches to history education. The Vancouver series will be based on the theme for Canada Heritage Day 2015, "Main Street: At the Heart of the Community," and tentatively will include talks and tours about heritage buildings, city parks, and ethnic communities located in and around Vancouver's Main Street area. Check out the new webpages dedicated to this series for updates and registration information. All events are free.

What's new with our partners?

* **The Museum of Vancouver (MOV)** will confer three awards at its gala dinner on October 8. Its *Legacy Award* will be presented to Morris and Yosef Wosk for their achievements in business and community contributions. Dr. Julio Montaner, UBC AIDS researcher, will receive the *City Shaper Award*. The *Emerging City Visionary Award* will be presented to Wade Grant of the Musqueam Nation for his government work and as co-chair for the Vancouver Urban Dialogues Project. More details.

**museum of vancouver
LEGACY AWARDS DINNER**

* **ActiveHistory** has posted a podcast of the 2014 Canadian Historical Association (CHA) Annual Meeting Keynote Address by Ian McKay on its website, "A Half-Century of Possessive Individualism: C.B. Macpherson and the Twenty-First Century Prospects of Liberalism."



chin.gc.ca 

* **The Canadian Heritage Information Network (CHIN)** has transferred responsibility for the Virtual Museum of Canada to the Canadian Museum of History, and so it will no longer publish the *Virtualmuseum.ca Newsletter*. However, you can still subscribe to the *CHIN Newsletter* to keep abreast with trends in museums and technology. More details and to subscribe.

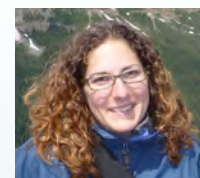
Graduate Student Committees

Here we are in 2014-15! So far this month the Anglophone Graduate Student Committee's *Teaching the Past* blog has been heating up with a re-post from Sean Carleton on comics and feminism and new contributions from committee members: "Diary of an Archivist: Defining Archivist" by Emily Chicorli, "Is Historical Illiteracy for Real?" by Angelica Radjenovic, and "How to Teach the First World War" by Scott Pollock. Thanks for continuing the dialogue about new ideas in history education! The committee has also been looking forward to 2015 and planning for the possibility of collaborating on a panel at Congress in Ottawa. Lastly, we are anticipating the results of an application to the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada for a Connection grant to hold a small workshop on the topic of *Finding Franklin: New Approaches to Teaching Canadian History*. It seems we are one big step closer to actually finding Franklin, as earlier this month one of the ships was located! Thanks to Inuit knowledge for pointing us in the right direction all along... Until next time! Contact Heather McGregor.



Heather McGregor

September brings the fresh air of a new school year. The Francophone Graduate Student Committee has several projects on the go this fall. Two of our members, Geneviève Goulet and Frédéric Yelle, have contributed chapters to the recent edited book *Faire aimer et apprendre l'histoire et la géographie* (Éditions MultiMondes, 2014), which is an absolute must buy. Come and chat with us at the AQEUS conference in Trois-Rivières (16-17 October) or at the SPHQ conference (23-24 October) in Sainte-Adèle; we would be very happy to see you. The blog *Enseigner l'histoire* is also getting back to its usual schedule and will have several new posts over the next few weeks. I invite you to read the latest one by Philippe Denis which describes how we can learn from museum collections and urban architecture. Happy reading and welcome to a new academic year! Contact Marie-Hélène Brunet.



Marie-Hélène Brunet

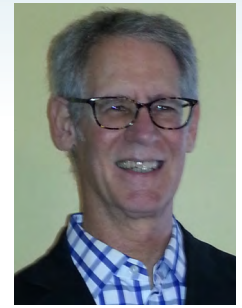
Research Snapshots

This section of our monthly e-Bulletin highlights our members' research projects.

Bruce VanSledright
Professor, History and Social Studies Education Research
University of North Carolina at Charlotte

So What are Your Epistemic Beliefs About History Anyway?

You can gather information about a particular historical event up to a certain point, but depending on the documents you pick or the people that you talk to, there will always be bias, I guess...



This explanation came from an experienced history teacher responding to a question one of my students asked about where historical knowledge comes from and how its knowledge claims are warranted. Such questions stem from my recent research program that focused on how the epistemic beliefs of college students and practicing history teachers shape how they think about the nature of history and its knowledge claims, and for teachers in particular, how those beliefs influence their practices.

In my efforts to better understand how people learn to understand the past, epistemic beliefs about the nature of historical knowledge loom large as a substantive influence. In my early studies of young children, most appeared to think the past and history were the same thing, that one needed only to consider objects from the past and they would reveal history as it actually happened. Yet in the presence of conflicting testimonies about an event in the past, these children were stumped and history ground to a halt. The past became virtually incomprehensible. They often shrugged their shoulders in resignation about what to do next.

With young children, this might not come as much of a surprise. However, some history majors and experienced history teachers I studied manifested similar beliefs and confronted the same problem of making sense of a perspectives-laced past and the histories that flowed from it. Their resignation—or sometimes indifference and/or consternation—in its face was a bit more disconcerting. Perhaps a bit of all three is in the opening teachers' quote, especially where her voice trails off.

It made sense to ask, how would history teachers, for example, actually deal with such conflicting testimonies in class? What strategies would they employ if students held strongly to ideas about past events that were at odds with the official history they were charged to teach? I typically saw two responses among

teachers in the classes I observed: brushing the problem under the proverbial desk (*i.e.*, ignoring the issue; changing the subject), or making a distinction between real historical facts and people's generally entitled, but subjective (groundless?) opinions, the latter of which most peoples' ideas were surmised to belong. One could transcend the problem by focusing on real facts and dismissing mere opinions because of their inherent biases. How this was to be accomplished exactly was seldom clear.

The empirical work I've done more recently with colleagues Liliana Maggioni and Kimberly Reddy allowed us to make sense of this epistemic-beliefs issue as one in which actually doing history—that is, trying to understand what happened in the past, how people acted, how they understood themselves in those contexts, and why—plunges investigators into concerns over interpretation. How much interpretive license can be taken? If we look for hard facts and trust objects from the past to reveal history clearly (naïve objectivism), often we don't get very far. On the other hand, if we resign ourselves as subjective inquirers to history's frequent indeterminacies, then it seems we are left with a form of naïve subjectivism (one biased interpretive opinion is as good as another).

We witnessed vacillation between these two epistemic-belief poles in history classes and in the utterances of college students. Coordinating the role of the knower (subject) with what could be known (from the objects), and therefore claimed as knowledge about the past, appeared illusive. Criteria and methods for arbitrating interpretive license seemed absent. Our data showed that prospective and practicing teachers wobbled epistemically. Doing history then stopped. Because of this impasse, many practicing teachers dropped the investigative effort from their pedagogical repertoires.

Much research on historical thinking over the last three decades has championed the importance of doing history as a vehicle for deepening understanding. But to cultivate thinking by doing history appears to require some upfront epistemic clarity, some form of criteria and methods-infused guidelines for dealing with the question of interpretive license. But what approaches will lead us there? Who is best equipped to do this work? Under what circumstances: in teacher preparation, history courses, ongoing professional development contexts—all three? From where I sit, this area of epistemic beliefs in history seems significantly under-researched, and might benefit from more concerted attention if we wish to see a continued evolution toward doing history as the primary means by which young learners deepen their understandings of the past. A recent example of this work is an article I co-authored with Kimberly Reddy, "Changing epistemic beliefs? An exploratory study of cognition among prospective history teachers," *Tempo e Argumento*, 6 (11) (2014): 28-68.

*** MORE TO COME NEXT MONTH!**

