

Visiting the Centre for the Study of Historical Consciousness, UBC The Growing Interest in Historical Thinking within Canada

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During my time as a Visiting Doctoral Student I travelled to the University of British Columbia (UBC) to meet with Dr. Peter Seixas and Dr. Penney Clark. Peter is an internationally known expert on historical thinking and is the Director of the Historical Thinking Project, while Penney is equally well known for her work on the history of education and her role as Director of THEN/HiER.



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My doctoral research is focused upon the process through which historical thinking came to be imbedded within the newly revised (2013) Ontario history curricula. In order to properly contextualize and analyze this I am also tracing the development of the concept of historical thinking within Canada. Interviewing both Peter and Penney has provided me with a much clearer picture of this process. In particular, Peter was able to provide a detailed account of the development of the Historical Thinking Project (originally the Benchmarks of Historical Thinking), while Penney was able to explain the process that led to the creation of THEN/HiER. As readers of

this report are no doubt aware these two organizations have played pivotal roles in the development of an approach to history education that emphasizes historical thinking.

While my research is still in its early phases, the data gathered thus far paint an interesting picture, with many different academics working purposefully towards the development of a broad based community dedicated to the improvement of history education. This group, which rapidly expanded to include a range of stakeholders, seems to have benefited from many broader socio-political and educational trends, such as changes in government funding (e.g., development of the Canada Research Chair Program), increased public interest in history, and shifting beliefs about educational best practices. At the same time, both the Historical Thinking Project and THEN/HiER have been developed with great care. Their broad based, consultative, and focused approach has led to the development of networks, resources, and research that have been (and will continue to be) a boon to history educators across Canada.

As is often (if not always) the case with historical research, my interviews with Peter and Penney have also raised many questions for further inquiry. Moving forward I hope to conduct research into:

- The relationship between the “history wars” of the 1990s/early 2000s and the spread of historical thinking. In particular I am curious why most of Canada (Quebec being an exception) seems to have avoided the debate over content that occurred in other nations (e.g., the US, Australia).
- The role of organizations, such as the Dominion Institute and Historica, in the development of historical thinking within Canada.
- If/How the rise of historical thinking within curricula is tied to changing conceptions of citizenship and the place of critical thinking.
- To what extent a sense of a decline in history’s status within school curricula has been a motive for adopting the historical thinking approach.

Beyond gaining greater insights into the development of historical thinking within Canada, my visit to UBC also provided me with an opportunity to discuss research into history education with a number of other graduate students at the Centre for the Study of Historical Consciousness. I would like to thank all of them for their hospitality and willingness to discuss their research. I would also like to thank the *Truth and Method* discussion group for allowing me to join them in their ongoing analysis of this seminal text. Talking about this book was enlightening and highly enjoyable. Finally, I would like to very sincerely thank Dr. Clark, Dr. Seixas, and THEN/HiER for providing me with this opportunity.

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