7

History Education and Historical Thinking in Multicultural Contexts: A Canadian Perspective

Naomi Ostwald Kawamura

Introduction

Public education, as an extension of the state, contributes to the shaping of national identity and fostering patriotism, and thus state-sponsored history education can play a central role in nation building and serve as a generative site to examine the debates surrounding national memory, narratives and identity (Seixas 2009b). In Canada, a stated commitment to the principles of multiculturalism complicates, if it does not preclude, the formulation and inculcation of a single, coherent, state-sanctioned national narrative. In its place are a series of narratives grounded in the unique experiences of different peoples and regions, highlighting a national *ideology* centred around practices of accommodation. The organisational structure of public education in Canada adds further complexity: education is the responsibility of its provinces and territories and there is no ministry of education at the federal level. Canada's

N. O. Kawamura (✉)
University of British Columbia, Vancouver, BC, Canada
e-mail: naomi.kawamura@densho.org

© The Author(s), under exclusive license to Springer Nature Switzerland AG 2023

H. M. H. Ting, L. Cajani (eds.), *Negotiating Ethnic Diversity and National Identity in History Education*, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-12535-5_7

constitutional commitments to multiculturalism, the absence of a single state-sanctioned historical narrative and the complexity of Canadian identity politics in conjunction with a highly decentralised approach to education have complicated the aims of history education in Canada.

This chapter will examine one approach to Canadian history education, *historical thinking*, through the lens of Canadian multiculturalism. First articulated by Peter Seixas, this approach has not been uniformly adopted nationwide, but its principles widely inform teacher education programmes, teacher professional development and curriculum (Clark and Sandwell 2020). The framework emphasises a disciplinary approach to history education, comprising six procedural concepts that call for students to establish historical significance, use primary source evidence, identify continuity and change, analyse cause and consequence, take historical perspectives and understand the ethical dimensions of history (Seixas and Morton 2012). Historical thinking also calls for nurturing students' progression in handling these concepts in more sophisticated ways.

This chapter maps a commitment to accommodating diversity onto a Canadian approach to history education. I begin by discussing the Canadian context and the current absence of a single, state-sanctioned national narrative as conventionally understood. In its place is a constitutionally inscribed multicultural ideology that describes Canada as comprised of numerous groups, each retaining their own identities and narratives. I then provide an overview of the educational context, including its structural attributes and the role of history as a subject in the curriculum. In the third section, I discuss the historical thinking approach in relation to Canadian multiculturalism and how this framework attends to the following related issues of identity and its treatment of Indigenous

Peoples[1], sub-state/minority nationalisms[2] and ethnocultural diversity. I examine the extent to which the historical thinking approach has the potential to meet the competing demands of multiculturalism in the classroom.

The Canadian Context

Contemporary Canada, with an estimated population of 37.7 million, is an ethnically, culturally and linguistically diverse nation (Statistics Canada 2019). As recognised by the constitution, there are three distinct groups of Indigenous Peoples: the First Nations, Inuit and Métis. The 2016 Canadian Census reported an estimated 1.6 million Indigenous Peoples, who had one of the highest population growth rates (Statistics Canada 2017). Canada's diversity has also been further increased by high rates of inward migration. According to this census, nearly one out of five Canadians are immigrants and six million have been admitted since 1990 (Government of Canada 2017). In addition to the official languages of French and English, more than 200 mother tongue languages are spoken nationwide (Statistics Canada 2017).

Canada exists as a "fragile union" between its Indigenous nations and the former colonies of Great Britain and France (Faden 2015, p. 54). Historically, each of these "nations" has expressed their own unique cultural and political identities and continues to do so, thus complicating the development of a pan-Canadian national identity and narrative. Clark et al. (2015) describe further challenges to articulating a simple story of Canadian nationhood, including the vast geographical area,

[1] In Canada, the term "Aboriginal" refers to First Nations (Indian), Métis and Inuit peoples. The term gained popular usage after its inclusion in the Canadian Constitution in 1982 but is not widely used internationally. The term "Indigenous" encompasses both local and international contexts. For this chapter, I will be utilising the term "Indigenous" or "Indigenous Peoples" unless referencing or citing other research.

[2] There are more than 50 First Nations, each recognised as self-governing and self-determining. To place a nation-state frame on Indigenous Peoples is to not recognise the *sui generis* nature of Indigenous rights and to define Indigenous identity through a colonial system (Frideres 2008). For this reason, I will be treating Indigenous nations as unique from sub-state nations like Québec, and Indigenous people as distinct from other ethnocultural groups, immigrants or visible minorities.

distinct provincial and regional identities, strong cultural influences from the United States of America and divides between historians' research agendas and history teaching. Scholars now characterise Canada's grand narrative of nationhood as a shared commitment to principles and ideologies, rather than to a shared national narrative (Anderson 2017; Rigney 2018).

Grand narratives of nation-states, however, were commonplace during the nineteenth century, providing origin stories and timelines of their achievements and adversities in becoming nations (Ahonen 2017). In Canada, early attempts at inculcating stories of a grand narrative of nationhood fall into this timeframe, coinciding with the establishment of school systems and the authorisation of textbooks (Anderson 2017; Clark 2005). Yu (2011) characterises these earlier nationhood stories as narratives in which European immigrants become "'Canadian', and for all those who were non-white to remain a 'visible minority', forever arriving late, or a 'native' forever destined to disappear" (p. 305). Stanley (2002) draws attention to how this particular version of history, as told in history education, always "begins" with the earliest European colonies. Centring attention on European arrival and the formation of the nation not only neglects the presence, history and dispossession of Indigenous Peoples of North America but also emphasises the progress of European colonisation as the central narrative (ibid.). Clark (2007), examining Indigenous representation in English Canadian textbooks, finds that "Aboriginal people are 'othered'" and presented "in relation to the European settler story" (p. 111). See Clark (2005, 2007, 2009) for comprehensive examinations of Canadian textbooks over time.

In the 1960s and 1970s, Canadian history education began shifting towards a focus on social issues, particularly in response to issues of Indigenous rights, multiculturalism, feminism, Québec nationalism and other ethnocultural groups (Clark et al. 2015). Beginning in the early 1970s, Canada actively shifted towards a gradual process of reconciliation with First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples (Kymlicka 2003), following a lengthy history of continuous assault, mistreatment and systematic oppression (Frideres 2008). In 1991, a Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples was established to address mounting tensions between the Canadian government and Indigenous Peoples, evidenced, for example,

by the armed 78-day standoff between the Canadian military and the Kanien'kéha:ka (Mohawk) at Oka, Québec in the prior year. In 1996, the commission released a 4000-page report that outlined 440 recommendations to improve relations between the Canadian government and Indigenous Peoples, including an official inquiry into the Indian Residential Schools.[3] First established in the 1880s, this school system was funded by the federal government and operated by Anglican, Presbyterian, United and Catholic churches. Its primary aims were to isolate Indigenous children from their communities and enforce policies of assimilation and conversion to Christianity (Truth and Reconciliation 2015), intended to "kill the Indian in the child" (Royal Commission 1996). The last school closed in the 1990s. There were also reports of rampant emotional, sexual and physical abuse (ibid.), and an estimated 4200 children died in these schools.[4] In 2005, the federal government announced the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement, which entailed a $1.9 billion compensation package for former students and the establishment of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) to document the stories of the survivors. The final TRC report, released in 2015, called for 94 actions to be taken by Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadians nationwide to redress the legacy of residential schools and support active reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples. The report prompted further changes across Canada, including: the modification of institutional practices at libraries, museums and archives towards decolonisation; the establishment of a National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation; curricular changes to history education in some provinces; and the adoption of policies within governments, organisations and corporations to recognise key findings. In 2008, Prime Minister Stephen Harper made an official apology for the treatment of children in these schools.

Ethnocultural groups have also called on Canada to address state-sanctioned historical injustices as a means to grapple with issues of recognition and repair relations. Japanese Canadians, for example, demanded

[3] They operated between the late 1870s and 1990s, where an estimated 150,000 Indigenous children were placed in 132 industrial boarding or "residential" schools.

[4] National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation. See https://news.nctr.ca/articles/nctr-creating-memorial-register-honouring-residential-school-children.

"redress" for the dispossession, forcible removal, and incarceration of their community during the Second World War. Dr. Edward Banno, a Japanese Canadian activist and survivor of the Tashme Internment Camp, articulated his hope "that someday the people of this great Dominion will count the Nisei Japanese Canadians as a definite part of their national existence."[5] The community's efforts eventually led to a formal apology issued by Prime Minister Brian Mulroney in 1988, monetary compensation for the remaining survivors and the establishment of the Canadian Race Relations Foundation. Many other public apologies to other ethnocultural groups have followed in subsequent years.

By the late twentieth century, the use of grand narratives lost favour, due in part to the rise of postmodernist theory and the omission of stories of Indigenous Peoples, women and ethnocultural groups (Ahonen 2017). However, the absence of such narratives does not preclude the existence of any narratives. Those that continue to exist have become more oriented towards identity shaping narratives (Seixas 2017). Demands for recognition, redress and reconciliation as well as the cultural, linguistic, ethnic and regional diversity of Canada have instead created conditions for the adoption of a national identity centred around multiculturalism, which has since flourished—a "modest remedy" to accommodate differences (Winter 2015, p. 650).

Kymlicka (2003) claims that the two distinctive features of Canada's approach to accommodation are the breadth of challenges surrounding issues of diversity that Canada has faced (immigration, Indigenous Peoples' right to self-determination, and sub-state nations) and the inscription of multiculturalism into its constitution, cultural symbols and national narratives. These features illuminate a Canadian national identity built around the principles of multiculturalism. Several key federal policies also illustrate Canada's commitment to multiculturalism, including: the passage of the Official Languages Act in 1969, which

[5] Personal written communication relayed to author by members of the late Edward Banno's family, 29 June 2020. Banno addressed parliament in 1936 to extend voting rights to Japanese Canadians. This was denied. Edward's son, Robert Banno, who was born in Tashme Interment Camp, would later establish the Nikkei National Museum & Cultural Centre in 2000. In July 2020, Robert was awarded a Meritorious Service Decoration (Civil Division) by the governor general of Canada for his contributions to the country.

established both French and English as the official languages of Canada;[6] the introduction of a multiculturalism policy in 1971; and the enactment of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms in 1982, which included minority language rights and recognised the country's multicultural heritage. Canada's multiculturalism policy was written into section 27 of its constitution, and in 1988, parliament passed the Canadian Multiculturalism Act, thus making Canada the first country to adopt a multicultural law.

While Canada has shifted away from promoting nation-building *narratives* towards promoting a national *ideology* of multiculturalism, history classrooms remain part of the nation-building project by providing students with concepts and frameworks needed to construct identities, be they individual, regional or national (Carretero et al. 2012). Lévesque and Létourneau (2019) suggest that history education which aims to foster exclusive national identities is no longer relevant for multinational and multicultural nations like Canada.

Educational Context

The history classroom remains an important site for examining how young Canadians learn about the nation's past. As Seixas (2009b) articulates, classrooms are distinctive locations subject to official policies, where young people are compelled to attend lessons over a duration of time, serving as principal sites for transmitting historical narratives and perspectives to younger generations.

Education is compulsory for all Canadians aged 5 to 16 (or 18 in the provinces of Manitoba, Ontario and New Brunswick). According to a 2014 report from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2014), Canada's annual spending per student in primary education and its total expenditure as a percentage of gross domestic product are above its averages. Public schools are tuition-free.

[6] The passage of the Official Languages Act raised concerns from ethnic minorities who believed that this policy minimised the contributions of other linguistic groups in Canada. In a 1964 parliamentary address, Ukrainian Canadian Senator Paul Yuzyk characterised Canada as "multicultural", the first public articulation of a "multicultural" Canada.

Canada's K-12 (kindergarten through Grade 12) educational system operates on a decentralised model, where the responsibility for public education lies with its ten provinces and three territories. Typically, through provincial ministries or departments of education, provincial governments oversee the authorisation of textbooks (in some provinces), the allocation of funding to schools and the teacher certification processes. There are English, French and Catholic school boards. Since 1969, the federal government has also provided funding for minority language education and second language instruction.[7] However, language policies in public schooling centre around the teaching and maintenance of French and English, with some support for other heritage languages which are not universally accessible (Slavkov 2017).

An additional challenge to Canada's educational system is found in the asymmetries that exist in supporting the needs of Indigenous students. While Canada consistently performs well on international studies of student achievement,[8] a significant achievement gap exists between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students (Statistics Canada 2011). The TRC (2015) has called on the federal government to draft legislation, commit funding and provide the necessary support to improve the educational attainment levels of Indigenous students in one generation.

In the area of history education, most provinces and territories mandate learning either social studies (which often include geography, civics, political science and history) or history in their schools (Clark 2018; Lévesque and Clark 2018). In fact, only Ontario and Québec explicitly mandate history courses instead of social studies (Lévesque and Clark 2018). Clark et al. (2015) point to the late 1990s as a turning point in Canadian history education, when the field began to adopt an inquiry-based approach to teaching and learning. The authors contend that history education was strongly influenced, among other factors, by Seixas' 1996 paper, "Conceptualizing the Growth of Historical Understanding", which introduced elements of a disciplinary approach to history education—later further conceptualised in his model of historical thinking.

[7] See Council of Ministers of Education, Canada, cmec.ca/154/Official_Languages.html.

[8] Results from the 2018 Programme for International Student Assessment reflect that 15-year-old Canadian students scored higher than average in reading, mathematics and science.

Historical Thinking Approach

Drawing from international approaches to history education, the Canadian historical thinking approach focuses on six competencies that engage both teachers and students to think critically about history while exploring theoretical, epistemological and ontological issues concerning the nature of history and historical knowledge. Its central features are influenced by the works of cognitive psychologist Jerome Bruner, British scholarship surrounding the Schools History Project, Sam Wineburg's (1991) contributions from the United States, and German contributions around a notion of historical consciousness.[9]

The six competencies serve as a framework for students to learn the conceptual tools, vocabulary and standards of the discipline to enhance their progression of historical understanding. Seixas (2017) articulates that the benchmark competencies "function, rather as problems, tensions, or difficulties that demand comprehension, negotiation and ultimately, an accommodation that is never a complete solution" (p. 5). The historical thinking framework challenges students to consider answers to the following questions:

1) How do we decide what is important to learn about the past?
2) How do we know what we know about the past?
3) How can we make sense of the complex flows of history?
4) Why do events happen, and what are their impacts?
5) How can we better understand the people of the past?
6) How can history help us to live in the present? (Seixas and Morton 2012)

The aim is for students to develop a deeper understanding of the use and nature of history. An additional area of emphasis is on the *progression* in students' historical thinking (Seixas 2011). Progression can be defined as the expansion of students' abilities to develop more powerful ideas of the nature of historical knowledge. Seixas (2011) suggests that a sophisticated understanding of historical thinking might be characterised as students' abilities to "be able to articulate what is known, what is not known,

[9] See Seixas (2017) for a review of the roots of the Canadian model of historical thinking.

what additional evidence might shed more light, and possibly, what is simply unknowable" (p. 145). Students develop and apply their understanding with richer inquiry.

The Canadian project is also informed by German scholarship surrounding "historical consciousness", situated at the intersection of "public memory, citizenship, and history education" (Seixas 2006, p. 15). It involves the relationship between the past, present and future; the past that holds meaning in the present; and how the past is "expressed though narratives that embody a moral orientation" (Seixas 2017, p. 596). For learners in multicultural contexts, a historical thinking approach can be particularly beneficial, because students are able to examine why certain narratives hold particular meanings, be they at the individual, collective or national level.

The historical thinking approach allows students to wrestle with both the ethical implications of history and how our current understanding of history may help us take more informed positions on ethical issues. The *ethical dimension of history* specifically considers "the memorial obligations that we in the present owe to victims, heroes, or other forebears who made sacrifices from which we benefit" (ibid., p. 602). This concept enhances students' understanding that many familiar contemporary issues have roots in the past. In this sense, a historical thinking approach is an attempt to equip Canadian students with the ability to handle questions about the consequences of past actions and apply them to contemporary issues.

To some extent, the historical thinking approach allows Canadian history education to circumvent some of the complexities surrounding identity politics by focusing on the development of the critical thinking skills necessary to navigate a multicultural environment. I will examine historical thinking in the context of the following three areas concerning diversity: Indigenous Peoples, Québec/Francophone identity and ethnocultural diversity.

Indigenous Peoples in Canada

The final report of the TRC highlights the role of education as "the key to reconciliation". Its recommendations in the areas pertaining to history education include the following:

i. Developing and implementing Kindergarten to Grade Twelve curriculum and learning resources on Aboriginal peoples in Canadian history, and the history and legacy of residential schools.
ii. Sharing information and best practices on teaching curriculum related to residential schools and Aboriginal history.
iii. Building student capacity for intercultural understanding, empathy, and mutual respect.
iv. Identifying teacher training needs relating to the above. (Truth and Reconciliation 2015, p. 238)

Provincial and territorial responses to the recommendations have differed widely, due in part to the lack of consensus about what specific changes need to be implemented (Gibson and Case 2019).

An examination of Canadian history education in the context of Indigenous Peoples and histories reveals many of the limits of multiculturalism and raises a distinctly epistemological challenge for historical thinking. Indigenous scholar Michael Marker (2011) reasons that Western intellectual traditions and traditional forms of teaching history are incompatible with Indigenous ways of meaning making and knowledge construction. Cutrara (2018) also stresses the challenges of reconciling Western intellectual traditions with Indigenous epistemologies, because one has historically and actively dismissed the other. Marker (2011) calls on history teachers and scholars to make space in classrooms to include Indigenous perspectives; study First Nations, Métis and Inuit Peoples' relationships to time, land and the past; as well as challenge "embedded assumptions made about progress and modernity" (p. 111). McGregor (2017) calls for a historical thinking approach that adopts more "respectful engagement" with Indigenous knowledge and epistemologies through an intentional and collaborative coordination of efforts

between scholars knowledgeable about historical thinking and scholars of Indigenous education.

An added layer of complexity is the cultural and linguistic diversity among over 600 First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples, and more than 50 language or cultural groups. This diversity also represents the many distinct and varied approaches to Indigenous perspectives and knowledge (Archibald 2008). Multiculturalism can also act to occlude the distinct concerns of First Nations, Métis and Inuit by conflating Indigenous Peoples with other ethnocultural groups[10] while offering distractions from the issues of sovereignty, Canada's settler colonial history and present-day land claims (St. Denis 2011).

This raises specific challenges for a history education approach that can effectively contribute towards repairing relations between non-Aboriginal and Indigenous Peoples, which is specifically addressed in Gibson and Case (2019). They call attention to three potential areas for changing practice, including: centring Indigenous content, "histories, perspectives, epistemologies, ontologies, and axiologies" in the classroom (p. 254); challenging the traditional model of teaching history with an open and unambiguous awareness of the judgements, interpretive choices, perspectives and assumptions surrounding historical accounts; and developing multidisciplinary courses that explore and meaningfully engage with both Indigenous and Western epistemologies. The authors also highlight the importance of pedagogy—namely the efficacy of how historical thinking is taught and an emphasis on enhancing teachers' knowledge of Indigenous history, culture and epistemologies—as well as deepening cultural competency and cultural responsiveness in classrooms. However, for history education to meet the needs of its Indigenous students, significant reforms will be required that also recognise the legacy of both residential school history and settler colonialism.

[10] Indigenous scholar Verna St. Denis (2011) explains that multiculturalism obscures the "unique position of Aboriginal peoples as Indigenous to this land" when categorised together with racialised ethnic immigrants (p. 311).

Québec and the Québécois *Nation*

In 2006, the House of Commons of Canada (2006) approved a parliamentary motion "recognizing that the *Québécois* form a nation within a united Canada". This motion officially recognises the unique culture, history and identity of the people of Québec, symbolically legitimising the province as a nation within a nation. Predictably, history education in Québec primarily centres on notions of *Québécois* identity, the province's struggle for nationhood and the preservation of a collective Francophone identity (Létourneau 2011). Clark (2018, p. 2) writes that national history taught in the province of Québec "is a history of the *Québécois* 'nation' first, set within the larger context of the Canadian confederation". Québec's culture is dominated by the concept of *"la survivance"*, or the "continuous and necessary survival of Francophone language and culture in the face of English Canadian or Anglo-American hegemony" (Lévesque and Létourneau 2019, p. 152).

In the case of Québec's history education, "the poles of a usable versus a critical past represent an irreducible tension" (Stearns et al. 2000, p. 8). The public desire for a coherent, collective identity creates a unique challenge to adopting a disciplinary approach to history. However, an area of historical thinking has gained some traction, specifically surrounding the concept of historical significance. A study of historical thinking among Francophone and Anglophone high school students by Lévesque (2005) has found that Francophone students placed historical significance on events and developments that served to support their Francophone identity. The historical thinking approach has great potential in this context, since it attempts to bridge disciplinary practices with cultural beliefs. Classroom teachers can actively engage with students' memories and identities (individual, cultural, familial, etc.) and their prior understandings of the past. This "collective memory" can be laid open to historical inquiry. The emphasis is then on active engagement and the development of the tools necessary to negotiate "production solutions" to problems that may not be reconcilable (Seixas 2017).

Létourneau (2011) explores the debates surrounding *Québécois* history education, namely the challenges of balancing public calls to address

provincial and cultural identity while meeting the challenges of a changing, ethnoculturally diverse population. An independent review of Québec's high school history textbooks commissioned by the English Montreal School Board (2018) revealed that the textbooks and programme were "ultimately a 'history of Québec" (p. 7) intended to tell a "nationalist narrative in function of a *Québécois* nation-state ideology" (p. 9). The critical review recommended that the textbooks be pulled entirely from schools, but Québec's education minister, Jean-François Roberge, responded that there would be no changes to the high school history curriculum and that "history will always be subject to debate" (CBC News 2018). However, Létourneau and Gani (2017) maintain that the absence of a shared or common grand narrative would not inhibit integration or a shared collective identity. Banting and Kymlicka (2010) also suggest that shared values which accommodate differences can also create bonds and a sense of solidarity between Canadians with long established histories in Canada and recent immigrants.

Ethnocultural Diversity

Canadian history involves a long record of exclusions based on race. State-sanctioned exclusions and racialisation historically prohibited many ethnocultural groups from integrating into Canadian society. Adopting an ideology of multiculturalism demands recognition and reconciliation with this legacy through teaching and learning about the past. Projections suggest that by 2036, immigrants and children of immigrants will represent close to one in two Canadians and visible minorities aged between 15 and 64 years.[11] This poses a specific challenge for history education in addressing the linguistic, cultural and ethnic diversity of its students.

Carla Peck has led Canadian scholarship surrounding students' ethnic identities and historical thinking, including studies that examine how students ascribe significance to historic events. Peck (2018) theorises that students "do not simply absorb [a] historical narrative or interpretation transmitted in school but filter them through their own identities and

[11] Canada's Employment Equity Act defines visible minorities "as persons other than Aboriginal peoples, who are non-Caucasian in race or non-white in colour".

backgrounds" (p. 327). These findings call on teachers to engage with students' identities in history class more explicitly. Lévesque (2011) maintains that a disciplinary approach will enable students to explore personal histories in the classroom, particularly how such narratives "intertwine with those of the communities they inhabit" (p. 45). With a deeper understanding of the interpretive nature and complexity of history, students are better equipped to appreciate or resolve potentially conflicting narratives which they may encounter (Seixas 1997).

An exploration of the concept of historical significance has particular promise for students belonging to ethnocultural groups, being primarily concerned with deepening students' understanding of how and why certain people, events or developments are remembered, talked about and taught. For example, students are expected to arrive at the understanding that events, people or developments are ascribed significance if they resulted in change with deep consequences for people over periods of time, shed light on issues either in the past or in contemporary life, emerged through the construction of a meaningful narrative and varied over time and between groups (Seixas and Morton 2012). An exploration of historical significance allows students to examine how individuals or nations decide what is important to learn about the past while probing the constructed and interpretive nature of history. Peck (2010) examines how students' ethnic identities influenced their interpretation of Canadian history. Students ascribed significance to specific events or developments as forms of "'identity resources' in order to locate themselves" within a story of Canada (p. 606). For members of ethnocultural groups whose histories have previously been silenced or marginalised, an exploration of historical significance provides an opening into questioning who or what decides what is important to study about the past. Since debates over national history are frequently centred around "which story to tell", a historical thinking approach allows students to question how and why the past is remembered and the role of history in shaping the narrative and identity of a country.

Historical research has the potential to facilitate bringing new or silenced stories to the forefront in yielding new narratives. Rigney (2018) highlights the importance of articulating previously subsumed histories to draw connections between historical memories. This in turn might

also allow students to make connections between groups that are often unlinked in Canadian history, such as the history of Chinese miners in Nlaka'pamux territory during the Gold Rush, or the stories of Japanese Canadian redress activists who advised First Nations bands on land claims.

Some Limits on and Future Directions for Historical Thinking

Some criticisms levied against a rational, disciplinary approach to history education suggest that a historical thinking framework actively fails to provide students with the tools needed to recognise the intersections between politics and history, or challenge their understanding of power, citizenship or the state. Cutrara (2009) argues that historical thinking fails to explicitly engage students with the ways in which settler colonialism and racism have shaped contemporary Canada. Anderson (2017) suggests that historical thinking concepts are limited in their ability to critically examine, contest and rebuke the national narratives that may omit or marginalise Indigenous People or other ethnocultural groups, stereotype *Québécois*/French Canadians or appropriate ethnocultural minorities. Beyond the inclusion of previously omitted histories, history education would need to move students beyond a recognition that *difference* exists. Further engagement would aim to gain insights from different intellectual traditions, develop a critical eye towards the interpretive nature of history and challenge the assumptions surrounding past perspectives and belief systems.

Conversely, criticisms of the historical thinking framework and its potential harm can also be potentially problematic if they inadvertently assume that young people, namely Black, Indigenous and racialized students, have no agency or ability to question what they encounter. Studies on ethnic minority families have demonstrated that prominent features of parenting within these contexts include ethnic and racial socialisation and a preparation for bias and discrimination (Hughes et al. 2006). Hébert et al. (2008) have found that immigrant youth are able to shift between, redefine or disregard cultural, racial, ethnic and linguistic

identities and boundaries. Some students may in fact be more empowered to engage with material because their own life or familial experiences have allowed them to recognise that anything is conditional on what perspectives help to shape them (Chesler et al. 1993). Monte-Sano and Reisman (2016) make a case for further research on historical understanding that considers how disciplinary practices and lived experiences might interact or intersect.

McGregor (2017, p. 13) further stresses that knowledge surrounding historical thinking is derived from "a particular group of people, in particular places, with culturally situated understandings of the past, of the flow of time and of meanings derived from human experience". Expanding on this criticism, many of the scholars cited here have prefaced their analyses by self-identifying as non-Indigenous or non-"white".[12] This underscores the relevance of identity within this research. Since Peck (2009, 2011, 2018) and others have argued that meaning making is filtered through the lens of identity, then much of Canadian research surrounding historical thinking can be said to be filtered through the lens of whiteness. While some scholars may articulate their positionality as "white", they do not articulate how the predominance of scholarship by white scholars might shape or limit Canadian research on historical thinking. Ethnicity and race may be viewed as a narrow lens by some, but to scholars for whom identity is a central component of their interactions with society, the significance is real. This accentuates a pressing need to make room for voices, particularly those of Indigenous and racialised scholars, that bring relevant lived experiences and nuanced discourse on identity politics to researching history education. This will not only serve to diversify the perspectives that shape Canadian history education scholarship, but also compel change from within the field in order to generate and bring new knowledge into historical thinking in multiethnic and multicultural contexts.

Létourneau and Gani (2017) caution against placing unrealistic expectations on the potential and capacity for history education to unify people, provinces or nations, particularly when its impacts have not been measured. The introduction of a historical thinking framework also does

---

[12] See, for example, Anderson (2017) as well as Gibson and Case (2019).

not determine its use or outcomes in the classroom (McGregor 2017). There is a need to not only evaluate current practices of history education but to measure the potential effectiveness of historical thinking. While Ercikan and Seixas (2015) articulate the challenges in developing assessments of historical thinking, Duquette (2020) cautions that without effective assessments aligned with provincial or ministerial mandates, history teachers will not be incentivised to shift their teaching practices towards adopting this approach. A national research project, "Thinking historically for Canada's future",[13] has recently been funded to examine how history and historical thinking is being taught nationwide and across different contexts. The findings from this seven-year study will potentially chart a new course for Canadian history education and research on historical thinking.

Conclusion

In a 2015 interview, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau claimed that "there is no core identity, no mainstream in Canada. There are shared values" (Lawson 2015). If Canada were to seek a simple, singular narrative of nationhood, it may be one that articulates its national identity as an aggregation of many different identities. Being a democratic nation, democratic methods help to produce and shape its identity. Recent contributors to Canadian history education scholarship have not called for a new inscription of a national identity or narrative as a way forward (Anderson 2017), but rather push towards developing the tools to foster an appreciation for and understanding of coexisting narratives nationwide (Lévesque 2017). Since identity is not fixed, history education surrounding national identity must also remain open and be presented as a concept "that can be questioned rather than proof that must be preserved" (Létourneau 2017, p. 240).

A common point of convergence is found not in a unified national history or identity, but in the promotion of a shared set of skills which allows citizens to make sense of the past in ways that are relevant to their

[13] See https://thinking-historically.ca.

lives. Instead of an extant identity, a focus on the process may contribute towards shaping a Canadian identity based on a "historical commitment to a distinctively Canadian deliberation about the past and future of the country" (Lévesque 2017, p. 238). While the underlying purpose of history education cannot be extricated from notions of nationhood and social cohesion, there is a case to be made that a move towards providing students with critical tools in historical thinking may afford citizens the ability to critically engage in more nuanced public debate and discussion about issues relevant to the country. A historical thinking approach can prompt young people to critically engage with the role of national narratives, public memorials and other sites of memory that may perpetuate specific narratives, values or ideologies (Gibson and Case 2019). Seixas (2009a) suggests that the historical thinking approach be viewed as a "starting point" (p. 30), emphasising the importance of offering young people critical thinking tools and skills "to steer between mindless pie-in-the-sky utopianism and deadly despair as they shape themselves into the historical agents of their own futures" (Seixas 2012, p. 871). This approach, with an agenda towards accommodating diversity, can potentially offer two critical outcomes: an understanding that many divergent narratives and perspectives may coexist in pluralistic societies, and that citizens will be able to meaningfully and critically engage with the past and one another.

References

Ahonen, S. 2017. The lure of grand narratives: A dilemma for history teachers. In *International Perspectives on Teaching Rival Histories: Pedagogical Responses to Contested Narratives and the History Wars*, ed. H.Å. Elmersjö, H. Clark, and M. Vinterek, 41–62. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Anderson, S. 2017. The stories nations tell: Sites of pedagogy, historical consciousness, and national narratives. *Canadian Journal of Education* 40 (1): 1–38.

Archibald, J. 2008. *Indigenous storywork: Educating the heart, mind, body, and spirit*. Vancouver: UBC Press.

Banting, K., and W. Kymlicka. 2010. Canadian multiculturalism: Global anxieties and local debates. *British Journal of Canadian Studies* 23 (1): 43–72.

Carretero, M., M. Asensio, and M. Rodriguez-Moneo, eds. 2012. *History education and the construction of national identities*. Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing.

CBC News. 2018, November 30. Quebec has no plans to change history curriculum despite scathing review.

Chesler, M., M. Wilson, and A. Malani. 1993. Perceptions of faculty behavior by students of color. *The Michigan Journal of Political Science* 16: 54–79.

Clark, P. 2005. "A nice little wife to make things pleasant": Portrayals of women in social studies textbooks approved in British Columbia. *McGill Journal of Education* 40: 241–265.

———. 2007. Representations of Aboriginal people in English Canadian history textbooks: Toward Reconciliation. In *Teaching the violent past: History education and Reconciliation*, 81–120. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers.

———. 2009. "The most fundamental of all learning tools": A historical investigation of textbook controversies in English Canada. In *Einleitung: Auf der Suche nach der wahren Art von Textbüchen*, ed. M. Depaepe and A. Van Gorp, 123–142. Bad Heilbrunn, Germany: Verlag Julius Klinkhardt.

———. 2018. History education debates: Canadian identity, historical thinking and historical consciousness. *Arbor* 194 (788). https://doi.org/10.3989/arbor.2018.788n2001.

Clark, P., and R. Sandwell. 2020. The History Education Network: An experiment in knowledge mobilization. In *The Palgrave Handbook of History and Social Studies Education*, ed. C.W. Berg and T.M. Christou, 253–293. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Clark, P., S. Lévesque, and R. Sandwell. 2015. Dialogue across chasms: History and history education in Canada. In *History Teacher Education: Global Interrelations*, ed. E. Erdmann and W. Hasberg, 191–211. Schwalbach am Taunus, Germany: Wochenschau Verlag.

Cutrara, S. 2009. To placate or provoke? A critical review of the disciplines approach to history curriculum. *Journal of the Canadian Association of Curriculum Studies* 7 (2): 86–109.

———. 2018. The settler grammar of Canadian history curriculum. *Canadian Journal of Education/Revue Canadienne de l'éducation* 41 (1): 250–275.

Duquette, C. 2020. Québec's history of Québec and Canada ministerial examination: A tool to promote historical thinking or a hurdle to hinder its

inclusion? In *The Palgrave Handbook of History and Social Studies Education*, ed. C.W. Berg and T.M. Christou, 323–354. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

English Montreal School Board. 2018. *An independent report of the History Experts Committee on the provincial history of Québec and Canada program and approved English textbooks.*

Ercikan, K., and P. Seixas. 2015. Issues in designing assessments of historical thinking. *Theory Into Practice* 54 (3): 255–262. https://doi.org/10.1080/00405841.2015.1044375.

Faden, L. 2015. Globalization and history education: The United States and Canada. In *Nation-building and history education in a global culture 13*, ed. J. Zajda, 51–65. New York: Springer.

Frideres, J. 2008. Aboriginal identity in the Canadian context. *The Canadian Journal of Native Studies* 28 (2): 313–342.

Gibson, L., and R. Case. 2019. Reshaping Canadian history education in support of reconciliation. *Canadian Journal of Education/Revue Canadienne de l'éducation* 42 (1): 251–284.

Government of Canada. 2017. *Immigration, refugees and citizenship Canada departmental plan 2017-2018* (Catalogue no. Ci1-27E-PDF). Ottawa: Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada. www.canada.ca/content/dam/ircc/migration/ircc/english/pdf/pub/dp-pm-2017-2018-eng.pdf.

Hébert, Y., Y. Guo, and M. Pellerin. 2008. New horizons for research on bilingualism and plurilingualism: A focus on languages of immigration in Canada. *Encounters on Education* 9: 57–74.

House of Commons. 2006. *39th Parliament, 1st session*. https://www.ourcommons.ca/DocumentViewer/en/39-1/house/sitting-87/hansard#Int-1798655.

Hughes, D., J. Rodriguez, E. Smith, D. Johnson, H. Stevenson, and P. Spicer. 2006. Parents' ethnic-racial socialization practices: A review of research and directions for future study. *Developmental Psychology* 42 (5): 747–770.

Kymlicka, W. 2003. Canadian multiculturalism in historical and comparative perspective: Is Canada unique? *Constitutional. Forum* 13 (1): 1. https://doi.org/10.21991/C9W37Q.

Lawson, G. 2015, December 8. Trudeau's Canada, again. *New York Times Magazine*: 88.

Létourneau, J. 2011. The debate on history education in Quebec. In *New Possibilities for the Past: Shaping History Education in Canada*, ed. P. Clark, 81–96. Vancouver: UBC Press.

———. 2017. Teaching national history to young people today. In *Palgrave Handbook of Research in Historical Culture and Education*, ed. M. Carretero, S. Berger, and M. Grever, 227–242. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Létourneau, J., and R. Gani. 2017. S'intégrer à une nation passe-t-il par l'assimilation de son récit historique? Réflexion à partir du cas québécois. *Canadian Journal of Education/Revue Canadienne de l'éducation* 40 (1): 1–27.

Lévesque, S. 2005. Teaching second-order concepts in Canadian history: The importance of "historical significance.". *Canadian Social Studies* 39 (2): 1.

———. 2011. The challenges of teaching national history in the Canadian multicultural context. *Canadian Issues/Thémes canadiens* 1: 41–46.

———. 2017. History as a "GPS": On the uses of historical narrative for French Canadian students' life orientation and identity. *London Review of Education* 15 (2): 227–242.

Lévesque, S., and P. Clark. 2018. Historical thinking: Definitions and educational applications. In *The Wiley International Handbook of History Teaching and Learning* 1st ed. eds. S.A. Metzger and L. McArthur Harris. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Lévesque, S., and J. Létourneau. 2019. "They fought for our language": Historical narratives and national identification among young French Canadians. In *Contemplating Historical Consciousness: Notes from the Field*, ed. A. Clark and C. Peck, 142–160. Berghahn Books.

Marker, M. 2011. Teaching history from an Indigenous perspective: Four winding paths up the mountain. In *New Possibilities for the Past: Shaping History Education in Canada*, ed. P. Clark, 97–112. Vancouver: UBC Press.

McGregor, H. 2017. One classroom, two teachers? Historical thinking and Indigenous education in Canada. *Critical Education* 8 (14): 1–18.

Monte-Sano, C., and A. Reisman. 2016. Studying historical understanding. In *The handbook of educational psychology*, ed. L. Corno and E. Anderman, 3rd ed. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. 2014. *Education at a glance 2014: OECD indicators*. Paris: OECD Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1787/eag-2014-en.

Peck, C. 2009. Peering through a kaleidoscope: Identity, historical understanding and citizenship in Canada. *Citizenship Teaching and Learning* 5 (2): 62–75.

———. 2010. "It's not like [I'm] Chinese and Canadian. I am in between": Ethnicity and students' conceptions of historical significance. *Theory and Research in Social Education* 38 (4): 574–617.

———. 2011. Ethnicity and students' historical understandings. In *New possibilities for the past: Shaping history education in Canada*, ed. P. Clark, 305–324. Vancouver: UBC Press.

———. 2018. National, ethnic, and Indigenous identities and perspectives in history education. In *The Wiley handbook of history teaching and learning*, ed.

S.A. Metzger and L. MacArthur Harris, 1st ed., 311–333. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Rigney, A. 2018. Epilogue: Citizenship, memory, and the curious case of Canada. *Citizenship Studies* 22 (4): 452–457.

Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples. 1996. *Looking forward, looking back: Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples*. Library and Archives Canada.

Seixas, P. 1996. Conceptualizing the growth of historical understanding. In *The Handbook of Education and Human Development*, ed. D.R. Olson and N. Torrance, 765–783. Hoboken, NJ: Blackwell Publishers.

———. 1997. Making sense of the past in a multicultural classroom. In *The Canadian anthology of social studies: Issues and strategies for teachers*, ed. R. Case and P. Clark, 163–170. Vancouver: Pacific Educational Press.

———. 2006. What is historical consciousness? In *To the Past: History Education, Public Memory, and Citizenship in Canada*, ed. R. Sandwell, 11–22. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

———. 2009a. A modest proposal for change in Canadian history education. *Teaching History* 137: 26–30.

———. 2009b. National history and beyond. *Journal of Curriculum Studies* 41 (6, Special Issue): 719–722. https://doi.org/10.1080/00220270903045253.

———. 2011. Assessment of historical thinking. In *New Possibilities for the Past: Shaping History Education in Canada*, ed. P. Clark, 139–153. Vancouver: UBC Press.

———. 2012. Progress, presence and historical consciousness: Confronting past, present and future in postmodern time. *Paedagogica Historica* 48 (6): 859–872.

———. 2017. A model of historical thinking. *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 49 (6): 593–605. https://doi.org/10.1080/00131857.2015.1101363.

Seixas, P., and T. Morton. 2012. *The big six historical thinking concepts*. Toronto: Nelson Education.

Slavkov, N. 2017. Family language policy and school language choice: Pathways to bilingualism and multilingualism in a Canadian context. *International Journal of Multilingualism* 14 (4): 378–400. https://doi.org/10.1080/14790718.2016.1229319.

St. Denis, V. 2011. Silencing Aboriginal curricular content and perspectives through multiculturalism: "There are other children here.". *Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies* 33 (4): 306–317.

Stanley, T.J. 2002. Nationalist histories and multiethnic classrooms. *Education Canada* 42 (3): 12–15.

Statistics Canada. 2011. *The educational attainment of Aboriginal peoples in Canada: National Household Survey*. http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/nhs-enm/2011/as-sa/99-012-x/99-012-x2011003_3-eng.pdf.

———. 2017. *2016 Census of population* (Catalogue no. 98-316-X2016001). Ottawa: Statistics Canada. https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/en/catalogue/98-316-X2016001.

———. 2019. *Annual demographic estimates: Canada, provinces and territories* (Catalogue no. 91-215-X). Ottawa: Statistics Canada. https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/91-215-x/91-215-x2019001-eng.pdf.

Stearns, P., P. Seixas, and S. Wineburg. 2000. Introduction. In *Knowing, teaching, and learning history: National and international perspectives*, ed. P. Stearns, P. Seixas, and S. Wineburg, 1–13. New York: New York University Press.

Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. 2015. *Honouring the truth, reconciling for the future: Summary of the final report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada*. Ottawa: TRC.

Wineburg, S. 1991. On the reading of historical texts: Notes on the breach between school and academy. *American Educational Research Journal* 28 (3): 495–519.

Winter, E. 2015. Rethinking multiculturalism after its "Retreat". *Lessons* 59 (6): 637–657. https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764214566495.

Yu, H. 2011. Nurturing dialogues between First Nations, urban Aboriginal, and immigrant communities in Vancouver. In *Cultivating Canada: Reconciliation through the Lens of Cultural Diversity*, ed. A. Mathur, J. Dewar, and M. DeGagné, 300–308. Aboriginal Healing Foundation.