Spaces of collaboration: The poetics of place and historical consciousness

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ABSTRACT: The process of engaging students in the negotiation of their place in historical landscapes is vitalized through the development of historical consciousness as a pedagogical tool for instruction in social studies. This study uses student reflection collected from a graduate course to examine how historical consciousness is understood and expressed through experiential interaction with historical sites and the role of people, places, and historical events in the creation of social history. The participants in the study reflected on how public memory is constructed and individualized within grand and personal narratives of their chosen area of commemoration. The study's participants showed an eagerness to incorporate interactive technology to express their understanding of historical events, further highlighting technology's role in democratizing information through digital historical narratives. The student-participants also internalized and articulated their experiences with history through artistic means, which permitted a free expression across multiple media. As prospective educators, the participants negotiated the role of historical consciousness in the development and extension of curricular practices, including the critical examination of official narratives in favour of a socialized history.

KEYWORDS: Historical Consciousness; Historical Sites; Public Memory; Commemoration; Digital History; Official Narratives.

Introduction

Faced with the prospect of developing new curriculum for a graduate course on historical narratives in education, as a professor in the Faculty of Education, I began to think in terms of preparing a course based on the theoretical directives of historical consciousness (or historical thinking) and commemoration for my mostly, non-history specialist students. My curricular focus on the interplay between and among historical people, places and events, prompted an exploration of commemorated historical sites and narratives in the local community. Guided by an understanding that space is infused with meaning through human reaction and interrelations (Osborne, 2001), in the course, the students were invited to explore previously selected "sites" to understand how public narratives and memory intersected with social, ideological, cultural and political landscapes.

This paper is a response to my curriculum-based, pedagogical dilemma. To better understand how the students experienced the course and what I as the teacher had learned from teaching it, together, four graduate students and I researched and wrote a critical account of our practice. The paper is divided into four separate, but overlapping and related 'vignettes'. The first vignette begins with the professor, providing an overview of the theoretical framework that informed her design of the course, followed by a discussion of the results of a survey that she conducted with former students who attended the course. In the second vignette, a group of three graduate students who completed one collaborative assignment wrote about their experience of completing the assignment as educators and as artists. This section is followed by the analysis of a fourth graduate student who records her separate experience of completing the assignment. In the final closing vignette, the professor and the graduate students reflect on what they learned from this experience and how these findings inform the theoretical underpinnings of their practice.

Opening vignette: the professor

In preparing this course, I drew upon three theoretical frameworks. First, I relied upon research on historical consciousness, narrative and teaching (Counsell, 2011; Lee, 2005; Levesque 2008; Seixas 2004; Stearns, Seixas & Wineburg, 2000; Straub, 2004) for insights and readings related to structuring the course. Current trends of historical thinking have been articulated by a number of educational historians and variously called historical consciousness, historical thinking, or historical mindfulness (Lee, 2004; Levesque, 2008; Osborne, 2006; Seixas, 2004; Straub, 2005). Historical thinking originated in research conducted in Britain and Germany during the 1970s and 1980s and began to be prominent in the United States and Canada during the 1990s (Rusen, 2004). More recently, scholars such as Straub (2005) and Lee (2005) have invited educators to consider ways in which historical consciousness "is inevitably connected to narrative acts" (Straub, 2005, p. 54) and to recognize that "in understanding students' prior conceptions of history and the past we need to be able to pursue different kinds of questions" (Lee, 2004, p. 37). In Canada, Peter Seixas, a leading theorist defines historical consciousness as "the intersection among public memory, citizenship, and history education" (Seixas, 2006, p. 15). This intersection can best be understood through a series of questions that are not only about the past, but about links to the present, which relate to how we see things from the past in the present and under what conditions or circumstances we have come to understand issues in this way (Hawkey, 2013; Reisman, 2012). To accomplish this objective, I took direction from Seixas' and his colleagues (2013) six historical thinking concepts (historical significance, cause and consequence, historical perspective-taking, continuity and change, the use of primary source evidence, ethical dimensions of history) and Levesque's (2008) instructions for 'thinking like historians' to shape the questions that the students encountered at the 'sites' that they visited for their course assignment. This foundation in historical consciousness also links to traditions of practice-oriented education in relation to understanding and learning about, and within, a subject discipline for students. I was therefore mindful of related educational writings that oriented understanding and learning as social practices (Barrow & White, 1993; Hirst 1974/2010), as well as seeing learning as equally participatory and rooted within students' life-narratives and must be understood for these students as related but at the same time within the culture of the discipline of history itself (Bruner, 1996; Gardner, 2001).

Equally important, I selected course readings related to my three themes of place, people and events. In so doing, I deliberately choose texts (which included videos, book chapters and articles) that invited students to move beyond the grand narratives of the past and commemorations in the present. I attempted to unsettle and disrupt prior impressions of

history as a 'national narrative' (Neatby & Hodgins, 2012) and their representations through public memory and commemoration by including provocative readings by Werner (2002) and Hall (1997), and by lecturing in the first class on related concepts of history, heritage, collective memory, representations and narratives. This lecture was followed by a workshop where the students applied theoretical concepts to a range of primary source materials drawn from the past, but with which they might have some familiarity. In sum, my goal was to 'make the familiar strange' by taking 'public memory as a sphere for developing a historical consciousness' (Simon, 2004, p. 197). To better understand the historical process of making 'memorable history' in public commemoration sites, I invited an historian from the one of the national commemoration sites (Parks Canada) to talk with my class about the rigorous background process required for a person or a location to be granted an official plaque of commemoration in Canada (Dodd, 2009).

Subsequent classes included discussions of debates – the history wars -- to frame the lengthy and divisive history wars nationally, in Canada, and internationally (Osborne, 2003; Taylor & Guyver, 2012). To help the students comprehend the context in which some of these controversies occurred, additional readings reminded the students of the seemingly banal discourses of racism that are embedded in the colonial legacies of that past and continue to be normalized in the present (Montgomery, 2005; Stanley, 2009). Finally, a piece by Brian Osborne (2001) guided the students to new ways of thinking about a history as a 'geography of place'.

To address the narrative part of the course project, I selected twelve historical sites and for the first assignment, students were invited to create their own historical narrative of the person, place or event commemorated at their chosen site. According to Kenneth Osborne (2006) historical mindedness preserves narratives as the way people make sense of the world, and for students to identify sites of power in their lives, in the ways narratives are privileged through forms of collective memory and commemoration, they must be familiar with the nation-building narrative of Canada. Although different groups have responded to the same commemorative process, they have done so at different times and often for similar or overlapping reasons – especially when responding to the role of nation building (Neatby & Hodgkins, 2012).

In order to critically reflect on this process here, we addressed the following questions: 1. We were guided by the central research question of historical consciousness: What sort of past do we carry around and for what uses do we understand the past in the present and its relationship to the future? 2. How do sites of public memory and commemoration (re)historicize people, places and events within the grand narrative? 3. What knowledge and narratives can we bring to understanding the past? In particular, what sort of knowledge and narratives exist about historical places on the internet? 4. As students, how do we represent our narratives of historical knowledge in the 'site assignment?' What do I bring to historical knowledge production?

There are multiple ways to construct narratives – grand narratives, personal narratives, digital narratives and historical narratives. The conceptual framework of historical mindedness builds on the kind of connections between past and present that are often found in the public history approach, ones that enable students to construct their own narratives. To do so, students need the skills of historical thinking to build historiographical contexts. Osborne (2006) argues that historical mindedness makes history become part of a set of problems to engage students intellectually, one that encourages them to make the imaginative leap into other people's lives and to see the world through their eyes. This in turn allows students to see the choices that were available, the decisions that were made when people like themselves did not know how things would turn out.

Drawing on the notion of a 'democratizing public memory' (Stanley, 2006) for the course assignment, I selected 'sites' which challenged the received official heroics and nation building narratives and invited students to engage with rethinking history and commemoration. Some commemorations invited students to confront racializations of Black and First Nations communities directly or through the insights that they gained when examining the controversial nature of selected sites. Informed by a national 'social memory' of the past (Neatby & Hodgins, 2012, p. 15), which I assumed many students had studied in their history classes and, in fact, proved true with only minor exceptions, as students reproduced the traditional 'grand narrative' (Counsell, 2011). To further delve into students' understandings of the past, I selected monuments which fit with the traditional national narrative featuring war, former prime ministers' residences, and places related to economic development such as the UNESCO designated Rideau Canal. With this grouping, I represented what Neatby and Hodgins (2012) describe as "cashing in on the past" (p. 15). Under these circumstances, Neatby and Hodgins (2012) assert that the process of remembering is weighted down with memories meant to strengthen among viewers "a dearly held nation" (p. 14) by building a methodology of purposeful amnesia. Unsettling notions of the past, in some instances, also meant investigating familiar places or (re)discovering new 'sites'. With Brian Osbornes' (2001) notion of historical 'place' as a frame of reference, some students explored repurposed historic spaces to uncover their past such as the renovated structure which currently houses city hall, but is the site of the former Teachers' College or condominiums located in the popular local market area that were once the site of a major language dispute at the previously occupied elementary school.

By following through on the concept of having students create their own narrative, for the final assignment or project, I wanted to pay particular attention to students' preferences for learning which invited them to be creative, and emotionally and socially engaged, (Coetzee, Munro, & Boer, 2004) – in Zeeman and Lotriet's (2013) words, to go "beyond the expected" (p. 179). As Jensen (2001), among others have argued, "arts enhance the process of learning. The systems that nourish, which include our integrated sensory, attentional, cognitive, emotional and motor capacities are in fact, the driving forces behind all other learning" (p. 2). Scheurman and Newmann's (1998) idea of 'authentic intellectual work' (p. 1) brings depth to the educational experience. To tap into the individual, creative skills of the students as researchers and artists – the site assignment offered interactive learning opportunities for constructing their own understandings of historical knowledge (Osborne, 2003).

Research that links social development with learning in the Arts (Bresler, 2007; Deasy 2002; Jensen, 2001) suggests that the Arts provide strategies for 'deepening the learning experience'. This approach is further strengthened by the constructivist views of Scheuman and Newman (1998) that support opportunities for deep learning. For the assignment, the students were offered a choice among 12 historical 'sites' that were located within a 20 minute walking distance from the university. There were three parts to the assignment: exploring the 'site' through a series of guiding questions that accompanied each destination, researching the history which was to be completed after the initial visitation, and then presenting the 'site' in a 'product' such as designing a brochure, develop a lesson, write a media report, prepare a graphic story, portrait zine, children's book or sketchbook using the RAFT (role, audience, format, topic) structure[1]. Evaluation criteria were based on the coverage of context, creativity in presentation, academic references, quality of writing, and level of background research. As a guideline, I suggested a length of five to seven pages or equivalence. Given that I was striving for authentic learning, I wanted to accommodate the students' career choices in the assignment so that teachers, for example, could prepare lesson plans or write a children's book (Ravich, 2000). The resulting assignments were unique, insightful and creative -- submissions ranged from a 'published' children's storybook and a

collection of letters, to a scrapbook, brochure, portrait zine, blog and wiki. As we shall see, among the students selected for an in depth analysis in the paper, democratization of the past, led them to the poetics of digital technology.

Methodology

To analyze the survey that I conducted with all the students, I employed Auerbach and Siverstein's (2003) coding method. Their approach contains three separate phrases -- each one dealing with a different level of analysis that moves back and forth as the complexity of the text emerges. Drawing on these three phrases, which I adapted to reading the survey results (making the text manageable, understanding what was written and analyzing the data in relation to the historical consciousness theory), I selected the relevant text and grouped repeating ideas into themes. The second part of the study, completed by the four graduate students (authored here), relied on a hermeneutic reflection of their experience with both the historical sites, and the course (Linge, 2004). These reflections are grounded in Gadamer's (1975, 2004) dialectical hermeneutics, and informed by a critical use of Seixas' (2013) method of understanding historical consciousness. Their analysis of their experience and its relation to theory is included in the second part of the paper.

To expand upon my understanding of how learning took place beyond the survey that I conducted, the research and this paper includes an in depth analysis of the experiences of two groups of graduate students. This is not a sampling of the learning experiences of all, or a sampling of the students' assignments, rather it is through the narratives of the two groups who used technology that we are attempting to understand the learning process. It's not an evaluation of this assignments' approach as a learning model (although it could be understood as providing one way to teach historical consciousness), rather, with this paper, we are trying to understand how one experiential learning model facilitated the selected groups of students' understandings of larger issues of historical consciousness, history and commemoration.

The first 'site' assignment of the semester, in part, dictated the selection of course readings. The site assignment was an integral part of the course experience and not simply the evaluative component. Some people worked on single projects and others worked in groups. I selected a single project and a group project for further analysis. These assignments were selected as examples because in these two instances, with the digital component, the students took up technology to foster knowledge production. We (the professor and the students) wanted to explore more in depth how we understood the relationship between historical consciousness and technology. In particular, as a professor of history, I was interested in finding out more about how practices of learning history and constructing historical narratives shifted with online formats. As well, each group involved a PhD student who is working in the area of historical narratives for her thesis -- the other two students are high school teachers and I was interested in how they would represent historical thinking given their prior experience as educators (Reisman, 2012).

Among the class of 27 graduate students, after completing the required ethics consent forms, eight people responded to the six-question survey. Given that four additional students participated in reflecting on the course and the assignment as authors of the paper almost half the students in the course completed the questionnaire. Although several of the respondents had history degrees, none of them were familiar with historical consciousness prior to taking this course.

In responding to questions related to exploring the site and researching the history, although some of the students were familiar with the place that they visited or the person/event that they were researching, half of the students commented on the extent of the

research that was required to locate information about their topic and to understand their site. One student within the survey reported that 'repeated site visits were necessary to understand both the location in which the monument is situated and the [composition of the] monument itself'. When asked what they learned about historical consciousness, the students addressed the following themes: commemoration and relevance, their role as educators, and the assignment as a personal experience.

For several students, this assignment took on a level of significant importance because of the way that they personally related to the site. This personal experience impacted the way they thought about the representation of the past as it is commemorated in the present. The particular importance was summed up in the comment that commemorative sites should be established 'tactfully, because for the most part, this [visit] will be the only source of information on that particular site for the public', moreover, 'commemoration of an individual or subject is complex and sometimes a controversial task'. In making the connection between commemoration and history, another student rightly observed, 'History is not always about the "facts" about an individual, but the choices that go into representing him/her'.

Further, several students connected their understanding of historical consciousness to the way in which they, as educators, have taught about the past to their students noting how connections can be made in the unlikeliest places and history can easily be manipulated with the use of random facts. For the student who researched a Canadian hero, the assignment was a big challenge to present all issues, including that of 'hero' from a perspective of critical thinking reminding him/herself 'never to present projects to students that carry your own bias'.

Finally with regard to their personal experience of connecting the site assignment to their understanding of how the past can be overlooked as (ir)relevant in the present, a respondent opined how easy it is to pass by something and not notice the features which make is distinct. Furthermore, the student observed, how easy it is to forget that there are objects that are worth noting because of what they tell us about the history of Ottawa, or anywhere in the world. One respondent who completed this assignment experienced a deep personal connection to the site. He/she remarked that this site has now become a 'favourite place' because of how eloquently the artist used a visual text in the present to speak of the way that it honours a past event. Overwhelmingly, all the respondents stated that they had enjoyed the assignment (which may, of course, explain why they completed the survey).

The influence of artistic representations and technological options was one of the surprising and enriching outcomes of the assignment. As indicated previously, the students took advantage of the RAFT model to design a range of 'products' for their assignment. Several students commented on the advantage of having options for their assignments and a couple of teachers wrote lesson plans. One student remarked on the creative benefits of the RAFT model for their product so that sensory elements of sounds, images and photographs could be included in their audio/visual assignment, while another student stated that this approach allowed him/her 'to apply my knowledge and learning in a different context than a traditional paper would have allowed me to'. Additional insights related to using technology to develop their 'product' and to further understandings of historical narratives and consciousness, will be developed in the students' vignettes in the next section.

Digital historical narratives

Graduate students' experience with the sites

The following site assignment narratives illustrate deep connections and intersections between Seixas' (2006) work on historical consciousness and (three) historical thinking concepts (Seixas et al., 2013), when coupled with digital technologies (Hennessy, Ruthven, and & Brindley, 2005). Both sites, easily accessible in the nation's capital city, were chosen for their historical significance – one of the six historical thinking concepts (Seixas et al., 2013) albeit for different reasons. The contemporary site of École Guigues (a former school), now renovated for residential and community use, changed the way the group interacted with the location, as the original structure was in tact, but the neighbourhood and function of the building no longer conveyed its historical significance. Continuity and change, a second historical thinking concept (Seixas et al., 2013), played a dominant role in the construction of the group's publicly accessible wiki for teachers and students, as the focus of the narrative was through an interdisciplinary approach, weaving themes of change into teaching resources and lesson plans in secondary Geography and Language Arts.

A student using an interactive online blog constructed the second selected narrative, which was also displayed in a publically accessible forum. The second site visit, the Rideau Canal, is unpacked by the student using a narrative that evokes cause and consequence, a third historical thinking concept (Seixas et al., 2013). This narrative engages with the site as a physical experience, to appreciate the breadth of undertaking of a large structural development, created through human labour. Both the causes and consequences of intentionally shaping of the land and displacing peoples are explored using a personal blog.

By using an online forum for displaying their narratives, both groups demonstrate the significance of digital technologies in the construction of historical consciousness. The ongoing, dialogical processes of meaning making, starting with the site visit, and continuing through the creation of online interactive technologies fuses together digital hermeneutics (Capurro 2010; van den Akker et al., 2011) and historical consciousness. As stated earlier, Seixas' (2006) definition of historical consciousness blends both public memory and history education. Through the interactive materials on the wiki page and blog site, each assignment uniquely blends public memory through historical and contemporary documents and photographs, lesson plans, resources, and critical reflections to create a 'digital historical consciousness' that weaves public memory and history education through historical thinking concepts.

First graduate students' vignette: École Guigues

We chose to visit École Guigues because as residents of the city of Ottawa (capital of Canada), we had all walked past the location, where tensions had erupted nearly 100 years before, without ever understanding the historical significance of the site. Upon arriving, we found the historical marker that was hidden in plain-view—pedestrians passed by without notice as we unpacked our cameras, notebooks, and began to explore the present-day condominium complex that was once at the forefront of the debate over French language education in Ontario, Canada. Although the site had been used by Roman Catholic schools dating back to 1864 (Bytown Museum, 2009), École Guigues was built between 1904 and 1905. École Guigues was directly affected by the provincial government's adoption of Regulation 17 in 1912.

In 1912 the Ontario provincial government, led by Premier James Whitney, passed Regulation 17. The regulation made English the official language of instruction in all schools. French language education could only be used in primary education when students did not have a functional use of the English language. In 1913, the regulation was changed to allow the use of French in later grades if it was directed by the parents and did not exceed one hour

per day (Axelrod, 1997). In response to this and other infringements upon their rights as a result of Regulation 17, the French-language community fought back in various ways. École Guigues became a symbol for this struggle for language minority rights because there was a direct confrontation between city officials and French-speaking community members on the front steps of the building. In 1915, the provincial government refused to fund French-speaking schools -- but this did not deter the administrators of École Guigues. The administrators regained control of the school in 1916, and the government eventually recognized the authority of bilingual schools in 1927 (Bytown Museum, 2009). It was on the steps of École Guigues --once a catalyst for conflict--where we, as students, artists, and educators, found ourselves tasked with creating meaning of the symbolic site.

Response as artists

We arrived at the site compelled to capture our interactions through the visual medium of photography and narrative. As we explored the perimeter of the building, we captured images of all facets of the location to situate it visually within the narrative provided by the professor. Special attention was paid to architectural features of École Guigues, including renovations matching the original building style, and noted the function and aesthetic aspects of adjacent buildings to further contextualize the constructed, commemorative space. Understanding that 'places are defined by tangible material realities that can be seen, touched, mapped, and located' (Osborne, 2001, p. 43) we circled, photographed, touched, and gained access to the lobby, to fully interact with the site.

After the École Guigues visit, we uploaded and shared our images and reflections, juxtaposing the visuals against historical records of the site. Just as we were compelled to explore and make meaning of the former school, we wanted to present our findings in a similar fashion, through an interactive approach using collaborative technology. We found the contemporary technology of the Wiki would provide both the interactivity and visual capacity to match our own experiences with the site. As Werner (2002) reminds us, 'the educator's role is to encourage the conditions that allow readers to dialogue richly with / about / against images, and to be less dependent upon he textbook's authorization of correct interpretations' (p. 425); the interactivity of the Wikispace permitted our visitors to not only learn about the history of École Guigues and Regulation 17, but to experience and contribute to the significance of the site digitally as we experienced it physically.

The movement from static digital technology to interactive (web 2.0) technology reframed the ability for students to become active participants in the study of history as opposed to passive recipients. According to a study by Hazari, North, and Moreland (2009), using Wikis in the social studies classroom promotes a sense of collaboration among students and ensures that they develop a familiarity with contemporary tools for storing, accessing, and editing data online. To construct our Wiki, we collectively and collaboratively used the internet to research the narratives surrounding the place of École Guigues and compiled them into subsections within the Wiki. By adapting this approach, we presented the information in a way that invited our audience to interact, interpret, and create their own 'memorable histories' that were meaningful to their own lives.

Response as educators

As part of the assignment requirements, we created lesson plans for educators to use to guide students through the collected-content of the site visit. We were able to extend beyond simple history lessons, and incorporate the visual arts through photography, geography through mapping, and English language arts through narrative response. As educators, we aimed to promote active, rather than passive meaning making, allowing the website visitors to connect

parts of the wiki to the overall historical significance of the site; as Werner (2002) suggests, 'readers/viewers do not passively receive meaning; they make meaning by understanding how the parts are related to the whole' (p. 403). These processes of meaning making are essential to the development of historical consciousness. According to Sexias (2009), 'students as historical agents operating in their own historical moment means this: that they understand the impossibility of knowing once and for all the story of which they might be a part, and yet have the tools to steer between mindless pie-in-the-sky utopianism and deadly despair as they shape themselves into the historical agents of their own futures' (p. 871).

The course assignments' pedagogical shift from learning about history in the classroom, to exploring dynamic historical spaces in the community, fostered collaboration among our group members and inspired a second pedagogical broadening as we created our lesson plans. Through the historical site activity, we individually envisioned innovative ways to communicate the experience of École Guigues as a historical place, connected to significant events and people. Seixas' historical thinking concepts of cause and consequence, historical perspective-taking, and continuity and change, guided the purpose and structure of the lesson plans, seeking to recreate the interactive experience of a commemorative site through use of the Wiki and online archived materials. Situating École Guigues both as a historical site of a significant event, and as a contemporary public space, acknowledges the dynamic nature of history through what Rüsen (2004) calls 'genetic' historical consciousness; 'past actualities' are understood to be temporal, transformational and evolving (p. 77). Just as we as educators questioned, interpreted, and created meaning through our experience with the site and development of our Wiki, we hoped our students and visitors would be enabled to become constructors of their own meanings as 'historical agents' as well.

As educators working with the secondary history curriculum in Canada, textbooks have traditionally played a predominant role in instruction. As they are aligned with the curriculum and are generally considered politically neutral (Issitt, 2004), textbooks are a safe resource that many history teachers rely on as a primary source of instruction. Our own education in history involved reading assigned pages and completing questions, which is a rote learning environment that did little to instil critical historical thinking. The site assignment provided an opportunity to explore alternative ways to approach the curriculum in order to foster student curiosity and historical consciousness. Whereas textbooks situate historical events in a static portrayal, the experiential exploring of the physical site in real time and place inspired a more personal interaction with history than the traditional textbook. The exploration of history through the site assignment made us rethink our pedagogical approach in our own classrooms and the role technology can play in fostering historical consciousness and historical thinking. The use of technology to engage student learning promotes an interaction rather than a mere transaction with the subject matter; it requires active rather than passive learning. The site assignment allowed us to move away from being individual learners of history through text, to a community of learners making meaning in physical and digital communities. Through the mode of digital technology, we aimed to replicate this exploratory experience for our students.

Second student vignette: Rideau Canal

Experience of the site

I chose the Rideau Canal for my site assignment for both practical reasons, as it was quite close to campus, and also because I was curious about it in relation to mapping, creating, controlling and defining Ottawa as a historic space. As a resident of the city during my studies, the canal was a banal part of the urban landscape I regularly occupied. It was in an

effort to engage in historical consciousness making in relation to this banal 'site' that I chose to investigate the Rideau Canal in relation to my own personal narratives and the larger historical narratives in which it is situated. In this way, I wanted to think through some of the historical concepts we had been engaging in class up to that point – dealing with historical narratives, Sexias' historical consciousness, as well as the ways in which commemoration, narrative and nation inform understandings of place now and in the past.

In an official way, the Rideau Canal was designated as a UNESCO world historic site in 2007 for its engineering achievement as slack water canal of 202 kilometres running from the mouth of the Ottawa River to the harbour in Kingston in Lake Ontario in Canada (UNESCO, 2007). With a large map of the canal and the city's walking and biking pathways in front of me, I was standing a couple of kilometres down from the Bytown lock portion at the end of the canal which leads into the Ottawa River. It was a sunny afternoon as I walked with a classmate to look at the canal, not as a citizen of the city, but with the lens of a student/researcher of history of place. I wanted to purposely look at the site as something constructed, and begin to unpack how I related to the site; my position in history, as well as what such a position means for understanding and engaging with historical places.

Experience as an artist

Our site assignment asked us to consider the canal in Ottawa in front of a map of the canal and its pathways. As I stared at the map, I attempted to re-see the space in historic terms, what it would have felt like in this place before the canal existed, while it was being built and in its first years of operation. Looking back at the map I took a photograph of it, not knowing how I would use such a picture, but at the same time feeling as though the map itself spoke something historically significant about understanding the Rideau Canal and the mapping of space that was so casually put up as information for tourists. I was reminded of this fact as several passers-by asked my classmate and I if we were lost, or needed help. The everydayness of the map as being marked for tourists became all at once apparent to me and the strange feeling of being placed here as student, as researcher, as tourist, and as citizen of the city for going on two years. I was reminded of Seixas' call for understanding how we know about the past, and what this tells us about our present, and our future, but also Cutrara's (2009) call to be critical and skeptical of the 'naturalness' of history as a larger narrative project of the state. As I became aware my own conflicting and overlapping interactions with the site, I decided to delve deeper into my own connections of past, and future for the assignment in relation to these tensions, but also the process by which I produce such narratives.

Response as researcher

I looked again at the photograph I had taken. It spoke of a past of mapping the canal and the Ottawa area as well as a present reflected in the glass - the poetic irony of the buildings of the university in the background. I decided to use my picture as an artistic conception of the canal in the present and relate it to other past artistic conceptions of the canal for the site assignment. Understanding my connections and understandings of the historicity of the Rideau Canal required a medium in which I could narrate my thoughts and connect them to my present and in doing so relate to the history of the Canal as a site itself. How can such a picture 'work' to relate a history of place that is situated, contextual, critical but also revealing of the ways such a place is constructed as finished and banal - part of the urban landscape as it weaves its way through Ottawa's downtown, I wondered. To make my photograph meaningful in the continuum of past, present and future understandings of the same space, I endeavoured

to relate my own narrative to other artistic conceptions of the canal from different points in its history. The artistic conceptions, related to my own, and the running narrative of my investigation, would provide a strong visual ethnography of place, and also allow me the space to write and wonder critically within, and as, I investigate such relationships (Pink, 2007). In order to do this I decided to create a blog of my experience of the research process itself within Sexias' (2009; 2012) historical consciousness framework (as I understood it then) and relate my present understandings to those of other visual representations of the Canal from the past – namely through paintings. I googled, wikied, bookmarked and clicked though the many sites in the archives and webpages of cyberspace to find two artistic conceptions of the canal from the past to keep my project manageable and within the prescribed writing limit. I chose two paintings as a way of engaging my self and my responses and documenting the dialogic relationship I began to conceive with this place, as well as the many visual representations of the past in the canal as a dynamic historical site.

Response as educator

I wanted my blog to focus on the reflexive *process* of historical consciousness making in an online environment where access to other archival visual understandings of the Rideau Canal in different points in its construction through paintings. Often research and writing focus on the product (Coylar, 2009), and the blog as a medium gave me the space (in a variety of its conceptions) to put my own understandings and historical consciousness making; the very ways I made links between the past in the paintings, the present I now experience, and a newly connected futures that allows such comparisons to make other's engagements with my blog and with the site and the paintings I put together, create a deeper and more textured understanding of the Rideau Canal. As my particular focus was both the site itself, and the colonial project it espoused, (being an antiracist educator) I looked at the ways my historical consciousness building related to the historicity of the colonial legacy the Rideau Canal engenders and how this consciousness raising has the potential to work to trouble this historicity of place. Furthermore, I wanted to see what such a framework for the engagement with historical representations and visual as well as discursive narratives would look like; what was such a process like pedagogically. I found that blogs provide a framework to foster historical thinking concepts that are in process and has the potential as a pedagogical tool to this end. Though this was not something that was directly part of the assignment, understanding our own pedagogical journey through such reflections as well, for my part, in the making of the project itself, is an important task within this work as well as academic work more largely.

Much like the group above who investigated École Guigues, the online component provided a framework for the continued engagement with histories and historical narratives that was dynamic, dialogical and continually in process. It was the potential within the online frameworks that we all gravitated towards, as they provide the much-needed flexibility and access that works for the promotion of the historical consciousness *in the making,* which our assignment asked us to consider.

Dialectic engagements: digitalizing the site assignment

The two assignments highlighted in this paper are presented as narratives of experience, first through the physical visit to the historical sites, secondly, through personal interpretations and collaborative interactions after the visit, and lastly, the finished projects are discussed in the narratives as part of their chosen digital interactive mediums: a wiki and blog. Hermeneutic

methodology underpins the site assignment evident in the multiple layers of meaning making and student narratives of experience. As a reflexive search for meaning through common-sense understandings of everyday places, hermeneutics as a methodology seeks to make the familiar strange (Linge, 2004) by engaging in a dialectical process of experiencing, reinterpreting, and reflecting on the original experience with the site visit. In the hermeneutic tradition of Gadamer (2004), this process can be understood as dialogical through three ongoing stages of engagement: initial interaction with the historical site as a text, understanding the site as part of a larger (historical) text, and creating new meaning from these engagements through the creation of projects that are available online as text. 'Text' in this case is used to encompass multiple meanings of text, which include both physical place and digital spaces of the blog and wiki. The stages in the hermeneutic process facilitate a deep engagement with the site visit by allowing students to question the everyday places they are familiar with; to make the contemporary sites 'strange' by reflecting on the historical memory and significance of that place. Interestingly, Gadamer and Fantel (1975) are critical of a disciplinary model of historical consciousness (much like Seixas' (2013) work), where historians use a methodological model to interpret historical places, people, or events. Instead of being overly formulaic, Gadamer and Fantel (1975) suggest that each interpretive experience must be situated carefully in the creation and production of knowledge and truth in that particular historian's context. In essence, , hermeneutic methodology enhances the building of historical consciousness by engaging the students to think about place in terms of its public memory and historical significance, from their perspective. A critical, historical consciousness lens was taken throughout the analyses, specifically attending to the contextualized experiences of each author, in order to safeguard against disciplinary rigidity (Gadamer & Fantel, 1975).

The digital aspect of the students' projects necessitates a discussion on the fusion of dialectical processes of engagement and understanding of the historical site, with the choice of open-access, online mediums to display the finished product. The accessible wiki and blog become another text that can further engage in the dialectic process of the site visit: teachers or students choosing to use the wiki or blog not only engage with the historical place through pictures, maps, and links, but also through the narrative engagement of the students who created the wiki and blog. This broadens historical consciousness building, and historical thinking skills through what Capurro (2010) calls 'digital hermeneutics'. Compared to traditional methods of learning history through a textbook, visiting a website, wiki, or blog created about a historically significant place prompts a student to virtually visit the site and its resources, to build on their understanding of the place as a static, flat part of history. The digitalized site assignments arguably have the potential to cobble together historical thinking and historical consciousness by expanding what we know as traditional historical teaching methods. The dialectical process, through a digital hermeneutic approach, also has the potential to continue the project via open access sites for teachers and students.

Closing vignette

As graduate students, we see the ways in which we have engaged with archival evidence to create a dialogical relationship where the past can be cut and pasted into the present. Similar to the layers we experienced in studying Seixas' (2004, 2006, 2009, 2013) concepts, with technology, we are changing the ways in which we engage with multiple pasts by shifting the emphasis from solitary, archival researching to an integrated, open and connected process of historical consciousness making. In both assignments discussed in this paper - the blog and the wiki - the process was open and known as changes occurred and we were aware that we were engaging with them in a tactile manner. For us, the very narrative nature of history and

meaning making became a more reflexive and open hermeneutic, dialogical process. This finding speaks to Rüsen's (2004) concept of seeing history as temporal, partial and changing. Not only did the internet change the way we interacted with the past, but we used the web as its own historical site in relation to the physical space we visited. This experience brings to mind larger questions that are implicit in projects as the process of 'finding history' shifted to the Internet. We discovered that history is not singular, but multiple. With these multiple pasts, the web is an ever-present reality that we can engage with to understand and negotiate sites and conceptions of our present(s) and our future(s). The internet as archive allowed for a continual re-description of pasts in relation to presents that are continually being engaged, connected and made meaningful through those connections of digital spaces to physical ones and back again.

With this course and the related 'site' assignment, as a professor I attempted, as Osborne suggests (2006), to make history become part of a set of problems to engage students intellectually, one that encourages them to make the imaginative leap into other people's lives and to see the world through their eyes. This in turn allows them to see the choices that were available, the decisions that were made when people like themselves did not know how things would turn out. As scholars and poets, the students and I explored the possibilities of a curricular focus on the interplay between and among historical people, places and events, which prompted an exploration of commemorated historical sites and narratives in the local community. Given that the students were invited to explore previously selected 'sites' to understand historical consciousness as 'the intersection among public memory, citizenship and history education', (Seixas, 2006, p. 15) and to produce creative, artistic assignments, the results, as you have read in the section above, were 'beyond the expected'. This research on historical thinking and teaching invites educators to consider the multiple ways that public narratives, memory and technological interventions can shape our experiences of understanding history as a process, as an engagement with a way of thinking about the contexts of their world and history as a way of thinking itself, whereby students come to play an active role in shaping it in the present.

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Endnotes

[1] For additional examples using RAFT see https://crmsliteracy.wikispaces.com/Role-Audience-Format-Topic+(RAFT).

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