

## **Developing Historical Consciousness and a Community of History Practitioners: A Survey of Prospective History Teachers Across Canada**

### **Le développement d'une conscience historique et d'une communauté de professionnels en histoire : enquête auprès des futurs professeurs d'histoire à travers le Canada**

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Résumé de l'article

Cet article s'intéresse à la conscience historique des futurs professeurs d'histoire au Canada. Réalisée auprès de participants bénévoles ( $N=233$ ) à l'aide d'un outil de sondage en ligne s'inspirant de la recherche pancanadienne *Les Canadiens et leurs passés*, cette enquête étudie les connaissances de base, la perception de la fiabilité des sources, l'expérience en classe d'histoire et la vision de l'histoire en milieu scolaire de futurs enseignants. Les résultats mettent en lumière le fait que peu d'entre eux possèdent une connaissance approfondie de l'histoire canadienne. De plus, ceux-ci ont peu d'expérience des méthodes d'enseignement basées sur l'enquête historique. Cependant, une majorité des futurs professeurs a une représentation très prégnante de ce qu'est l'histoire en milieu scolaire et de ses fins. Cet article aborde les retombées de cette recherche, notamment le besoin de communautés professionnelles d'enseignants de l'histoire.

# DEVELOPING HISTORICAL CONSCIOUSNESS AND A COMMUNITY OF HISTORY PRACTITIONERS: A SURVEY OF PROSPECTIVE HISTORY TEACHERS ACROSS CANADA

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**ABSTRACT.** This paper looks at the historical consciousness of prospective history teachers in Canada. Using a bilingual online survey instrument inspired by the pan-Canadian research *Canadians and their Pasts* with volunteer participants (N=233), the study investigates their background knowledge, their perceptions of the trustworthiness of sources, their experiences in the history classroom, and their visions of school history. Results reveal that few prospective teachers have extensive knowledge of Canadian history and limited experience with active, inquiry-based teaching approaches to the past. However, a majority of them have very strong conceptions and sense of purposes regarding school history. The paper discusses the implications of this study, notably the need for professional communities of history practitioners.

## LE DÉVELOPPEMENT D'UNE CONSCIENCE HISTORIQUE ET D'UNE COMMUNAUTÉ DE PROFESSIONNELS EN HISTOIRE : ENQUÊTE AUPRÈS DES FUTURS PROFESSEURS D'HISTOIRE À TRAVERS LE CANADA

**RÉSUMÉ.** Cet article s'intéresse à la conscience historique des futurs professeurs d'histoire au Canada. Réalisée auprès de participants bénévoles (N=233) à l'aide d'un outil de sondage en ligne s'inspirant de la recherche pancanadienne *Les Canadiens et leurs passés*, cette enquête étudie les connaissances de base, la perception de la fiabilité des sources, l'expérience en classe d'histoire et la vision de l'histoire en milieu scolaire de futurs enseignants. Les résultats mettent en lumière le fait que peu d'entre eux possèdent une connaissance approfondie de l'histoire canadienne. De plus, ceux-ci ont peu d'expérience des méthodes d'enseignement basées sur l'enquête historique. Cependant, une majorité des futurs professeurs a une représentation très prégnante de ce qu'est l'histoire en milieu scolaire et de ses fins. Cet article aborde les retombées de cette recherche, notamment le besoin de communautés professionnelles d'enseignants de l'histoire.

The preparation of history teachers has been the subject of lively debates in Canada. Following the implementation of the new Québec History and Citizenship Education program in 2006, various commentators, including some historians, publicly lamented the “insufficient training of beginning teachers”

(Coalition pour l'histoire, 2012; Lavallée, 2012), suggesting that they were merely "learning instructors" and "classroom managers" trained primarily in pedagogy, not in history or other disciplines (Gagné, 1999). Already in 1995, during the Estates General on Education, the Lacoursière Report (Groupe de travail sur l'enseignement de l'histoire, 1996) argued that "many of the problems in the area of history teaching are related to initial teacher training and are bound to become worse if reforms are not introduced" (p. 61). Similar criticism has been made elsewhere in Canada (see Osborne, 2003; Sandwell, 2012). For historian Jack Granatstein (1998), the educational focus on multiculturalism, whole-child development, and civic education has led to a generation of teachers who "scarcely teach history, so busy are they fighting racism, teaching sex education, or instructing English as a second language for recent immigrants" (p. 3). Throughout North America, teacher education has been decried publicly and put at the forefront of efforts at improving history teaching in schools. In doing so, some pundits have placed greater emphasis on the transfer of referential-type national narratives and content knowledge as a means of democratic integration, while others have stressed key discipline-based thinking dimensions for helping students develop autonomous perspectives on the past, albeit in well-informed and well-reasoned ways (Zanazanian & Moisan, 2012).

Within the parameters of such a tension, "it has [nonetheless] been more or less assumed," Marilyn Cochran-Smith and Susan Lytle observed, "that teachers who know more teach better" (as cited in Barton & Levstik, 2004, p. 245). But this statement begs asking: what does it mean to *know more* for history teachers? How is such knowledge *gained*? And *to what ends* does it *serve* history teachers? Traditionally, the idea of knowing more history was equated with the accumulation of content information that teachers were supposed to possess and transmit to their students, unrelated necessarily to knowledge about pedagogy. It was, however, precisely in light of such similar practices in the United States in the 1960s that led Lee Shulman to call for fostering his notion of "pedagogical content knowledge" among future teachers (Shulman 1986, 1987; Shulman & Quinlan 1996). Shulman (1987) argued that pedagogical content knowledge is of special interest "because it identifies the distinctive bodies of knowledge for teaching... the category most likely to distinguish the understanding of the content specialist from that of the pedagogue" (p. 8). For him, competent teachers were those who had a thorough teaching knowledge base, which he represented graphically as the intersection between "content" and "pedagogy." Such knowledge bases make it possible for them to transform the content knowledge they possess "into forms that are pedagogically powerful and yet adaptive to the variations in ability and background presented by the students" (Shulman, 1987, p. 15).

Facing these questions and larger public demands to properly teach history, teacher educators may find it challenging to help prospective teachers authen-

tically articulate a voice, vision, and practice regarding the subject matter; ones where they would adequately harmonize history teaching's main social functions for shared content and historical literacy, while also developing the necessary mindsets and pedagogical tools for doing what they deem best for their students' personal and academic growth. As creative teacher educators may introduce such distinctive approaches to their teaching as inquiry-based learning and historical thinking (Lévesque, 2008; VanSledright, 2002), assuming and hoping that these would make their students *better* teachers, prospective teachers' own personal beliefs about pedagogy and history, and about epistemological and life understandings may all have a greater effect in the long-run (Adler, 2008; Barton & Levstik, 2004; van Hover & Yeager, 2007; VanSledright & Reddy, 2014).

Although teacher educators may consider what their students actually do know and think about history, the question remains to what extent and how they take such knowledge into consideration when preparing them. Looking at prospective teachers' historical consciousness, or what we might conceive as their capacity to give meaning to the past for making sense of and acting in present-day reality (Rüsen 2005; Zanazanian 2012, 2015), serves one key way of elucidating the many understandings of history's operations and its concomitant teaching activities that they are most inclined to espousing once in the field. The underlying logic of historical consciousness is based on the principle that every person embodies – consciously or not – some beliefs, assumptions, and visions about the past that are used to make guiding decisions in life (Conrad et al., 2013). For Jörn Rüsen (2005), this consciousness makes it possible for individuals to understand and orient their life in reference to the course of time, and to establish relevant links between the past, the present, and the envisioned future in the form of a usable past – or what Jean-Pierre Charland (2003) called “knowledge mobilization for action” (p. 21). Following this logic, aspects of prospective teachers' historical consciousness emerge when their own positionality is “confronted” in actual situations that require referral to the past and the use of relevant interpretive filters for justifying and mobilizing their sense of agency – which history teaching, in and of itself a fundamentally political, ethical, and practical endeavour, permits one to do (Zanazanian, 2012, 2015).

Unfortunately, Canadian educators only have a partial understanding of how teachers, and prospective teachers in particular, think about the interplay between pedagogy and history. Although we may read about particular action-research or classroom projects in various Canadian settings (Cardin, Éthier, & Meunier, 2010; Lévesque, 2003, 2009; Peck & Seixas 2008; Seixas, 1993a), we lack a more global perspective on teachers' historical consciousness as evidenced by their background knowledge, their perceptions of the trustworthiness of sources, their experiences in the history classroom, and their vision of school history.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, growing research has suggested that knowing history is more

complex than mastering vast historical facts, as is bridging the gap between novice and expert harder than overcoming the disparity between disciplinary knowledge and pedagogy among future teachers (Fallace 2007, 2009; Fallace & Neem, 2005). As Barton and Levstik (2003) suggested, exemplary history teachers possess and deploy strategic forms of knowledge, which implies “doing history”; engaging learners in historical activities and inquiries, sourcing historical information, assessing the value of sources, and considering various perspectives. These strategic forms of knowledge can today be understood as being informed by the workings of teachers’ historical consciousness and their own views on pedagogical content knowledge (Hartzler-Miller, 2001).

In following this logic and keen on looking at key factors that could facilitate the development of a professional community of practitioners among history teachers, the aim of this article is to examine prospective teachers’ historical consciousness and how this affects their sense of professional identity and knowledge base for teaching. To this end, we revisit a survey on history student teachers’ ideas about history, both its disciplinary and pedagogical workings, as expressed during their professional development in teacher education programs across Canada (for additional results from this study, see Lévesque & Zanazanian, 2015).

This project, which was supported by the educational research unit “Making history / Faire l’histoire” of the University of Ottawa, emerged in the wake of the national study *Canadians and their Pasts* (see Conrad et al., 2013). Led by historian Jocelyn Létourneau, the research team surveyed nearly 3,500 adult Canadians across the country using a telephone questionnaire inspired by previous American and Australian investigations (Ashton & Hamilton, 2003; Rosenzweig & Thelen, 1998). Our study was more modest in goals and resources. We developed an online questionnaire that was first piloted in three university classrooms in 2010-2011 (Lévesque, 2014). The final version of the bilingual instrument was put online in 2012 using SurveyMonkey ([www.surveymonkey.com/s/historiprof](http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/historiprof)). In order to contribute to the study, prospective teachers had to complete a consent form, select the language of participation, and complete a series of 53 questions dealing with their relations regarding history (which included both multiple-choice and open-ended questions). To maximize the number of participants, we adopted different strategies. We first contacted history and social studies education professors across the country by email in September 2012 and informed them about the study. We asked that they present the project (via a description sheet) to their history / social studies students, and to invite them to go online and complete the questionnaire individually. We also posted a bilingual invitation on The History Education Network website ([www.thenhier.ca](http://www.thenhier.ca)), the largest organization in Canada dedicated to history education that reaches out to thousands of web visitors. Overall, 341 participants accessed the online survey between September 2012 and May 2013. However, 108 participants did not complete

the consent form or full questionnaire, thus bringing the total down to 233 participants. Of this total, 76% (178) completed the survey in English and 24% (55) in French.<sup>2</sup> Women accounted for 74% of participants compared to 26% for men. Overall, 88% of participants were born in the decade between 1980-1990. The geographical distribution of participants was as follows: Manitoba (1), Nova Scotia (1), British Columbia (2), Saskatchewan (6), New Brunswick (7), Alberta (13), Ontario (78), and Québec (125). We understand that the sample of voluntary participants is not characteristic of the entire Canadian teacher education population due to a high representation from the two most populated provinces (Ontario and Québec). Still, we believe it represents a rich and substantial sample of the present-day cohort of beginning history and social studies teachers for these two central Canadian provinces. Although the exact figure regarding the overall population number of history / social studies prospective teachers is not available, we roughly estimate this number as being in the hundreds, and thus believe our population sample is representative as the participants come from various French- and English-speaking educational institutions across Québec and Ontario. In this way, our assessment offers a unique portrait of the growing generation of teachers in our education programs; some might even say the future of the profession.

#### ACADEMIC BACKGROUND AND DISCIPLINARY KNOWLEDGE

There is a growing consensus in history education research that professional teachers need to possess deep knowledge of their discipline (VanSledright, 2011; Wineburg, 2001). Even in the 1960s, A. B. Hodgetts (1968) was stunned in his pioneering national assessment of Canadian education by the fact that few history and social studies teachers had an academic background in their discipline. He claimed that this deficit was one of the major reasons explaining the poor quality of history and civic education in Canada. What does our study tell us about current prospective teachers?

TABLE 1. *Number of university courses taken by candidates (weighted data in percentage)*

Number of history courses	Total
1 to 3	31
4 to 6	19
7 to 9	18
10 or more	32

First, it is worth noting that all participants in our study were registered in a Canadian teacher education program at the time of the survey. However, the length of these programs varied considerably across the country, from a one-year post-graduate degree in the province of Ontario to a four-year combined

degree in Québec. As Table 1 indicates, 32% of our participants had completed at least 10 postsecondary courses in history, which in many institutions across Canada represent the equivalent of a minor in history (30 credits). An almost equal number (31%) had taken one to three courses, while 37% declared having between four to nine.<sup>3</sup> These findings suggest that the majority of current prospective history and social studies teachers (68%) will find themselves in Canadian schools with less than 10 academic courses in history. Interestingly, these numbers are more encouraging among the Francophone participants of our study. A total of 54% of these prospective teachers declared having taken 10 courses or more in history. The fact that the number of participants with graduate degrees (Masters or Ph.D.) was significantly higher in the Francophone sample (23%) in comparison to the Anglophone one (7%) would account for this important difference.

**TABLE 2.** *Number of Canadian history courses taken by candidates (weighted data in percentage)*

Number of history courses	Total
1 to 3	56
4 to 6	29
7 to 9	10
10 or more	5

When looking more closely at the type of academic background held by prospective teachers, we find that the number of participants with a high concentration of courses in Canadian history is significantly lower. As Table 2 indicates, only 5% had completed 10 courses or more in Canadian history (no significant difference was found between the two language groups). The majority (56%) of participants had taken between one to three courses, while 39% claimed having accomplished between four to nine of them. In arguing that the more Canadian history courses students take, the more their knowledge base in the field increases, some may find these findings disturbing, for they suggest that only a small minority of prospective teachers could claim to have an extensive disciplinary knowledge of Canadian history. These findings are moreover consistent with what Hodgetts (1968) found when he revealed that 52% of Canadian teachers had only taken one such course, thereby implying that not much has changed since the 1960s. But another perspective can also be taken on these results. In comparing Tables 1 and 2, it becomes clear that among those students who took more than seven courses in history (50%), about a third of them took six or less courses in Canadian history, with the majority of them taking one to three courses, as can be seen with the significant increase in that category. This would mean that for many prospective teachers who have taken a significant number of history courses, Canadian history

accounts for at least half the amount of history courses they did take, which in and of itself is interesting, given their overall course load and expectancies for graduating. An important question thus surfaces. How many courses in Canadian history do history teachers actually need in order to be considered or to feel adequately prepared to teach the subject matter to their students? While a mere 5% taking 10 or more courses may be too low, some may consider the score of 44% with more than three preparatory courses in Canadian history as being sufficient as long as teachers are educated and motivated to further research information on their own, both for improving their own knowledge base and for having a desire to offer only the best to their students. As a matter of fact, Fenstermacher (1986) is of the view that teacher education ought to be conceived in a way that does not “train” teachers but educates them to reason soundly about their practice and growth in their expertise. In other words, beginning teachers should be taught how to use their knowledge base and seek out information they need to make sound pedagogical decisions.

**TABLE 3. Knowledge of history in general (weighted data in percentage)**

Level of knowledge	Total
Very thorough	6
Thorough	54
Not very thorough	38
Not at all thorough	2

In order to consider the possible effect of these academic background results on prospective teachers’ sense of self-confidence, we asked participants to evaluate their own self-reported knowledge of history. As Table 3 indicates, few (6%) claimed to have a “very thorough” knowledge of history, even among the Francophone subgroup, which presents twice as many prospective teachers with a history major background. A majority of participants (54%) believed instead to have a “thorough” knowledge of history in general, while 38% indicated having a “not very thorough” knowledge of history.

**TABLE 4. Knowledge of Canadian / national history (weighted data in percentage)**

Level of knowledge	Total
Very thorough	9
Thorough	56
Not very thorough	31
Not at all thorough	4



Data on prospective teachers' assessment of Canadian history knowledge offer comparable results (see Table 4). While only 9% of participants declared having a very thorough knowledge of Canadian history, most of them instead claimed to have a thorough (56%) or a not very thorough (31%) knowledge of it. As with the previous table, participants claimed to have a weak grasp of Canadian history (35%) ("not very thorough" and "not at all thorough" together), comparable to 40% regarding history in general.

Overall, there is a clear correlation between the number of university courses taken in history and prospective teachers' self-reported knowledge of history. The majority of those (60%) who indicated a not very thorough knowledge of history had taken between one to three history courses (both in general and Canadian history). One could thus assume an insufficient preparation for teaching history to students. Yet, taking a high number of Canadian history courses does not necessarily correlate with teachers' self-confidence in having a good grasp of the history of Canada. Indeed, there remains a significant gap between the one to three courses taken (56%) and prospective teachers' declared weak grasp of Canadian history (35%) (not very thorough and not at all thorough), suggesting that even if prospective teachers were to take one to three courses in Canadian history, some of them may still believe that they possess enough knowledge as a teacher. This raises some questions. Does the number of courses really matter? Should the number of courses and a high declaration of knowledge possession correlate? Could we make the same case Hodgetts' did, that "most teachers do not receive or take enough post-secondary school academic courses to become proficient in Canadian studies" and thus they "cannot be expected to do a good job" (1968, pp. 98-99)? These will be addressed further below in the discussion section.

## TRUST IN HISTORICAL SOURCES

Prospective teachers, despite their diverse educational backgrounds, clearly have a good level of interest in history. But what sources do they trust to tell what happened? What value do they place on the stories of the past they encounter in museums or in movies? Do they consider teachers as trustworthy sources of information about the past? These questions are extremely important because they help understand how prospective teachers sort out the problem of historical veracity in a 21<sup>st</sup> century culture dominated by multiple, conflicting historical information.

As Table 5 indicates, 58% of prospective teachers judged historians to be "very trustworthy" sources, followed closely by museums (47%), and historical sites (44%). Participants upheld their decision by making reference to the notion of "experts in the field," as many put it in their justifications. These results are similar to the ones found by the study *Canadians and their Pasts* (Conrad et al., 2013), which revealed that over 60% of Canadians consider museums to be very

trustworthy, followed closely by historical sites and history books. Surprisingly, only 20% of our participants judged teachers to be very trustworthy sources of information about the past. This is a shocking finding emerging directly from the field. For many, the trustworthiness of teachers varies considerably because, as one participant observed, “not all teachers have the same educational background.” This is a revealing statement because many prospective teachers know first-hand that, unlike professional historians, Canadian history teachers often have very diverse educational experiences and university qualifications, which may affect their credibility as trusted sources of historical information.

**TABLE 5.** *Trustworthiness of historical sources (weighted data in percentage for category “very trustworthy”)*

Historical sources	Total
Historians	58
Museums	47
Historical sites	44
Teachers	20
History books	17
Family history	7
Internet sites	3
Historical movies	1

Equally interesting are the results dealing with the Internet and historical movies. While our participants use them extensively in their daily lives (82% reported using the Internet for searching historical information), only 3% of respondents find Internet websites as being very trustworthy. As one participant stated, “I think the internet is an amazing resource only if you use trusted sites.” Historical movies, which came in last (1%), suffer from similar shortfalls, having repeatedly been questioned for their historical value beyond mere entertainment. As one informant put it, “Hollywood movies are notoriously unreliable.” Others, however, were more specific in their assessment and made important distinctions between documentaries and historically-based movies, noting, for example, that “it depends on whether or not the movie is a documentary versus an ‘interpretation’.”

In the face of such authority figures as families, our participants were also very critical, much more so than the larger Canadian average (where 33% considered family stories as being very trustworthy). One prospective teacher noted, “family stories are easily exaggerated or embellished over time, especially if there is no written record.” Such a critical assessment supports a key conclusion of the *Canadians and their Pasts* study regarding participants’ level of education. Canadians with no post-secondary education are much more

likely to identify such sources as family stories as being very trustworthy. As one informant put it bluntly in the latter study, “my mom doesn’t lie,” and another replied, “because they’re my family” (Conrad et al., 2013, p. 52). No participant in our research came up with such a common-sense justification.

## VIEWS ON SCHOOL HISTORY

The prospective teachers in our survey represent a unique cohort of Canadians. Not only did they pursue postsecondary education in a Canadian university, but all of them were also registered in a professional educational program to become history or social studies teachers. So it is no surprise that nearly half of them indicated that history was their preferred subject in school. Yet, the challenge of being successful in teaching history is to move beyond personal interests in the past and acquire disciplinary and pedagogical content knowledge. To look more specifically at this aspect, our study included questions concerning classroom experiences, participants’ perspectives on teaching approaches and resources, as well as their visions of school history. Such findings are extremely important because studies suggest that many beginning teachers adopt teaching practices consistent with their familiar learning experiences and the school culture in which they teach (Barton & Levstik, 2003; Cochran-Smith, 2004; VanSledright, 2011). Hodgetts, writing in 1968, was appalled by the conventional environment of Canadian classrooms. He concluded that students were largely “bench-bound listener[s]” learning primarily from history lectures and textbook-based activities (p. 44). Four decades later, we can still ask: what role do prospective teachers envision playing in classrooms?

TABLE 6. *Student roles in high school classes (weighted data in percentage for category “very often”)*

Roles	Total
Listen to teacher and take notes	68
Read textbook and answer questions	60
Watch videos and historical movies	28
Use computer to conduct research	21
Analyze primary sources	6
Visit museums and historical sites	6
Play simulations or re-enactment	6

As Table 6 indicates, listening to teachers and taking notes continued to be the dominant role in participants’ own high school classes (68%), followed closely by textbook reading and answering questions (60%). The analysis of primary sources (6%), visits to museums and historical sites (6%), and role-playing and re-enactments (6%) were activities that were clearly not used very

frequently by their teachers. As a participant declared, “high school was very textbook-based learning – I cannot really recall it being any more than such a classroom experience.” Surprisingly, the use of computers for research (21%) was still marginal in Canadian schools in the late 1990s according to prospective teachers. For one Ontario participant, born in the 1980s, things might have changed as “computers were not used anywhere near as often as they are today when I was in high school.”

In light of these findings, we asked our prospective teachers to again evaluate their classroom roles, but this time at the university level. As Table 7 indicates, their primary function in undergraduate courses still consisted of listening to their instructors and taking notes (78%), followed by the use of computers to research historical information (51%), and reading from history textbooks (31%). Surprisingly, only a quarter of participants reported analyzing primary source materials on a very often basis. An even smaller number said they visited museums or historical sites (6%) or played simulations or engaged in re-enactment type activities (2%). For one Nova Scotia participant, there is a clear distinction between undergraduate and graduate educational experiences: “As an undergraduate student, my experience was limited to classroom lectures. However, as a graduate student, I was very active in class and as a researcher, and visited numerous archives, historical sites, and museums.” Other participants corroborate this finding, making observations such as “taking notes, listening, and writing papers, a midterm exam... that was my education as an undergraduate student in university.” When comparing participants from Canada’s two official language groups, we find relatively similar roles for students in Canadian universities, except perhaps for taking notes and listening to instructors, which seem to be more frequent in our Anglophone sample (82% vs. 69%).

**TABLE 7. Student roles in university classes (weighted data by language group, in percentage for category “very often”)**

Roles	Total
Listen to instructor and take notes	78
Use computer to conduct research	51
Read textbooks and answer questions	31
Analyze primary sources	27
Watch videos and historical movies	17
Visit museums or historical sites	6
Play simulations or re-enactments	2

In the face of such findings, prospective teachers were given the opportunity to comment on the most pertinent approaches and learning activities that they

would use in their own classrooms as practicing teachers. The results are very interesting for history education. As Table 8 shows, the preferred activity is the inquiry-based project with primary sources (32%), followed by computer and Internet research (26%), and simulations and role-playing (25%). The traditional lecture with note-taking came in fifth position (16%), just ahead of visits to museums and historical sites (15%) and textbook reading (12%). These findings contrast with participants' experiences in university and high school. In many ways, prospective teachers seem to have embraced a greater variety of inquiry-based learning approaches, which emphasize "learning by doing" with authentic sources. For one Ontario respondent, "engaging with history with primary source material – is the most impactful way to help students understand it. Having fun with it – makes the learning even more meaningful." Another participant commented on the potential role of technology in students' learning: "The Internet is huge and an ever-expanding resource of information and media." Equally interesting are the comments regarding the need for emotionally powerful strategies of perspective-taking, as this one from a Saskatchewan participant: "By using games and simulations, students feel a greater pull, empathy even, for those who went through the event that is being studied." These findings suggest that prospective teachers are keen on fostering critical and creative thinking as well as problem-solving skills among their students, perhaps something they themselves would have appreciated having more of in high school and university.

TABLE 8. *Most pertinent learning activities (weighted data in percentage for category "very pertinent")*

Activities	Total
Inquiry project with primary sources	32
Computer and Internet research	26
Simulation and role-playing	25
Videos and historical movies	18
Classroom lecture and note-taking	16
Visit to museums or historical sites	15
Textbook reading and activities	12

Barton and Levstik (2004) contend that what prospective teachers *intend* to do in class does not necessarily correlate with what they will *actually* end up doing because, as they argue, teacher education programs have a limited impact on their teaching practices. As we did not observe them in a classroom environment, we asked our prospective teachers a follow-up question regarding the frequency that they thought they would use the aforementioned activities, as well as for their justifications for using them when in the field.

TABLE 9. *Frequency use of pertinent learning activities (weighted data in percentage for category “very often”)*

Activities	Total
Inquiry project with primary sources	23
Computer and Internet research	20
Simulation and role-playing	19
Videos and historical movies	13
Classroom lecture and note-taking	13
Visit to museums or historical sites	9
Textbook reading and questions	9

Surprisingly, the results in Table 9 are not drastically different from the ones in Table 8. If the number of responses for the category “very often” is significantly lower across the activities, the order of the categories is unchanged. This highlights participants’ recognition that some strategies might be more difficult to implement in school (e.g., inquiry projects), but not to the point of reversing their views about their importance for learning history. For one Toronto student, “this is not really an issue of desired teaching strategies, but rather of resources. I would go to the [Royal Ontario Museum] with my class every day if only I could.” For other participants, the need to prepare students in senior history courses for post-secondary education can also impact the type of activities used in class, as noted by this informant:

Although I do not value lectures a great deal, I do believe they should remain a part of the classroom to prepare students for university. The most important thing I wish to impart on the children though is the value of a well delivered argument which is useful in any future endeavour; research, being a key to delivering a good argument.

Perhaps the following statement from a Toronto participant best summed up the views of many prospective teachers: “History is a verb – we learn it best when we are doing it.”<sup>4</sup>

Following the answers provided by participants on their preferred activities in class, we concluded the questionnaire by asking them to summarize, in one sentence, their rationale for teaching history in Canadian schools. The question was meant to look at their personal visions of school history as well as their justifications for the inclusion of history in the present educational system. Because the question we asked was open-ended, we generated broad categories from the analysis of their sentences. While most participants followed our instructions, some, however, provided more than one rationale for history in schools. For these instances, we coded their answers according to our various emerging categories. As Table 10 indicates, prospective teachers identified “understanding the present” (30%) as the most important rationale for teaching history in school, followed by an “orientation from the past to

the future” (17%), education for citizenship (11%), learning “lessons from the past” (11%), critical and historical thinking (10%), and developing a “global / world understanding” (10%). Acquiring “knowledge about the past” (7%) and “identity building” (4%) both came in last.

TABLE 10. *Rationale for teaching history in school (weighted data in percentage)*

Categories	Total
Understanding the present	30
Orientation from past to future	17
Education for citizenship	11
Lessons from the past	11
Critical and historical thinking	10
Developing a global / world understanding	10
Knowledge about the past	7
Identity building	4

The combined first two categories (47%) suggest that prospective teachers ascribe an important role to history in providing an orientation mode for understanding present actualities, and in preparing the future in reference to past realities. In this sense, school history seems to offer students a temporal framework for situating their own contemporary lives in the course of time. Many participants presented their rationale by offering statements such as “to have students understand that people lived, and made decisions and these decisions still effect our society,” “to understand where they come from and how things are the way they are today,” and “learn about the world and what has formed it into the shape we are in today. You can’t plan the future without knowing the past.”

Interestingly, matters of citizenship, critical thinking, and global perspective all received fairly equal mentions in participants’ statements. However, there are some important variations between Canada’s two language groups. If the first category is clearly prevalent among all prospective teachers, Francophone participants, predominantly from Québec, were more likely to consider “citizenship education” (20% vs. 7%), “critical and historical thinking” (14% vs. 8%), and “identity building” (10% vs. 3%) as rationales for history in schools. The new History and Citizenship Education program in Québec, implemented in 2006, is possibly a key influence for the Francophone participants from this province. As this Québec participant put it:

*Former de bons citoyens, intéresser les élèves à l’histoire, développer l’esprit critique des élèves, le tout dans une démarche d’interprétation du passé pour mieux mesurer la complexité de leur environnement immédiat [prepare good citizens, interest students in history, develop their critical thinking, through an interpretative approach to the past so they better evaluate the complexity of their environment].*

Possibly lurking behind the influence of the History and Citizenship Education program is an unconscious or inadvertent Francophone concern for identity and national survival as handed down through various processes of group socialization. When compared to Anglophones, Francophone responses regarding citizenship education and identity building potentially resemble the high level of identity politics that exists, particularly in the province of Québec, as found in the following excerpts:

*Créer une identité nationale chez l'élève et une meilleure compréhension du présent* [create a national identity among students and a better understanding of the present].

*L'objectif serait d'établir une connaissance nationale de l'histoire en étudiant les différentes interprétations. De permettre à chaque étudiant de faire un lien avec lui-même et le pays* [the objective would be to establish national knowledge of history through different interpretations. To allow each student to make links between himself / herself and the country].

*Développer un sentiment identitaire fort et développer le sens de l'analyse* [develop a strong national identity feeling and analytical skills].

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In light of all these results, two key questions surface regarding prospective teachers' practical engagements with history as a disciplinary subject matter to be taught to Canadian students. Are Canada's history teachers *better* prepared to take on their professional responsibilities in today's classrooms, more so than in the past, as per Hodgetts' (1968) report? Do they have a better understanding of Canadian history or of how to teach it effectively so as to foster deeper awareness of Canadian civic values and a united citizenry among students? While it is tempting to offer firm conclusions based on our open online survey instrument, such an attempt will not suffice without venturing into prospective teachers' own real-time practices. As Hodgetts himself contended, the classroom is really where the action takes place. "Only there," he argued, "is it possible to determine the extent to which theory and practice coincide" (Hodgetts, 1968, p. 3). With this limit in mind, at least three key elements that emerge from our study nonetheless provide illuminating opportunities for discussing the content, character, and sources for a knowledge base for teaching history (Shulman, 1987). These include: the background knowledge of prospective teachers; the extent of prospective teachers' exposure to and experiences with classroom lecturing and textbooks; and the importance of surveys, like ours, for assessing teachers' knowledge, experiences, and visions regarding the teaching of national history.



### *Background knowledge of teachers*

In order to better assess prospective teachers' background knowledge and its relevance for their eventual careers, we asked ourselves some of the following questions: What do prospective history teachers seem to know or have developed as pertinent historical information through their different educational trajectories? What are their overall interests and self-confidence levels in history in general and in Canadian history? These questions are important because one of the key sources for a knowledge base in history teaching is scholarship in disciplinary content knowledge (Shulman, 1986).

According to our study, the number of courses taken in history and in Canadian history by participants in our survey seems to have more or less remained proportionately the same since the days of Hodgetts' (1968) report. Questions nonetheless arise regarding the number of courses actually needed for being prepared to adequately teach history. Do more courses in the discipline area indicate better preparation for teaching the subject matter in schools? While we can always expect student teachers to take more courses, we can be sure that, on average, most of them will realistically take less; possibly similar to those who have taken three or less courses in Canadian history in our survey. This is understandable given the structure of teacher education programs throughout the country and the many different types of credits required for obtaining one's teaching certification. Should prospective history teachers still take more Canadian history courses? Or, as Fenstermacher (1986) contends, should they be educated to learn how to self-direct and to constantly learn history as part of their teaching responsibilities and to research new, relevant studies and findings as autonomous professionals working in communities, like historians? While history teachers do not work in the same kind of "community of inquiry" as the latter do (Seixas, 1993b), this approach is certainly worth exploring. "Engaging teachers in communities of practice that actually do history," as Alan Sears (2014) contends, "[has] the greatest potential to break down the resistances of long-standing cognitive frames and develop the kind of complex disciplinary understanding necessary for fostering historical thinking" (p. 18). Interestingly, some provinces like Ontario have adopted similar ideas with their in-service education. For instance, the Ontario College of Teachers (OCT, 2014) states in its *Standards of Practice* that "a commitment to ongoing professional learning is integral to effective practice and to student learning. Professional practice and self-directed learning are informed by experience, research, collaboration, and knowledge" (p. 1).

Logic suggests that the number of courses prospective teachers take should directly correlate with their self-confidence levels, but as our survey shows, that is not always the case. Some prospective teachers seem to declare knowledge possession of history without necessarily correlating positively with the number of history courses taken in university. Further research in this regard is, however,

needed to precisely understand what aspects of their historical consciousness give them the necessary self-confidence for teaching their subject matter. Is this confidence related to extracurricular activities that these teachers are involved in and that pertain to history? Or is it about the meaningful experience and passion that they developed while taking their history courses? Shulman (1987) contends that the teacher has special responsibility with regard to disciplinary content knowledge. This responsibility, he argues, “places special demands on the teacher’s own depth of understanding of the structures of the subject matter, as well as on the teacher’s attitudes toward and enthusiasms for what is being taught and learned” (p. 9). This means that beyond the number of specific history courses, prospective teachers ought to develop positive attitudes from their learning experiences that could subsequently be incorporated into their teacher education programs as best practices. The work of Hartzler-Miller (2001) with American beginning teachers provides some directions for action here. She suggests that helping history teachers to improve requires an understanding of “multiple notions of best practice” (p. 691). Not every teacher is enthusiastic and supportive of the same approach to Canadian history. It is very possible that the growing generation of teachers might be more inclined to favour “best practices” that are in line with their own practical life and sense of purpose, including work with museum exhibits, historical site visits or tours, digital history projects, or possibly even more intimate, narrative-based methodologies which attract legions of Canadians, as reported in the *Canadians and their Past* study (Conrad et al., 2013). These new activities could be catered to various types of learners and can help develop a better sense of self-confidence among students, as well as a deeper sense of purpose as educators.

Empirical studies would also be needed to research the mental operations of teachers’ historical consciousness and how this affects their professional investment in their teaching preparation time. Comparative studies could also help discern the existing inclinations for better grasping differing perspectives on Canadian history, notably those of the country’s official language communities, in all their diversity, and of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis in various provincial regions. Variations in content would definitely exist, but if given the tools and the sense of responsibility for getting such information on their own, certain gaps outlined above can be closed. A good lead as an entry point for fostering curiosity in Canadian history would be to gear the content of courses to the various types of interests as expressed by learners. If educators were to take the pulse of their classrooms, they could more aptly connect their courses to their students’ interests and prior knowledge. Using examples from these disciplinary areas and bringing them in with relevant teaching methodologies (e.g., historical thinking dimensions, narrative approaches to personal and collective history) could spark teachers’ overall knowledge possession and self-confidence. If given in concert with a heightened awareness of their social posture, and if they were to make the underlying connections

between their sense of purpose and the reasons for why they would choose certain methodologies and approaches over others, teachers may also develop that important sense of responsibility greatly needed to get more information on their own, thereby not always necessitating a higher number of courses in Canadian history (Cercadillo, 2010; van Hover & Yeager 2007; Voss & Carretero 1994; Wineburg 2001).

### *Exposure to and experience in school*

In terms of prospective teachers' exposure to and experiences in schooling, our survey points to their lucid consciousness of where they stand as educators. Of significance, they are aware of the need for an inquiry-based approach to teaching history, as well as for developing historical and creative thinking skills. But no clear information on their understanding of Canadian history as well as of why and how they should transmit it seem to emerge from our study. Students' sense of purpose as Canadian history teachers should thus possibly be strengthened in teacher education programs as a means of encouraging a more disciplinary manner of teaching it. Our survey shows that the majority of prospective teachers are nonetheless still confronted with conventional teaching methods, activities, and sources of information. Without discounting the relevance of some of these approaches, it becomes evident that both history and teacher education programs should make greater efforts at offering teachers more tools and first-hand experiences in using historical sources of information to work with, particularly in today's digital age (Lévesque, 2006; Sandwell, 2011). Prospective teachers in our survey would also like to bring more inquiry-based historical projects to their teaching, well aware that they are not being engaged extensively in their own classrooms. The question remains whether they will maintain their acknowledged drive for doing so once in the field. Under such circumstances, it becomes crucial that history education professors model the kind of work we expect history teachers to offer in their own classrooms. This drive should, however, correlate with participants' teaching rationales, which seem to suggest that prospective teachers are largely interested in "historical consciousness" type of operations in the classroom (understanding the past; orientation from past to future).

In using a survey similar to ours, teachers' faith in reliable sources of information can further be discerned and exploited for educational and pedagogical purposes. Of particular significance, such emerging information could be employed to create professional communities of practitioners among student teachers whose communal activities can help make historical learning more engaging and thus relevant (Sears, 2014; Seixas, 1993b). Based on these results, for example, professors could bring in professional historians to talk about their work and the types of dilemmas they face in establishing the trustworthiness and reliability of the primary sources they engage with for constructing plausible narratives. They can also discuss how they develop their own perspectives on the past, dealing with their own subjectivities, and on how they account

for and handle different historiographical traditions. Such an approach has already proved to be useful as can be seen with Fallace's (2007, 2009) notion of immersing prospective teachers in a historiography course, which helped them break down compartmentalized thinking between disciplinary history and pedagogy (see also von Heyking, 2014). Similar input could be gained by bringing in other guest speakers from museums and historical sites to talk about the kind of work they do, and what their pedagogical objectives and dilemmas involve. Onsite visits could also be advantageous to teachers. They would possibly need to see how history is conducted in contexts other than formal educational institutions to grasp both the relevance of history for society and for the proper development of their students' lives. The critical reading of Internet resources and historical movies could also comprise classroom activities given their growing importance in public culture (see Lévesque, Ng-A-Fook, & Corrigan, 2014).

While prospective teachers in our study do not seem to view family history as a reliable source of historical information, they could become acquainted with such nationwide research projects as *Canadians and their Pasts*, which point to how a majority of everyday Canadians engage with history through their families' past experiences. *Canadians and their Pasts* (Conrad et al., 2013) reveals that history matters to Canadians but, like any subject of intellectual inquiry, it can easily fall prey to abuses of all sorts for contemporary and ideological purposes. So, as reflecting on how groups of people use and do history can help us grasp their historical consciousness and the role history plays in their lives, such a focus can moreover help foster more critical and reflexive uses of the past. Contact with such studies, conducted both in Canada and elsewhere, could better help prospective teachers understand the relevance of history for society; this could also help them decide on the pedagogical activities they would like to bring to their own classroom teachings.

All these activities point to the urgency of developing communities of history practitioners in teacher education programs across the country. As history teachers form bridges between the world of historians and classroom learning, teacher educators hold the power to form similar links between the former group and their own students – who at the end of the day should learn to develop similar bridges themselves between their students and the various sources of historical information that exist. Surveys in this regard can be very helpful for they can offer insight into the workings of student teachers' historical consciousness, or its various / differing practical aspects and how these relate to teachers' own eventual espousal of teaching methods for their own future classrooms. As prospective teachers' historical consciousness can offer insight into what they already know and what is needed to be done to improve their understandings and practices, bringing them in together as part of a community could make the whole process even more productive for they can learn from each others' own experiences and challenges when trying to think historically and to render such information usable for students.

*Importance of using such tools as survey instruments to assess teachers' knowledge, experience, and vision*

The online survey method for teaching and assessing teachers' own ideas is rather unique and effective because it is a cost-efficient method to reach out to educators and to help raise necessary questions that require further qualification in history education. Ironically, while there is growing interest in school for assessing students' prior knowledge about the past, very little attention has been given to educators themselves. As an educational tool, if brought to prospective teachers, such surveys can allow them to reflect on emerging issues of significance in the profession. It could thus inspire them to develop a stronger sense of purpose as history educators and members of a community of practice. They can moreover develop surveys of their own as a means of getting more involved in the processes of thinking about their profession and what their responsibilities should involve at the local, national, and international level.

Yet surveys like ours have both strengths and weaknesses. If they allow for a more global "cartography" of prospective teachers' ideas across a vast and regionally divided country like Canada, they nonetheless have a very low-resolution scale, making it difficult to accurately evaluate teachers' own practices. Unlike Hodgetts' (1968) study, such an online survey instrument again does not account for the rich findings emerging from classroom observations. Unfortunately, these observations are very research and labour intensive and would require more financial and institutional resources to be accomplished. As such, we believe that surveys like ours should be used in conjunction with other research instruments that are meant to assess the historical thinking and practices of prospective teachers.

## CONCLUSION

It is clear from our national survey that prospective teachers' historical consciousness in Canada impacts the way they learn, teach, and engage with history, as it does affect their attitudes towards acquiring disciplinary and pedagogical content knowledge. Moreover it becomes clear that prospective teachers from various provinces and from both language communities are faced with similar professional and pedagogical challenges, with the main difference being the workings of their historical consciousness and the different historical storylines about the past that they are taught (see Lévesque & Zanazanian, 2015).

The participants in our survey seem to already have the workings of a pedagogical vision for when they enter the classroom, and it would seem that they would like to uphold or to even build on what they have in mind. The only question is, will they? It seems to us that the changes that have come about since Hodgetts' (1968) report have more to possibly do with curricular changes than with direct pedagogy, epistemology / methodology, and history as a

discipline than anything else. Despite taking time to sink in, some important disciplinary ideas, such as inquiry-based learning and “doing history,” do catch on. What is urgently needed is to engage prospective teachers in professional communities of historical inquiry to help move things along. Organizations like the History Education Network ([www.thenhier.ca](http://www.thenhier.ca)) have done a great job in offering the infrastructure needed to sustain cross-boundary teams of scholars, public historians, teachers, and graduates to work collaboratively in both the development of teaching materials and providing in-service education to other teachers. The only issue now is to get governments and ministries of education on board to fully invest their time and efforts in maintaining such communities for the good of our democracy and its future citizens in the long run.

#### NOTES

1. One possible exception is the study of Jean-Pierre Charland (2003), which also used a detailed questionnaire instrument to survey the historical consciousness of high school students in Montréal and Toronto. While the focus was primarily on learners, one section of the study also looked into classroom teachers.
2. Although the language selected by participants is not a precise indicator of their mother tongue, it is worth noting that 95% of participants completed the questionnaire in the language of their schooling. We can thus assume that participants who chose to complete the questionnaire in French belong to the French-speaking educational community broadly defined. The same can be said for the English-speaking participants.
3. Due to the types of questions in our survey, which sometimes allowed participants to choose more than one possible answer, and to the necessity of rounding up the percentage in the tables, it is possible that the totals do not always reach 100%.
4. Here it is worth noting that the concept of “history as verb” was first coined by Ruth Sandwell as part of her own research and practice teaching at the University of Toronto (see Sandwell, 2011). The concept seems to have gradually percolated into the history education discourse and has been appropriated by student teachers themselves to discuss their views on history.

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