"It is like the re-enactment show": Narrative and historical culture among young French Canadian students

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ABSTRACT

This study of historical consciousness illustrates the cultural processes by which French Canadian students narrate the history of their national past. Findings are based on data collected through a narrative inquiry with 635 francophone students from a variety of backgrounds. Although participants made explicit references to and use of formal learning from their school history courses, a majority of participants produced simplified narratives largely informed by mythistories of their historical culture. These findings suggest that the current curricular emphasis on historical thinking may fail to challenge students' historical ideas in ways that take into consideration the forces of historical culture (mythistories, mnemonic infrastructure representations, conceptions of the past) and help them generate more complex narratives of the collective past that acknowledge the diversity of perspectives present in the society in which they life.

KEYWORDS

Historical consciousness, Narrative, Culture, Historical thinking, History education

CITATION

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Introduction: The Canadian context

Helping students to develop an understanding of different perspectives, including an appreciation of the diversity and complexity of Canada's past, is a key objective of school history programs across Canada. This objective is central given the multicultural diversity of society. As Kymlicka (1998) has argued, Canada is an interesting case because it contains many distinctive forms of diversity, including immigration, national minorities and bilingualism, and Indigenous peoples. One of the fundamental reality of Canada, dating back to the origins of the federation, is the co-existence of sociologically distinct communities imagining themselves as "nations" (French Canadians, First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples) within the Canadian state. These communities form relatively complete and functioning societies with their own languages and institutions, including schooling, that have been incorporated as a result of colonisation into the Canadian federation of 1867 (Russell, 2017). Canada's distinctive forms of diversity have generated critical challenges and equally distinctive ways of accommodating minority groups, including official policies of multiculturalism, guaranteed educational rights for official linguistic minorities, and asymmetrical federalism (to provide distinct powers to certain provinces and authorities). In the last twenty years, Canadian school history has undergone important changes in the ways it is being understood and presented, and for good reasons. National and international research on students' learning, scholarly debates over questions of national history, race, and identity, and intensified public interests in issues of collective memory, reconciliation with Indigenous peoples, and cultural representations of the past have led to the recognition that "history curriculum is no longer the province of any single group and that multiple constituencies must come together to address problems that are by definitions beyond the capabilities of any single faction" (Stearns, Seixas & Wineburg, 2000, p. 5). As Lévesque and Clark (2018) have observed, a confluence of initiatives in English and French Canada around the turn of the twenty-first century resulted in a warm reception for moving school history from an emphasis on teaching a grand narrative of nation-building to an understanding of historical thinking.

In English Canada, Peter Seixas' scholarship was a major impetus for a general interest in the Canadian provinces on the development of competent *historical thinkers*, much in line with development of *scientific thinkers* in the domain of science education (Donovan & Bransford, 2005). Seixas and his collaborators (see Denos & Case, 2006; Lévesque, 2008; Morton & Seixas, 2013) advanced a set of six historical thinking concepts (historical significance, continuity/change, cause/consequence, historical perspective (empathy), evidence, and ethical judgment) rooted in the works on second-order concepts developed by English educators such as Dickinson and Lee (1978), Portal (1987), and Shemilt (1980, 1987). The goal, as Seixas (2015a) observes, was to advance history as a form of disciplined inquiry "communicable and intelligible to teachers and their students" yet firmly grounded in historical expertise (p. 5).

In French Canada, and in the province of Quebec in particular, changes in history education resulted from major governmental initiatives following public consultations that took place in the 1990s during the so-called Estates General on Education (Government of Québec, 1996) and the task force on history education (Lacoursière, 1996). According to Martineau (2010), what characterised the educational reform of the time was "the desire to help students develop both disciplinary and cross-curricular skills" for the 21st century (p. 23). In history, this approach meant the development of civic and historical thinking competencies, close to the ones proposed by Seixas, and with an emphasis on historical perspective and the history method (Duquette, 2015; Martineau, 2010). Programs of study elaborated in the early twenty-first century for Quebec elementary and secondary schools were thus influenced by this disciplinary approach which, as we will see below, did not go unchallenged and generated heated debated notably among nationalists.

Since their initial elaboration, we can say with much confidence that the historical thinking (HT) frameworks developed in English and French Canadian literature have had significant influence on the development of history and social studies curricula as well as on the production of textbooks and professional learning materials (Clark, 2011; Éthier et al., 2017). Even official

publications (e.g., Parks Canada, Museum of Canadian history) and professional and non-profit organisations (Canada's History Society, Critical Thinking Consortium) now reflect a HT approach to their learning resources. To date, the preponderance of research on historical thinking in Canada has focused notably on issues of historical significance (Gibson & Duquette, 2020; Lévesque, 2005; Peck, 2010; Seixas, 1997), agency (Éthier & Lefrançois, 2019; den Heyer, 2003), use of evidence (Boutonnet, 2013; Lévesque, 2002; Yelle, 2017), perspective-taking, and ethical judgments (den Heyer, 2019; Milligan, Gibson & Peck, 2018; Seixas & Clark, 2004; Seixas, Gibson & Ercikan, 2015).

Yet, the Canadian HT models have generated much scholarly conversation and political debates. On the political side, vocal nationalist organisations, political leaders, and stakeholders have decried the project a blatant educational attempt to "denationalise" the study of the national past (Bock-Coté, 2007; Beauchemin & Fahmy-Eid, 2014) for the sake of multiculturalism and liberal citizenship that ultimately undermine nationality, bilingualism, and historic claims from minoritised groups such as Québécois. A central argument used by these critics has been to oppose "content" and "process" so as to claim that too much emphasis is now placed on the procedural practice of critical thinking at the expanse of the necessary narrative content knowledge, the result being that young citizens are now abysmally "ignorant" and "illiterate" (Chouinard, 2011; Rioux, 2006). The current emphasis, as Beauchemin and Fahmy-Eid (2014) argued in their advisory report to the government of Quebec, has resulted in an unintelligible understanding of collective history among both teachers and students.

On the scholarly side, the HT models have raised important questions on at least two related grounds. First, some scholars have rightfully questioned the models' insufficient consideration for the dynamic interplay between the dimensions of time in relation to life orientation and the interpretative nature of narrative representations (Nordgren, 2019; Zanazanian, 2015). Canadian historical thinking, as Anderson (2017) has claimed, lacks a comprehensive narrative dimension. It tends to place the pedagogical attention on the distinctive concepts themselves, such as the analysis of source as evidence or the deconstruction of specific accounts of past events that "do not explicitly address hidden master national narrative schemes" that are communicated in sites of pedagogy (p. 3). The result of this thinking process, in her view, is that current HT models "do not facilitate engagement with the urgent identity questions—ethnic, global, transnational, diasporic, and Indigenous—in relationship to the state that permeates and shape contemporary Canadian society" (p. 3). A related argument has also been offered by Létourneau (2017) who claims that current approaches leave students with limited understanding of historical big pictures of their society which, in the end, only make them more vulnerable to the cultural power of collective memory. As he puts it:

> Just within the realm of teaching history to young people, it seems that training them to engage in complex, plural and non-narrative thought—one of the goals of history teaching these days—leaves them but few, paradoxically, in a situation where their dependence on the simple visions and accredited memorial discourse is reinforced rather than mitigated. (Létourneau, 2017, p. 235)

On the sociocultural side, the Canadian HT models have also been criticised for their lack of consideration for the positionality of the learner and the significant impact of cultural, socioeconomical, political and gender factors on students' engagement with the past. As Peck (2018) contends, the current school failure to engage students' prior historical knowledge "is problematic both for students from the majority/dominant culture and for minoritized students; the potential to significantly enrich both groups' understandings of history is lessened when these connections are neither sough nor explored" (p. 312).

Indeed, studies conducted in English and French Canadian schools have revealed that ethnocultural identities are powerful forces that seriously affect the ways in which students construct narrative representations of the collective past and assign significance to distinctive aspects of this past (see Lévesque, Croteau, Gani, 2015). For example, in his comparative study of

Francophone and Anglophone learners in Ontario, Lévesque (2005) found major differences in how participants ascribed significance to important events in Canada history. Francophones were more inclined to select events that predominantly featured French Canadian history moments, like New France, Quebec referenda on sovereignty, or Franco-Ontarian resistance movement of the 1910s. Anglophones, on the contrary, favoured more national events that emphasised nation-building with limited consideration for the role of Francophone or minority groups in Canada's past. Equally interesting were the criteria used by participants to assign significance to historical events, with Francophones more prompt to rely on "intimate interests" (personal, family, community) for making those selection. Lévesque's findings support the work of Barton and McCully (2012) in Northern Ireland which offers similar results when comparing Catholic and Protestants students' engagement with the collective past. Not only participants identified with different aspects of Northern Irish history, but the formal intent of the school system to offer a "neutral and balanced approach to history" seem to do little to challenge their affective attachment to particular interpretations of the past, particularly when links to contemporary community identifications (p. 400). Peck (2010) in her study of young Canadians of minoritised groups asked participants to define their identity and then explain their connections between their own self-identity and historical events from, and narratives about, Canada's past. Her findings confirmed earlier works (Barton & Levstik, 1998; Bougie, 2005; Epstein, 2009) on the impact of ethnicity of students' complex and shifting relations to the past as well as on the importance of self-awareness in interpreting the past. Research with Indigenous students also offer interesting findings. In comparing Mi'kmaw students who attended band-controlled school (under the jurisdiction of the Indigenous community) with those who attended public schools from the province of Nova Scotia, Tinkham (2013) found that Indigenous students in public schools felt far more tensions between historical knowledge learned at home and formal knowledge taught in school, and also received far less educational support to resolve these tensions that seriously impaired their grasp of history.

All these studies point in one direction and confirm the significant role played by sociocultural forces on learners' identity and engagement with the past, even in the context of the classroom. They also question the inadequate goal of current history education programs in addressing this crucial facet of learning.

A revised matrix of historical consciousness

As we have argued elsewhere (Lévesque & Croteau, 2020), the ability to think historically is not confined to a given culture nor is it understood exclusively in a disciplinary way of knowing. As Rüsen (2005) has pointed out, history is much more than a matter of historical studies. It is an essential cultural factor in all people's life, making it possible for individuals to orient their practical life in the course of time by remembering the past and anticipating the future. Historical studies are, for Rüsen (2005), a "systematic way of performing this function of orientation" (p. 1). In order to understand how the discipline of history functions in relation to the wider culture in which it takes place, Rüsen has conceptualised this process in a dynamic, circular model which integrates historical scholarship (upper part of the wheel) and human everyday life practice (lower part of the wheel) (Körber, 2015). This model, as Seixas (2015a) has observed, provides a distinctive way of "thinking about the relationship between the discipline of history and the larger cultural circumstances within which the discipline is practiced" (para. 2). Yet, Rüsen's circular model was not devised, at least initially, to account for the practice of history education but rather to offer a conceptual way of making sense of historical consciousness in human life. Therefore, we recently proposed (Lévesque & Croteau, 2020) an adapted model that better responds to and encapsulated the essence of historical thinking in a larger cultural context that includes public education (see Figure 1).

Figure 1

Matrix of historical consciousness
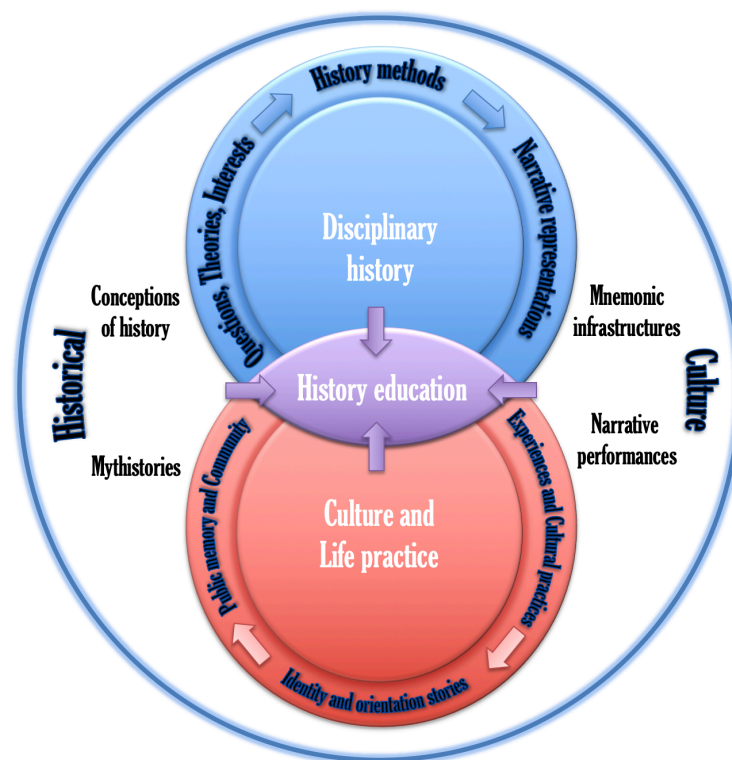
First, this matrix allows us to see how diverse communities are related in society and how they can potentially inform one another without being conflated into a one-dimensional wheel, as defined by Rüsen and later updated by Seixas (2015). Disciplinary history, cultural and daily life practice, and history education subscribe to distinctive approaches to generate narrative representations of the past (see Ahonen, 2017; van Boxtel & van Drie, 2018). Much has been said about this disciplinary process in the context of education (Chapman, 2021, Lee & Ashy, 2000; Lévesque & Clark, 2017; Seixas, 2017; Wineburg, 2001, 2018).

But history, as Rüsen reminds us, is an essential cultural factor in people's lives. One function of this cultural, public use of the past is to establish meaningful connections between the past and the present so as to shape people's sense of historical orientation, identity, and community-building over time. Disciplinary history is a scholarly way of performing this function through established norms and principles. While a distinction between these two sets of practices serves useful conceptual purposes, it is important to remember that the two often overlap and coexist in the lives of citizens, including historians, as indicated in the matrix. Indeed, these various historical practices do not operate in a vacuum; they take place in the larger context of "historical culture," that is, within the totality of discourses whereby a society understands itself and its future by interpreting and narrating the past (Carr, 2006). According to Grever and Adriaansen (2017), the notion of historical culture (*Geschichtskultur*) was coined by German didactics scholars as a way to challenge the sharp delineation between "memory/heritage" and "history/discipline" as disseminated by influential thinkers such as Nora (1996) and Lowenthal (1998). "Nora's universe of the French nation," as they argued, "spurred research on social or collective memory throughout Western historiography, but it also created a distinction between academic historiography on the one hand and popular history on the other" (Grever & Adriaansen, 2017, p. 76). Historical culture was thus conceptualised in a way that made it possible to overcome this rift and better account for the full range of activities of historical consciousness.

Indeed, for Rüsen (2005), a key advocate of the concept, historical learning has both an inner and outside side. The inner side corresponds to the individual historical consciousness—how people use cognitive means to make sense of the experiences of time—whereas the outer side—the historical culture—includes all the institutions and mechanisms that form the infrastructure for historical consciousness to develop. Historical culture comprises government policies and guidelines, schools, programs and textbooks, but also museums, cultural industries, commemorations, mass media, and institutions that "can be recapitulated in the category historical culture" (in Grever & Adriaansen, 2017, p. 75). For the sake of conceptual clarity, Grever and Adriaansen (2017) have proposed three complementary features of historical culture: narratives and performances of the past, mnemonic infrastructure, and underlying conceptions of history.

- The first aspect refers to the participatory nature of historical culture in which individuals are involved through narrative acts and performances in mnemonic praxis (rituals, plays, music, commemorations, re-enactments, etc.). This story-telling process includes "the production, (re)mediation, appropriation, dissemination and transmission of substantive

- interpretative frameworks by people who share in the present specific human experiences of the past" (Grever & Adriaansen, 2017, p. 78). These substantive interpretations also include what Létourneau (2006a; 2006b) calls "mythistories," that are a set of cultural references including teleological schemes, clichés, reified characters, and fragments of the past through which the present and the future are not only decoded but anticipated.

- In order to tell stories about the past, mnemonic infrastructure are necessary to anchor culture in time and place. Museums, historical sites, and monuments are all infrastructures created to ensure the transmission of memories, narratives, and identities over time. The recent debates over certain controversial monuments demonstrate the changing value and significant impact of mnemonic infrastructure on the symbolic articulation of relationship between the past and present.

- Finally, cultures always presume certain, often implicit, conceptions of history, that is, distinctive ways of making sense of the dimensions of time. These conceptions of history provide the cultural structure or modalities for generating narratives representations and mnemonic infrastructures which offer members of a cultural group a sense of temporal orientation, articulating human action and historical identity with historical knowledge. For Hartog (2015), it is possible to discern at least three "regimes of historicity" that can be understood as conceptions of history: the passeist/exemplary, the modern/futurist, and the presentist. We present and discuss these later in the article.

We believe the notion of historical culture is extremely important to consider as recent works on the philosophy of history have highlighted the situated nature of historical knowledge production and convincingly revealed that all historical narratives, including the ones of professional historians, are moulded by the narrator's own epistemological perspective and positionality (Carr, 2006; Munslow, 2007). Both historians and lay people are shaped by cultural forces—including language, cultural and religious affiliation—and this fosters and even regulates the milieu within which it is possible to study the evolution and orientation of culture over time (Parks, 2018; Wineburg & Gottlieb, 2012).[1] Historical culture, as Clark and Grever (2018) have noted, has become a central category of analysis in the field of public history notably in the context of large-scale comparative projects in Australia, America, and Europe (Angvik & von Borries, 1997; Ashton & Hamilton, 2010; Rosenzweig & Thelen, 1998).

In Rüsen's conceptualisation, narrating history and understanding historical narratives are structural competences of historical consciousness. Our revised matrix provides a distinctive model for analysing current debates over national history in education. It makes it possible to understand the distributed nature of historical knowledge production in society as well as the inherent tension and relation between such knowledge. We support the view of Körber (2021) that the goal of history education is not to endow students with the best scholarly knowledge from

the discipline, but to enable them to *engage critically* with these different forms of knowledge so as to use them more successfully in the practice of their life as young citizens.

Our research focused on young French Canadians and their relationships to the collective past in a federal state in which they have access to a societal culture used in a wide range of socio-political institutions, including French language schooling, media, law, and government. As both the provinces of Quebec and Ontario were implementing revised history programs at the time of this study, we offer additional evidence about the kinds of narrative representations students hold, and the role that history education can play in (de)constructing historical culture and in promoting more powerful narratives relevant for orienting students' twenty-first century life. More specifically, we demonstrate that despite the fact they live in different regions, participants share common features of historical culture (mythistories, mnemonic infrastructure, conceptions of history) that they strategically used to represent the past. As participants developed their stories in relation to various cultural forces, we expose the power and limit of historical culture and discuss the implications for history education in complex societies such as Canada.

Methods

Using a narrative methodology inspired by the influential works of Létourneau (2006, 2014; & Moisan, 2004) in Quebec, our study was developed in the wake of similar investigations which have offered instructive findings regarding students' historical consciousness (Duquette, 2015; Lantheaume & Létourneau, 2016; Reich et al., 2015; Robichaud, 2011; Zanazanian, 2015; many contributions in Létourneau & Chapman, 2017). The questionnaire for this study included two different items: a hand-written, two-page narrative task and a series of personal/identity questions. For the identity questions, students had to choose on a scale (from 1-very weak to 7-very strong) their self-identification with various collective groups in Canada. This strategy, well known in social psychology, made it possible to identify students' own sense of belonging and membership to groups beyond traditional variables such as first language, ethnic/racial group, and so forth.   To avoid the limitations of previous studies, the research team first presented a narrative task to all participants: Please tell us the history of French Canadians in this country as you know it. We used this particular prompt for three reasons related to findings of the pilot study conducted with a sample of participants from the Ottawa region in 2015. First, the instruction to "tell us the history" places students in the strategic position of narrators. They have to mobilise historical knowledge in the form of a story (a synthesized representation of the experiences of time) that aimed to represent their narrative understanding of the past. Second, the task was focused on the "history of French Canadians" because national history is taught from the perspectives of the two linguistic groups that make up the country. This linguistic and schooling division is not accidental as it serves to exemplify the multinational nature of Canada (Kymlicka, 1998). Unlike immigrants and ethnocultural groups within Canadian society, members of these nations claim collective identities and rights of self-determination, including the powers necessary to ensure the development of their societal culture over time. The Canadian constitution was intended in part to help satisfy these collective demands (such as official languages and public schooling). Finally, the task purposely stated "French Canadians in this country" to leave it for students to interpret what *country* means to them given the fact that members of nations-within Canada do not necessarily associated the nation with the state (Létourneau, 2014).

The questionnaire was presented in class to students (grades 10-11) during the school year 2016. Participants were given one hour to complete the task and also instructed not to use textbooks or the Internet as the study was fishing neither for correct facts nor for their ability to search the Internet. The goal was broader: to understand what historical knowledge and stories of the national past could be used for structuring a narrative of the historical experiences of French Canadians. All participants completed the research task in class during regular school

hours and were offered a complementary gift card for their contribution to the study. The study was approved by the research ethics board of the University of Ottawa.

Participants for the study were selected from Quebec and Ontario. These two original provinces of Canada offer interesting cases for comparing the development of students' historical consciousness in two related sociopolitical contexts: a French-speaking majority setting (Quebec) and a French-speaking minority setting (Ontario). The study reached out to 635 volunteer participants who had completed their national history courses in their respective province of residence. In Quebec, students have to complete two years of national history (grades 9-10), while in Ontario, national history is covered over a three-year period (grades 7-8, 10). To ensure better demographic representation of the population, the research team (principal investigator, co-researcher, and two research assistants) reached out to various schoolboards across these provinces to present the project and recruit schools and teachers. Overall, the research team visited thirteen different public high schools (seven in Quebec, six in Ontario) located in various geographical regions with distinctive characteristics: French-speaking majority/French-speaking minority, homogeneous/multicultural, rural/urban.

In terms of demographic information, we found the following characteristics for each student population. In Quebec, 385 students volunteered for the study. Of these, 174 (45%) were female and 210 (55%) were male. A total of 332 (86%) participants identified French as their mother tongue, 5 (1%) participants identified English, and the remainder (13%) another language. The great majority (89%) indicated being born in Canada. The Ontario sample is made up of 250 participants: 137 females (55%) and 113 males (45%). Overall, 120 participants (49%) identified French as their mother tongue, 86 (35%) English, and the remainder (16%) another mother tongue. Most participants (86%) indicated being born in Canada. The average age was 16.3 in Quebec and 16.0 in Ontario.

All data collected were transcribed and coded in QDA Miner software by three separate raters using an inductive/deductive method of analysis. Categories of narrative orientations – or "schematic narrative templates," in James Wertsch's original terms (Wertsch, 2008) – were initially informed by a literature review in Canadian historiography and popular history. Through an iterative process, in which Canadian historiography and students' own narratives were scanned to identify possible recurrent constant narrative features (e.g., European exploration, American "discovery," French adversity, Quiet revolution) as well as other narrative templates (e.g., social history, economic history, Indigenous perspectives), each rater conducted a sample analysis of various responses from the two groups so as to expose additional categories of narrative analysis. These additional categories were then compared, merged or added to the initial historiographical categories so as to account for the diverse themes and visions expressed in students' narratives. This coding process was highly deliberative and contributed to generate among the research team a shared understanding of the coding list which ultimately led to limited disagreement or discordance between raters. The coding was applied first to a representative sample of participants (n=30) to test its validity and then to the entire corpus (n=635). In the end, all the coded narratives were distributed and shared with the members of the team through the QDA Miner software merging/sharing tool. In the rare cases where raters did not agree or were uncertain on the coding of narratives, further deliberation took place among all the team members so as to reach a consensus decision in the end. The final categories used for the study include:

- Stories of French Canadian collective experience (affirmative story focused on positive exploits, activism and militancy of French Canadians;

- Adversity story representing both collective progress and decline over time with unclear future direction;

- Defeat story centred on a pessimistic vision of the historical development of French Canadians;

- Presence story focused on the historical development of French Canadians without a clear positive/negative/mixed orientation in time;

- Canadian nation-building story framed on the historical development of Canada from colony to nation-state;

- Modernization story inspired by social and economic history of the people(s);

- Indigenous perspectives story exposing the visions and historical experiences of Indigenous peoples;

- Personal life story centred on personal or family history;

- Descriptive story without a clearly established narrative vision connecting the past to the present; and,

- Undetermined story offering an incomplete text.

We understand that this comprehensive list of categories is not absolute or perfect, as researchers might find additional ones, but we believe that it characterizes very well the visions found in the corpus of data as well as the various aspects of historical consciousness presented in the study (that is, categories informed by the various disciplinary, cultural, and educational forces that act to historicize young people's life).

We have previously reported the principal findings of this research elsewhere (authors, in press; 2020). We indicated that our participants produced stories that represent a wide spectrum of historical narratives, ranging from Indigenous perspectives (1% On; 3% Qc), to descriptive story (2% On; 3% Qc), life story (4% On; 1% Qc), story of modernization (2% On; 14% Qc), Canadian nation-building (8% On; 2% Qc), French Canadian pessimist/defeat story (3% On; 6% Qc), French Canadian affirmative story (13% On; 8% Qc), French Canadian presence (13% On; 19% Qc); and French Canadian adversity story (52% On; 44% Qc). Yet, one dominant perspective—that of *adversity*—was privileged by a majority of participants, in both provinces and across regions and linguistic backgrounds. That narrative vision, we argued, presents a historical development of French Canadians that is neither entirely positive nor totally negative but instead nuanced and uncertain for the future.

The use of the *adversity* framework, which Létourneau coined with reference to Quebec francophone students, was intriguing because it does not emanate from modern historiography or school history programs. As we have observed, most professional historians, with some major exceptions (Bédard, 2013; Lacoursière, Provencher & Vaugeois, 2018), have abandoned the study and narrative representation of the collective past along the line of *adversity*. English and French Canadian historical scholarships now represent vast and dynamic domains of knowledge inclusive of various practicing fields, including social history, women history, oral history, and digital history (see Bryden, 2019). In the same way, history curricula and accompanying textbooks have also gradually abandoned the telling of a master-narrative of nation-building to emphasise historical thinking and citizenship education; something that nationalists have decried forcefully. In Ontario, for example, the curriculum for grade 10 explicitly states that "students develop ways of approaching the past as historians by applying the concepts of critical thinking in history and by following the process of inquiry" (Ministère de l'éducation de l'Ontario, 2013, p. 113).[2] Similar objectives are found in the Quebec history and citizenship education program in used at the time of the study (Ministère de l'Éducation et de l'enseignement supérieur, 2011). While scholars (see Lanoix, 2018; Zanazanian, 2008) have suggested that some teachers continue to rely on a traditional approach to teaching national history, the overwhelming presence of the stories of *adversity* across regions suggests that factors beyond formal classroom learning were at play.

So why did participants choose to tell this particular narrative? Why did they draw selectively from the school curriculum to reinforce this particular vision of history? Following the work of Létourneau and Moisan (2004), we speculated that forces of historical culture, the so-called "cultural curriculum" (Wineburg et al., 2007, p. 175), played a key role in this learning process. Yet, we did not tackled this aspect in our previous works. The present analysis is thus meant to address this shortcoming. To do so, we re-examined all students' narratives of *adversity* in light of the three complementary features of historical culture presented earlier through a directed content analysis using these features as guidance for codes. As all narratives were initially transcribed and coded in QDA Miner software, we ran a content analysis (frequency count) using the WordStat application. Our results provide additional evidence of the presence/absence of features of historical culture in students' texts in relation to their narrative orientation, as presented above.

Because of the non-probabilistic sampling strategy we used, the results of this study do not claim to represent all young French Canadians. The primary purpose was to describe students' narratives in reference to the impact of historical culture, not to offer a representative analysis of all Canadian students' historical ideas. Also, the results provide a specific portrait of young citizens at a given moment in time, knowing that students' ideas are likely to change over time and according to circumstances.

Results

Historical culture: mythistories, mnemonic infrastructures, and conceptions of history

Students explicitly understood that our task was not to evaluate them on formal learning from their history courses—something we stated clearly in our instructions. Indeed, our narrative approach to young people's historical knowledge differed significantly from the ones typically focused on the study of formal learning objectives. Because these studies do not account for external, sociocultural forces, they cannot tell us what is common, shared, and widely understood by students about the past that inhabits their practical life.

In order to reveal this seemingly contradictory aspect of their relationship to the past, we decided to look more closely at Shemilt's notion of narrative frameworks or "big pictures of the past" (Shemilt, 2009). For him, big pictures of the past refer to the narrative ways in which students put together and make sense of the content of the past, as learned from both formal and informal sources of information. These pictures possess meaning and narrative logic, that is, they are organised in story-form – they offer a coherent representation of the experiences of time. They represent students' ability to move beyond a "chronologically ordered past" to a "meaningful account" that imputes narrative significance and logic to events by means of connections, patterns, and colligatory generalisations (Shemilt, 2000, p. 95).

Consider the following *adversity* narrative from a Montreal student as a typical example produced by our participants:

> It all started with the arrival of the first French explorers. They first came to America for the fur trade and other resources but soon had to "socialise" with the Native people. The king of France then decided to send French subjects to colonise the territory. The intendant in charge thus brought laymen, prisoners, Filles du Roi [unmarried women sponsored by the king of France] etc. which led to the colonisation of the New France. At that time, the English also landed here and competed with the French. There were several wars and the conquest of the territory of New France endangered the culture, the language and also the French people. However, after many years, the territory became known as "Canada" and was divided into provinces. Fortunately, Francophones kept a part of this territory, Quebec. From now on, they are no longer called French but

> Québécois. The culture, the language, the traditions have changed as a result of this adaptation. Today, laws have been passed in Quebec to protect language and culture because they are threatened by multiculturalism. One question still raises many debates among Quebecers: the sovereignty of Quebec. (GR0512-Montreal)

This simplified story of French Canada offers instructive information on the nature of this big picture framework. First, it situates the general context ("It all started with the arrival of the first French explorers") with the arrival of European explorers in America, and roots French Canadian cultural difference in the establishment of French settlements (New France) over four hundred years ago. This story of origins helps the narrator explain the unique trajectory of the Francophone community in the *longue durée*. History becomes the central element with which this student can demonstrate how French Canadians in general, and Québécois in particular, are different from others, most particularly English Canadians. Second, the story introduces a conflict that seriously impacted the development of the colony: the arrival of the British and the takeover of New France (the "Conquest"). This military conflict of the Seven Years' War represents the greatest challenge faced by the French colony as the language and culture of Francophones came under threat. The British conquest becomes the central organising feature (the plot) of the narrative, forcing French Canadians to engage in a long period of struggle for cultural and political survival. Fortunately, the creation of the Canadian federation has made it possible for Francophones to (re)gain some powers, develop their own province (Quebec), and pass legislations to protect the language and culture. This sociopolitical development has resulted, for the student, in an important "adaptation" of the people, now defined more distinctively in terms of Québécois. Yet, the future remains uncertain. There is a sense of both fragility and uncertainly for the future of Francophones in Canada as many continue to debate the necessity of national "sovereignty."

The following sections illustrate how the three features of historical culture presented earlier help understand more concretely some of the key reasons why students like this participant produced archetypal stories of *adversity* that do not fit formal history learning.

"It all started when Cartier landed in America": Using mythistories of French Canada

Communities, whether they are cultural or political, always tell stories about themselves. This performative process to carry out narrative emplotment is, for Ricoeur (1991), inherent to human beings' need to make sense of time and experience and to create a sense of identity beyond birth and death. In this way, individuals try to balance the continuity of their own self over the course of time with sheer changes that affect their identity over time. For Rüsen (2005), this dynamic narrative process is true for individuals as well as for groups. Identity, he argued, is "a concept of continuity of the sameness of oneself in the changes that every person and group have to undergo in the course of their lives" (Rüsen, 2005, p. 191). But a historical narrative, Rüsen went on, is not merely a truthful representation of what happened, it is a "translation of the past into the present," an interpretation of past actualities via a conception of temporal change which moulds moral values into traditions, rules, concepts of development, and meaningful life experiences (Rüsen, 2005, p. 25).

For Carretero (2018), narratives of the nation have traditionally relied on a romantic plot structured around a simplified schematic framework that renders the complexity of the past intelligible for their members. This romantic view, he argues, emphasizes the past as a model for, or justification of, the present and values identification with the past in a positive sense of historical continuity. In the case of Quebec, and by extension French Canada, Létourneau and Caritey (2008) have proposed some recurring "mythistories" that characterise the narrative plot as found in the national memory of this people: the French filiation, the blame on the "Other," and the quest for collective survival. Interestingly, these mythistories are explicitly and frequently present in the stories of *adversity* of our participants.[3] Indeed, for the great majority of students in both Quebec and Ontario, the beginning of French Canadian history starts with European

explorers, the so-called "discovery" of America, and the establishment of New France. French explorer Jacques Cartier (sometimes confused with Christopher Columbus) and French colonist Samuel de Champlain are emblematic figures of this period, which many represented as a golden age of French expansion in North America. Overall, 99% of all text references to Cartier are found in stories of *adversity*. In the same way, New France (84%), colonisation (85%), and the *filles du Roi* (98%) (unmarried women sponsored by the king to immigrate to New France) are concepts predominantly mentioned by students who wrote such narratives, which gave pride of place to the colonial period.

> It all started when Cartier landed in America and planted his cross on the shore in Gaspé. (03A04-Quebec city)

> In 1608, Samuel de Champlain was the first Frenchman to settle in America. He founded New France and Quebec city. (04B11-Quebec city)

> The French wanted to establish a great French empire so they settled in Northern Ontario to the West. This is why there are more French cities in the North (Cochrane, Timmins, Sudbury). The French have stayed in what is now Quebec. Here near Ottawa we are French thanks to our French ancestors. (0111A01-North)

The reference to the "Other" is also central to the *adversity* narrative, representing no less than 61% of all references to others in students' texts. Identity building is always a dialogical process of self-construction in reference to others. In other words, people define themselves (in terms of "we" and "us") in dialogue with and sometimes in struggle against the others (Taylor, 1989). In stories of *adversity*, the reference to others is typically applied to two distinctive groups of people who have served to define French Canadians over time. The first one is the British or English people, represented as the imperialist, dominant other who landed in America, crushed New France, and subsequently attempted to assimilate French Canadians into the British Canadian mainstream. Overall, more than three quarters of all references to the British are found in stories of *adversity*. Interestingly, British (78% of all references) and English Canadians (80% of all references) are rarely differentiated in stories, as if both groups not only shared a common language but have endorsed throughout time an imperialist vision of the country in which Francophones have been relegated to a marginalised group.

> After the French were established (for centuries), the French went to war with the English. The British won and took over the territory. They wanted to assimilate all French Canadians (04A01-Gatineau)

> Francophones were persecuted because they were (and are still) a minority in this country. I am not sure how many years later Regulation 17 was created by the [Ontario] Department of Education. This law prohibited the use of the French as a language of communication and education. (0211B09-East)

The references to the "English" (*les Anglais*) in students' narratives not only serve to position and define French Canadians in the *longue durée* of history, but also to identify the main antagonist who caused the minoritised situation in which they find themselves. As we will see below, all subsequent sociopolitical developments after the fall of New France are attributed to stiff conflicts between these two peoples—or what Lord Durham referred to in his infamous report of 1839 as "two warring nations within a single State."

But the notion of "Other" also refers in students' texts to members of the Canadian society who do not neatly fit the two dominant, linguistic groups. Immigrants and Indigenous peoples in particular are largely absent or presented as if they were not part of Canada. As a matter of fact, in all the references to Indigenous peoples, only 3% came from stories of *adversity*, and these mentions were primarily in reference to First Nations in past times, notably during the colonisation period. After this, Indigenous peoples no longer exist. They mysteriously disappeared

from the narratives. Immigrants are cited more frequently but members of immigrant groups are (re)presented as people who have impaired French Canadian development because of their different languages, cultures, or religions. This is most particularly the case of immigrants who came to Canada as a result of the American revolution, globalisation, and growing international migration.

> After the American revolution, the English Montrealers and the loyalists settled in Canada but they didn't want to mix with the Francophones, so they decided to settle in another territory, which created Upper Canada and Lower Canada. (05A09-North Montreal)

> Immigrants arrive in Canada and the [French] language is spoken less and less these days. (05A04-Quebec city)

> With the arrival of English-speaking immigrants, we are beginning to worry about the survival of French, the language that distinguishes Quebecers from the rest of Canada. (GR0518-Montreal)

The third mythistory of Létourneau and Caritey (2008) is the quest for survival. All stories of *adversity* present a series of historical developments, from colony to present-day Canada, that follow this orderly arrangement of events highlighting the courage and exploits of French Canadians in the face of military, cultural, educational, and political hardship. Whether it is the Conquest of New France (86% of all references), the rebellions of the French patriots of 1837-1838 (93%), the hanging of Métis leader Louis Riel in 1885 (90%), the imposition of Regulation 17 to limit French language schooling in Ontario in 1912 (89%), the provincial attempt to close the only francophone hospital of Ontario (Montfort) (94%), or the two failed referenda on Quebec sovereignty (98%), stories of *adversity* are structured in such a narrative way that recurring confrontations serve to explain the survival of French Canadian language against the English-speaking majority.

> Without the support of France, Quebec was too weak to fight against the British power and their loyalists. As the 1837-38 revolutions show, taking up arms will not work and they will find other ways to reclaim our lands occupied by Anglophones. (GR0631-Quebec city)

> Other provinces such as Manitoba have large French populations. They also had to fight for their right to speak French. History also remembers Louis Riel who helped and led the cause of the francophones in Manitoba. (0112A07-East)

> In recent years, they wanted to change the hospital from French-speaking to English-speaking. But Francophones "fought" back to keep the only francophone hospital in Ottawa and that worked. To conclude, for a long time, francophones have tried to keep/defend their place in Canada and this continues even today (0211B9-East)

"We also have a flag": The role of mnemonic infrastructures

In order to be able to tell specific narratives, groups create material and immaterial mnemonic infrastructures. These include museums, historical sites, and other social environments (clubs, churches, schools, etc.), but also commemorative events that act to historicise the contemporary life of community members. For example, Saint-Jean-Baptiste Day—or *Fête nationale du Québec*—is celebrated every year on 24 June as the official holiday of French Canadians. This day coincides with the summer solstice and also with the taking over by the Christian Church as a religious holiday to celebrate the birth of Saint John the Baptist – also the saint patron of French Canadians. Motivated by Montreal's popular St. Patrick's Day celebrations, the Saint-Jean-Baptiste Day was established in the nineteenth century to produce similar collective pride for French Canadians. Created in a sociopolitical atmosphere that was resistant to British Canadian rule and traditions,

it was meant to promote French language as well as Catholicism. While the celebration is no longer religious, it continues to serve as an important identity marker, as expressed by the following students.

> The Saint-Jean Day is all about Quebec! (0210A06-North)

> Saint-Jean Baptiste is also celebrated by Franco-Ontarians with performances by Francophone artists. (0111A03-North)

> These days we celebrate Saint-Jean Baptiste Day to celebrate the Francophonie. We also have a flag to represent us. (0111A04-North)

The various references to Saint-Jean-Baptiste in stories of *adversity* (75% of all references) are often linked to another celebration, that of the fleur-de-lis flag which is prominently displayed in nationalist celebrations as well as in all Francophone schools of Québec and Ontario. Well before Canada adopted its maple leaf flag in 1965, Quebec had already made the fleur-de-lis its own national symbol: a white cross, which evokes the faith of the province's founders, and the fleur-de-lis and blue background to recall its French origins. In Ontario, Francophones also adopted their own distinctive fleur-de-lis flag in 1975, which is celebrated every year on 25 September; the first day it was officially flown in the province. Over two-third of stories of *adversity* explicitly talked about the flag, with sometimes emotional connections.

> Franco-Ontarian Day, on September 25, is the day the Franco-Ontarian flag was created. Most Francophones celebrate it. The Franco-Ontarian flag has green and white colors, and on this day Francophones wear these colors to show that they are proud to be Francophones in Canada. (0211A10-East)

> In Quebec we have discovered many things that are unique to us and that represent us, such as maple syrup, the fleur de lis, hockey and many other things that distinguish us and show our origins, where we come from. (0204A13-Gatineau)

Interestingly, these symbols not only represent Francophones but also serve as a trigger for students' participation in the historical culture of their community. It becomes a rallying element for being involved in a mnemonic praxis, which includes festivals, music, plays, and commemorations. "All these festivals and activities (games, forums)," as this Ontario student put it, "help me understanding who are Franco-Ontarians" (0110A10-North).

Historical culture may find its explicit expression in grandiose commemorative events that attract the masses, but it also includes more intimate spaces and rituals that take place in informal family reunions and community events that enable "a mediation between past and present, between personal and collective memory" (Grever & Adriaansen, 2017, p. 80). Some students who wrote stories of *adversity* did not hesitate to refer to these intimate encounters when narrating the collective past, observing that local festivities and family reunions helped them solidify traditions and maintain a sense of membership. While not frequent in number, these references still represent almost two-third (64%) of all the references to family and community in stories of *adversity*. Others presented stories wrapped in a rhetorical discourse around the nation as a big family, a community of destiny that has endured since colonial times.

> At home we have always spoken French, my mother tongue is French. My mother and father are both French and the other generations before my parents are French. I know the traditions well. I grew up with these traditions. (0111A03-East)

> We must never abandon this rich and strong culture for another culture that is for others. If we look closely, we see that we are all part of the same family, and that for eternity. (105A16-Gatineau)

"We will continue our fight toward success": Conceptions of history

The third element pertains to underlying conceptions of history. Mythistories and mnemonic infrastructures are inherently constituted by a distinctive cultural conception and expression of history that serves as the backbone or modalities for making sense of the past for present-day purposes. Such a conception, for Grever and Adriannsen (2017), refers to a specific interpretative framework of the relationship between the past, the present, and the envisioned future. This framework, in turn, provides a sense of direction and agency as well as the epistemological (im)possibilities to know the past.

Hartog's (2015) "regimes of historicity" can be understood as articulations of distinctive conceptions of history. In the passeist/exemplary regime, the past determines both the present and the future. Traditional moral values guide present and future-oriented actions through narratives of permanence and continuity of identity and values over time. In the modern/futurist regime, the past no longer serves as an exemplary model for actions, but a meaningful reference by means of the notion of temporal change which affects our modern, present-day lives. Narratives are structured and oriented toward the future in reference to the past. "History," Hartog (2015) wrote, "is made in the name of the future, and it must be written in the same way" (p. 107). Coming out of the Enlightenment, the modern/futurist regime focuses on the promise of the future to be achieved through the progress of ideas and people. Finally, in the presentist regime, present-day perspective and morality define both the past and present as a result of a sense of losing connection with the past and uncertainly about the future – the shock of a possibly closed future. "Since it has neither a past nor a future, Hartog (2015) argued, presentism "daily fabricates the past and future it requires, while privileging the immediate" (p. 113). This regime is, for Hartog, the failure of the master-narratives as the present has become "omnipresent," generating the past and the future only to valorise the immediate.

Hartog's regimes of historicity have generated much discussion, notably in terms of conceptions of time and generalisations, which we will not review here (see Hutton, 2016; Seixas, 2015b). According to Hartog, these three regimes should be understood as mental constructs whose value lies in their heuristic potential for making sense of our experience of time. Indeed, his work stimulates us to think about the different ways in which historical cultures organise the relationships among past, present and future. As such, it helps understand how people, including young citizens, position themselves with regard to their culture and the dimensions of time. This is most particularly important considering the recurring popular assumption that the younger generations are abysmally ignorant of the past, with catchy headlines such as "Amnesiac generation," "Assisted suicide," and "Memory hole." As we did not initially code students' narratives in relation to Hartog's regimes, it is not possible to offer a precise evaluation of students' own regimes of historicity. That being said, it is clear from our narrative analysis that participants do not support hyperbolic statements decrying their apparent narrow-minded, twenty-first century-centred life. On the contrary, very few participants (less than 2%) presented narratives that could fit under the presentist regime of Hartog.

Stories of *adversity* are firmly grounded in historical experiences with an outlook unto the future that more likely fit the modern/futurist regime. Indeed, most students acknowledged the important struggles of past generations (e.g., Conquest of New France, rebellions of the patriots) for their cultural survival but also recognised the unique challenges they face today as a minority in North American (e.g., anglicisation of society as a result of globalisation and migration, demands for French language hospital and post-secondary education). In many ways, their narratives are oriented toward the future; a future that a majority of them sees as uncertain. In the circumstances, it is no surprise to find that 90% of all references to the current need to "fight" for "linguistic rights" are found in stories of *adversity*.

> Culture, language, traditions have changed because of societal adaptation. Today,
> in Quebec, laws have been passed to protect the Quebec language and culture
> because they are now threatened by multiculturalism. (GR0512-Montreal)

> Even today, Francophones try to preserve their language through festivals, music, or with the help of the media. (0206GR-Quebec)

That being said, various historical cultures around the world could legitimately fit under Hartog's modern/futurist regime. So in our view, what makes French Canadian culture singular is its distinctive relationship to temporal experience, articulating memory and identity with historical knowledge in a way that generates archetypical narratives of what Létourneau has called "mythistories" of French Canada. These mythistories serve at least two practical functions. First, they help establish patterns of historically significant events, revealing what is worth remembering and forgetting from the collective past. The mythistory of the French filiation, for example, leads students to overemphasise the French colonial period in their narratives. This shared filiation is common to both Quebec and Ontario participants and serves to establish personal and collective identities in the *longue durée*. The findings of the national study *Canadians and Their Pasts* (Conrad et al., 2013) conducted with over 3000 adult participants across the country confirm this cultural trend among Francophones.

Second, mythistories serve to establish some basic narrative structures to make sense of the past in story-form; what Wertsch (2008) has called schematic narrative templates. Quebec and Ontario students' representations of the past are different at the level of the specific content. But both groups told stories along the same pattern using common cultural references already emplotted in general, narrative ways. So when students referred to Jacques Cartier or Samuel de Champlain, a particular semantic network was activated in their minds, leading them to create a big picture of the past that already possessed a story-shape. The mythistories of French Canada, so predominant in historical culture, made it possible for both Quebec and Ontario students to understand the past and envision the future in very similar configurations. The fact that participants from immigrant backgrounds, with limited experience of Canada, also subscribed to this pattern suggests that powerful forces of historical culture helped shape their historical consciousness much as it did for native citizens.

Discussion

Our study of young French Canadians' historical consciousness highlights the process by which Francophone learners in Quebec and Ontario schools generate narrative representations of the collective past. As we have argued, participants have drawn selectively from the school curriculum in order to reinforce particular narratives of the nation, notably that of *adversity*, that find their origins in the larger historical culture of French-speaking Quebec and Ontario. These big pictures of the past are informed by powerful mythistories of French Canada, mnemonic infrastructure that ensure the transmission of these representations over time, and finally a distinctive conception of history which offers French Canadians a sense of orientation, agency, and identity.

As per our earlier matrix of historical consciousness (Figure 1), our findings help situate history learning in the broader sociocultural context of French Canada, thus reminding us that educators are among a diverse group of agents in the formation of students' historical consciousness (Ahonen, 2017). As such, we believe that history educators no less than researchers need to reconceptualise the development of students' historical ideas, not as an intuitive practice of memory or a disciplinary process of historical thinking, but as the effective result of the interplay among historical culture, public memory, practical life, schooling, and the practice of history. How we conceptualise the rationale for history education should thus be informed by the study, influence, and interplay of these forces. Research into the nature of narrative representations among learners has developed significantly in recent decades and revealed the ways in which various forms of historical knowledge shape their narratives (Barton & McCully, 2004; Grever, 2012; Lantheaume & Létourneau, 2016).

As a result, we present below some pedagogical reflections on how to better integrate learners' engagement with the forces of historical culture so they can learn to (1) deconstruct their personal

and community representations of the past, and (2) generate more complex, usable narratives that serve to orient their twenty-first century life.

Deconstructing historical narrative

First, Canadian history curricula are not currently designed to account for learners' narrative ideas as developed inside and outside the school environment. References to the assessment of students' prior knowledge "relate to the curriculum expectations and learning goals and, as much as possible, to the interests, learning styles and preferences, needs, and experiences of all students" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013, p. 34). From this perspective, teachers typically assess students on the prescribed knowledge they should have acquired in previous lessons with limited consideration for identity factors and cultural forces. What this study suggests, however, is that such scholastic strategies keep at bay the historical narratives students gain from the "cultural curriculum" that occupies their practical life. Students' education is too complex to be reduced solely to formal school lessons. Vast studies conducted with adult citizens confirm the limited impact of formal schooling on how people think about the past. In the U.S., for example, Americans were asked to identify how connected to history their felt in different life situations. Participants ranked classroom dead last with an average score of 5.7 on a 10-point scale. "Boring" and "boredom" were the words most used to describe their schooling experience (see Rosenzweig, 2000, p. 274).

Educators should thus consider alternative strategies, such as the one used in this study, meant to capture more accurately students' own historical ideas—in terms of both small and big pictures of the past (Nokes & De la Paz, 2017; Perks & Thomson, 2016; Rogers, 2016). We believe that narrative strategies, which are focused on creating a meaningful synthesis of heterogeneous events into a coherent whole through emplotment, have key educational merits. For psychologist Jerome Bruner (1985), narrative thinking is no less than an "irreducible mode of cognitive functioning" providing human beings ways of organising representations of actions in memory and of filtering the perceptual world (p. 97). From this view, using narrative strategies in class does not require students to master a new cultural tool for history learning. Narrative strategies focused on histories circulating in public sphere can also help expose the constructed nature of these stories as well as students' own visions and emotional attachments to them (Peck, 2009). Studies conducted with students in divided societies have revealed the power of identity and culture on their ways ascribing value and significance to aspects of the past. These have serious implications on how students engage with formal history knowledge. Scholastic exercises conducted in the context of the classroom should thus pay far more attention to students' affective attachment to particular interpretations of the past "particularly when links to contemporary community identifications [that] go unexamined" (Barton & McCully, 2012, p. 400).

Going back to our study, we believe that educators would be in a much better position to help students deconstruct historical narratives if formal programs of study were designed to address national stories and belonging (as Québécois, Franco-Ontarian, Canadian, Indigenous, etc.) as well as the multifaceted, changing nature of identity as a sociohistorical construct (how collective identities develop and change over time). Indeed, current programs in Ontario and Quebec do not explicitly link historical thinking to identity, mnemonic infrastructures, and narrative conceptions of history which, as Peck (2009) has observed, has resulted in poor consideration of the sociocultural context within which formal education takes place. This is particularly acute in a multicultural country such as Canada where different forms of diversity, notably national minorities, necessitate distinctive approaches to history education.

As a pedagogical example, students might engage in this process by analysing contested representations of the past, such as public monuments (e.g., statues of French colonist Samuel de Champlain), and examine the perspectives of those who created these representations, as well as the ways in which their initial perspectives have evolved over time (how subsequent generations have (re)interpreted these monuments). Students would thus be in a better position to engage in contested historical memories that currently divide the Canadian population along political,

cultural, and post/colonial lines (see Lévesque, 2018). Part of this contextualisation process would involve analysing the simplified yet pervasive mythistories associated with them. This means, among other things, deconstructing identity-related cultural myths (e.g., the myth that Indigenous peoples were not seriously harmed by French colonialism). A similar process should also be undertaken with English Canadian programs which have traditionally excluded the analysis of French Canadian perspectives, relegating them either to a folkloric group or to another ethnic group making up the so-called Canadian multicultural mosaic (Francis, 1997; Osborne, 2000; 2003).[4]

Reconstructing historical narratives

Second, students need educational opportunities to reconstruct more powerful narrative representations as a result of their reflection on the past.[5] Like Létourneau (2017), we believe that the current curricular emphasis on historical thinking does not empower students to become active historical narrators, that is, to relate learned information from various sources into a coherent, plausible story of the collective past useful to orient their life.

This narrative approach to the development of students' historical consciousness very much supports the German "FUER model" of competences of historical thinking with its practical emphasis on the procedural understanding of Rüsen's ideas in terms of deconstruction/ reconstruction of history. As Körber and Meyer-Hamme (2015) put it, the task for students is not only to analyse historical sources, including their own stories, but to be confronted with "the challenge to construct plausible historical narratives, using a set of given components of several historical narratives about the same topic" (p. 96). More recently, Körber (2022) has further elaborated this learning process in the form of a multidimensional progression model that accounts for development in historical thinking in various niveaux of operation. However, this conceptual model is still inadequately adapted to the Canadian context of history education. More pedagogical work is thus needed to transpose such conceptualisation to distinctive educational cultures. For conceptual clarify, we have schematised our model in reference to our earlier matrix of historical consciousness and in line with Korber's (2021) own original process (see Figure 2).

Figure 2

Model of narrative competence (construction and de/reconstruction of narrative)

We believe that narrative strategies place students in the active position of historical narrators who have to move from mastering "fragments of the past" to crafting a "meaningful story" that has a narrative structure and logic, offering a coherent synthesis of the dimensions of time simultaneous with those of values and experiences. Narratives, as Barton and Levstik (2004) argue, enable people to make sense of the complexity of the past. Students and historians, they contend, "use narrative in fundamentally similar ways" (p. 136). This quest for historical meaning-making provides educator with a fantastic opportunity to further their narrative thinking and ways of developing powerful histories relevant to orient their practical lives.

The first step of our model engages students in either the production of a personal narrative on the subject-matter or the study of an existing story available to them (e.g., textbook or article). The purpose of this task is to probe students' historical ideas so as to understand prior knowledge understanding in reference to formal and informal learnings (What stories are/were told on the subject? What understanding(s) do students have of the subject?). With this first step, educators are in a better position to identify students' narrative strengths and weaknesses, including sources of influence, and to offer coaching for progression in learning. This coaching is extremely important as it provides students with guidance on ways to develop their capacity to reflect on their learning, set individual goals for improvement, and determine next steps for progression.

The second step engages students in a critical rewriting of their personal narrative considering the features of content, form, and function of historical narratives. Each of these elements, originally devised by Rüsen (2005), is associated with a distinctive competence:

Content refers to the ability to grasp the specific meaning and temporal quality of past actualities. Since we always look at the past retrospectively, students need to consider the perspectives of the past, people's own thinking and values and their horizons of anticipation, as well as present-day perspectives on the past. They also need to take into account the reality of the historical past as remembered and evidenced by relics and stories. This ability is defined in terms of the competence of historical experience and perspective-taking: What was the context of the time? What did people do? What was their values, horizon of perceptions, and anticipation for the future? What sources can tell us about the past? How is the past different from/connected to the present?

Form refers to the distinctive process of emplotment, the ability to bridge the heterogeneous elements of time so as to understand the present and anticipate the future in reference to the past. This ability highlights the distinctive nature of historical narrative as a coherent interpretation of the past or what Ricoeur (1984) called the *configuration* of events, agents and objects into a meaningful whole in which each element takes a place. This ability is defined in terms of the competence of historical interpretation: What events/periods are significant to remember? What is the causal explanation? What discernible patterns of change/continuity are to be found?

Function refers to the ability to utilize temporal interpretation with meaningful content to orient practical life through a relevant, usable narrative. It involves guiding modern-day actions by means of temporal change, articulating the narrator's own life-view and identity with historical interpretation and perspective. It is defined in terms of the competence of historical orientation: How can the past inform the present and future? Have things progressed/declined? In what ways? What synoptic view/framework can be developed? How is this view useful to orient practical life?

In the final step, students are invited to share and compare their historical narratives developed in the previous steps. For Ricoeur (1984), narratives only make sense if they are read by an audience, the narratees who will appropriate and concretise the meaning of the text through the *refiguration* of their own experiences—through their own logic of questions and answers. Refiguration thus transforms the configured narrative of the original author into a new personal representation as a result of this encounter. Through a comparative analysis of stories from classmates, students are in a better position to appreciate the diversity of points of view on the subject matter, including their own, and realise how these multiple stories can potentially enrich their own narrative representations. Consistent with our matrix of historical consciousness, the

comparative analysis of narratives should always be conducted with careful consideration for students' own perspective, identity and emotional connections, and positionality.

This circular approach to the narrative competence is evolutive in the sense that learners will gradually acquire more expertise in constructing and deconstructing narratives and thus develop more sophisticated and powerful forms of historical consciousness more attuned to historical realities and adapted to the complexity of their modern world. In turn, educators will have to account for these developmental changes and progressively put together more advanced narrative activities meant to engage students in narrative competence.

Conclusion

In our view, the narrative approach to history education presented in this article does not go against the development of content knowledge nor the ability to think historically, as prescribed in current Quebec and Ontario programs of study. On the contrary, we believe that this approach renders more explicit both the multifaceted nature of historical knowledge transmission in society and the struggle students face when confronting conflicting narratives; narratives which in the present circumstances may trap students into polarised and politicised ways of imagining the collective past. As Barton and McCully (2012) conclude in their own work with students in Northern Ireland, students are hardly alone in this struggle, as adult members of society also confront multiple historical discourses in their life, but "because schools are explicitly charged with expanding students' historical understanding" (p. 400), we need programs of study that will better take into account the multiple forces of culture that act to historicise them. Failing to do so only reinforces schooling's lack of practical relevance for orienting their twenty-first century life.

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Endnotes

1 The empirical study of Gottlieb and Wineburg (2012) is one example of the impact of culture and identity on the historians' epistemological beliefs—their beliefs about the nature of knowledge. When faced with documents in relation to their religious beliefs (Exodus), historians with religious commitments "openly acknowledged alternative logics and tried to navigate between the dictates of their professional training and their reverence for sacred history" (pp. 110-111). For Gottlieb and Wineburg, these historians engaged in "epistemic switch" varying epistemological criteria to align with the allegiances triggered by the document under review. A similar argument, on national and linguistic grounds, was also made by Meisel, Rocher, and Silver (1999) with regard to the radically different historiographical traditions between French and English Canada. When looking at a series of 34 key episodes in Canadian history, the current mutual incomprehension between the two groups, they argued, "is undoubtedly fuelled by contradictory visions of the past, it is also the case that today's conflicts influence interpretations of this past" (p. 5). The historians themselves, they concluded, are not "entirely impervious to the dominant ideologies of their age and environment" (p. 367).

2 In agreement with the constitutional provisions for French-speaking and English-speaking public schools, the Ontario Ministry of Education has developed separate programs of study for each language group. For the Canadian and world studies curriculum (which includes history and geography), the overall orientation and general objectives remain the same for both groups but some content objectives (e.g., emphasis on Francophone culture) are specific to the French-speaking curriculum. Examples presented in this article are translations of the original French objectives. In Quebec, the program of History and Citizenship Education (HCE) in application during our study was gradually replaced in 2017-2018 with a distinctive course on History of Quebec and Canada (HQC), which places greater emphasis on Quebec national history and moves citizenship education to another program of study. This change more or less takes the Quebec curriculum back to its earlier Quebec/Canadian orientation, that is, before the implementation of HCE in the early 2000s.

3 As we have argued elsewhere, the historical culture of Francophone Quebec finds its origins and development in the establishment of French Canada. Over the course of the 20th century, and particularly as a result of the modernisation and secularisation of society in the 1960 during the so-called "Quiet Revolution," Quebec has adopted a more territorially-based nationalism confined to the powers and limits of the provincial government. This change has resulted in a fragmentation of French Canadian nationalism and the rise of also more provincial identities across Canada (e.g., Franco-Ontarians, Franco-Manitobans, etc.). That being said, various intellectuals have demonstrated that the historical culture and the *intentionalité* (their collective will) of French Canada have in various forms endured even after the Quiet Revolution (see Gilbert & Langlois, 2010; Thériault, 2007).

4 One interesting exception is the province of Alberta which recently drafted revised social studies programs in which all subjects are to be explored from diverse perspectives, including Francophone and Indigenous (see Gani, 2022).

5 In agreement with our matrix of historical consciousness, we refer to powerful narratives as historical narratives that are complex in terms of form and content (as opposed to simplified mythistories), polythetic in nature (open to multiperspectivity), and plausible representations of the past useful for orienting practical life.