



Walking in their footsteps: Historical empathy and experiential learning on battlefield study tours

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ABSTRACT

Reflecting on my experience leading battlefield study tours for secondary school students, this article explores the pedagogical benefits of experiential learning for fostering historical empathy. I suggest that experiential learning offers students opportunities to engage with both the cognitive and affective dimensions of history, which are necessary for developing historical empathy. In doing so, I adopt Davison's (2017) conceptualization of historical empathy as a cognitive-affective "pathway" to demonstrate how experiential learning supports students' understandings of perspectives and experiences in the past. On the study tours, students *entered the past* by developing emotional connections to historical actors and particular places, based on their family histories and backgrounds. While visiting historic sites and interpreting battlefield landscapes, students *worked with the historical record* to build contextual knowledge and consider diverse perspectives. Finally, students *exited the past* to form ethical judgments about the World Wars and applied their learning within their communities back home in Canada.

KEYWORDS

Historical empathy, Experiential learning, Study tours, History education

CITATION

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Introduction

While teaching on a battlefield study tour in August 2019, I witnessed a secondary school student running as fast as they could, up from the water's edge toward the seawall at Juno Beach, where Canadian soldiers landed on D-Day during the Normandy Invasion 75 years earlier. The student later explained that they were timing their run; it took them 25 seconds to clear the beach and they determined that this was a long time to be exposed to gunfire. In reflecting on this experience, the student expressed how seeing the places where major events of the World Wars took place enhanced their understanding of what those at the time experienced. This student's actions and reflections highlight the significance of visiting historic sites for developing deeper understandings of past perspectives and experiences. The student evoked both cognitive and affective dimensions of learning about the past: not only was their historical inquiry informed by evidence (present-day landscapes) and context (warfare in the 20th century), but they also used their imagination to consider how soldiers may have experienced the landings. Additionally, this student showed they cared about the past, enough that they were motivated to run across Juno Beach during their free time.

Upon reflection, I realized this student was engaging in historical empathy—a process of attempting to understand the thoughts, feelings, experiences, decisions, and actions of people from the past within their historical contexts (Barton & Levstik, 2004; Endacott & Brooks, 2013). For nearly five decades, historical empathy has been a rich area of research in history education around the world, particularly in the United States and England (Brooks, 2009; Endacott & Brooks, 2018; Yilmaz, 2007). Scholars have presented various approaches, influenced by debates about whether historical empathy in schools should be a purely cognitive undertaking grounded in the methods of the history discipline (Blake, 1998; Bryant & Clark, 2006; Foster, 2001; Foster & Yeager, 1998; Lee & Ashby, 2001; Lévesque 2008; Yeager & Foster, 2001) or a cognitive-affective process that also allows space for a range of feelings, emotions, and connections to be present alongside historical inquiry (Bartelds et al., 2022; Barton & Levstik, 2004; Davison, 2017; Endacott & Brooks, 2013; Karn, 2023; Kohlmeier, 2006).

In recent years, there have been a number of classroom studies that reveal the content and pedagogies teachers use to foster historical empathy among elementary and secondary students. These studies highlight a range of activities that promote empathy, including writing tasks (Brooks, 2008; De Leur et al., 2017), discussions (Bartelds et al., 2020; Brooks, 2011; Doppen, 2000; Kohlmeier, 2006), debates (Jensen, 2008), role plays and simulations (Endacott & Pelekanos, 2015; Rantala, 2011; Rantala et al., 2016), multi-genre research projects (D'Adamo & Fallace, 2011), field trips (Bartelds et al., 2020; Cunningham, 2009), museum visits (Brauer, 2016; Innes & Sharp, 2021; Uppin & Timoštšuk, 2019), and virtual/augmented reality (Patterson, et al., 2022; Sweeney et al., 2018). Although these studies have made significant contributions to our understanding of how historical empathy may be approached in practice, there is very little discussion of experiential learning as a pedagogical approach.

Experiential learning is often described as “learning by doing” (Lewis & Williams, 1994, p. 5). However, such a broad interpretation incorporates all types of immersive learning experiences, from simulation scenarios within a classroom setting to field-based internships outside of the classroom. Due to these varied approaches, “the matter of definition of experiential learning is complicated” (Moon, 2004, p. 107). For the purposes of this article, I present an understanding of experiential learning that is tied to places of historical and contemporary significance, outside of the classroom. This form of experiential learning has been referred to by other scholars as an “outbound mobility experience” (Innes & Sharp, 2021), or more commonly as a “study tour” or “tour” (Atherton & Moore, 2016; Pennell, 2018, 2020). Keeton and Tate's (1978) definition of experiential learning is applicable to the study tour:

Learning in which the learner is directly in touch with the realities being studied. It is contrasted with the learner who only reads about, hears about, talks about, or writes about these realities but never comes into contact with them as part of the learning process. (p. 2)

During study tours, students expand upon their classroom-based studies by learning through their engagement with particular places (e.g., historic sites and monuments, conservation areas, government institutions, community organizations). Thus, when I use the term “experiential learning” in this article, I am limiting it to the context of a study tour, which may take place locally or involve international travel.

With these areas of literature in mind, this article explores the pedagogical benefits of experiential learning for fostering historical empathy. It asks: what possibilities for fostering historical empathy might open up if we venture outside of the classroom to learn about past perspectives at historic sites, monuments, and other places within our communities? Reflecting on my experience leading battlefield study tours for Canadian secondary school students, I suggest that experiential learning offers students opportunities to engage with both the cognitive and affective dimensions of history, which are necessary for developing historical empathy. In framing this argument, I adopt Davison’s (2017) conceptualization of historical empathy as a cognitive-affective “pathway.” Despite some challenges and limitations, experiential learning can support students in coming to understand diverse perspectives and experiences in the past.

Educational context and sources

In working to identify the pedagogical benefits of experiential learning, I reflect on my experience as a teacher leading battlefield study tours for secondary school students. In 2018 and 2019, I led four experiential learning programs for the Vimy Foundation, a Canadian non-profit organization that aims to teach youth about the legacies of the World Wars. Each year, the Vimy Foundation’s programs bring together students aged 14-17 from across Canada to visit memorials, cemeteries, museums, and other historic sites on the First and Second World War battlefields in Belgium and France. At the time I was involved in these programs, the Vimy Pilgrimage Award was a week-long educational program that took place in April while the Beaverbrook Vimy Prize program was two weeks in length and occurred in August. Both were fully funded experiential learning opportunities that emphasized educational experiences. Students were selected for each program from a national competition which required the submission of a resume, reference letters, a statement of volunteer work, and an essay. Those students on the shortlist were interviewed remotely and subsequently the finalists were announced.

Throughout each study tour, students were provided with many opportunities to reflect on their learning. In addition to group discussions at each site we visited, students wrote daily journals and blog posts, and they also completed post-program surveys. These opportunities to reflect before, during, and after the study tour were essential to the experiential learning process because, as a number of scholars have highlighted, reflection results in more powerful learning (Eyler, 2009; Kolb, 1984; Lewis & Williams, 1994; Moon, 2004; Silberman, 2007). As a teacher on these programs, I reviewed students’ journals and blog posts to support an ongoing process of reflection and feedback on each tour. Throughout this article, I rely largely on my own pedagogical reflections based on my daily interactions with and observations of students. To highlight students’ voices, I also draw from blog posts which were published on the Vimy Foundation’s website during each program.¹

An empathic pathway

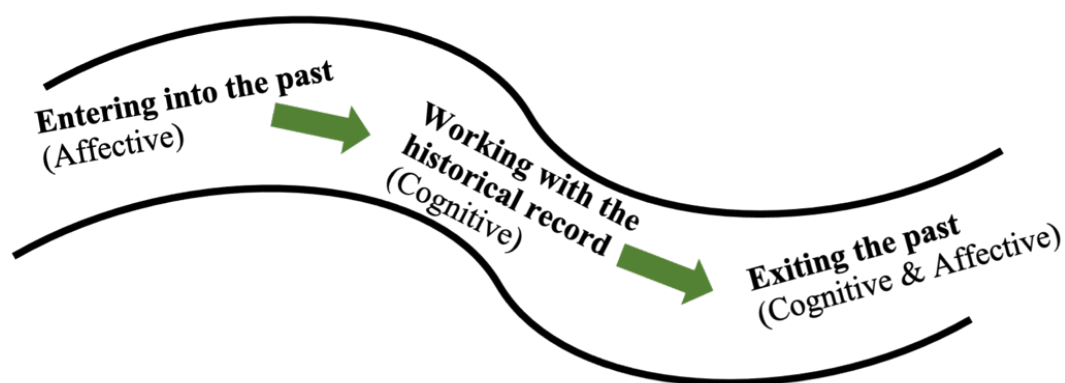
To demonstrate the potential of experiential learning for developing historical empathy, I adopt Davison’s (2017) conceptualization of historical empathy as a “pathway”—a fitting metaphor for experiential learning (see Figure 1). As he explains, the empathic pathway “represents students affectively entering the past and then cognitively working with the historical record before finally making an exit and arriving at a series of judgements” (p. 150). This approach to historical empathy places equal importance on the affective and cognitive dimensions, and best represents my own experience with how students developed historical empathy through experiential

learning. It also complements Kolb and Fry's (1975) theory of experiential learning, which emphasizes "the *integration* of concrete emotional experiences with cognitive processes" (p. 34, emphasis in original).

In the following three sections, I explore how experiential learning on battlefield study tours provided students with many opportunities to engage with both affective and cognitive dimensions of historical empathy. First, I consider how students *entered the past* by developing emotional connections to historical actors and particular places. Second, I describe how students *worked with the historical record* to build contextual knowledge and understand diverse perspectives by visiting historic sites and battlefield landscapes. And third, I explain how students *exited the past* to form ethical judgments about the World Wars and applied their learning to make a difference as young citizens in their communities back home in Canada. Although these study tours were not informed by Davison's (2017) theory of historical empathy, in retrospect, each of these three elements of the empathic pathway emerged organically throughout the programs, as revealed by students in their own words.

Figure 1

Visual depiction of Davison's (2017) empathic pathway. Designed by author, 2021.



Entering into the past

When students enter into the past, they engage with the affective dimensions of historical empathy. According to Davison's (2017) empathic pathway, entering into the past involves open-mindedness, feeling care, and imagination. In his study, open-mindedness was signified by students considering values, beliefs, and behaviours that were different from their own. As students developed care for historical actors, they learned more about different perspectives and experiences. Imagination also allowed Davison's students to consider what it may have been like to live in another time and place, thereby, engaging them in learning about history. Though some scholars (Foster, 1999; Stockley, 1983) have raised concerns about the imagination overriding historical interpretations grounded in evidence and context, elsewhere I have proposed using the term "informed historical imagination" to encompass both cognitive and affective approaches to historical empathy (Karn, 2023). Engaging the imagination not only leads to more meaningful learning (Friesen, 2011; Judson & Egan, 2013), but students may also expand their abilities to empathize with historical actors, filling in gaps in the available evidence by imagining details that fit within the context of the time (Lévesque, 2008). This balanced approach, drawing on the imagination alongside historical evidence and context, was demonstrated by students throughout the Vimy programs.

From the beginning of each program, students developed affective connections with historical actors. They entered the past by learning about the wartime experiences of a Canadian soldier or nursing sister who was killed in Belgium or France during the First or Second World War. In addition to learning more about this individual's life and wartime experiences by conducting

research, students also completed a creative assignment, usually a tribute to the soldier or nursing sister in the form of a letter, poem, or song. This arts-based response allowed students to establish a closer, more emotional connection to the past.

Although each student formed an affective connection with a soldier or nursing sister, the nature of their link to the past differed. Some students selected individuals from their hometowns, while others had family connections to the wars or some other personal connection to the chosen individual. For example, one student researched the first Canadian nursing sister killed in action overseas because “I have a lot in common with her: she was born in my hometown, graduated from my high school, and entered the medical field like I hope to next year” (blog post, April 2018). This student highlighted the added significance of learning about a woman killed during the war because it allowed them to understand female perspectives in the early 20th century.

In another case, a student selected two Black soldiers for their project and developed care by identifying similar life experiences. During the program, this student expressed feeling closer to the soldiers because they also faced racism and discrimination. However, the student accounted for historical contexts by recognizing that, because they lived during a different time, their struggles differed in many ways. Through getting to know these soldiers’ stories, this student developed a connection to the past that made history more meaningful. I remember this student explaining that prior to researching these soldiers, they did not know that Black Canadians served in the First World War or that there was a segregated Construction Battalion because soldiers were usually represented as white in history textbooks. In their words, “...I did not believe that I had a place in Canadian history” (blog post, April 2019). The student reflected on how learning about more diverse perspectives impacted their view of history because they now saw the wars as part of their own history. By learning about individual soldiers and nursing sisters, students gained deeper insight into the thoughts and experiences of wartime Canadians and demonstrated care toward historical actors before they even visited the battlefields.

Affective connections to the past were also encouraged at each place we visited by allowing students time to interact with artefacts, monuments, and landscapes on their own. Upon arrival at each site, students were encouraged to draw upon their senses and prior knowledge to imagine how people in the past may have experienced the place. For example, we asked questions such as, “What sounds might a soldier have heard here 100 years ago?” These types of questions elicited affective responses in students because our senses are closely tied to our emotions. As students explored the sites, they connected with them differently and noticed certain things depending on their own backgrounds and experiences. A Sikh student shared that seeing a Sikh soldier’s name listed on one of the memorials we visited “added a personal connection to the experience” (blog post, April 2019). Another student became emotional upon reading an epitaph on a headstone, dedicated by a mother and sister, because it made them think of their own brother who was around the same age as the soldiers who fought in the First World War. By exploring sites on their own, students were able to activate their prior knowledge while taking in their surroundings, which often led to a desire to work with the historical record and learn more about the people connected to the places we visited.

Working with the historical record

The next step along the empathic pathway involves working with the historical record, moving students from an initial affective connection to deeper understanding and empathy. As Davison (2017) explains:

Historical empathy’s cognitive elements of exploring evidence, building contextual knowledge, finding multiple perspectives and being aware that past and present are different become helpful once students have, so to speak, entered the past and now begin to work with the record of that past. (p. 152)

In my teaching experience, the affective dimensions of historical empathy continued throughout this stage and, in fact, augmented students' abilities to examine sources, consider contexts, and identify multiple perspectives.

On the study tours, students were surrounded by a wide variety of artefacts at the museums we visited, but the most memorable for students were those that remained in their original form on the battlefields. In France, students had the rare opportunity to go down into the Maison Blanche cave, where many Canadian soldiers waited to launch the assault on Vimy Ridge on 9 April 1917. In reflecting on this experience, one student portrayed the cave as a valuable primary source:

It [Maison Blanche] contained a multitude of carvings or "graffiti" which are very significant in the understanding of the thoughts and attitudes of the soldiers who stayed there. I found it to be an especially unique way of gaining insight into the mindset of soldiers in the First World War. (blog post, August 2018)

In some cases, students were able to infer how soldiers felt at the time based on their carvings. For example, a few soldiers carved farm animals and students inferred that this represented how much the soldiers missed their farm and family. Although these carvings have been photographed and replicated for museum and online exhibits that any student could have access to, the experience of being underground in the dark, damp cave provided students a glimpse into how soldiers may have felt during their time there.

Experiential learning also provided students the opportunity to interpret landscapes across Belgium and France as primary evidence, building from their initial emotional reactions and sensory experiences. While walking the terrain where significant battles took place, students were asked questions such as, "Based on your view of this landscape, why do you think those in leadership positions made the decision to launch an attack here?" As they viewed the "high ground" in places like the Ypres Salient in Flanders or Hill 145 at Vimy Ridge, students began to understand how important the natural environment was to informing decision-making during the First World War. In their group discussions and written reflections, students also commented on how the weather helped them gain new perspectives and understandings of wartime conditions. For example, during a rainy visit to the Beaumont-Hamel Newfoundland Memorial in France, one student empathized with how difficult it would have been for soldiers to see through the rain and fight through the mud.

In combination with viewing the landscapes, students also examined primary sources to help contextualize the significance of the site. For instance, students read war diaries (unit intelligence logs) from the Canadian infantry battalions that landed at Juno Beach on 6 June 1944, while sitting around a beach-side monument. During our group discussion, many students remarked that it was surreal to be reading historical records written almost 75 years earlier, near the location where soldiers had been fighting. One student said they appreciated being able to visualize the landmarks identified in the documents to achieve a deeper understanding of what took place and how decisions were made at the time. In their blog post written later that day, another student remarked, "It was also an amazing experience to be on the beach and see the geography of it all. It made it much clearer in my mind" (blog post, August 2018).

Throughout the programs, students also learned about the World Wars from local residents, tour guides, and veterans. Each offered diverse perspectives that are often overlooked or not as easily accessible in Canadian history classrooms. In particular, our Belgian tour guide on the Ypres Salient left a lasting impression because their storytelling approach was meaningful and allowed students to feel more connected to the histories and ongoing legacies of the First World War. Students appreciated hearing family wartime stories as records of the past, while visiting some of the actual places where these stories played out.

Exiting the past

Once students have engaged with the historical record, they are invited to exit the past, which involves both cognitive and affective dimensions of historical empathy. At this point along the empathic pathway, students are offered opportunities to use what they learned to form or examine judgments about the decisions, events, and perspectives under study. Davison (2017) explains that this is “a time when I encourage reflection on the practical consequences of what has been studied” by exploring contemporary issues and debates related to the topic” (p. 153). Throughout the study tours, students applied their knowledge and insights gained through experiential learning in order to develop informed judgments about wartime decision-making. Perhaps the best example involves the Allied raid on the port city of Dieppe on 19 August 1942, a tragic day in Canada’s military history, which is often portrayed as a “catastrophic failure” (Lévesque, 2008, p. 156). During our time in the town of Dieppe, students experienced the landscapes that played such an instrumental role in the raid’s devastating consequences. On each program, I led our group of students from the shoreline up the steep, rocky beach surrounded by the imposing cliffs. As they traced the footsteps of the soldiers who landed at Dieppe, students seemed to better understand how the harsh terrain and lack of natural cover resulted in so many casualties. According to one student:

I was drawn in as soon as I stepped foot on the rocky beaches... Seeing the landscape, hearing the sounds, and feeling the burn of my muscles as we explored the terrain truly put the event into perspective for me. (blog post, August 2018)

At this point, many students formed the conclusion—if they had not already—that the Dieppe raid was doomed to fail. However, by reading firsthand accounts and studying maps of the French coastline, students began to understand the point of view of decision-makers at the time.

On one program, we engaged in a passionate discussion about the decision to attack, from a cliff-top vantage point where we could see along the entire beach. In groups, students read through evidence packages about various locations along the French coast where a raid could have been launched in 1942. As one student explained, “We were given only certain information and I realized how the Allies were working with incomplete intelligence of the German defence” (blog post, August 2019). In the end, most students decided that Dieppe was the best of very few options for a raid along the French coast. Following the activity, many students reflected on how their perspective of the raid and the judgments they had previously made about the military leadership’s decision-making changed as a result of this simulation activity that took place overlooking the beaches at Dieppe.

The empathic pathway need not end with the conclusion of an experiential learning opportunity. After hearing the stories of Canadian soldiers and nursing sisters, and interacting with veterans and local residents overseas, I recall that one student in particular began to care deeply about the lives of veterans who survived the war. This student recognized that Canadians have served in other conflicts around the world since the Second World War and wanted to hear their stories as well. With the help of other students in their school’s history club, the student decided to hold an appreciation luncheon for veterans in the community. Local veterans were invited to the school to share their stories with students, honour the fallen in past conflicts, and support the men and women who serve in the Canadian Armed Forces today. This student’s actions suggest that they translated historical empathy into everyday empathy through experiential learning on these programs. In doing so, this student demonstrated civic engagement, motivated by a genuine desire to understand, help, and honour Canadian veterans today.

Through this experience, students learned to recognize connections between the past and present, and considered how these connections might inform their values moving forward. I remember one student reflecting on how learning about minority communities in war contributed toward a sense of respect for what certain groups have experienced, and they expressed an increased desire to support reconciliation efforts in different contexts. This student showed

greater awareness of diverse experiences, as well as a willingness to engage in reconciliation moving forward. Whether taking action or reconsidering their prior values, these students demonstrated the potential historical empathy holds to “help students develop a stronger awareness of needs around them and a sense of agency to respond to these needs” (Endacott & Brooks, 2013, p. 45).

Challenges and limitations

Although I have provided insight into the many benefits of experiential learning for developing historical empathy, there are also some challenges and limitations that should be addressed. A number of researchers have pointed to the limitations of anyone’s ability to understand people’s thoughts, actions, and decisions in the past (Endacott, 2010; Lowenthal, 2000; Shemilt, 1984; VanSledright, 2001; Wineburg, 2001). For instance, Jenkins (1991) concludes that “empathizing effectively is impossible” (p. 48) because we cannot enter into the mind of someone who lived in a different time. Likewise, we cannot physically walk in the footsteps of people who lived in the past, even while engaging in experiential learning.

Studies have shown that students often face difficulties in setting aside their own lived experiences and perspectives to understand historical actors who live in vastly different times and places (Barton & Levstik, 2004; Endacott, 2010). Throughout each study tour, many students recognized the limits to being able to empathize with historical actors whose experiences differed greatly from their own. In their reflections, students often explained how at each site we visited they tried to imagine what it may have been like to be a soldier who fought there, but many admitted that they found it difficult to truly understand. For example, one student expressed, “That kind of courage is unimaginable to me. I have never been thrust into a situation dire enough to require it” (blog post, August 2018). These challenges expressed by students highlight the limitations of our imagination—that is, how far one can reach when supposing or inferring details about the past based on available evidence (Lee, 1984). When empathizing with others, it can be difficult to make an “empathetic leap” between the past and present (Seixas & Morton, 2013, p. 144).

In attempting to span this gap of time between the past and present, students are likely to engage in presentism, or viewing the past through the lens of the present (Miles & Gibson, 2022; Wineburg, 2001). Although we continually encouraged students to consider the knowledge and perspectives held at the time, some students continued to condemn certain decisions by military leaders as reckless and ill-informed. In this way, some of our students demonstrated just how difficult it can be to set aside our knowledge of how events unfolded, when attempting to understand the decision-making processes that led to particular consequences—consequences that we have the privilege of knowing in the present. On a related note, students also commented on the difficulties of setting aside preconceived notions of history formed through popular culture (films, books). In the case of the Second World War especially, student perceptions were often informed by Hollywood interpretations that may not always be historically accurate, so setting aside these perspectives can be a barrier to empathizing with historical actors.

Another significant challenge involved the affective dimensions of historical empathy. In their written reflections, many students commented on the obstacles they faced in discussing their emotions or writing them down. They often identified specific sites (usually cemeteries) that evoked sadness and despair, which they found difficult to process. One student explained that upon finding their soldier’s name etched on the wall of the Menin Gate in Ypres, Belgium, “I was so overcome with emotions of all sort [*sic*] that I began to cry. I was speechless” (blog post, April 2019). In some cases, students’ personal or family experiences with war, death, or trauma in other contexts triggered an emotional response to learning about the First and Second World Wars. These situations underline the importance of developing understanding and trust with students to support their emotions and wellbeing, and to recognize the many different ways that students may respond to encountering difficult knowledge (Britzman, 1998).

Conversely, there were times when students explained that they did not feel any emotional connection to people in the past, particularly in their journals which were only read by the teachers. Some expressed surprise that they did not cry while giving their soldier tribute, and other students explained how they felt a significant sense of separation between the past and present because they could not speak directly to historical actors. As with any learning experience, the students on these study tours responded in very different ways and, therefore, their process of engaging with the empathic pathway looked different.

Beyond this particular study tour, other experiential learning opportunities may face different challenges. I recognize the unique nature of the Vimy Foundation's programs and the influence certain factors may have over students' engagement and motivation to empathize with others. The First and Second World Wars are areas that many students are interested in learning about and have prior knowledge of, due to the prevalence of family histories and Remembrance Day ceremonies that inform our collective memory of the wars. The students on these programs were also willing to take part in an extensive application process and were selected by the Vimy Foundation based on their commitment to academics and volunteer work. In these ways, my experiences on these study tours and with these students are not representative of all experiential learning opportunities, and other topics and approaches will likely bring about new challenges and limitations—as well as new opportunities.

Conclusions

In this article I have provided a glimpse into my own teaching experience to highlight the potential of experiential learning for fostering historical empathy. Throughout the study tours, students engaged with the cognitive and affective dimensions of history to better understand diverse perspectives and experiences in the past, despite the noted challenges and limitations in doing so. As students walked the battlefields—and developed emotional connections, analysed landscapes as evidence, and formed ethical judgments—they were also walking along Davison's (2017) empathic pathway. This teaching experience has demonstrated that the pathway metaphor is particularly fitting for pedagogical approaches to historical empathy centred around experiential learning. By venturing outside the classroom, new pathways are forged for fostering empathy.

While this type of study tour may be pedagogically valuable, I realize it may not be possible to incorporate long-distance travelling into elementary or secondary history programs due to budgetary, safety, and time constraints. Therefore, I suggest that Davison's (2017) empathic pathway can also be taken up in other learning contexts and through local connections with place. Students may be invited to enter the past closer to home by writing biographies of historical actors in their own communities to explore their thoughts, actions, and decisions. As a follow-up, teachers can facilitate tours of local historic sites, buildings, monuments, memorials, and neighbourhoods to further explore connections to the historical actors' lives. Visiting local sites and viewing landscapes also offers students opportunities to work with the historical record. For instance, conservation areas and industrial sites can serve as primary sources that reveal the histories of human impacts on the environment. As they exit the past, students may form judgments about past values, actions, and decisions within their own communities, and consider their legacies for today (Gibson, 2017, 2021). Students may also be encouraged to become involved in community movements and organizations to effect positive change on issues with deep historical roots. With these ideas as a starting point, history and social studies teachers are invited to incorporate experiential learning into their practice and share their encounters with other teachers to foster a generation of more empathetic youth.

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Endnotes

¹ Queen's University's (Kingston, Canada) ethics board granted approval for me to include de-identified direct quotations from students' blog posts. These blog posts were written and published during each tour and were publicly accessible on the Vimy Foundation's website until recently. Now the blogs have been placed in an archive, to which I was able to gain access with permission from the Vimy Foundation.