

Thinking Historically for Canada's Future

Visiting Doctoral Student Program Report

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Faculty Host: Dr. Jacqueline P. Leighton, Department of Educational Psychology, University of Alberta

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As part of *Thinking Historically for Canada's Future's* Visiting Doctoral Student Program, I had the pleasure of spending two weeks with [Jacqueline P Leighton](#), a professor in the Faculty of Education in the Department of Educational Psychology, who kindly (and patiently) agreed to host me (and help me). I cannot fail to mention the warm welcome I received from Drs. Carla Peck and Vivian Lei, who made sure that I was as comfortable as possible, both by giving me access to a work space and by providing me with a kettle and a mug (in Quebec colours) to warm me up.



My thesis uses various data collection tools (open-ended questionnaires, Likert scale, free and forced associations, interviews, etc.) to examine the representation of the discipline of history that adolescents construct for themselves following their schooling. I was able to reach 332 students from different regions of Quebec and I asked them what they thought history was and what it was used for, thus enabling me to document the social representations they constructed and maintained during their secondary school education. My goal to ascertain the state of history teaching in Quebec from the perspective of graduating high school students. Preliminary data from this research indicate that learners, despite having been subjected to a curriculum that promotes a constructivist view of history, maintain their endorsement of positivist elements, which could be explained by the requirement to pass a single test issued by the Ministry of Education in order to graduate from high school, a qualification that is very important for the job market and for further education in Quebec.



Part of my data collection is based on the questionnaire concerning epistemological postures about history developed by Maggioni *et al.*(2009, 2010). After doing some basic statistical analyses with the help of a statistician from Laval University, it was possible to see that the data is surprising and that the epistemological postures of the respondents differ from initial expectations. Before moving forward, I felt the need to be sure of my conclusions: the expert eye of a psychometric specialist such as Jacqueline P. Leighton made a big difference in the quality of my thesis and the richness of my analysis.



From our first meetings, Dr. Leighton was kind enough to listen, in my broken English, to a summary of the various statistical treatments I had applied to my data. Over the course of our meetings, Dr. Leighton guided me back to the basics of quantitative analysis. The choices that had been made earlier in the data cleaning and instrument selection stages were justifiable from a statistical point of view, but the multiple imputation had introduced “noise” into the measurements. With Dr. Leighton, we went back to the analysis, justifying our choices step by step, ensuring that each tool was the best one to meet the objective of this research: to document the epistemological postures present in adolescents at the end of their high school history training.



In terms of learning, this journey allowed me to develop a much better argument to justify the methodological and statistical choices I had to make in my thesis. Between the initial approach of my data and Dr. Leighton's, if I may use the image, it is the difference between following a recipe that is provided to you on the back of a box of cake mix and understanding the chemistry in place when you add yeast to your homemade mix. In one case, you simply perform the required tasks, in the other, you consciously make the best choices for your purpose.



Of course, I can't pass up a few extracurricular activities I was able to do on this trip, among them an impressive visit to the Royal Alberta Museum (I highly recommend the Ice Age room) and a disorienting trip to the West Edmonton Mall (I never realized I would need a map to locate myself in a mall one day).



Again, I thank the *Thinking Historically for Canada's Future* project for this opportunity. I must acknowledge the kindness of Drs. Carla Peck and Vivian Lei, who did everything in their power to make me feel at home some 4,000 kilometres from my home. And my sincere thanks to Dr. Jacqueline P. Leighton for her patience, kindness and time. With your help, I was able to forge several arguments to support my thesis.