Implementing a Holistic Approach to the Study of War: Challenging Collective Memory

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Introduction

I’ve been researching about the teaching of world war one in Ontario classrooms—I’ve spoken with teachers, observed my own students as teacher candidates in their practicum, and examined dozens of Ontario history textbooks in the OISE library and archives, all which reflect the complexities of teaching war. Most resources present war into short, sanitized and neutralized packages that focus on battles and technology through photos, short summaries, primary documents, maps, timelines and in some cases, games.

The focus of the new history and social studies curriculum in Ontario centres on disciplinary concepts, historical thinking concepts and critical thinking pedagogy provide opportunities to teach war more holistically.
Historical examinations within history course studies frequently frame the history of war within a chronology of battle dates, victories, and military action.

The boundaries of historical inquiry in the classroom have meant that students are often only exposed to understandings of war that are supported within limited chronological parameters and compartmentalized subsections.

The inclusion of counter-narratives, such as anti-war activism, the destruction of the environment and the lives of citizens, is often difficult to insert into this framework. And are often viewed as less important.
Avoid ‘heroism’: the lives of everyday individuals and community-based achievement is just as historically significant.

War blurs the lines between military and civilian populations so why explore these topics separately?

Include the voices of war resisters and the voices of Children and Families.

Alter language (terms are suggestive): “Total war” suggests unity. “All out war” suggests anything and everything can happen.

Explore the impact of war on environmental degradation – immediate/ multi-generational affects.
More strategies

- Complicate the binary structure of historical narratives [Us vs. Them, Good vs. Bad]
- Challenging notions of citizenship
- Provide deep historical context, critique and analyze—include multiple perspectives
- Avoid tokenism: authentic inclusion involves questioning the standard cultural lens
- Name the names: avoid categorizations of people

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• Acknowledge the **central role of the military industrial complex** in shaping national and international perspectives as well as supporting national commemorations of war.

• Integrate the **experiences of women** to reflect a historically accurate examination of their activism and participation.

• The voices of women are usually portrayed in supportive roles/fulfilling duties of good citizenship and good Mothers and as benefiting from war participation. Are there other positions?

• Women, Indigenous communities, ‘Minority’ cultures are embedded in local/ global histories
How to Connect to Historical Thinking Concepts in the Curriculum

Establish historical significance
Use primary source evidence
Identify continuity and change
Analyze cause and consequence
Take historical perspectives
Understand ethical dimension of historical interpretation

Source: www.historicalthinking.ca

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Tc2.ca model for developing a thinking classroom focuses for teacher action:

- building a community of thinkers
- promoting critical challenges
- teaching thinking tools
- assessing for thinking

Fine-Meyer 2014
War is Complicated

History Textbooks portray war within simplistic themes and a division between combat and War work (separate chapters examine the home front versus the war front)
Challenge Textbooks that suggest that war is Inevitable

Textbooks chart “The Road to War”
1. Archduke is assassinated.
2. Austria sends ultimatum.
3. Serbia rejects.
4. Austria invades Serbia.
5. Russia mobilizes army.
6. Germany declares war on Russia.
7. France and Germany declare war on each other.
8. Britain declares war on Germany.
9. Canada and the rest of the British Empire are at war!

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Challenge the use of war games: Some are found in textbooks/others online.
Focus on diverse perspectives - competing visions of war before-during and after-and lack of support.

Warfare is the product of a wide range of interrelationships: political, economic and social, that exists in multiple layers.

Explore multiple and alternative narratives - question state classifications of “enemy alien”

Allow for the complexities of war to be explored. Avoid neat, summaries.

Explore the ways in which wars affect societies, institutional structures.
Where to find materials:

- Community-based interviews, oral histories, first-person accounts
- Partnerships with public libraries, community centres, museums, local, provincial, university archives
- Seek out new scholarship: academic journals, new books, and attend conferences
- Research online:
  - http://www.thenhier.ca/
  - http://tc2.ca/
  - www.collectionscanada.gc.ca
  - http://www.archives.gov.on.ca
War affects everyone. War work required to support the trenches

- Military Uniforms (clothes, boots, etc)
- Food and water
- General supplies
- Medical supplies
- Support staff for all procedures
- Medical support staff
- Transportation (all)
- Other....
Links between making and wearing uniforms for combat

“Making Tommy’s Uniform” and Canadians returning from trenches CWM 19920085-006
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Links between medical support & field hospitals & the battlefield
The Diversity of Women’s Contributions to the War Effort

[Red Cross ambulance, Toronto Archives Fonds 1244 item 885] & French Field Hospital

Grace MacPherson as a Voluntary Aid Detachment (VAD) driver for the British Red Cross on June 8, 1917. This photograph and others were taken for the Canadian War Photographs exhibition at the fashionable Grafton Galleries in central London, and appeared on the front page of The Canadian News Record, which was published by the War Records Office. Library and Archives Canada/Department of National Defence collection PA-001305.
Nursing sisters overseas
Rationing: not everyone supports the consequences

WAR MEALS

PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS TO SAVE BEEF, BACON, WHEAT AND FLOUR TO MEET THE WAR-NEEDS OVERSEAS.

TO CANADIANS,

Every man and woman in Canada should do their share of saving food and every lap of their clothing, every gallon of their milk, and every pound of their meat, flour, sugar and other necessities, in order to save the lives of our men in the Front. yourselves and their brothers. All unnecessary waste of food will be considered as a flagrant disregard of the ties that bind us together.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Food Controller.

ISSUED BY THE FOOD CONTROLLER FOR CANADA.

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Long term impact of Internment camps in Canada

[Women, Children and men in Sprit Lake Internment Camp Quebec, NLA, PA 170 620]
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Hard labour for internees at the Kapuskasing camp, circa 1917.

(Photo courtesy of the Ron Morel Museum and Glenbow Museum)
Long term impact of Propaganda
Victory?: Human and Environmental Consequences
Veterans in Christie Street Hospital, Toronto

[Canada’s Nursing Sisters by GWL Nicholson, Toronto, 1975]

30. Bombing at Etaples. The demolished wing of the nursing sisters’ quarters, No. 1 Canadian General Hospital, after the air raid of May 19, 1918.


32. Caring for veterans. After the First World War many nursing sisters joined the staffs of hospitals for veterans. Here, nurses at Christie Street Hospital, Toronto, watch a race for handicapped patients in 1919.

33. Mrs. Eva Coghill, the first woman of the Ottawa Branch of the

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World military expenditure in 2012 is estimated to have reached $1.756 trillion. The total is higher than in any year between the end of World War II and 2010. This corresponds to 2.5 per cent of world gross domestic product (GDP), or approximately $249 for each person in the world.

In 2012 the Canadian government spent $22 billion on the Department of National Defence and $1 billion on Environment Canada. (vowpeace.org)

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