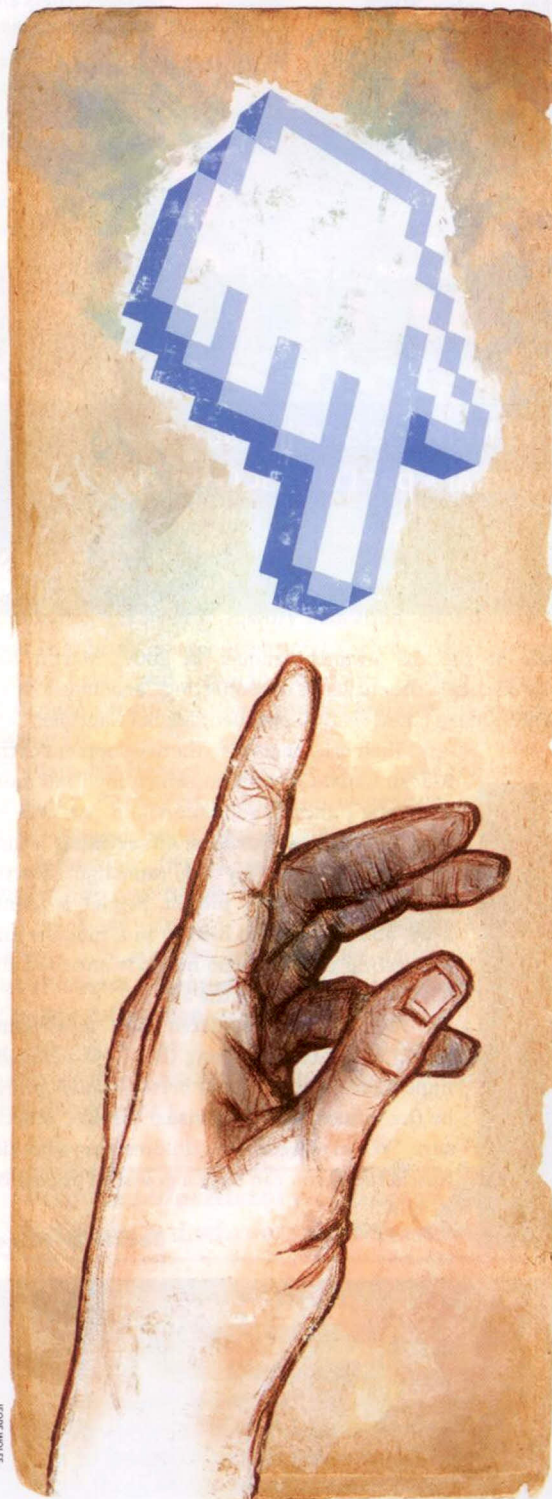


Currents

Making connections

THEN/HiER removing barriers between ivory tower and classrooms.



JUDY WOLF

History educators have long been aware of the disconnect between the ivory towers of academia and the classroom. But a new national network for history educators — from elementary schools to universities — wants to make it a problem of the past.

"Our project is primarily a response to the lack of communication among the constituencies involved in history education," says Penney Clark, director of The History Education Network/Histoire et Éducation en Réseau. Also called **THEN/HiER**, the network aims to connect academic historians, history educators in faculties of education, historians in museums and historic sites, archivists, practising teachers, and curriculum policy-makers. It offers them the opportunity to communicate, collaborate, and learn from others' experiences.

"It is about history education wherever it takes place," says Clark, an associate professor at the University of British Columbia.

"This could be in schools from kindergarten through to graduation, in post-secondary institutions, in museums and historic sites, or at the feet of an aboriginal elder as she shares an oral history account."

Recently, the network launched a website, www.thenhier.ca.

"We want to get people involved through the website, because obviously we can't get people together face-to-face that often," Clark says. "It's a big country, so it would be very expensive. The website, therefore, will be a vital means of communication."

Besides offering news on the latest research in history education, the site provides educators with the opportunity to compare curricula from across the country.

"A teacher from B.C., for example, could find out what the curriculum of a history teacher in Ontario looks like," Clark says.

In addition, the site will have links to drafts of curricula in development stages in order to seek out feedback from teachers and administrators. The site also features video podcasts of classroom history lessons and conference presentations, as well as a forums section where educators can debate hot topics in history education.

"A teacher could go on the website, and they might see a question around history education that states, 'Should we have a common national history curriculum?'" Clark says. "They could respond to that and hear what other people have to say about it."

THEN/HiER, however, is more than its website. Besides working to create a sense of community among history educators and researchers, the network funds projects promoting co-operation between them while advancing history education.

"We're trying to get different groups together to engage in projects, and we'll give them up to \$2,500 for their expenses," Clark says about the Small Project Grant program.

The network is planning a major meeting in 2010, working in conjunction with the **Benchmarks of Historical Thinking** project, provincial ministries of education, **The Historica - Dominion Institute**, and **Canadian Heritage** to develop strategies to infuse historical thinking concepts into provincial curriculum development.

— Joel Schlesinger