

Our monthly e-Bulletin provides quick updates on activities of THEN/HiER and its partners.

What's new with THEN/HiER?

* **Stéphane Lévesque** is very pleased that one of his undergraduate students in Education, Marie-Claude Savoie, has received a grant through the University of Ottawa's Undergraduate Research Opportunity Program (UROP). She was awarded the Library Prize in Education for her research presentation, *Les Premières Nations de l'époque précoloniale ont-elles une place adéquate dans l'histoire canadienne?* (Are First Nations of the Colonial Era Adequately Represented in Canadian History?)



Stéphane Lévesque and Marie-Claude Savoie

* **Kevin Kee** is leaving his position as Associate Vice-President of Research at Brock University to become Dean of Arts at the University of Ottawa. He stated, "What a unique privilege it has been to work with the wonderful people at Brock. I'm going to miss them, but I look forward to finding ways that we can still work together." Congratulations on your new position, Kevin! Read more.



* **Kristina Llewellyn** and **Nicholas Ng-A-Fook**, THEN/HiER members, are organizing a workshop at Demarais Hall, University of Ottawa on May 24 and 25. At *Oral History and Education: Theories, Dilemmas and Practices*, Canadian and international experts will address the potential and significance of oral history for education. Registration is free and meals are included. Register by email with your full name, institutional affiliation, and contact information before May 10 (registration is limited). View the schedule here. THEN/HiER is making a financial contribution to the event. Read more on Facebook.

Oral History Education
Free 2-Day Workshop Invitation
Oral History and Education:
Theories, Dilemmas, and Practices
May 24-25, 2015

THEN/HiER Reception at Congress

THEN/HiER will be co-hosting a reception at the Congress of the Humanities and Social Sciences with the Canadian Association of Foundations of Education (CAFE) and the Educational Research Unit (ERU) "Making History" at the University of Ottawa. The reception will follow a keynote address by Chad Gaffield, Past President of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) and current Professor of History and University Research Chair in Digital Scholarship at the University of Ottawa. The keynote, titled "Micro History, Macro Interpretations, and Mass Schooling: Understanding Canada@150," will take place on June 3 at 4:30 pm in the Faculty of Social Sciences building, Amphitheatre 1007, and the reception from 5:30 to 7:00 pm in the main foyer 1000A. The talk and reception are open to all Congress delegates.

Approaching the Past

The most recent *Approaching the Past* event took place on April 29 at Queen Elizabeth Park and Bloedel Conservatory in Vancouver. Vicky Earle, VanDusen Botanical Garden Governor, and John Coupar, Vancouver Park Board Chair, spoke about the history of the park and iconic conservatory, techniques used in the recent roof restoration project and unique stories of the lives of the plants and birds that call Bloedel home. The next Vancouver *Approaching the Past* event will tentatively take place at the Bud Kerr Baseball Museum at Nat Bailey Stadium in June. More details will be available shortly here on our website.







This month the *Teaching the Past* blog featured a number of pieces dealing with the use of technology in the history classroom. A particularly interesting piece was Mary Chaktsiris' blog, *On the Use of Digital Humanities in the Classroom*. It offers an interesting discussion of the digital humanities as well as a detailed discussion of a great digital history classroom project.

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*** The BC Heritage Fairs Society** has received \$125,000 from the Government of BC to support its Heritage Fairs program. The funding will help strengthen the Society's ability to support, facilitate and implement a Heritage Fairs Program in BC at both the provincial and regional level and to continue to develop critical thinking both inside and outside the classroom. Read more.

 hin.gc.ca 

- Capture Your Collections 2012 - Small Museum Version
- Podcasting for Small Museums: A How-to-Guide
- Making Up the Rules: New Documentation Standards for Canadian Museums
- Collections without Borders: Sustaining Digital Content at Cultural Institutions
- Choosing the Right Social Media for Your Institution

Click on the links to learn about each resource.



MUSEUMS
ASSOCIATION OF
SASKATCHEWAN

I am very pleased with the opportunity to assume the position of Anglophone Graduate Student Committee Coordinator! Thanks to Heather McGregor for all her hard work in this position, and for helping me to smoothly transition into it. This month has been an active one for the *Teaching the Past* blog. Our writers have offered up interesting ideas on a range of topics. Angelica Radjenovic discusses the impact of ethnicity on the learning of history, Emily Chicorli provides insights into the use of audio recordings in teaching, and Rose Fine-Meyer shares part of her recent talk on inquiry in the history classroom. I have also written a blog about using computer games to teach history. We encourage you to read and comment on our blogs. Contact Scott Pollock.



Marie-Hélène Brunet

Research Snapshots

This section of our monthly e-Bulletin highlights our members' research projects.

Bob Bain, Associate Professor
School of Education and Department of History
University of Michigan



Identifying and Navigating the Levels or Scales Problem in Teaching and Learning

Over the past twenty-five years, I have been thinking about and working on an instructional and historiographic problem that historian Thomas C. Holt called the “levels problem” in his article “Marking: Race, Race-Making and the Writing of History” (*American Historical Review* 100, no. 1 [1995]: 1-20) – i.e., the challenge historians face in “establishing the continuity between behavioral explanations sited at the individual level of human experience and those at the level of society and social forces.”

I first became aware of the problem of making connections among “levels” or “scales” of experience while working on a historical study of the ways that the educators, juvenile court officers, and area therapists in an American city had treated adolescents and children labeled as “problems.” While working with archival papers of individuals in each of those groups, I struggled to situate ideas and actions within the larger knowledge and practices of their respective professional communities as well as within the dramatic social changes occurring in the United States and the world between 1880 and 1940. It was hard for me to simultaneously keep in mind and connect the actions of individual actors and the larger forces at work in the professions, communities, society, and the world.

It was, however, while teaching world history in a public high school that this problem became central. I was struggling almost daily to help my students understand global, national or institutional systems, structures, and forces while maintaining their focus on human agency, ideas, and historical contingency. I developed practices and cognitive tools to help students dig deep into primary sources grounded in my familiarity with curricular projects such as the *Amherst Project* and research on historical cognition by scholars such as Sam Wineburg, Peter Seixas, and Peter Lee. In early studies of my instruction (e.g., “Rounding Up Unusual Suspects,” *Teachers College Record* 108, no. 10 [2006]: 2080-2114), I described and analyzed the various practices that supported students in sourcing, corroborating, and contextualizing documents created by individuals, evaluated the authority hidden in history classrooms, and suggested ways to expand students’ capacity for perspective taking, particularly as it pertained to race, class, and gender.

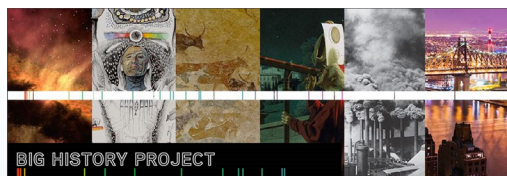
However, it was very different when I asked my students to situate human actions within larger trans-regional and global contexts. They had great difficulty in connecting the specificity coming out of their study of primary sources to more abstract concepts such as global systems, social structures or prevailing pre-suppositions. They typically personified larger forces (e.g., “the middle class wanted capitalism”) or abandoned ideas of human agency to offer deterministic explanations of action. They had even greater difficulty using primary sources when working with aggregated data that showed large scale patterns of ecological, environmental, economic, or demographic change.

As a student of history, I was familiar with the *Annales* School and Braudel’s parsing history at three different levels and loved Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie’s claim that all historians were either parachutists or truffle hunters. However, as a teacher of history, I soon recognized that my students needed to be both parachutists *and* truffle hunters to make connections among Braudel’s levels.

Indeed, as Holt warned, history that privileges macro forces, as much world history teaching has done, yields an “atrophied, lifeless, passionless” history that tends towards historical inevitability. However, history and history teaching “isolating micro-level phenomena renders human behavior simply unknowable.” The challenge of making connections and linkages across the different scales of time and space is key.

Thus, the levels or scales problem in history education asks: How do teachers and curricula represent temporal and spatial scales for students? How do students experience events at different scales? What do they see and think about scales? How might we enhance students’ capacity to shift scales and make connections between “the individual level of human experience and those at the level of society and social forces”?

In taking up these questions, I have helped to develop instructional resources that made scales or levels thinking visible, such as the model curriculum *World History for Us All*, and have analyzed the challenges of scale shifting in a number of publications.



Currently, I am working in the Big History Project, a curricular research and development project that has constructed a course in big history for secondary students around the world to help them travel through almost 14 billion years of time from the Big Bang to the future. While not abandoning history education’s focus on reading like historians – there are ten document-based investigations in the course – the course makes switching and connecting temporal and spatial scales a central practice.

Space does not allow me to discuss in detail the BHP approach to navigating the levels or scales problem, but I encourage you to take a look for yourself at www.bighistoryproject.com.

*** MORE TO COME NEXT MONTH!**