

Workshop Report: Teaching History in Diverse Venues
Airport Holiday Inn, Toronto
November 4, 2010

Thirty-six historians, educators, museum professionals and graduate students from across the country attended the first of what we hope will be an annual workshop offered by THEN/HiER in partnership with ActiveHistory.ca. This year's workshop was realized in conjunction with the [Association for Canadian Studies](#) and the [Ontario History and Social Sciences Teachers' Association](#) joint conference, "Canada's Diverse Histories," held at the same venue November 5th and 6th.

The day began with a keynote presentation by Trent University assistant professor [Christopher Dummitt](#). Titled "After Inclusiveness: The Future of Canadian History" (after his chapter of the same title in his 2008 co-edited collection, [Contesting Clío's Craft: New Directions and Debates in Canadian History](#)), Dummitt's talk began with the provocative claim that the history wars are over, a decisive victory on the side of the new inclusive history—now, as he reminded us, not so very new anymore. Where to, he asked, from here? Too much energy and attention, he argued, is being spent on fighting a battle that has been won—if largely by attrition through the retirements of an older generation of historians. What are the central debates that will take the practice of Canadian history into the future? His talk also challenged historians to consider what has been lost in dismissing these older ways of doing history. In the drive to fragment and deconstruct the narratives of the past, he argued, we have lost the ability to tell stories that synthesize and explain developments over larger historical periods, and to frame these explanations in narratives that are accessible to broader publics. Historians, he suggested, cannot just be part of the wrecking crew. Instead, we need to be architects in crafting new and meaningful narratives that explain key periods and developments in the Canadian past.

Chris's talk sparked a rich discussion. History teachers and students and faculty in the field of Education in particular felt that the trends he highlighted were largely confined to the realm of academic historians. High school teachers, they pointed out, are still very much dealing with "the big story" of traditional history, and attempts at inclusivity still represent sidebar narratives to this larger story. Here the history wars, they suggested, are far from over. Discussion continued in break-out groups that stretched until the lunch hour. Informed by a selection of pre-assigned readings, these discussions covered a wide range of topics and drew upon the diversity of experience present in the room.

After lunch, we boarded a bus for the nearby Claireville Conservation Area, where staff of the Toronto District School Board welcomed us to the Etobicoke Outdoor Education Centre and introduced us to a series of activities aimed at teaching aspects of Canadian history to school groups in outdoor environments. The idea for the field trip was to connect the morning's theoretical discussions around teaching revisionist history with an example of an innovative form of teaching practice, and

to provide an opportunity for ongoing informal discussion among participants. How much we achieved this will be the subject of discussion as we look ahead to planning next year's workshop, and ways of linking theory with practice. One of the things this workshop showed us was that several hours for discussion about teaching history in different venues was not enough, and we'd like to look at ways of extending opportunities for discussion within a longer workshop format—perhaps a day and a half—in future years.

We concluded the day by reconvening at the hotel for dinner, and sharing individual reflections on what we would take away from the day and how it might influence our individual teaching practices. A dynamic group of participants from diverse fields in history education, a thought-provoking keynote presentation, and the opportunity for informal discussion in a rare environment for many of us in our teaching careers—the outdoors—made this first workshop a great success. We look forward to bringing people together again next year in a different part of the country, to focus on another aspect of theory and practice in the field of history education.

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