



An exploratory study of epistemological stances among teachers and secondary IV history students in Quebec

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ABSTRACT

An analysis of the history curriculum (MEES, 2007, 2017) as taught in Quebec Secondary schools shows that it encourages the development of a constructivist view of history, focused on the historical method and on developing skills and competencies in students (Boutonnet, 2017; Cardin, Éthier & Meunier, 2010; Duquette, 2020; Éthier, Boutonnet, Demers & Lefrançois, 2017; Éthier, Cardin & Lefrançois, 2014). Yet some scholars (Demers, 2012; Moisan, 2010; Yelle, 2016) have noted the conflicting presence of two epistemological stances toward history among Quebec teachers: history that serves as a “memory reservoir”, or history as a science that develops intellectual qualities. These diverging views of history can lead to different teaching styles and usage in the classroom. Given tensions in the educational community between the Quebec ministerial exam (Blouin, 2020; Déry, 2016)—which is predicated on the concept that there can only be one correct answer—and the constructivist curriculum, between the stances of the teachers themselves and the representations of history among the general public (Éthier, Lefrançois & Joly-Lavoie, 2018; Rosenzweig, 2000) some questions remain: how do students view the learning of history? How do teachers react to these representations when confronted with them? To answer these questions, we conducted an exploratory study in which 332 students completed a questionnaire (Maggioni, 2010; Maggioni, VanSledright & Alexander, 2009; Miguel Revilla, Carril Merino & Sánchez Agustí, 2017) on their representations of history. We also held interviews with eight teachers to further explore how beliefs and epistemology are constructed in history class. We used these questionnaires and interviews to gain insight into part of this construction.

KEYWORDS

History education, Epistemology, History teachers, High school students, Historical representation, History class, Historical thinking

CITATION

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Introduction: The Issue

As a science, history has changed paradigms more than once. Positivist epistemological stances (Gavard-Perret, Gotteland, Haon & Aubert, 2008), were particularly popular in the field of history during the 19th century (Caire-Jabinet, 2008; Carbonell, 1978, 2002; Cardin, 2010; Moisan, 2010) favoured the development of narratives seeking to transmit a historical truth in an attempt to offer objective and neutral points of view. There has since been a shift away from the search for an absolute truth (and taught as such in the classroom) to more interpretative stances inspired by qualitative methodology, where historians are exegetists, constructing their interpretations using historical sources and evidence (Cuban, 2007). We have also seen a growing interest and awareness in giving a greater voice to minorities traditionally left out of the dominant narrative (Caire-Jabinet, 2008). With the ascendancy of these constructivist epistemological stances and tools developed through qualitative research (Gavard-Perret et al., 2008), there has been a noticeable change in the way that history is produced and represented. As interpreters of the past, historians are increasingly seeking to make sense of the various artifacts or traces left behind to construct their interpretation of a given phenomenon (Cardin, 2010; Seixas & Morton, 2013).

While this paradigm shift is now well established in academic circles around the world, it does not appear to have reached the halls of elementary and secondary schools—nor the general population—in Quebec. Laville (1984) in Quebec, Sandwell (2005, 2006) in Canada and Marbeau, Audigier, Crémieux, Le Gall & Margairaz (1981) in Europe have already noted the widening gap between the history of academic historians and the discipline taught in schools. Sears (2014) argues that history teachers represent the fringe of the active community of historians. An American study by Wilson and Wineburg (1993) found that teachers' representation of history in the classroom often reflects the history taught during their initial training. Sears (2014) and VanSledright (2011) both point out that secondary school history teachers hardly ever had the opportunity to exercise historical thinking during their pre-service years, thus it makes sense they might eschew teaching it in class in favour of replicating what they themselves experienced as learners, a teaching focused on imparting set knowledge presented as "true." Bain (2000), an American researcher with one foot in teaching high school while pursuing postgraduate studies, witnessed first-hand the difficulty of reconciling the historical method of instruction in graduate studies with the representations of his own high school students, as they sought to learn "true" facts chronologically related to past events.

An analysis of the elements in the Quebec Education Program (MEES, 2007, 2017) related to the teaching of history at the secondary level shows that it encourages a constructivist view of history and the historical method, and is focused on developing competencies in learners (Boutonnet, 2017; Cardin, 2010; Cardin, Éthier & Meunier, 2010; Duquette, 2020; Éthier, Boutonnet, Demers & Lefrançois, 2017; Éthier, Cardin & Lefrançois, 2014). While the education program encourages the development of a constructivist vision of history, the presence of a "Progression des apprentissages" and a "Précision des connaissances" - additions to the programs by the Ministry in response to teachers' concerns about the lack of a list of knowledge to be acquired in the program - points towards a transmissive vision of history. Even within the Ministry documentation, we can feel an alternation between the ideas that history is a science with a method and the idea of history as a source of factual knowledge. In this situation, where two contradictory discourses on history are being heard, teachers are trying to create a learning

environment that is coherent with ministerial directives, Ministry-imposed assessment and their own representation of history.

Among teachers of the discipline, Yelle (2016) and Moisan (2010) contend that there are two main conceptions of history education that thrive: a “memory reservoir” to be acquired, or a science serving to develop certain intellectual competencies. Ironically, in an educational context, the views of teachers in Moisan’s study suggest that historical knowledge must be acquired through declarative knowledge, a foundation that appears to be essential, from the teacher’s viewpoint, in understanding the world in which learners thrive. Demers (2012) concurs, noting among her sample of teachers a “tendency to conceive history as an objective truth accessible through expert narratives” (p.23).

This brings us to the question of the current representation of history among Quebec students. To address this, we must first and foremost consider the context of the ministerial history exam. For Quebec students who won’t go on to higher education, the ministerial exam is the last time they will have an “active relationship” with history. That’s why this turning point is so important to study. This uniform, province-wide assessment of competency is rather complex to produce as it tries to consider the interpretive nature of knowledge production in history (Barbe et al., 2016). Although it officially recognizes the value of learning history, several scholars have expressed concerns about this exam (Blouin, 2020; Déry, 2016, 2017; Duquette, 2020; Éthier et al., 2014), particularly the operations students need to perform during it—which mimic historical thinking without reaching it—and the epistemological stance this tool appears to convey. The exam also encourages teachers to make strategic choices about the use of class time, between preparing students for the exam and teaching history (Lanoix, 2019; Moisan & Saussez, 2019; Pageau, 2023).

Among students who had failed this exam and enrolled in summer remedial courses, one reason for failure often cited was that they had not sufficiently studied or memorized the historical narrative imparted by the teacher to be able to answer the questions (Pageau, 2016). In other words, in their view, the reason they failed was not due to poor proficiency in history, but rather because they had not memorized the “official narrative” well enough.

Considering that epistemological understanding of the discipline can influence results on the single test and is therefore linked to academic failure, by documenting the impact of the present situation on learner training and assessment, we will address a sensitive issue for teachers, school administrators and the Ministry of Education. Indeed, our investigation concerns the social representations of historical science that are currently developed among Quebec learners, which leads us to pursue a political and pragmatic issue (Van der Maren, 1995). Given tensions in the educational community between the history curriculum in the Quebec Education Program and the requirements of the ministerial exam, between the epistemological stances reproduced by the teachers themselves and the view of history among the general public (Rosenzweig, 2000), one question remains: Which representation of history students construct? This article will aim to trace the social representations of the history of students about to take the single ministerial test. To deepen our understanding of the phenomenon and the various influences on students, we’ll also look at the representations of teachers working with students, drawing, in this article, a dual portrait of the representations found in Quebec schools.

Conceptual Framework

It is impossible for us to go back and experience the past. We can, however, make a representation of it with the help of what has been left behind. This idea, a cornerstone of the constructivist view of history, led Lowenthal (1985) to declare that the past is irretrievably gone, leaving us only artifacts to organize our understanding. The study of history allows us to arrange our collective experience of the past and provide a meaningful context for our experience of the present (Seixas, 1996; Wineburg, 2001).

Secondary school students’ representations of history are influenced by their experiences both in and out of the classroom (VanSledright & Reddy, 2014). Lee (2005) argues that learners come

to history class with preconceived notions about the topics covered. It is important to take these preconceptions into account, as it is easier for students to hold on to them than to change their representations (Moliner, 1992). Any study on adolescent representations will be informed by not only the sum of their academic learning but also the many experiences related to this learning. The learning drawn from these experiences can help construct a functional and hopefully coherent representation for us to examine, that is, how history learners rely on their social representations to understand the content encountered in history class, as well as history as a science.

Social representation is a system of beliefs shared by a community that facilitates communication between its members (Jodelet, 1984; Moscovici, 1989). Through school and experiences, secondary students build their social representation of history and what constitutes a history class. Based on the Central Core Theory (also known as Central Nucleus Theory), a representation can be viewed as a dual system with a core and a periphery, whose function is to maintain the stability of the representation through any differences that individual members bring to it (Moliner, 1992). Any deviation between the representation and observable reality can lead first to the transformation of its peripheral elements and then to the development of what Flament (1989) calls “strange schemas”: patterns that seek to negotiate the deviation and reconcile the representation with the contradictory elements. If the deviation persists, the representation is likely to collapse. For Moliner (1992), in the transformation of a social representation, individuals will still retain their individual representations when only the peripheral elements are modified. However, when an element of the central core is contested, a change in the representation occurs. Hence the importance of examining students’ representation of history as a science: their actions in class and in preparing for the ministerial exam will most likely be linked to their representations of history and the operations required during the test.

We owe to Lee & Ashby (2000), Lowenthal (1985) and Shemilt (2000) the nuance between “history” and “the past”, which succinctly defines the past as the whole of time that took place before the present moment and on which the historian looks to find answers through an interrogative approach (the historical method). Shemilt (2000) suggests that learning history allows the learner to create accurate images of the past. His observations—yet to be empirically verified—led him to develop a schematic representation in four stages¹ to outline the learner’s progress in understanding the currency of narrative frameworks used in history (Figure 1).

Figure 1

Schematic representation of understanding narrative frameworks in history

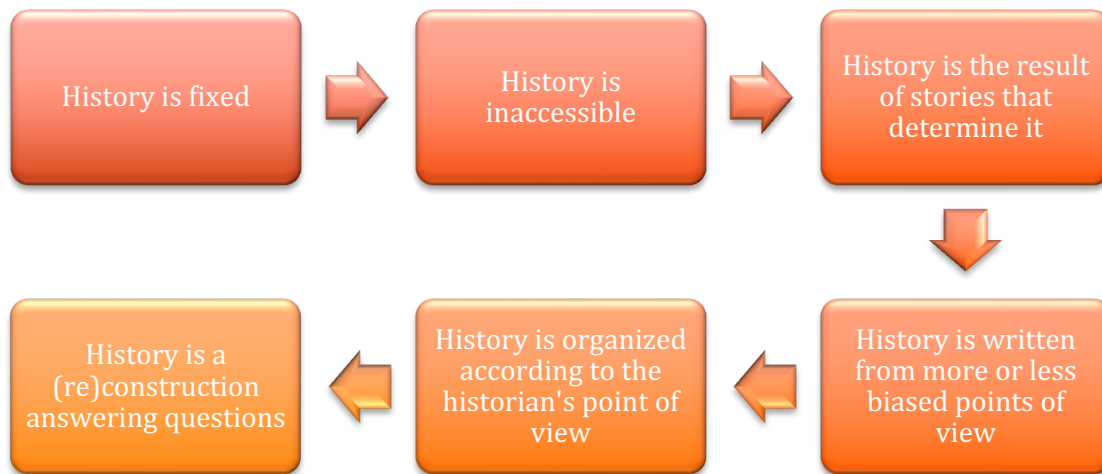


Notes. Based on Shemilt (2000)

Lee and Ashby’s Concepts of History and Teaching Approaches (CHATA) project sought to study the perception of history among children between the ages of 7 and 14, and map how their representation of history changes over time. Figure 2 shows how the different stages of representation of history are articulated in Lee and Ashby’s (2000) work. The authors found that age appears to matter less in advancing between these stages than the learner’s own experience with history (Lee & Ashby, 2000).

Figure 2

Stages in representations of history



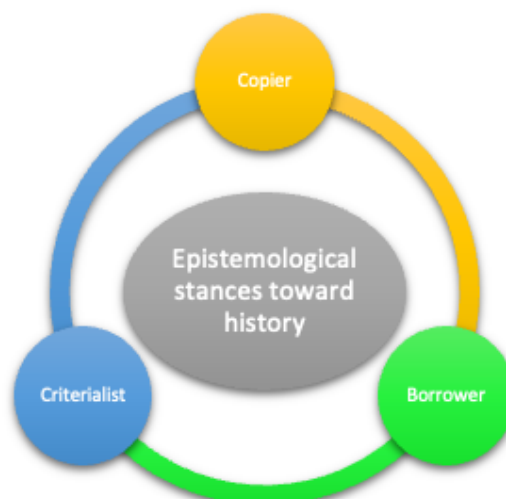
Notes. Based on Lee and Ashby (2000)

As part of Lee & Ashby’s work, the notion of first-order (historical) and second-order (metahistorical) concepts emerged. The latter allows us to study the logic underpinning how history learning is organized, anchored in concepts that evolve across pens and over time, for example: time, change, historical empathy, causes, evidence and accounts (Lee, 2005).

Maggioni, VanSledright and Alexander’s model (2009) synthesized this second-order logic into three epistemological stances: the *copier*, where history is viewed as a transmission; the *borrower*, where evidence is built using bits of information about the past to understand it; and the *criticalist*, where history answers questions and involves the use of historical thinking (Figure 3).

Figure 3

Maggioni, VanSledright and Alexander’s model (2009)



This model has led to the development of a survey tool, the *Beliefs about Learning and Teaching History Questionnaire* (BHQ)² (Maggioni, VanSledright & Alexander, 2009), a questionnaire that brings out the participant’s dominant postures (Stoel et al., 2022).

To understand what representations of history adolescents construct, we have therefore built a tool that will enable us to document students' school and out-of-school experiences (VanSledright & Reddy, 2014), students' preconceptions (Lee, 2005), which will bring out the structures of students' representations (Flament, 1989; Jodelet, 1984; Moliner, 1992; Moscovici, 1989), which will document how they perceive the difference between the past and history (Lee & Ashby, 2000; Lowenthal, 1985; Shemilt, 2000) and which will document their epistemological postures towards history (Maggioni, 2009).

Methodology

For our exploratory study, data collection began with a survey of Secondary IV history students preparing to take the ministerial exam. We then conducted explanatory interviews with history teachers about their representations of history but also about their perception of the representations of history of their students. This twin data collection aimed to produce a comprehensive picture of the representations students build of history.

We carried out an exploratory analysis as defined by Van der Maren (1995) with mixed methods (Fortin & Gagnon, 2010; Van der Maren, 1995) using principal axis factoring (Dancey, Reidy & Gauvrit, 2007) on the results of the BHQ questionnaire³ (Maggioni, VanSledright & Alexander, 2009, Miguel Revilla, Carril Merino & Sánchez Agustí, 2017). For our study, we limited factoring to three axes to reflect the three epistemological stances we hypothesized would emerge (copier, borrower and criterialist)⁴.

Our survey tool also employed, first, a thematic analysis (L'Ecuyer, 1990) of open-ended questions (Van der Maren, 1995) (see Table 1). Thematic analysis was used to bring out the main themes of the open-ended questions in the survey questionnaire and interviews. We also used cluster analysis of idea occurrence⁵ to understand how closely associated themes emerging from the thematic analysis were. We used, in second and third, both free and forced association exercises of hierarchical evocation (Flament & Rouquette, 2003; Moisan, 2010) (see Table 2) to arrive at a more granular picture of the representations of history our student respondents had. Hierarchical evocation is a strategy for understanding the organization of participants' social representations by associating key words (using the whole of one's vocabulary in free association or limiting it to a pre-established list in forced association), thus enabling one to understand the organization of one's thoughts in relation to a subject.

Table 1:

Two (translated) examples of open-end questions from the survey that was addressed to students.

What do you think history is?
What do you think is the point of studying history?

Table 2:

Example of the free association of hierarchical evocation method with the keyword "history" (translated)

Name the four keywords that come to mind concerning the following word. Indicate the order of importance of each word, with 1 indicating the most important, and 4 the least important:	
History	
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	

To document social representations, we need to establish the elements linked to these representations in the minds of the participants, hence the use of hierarchical evocation. The thematic analysis enables us to go further in this exploration, refining and validating the results obtained.

In all, we collected data from 332 secondary students and 8 history teachers across Quebec, through an online questionnaire and Zoom meetings using convenience sampling. Our student sample was 64% female and 36% male, with an average age of 15.46. Of the teachers, three were women and five were men, with seven working in the public education system and one in a private school. The average number of teaching years was 17.5.

Results

Student epistemology

First, using a French version of the BHQ⁶ adapted for Quebec, we were able to gauge how the epistemological stances of student respondents aligned with those identified by Maggioni et al. (2009) in the Likert scale with a principal axis analysis. Using groupings of questions⁷ based on the different stances, we first calculated, for each respondent, his or her average agreement for each question and then, for each grouping. This value was a number between 1 and 6 (the lower the average, the more in agreement the student was with a given group of items⁸). In the next step, respondents were then subdivided into categories: those who had obtained high averages (H) for each grouping of items and those who had obtained low averages (L). This allowed us to produce respondent profiles as well as determine their relative frequency. To better visualize the sample distribution, we set two thresholds, the median and the upper quartile (Table 3).

Table 3

Student respondent profiles obtained using the median and upper quartile

Category	Profile significance	Frequency at median	Percentage at median	Frequency at quartile	Percentage at quartile
HLH	Copier Borrower Criterialist H L H				
HLH	High agreement with copier and criterialist stances	28	8.4	15	4.5
HHH	High agreement with all stances	70	21.1	18	5.4
LHH	High agreement with borrower and criterialist stances	47	14.2	18	5.4
HHL	High agreement with copier and borrower stances	47	14.2	18	5.4
LLH	High agreement with criterialist stance	27	8.1	28	8.4
HLL	High agreement with copier stance	29	8.7	42	12.7
LHL	High agreement with borrower stance	43	13.0	45	13.6
LLL	No high agreement ⁹	39	11.7	146	44.0
Incomplete	Insufficient data	2	0.6	2	0.6
Total		332	100	332	100

A more detailed analysis of our categorization using the upper quartile reveals that a large majority of our student sample gravitate to the borrower (13.6%) and copier (12.7%) stances, followed by the criterialist stance (8.4%). It is thus possible to conclude that the first two stances are the most common among our students and that the presence of hybridization between the

stances in the median table shows a change or ambivalence in their thinking. It is possible to note that some students agree with two “opposite” stances, this will be explained with the thematic analysis that follow.

Second, we undertook a thematic analysis of responses given to the question “Selon toi, qu’est-ce que l’histoire?” [“In your view, what is history?”] With the help of a cluster analysis using Jaccard’s coefficient on the responses, we were able to better measure the social representation of history among our student samples. Looking past the inevitable outcomes, we observed an interesting proximity in the corpus between the grouping of the verbs “to learn”, “to remember” and “to know” with the grouping of the nouns “events” and “past”, thus confirming the trio of ideas that has been recurrent in our study: for these students, history is learning about past events. Taking this analysis even further is the logical continuation, according to the groupings in the analysis, that history influences the present and allows us to understand it. Also emerging is the concept that the construction of “us” linked to identity is also closely connected to tracing back our origins and ancestry.

To reach a better understanding of the students’ results, we interviewed teachers and presented them with our preliminary findings. These corresponded with their perception of what students’ representations of history were. As the interviews progressed, the idea of the malleability of the students’ representations of history emerged, testifying to the fact that students adapted their representations to the school situation: during a discussion on the nature of history, they tended more towards a criterialist posture; during evaluation, they retreated to a more copier posture.

Lastly, and most importantly for our study, we were able to define our student respondents’ social representation of the word “history” using free and forced association exercises and hierarchical evocation (Tables 4 and 5).

Table 4

Frequency and ranking of words freely associated with the word “history” by students

	Global Frequency	Frequencies in the first position	Frequencies in second place	Frequencies in third place	Frequencies in fourth place
Évènement [event]	90	28	27	13	22
Guerre [war]	44	5	15	16	8
Fait [fact]	37	10	16	7	4
Important [important]	26	2	10	4	10
Date [date]	25	5	8	6	6
Évolution [evolution]	24	3	6	10	5
École [school]	23	6	7	3	7
Étude [study]	21	2	4	7	8
Personnage [person/figure]	19	3	7	6	3
Ancien [old]	17	2	10	3	2
Politique [politic]	17	3	3	7	4
Temps [time]	17	6	3	6	2
Ancêtre [ancestor]	16	1	8	4	3
Historique [historical]	16	4	6	3	3
Intéressant [interesting]	16	-	2	7	7
Connaissance [knowledge]	14	4	4	3	3
Culture [culture]	14	4	5	2	3
Cœur [heart] ¹⁰	13	4	3	2	4
Compréhension [understanding]	13	4	3	3	3
Marquant [marking]	13	5	3	2	3
Cours [class]	12	-	3	4	5
Matière [subject]	12	5	5	1	1
Apprentissage [learning]	11	1	1	6	3
Histoire [history]	10	4	1	2	3
Livre [book]	10	2	3	3	2
Quebec	10	2	3	2	3
Vieux [old]	10	3	3	1	3

Table 5*Frequency and ranking of words (in French) in forced association with the word "history" by students*

	Global Frequency	Frequencies in the first position	Frequencies in second place	Frequencies in third place	Frequencies in fourth place
Faits [facts]	135	21	37	38	39
Culture [culture]	122	18	33	37	34
Chronologie [timeline]	121	20	39	29	33
Dates [dates]	108	29	28	30	21
Mémorisation [memorization]	82	24	27	16	15
Personnages [person/figure]	75	10	16	20	29
Célèbres [famous]	72	10	15	19	28
Société [society]	60	4	15	21	20
Interprétations [interprétations]	37	5	6	10	16
Temps [time]	34	3	11	9	11
Étude [study]	34	10	12	2	10
Récit [narrative]	30	4	6	14	6
Sources [sources]	26	2	5	12	7
Critique [critique]	23	4	5	8	6
Durée [length]	22	2	9	3	8
Esprit [thinking]	22	4	4	8	6
Narration [narration]	21	2	5	11	3
Évaluation [evaluation]	21	6	7	5	3
Futur [future]	19	2	8	3	6
Examen [examination]	17	2	7	5	3
Plaisir [pleasure]	17	5	3	4	5
Présent [present]	13	5	2	3	3
Facile [easy]	12	3	2	3	4
Difficile [hard]	11	2	4	3	2
Diplôme [diploma]	10	4	1	3	2

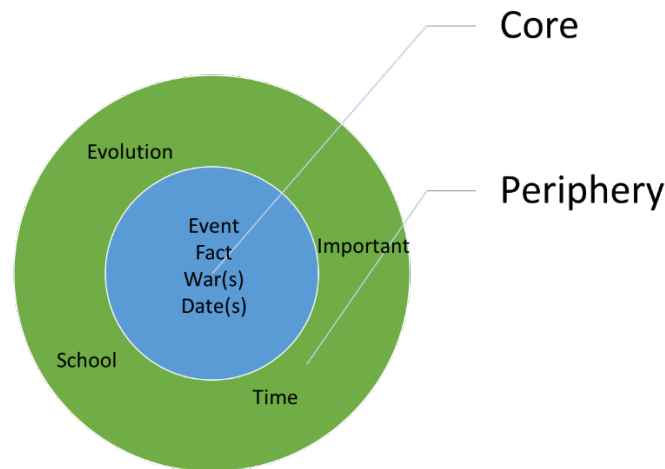
In the free association exercise on the word "history", it is possible to see the relative importance of the words "event", "war", "fact", "important", "date", "evolution", "school" and "study" (Table 2). A total of 1,483 words were logged in this exercise, with 25.5% excluded from our calculations (e.g., conjunctions). To streamline our analysis, only words occurring at least 10 times were retained.

For the forced association exercise on the same word, respondents were provided with a list of keywords that had been selected following the pretest and discussions with teachers, and asked to choose and rank, in order of importance, four words from the list. In total, 1,383 words made the list and 16% were excluded from further analysis (Table 3). As with the free association results, only words occurring more than 10 times were retained.

In light of these results, applying Central Core Theory and taking into consideration the global frequency and the hierarchical position, we found that the social representation of history among our student sample appears to be arrayed around four keywords: "event", "fact", "war" and "date" (Figure 4).

Figure 4

Student respondents' social representation of history



For the peripheral elements, we opted for “evolution”, “important”, “time” and “school”. When it came to choosing these, we favour words from the free association exercise results, reasoning that this would better reflect the respondents’ own thinking, unprompted by any suggested word bank (i.e. the forced association word list).

Teacher epistemology

Before being interviewed, seven of the eight secondary history teachers who agreed to participate in our study took part in free and forced association exercises ranking certain words of interest.

Table 6

Frequency of words (in French) freely associated with the word “history” by teachers

	Frequency	Number of cases	% of case
Passé [past]	3	3	42,86%
Compréhension [Compréhension]	2	2	28,57%
Identité [identity]	2	2	28,57%
Interprétation [interpretation]	2	2	28,57%
Présent [present]	2	2	28,57%
Agit [act]	1	1	14,29%
Anticipation [anticipation]	1	1	14,29%
Changements [change]	1	1	14,29%
Chemin [way]	1	1	14,29%
Connaissance [knowledge]	1	1	14,29%
Critique [critical]	1	1	14,29%
Découverte [discovery]	1	1	14,29%
Démarche [approch]	1	1	14,29%
Enquête [survey]	1	1	14,29%
Esprit [thinking]	1	1	14,29%
Explication [explanation]	1	1	14,29%
Fait [fact]	1	1	14,29%
Fierté [pride]	1	1	14,29%
Partage [share]	1	1	14,29%
Perspective [erspective]	1	1	14,29%
Pouvoirs [power]	1	1	14,29%
Questionnement [questionning]	1	1	14,29%
Temps [time]	1	1	14,29%
Évènements [events]	1	1	14,29%

Table 7*Frequency of words (in French) in forced association with the word “history” by teachers*

	Frequency	Number of cases	% of case
Angoisse [anxiety]	4	4	57,14%
Passé [past]	4	4	57,14%
Stress [stress]	4	4	57,14%
Culture [culture]	3	3	42,86%
Faits [facts]	3	3	42,86%
Évaluation [evaluation]	3	3	42,86%
Difficile [hard]	2	2	28,57%
Diplôme [diploma]	2	2	28,57%
Examen [examination]	2	2	28,57%
Étude [study]	2	2	28,57%
Actuelle [current]	1	1	14,29%
Facile [easy]	1	1	14,29%
Forme [shape]	1	1	14,29%
Futur [future]	1	1	14,29%
Inutile [useless]	1	1	14,29%
Plaisir [pleasure]	1	1	14,29%
Présent [present]	1	1	14,29%

In the free association exercise (table 6) on the word “history”, some recurring words were suggested: “Past” was mentioned by respondents three times (ranked in first and fourth position). “Understanding” (first and third), “identity” (first and fourth), “interpretation” (first and third) and “present” (second and third) were all mentioned twice. Words related to “interpretation” (e.g. “understanding”, “interpretation”, “explanation”) and “identity” (e.g. “pride”, “identity”, “culture”) also emerged.

In the forced association exercise (table 7), the word “past” was brought up on three occasions in the first position and once in the fourth positions. “Anxiety/stress” was chosen four times in the second and the fourth position. “Culture” and “facts” were both selected three times in first and third position. “Evaluation” was selected three times and ranked second.

It appears that teachers place the past at the center of their representation of history. In their view, history serves to understand, interpret, and construct identity. For this group of respondents, history in a secondary school setting is closely associated with the idea of evaluation and anxiety.

Teachers were also asked to complete the BHQ questionnaire (Maggioni, 2010; Maggioni, VanSledright, & Alexander, 2009). As only seven questionnaires were administered, we did not feel it would be meaningful to conduct the same statistical analysis we did for the student cohort. However, we were able to apply the classification of the questions used in the student questionnaire, divided into the three stances (copier, borrower and criterialist) generated by the tool (i.e., the result of principal axis factoring) to measure the degree of agreement relative to each of the epistemological stances of the teachers participating in this exercise.

Table 8 presents the relative degrees of agreement of the participating teachers with the three stances investigated in the questionnaire. The closer the average value was to “1”, the more likely the teacher was to agree with the stance, while disagreement was expressed with values closer to “6”.

The analysis of this average led us to conclude that all the teachers in our sample lean toward a criterialist view of history, given that their averages (situated between 1 and 3.5) express a greater degree of agreement.

Table 8

Degree of agreement relative to copier, borrower and criterialist stances among participating teachers

Teacher	Average agreement with copier stance questions	Average agreement with borrower stance questions	Average agreement with criterialist stance questions
1	4.25	3.75	2.78
2	5.00	4.50	2.63
3	3.88	3.75	2.22
4	3.43	4.00	3.13
5	3.71	3.25	2.63
6	3.80	3.75	3.25
7	4.00	3.75	3.00

Lastly, we concluded our investigation with a thematic analysis of the teacher interviews. A cluster analysis of occurrences of ideas using Jaccard's coefficient helped us visualize the links between the themes conveyed in the teachers' definition of history. In order of importance, we see first the dominant theme of "identity", strongly linked with the themes of "culture" and "passion". These are also closely linked with the duo of "not repeating the mistakes of the past" and the "future". The second most important grouping would be the one related to "society(ies)" and having many "perspectives" to "understand" it (them). Next in descending order are the themes of "ancestry", "politics", the "student-teacher relationship" and "teaching approaches". There is also a strong correlation between the duo "History as a Science versus History Education" and "recounting history". Another interesting grouping for our analysis is that formed by the themes linking the importance of studying the history of "minority groups", "heritage" and "understanding the past". Finally, we noted that "interpretation" and "memorization" were often coupled together and connected to the idea of using history to develop a "worldview", and to a lesser extent, engaging in a "conversation," "historical process," and "knowing the past." One last pairing of note was "critical thinking" and "curiosity".

Limitations

While our sample size too small to be generalized to the entire population. We must also consider the fact that a participant in a study on epistemological positioning may tend to show greater epistemological sophistication to satisfy the researcher's projected requirements, through the social desirability effect (Therriault, 2008). We also had to deal with the constraints associated with the global Covid-19 pandemic, which tinged the responses we obtained with, among other things, allusions to distance learning, which was not a phenomenon under study here. In addition, our data collection was based on the voluntary participation of respondents, so it is conceivable that we obtained feedback from students with a relatively positive relationship to history. Despite these limitations, our study has enabled us to paint a picture of certain trends and phenomena present in the population studied.

Discussion

Through the BHQ questionnaire and the open-ended questions in our survey tool, we were able to glean students' views of history and thus understand the representations of history they developed during their school years. We examined these representations through the epistemological parameters identified by Lee and Ashby (2000), Maggioni (2010) and Maggioni et al. (2009). From the interview with the teachers, we found that students tended to be malleable in their epistemological stances, depending on the learning situation they encountered: likely to

take a more criterialist stance in a student/teacher discussion setting, but retreat to a copier stance and use tools such as memorization during an exam. This piece of information helps us to understand the surprising fact that some students can agree with two, apparently, opposite stances in the BHQ questionnaire. Factors that would explain this phenomenon are many and varied: being taught by different teachers through their educational background, learning, and being introduced to history as a science, the view of history among the general public (Rosenzweig, 2000) or in-class pedagogical activities, to name but a few. This finding was corroborated by the responses to the BHQ questionnaire, where students would agree with one question describing the copier stance concerning one particular memory but adopt a criterialist stance on another reminiscence. This malleability, when presented to the teachers who participated in the explanatory interviews, seems to be in line with what they have observed in their own classrooms and with what is called the wobbling or epistemic inconsistency (VanSledright & Maggioni, 2016).

Our free and forced association exercises revealed that teachers do place the past at the center of their representation of history and that history is used to understand, interpret, and construct their students' identity. The BHQ questionnaire made it possible to confirm that all the teachers in our sample lean toward a criterialist view of history. We were also able to demonstrate the proximity between the key ideas of history, "past" and "culture", which are followed, at a second level, by those of "society" and "identity" then by the ideas of "fact", "politics", "heritage", "critical thinking", "event", "understanding", "path" and "today".

Conclusion

The aim of this article was to trace the social representations of the history of students about to take the single ministerial test, and those of the teachers who accompany them. We were able to document the malleability of the social representation of history among teenagers. We were also able to see, in the interviews, that teachers encourage their students to connect with their past by introducing them to a culture and a construction of identity through intellectual curiosity and the study of history. This type of history education is used to develop critical thinking when considering diverse perspectives in historical or societal settings. An analysis of the teachers' views on how they use history to help to acquire a shared social vision in developing a group identity among students. It is therefore possible to connect the dots between the societal aspect of the student's representation of history, as reflect in the thematic analysis, and how teachers use history in class. While resisting the temptation to reduce this association to a simple cause and effect, there is a need here to reinforce this aspect of representation.

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Endnotes

1 For information on epistemological stances which aren't domain-specific, see Hofer, B. K., & Pintrich, P. R. (1997). The Development of Epistemological Theories: Beliefs About Knowledge and Knowing and Their Relation to Learning. *Review of Educational Research*, 67(1), 88-140. <https://doi.org/10.3102/00346543067001088>

2 You can find the tool developed by Maggioni, L., VanSledright, B., & Alexander, P. A. (2009). Walking on the Borders: A Measure of Epistemic Cognition in History. *The Journal of Experimental Education*, 77(3), 187-214. <https://doi.org/10.3200/jexe.77.3.187-214>

3 We chose this methodology over the one elaborate by Bouhon (2009) for its straightforwardness that suits our goal with the teenage population.

4 While previous researches were in exploratory mode with this construct, which motivated the use of principal component analysis, we chose principal axis analysis, as we had a theoretical basis established by Maggioni et al. (2009) implying that constructs must emerge (Jean, 2017) (i.e. the three postures of copier, borrower, and criterialist). Thus, it can be seen that our analysis is based on three axes, whereas Maggioni et al., in principal component analysis, was based on two components with an opposition between two postures.

5 A cluster analysis shows how closely associated the ideas in the sample are. To do that, we also used the Jaccard similarity coefficient to evaluate the similarity of the sample set. This analysis enabled us to assess the closeness of the ideas evoked by the participants during their interviews.

6 You can find the tool developed by Maggioni, L., VanSledright, B., & Alexander, P. A. (2009). Walking on the Borders: A Measure of Epistemic Cognition in History. *The Journal of Experimental Education*, 77(3), 187-214.
<https://doi.org/10.3200/jexe.77.3.187-214>

7 The groupings used to classify items according to epistemological postures depend on principal axis analysis, as found by the American (Maggioni, 2010; Maggioni et al., 2009) and Spanish (Miguel-Revilla & Fernández Portela, 2018) teams that have used this tool. Thus, for our Quebec participants, 8 items were classified as copier, 4 as borrower and 11 as criterialist. The Cronbach's alpha for each stance were 0.640 for copier, 0.548 for borrower and 0.714 for criterialist.

8 Related to the tool we used, the closer the average value was to "1", the more likely the participant was to agree with the stance, while disagreement was expressed with values closer to "6". The original BHQ is coded between 1 (strongly disagree) and 6 (strongly agree).

⁹ The large number of students with no dominant postures is simply explained by the fact that many respondents remained in the central levels of the Likert scale and did not compromise to a posture.

10 In French, knowing something "par cœur" [at heart] means to have memorized it: it's a plausible explanation for the presence of that word.