

Retooling the teaching of history: Refining a unit targeting conceptions about differing  
historical accounts

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## ABSTRACT

We report on two implementations of a unit designed to teach mature conceptions about differing historical accounts, offered in the 2008/2009 and 2009/2010 school years. Each offering of the unit involved approximately 90 eleventh-grade social studies students in the area of greater Vancouver, Canada, and revolved around the question, “Has Canada become a more compassionate country over the last 100 years?” In the course of the unit, students examined primary source evidence (period newspaper articles, legislation and photos) about historical events chosen to support differing views on this question. Students discussed their interpretations of this evidence in an on-line forum in preparation for a whole-class debate. Data are examined reflecting students’ pre- and post-unit conceptions about the reasons for historical accounts to differ, and their engagement in a concluding classroom debate around the central question of the unit. We discuss several adjustments made to the design of the unit between the two implementations, assess their efficacy, and discuss what our data suggest about the theoretical premises embodied in our unit design.

## INTRODUCTION

Youth growing up in a democratic society inevitably encounter historical accounts as part of the implicit or explicit rationale for present day decisions. Consider, for example, the suggestion of U.S. Vice President Dick Cheney in 2003 that troops arriving in Iraq would be “greeted as liberators” by the Iraqi people (Russert, 2003). This prediction seemed to be an intentional allusion to the welcome that U.S. soldiers received in Europe during World War II; yet that was a very different invasion under very different circumstances, with ultimately different results.

If students are to understand and assess such uses of historical accounts independently, they must understand that historical accounts differ, and they must appreciate the variety of reasons *why* they can differ. These “metahistorical” conceptions about the nature of historical narratives and their construction are challenging to teach (Lee, 2004; Seixas, 2006). A number of documented efforts have been made in North America to develop curriculum materials and teaching strategies that will aid teachers in teaching mature metahistorical conceptions (e.g. Sandwell, 2005; Saye & Brush, 2002). However, there have been few documented efforts to progressively test and refine such curricula and pedagogical strategies over time. This is regrettable, because many teaching innovations do not work as well as they might on the first attempt (Collins, Joseph, & Bielaczyc, 2004), and there is important theoretical potential in understanding why a curriculum that achieves its intended goals in one setting may fail to do so in another (Clarke & Dede, 2009).

We have been involved in a three-year effort to develop, field test, evaluate and improve an eleventh-grade social studies unit that aims to enrich students’ conceptions

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about why historical accounts may differ. We report on two implementations of this unit in two different schools. We discuss the evaluation work that took place around each implementation, the design revisions made for the second implementation based on findings from the first, and the apparent impact of these design changes on both students' involvement in the activities of the unit and their metahistorical conceptions.

### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

If we believe that a meta-level understanding of historical knowledge should be part of students' preparation for life in democratic society, two questions become urgent. First, what sort of understanding should students reach? Second, given the well-documented importance of students' prior conceptions in learning new ideas (Bransford, Brown & Cocking, 2000), how can we understand the various pre-conceptions from which students begin to develop the more complex understanding that educators desire for them?

While there are many possible answers to these questions, one useful framework for addressing them comes from the work of Denis Shemilt (1987, 2000). As part of the National School Councils History 13-16 project in the United Kingdom, Shemilt conducted research into the development of adolescents' thinking about historical evidence and methodology. Shemilt's 4-stage developmental model, based on many hours of interviews with British adolescents, presents a compelling and coherent account of the development of adolescents' thinking about historical evidence and research methods. Shemilt's model is widely known and well respected among social studies scholars. For convenience, we will describe it briefly here.

At the lowest level of understanding, Stage 1 of Shemilt's model, students take knowledge of the past as given. The only difficulty they associate with history is the

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difficulty of reading the stories and remembering them. By extension, they think of historians as no more than good memorizers of stories about the past. Students attain a Stage 2 understanding when they realize that the past does not speak with a single voice: knowledgeable people do disagree in their accounts of the past. However, the only explanations a Stage 2 thinker can muster for this disagreement are that the evidence may not be reliable (e.g., some people saw the events in question while others did not) or that some reporters may be biased. At this stage, students think of historians as people who are somehow able to sniff out false or biased stories about the past, “read off” the truth from sources, and piece together the one true account.

Students at Stage 3 are distinguished by the understanding that historical knowledge can never be absolutely certain. At best, we can use the evidence available about the past (some of which is other peoples’ stories, but which also includes relics and non-narrative records) to reduce the uncertainty of our knowledge. In line with this view, Stage 3 thinkers understand historical scholarship to involve reasoning methodically with evidence to come up with an account that represents the most likely and believable reconstruction of events. Stage 3 thinkers understand historians as people who know how to do this methodical work.

Finally, in the 4th and most advanced stage of Shemilt’s model, historical knowledge is viewed as kaleidoscopic. Students recognize that it is possible to have several equally defensible accounts of the past – particularly if they have been constructed to address different questions. In this view, a historical account is understood to be a creature of its time. It is constrained by the available evidence, but is also shaped

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by the questions it seeks to answer. Like a kaleidoscope, history's "patterns are ordered and determinate, but do not yield a single stable picture" (Shemilt, 2000).

Because every student enters the classroom with his or her own preexisting ideas about the nature of historical knowledge, teaching metahistorical conceptions is necessarily a matter of conceptual change (Vosniadou, 2007). Scholars have proposed that when one's goal is conceptual change, learners must be made to experience dissatisfaction with their existing understanding of a phenomenon in order to be open to developing a new one (Limon, 2001; Posner, Strike, Hewson, & Gertzog, 1982). For this reason, we aimed for our curriculum to unsettle students' pre-existing understandings with regard to historical accounts.

In line with this goal, we developed a concept for history teaching that employed a modified jigsaw approach (Brown et al., 1993) to produce cognitive conflict and, consequently, conceptual change. We call this design concept "Metahistorical conceptual change through cognitive conflict", or MC4. The unit we used to test our design concept centred on a historical question dealing with change over a long span of time (the 20th century), and a set of resources and activities that would arouse conflict about appropriate answers to this overarching question.

### THE DESIGN OF "COMPASSIONATE CANADA?"

The design of our unit emerged from a collaborative process involving several seasoned social studies teachers. Between August 2007 and August 2008, our research team held three half-day design meetings involving three experienced secondary teachers. In the first meeting it was agreed that our goal should be to develop a new 11<sup>th</sup> grade social studies unit that would afford opportunities to develop students' metahistorical

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conceptions, without sacrificing curriculum coverage. In the following meeting, we converged on four design parameters for the new unit:

1. Students would pursue the question, “Has Canada become a more compassionate country in the last 100 years?”
2. Students in each class would be assigned to pursue the question using evidence about *different* historical events during the 100-year period (e.g. the Japanese Internment during World War II, Canada’s treatment of Tamil refugees in the 1980s), bringing the evidence together at the close of the unit.
3. The provided materials should include all the primary and secondary source evidence students would need.
4. The unit should take no longer than two weeks to implement.

During the third design meeting, the research team took notes while the three teachers generated a list of all the historical events in the prescribed British Columbia eleventh-grade social studies curriculum that they saw as related to the overarching question of the unit. Over the following months, the researchers carried out archival research to determine which events could be best documented in a way that high school students could understand.

At a small workshop in September of 2008, the research team demonstrated an online archive of primary source materials we had developed for eight of the events that teachers had identified in the third design meeting. The sources included newspaper articles, photographs, and period legislation. Some of the events documented in our archive had been deliberately chosen to illustrate the compassion of Canada’s government or its people towards those in need (e.g. Canada’s response to Tamil refugees

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in the 1980s), while others were chosen to call that compassion into question (e.g. the internment of Japanese Canadians during World War II). On its surface the unit followed a jigsaw approach in which students would pursue independent research about related events and bring the results together; but we deliberately constructed students' study materials in such a way that the "pieces" (if fully understood) would *not* fit together. Depending on which historical events they were assigned to examine, students would likely arrive at different stances on the issue of Canada's compassion, and encounter cognitive conflict during the wrap-up debate for the unit.

The archive of source materials was hosted in Knowledge Forum (Scardamalia & Bereiter, 1994), a highly visual web-based environment that could be used both to provide online access to the source materials, and a secure space in which students could formulate and discuss rival interpretations of the sources. Figure 1 shows a timeline we posted in Knowledge Forum for one of the eight documented events used in Implementation 1. The grey boxes on the timeline are links to downloadable source materials.

It is worth noting that of the eight events documented for students in Implementation 1, most had timelines beginning early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. As shown in Figure 1, one timeline associated with Canada's immigration policy began in 1908 and ended in 1915. Other timelines provided to students began in the 1920s, '30s and '40s. Only one timeline, dealing with court challenges made to laws following changes to Canada's constitution in 1982, started at a time that students might view as "recent." This perception had important implications in Implementation 1, as we will discuss below.



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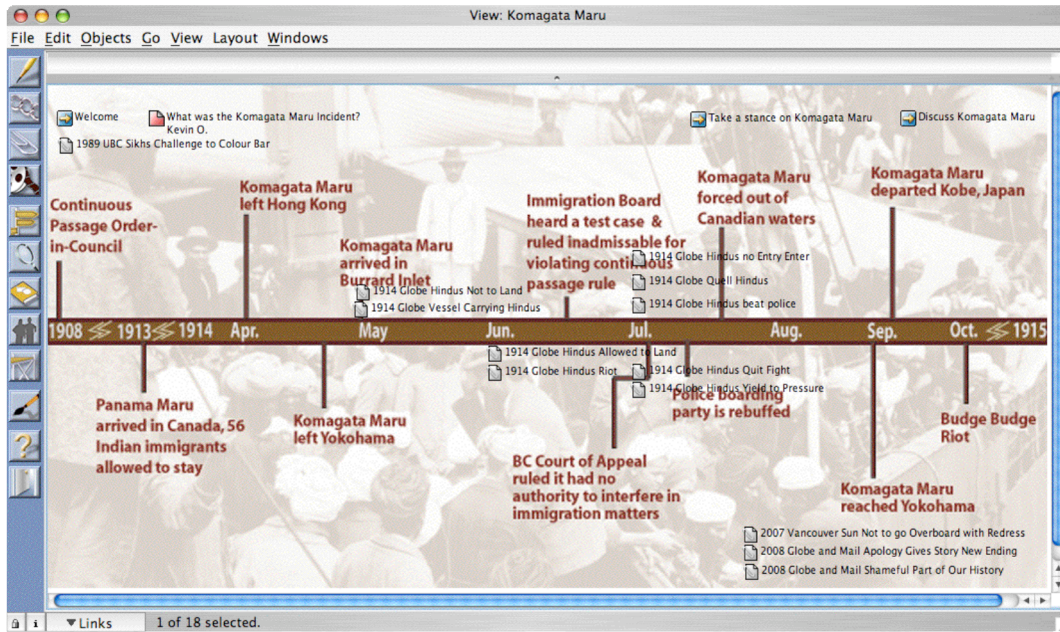


Figure 1: A timeline view for one case in *Knowledge Forum*,  
with source documents attached

In our initial conception, students were to be formed into small groups. Each group was to be assigned one of the historical events to examine, and asked to develop an evidence-based stance on the overarching question of the unit (has Canada become more compassionate over the last 100 years) based on this event. At the conclusion of the unit, each group would present its stance to the class, and attempt to persuade their classmates of their stance, during a live “horseshoe” or “U debate” (Fielding, 2005). During this debate, students would arrange themselves on a large U shape in the school library, gymnasium or other large space. One end of the U would represent the position “yes, Canada has become more compassionate” while the other would represent “no, Canada has not become more compassionate.” As the debate progressed, students would be encouraged to change positions on the U if they were persuaded by what they heard from

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their differently-informed peers. This activity was intended to both provide a stage for cognitive conflict to arise and a venue in which to resolve it.

In the run up to the U debate, students were required to develop speaking notes for themselves, and post these publicly on an online “horseshoe” provided in Knowledge Forum (see Figure 2). Critical feedback on these speaking notes was provided by history graduate students who had volunteered to serve as online “mentors,” but all participating students could read them if they liked. Each box on the horseshoe in Figure 2 represents either a set of student speaking notes, or feedback provided by a graduate student mentor (connected by an arrow).

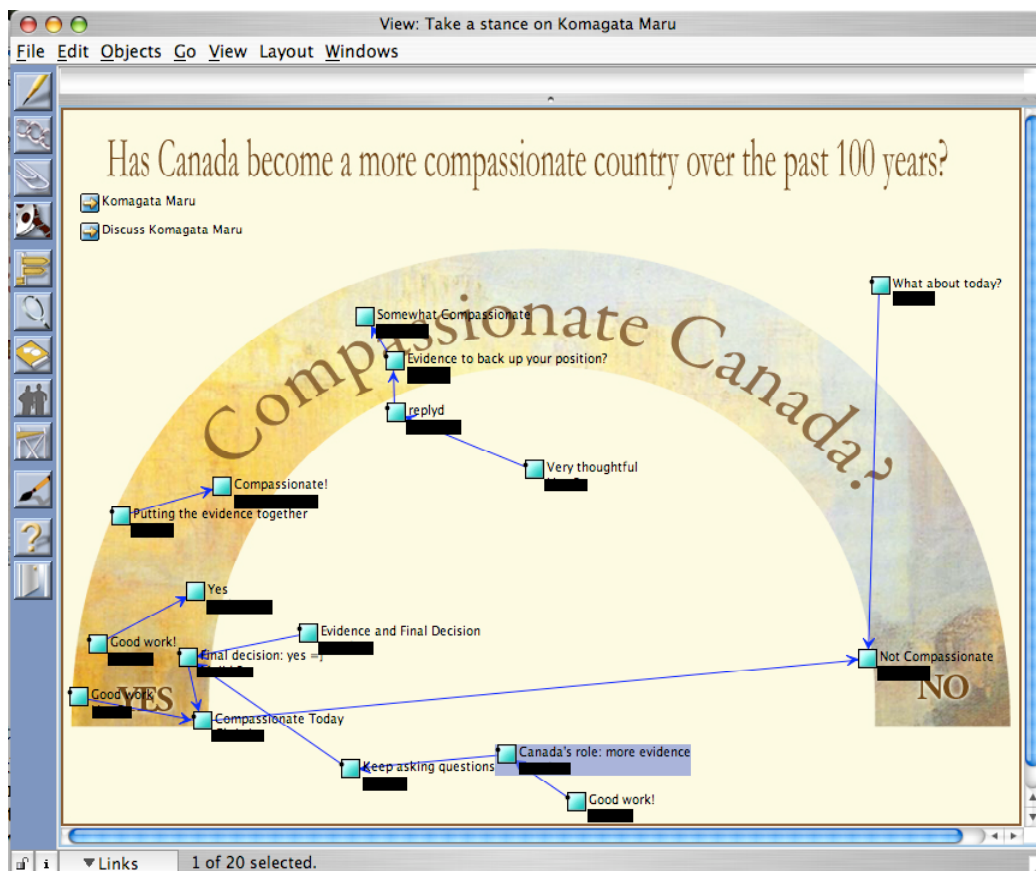


Figure 2: A “take a stance” view from implementation 1. (Usernames are obscured for participant anonymity.)

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Our expectation was that through this design, students would come to recognize the complexity of historians' work in at least three ways: first, through experience working with primary and secondary sources to address a large-scale question about change over time; second, through encountering the juxtaposed views of students with in-depth knowledge of different relevant events; and third, through interactions with historians providing mentoring on-line. (We do not report in detail on the online mentoring in this paper, since this design feature of the unit did not alter between Implementations 1 and 2.)

We expected these experiences, along with guidance from teachers in class, to lead to more mature conceptions about why historical accounts might differ. For example, we expected students to lose faith in the naïve Stage 2 ideas that differences between accounts can always be explained as a result of storyteller bias, or that eyewitnesses to events have a monopoly on historical truth (Shemilt, 1987). We also expected students to gain an appreciation of the uncertainty inherent in historical scholarship, in which extant evidence is always incomplete, and may not directly align with present-day questions (such as the question at the centre of our curriculum unit).

Several critical changes were made to the enactment of this design between the 2008/2009 school year and the 2009/2010 school year. However, the design goals and basic framework remained the same. Details of changes in the implementation, and their consequences for student engagement and conceptual change, will be discussed in detail below.

## METHODS AND DATA SOURCES

Our orientation to this research was design based (Brown, 1992; Collins et al., 2004). In the design-based approach to educational research and development, researchers' theory-based conjectures are embodied in an educational design that is implemented under realistic classroom conditions (Sandoval, 2004). Qualitative and quantitative data are gathered to examine both whether a design is effective, and provide insight into *how* it works (or fails). During later analysis, effort is made to assess whether the embodied conjectures are strengthened or invalidated by classroom experience, and insights gained from each implementation are used to adjust the design of the innovation for the following implementation.

Each implementation we discuss below involved approximately 90 students from three ethnically and socioeconomically diverse public high school classes in the Pacific Northwest. In the first implementation, all 90 students were taught by the same teacher (in three separate classes). The second implementation (of the revised curriculum) involved 90 students taught by two different teachers at a similarly diverse school in the same geographic area. Data for this study comprise observation notes from each day of the unit's implementation; video of the culminating U debates; and students' pre- and post-unit responses to a 17-item survey designed to gauge their conceptions about differing historical accounts (O'Neill & Guloy, 2010). We elaborate on the collection and analysis of each data source below.

### *Classroom observations*

During both implementations of the unit, each class session was observed by at least two members of the research team. At least one researcher took field notes, while the other

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often provided technical support to students with Knowledge Forum, and aided the teacher with the implementation of the unit as requested. The observer taking field notes was directed to observe how the materials and activities were interpreted (by both the students and the teacher), logistical stumbling blocks to teachers' and students' work (e.g. computer and network problems, limitations of the classroom or lab space), intellectual challenges to teachers' and students' work (what they found confusing or what "stumped" them); students' interactions with one another during teamwork; emotional responses of teachers and students to the unit and its component parts (e.g. individual assignments, assessment); and signs of students' interest or disinterest in the unit and its component parts. Approximately 100 pages of typed field notes were produced over the course of each implementation. Each set of field notes covered 8 school days during which the Compassionate Canada unit was implemented.

### *U Debate Videos*

Each U debate was captured on video from at least two different camera angles by a researcher with extensive filmmaking experience. The camera footage was later edited together to produce a single recording that captured the event as well as possible. In analyzing the recordings of the U debates, our aim was to capture the students' grasp on the historical events they were asked to study, the sophistication of the arguments they constructed with respect to the overarching question of the unit, and the depth of their understanding of the question itself.

We treated each "turn" (student speech) in the debate as a unit of analysis, but did not aim to compare individual students' performances within or between the debates. Instead, since speakers sometimes took multiple turns and built on the arguments of

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others, referring to evidence that had previously been introduced, we analyzed each debate as a feat of collective intelligence. We took the overall sophistication of the arguments presented in each whole debate as an indication of how well that implementation of the curriculum unit had achieved its intended goals.

With these goals in mind, coding categories were developed inductively by two researchers involved in both implementations of the unit. Once an initial set of codes and definitions was developed, each researcher applied the codes independently to a segment of video including four student speeches. The two coders discussed discrepancies between their codings in depth, negotiating differences and creating a common interpretation. This resulted in refined, less ambiguous code definitions. The revised coding scheme was applied to another segment of video containing six student speeches, with the two researchers again coding independently. This process was repeated until an acceptable level of inter-coder reliability (calculated using Cohen's Kappa) was obtained. For the analysis reported below, Kappa ranged from a high of 1.0 for 10 of the 15 codes, to a low of 0.406 for one code, calculated on a set of 10 debate turns coded independently.

Appendix A shows the code definitions used in the analysis reported below. Rather than discussing each code in detail here, we will explain how the four families of codes reflect our pedagogical goals for the unit.

Four codes were created to capture different ways in which students defined the central concept of the unit, "compassion" during the debate. If students appealed to a *definition* provided or developed in class (DEF) this was viewed as good practice, but not necessarily a reflection of deep understanding. We created three further codes to capture

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inventive ways in which students operationalized “compassion” and linked it to their historical sources: reading compassion into the *rapidity* with which Canada responded to those in need (RR), dismissing an action that might appear compassionate but was arguably driven by a self-serving *motive* (MO), or downplaying the weight of empathetic actions on the grounds that Canada was merely “protecting its own” rather than being *generous to others* (GO). We view these elaborative definitions as evidence of deep thinking about the concept of compassion.

Another set of eight codes was created to capture different facets of students’ work in stating and supporting their positions. These codes were used to note, for example, students’ clear declaration of a *position* (POS), effort to set the events of a case in the *context* of surrounding events (CON); recall of specific *details* (such as names, dates, numbers of people or amounts of money) from the source documents that students were assigned to read (DET); and their explicit use of these details as *evidence* in supporting a position (EV). Another code was created to capture students’ occasional use of *analogies* to support their interpretation of the evidence with respect to the question of the unit (AN). We viewed the use of such analogies as evidence of especially deep thinking about the cases. Finally, one code captured students’ use of relevant *personal* experiences to support a stance (PER).

Since the unit’s design relied strongly on the debate to bring conflicting accounts together, a pair of codes was created to capture the degree to which students took account of one another’s positions during the debate, either *building onto* one another’s statements (BO), or explicitly *rebutting* them (RB). Finally, one code (QC) was created to capture occasional instances in which students *questioned the comparability* of the cases

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provided to them, arguing that they could not be used as evidence of change or lack of it. We viewed such questioning as reflective of especially deep thinking about the materials and the question of the unit.

During each implementation, more than one debate had to be held due to school schedules (three debates in Implementation 1, two debates in Implementation 2). For the analysis that follows, we selected what we considered the strongest debate of each implementation. Each video included approximately one hour of student talk time. Codes were applied in a binary fashion to each “turn” or speech in the debate (ie. each turn either received a particular code or did not). Since students’ turns in the 2008 debate averaged twice as long (about six minutes) as those in the 2010 debate (roughly three minutes), it was necessary to establish a fair basis for comparison. To avoid Implementation 2 having higher counts of some codes (such as DEF and EV) simply because those students took shorter turns in the debate, we calculated the number of code occurrences for every five turns in the debate.

### *Analysis of Metahistorical Conceptions Surveys*

The Historical Account Differences (HAD) survey (O'Neill & Guloy, 2010) was developed to gauge students’ conceptions about why historical accounts may differ. The survey consists of four questions:

- What makes somebody a historian?
- How do historians know what caused an event in the past?
- Why do historians write new books about events that were already written about before?



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- If a historian is learning about the events of a period and finds two stories about them that disagree, what should she do?

Students respond to each question by rating their agreement with four or more non-exclusive statements. Each of the 17 statements was written to reflect the conceptions of students at one of the four stages hypothesized by Shemilt. For example, the question “What makes somebody a historian?” asked students to rate the following four statements on a scale from 1 (disagree strongly) to 7 (agree strongly):

- They have studied a lot about the truth of what happened in the past, and remember it (Stage 1)
- They can figure out which stories about the past are biased or untrue and put together the one true story (Stage 2)
- They don’t necessarily know exactly what happened, but can use evidence to figure out what probably did (Stage 3)
- They investigate new questions that people ask about what happened in the past and what it means today (Stage 4)

The HAD survey was designed to build upon Shemilt’s (1987) previous findings about adolescents’ metahistorical conceptions, while avoiding assumptions about whether these conceptions clustered in the coherent stages previously formulated. Lee & Shemilt (2003) suggested that researchers, particularly in North America, needed to empirically examine the applicability of the UK stage models to their own settings in the present day.

Our first step in analyzing students’ responses to the HAD survey was to perform a factor analysis on the rating scale items. Factor analysis is a statistical data-reduction technique based on examining the common variance among a set of variables (Williams,

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1992). Common variance can be thought of as the apparent overlap between what two different measures are measuring. When applied to a large set of variables such as our survey responses, factor analysis can produce a smaller set of abstract “factors” that reflect the underlying relationships in the data (Kachigan, 1991). In this case, we used factor analysis to examine how students’ responses to 17 scaled-response questions on HAD cohered.

The factor analysis was performed with *PASWStatistics 18* using Principal Axis Factoring and Varimax rotation with Kaiser normalization. To provide the most robust factor solution possible, we included in this analysis 208 sets of available student responses to the HAD scalar items. These included responses from research participants in both implementations of Compassionate Canada, plus a smaller group of demographically similar students who completed only the survey as part of an earlier study. Both pre- and post-unit responses were included in the factor analysis, on the assumption that regardless of whether the participants had completed the survey once or twice, the underlying factor structure should be the same. Results from our analysis are presented in Table 1.

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Factor	Survey items	Factor Loading	Researchers' Interpretation	Reliability ( $\alpha$ )
1	[Historians know what happened in the past because] They consider several possibilities and make an educated guess based on the evidence available for each one	.686	Evidence-based Educated Guess	.613
	[Someone is a historian because] They don't necessarily know exactly what happened, but can use evidence to figure out what probably did	.528		
	[If a historian is learning about the events of a period and finds two stories about them that disagree, she should] Make an educated guess about what most likely happened, based on other evidence	.488		
	[Historians know what happened in the past because] They look at what several people have said about what caused the event, and decide who is the most believable	.430		
2	[Someone is a historian because] They can figure out which stories about the past are biased or untrue, and put together the one true story	.550	One True Story	.604
	[Someone is a historian because] They have studied a lot about the truth of what happened in the past, and remember it	.537		
	[Historians write new books about events that were already written about because] New evidence is discovered that might change the story	.523		
	[Historians write new books about events that were already written about because] As time goes on, new questions come up that historians need to answer	.485		
3	Historians should not write new books because older ones are better	.575	Demand for Simplicity	.550
	[Historians writing new books] makes no sense because there should only need to be one book [about any single event in the past]	.497		
	[If a historian is learning about the events of a period and finds two stories about them that disagree, she should] She should ignore both stories. It does not make sense for historians to disagree	.434		

Table 1: Factors identified in the HAD survey responses

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Eleven of the 17 HAD survey items loaded on the three factors shown in Table 1.

Reading the output of a factor analysis and labelling the factors is necessarily an interpretive process (Williams, 1992), because the output tells the researcher a set of variables have an underlying relationship (based on shared variance), but not what this relationship is. Thus, interpreting a factor structure is a matter of theorizing about what the set of variables loading on each factor has in common, and how each set is distinct from the others. In naming a factor, it is common practice to emphasize the variable with the strongest factor loading. In this case, since we are working with students' responses to a survey, we then theorize about how students may understand the whole set of variables loading on the factor to be related to the strongest-loading variable.

Working in this way, we interpreted Factor 1 to represent the strength of a student's belief that historians' accounts result from a kind of evidence-based, educated guesswork. Three of the four survey items loading on this factor were written to capture Shemilt's Stage 3. Two items include the phrase "educated guess", and the third talks about "what *likely* happened, based on other evidence" (emphasis added). The fourth, weakest-loading item was written to capture Stage 2 conceptions; however it coheres with the other three items if one reads the problem of deciding "who is the most believable" as requiring an informed but uncertain judgment.

We interpreted Factor 2 to represent the strength of a student's belief that historians' accounts are attempts to express the one true story about a past event. The survey items with the strongest loadings on this factor capture this idea well. The strongest-loading item (written to capture Shemilt's Stage 2) talks about "the one true story", and the next (written to capture Stage 1) talks about "*the truth* of what happened

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in the past.” The third item (written to capture Stage 3) mentions new evidence that might change *the* story (emphasis added). The most challenging item to interpret together with the others is the fourth, and weakest-loading one, which was written to capture Stage 4. It coheres with the previous three items under the interpretation that each new question about the past should have a single true story to answer it.

We interpreted Factor 3 to represent the strength of a student’s desire for simplicity in history. The strongest-loading item was written to capture Shemilt’s Stage 2, and the remaining two were written to capture Stage 1. The label “demand for simplicity” we use here is intended to capture the tone of frustration that the three items share about the very existence of divergent accounts. This factor has a strong conceptual coherence with Shemilt’s Stage 1.

The next step in our analysis was to examine the reliability (internal consistency) of the items loading on each factor. If responses to a set of survey items are not sufficiently consistent, measurement specialists consider that these items cannot be interpreted as measuring the same underlying construct. A traditional measure of reliability, Cronbach’s alpha, was computed for the set of variables loading on each of the three factors, to evaluate the internal consistency of the respective items (see Table 2). Factor 3, while interesting, did not meet the generally-accepted threshold for reliability of .60, so this set of variables was excluded from further analysis.

Rather than attempting to simplify each student’s beliefs about historical accounts to a single stage, we computed an “epistemic profile” for each participant by averaging his or her responses to the items loading on Factor 1 and Factor 2 (that is to say, each student’s Likert responses were averaged). This yielded two scores for each student that

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can be thought of as reflecting the salience of the “evidence-based educated guess,” and “one true story” ideas when they are confronted with scenarios in which different stories about past events exist. Pre-unit and post-unit epistemic profiles were computed for each student involved in each implementation of our unit.

### IMPLEMENTATION 1

#### *Participants*

Our first implementation of Compassionate Canada took place in 2008 with almost ninety students from Hanover Secondary<sup>1</sup>, a public school in Metro Vancouver. Hanover serves 500 students whose families speak many different languages in the home. Students participating in our trial came from three sections of Mr. George’s eleventh-grade social studies class. Demographic details for the participants are provided in Table 2.

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<sup>1</sup> A pseudonym. All school, student and teacher names have been altered to preserve anonymity.

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Number of research participants	39	
Percent of females	43.6	
Average hours spent on homework per day (Mean)	1.9	
Average hours per week spent working (Mean)	8.4	
Average grades in school (Median on the rating of categorical statements)	“About half A and half B”	
Mother’s highest level of education (Percent Frequency)	High School	10.3
	Some Post-High School	15.4
	College Diploma	17.9
	Bachelor’s Degree	23.1
	Graduate Degree	10.3
Father’s Level of education (Percent Frequency)	High School	10.3
	Some Post-High School	7.7
	College Diploma	10.3
	Bachelor’s Degree	28.2
	Graduate Degree	28.2
Percentage of students bound for university	66.7	

Table 2: Demographic data for Implementation 1 participants

Eighty-seven students were approached for research consent, of whom 41 provided the required approval forms. The overall consent rate was 47%. However, for the demographics in Table 2 and some of the analyses below, not all participants provided all the necessary data (due to absence on a survey administration day, for example).

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### *Implementation*

On the first day, Mr. George and the first author introduced students to the unit, and led brief class discussions about what the word “compassion” meant. On the following class day, students were assigned to teams and cases by Mr. George, who also appointed a team leader based on his knowledge of the students.

Students spent most of the remainder of the unit in one of the school’s two computer labs, examining the archival documents related to their assigned cases. In the narrow aisles of the computer lab, it was difficult for students to physically arrange themselves around a single computer screen so they could examine sources and share interpretations together. Several of the four-person teams seated themselves along a row of the computer lab, where they could talk as conveniently as the space allowed. Other teams divided up their work and seated themselves far away from one another, speaking rarely.

We became aware during the implementation that the class had not done any group work previously in that school year; so they had no established routines for group work. Some teams did as we expected and divided the evidence for their assigned cases, with each student reviewing a portion of the documents and reporting back to the others. Other groups divided major tasks for the unit, such as reviewing the evidence, writing speaking notes for the horseshoe debate, and presenting as part of the debate. The latter arrangement clearly undermined the pedagogical purpose of the unit, as not every student had necessarily reviewed the provided evidence in depth.

On the final class day prior to the U debate, students returned to the classroom. Mr. George reminded students that they would be required to take a position on the



question of the unit, and defend it based on the evidence assigned to them. Mention of

Short Form	Code	Occurrences /5 turns
DEF	Explicit use of definitions/criteria for "compassion"	0.0
RR	Rapidity of response	0.0
MO	Motivation (image, selfless desire to help)	0.3
GO	Generosity to "others"	0.0
POS	Takes a clear position	2.2
DET	Mention of details from documents	2.2
EV	Use of evidence in argument	2.2
-EV	Misunderstanding/misrepresentation of evidence	0.6
SS	Sweeping statement without evidence	0.3
CON	Historical contextualization	1.1
PER	Relevant personal experience	0.0
AN	Use of analogy	0.0
BO	Build-on to another speaker	0.0
RB	Rebuttal to another speaker	0.0
QC	Questioning comparability of cases	0.0

Table 3: Coding results for the a U debate from Implementation 1

“evidence” created mild panic among some students, who asked for additional time in the computer lab. One member of each team was allowed to return to the lab to locate additional evidence, while the remainder of the team worked together on their speaking notes for the debate.

### *The U Debate*

During the U debate for implementation 1, it became obvious that the unit had not given rise to the degree of cognitive conflict that we had intended with the unit design. There was very little range in the positions students staked out in the debate, with the great majority of students clumped together on the “yes” side (ie. Canada has definitely become more compassionate). After each team spoke, the teacher prompted other teams for questions, but there were none; nor did the teams’ speeches explicitly acknowledge the positions taken by others.

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Several things stand out in the results of our coding of the U debate from Implementation 1 (Table 3). First, there was no interaction between the students. Though they did connect their positions to evidence, students did not rebut or build on one another's positions.

Also worthy of note is the fact that in Implementation 1, students did not engage so deeply with the material that they generated relevant analogies for interpreting the events they studied, connected personal experiences with the question of the unit, or questioned whether one of the cases provided was comparable to another with respect to the central question of the unit.

### *Survey Results*

The lackluster U debate was accompanied by disappointing results from the metahistorical conceptions survey. As Figure 3 shows, students began the unit without a particularly strong commitment to the Factor 1 idea that historical accounts require evidence-based speculation (a mean of 5.28 on the 7-point scale). It was expected that by working with primary source evidence to address a challenging question dealing with change over time, and interacting with historian mentors, students' scores on this scale would increase; but by the end of the unit, students' views appear to have changed little. Students' mean score on Factor 1 rose to 5.34 by the end of the unit, however this change did not reach statistical significance. A Wilcoxon Signed Rank test showed the difference between the means was not significant at the .05 level ( $p=.088$ )

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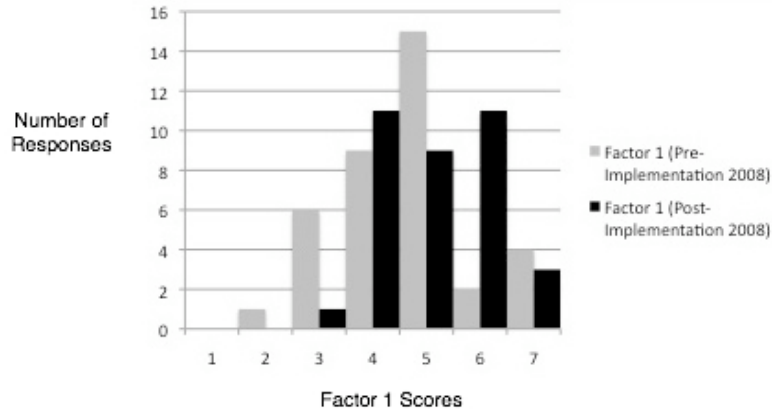


Figure 3: Pre and post distribution of scores on the Factor 1 “Evidence-based Educated Guess” scale for Implementation 1

With respect to Factor 2, we had expected students’ faith in the idea of a single true story to lessen as a result of encountering conflicting stories based on related evidence.

However, perhaps not surprisingly given the lack of interaction in the U debate, no significant change took place on this scale (see Figure 4). Students’ mean Factor 2 score was 5.28 (on the 7-point scale) at the start of the unit, and rose only slightly to 5.34 by the end of the unit. Again, this change was not statistically significant.

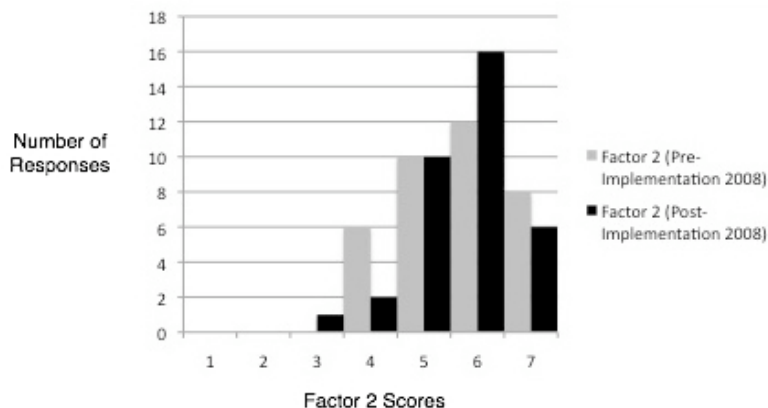


Figure 4: Pre and post distribution of scores on the Factor 2 “One True Story” scale for Implementation 1

### LESSONS LEARNED

A few days after the U debate, Mr. George led a whole-class discussion in which students generated a list of things that worked for them, and didn't work for them about the unit.

When prompted about what didn't work, some students said they felt their answers to the central question of the unit (has Canada become more compassionate) was predetermined as "yes" because the cases depicting a lack of compassion were all distant in time, and were not matched with similar recent or current-day events. In their view, in the absence of recent events that paralleled the abuses of the past (for instance, racial discrimination), one *had* to assume that improvement had been made. Clearly, this assumption would have reduced the range of stances that students would take on the question of the unit, and therefore cognitive conflict.

Mr. George's focus group, together with our classroom observations and the survey data, led to a number of design changes prior to the second implementation. First of all, the central question of the unit was changed to validate the view that progress had not *necessarily* been made. The revised question read "to what extent, if any, has Canada become more compassionate over the last 100 years?"

Second, in response to the observation that students rarely appealed explicitly to a notion of compassion, either in their written work or in the end-of-unit U debate, we decided to spend more time at the start of the unit defining "compassion" and giving students an active role in developing their own criteria for it. It was not entirely clear that students understood this concept, despite how central it was to the unit; so a lesson plan was developed specifically around this.

## Re-tooling the Teaching of History

Third, our materials were re-organized in a way that we hoped would make comparison across time much easier for students. Rather than using only events that would be viewed by students as distant in time, each timeline depicted both an event from early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and a thematically-related event from late in the 20<sup>th</sup> or early in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. As in Implementation 1 however, the evidence provided on some timelines suggested an increase in compassion, while others suggested a decrease. For example, one pair of events invited the examination of changes in Canada's immigration policy, and suggested a decrease in racial profiling and a generally more "fair" approach. Another timeline invited students to compare Canada's response to Tamil refugees in the 1980s and in the post-9/11 era, and suggests a less open, more skeptical stance.

Fourth, instead of assigning cases to teams (which had divided labor in ways that sometimes subverted our goals), students were made individually responsible for examining the evidence. Students continued to work in groups during the second implementation, but under circumstances orchestrated by the teachers. This change was made to eliminate the poor division of labor observed among some teams in Implementation 1, and the lack of understanding demonstrated in the U-discussion, which we viewed as a direct consequence. In order to make the workload manageable for students working alone, the number of source documents for each event was reduced.

## IMPLEMENTATION 2

### *Participants*

Mr. George was not available to teach the revised Compassionate Canada unit in 2010 because he had taken an administrative position; so through professional connections, two new teachers were approached about implementing the new version. Neither Ms.

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Pearson nor Ms. Byron had been involved in the project to this time, but both were experienced teachers who were sympathetic with the goals of the project and enthusiastic about collaborating with us.

Between them, Ms. Pearson and Ms. Byron taught three classes of 11<sup>th</sup> grade social studies at Hillside Secondary, a suburban school in the Vancouver area. Like Hanover, Hillside Secondary has an ethnically diverse student body. Eighty-three students were approached for research permission, and 62 provided all the required forms. This resulted in a research permission rate of approximately 75%. Students providing research permission were broadly comparable to those involved in Implementation 1 with respect to their average grades in school, parents' education, and plans for postsecondary education (see Table 4).

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Number of students	58	
Percent of females	62.1	
Average hours spent on homework per day (Mean)	1.90	
Average hours per week spent working (Mean)	2.16	
Average grades in school (Median on the rating of categorical statements)	“About half A and half B”	
Mother’s highest level of education (Percent Frequency)	High School	16.7
	Some Post-High School	14.6
	College Diploma	20.8
	Bachelor’s Degree	37.5
	Graduate Degree	8.3
Father’s Level of education (Percent Frequency)	High School	8.3
	Some Post-High School	20.8
	College Diploma	14.6
	Bachelor’s Degree	37.5
	Graduate Degree	16.7
Percentage of students bound for university	75.9	

Table 4: Demographic data for Implementation 1 participants

### *Implementation*

As in Implementation 1, the teachers and researchers introduced the unit together.

However at the beginning, an entire lesson centred on each class developing and reaching consensus on a set of criteria for “compassion.” The criteria naturally bore a family

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resemblance from class to class, but they were expressed in students' words, and students seemed invested in them. Students' definitions generally incorporated the ideas that compassion involves both empathy for others who are suffering, and action to relieve their suffering.

As before, students were assigned to examine particular events documented in the Knowledge Forum database; they did not choose them. However as mentioned above, the events were paired thematically, with one from the distant past and one from the recent past presented on each timeline. Each student was thus responsible to study two thematically-related events, source evidence for which was provided on a single timeline. For example in Figure 5, students assigned to the "citizenship" timeline studied both the internment of Japanese-Canadians during World War 2 and the evacuation of Lebanese-Canadians from Lebanon during the 2006 armed conflict with Israel. This arrangement was designed to enable students to think more easily about the question of whether Canada had or had not become more compassionate over time.



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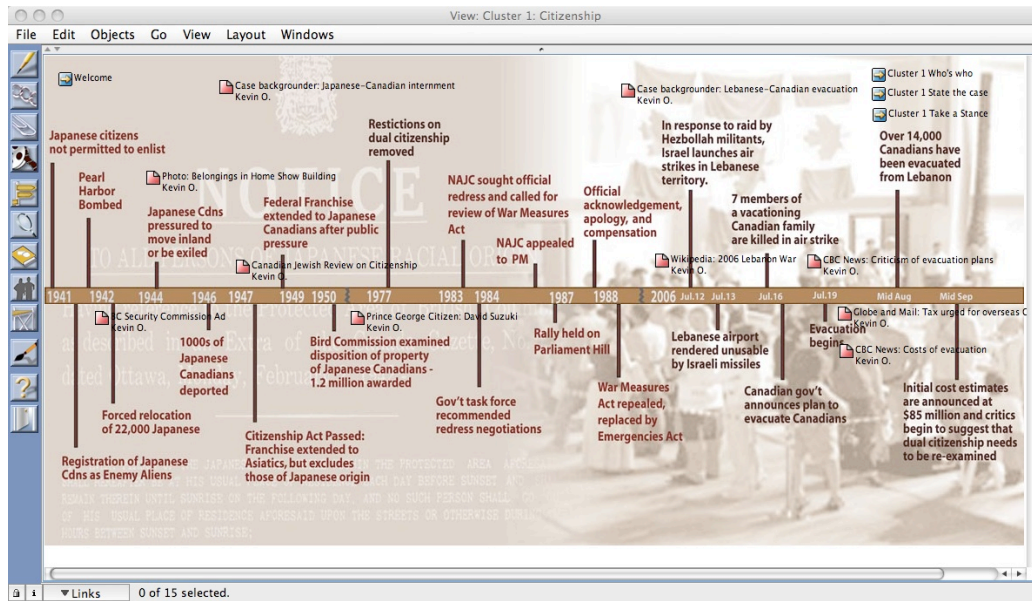


Figure 5: a timeline from Implementation 2, with thematically-related “distant” (Japanese-Canadian internment) and “recent” (Lebanese-Canadian evacuation) events

In Implementation 2, students again spent substantial time in the computer lab working with the source materials provided on Knowledge Forum; however this work seemed more focused because students were individually responsible for their work, and could not hope for a “free ride” from teammates. Periodically, when teachers felt it would be useful, students who had been assigned to the same timelines were brought together for small group discussions. In one of these discussions, students spoke in their “event pair” groups about what they felt their positions should be on the central question of whether Canada had become more compassionate over the previous century. Some cross-talk was also facilitated among the groups in class, raising issues such as what it meant when the government apologized and provided compensation for its past actions (as occurred on several timelines).

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As in Implementation 1, students prepared written speaking notes in preparation for the U-debate, and posted these in Knowledge Forum, where history graduate students provided critical feedback. Due to the 2-week time frame agreed upon for the unit, students had only two days to read the graduate students' advice and take it into account prior to the end-of-unit U debate.

### *The U Debate*

As the coding detailed in Table 5 shows, the U debate at the conclusion of Implementation 2 was far livelier than the debate in Implementation 1. The difference seems partly due to the fact that students took more widely varying stances on the question at the start of the debate. In fact, after reading the speaking notes students posted online, we were forced to re-label the ends of the classroom "U" at the last minute. One end remained "yes, Canada has become more compassionate" (as it was in Implementation 1); but the other became "Canada has become *less* compassionate." While for the most part students took the position that Canada had become more compassionate over the 20<sup>th</sup> century, in each debate a handful of students took and vigorously defended the stance that Canada was more compassionate early in the century than later.

This range of stances provided greater cognitive conflict than in Implementation 1, and as a result we observed more students both building onto one another's remarks or directly rebutting them.

Short Form	Code	Occurrences /5 turns
DEF	Explicit use of definitions/criteria for "compassion"	1.4
RR	Rapidity of response	1.9
MO	Motivation (image, selfless desire to help)	1.1
GO	Generosity to "others"	0.8
POS	Takes a clear position	5.0
DET	Mention of details from documents	4.2
EV	Use of evidence in argument	3.9
-EV	Misunderstanding/misrepresentation of evidence	0.8
SS	Sweeping statement without evidence	0.0
CON	Historical contextualization	2.5
PER	Relevant personal experience	0.8
AN	Use of analogy	0.8
BO	Build-on to another speaker	1.9
RB	Rebuttal to another speaker	0.8
QC	Questioning comparability of cases	0.6

Table 5: Coding results for the a U-debate from Implementation 2

The additional classroom time invested in having students define the concept of “compassion” appears to have paid dividends both with respect to their explicit use of defining criteria during the debate, and their thoughtful elaborations on the concept of compassion. As shown in Table 5, students in Implementation 2 connected the evidence provided to them with the concept of compassion in three ways not defined explicitly by the class. In some cases students argued that Canada was not sufficiently compassionate to those in need because it was too slow to respond. In other cases, it was argued that Canada’s motives for generous behavior were selfish, aimed primarily at improving its image on the world stage. Such positions problematized the question of the unit further, which suited our pedagogical goals well.

More striking, students invoked a number of appropriate analogies in the course of arguing their positions. One example is provided by a student we will call David. His

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classmate James had stood strongly for the position that Canada had become much more compassionate over the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. As evidence, James cited Canada's evacuation of thousands of Lebanese-Canadians from Lebanon during the conflict with Israel in 2006, at a cost of roughly 94 million dollars. David downplayed this case, arguing that Canada evacuating its own citizens was "like a mother protecting her own child." As he saw it, "the true measure of [our] compassion is how we respond to another group of people" (ie. non-Canadians).

Another appropriate analogy was invented by Alex, in response to a classmate who had argued that Canada had clearly become more compassionate by repealing immigration laws that specifically barred or impeded immigrants from China. Today, Canada's immigration laws stress applicants' useful skills and employment prospects rather than their race or country of origin. Alex's rebuttal used the analogy of a street fight. He argued that today, Canada discriminates by socioeconomic status rather than by race. Perhaps this is not as bad, but it is still not compassionate. He argued, "it's like if you beat up 20 guys in the street, and then like 20 years later you beat up two guys. That don't mean you improved, right? You're still a bad [person], but you're just doing less things."

Alex was also one of two students in Implementation 2 who directly connected his position to personal experience. He and another student who were themselves recent immigrants to Canada used their experiences to evaluate the position that Canada's use of education and skills as a way to determine eligibility to emigrate was more defensible than its prior use of racial profiling. Alex argued that it was presumptuous for

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immigration officials to judge the potential of an entire family based on the occupation of the primary breadwinner.

### *Survey Results*

The more vibrant experience of the second implementation was reflected in the results of the metahistorical conceptions survey. Whereas in the first implementation students made marginally significant pre-post gains on the Factor 1 (evidence-based educated guesswork) scale, the change measured in Implementation 2 was significant. Students began the unit relatively skeptical of the idea that a historical account was the result of evidence-based speculation, with a mean score of 4.34 on the Factor 1 scale. By the end of the unit, however, the mean score on this scale had increased to 4.76, a change which was statistically significant ( $p=.007$ ) according to a Wilcoxon Signed Rank test. We computed an overall effect size of .306. See Figure 6.

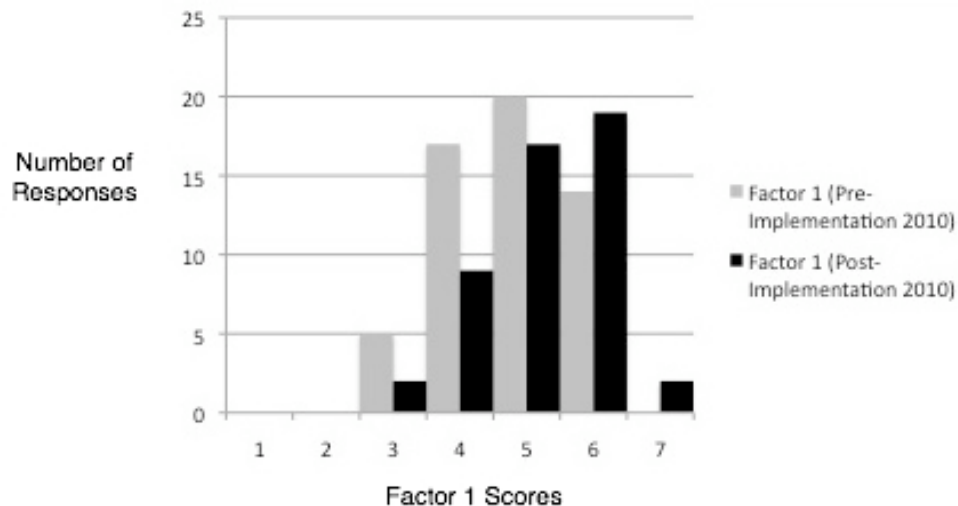


Figure 6: Pre and post distribution of scores on the Factor 1 “Evidence-based Educated Guess” scale for Implementation 2

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This change may have resulted from students' greater engagement in the U debate, as reflected in the rebuttals and build-ons we coded (Table 5). We speculate that this dialogic engagement, in turn, was made possible by the change to the overall question of the unit (which became less leading) and the new "event pair" structure of the materials, both of which were informed by student responses to Implementation 1.

Our results with respect to the Factor 2 "One True Story" scale were, however, again disappointing (see Figure 7). Students began the unit strongly committed to the idea that there should be one true story about a given event in past time (with a mean score of 5.41 on the 7-point scale), and their experiences in the unit apparently did not alter this commitment. The mean post-implementation score was just 5.45. The difference between these pre- and post-unit means was not statistically significant.

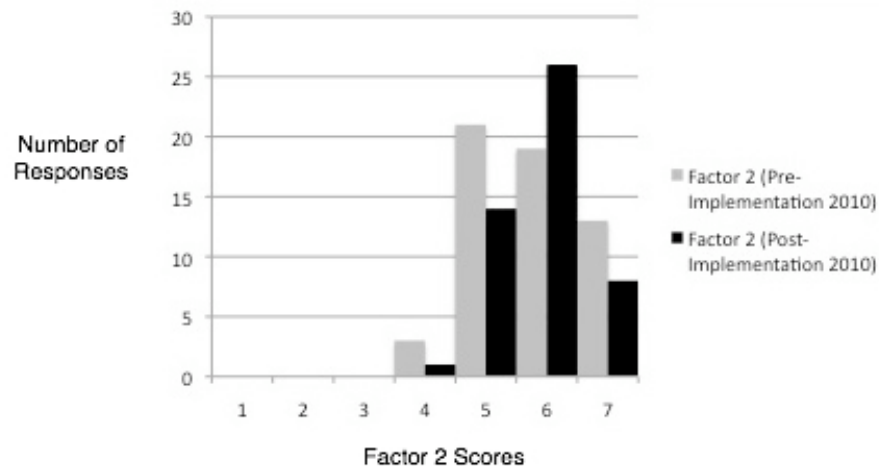


Figure 7: Pre and post distribution of scores on the Factor 2 "One True Story" scale for Implementation 1

## DISCUSSION

The past 25 years have witnessed a continuing surge in the volume of research focusing on the teaching and learning of history. The literature in this field has provided an ever-richer picture of the development of historical understanding, and its impediments. In short supply, however, is literature that documents efforts to embed the pedagogical implications of this research in curriculum artifacts. There is also a dearth of literature reporting on what we refer to in this paper as the process of “retooling” curriculum in response to classroom experience.

Curriculum designs are often shaped over time through a deliberative process undertaken by key stakeholders. We believe work that merely presents a summative sketch of a curriculum artifact and its use, without detailing the deliberative process of its genesis, surrenders important theoretical potential by failing to show how the artifact developed over time, and what experiences were taken into consideration as it changed. If we aim for well-refined curriculum that is robust in the face of widely varying school conditions, history education scholars need to write and share accounts of curriculum refinement more often, and together unpack what they imply for the theoretical premises embodied in our designs. This kind of scholarship aims toward the development of a critical connoisseurship of curriculum design (Eisner, 1985) that we believe can contribute uniquely to the public good.

With this objective in mind, the work reported here attempted to extend the tradition of design-based research into history education, by tracing the development of a curriculum concept over two implementations during which parallel data were collected. With this approach, we were able to document improvements in both the processes (ie. U

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debate participation) and outcomes (ie. metahistorical survey responses) resulting from refinements to the design of our unit. As a result of changes inspired by teachers' and students' suggestions and our own observations, more vigorous participation in the activities of our unit took place, greater cognitive conflict occurred, and significant increases were observed in students' appreciation that historical scholarship grapples with inherent uncertainty – a notion that Shemilt associated with Stage 3 thinking.

A problem worth speculating about and addressing in future classroom research is the apparent persistence of students' faith in "one true story" about past events, across both implementations of our unit. The unit design for Compassionate Canada was intended to shake students' belief in the idea of one true story, which Shemilt associates with Stage 2 thinking; however our analysis of both students' participation in live debates and their responses to the HAD survey suggests that this idea persisted *at the same time* that students' appreciation for the inherent uncertainty of historical scholarship increased. This finding is inconsistent with Shemilt's theoretical framework, and may be a sign that as he and Lee suggested could be the case (Lee & Shemilt, 2003), the four-stage developmental framework itself does not fit the present-day reality of our students' thinking about history.

With respect to our design, we suspect that that the culminating U-debate itself may have implied for students a single true answer to the question of the unit, toward which they were meant to converge. Thus, the focal question and the U-debate together may have reinforced the idea of "one true story." To unseat students' faith in one true story about the past, our unit may need to be followed up with another, specifically designed to assail this notion. Trofanenko's (2008) report of work with three eighth-grade



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students suggests that it is possible in the North American context to lead students to interrogate the idea of one true story. This experience points toward a possible direction for our future design work.

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APPENDIX A: CODING SCHEME FOR SPEAKERS' CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE U-DEBATES

Short Form	Code	Definition
<i>Defining Compassion</i>		
DEF	Explicit use of definitions/criteria for "compassion"	Speaker refers to the criteria for compassion developed by the class
RR	Rapidity of response	Rapidity of response (or lack of it) is mentioned as a criterion for compassion ("right away," "dropped everything")
MO	Motivation (image, selfless desire to help)	Purity of motive (or lack of it) is mentioned as a criterion for compassion ("image," "reputation")
GO	Generosity to "others"	Generosity toward "others" (not one's own citizens) is mentioned as a criterion for compassion
<i>Stating and Supporting a Position</i>		
POS	Takes a clear position	Speaker takes a clear position on the question
DET	Mention of details from documents	Speaker mentions details from one or more source documents (names, dates, locations, etc.)
EV	Use of evidence in argument	Speaker connects details from source documents to his or her position by an explicit warrant.
-EV	Misunderstanding/misrepresentation of evidence	Speaker clearly overlooks evidence, misrepresents or exaggerates it
SS	Sweeping statement without evidence	Speaker makes assertions without any reference to evidence – even evidence brought in by other speakers
CON	Historical contextualization	Speaker sets the case(s) within the context of surrounding events
PER	Relevant personal experience	Speaker shares personal experiences relevant to the assigned case or pair
AN	Use of analogy	Speaker uses relevant analogies to support interpretation of the evidence (implies deep processing of the material)
<i>Taking Classmates' Positions into Account</i>		
BO	Build-on to another speaker	Speaker extends the argument made by a specific previous speaker, or draws on evidence provided by others.
RB	Rebuttal to another speaker	Speaker rebuts the argument made by a specific previous speaker
<i>Questioning the Curriculum Materials</i>		
QC	Questioning comparability of cases	In taking or defending a position, speaker questions the comparability of two or more cases

APPENDIX B: HISTORICAL ACCOUNT DIFFERENCES SURVEY

This set of questions is designed to help us understand how you think about history and historians.

*There are no wrong answers. We are interested in your ideas.*

**Question 1**

What makes somebody a historian? (Rate your agreement with each statement)

	<b>Disagree Strongly</b>				<b>Agree Strongly</b>		
They have studied a lot about the truth of what happened in the past, and remember it	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
They can figure out which stories about the past are biased or untrue, and put together the one true story	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
They don't necessarily know exactly what happened, but can use evidence to figure out what probably did	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
They investigate new questions that people ask about what happened the past, and what it means today	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

**Question 2**

How do historians know what caused an event in the past (for example, the internment of Japanese Canadians during the Second World War)?

	<b>Disagree Strongly</b>				<b>Agree Strongly</b>		
They consider who had a motive to make it happen and examine evidence as far back as they've decided the story needs to go	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
They consider several possibilities and make an educated guess based on the evidence available for each one	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
They look at what several other people have said about what caused the event, and decide who is the most believable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
They read only what has been written or recorded about the event by the people who were actually there when it happened.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

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### Question 3

Over time, historians have written many books on the same people and events (for example, Canadian confederation, the War of 1812). Why do you think historians write new books about events that were already written about before? (Rate your agreement with each statement)

	<b>Disagree Strongly</b>				<b>Agree Strongly</b>		
New evidence is discovered that might change the story	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
They shouldn't because there only needs to be one book	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Historians should not write new books because older ones are better	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
As time goes on, new questions come up that historians need to answer	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Older historians made mistakes in weighing the evidence. These need to be corrected	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

### Question 4

If a historian is learning about the events of a period and finds two stories about them that disagree, what should she do? (Rate your agreement with each statement.)

	<b>Disagree Strongly</b>				<b>Agree Strongly</b>		
She should ignore both stories. It does not make sense for two accounts to disagree	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Learn about the authors and try to understand how they looked at and felt about the events	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Make an educated guess about what most likely happened, based on other evidence	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Try to figure out which author is less biased or was closer to the events, and use only that one	1	2	3	4	5	6	7