MULTI-ETHNIC HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS’ UNDERSTANDINGS OF
HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE:
IMPLICATIONS FOR CANADIAN HISTORY EDUCATION

by

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ABSTRACT

Sociocultural studies in history education demonstrate that “positionality” influences how one understands history. In this study I investigated the relationship between students’ ethnic, cultural and/or national identities and their ascriptions of historical significance to moments in Canada’s past. Twenty-six grade 12 students living in an ethnically diverse urban centre in British Columbia participated.

Phenomenographic research methods were followed, with a range of data informing the findings. In groups, students completed a “timeline task” during which they were asked to make decisions about the historical significance of particular events and themes in Canadian history. Students were asked to describe their ethnic identity and then reflect about the ways in which their ethnic identity may have influenced the decisions they made during the timeline task.

The students in this study employed five types of historical significance consistent with the typology originated by Cercadillo (2000; 2001): contemporary significance, causal significance, pattern significance, symbolic significance and significance for the present-future. It was common for students’ explanations to include multiple types of historical significance.

Students employed three narrative templates to construct the history of Canada and used specific types of historical significance depending on the narrative(s) they used. The narrative templates were categorized as: Founding of the Nation, Diverse and Harmonious Canada and Diverse but Conflicted Canada.

The students’ ethnic identities played a central role in determining which narrative template(s) they employed and the criteria they used to select the
events for their narratives. Many students articulated complicated notions of their identities, with some perceiving that particular “sides” of their identity were at play, or in use, during the research task. Students who collaborated during the timeline activity often interpreted the timeline using different narrative templates.

The students in this study were able to engage in metacognitive thinking because of a research design that pushed them to articulate their beliefs about the relationship between identity (self-ascribed) and the narrative they constructed. Implications for teaching, policy and further research are explored.
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In loving memory of Michael Cromer.
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

On February 17, 2009, the Department of Canadian Heritage’s National Battlefields Commission (NBC) cancelled a planned reenactment of the Battle of the Plains of Abraham, Québec, perhaps the most well known battle of the Seven Years' War. The reenactment was to take place in September 2009, the 250th anniversary of the event. However, when the NBC began to heavily publicize the event in January 2009, historians, politicians and people living in Québec raised concerns. Historians argued that such reenactments do not really promote deep historical thinking, politicians worried how their Francophone constituents would react to such an event and many Francophone Québécois (sovereignists and federalists alike\(^1\)) considered such a reenactment akin to rubbing salt in a 250 year old wound.

Many Canadians living outside of Québec could not understand why the reenactment had been cancelled. Many living in Québec could not fathom that such a reenactment had even been considered. *Globe and Mail* columnist Lysiane Gagnon supported the cancellation, arguing that the Battle of the Plains of Abraham “signaled the end of the expansion of the French language and culture in North America” and that it continues to have “a strong emotional echo in Québec” (Gagnon, 2009, p. A11). Rudyard Griffiths, co-founder of the Dominion Institute\(^2\), balked at the move to cancel the event, arguing that the

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\(^1\) The long and complex history of Quebec sovereignty requires significant exploration that cannot be done here. In the simplest of terms, Quebec sovereignists favour independent statehood for Quebec whereas federalists advocate Quebec remaining a province of Canada.

\(^2\) The Dominion Institute, formed in 1997, is a charitable organization “dedicated to creating active and informed citizens through greater knowledge and appreciation of the Canadian story” (Dominion Institute, n.d.).
NBC’s decision was “a worrying sign that Canadians’ deep-seated compulsion to whitewash the country’s past is very much alive and well” (Griffiths, 2009, p. A10). Konrad Sioui, Grand Chief of the Huron-Wendats, proposed replacing the reenactment with a peace ceremony over which he offered to preside (Dougherty, 2009). Charles Taylor (1993) was right when he observed, “in Canada, even history divides” (p. 25).

Why, 250 years later, is there such controversy over the historical significance of the Battle of the Plains of Abraham? For Francophone Québécois, the Battle of the Plains of Abraham marked the beginning of English Canada’s dominance over Québec. For English Canada, the battle represented a victory that “filled Britain with joy” (Duncan, 1922). Such controversies over historical significance permeate narratives of Canadian history. Is Louis Riel a traitor or a hero? Was the Red River Rebellion actually a rebellion or an act of resistance, as the Manitoba social studies curriculum states (Manitoba Education Citizenship and Youth, 2006)?

The significance of any particular event is derived from how it fits into a larger narrative, and, ultimately, how the historian (or student, or member of the public) relates to that narrative (i.e., what the narrative means to him or her). In English Canada, the Battle of the Plains of Abraham is known as “The Siege of Québec” and is part of a narrative of nation building. In Québec, its significance is seen quite differently. There, it is known simply (and melancholically) as “The Conquest.” Part of the reason for this difference is the tie one establishes between an event and his/her identity. In Québec, “survival” (of Francophone culture and identity) narratives dominate both public and private discourses (Létourneau, 2004) and shape how Francophone Québécois understand themselves and their history. Although many factors shape how an individual (whether an historian, or student, or anyone else) ascribes significance to historical events (e.g., knowledge of the subject matter, interest, past
experiences, familial influences, type of narrative in which the person situates the event) a few studies have demonstrated that an important and thus far under-researched influence on ascriptions of historical significance is identity.

In the past decade, researchers interested in students’ historical understandings have expressed interest in the ways in which one’s identity can shape a person’s interpretations of history. Levstik (1999) argues that research on students’ historical thinking should always include questions of identity:

Making sense out of history – perhaps especially national history – can never be a simple task. This is especially the case in post-colonial, multicultural societies. In these contexts in particular, any investigation of children’s historical thinking is also an investigation of positionality - of children’s different local and present as well as national or international historical contexts. The influence of these contexts makes it difficult to decide what constitutes a nation’s history (p. 4).

A growing body of research on students' historical understandings indicates that the positionality of the learner is a vital component for understanding how one engages in historical thought. Several scholars have begun to recognize the impact of socioeconomic, cultural, political, and gendered factors on students’ understanding of various aspects of history and have incorporated these elements into their research design and data analysis procedures. This research tells us that students, most notably those from ethnically diverse backgrounds, find it difficult to make connections between their family and/or ethnic histories and those which are taught in school. This is particularly true when neither the school nor the teacher make explicit attempts to establish such links. For example, after working with an ethnically diverse group of students, Seixas (1994a) found that although “many students expressed rudimentary historical understandings that could provide a framework for further learning,” these same students “also expressed frustration at the school’s failure to build upon that
framework” (Historical Significance section, ¶ 4). This is problematic for both majority and minority students; the potential to significantly enrich both groups’ understandings of history is lessened when these connections are neither sought nor explored.

In Canada, there is very little information on the relationship between students’ ethnic, cultural or national identities\(^3\) and their understanding of history. In this dissertation I argue that this is a research program that merits close attention. In so doing, I demonstrate that the history education community has not sufficiently theorized the nature of ethnicity (or related concepts) and its relationship to students’ historical understanding. History educators interested in students’ historical understandings must more explicitly investigate how identity, and in particular, ethnic identity, may influence these understandings.

### 1.1 Research Questions and Brief Outline of Study

This study examines the relationship between a student’s ethnic identity and his/her ascription of significance to historical moments in Canada’s past. According to Seixas (1997b), the chief concern of historical significance is about the relationships people in the present establish with past events and the ability to place events (or developments, or people) into a coherent narrative. However, some research suggests that minority students can experience difficulty organizing the history they encounter in school because it often fails to engage with their own prior historical knowledge and understanding of what counts as historically significant (Almarza, 2001; Barton & Levstik, 1998; Epstein, 2000; Levstik, 1999; Seixas, 1993a). Consequently, they are unable to find that “something important about [their] position in the world” that Seixas writes about.

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3 Hereafter shortened to ethnic identity.
This research is located at the intersection of two complementary theoretical frameworks. The first draws on constructivist learning theory which holds that all students come to every learning situation with a store of prior knowledge. Some of this prior knowledge might be accurate but, it is equally true that students may have (and tenaciously hold onto) naïve conceptions or misunderstandings about various concepts as well (Driver & Easley, 1978). Constructivist research aims to discover and understand the nature of students’ prior conceptions in an effort to better shape curricula and refine teaching approaches, and ultimately, increase a student’s ability to incorporate new and more complex knowledge into that which they already know (Hughes & Sears, 2004).

The second theoretical framework informing this study draws on the tradition of socio-cultural studies in education. The emphasis here is on the need to understand the social, cultural and political positions from which students approach learning (Barton, 2001a; Epstein, 1997; Nieto, 1999). Knowing what frameworks students use to make sense of the past is important, particularly for teachers working in schools within a multicultural society: “By understanding how young people from different racial or ethnic groups interpret history and contemporary society…teachers and policymakers can make more informed decisions about what and how to teach social studies subjects to diverse groups of students” (Epstein, 2001, p. 42). Research using a combination of these two frameworks will result in a richer understanding of the variety of prior conceptions influencing students’ understanding of historical significance as it pertains to Canadian history.

The central research questions that framed my study were:

- What criteria do students’ employ to ascribe significance to phenomena in Canada’s past?
What is the relationship between a student’s ethnic identity and his/her ascription of significance to phenomena (such as people, events, places, etc.) in Canada’s past?

This study serves to address the failure of most previous studies (Barton and McCully (2004) is the exception) to directly invite students to reflect on the relationship between their ethnic identities and their explanations of the historical significance of moments in their nation’s past.

I conducted my research in an urban centre in the Lower Mainland region of British Columbia and included Aboriginal, immigrant and Canadian-born (non-Aboriginal) students in my study (26 students in total). I asked students to complete a questionnaire about their demographic information and also asked them write a paragraph describing their ethnic identity “in a way that made sense to them.” I wanted the students’ descriptions to be – as much as possible in a research setting – in their own hands. Then, in small heterogeneous working groups, students completed a “timeline” task modeled on well-established American and European research (Barton & Levstik, 2004; Epstein, 2000; Lee & Ashby, 2000; Lévesque, 2005b; Levstik, 2000). Students were asked to select, out of thirty, the ten most significant events in Canadian history. Several group and individual interviews were held to probe students’ thinking about the decisions they made during the research exercise. The focus of the individual interview was on the students’ understandings of how their ethnic identity may have influenced the decisions they made in the timeline task.

1.2 Significance of Study

This study contributes to the field of history education by offering a unique perspective on an aspect of students’ prior knowledge that has yet to be fully investigated in Canada. It creates an opportunity to develop a deeper understanding of the relationship between a student’s ethnic identity and his or
her conception of historical significance within the Canadian context. Understanding the values, frameworks and knowledge students bring to their understanding of historical significance will help researchers, educators and students better understand how students construct their understandings of the past. This, in turn, has implications for how students locate themselves in larger historical narratives.

In addition, this study contributes to international research on students’ historical understanding and adds to an emerging body of research that has started to examine the links between identity and conceptions of historical significance (Almarza, 2001; Barton, 2001b; Barton & Levstik, 1998; Barton & McCully, 2001; Epstein, 1997, 1998, 2000; Levstik, 1999). To my knowledge, this is the first study to directly ask students about their perceptions regarding the relationship between their ethnic identity and their understandings of historical significance. Previous work has attempted to delineate this relationship, but it has been done entirely from the researcher’s perspective. That is, researchers have made evaluative statements about the relationship between ethnic identity and understandings of history (generally, or regarding specific aspects of historical understanding such as significance) but have not based these conclusions on students’ reflections on the nature of such a relationship. This study is a response to this gap, and sought to explicitly include student voices on this matter.

1.3 Conclusion

In this chapter I have outlined the context, purpose and significance of this study. The remaining chapters are organized as follows:

In Chapter 2, I begin with an exploration of how contemporary theorists employ the terms “ethnicity” and “ethnic identity” as these terms are central to my research question and are integral to my study. The beginning of this chapter
lays the groundwork for the subsequent chapters on data analysis and findings, where I examine conceptions of historical significance and the influence ethnic identity has on these conceptions.

I then turn to an examination of what is meant by “historical understanding” and some of the key theoretical arguments in this field of research. An important element of this discussion is an exploration of the difference between “substantive” concepts in history (those that make up the substance of history) and “second-order” historical concepts (the processes by which we make sense of the past). Understanding the distinction between these two types of historical concepts is integral to understanding the research on historical understanding.

Finally, I move to a more detailed analysis of the conceptual and empirical work on the second-order concept of “historical significance”. I begin by exploring how different theorists have defined “historical significance” and the myriad criteria used to ascribe significance to historical phenomena. Because my study focuses on the relationship between a student’s ethnic identity and his/her understanding of historical significance, I then turn more specifically to an analysis of the studies within this body of literature that focus explicitly on socio-cultural positionality and how this may influence the ways in which students understand significance in history.

In Chapter 3, I begin by describing the research method employed in this study (phenomenography) and explain why this particular method is suitable for my research. I also provide a detailed map of the research design used for data collection and analysis. In addition, I address a number of concerns related to qualitative research; particularly those related to trustworthiness and issues of transferability of research findings.

In Chapter 4, I explore students’ understandings of historical significance. What criteria do students use to ascribe significance to events in Canada’s past?
Which criteria are used most frequently? What events do they view as the most historically significant? What explanations do they provide for their selection of events?

In Chapter 5, I begin by analyzing student responses to the “ethnic identity question” on the questionnaire. I then turn to an exploration of the relationship between students’ ethnic identities and their use of different types of historical significance in the construction of narratives of Canadian history.

In Chapter 6, I revisit my research questions, provide a summary of the study and its findings, and discuss policy implications, implications for teaching practice and pre-service education, and make suggestions for future research arising from this work.
CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

This chapter reviews the literature related to 1) ethnicity and ethnic identity, 2) historical understanding and 3) the concept of historical significance, including research that focuses explicitly on the relationship between students’ ethnic identities and their understandings of historical significance. This chapter lays the groundwork for the data analysis and discussion chapters, which examine students’ conceptions of historical significance and the influence ethnic identity has on these conceptions.

2.1 Ethnicity, Ethnic Identity and Race

In this section, I explore how contemporary theorists employ the terms “ethnicity” and “ethnic identity,” as these terms are central to my research question and are integral to my study. What do we mean when we speak of “ethnicity” or “ethnic identity,” and how do these categories differ from “race,” or other cultural forms of identification? My goal is to provide a concise analysis of contemporary scholarship in this field rather than an historic review of the literature on these concepts.

In the summer of 2002, Statistics Canada, in partnership with the Department of Canadian Heritage, embarked on an exploration of what it means to “be Canadian.” The study, entitled The Ethnic Diversity Survey (EDS), aimed to provide information on the ethnic and cultural backgrounds of the Canadian populace and sought to better understand how Canadians of different ethnic backgrounds interpret and report their ethnicity. At the heart of this study was the concept of ethnic identity.
What is significant about this research is that for the first time Statistics Canada asked “an ethnic identity question” of its respondents (Kaddatz, 2005). The question was phrased as follows:

I would now like you to think about your own identity, in ethnic or cultural terms. This identity may be the same as that of your parents, grandparents or ancestors or it may be different. What is your ethnic or cultural identity? (Statistic Canada, 2002)

Interviewers were not allowed to provide examples but were allowed to accept up to six responses from each participant. This marks an important step in the Canadian government’s recognition of the plurality of identity in general and of ethnic identity in particular. This reconceptualization of ethnic identity as complex, fluid and ever-developing marks an important shift from previous thinking that perceived of it as static, unchanging and determined by birth.

The move by the Canadian government to recognize the complexity of ethnic identity is, in part, a reflection of the influence of critical and postmodern academic scholarship on society’s thinking about ethnicity and identity that has emerged in the last two decades. This work has had important implications on our understanding of ethnic identity and related concepts such as ethnicity. In 1999, Rattansi called for a radical rethinking of ethnicity, wherein

the first ‘postmodern’ move must be to decentre and de-essentialize [our thinking on concepts like ethnicity], by postulating what is often glimpsed but rarely acknowledged and accepted with any degree of comfort: there are no unambiguous, water-tight definitions to be had of ethnicity, racism, and the myriad terms in between (Omi and Winant, 1986, pp. 68-9).

Indeed, all these terms are permanently in-between, caught in the impossibility of fixity and essentialization. (p. 79 - 80, italics in original)
Rattansi’s caution is an important one. Johnston, Gregory, Pratt and Watts (2000) claim that ethnicity “is one of the most difficult concepts to define: researchers disagree on the meaning of the term; social groups differ in their expressions of ethnicity; and some theorists challenged the credibility of the concept in the first place” (p. 235). They go on to explain that,

In contemporary usage, ethnicity is seen as both the way in which individuals define their personal identity and a type of social stratification that emerges when people form groups based on their real or perceived origins. Members of ethnic groups believe that their specific ancestry and culture mark them as different from others. As such, group formation always entails both the inclusionary and exclusionary behavior, and ethnicity is a classic example of the distinction people make between ‘us’ and ‘them.’ (p. 235)

These authors also articulate two major misconceptions about the term ethnicity. The first concerns the use of the term only in reference to minority groups (Johnston et al., 2000). In many regions in North America, the dominant group is most often White and of European descent, and rarely sees itself as “ethnic,” even though it is commonly held that everyone is “ethnic”. This inability, or refusal, of the dominant group to see itself as “ethnic” is due, in large part, to the privilege it wields in society (Carr & Lund, 2007; J. Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1997).

The second misconception occurs “when the terms ethnicity and race are used interchangeably, or when they are seen as variants of the same classification system” (Johnston et al., 2000, p. 235). “Race” is a highly contested concept. It is widely held that the biological foundations of the term “race” have long been discredited. However, the fact that racism, and discrimination based on the idea of “race,” continue to exist cannot be denied. McLaren and Torres (1999) posit that “it is racism as an ideology that produces the notion of ‘race’, not the
existence of 'races' that produces racisms” (p. 47) and argue for “a clear understanding of the plurality of racisms,” including their historical evolution. However, scholars such as Dei, Karumanchery & Karumanchery-Luik (2004) have theorized the saliency of “race” in contemporary society, and “question assertions that place race as an exclusively ideological construct” (p. 27). They argue that,

it is problematic to argue against the reality and utility of the race concept, based solely on the fact that pseudo-sciences backing biological functionality have no scientific grounding. To do so negates the practical applications and circumstances of race’s social, political, economic and material impact on societies in general and on racialized bodies specifically. (p. 32; original emphasis)

Johnston et al. (2000) argue that, while racial identity is most often ascribed by others based on phenotype features, “the most basic difference between race and ethnicity is that ethnic affiliation arises from inside a group; ethnicity is a process of self-definition” (p. 236). In other words, the development of a person’s ethnic identity occurs through social interaction within a cultural group, and personal reflection on what it means to belong to such a group. It is an on-going process, and as Rattansi (1999) noted, above, necessarily retains a certain level of ambiguity.

But others suggest that the process of self-definition also occurs through interaction with members outside of ethnic groups. For instance, Nagel (1994) argues that,

Ethnicity is constructed out of the material of language, religion, culture, appearance, ancestry, or regionality. The location and meaning of particular ethnic boundaries are continuously negotiated, revised, and
revitalized, by both ethnic group members themselves as well as by outside observers. (pp. 152-153)

She goes on to explain that,

Ethnic identity, then, is the result of a dialectical process involving internal and external opinions and processes, as well as the individual's self-identification and outsiders' ethnic designations -- i.e., what you think your ethnicity is, versus what they think your ethnicity is. Since ethnicity changes situationally, the individual carries a portfolio of ethnic identities that are more or less salient in various situations and vis-à-vis various audiences. As audiences change, the socially defined array of ethnic choices open to the individual changes. This produces a "layering" (McBeth 1989) of ethnic identities which combines with the ascriptive character of ethnicity to reveal the negotiated, problematic nature of ethnic identity. Ethnic boundaries, and thus identities, are constructed by both the individual and group as well as by outside agents and organizations. (pp. 154-155)

Jenkins (1996), a social anthropologist, offers the following definition of ethnicity:

i) ethnicity is about cultural differentiation;

ii) although ethnicity is centrally concerned with culture it is also rooted in, and to some extent the outcome of, social interaction;

iii) ethnicity is no more fixed or unchanging than the culture of which it is a component;

iv) ethnicity is a social identity, which is both collective and individual, externalized in social interaction and internalized in personal self-awareness. (pp. 810-811)
Drawing on Bentley’s (1987) research on a young Maranao woman’s sense of ethnic affinity, Jenkins also identifies several “markers of ethnicity such as language, religion, non-verbal behavior, etc.” (1996, p. 813; See also Stasiulis, 1990).

Barker (1999) agrees that ethnicity is “centered on the sharing of norms, values, beliefs, cultural symbols and practices” (p. 62) but also argues that, because

ethnicity is a relational concept concerned with categories of self-identification and social ascription... ethnicity is not best understood in terms of cultural characteristics per se, but as a process of boundary formation which are constructed and maintained under specific socio-historical conditions. (p. 62; original emphasis)

Sociologist and cultural theorist Stuart Hall (1991) agrees that understanding one’s ethnic identity is an on-going process, one that views “identity as contradictory, as composed of more than one discourse, as composed always across the silences of the other” (p. 49). Hall notes the importance of reflecting on the various aspects that make up one’s identity and the ways in which identity is projected to, or interpreted by, others. Drawing on his own experience, Hall cites the term “Black” as an example of a representation of his identity that, previous to his immigration to Britain from Jamaica, had been meaningless to him. However, since the American Civil Rights movement the term “Black” had acquired significant political capital and people began appropriating the term for political reasons. They were choosing to represent themselves as Black, and with it, a change in how they viewed their own identity and how others view them.

Some forms of representation do not involve choice, however, and here I refer to the representation of “the other” (Said, 1979; Spivak, 1994). Hall (1991) and Nagel (1994) also make this point – that the identity of the other forms a significant component of a person’s identity. Bannerji’s (2000) experience of
othering illuminates this point. She recounts from personal experience: “Even after years of being an ‘immigrant,’ and upon swearing allegiance to the same Queen of England from whom India had parted, I was not to be a ‘Canadian.’ Regardless of my official status as a Canadian citizen, I, like many others, remained an ‘immigrant’ (p. 64). Bannerji credits her (and other’s) “unofficial” and yet seemingly permanent status as an “immigrant” to her non-white skin and to the fact that, in the past, she spoke English with a (non-French) accent. She also credits it to the process of othering that sometimes occurs within Canada society.

Although there are no clear-cut definitions of ethnicity or ethnic identity – indeed, Pryor et al. (1992), describe ethnicity as a “conceptual maze” (p. 215) – each of the above explanations of ethnicity carry similar characteristics. First, ethnicity is fluid and potentially plural in nature. The enunciation of one’s ethnic identity may change depending on the social, political, and/or cultural context in which one finds oneself. Second, the development of ethnic identity is both a personal and social process, which occurs through inter- and intra-group boundary formation. Individuals look not only within themselves, but also within-group for clues to their ethnic identity. Individuals also take cues from the larger society, including people, social, and political institutions to define their identity. Finally, some of the markers associated with ethnic identity include language, religion, appearance, ancestry, regionality, nonverbal behavior, values, beliefs, cultural symbols and practices.4

Recognition by academia and now, the state, of the complexity of ethnicity serves to reinforce the notion that ethnic identity is both individually and socially

4 I have purposely omitted “race” from this list of ethnic identity markers due to the contested nature of the term and the caution raised by Johnston et al. (2000) concerning the potential conflation of the terms ethnicity and race.
constructed rather than determined *a priori*. As Abu-Laban and Stasiulus (2000) note, this is especially true in the Canadian context: “Many Canadians, including those of second and further generations, have developed a hybrid sense of identity. While they are of Canadian *nationality*, their ethnicity is not simply that of being of English-Canadian *ethnic* identity” (p. 481, original emphasis).

While the above use of the term “hybrid” is seemingly employed to describe a multifaceted ethnic identity, already formed, for Bhabha (1990), hybridity theory is useful for explaining the process by which ethnic identities are formed. Using the colonizer-colonized relationship as his example, Bhabha uses hybridity to explain the new types of ethnic identities that were formed through the process of colonization: “For Bhabha, hybridity is the process by which the colonial governing authority undertakes to translate the identity of the colonised (the Other) within a singular universal framework, but then fails producing something familiar but new” (Meredith, 1998, p. 2). Instead of reproducing the colonized in the image of the colonizer, some combination of these two identities is actually produced – the hybrid identity. It is in this productive space – what Bhabha calls the Third Space – that one can begin to examine power relations within society. It is within the Third Space, Bhabha (2001) contends, “that the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized and read anew” (p. 37).

Bhabha’s (1990; 2001) explanation of hybridity opens up possibilities for understanding identity in ways not known before:

> The importance of hybridity is not to be able to trace two original moments from which the third emerges, rather hybridity … is the ‘third space’ which

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5 The constructionist versus primordial views of ethnicity are discussed in detail in Bentley (1987) and Jenkins (1996).
enables other positions to emerge. This Third Space displaces the histories that constitute it, and sets up new structures of authority, new political initiatives, which are inadequately understood through received wisdom. (1990, p. 211)

Thus, the concept of hybridity has important implications for educators working in pluralist societies. It helps explain that both students and teachers are constantly in a state of ‘being’ – that the classroom, the school and the playground are potential sites of the Third Space.

The concept of hybridity is important in a second way. Perceptions of identity are altered at a subconscious level; change occurs within the Third Space even though those in the space may not be fully aware of it. It is this open-endedness and unpredictability that makes hybridity so powerful. The space that opens up when identities meet means that change is inevitable. If we accept this principle then we must also accept that identity can never be static, unchanging or still. As Dei, Karumanchery and Karumanchery-Luik (2004) note, “it is important that we recognize that identities – whether personal, cultural, national or otherwise – are not fixed to some universal or essential property” (p. 54). The concept of hybridity acknowledges that identity can change depending on time, place, context and contact with other people and that people might experience tension, or ambivalence, with these changes. Dei et al. refer to these factors as socio-cultural systems and structures. The utility of hybridity is that it provides a mechanism for understanding how these systems and structures operate in the formation of ethnic identity, and enables us to operate across multiple identity domains. According to Grant (1997) this practice has become quite common:

Individuals, even whole groups, may operate in more than one culture, without moving totally from one to the other. This does not necessarily mean that the two (or more) are equivalent or interchangeable; cultures
can have their own domains of operations, as languages have. The number of domains and their relative strengths is, of course, uneven and changeable. The culture of the home may extend into the world of work and embrace most of their social relationships as well, leaving only school and the public domain for the ‘host culture’. The main point is that it is possible and common to live in two cultures (or more) without rejecting either and that the ways of doing so take different forms according to the circumstances of the cultures themselves and their individual members (p. 20).

This is not to say that the passage across these domains will be safe, easy or even permitted, since it depends on power relations and other such structures in place that may complicate such “travel.” For instance, educators must be diligent in their attempts to bridge the distance between home and school, and not just in a uni-directional fashion.  

Barker (1999) argues that, like any other theoretical construct, the concept of hybridity is not without its weaknesses. He argues that “it assumes or implies the meeting of completely distinct and autonomous cultural spheres” (p. 71). The previous discussion on ethnic identity refutes this. The descriptions of ethnic identity, above, belie attempts at essentialization. As Barker notes, the idea of British-Asian hybrid forms thought of as two separate traditions mixing in time and space overlooks the fact that neither British nor Asian cultures are homogeneous in the way that the phrase implies… nevertheless, the concept of hybridity enables us to recognize the production of the new, for example in the phrase “British Asian”. (p. 71)

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6 It could be argued that there are other such crossings too: teacher culture, school culture, etc. (Giroux, 1992)
The above discussion on dimensions of ethnicity and ethnic identity complicate the once taken for granted belief that ethnicity and ethnic identity are easily defined concepts. In addition to arriving at a working definition of ethnicity and ethnic identity, another important contribution of this work is the recognition that we all speak from a particular place, out of a particular history, out of a particular experience, a particular culture, without being contained by that position...We are all, in that sense, *ethnically* located and our ethnic identities are crucial to our subjective sense of who we are. (Hall, 2003, p. 94, italics in original)

A third contribution is found in the work on hybridity theory. It provides a framework for understanding the process by which new ethnic identities are formed, as well as the context in which this happens.

In the next section, I shift from an exploration of the nature of ethnicity at an individual level to the nature of ethnicity at a national level, specifically within the Canadian context.

**2.2 Ethnic, Cultural and National Identities**

How do theorists describe ethnicity within the Canadian context? In this section I explore two prominent Canadian theorists’ arguments on the nature of ethnic identity within Canadian society. I explore this topic in order to justify the approach I have taken to analyze my data, namely, the grouping of student data as follows: Those students who were born in Canada, those who are immigrants to Canada, and those who belong to national minorities (Kymlicka, 1998).

In an effort to explain the contested nature of ethnic identity within the Canadian context, Kymlicka (1998) identifies two types of minority groups that, he argues, are particular to Canada’s diverse population and history. The first, *national minority*, is defined as “historically settled, territorially concentrated, and
previously self-governing cultures whose territory has become incorporated into a larger state” (p. 30). He later subdivides this group into two discrete categories: “substate nations” and “indigenous peoples” (Kymlicka, 2001, p. 23). In Canada, the Québécois and Aboriginal peoples would fall into these categories, respectively. These are groups who have taken steps to preserve their distinctness, settled land claims and hunting and fishing rights, petitioned the federal government for the right to self-govern, and even made attempts at separation from the Canadian state. Historically, the Canadian government has been willing to negotiate with these two distinct national minorities in terms of the rights and privileges to which they lay claim.

Minority groups who do not meet the above-mentioned criteria are known primarily as immigrant or ethnic groups, despite the fact that, for many generations past, the descendents have not actually been immigrants. Those who have only arrived in Canada in the last hour are also included in this category. These groups are composed of people who have made a conscious choice to come to Canada and “knew that they were entering a new society with its own established laws and institutions” (Kymlicka, 1998, p. 7). Further, “historically, immigrant/ethnic groups have sought and achieved social and political integration in Canada – not self-government – although they have also wanted some accommodation of their ethnocultural distinctiveness” (p. 8). The main difference between national minorities and immigrant/ethnic groups is that the former have historically acknowledged (but still contested) inherent rights, and the latter do not. Kymlicka’s thinking on these issues is supported by another noted Canadian scholar, Michael Ignatieff (2000).

This is an interesting framework for understanding ethnic diversity and identity within the Canadian context. Both Kymlicka (1998) and Ignatieff (2000) contend that the Québécois and First Nations have significant claims to ‘distinctness’ and therefore should be accorded a different status and greater latitude in terms of
rights and accommodations, particularly in comparison to immigrant groups. Both Ignatieff and Kymlicka delineate clear and precise reasons why each group (national minorities and immigrant/ethnic groups) has a substantially different type of claim to rights within Canada. Their work represents a new and highly significant approach to thinking and talking about citizenship rights and responsibilities in Canada. For instance, Ignatieff (2000) reminds readers who might be inclined to think that minority rights protection ought to satisfy the needs of national minority groups like the Québécois and First Nations, that “these groups do not see themselves as minorities at all. Minority-rights protections fail to recognize that these groups are nations, not collections of individuals with similar characteristics” (p. 66).

But this framework is not without its weaknesses. It omits portions of the Canadian population who, due to historical circumstances, do not fit into the two categories described above. For instance, where do the Acadians fall in this grand scheme of Canadian identity? The Acadians, whose descendents still reside in parts of the Maritime Provinces, had their own forms of government and societal institutions (MacDonald, 2000) but are not national minorities according to Kymlicka’s categories. What special protection do they (or should they) have for their language and culture? New Brunswick is the only Canadian province to recognize French as an official language, otherwise, little is done to protect Acadian culture. I wonder also about the French communities outside of Québec, such as the Acadian communities in southern Nova Scotia, or the Francophone communities in Manitoba, Alberta and elsewhere in Canada. Where do they ‘fit’ (or do they) in Kymlicka’s thinking about Canadian identity? Perhaps they fit into the *sui generis*7 group described by Kymlicka and Norman (2000) to designate groups of people who either left, or were forced to leave their land and, upon

7 Unique; a “one of a kind” example.
return, found that their country (or region) no longer existed? The same questions could also be asked about the Métis as well. Where do they fit in this framework? These are questions that relate directly to research on ethnic identity, particularly in pluralist societies such as Canada.

Just as ideas about an individual’s ethnic identity are complex, so too are conceptions about ethnic diversity at a national level. In the following sections, I explore the nature of historical knowledge and the influence ethnic identity can have on students’ historical understandings.

2.3 The Nature of Historical Knowledge
In this section, I explore several theoretical and conceptual issues that emerge from the literature on historical understanding8. I summarize the arguments pertaining to the nature of historical knowledge and historical inquiry. In so doing, I distinguish between “substantive” concepts in history (those that make up the substance of history) and “second-order” historical concepts (the processes by which we make sense of the past). It is argued that both of these must be taught in conjunction with each other in order for students to develop a deep and rich understanding of history and the nature of historical inquiry.

In the United Kingdom in the mid 1970s, the government funded a “history curriculum development project…which was charged with generating a new history curriculum for pupils aged between 13 and 16” and which “took as its starting point the nature of history and the needs of the pupil” (Booth, 1994, p.

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8 Throughout much of the research literature on historical understanding, the terms “historical understanding” and “historical thinking” are used interchangeably (See, for example, Wineburg, 2001). Barton and Levstik (2004) consciously avoid attempts to define these terms, arguing that “rather than defining these terms and then trying to ascertain whether or how students engage in them, we’re interested in what research has to say about students’ participation in activities related to the past” (p. 24). They call for a research agenda that focuses less on individual “skills” and more on students’ uses of the past. Both terms are used synonymously throughout this dissertation.
This was a radical shift from earlier practice in two fundamental ways. First, researchers began to focus on “the particular nature of the discipline being taught” (Booth, 1994, p. 62) and argued that “the object of the historian’s study – the human past – is incommensurably different from the object of investigation of the natural scientist – the world of here and now – and the thinking it engenders is equally different” (Booth, 1994, p. 63). At question is the nature of what is being taught. As Dray (1957) points out, “the logic of historical thought is not primarily deductive and there is little sympathy amongst historians for those who have tried to force the discipline into the clear cut framework of the natural sciences” (pp. 7-12, as cited in Booth, 1980, p. 247). Booth explains further:

It can be claimed, therefore, that historical knowledge and the thinking it demands have certain distinct features; that it is concerned with the winnowing of evidence and the creation of a true, narrative account of events which have actually occurred (Rogers, 1979). To assess this by means of an a priori framework evolved in the first instance from children’s language and thinking when dealing with problems in the natural sciences where the evidence was ‘all in’, would seem misguided; what is needed is an analysis of children’s thinking in terms of the discipline’s particular knowledge form. (Booth, 1980, p. 247; See also Leinhardt, Beck, & Stainton, 1994)

The unique nature of the discipline was also an important consideration from a pedagogical standpoint. The argument that pedagogical methods could be designed without considering what was being taught (the subject matter) did not hold up under close scrutiny. In fact, the opposite was, and continues to be, true. History education researchers then and now feel strongly that content and pedagogy cannot be separated because historical knowledge develops most successfully by doing history – or using the discipline’s (or historian’s) tools to construct historical knowledge. As Seixas (1999) writes, “content and pedagogy
are inseparable in doing the discipline. Even conceiving of them as two different categories that must be united is no longer helpful” (p. 329; See also Barton & Levstik, 2004; Holt, 1990; Levstik & Barton, 1997, 2001; Rogers, 1987; VanSledright, 1997-98; Wineburg, 1999, 2001). Thus, doing history becomes the same as learning history, and pedagogy and content are conceptualized as two halves of one whole.

The needs of students were an additional concern for the researchers in the UK and are certainly important to researchers and teachers in North America and elsewhere (Barton, 2001a, 2004; Barton & Levstik, 1998; Epstein, 1997, 2000; Levstik, 1997-98, 1999; Seixas, 1993a, 1997a; VanSledright, 1997-98; Wertsch, 2000). To what end is history education the means? Some research is beginning to shed light on the processes students engage in as they try to orient their contemporary circumstances to people, events and developments in the past. But, as Barton (2004) illustrates, there is room for much more work to be done in this area:

> If educators hope to build on what students know – a basic tenet of contemporary theories of learning – they must start with attention to how people lived in the past and then help students understand the broader developments that shaped their lives. This necessarily means expanding students’ understanding of society, politics, and the economy, so that they recognize how such forces affect people’s lives (¶4).

Historical understanding is not, therefore, only about learning to think like an historian. It is also about how we use historical knowledge to understand how things used to be, why things are the way they are now, and to decide what shape we want our future to hold (Seixas & Clark, 2004).

The third fundamental shift in the conceptualization of historical understanding concerns the Piagetian notion that children are not developmentally capable of...
thinking historically because this is too abstract for their young minds. In describing the influence of Piagetian analysis on history teaching and research, Wineburg (2001) notes that “it is clear that Piagetian research lent support to historian G.R. Elton’s claim that serious work in history could not begin until students entered university.” (p. 40) This theory has unraveled under closer examination, as Wineburg observes: “It is also clear that these pessimistic assessments spurred on other research efforts, particularly those aimed at discovering a brighter side of students’ historical capabilities” (p. 40). British researchers in particular took up this challenge and developed their own school programs, and conducted studies designed specifically to document the ways in which children could, in fact, be taught to think historically (Ashby & Lee, 1987; Ashby, Lee, & Dickinson, 1997; Booth, 1980, 1983, 1987, 1994; Lee, 1983; Lee & Ashby, 2000, 2001; Lee, Ashby, & Dickinson, 1993; Short & Carrington, 1992, 1995, 1999).

2.4 First and Second-Order Concepts in History

Awakened to the possibility that students can be taught to think historically, historians and history educators alike began to delineate what historical understanding might look like. Tom Holt (1990) is widely recognized as an influential author on this topic, and is cited by both Seixas (1996) and Wineburg (2001) in their seminal works. Holt’s book, Thinking Historically: Narrative, Imagination, and Understanding, succinctly outlines the kinds of skills and habits of mind required to think historically. Interspersed throughout Holt’s discussion of these attributes are excerpts from interviews between Holt and a number of high school history students. Holt convincingly uses the excerpts to demonstrate the historical understanding of these students. In this section, I will explore the differences between first and second-order concepts in history and their relationship to historical understanding.
One of the first things we learn from Holt’s (1990) conversations with students is that they conceive of history as an uncontested story (as if the facts themselves are incontrovertible) – a story written from the “winners’” perspective which is of virtually no use to them except to memorize it in order to pass a test. In other words, history is a story with a predetermined plot to be memorized, not interpreted. Shemilt (2000) concurs, and notes that “…constructivist research into pupils’ historical thinking suggests…that students conceive the aim of History to be the presentation of a uniform ’picture of the past’” (p. 85). Holt seeks to disrupt this notion of history and suggests that history teaching should shift from a process of handing over stories for students to learn to a process of giving students “the raw materials of history” (p. 10) and letting them discover and decide what story should be told and for what purpose. According to Holt, students need to learn that, “to make sense, the narrative must have a point,” and that “the point” might be different depending on who is constructing the narrative (p. 5).

For Holt, the process of working with the raw materials of history is crucial for introducing students “to the essential skills a historian must cultivate” (1990, p. 10). These include knowing the type of material or document with which they are working, asking questions of the document such as (a) Who produced it? (b) What is the point of view? (c) What is the purpose of the document? (d) What are the apparent silences, gaps and assumptions made by/about this document? Finally, this process concludes with students using “the document or documents to synthesize a narrative about an event or development” (p. 10). Tim Lomas (1990) also delineated an extensive array of questions one might ask students in order to develop their historical understanding. Vass (2004) claims that Lomas began emphasizing the importance of second-order concepts long before the promulgation of the National Curriculum in England, which lists history as one of several foundation subjects (Education Reform Act 1988 (chapter 40), 1988).
Doing this type of work and asking these types of questions can help us understand the habits of mind most commonly associated with historians and the work they do. Lee and Ashby (2000) refer to these habits of mind as “second-order” or “procedural” concepts and explain that these are “ideas that provide our understanding of history as a discipline or form of knowledge…they shape the way we go about doing history” (p. 199; See also Lee, 1983; Lee, Dickinson, & Ashby, 2001; Seixas, 1996, 1997b; VanSledright, 1997-98). Lee (2005) acknowledges that “there is no convenient agreed-upon term for this knowledge of the discipline” (p. 32) and uses the terms “metahistorical,” “second-order” and “disciplinary” knowledge interchangeably when discussing the topic. For the purpose of this review of the literature, the term second-order concepts is employed as it is referenced in several seminal works on the nature of historical understanding.

Second-order concepts differ from “substantive,” first-order concepts in that the latter make up the content of our history lessons (e.g., revolution, World War I, treaty) whereas the former contextualize, support and provide evidence for whatever claims one might make in the course of those same lessons. Lee and Ashby (2000) argue that teaching second-order concepts leads to a deeper understanding of the substantive aspects of history and of the discipline itself. Historian David Lowenthal (2000) agrees and argues that, because the need to think historically carries over into our lives outside of school, history teaching should focus on building and strengthening students’ abilities to work with these concepts. He writes:

> Historical thinking – as distinct from historical content – is essential to manage everyday affairs. We continuously reshape our private memories to meet the rigorous truth standards of a public past. To reach a consensual understanding of what has happened and why, we must check
our own recollections and records against those of others. (p. 72; See also Dickinson, Gordon, Lee, & Slater, 1995)

Cercadillo (2001) also explains why a shift from substantive to second-order concepts is important from both a pedagogical and research perspective:

To reach a sophisticated historical understanding, substantive content should be shaped by second-order concepts and historical procedures. Students tend to hold certain tacit ideas which facilitate or hinder their historical understanding; the knowledge of the ideas pupils have about organizing concepts, and the subsequent construction by researchers of an underlying hierarchy, are means to approach students’ reasoning development in history. In this way, it is possible to delineate patterns of progression, or hierarchies of conceptual complexity in history learning, which are applicable to all kinds of content. (pp. 118-119)

In other words, if researchers are able to uncover how it is students are thinking about and working with (the second-order or procedural aspects of history) historical content (the substantive aspect of history), this has the potential to inform pedagogical decisions made at all levels – policy decisions, curricular development, and teaching history in the classroom.

As one examines the types of questions Holt (1990) and Lomas (1990) proposes in light of what Lee and Ashby (2000) and others discuss, a number of key second-order terms emerge. These may include evidence, change, empathy, and perspective taking to name a few (Ashby & Lee, 1987; Cercadillo, 2001; Dickinson, Gordon, & Lee, 2001; Lee, 1995; Lee & Ashby, 2000; Lee et al., 1993; Lowenthal, 2000; Partington, 1980b; Shemilt, 1987). Different authors use different definitions for some of these terms, and keeping track of the various definitions can prove difficult and a bit overwhelming. In an attempt to condense and clarify the nature of historical understanding, Seixas (1996) draws on
previous scholarship and his own work to provide a framework, made up of six second-order concepts, “that must be confronted in order to foster growth in historical knowledge” (p. 765). These are: empathy and moral judgement, epistemology and evidence, continuity and change, historical agency, progress and decline and historical significance (Seixas, 1996, pp. 768-777). Seixas' work on these key concepts is recognized as seminal in the field of research devoted to the development of students' historical understanding.

In the following sections I will explore the theoretical underpinnings of only one of these – historical significance – as it is the focus of my dissertation research. I will also review representative samples of the empirical research on students' understandings of historical significance, including research that explores the relationship between students' ethnic identity and their conceptions of significance in history.

2.5 Historical Significance: Theoretical and Pedagogical Issues

In this section I provide a detailed analysis of the conceptual and empirical work on the second-order concept of “historical significance.” Drawing on international research, I begin by exploring how different theorists have defined “historical significance” and the myriad criteria used to ascribe significance to historical phenomena.

Historical significance is the cornerstone of all historical inquiry; without it, stories from the past become jumbled assortments of facts and are rendered meaningless. Indeed, it has been argued that

‘significance’ is at the heart of the subject matter of both academic and school history. It is fundamental to understand a distinctive feature of the discipline: discrete events are not understandable without their link to a frame of reference and a sense of authorship behind them. (Cercadillo, 2001, p. 116; See also Phillips, 2002)
Rogers (1987) also highlights the importance of significance as a key concept in historical understanding:

[The historian's] selection of particulars is made in order to explain why events turned out as they did. Constructing an historical narrative thus involves a process of winnowing, of differentiation between the various members of a mass of crude facts and of showing their significance in relation to some theme or development. (p. 6)

However, according to Seixas (1997b), historical significance “is not only about relationships among events and people of the past, but also about the relationship of those events and people to us, in the present, who are doing the historical thinking” (p. 120). For Seixas, our understandings and interpretations of the past help us “organize events into a narrative that will show us something important about our position in the world” (1997b, p. 120).

Hunt (2000) agrees, and notes specifically that “the assessment of the significance of events, changes and people in the past not only deepens pupils’ understanding of the world, in which they live, but also helps them consider the ageless social, moral and cultural issues, which adolescents see as being very relevant” (p. 39). However, both Seixas (1996) and Hunt (2000) note that helping students understand the significance of specific events, trends, and/or people in relation to their own lives is one of the most difficult challenges that history teachers face.

Historical significance can be difficult for students to grasp for several reasons. First, students do not usually have “the breadth of information that historians have, so that their choices of what is more or less significant are severely constrained” (Seixas, 1996, p. 769; See also Hunt, 2000). Thus, they find it difficult to situate significance in its wider socio-political and historical context. Because of this, a second obstacle to understanding significance often arises,
and this involves the imposition of a “presentist” reading on past events. This is problematic for any number of reasons, but especially because it can lead students to “draw unwarranted ‘lessons’ from the past, by ignoring the historical mentalité, the culture in which the historical actors were embedded” (Seixas, 1996, p. 769; See also Seixas, 1997b; Seixas & Peck, 2004).

The third difficulty students may face involves failing to see the relevance of the past to their own lives. Because of this, Hunt (2000) argues that students “need to be convinced that they cannot escape the past. Without making some sense of the past, there will be many aspects of their own lives that are incomprehensible” (p. 44). We must be wary of such blanket statements, however. I would argue that there are many students, particularly those whose histories and presents include issues of oppression, violence and forced subjugation (among other atrocities), who know too well the power the past holds on their present lives and do, in fact, seek to escape it, and with good reason.

This raises a fourth concern with the notion of significance – that of relativism. Significance is not absolute or universal, and our interpretation of significance depends greatly on the lenses through which we view the past. To this end, Hunt (2000) suggests that “pupils are to learn that it is possible for there to be different selections of significant facts about some events or situations and that all of them can be equally valid” (p. 46). And though postmodern contributions (such as Hunt’s suggestion) have rightly challenged the grand narrative approach to teaching history, Seixas (2000) cautions that the “positive contributions” of postmodernism “have a downside. If all historical knowledge is understood simply as a weapon in a power struggle, if all accounts of the past are epistemologically equivalent, all history is turned into collective memory” (p. 31) and the reasons for learning how to understand history – and in this case, how to assess historical significance – are lost to the notion of relativism. Lee (2005) also cautions against relativist thinking, noting that students need to develop a
deeper understanding of the discipline of history, of history’s second-order concepts, so that they can better evaluate conflicting accounts of the past.

### 2.6 Historical Significance Criteria

In this section I draw on theoretical and empirical work to delineate criteria for ascribing historical significance.

Assessing the historical significance of phenomena from the past can be thought of as a dialectical process of balancing the weight of a phenomenon’s significance on a personal level against the weight of its significance in the broader historical context. Recognizing the need to find this balance and actually achieving it are two different matters, however. In a study asking eighty-two grade 11 students to draw a diagram of the most significant events in the history of the world and then explain their drawings, Seixas (1997a) found that it was possible “to distinguish between those students whose expressions of personal interests dominate, and those whose expressions of personal interests and particular social location apparently disappear in their assessments of world historical significance” (p. 23). While some students focused solely on personal interests during the research exercise and others relied on authorities (teachers, texts) to help them ascribe significance to world events, still other students understood that they could ascribe historical significance even to those events deemed personally significant through the construction of a coherent historical narrative, what Seixas calls the ability to transcend “the ‘subjectivist’ – ‘objectivist’ split: “With this strategy, any historical phenomenon, even that which might be dismissed as simply of ‘personal interest,’ has the potential to achieve significance by being linked to a larger fabric of significant world history” (p. 26-27).

Seixas’ (1997a) study was one of the first to delineate a typology of students’ thinking about historical significance and is very helpful from that standpoint.
However, it is difficult to know just how many students approached the ascription of historical significance in the ways noted above as he only provides data on five of the eighty-two students in the study. From both a research and a pedagogical standpoint, it would have been helpful if Seixas had then applied the typology to the remaining students, first, to know if the typology held water (was it replicated in the other student responses?) and second, to know how many students demonstrated these understandings of historical significance. Were the examples chosen the exception or the rule? Interestingly, other researchers interested in students’ ideas about historical significance do not seem to have taken up the typology presented in Seixas’ study. Barton (2008b) notes that this phenomenon is not uncommon in history education research. He suggests that, “perhaps because of their differing disciplinary and national backgrounds … researchers have not always fully incorporated the findings of previous studies into their own work, and this has hindered a more comprehensive understanding of the development of students’ ideas” (p. 241). A question remains as to the effectiveness of Seixas’ framework for understanding the ways in which students think about historical significance.

Other scholars have outlined different criteria for ascribing historical significance. Hunt (2000) and Phillips (2002), drawing on the work of Partington (1980a), delineate the following five criteria:

i) Importance – the degree to which the phenomenon was important to people in the past

ii) Profundity – the extent to which people’s lives were affected by the phenomenon

iii) Quantity – how many people were affected by the phenomenon
iv) Durability – how long people’s lives were affected by the phenomenon, and

v) Relevance – how past events or developments help us understand contemporary life (Partington, 1980b).

These criteria are helpful in that they specify the type of argument one (a student, teacher or historian) could make when ascribing historical significance to a particular event, person or development. However, many historical phenomena may not meet these standards for historical significance, particularly those which involve less well known events, people or developments. For example, in an examination of an archival photograph of “Wah Chong Washing and Ironing,” Seixas (2006) explains that although Wah Chong’s laundry was not “the site of the signing of a declaration of war or a treaty of peace,” it takes on historical significance when historians, teachers and students weave it into a narrative of “the history of multicultural Canada in ways that are central to our current conception of the growth of this country” (p. 59). The criterion of relevance, above, may be useful in this instance, and is somewhat similar to Counsell’s (2004) “resonant” and “revealing” criteria, detailed below.

Counsell (2004) delineates criteria for assigning significance to historical phenomena, criteria that emerged from her work with students in the United Kingdom:

i) Remarkable – the phenomenon was remarked upon at the time or since

ii) Remembered – the phenomenon was important in the collective memory of a group(s)

iii) Resonant – It is possible to make analogies with the phenomenon

iv) Resulting in change – the phenomenon resulted in consequences, and
v) Revealing – the phenomenon sheds light on another aspect of the past

Counsell’s “Five R’s” make a valuable contribution to the literature on historical significance. Her framework invites a shift away from ascribing significance on the basis of resultant change alone, and asks teachers and students to think more broadly about criteria for ascribing historical significance (Bradshaw, 2006). However, some of the criteria are more difficult to teach. Some teachers working with Counsell’s criteria note that the criteria are “not accessible for most pupils” (J.D. Clare, personal communication, December 9th, 2006). Whereas the “Resulting in Change” criterion seems relatively easy to recognize in historical narratives, “Revealing” has proven a more difficult criterion to teach and recognize: “Students find resulting in change straightforward, but revealing, casting light on contemporary issues and seeing events as part of a larger narrative, is tougher, probably because it depends so much on background knowledge” (T.Morton, personal communication, January 3rd, 2007).

Cercadillo’s (2001) study revealed criteria for assigning significance that were inductively determined from student data, although she does state that “the criteria employed to categorize students’ responses stem from the theoretical debate carried out by philosophers and historians” (p. 123). In this comparative study of 144 students (spread across three grade levels: 8, 10 and 12) in England and Spain, during which students were asked to discuss significance after having read two different accounts of two historical events (the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588 and the campaigns of Alexander the Great), Cercadillo found that students employed five types of criteria to ascribe historical significance:

i) Contemporary - Event is seen as important by people at the time, “in the context of their perceptions, beliefs and view of the world” (Cercadillo, 2001, p. 126)
ii) Causal - Student situates an event in relation to its causal power – significance depends, in part, on later events/consequences. Student shows some awareness of historical context and how event shaped future.

iii) Pattern - Is a “pattern” in the sense that the event/development/person provides a model for something, sets an example, or acts as a template for future actions/events/understandings. Student always situates an event in its historical context, and use of pattern significance is usually associated with other historical thinking concepts, such as progress and decline.

iv) Symbolic - Significance is ascribed from the perspective of the past or “from the perspectives of subsequent presents” (Cercadillo, 2001, p. 127) and “is attached specifically to notions of moral example (lessons from history) and mythical past” (p. 127). Use of this criteria demonstrates a particular use of history.

v) Present/Future – This criteria operates in the long-term and when employed, includes direct links to the future.

The data collected in Cercadillo’s (2001) study demonstrate that the most commonly used criteria by students across the three grade levels were contemporary and causal, particularly among younger students. Pattern significance was employed less by students in general, however “the proportion of responses is much higher in year 12 than in year 10 or year 8” (p. 130). The least employed criteria were symbolic significance and significance for the present-future, and again, the proportion of responses using these criteria was higher amongst older students. For these last two criteria, there was also a difference across country groups. More English than Spanish students employed these criteria during the research exercise.
Cercadillo (2001) used this typology of significance criteria to develop a model for progression in students’ historical thinking. She concluded that there are two main indicators of progression in students’ historical understanding. First, those students who employed symbolic and/or present-future reasoning appeared to have a deeper understanding of the historical significance of the defeat of the Spanish Armada and/or Alexander the Great. Students who discussed these events in relation to their symbolic significance and/or their impact on present or future events also tended to offer contemporary and causal explanations of significance. According to Cercadillo, “contemporary and causal notions of significance may be seen as a prerequisite for a more complete perception of significance in history” (p. 131).

A second indicator of progression in students’ thinking about historical significance “was the consideration of significance as variable within or between attributions or types of significance” (Cercadillo, 2001, p. 131). Whereas some students saw significance as intrinsic in the event itself, as well as having only one interpretation, other students indicated that the historical significance of an event may vary depending on a myriad of factors (person ascribing significance, differing views of contemporaries, length of time from event, and so on). Thus, “variable significance between accounts is always regarded at a higher level than fixed significance, even if only the contemporary and the causal types are indicated” (p. 131). Table 1 outlines Cercadillo’s hierarchical model of progression in students’ historical thinking with regard to significance.
Table 1: Model of progression in students’ historical thinking (Cercadillo, 2001, p. 131-132)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level 1</td>
<td>No allusion to any type of significance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 2</td>
<td>Intrinsic and single significance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 3</td>
<td>Fixed contextual significance: significance is fixed within/across attributions (contemporary and causal only)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 4</td>
<td>Fixed contextual significance: significance is fixed within/across attributions (besides or other than contemporary and causal)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 5</td>
<td>Variable contextual significance: significance varies within/across attributions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5.1: contemporary and causal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5.2: besides or other than contemporary and causal</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Cercadillo (2001) defends the notion that degrees of sophistication are evident in the data, noting that, “the idea of progression in types of significance…is empirically grounded. It is the older students who tend to mention a greater variability of types” (p. 131). Some caution is needed, however, because although this research comprised data from a large number of students (n=144), I believe more investigation is needed before we can directly link stages of sophistication in historical thinking to age. Like Ashby and Lee (1987) and Shemilt (1987), I am hesitant to make this claim. Students of the same age may vary greatly in their understandings and ascription of historical significance. Likewise, it is possible that some older students might demonstrate a less sophisticated understanding of the concept than some younger students. Age cannot be the only factor here: prior knowledge, experience working with second-order concepts, among other reasons, may cause differences in students’ understandings of the concept. More research is required before substantial claims about sophistication can be made.

2.7 Ethnic Identity and Students’ Conceptions of Historical Significance

In this section I review studies that deal explicitly with students’ ethnic identities and their understandings of historical significance. The research reviewed here involves students from a range of ethnic, cultural and/or national backgrounds (Kymlicka, 1998) and makes connections between the students’ identities and the formal and informal history education to which they would have been
exposed prior to and during the time of the studies. All of the studies involve students from a range of ethnic backgrounds. In the majority of studies reviewed here, the researchers had students perform a specific task and then conducted interviews with small groups of students. Only one study relied heavily on student interviews alone (Almarza, 2001). Almarza’s work deviates from what appears to be a trend in research on students’ understanding of historical significance (that is, assigning students a specific task); nevertheless it sheds important light on why students from diverse cultural or ethnic backgrounds have different opinions about the significance of people and events from the past. Although there are surely more studies concerned with the relationship between ethnic identity and conceptions of historical significance, those included in this review represent the studies that have been instrumental in guiding this particular research agenda and my own study. I will trace the chronological development of this research.

Research on students’ understanding of historical significance is concerned with the criteria and justifications used by students to ascribe significance to particular people and/or events from the past. In general, studies examining students’ understanding of historical significance tell us that students denote as significant those events and people from the past that (a) help them understand how their nation began, (b) describe the progress of their nation, (c) provide lessons from which present and future generations should learn, and (d) have had a lasting impression on their nation or the world at large (Barton & Levstik, 1998; Seixas, 1994b, 1997a).

There is a growing body of research, however, that demonstrates that many students have difficulty understanding the significance of certain events from the past when the criteria used to ascribe significance do not mesh with their own experiences, prior knowledge or significance markers (Almarza, 2001; Barton, 2005; Barton & Levstik, 1997, 1998; Levstik, 1997-98, 1999, 2000; Seixas, 1993a; Wertsch, 2000; Wineburg, 2000; Yeager, Foster, & Greer, 2002). It is
important to bear in mind that, even if several *a priori* frameworks exist to help researchers and educators understand the factors contributing to the ascription of historical significance, and even though some students may use some or all of these frameworks, different groups of people may operationalize other explanations of historical significance. Wineburg (2000) explains why this might occur:

> Each of us grows up in a home with a distinct history and a distinct perspective on the meaning of larger historical events. Our parents' stories shape our historical consciousness, as do the stories of ethnic, racial, and religious groups that number us as members (p. 310).

Despite Wineburg's problematic assumption that we all grow up in homes and with parents, the essence of his point remains the same: We each approach an understanding of history and significance with our own set of preconceptions, which have been shaped by a multitude of sociocultural factors.

One of the first studies to demonstrate that students' understanding of historical significance is influenced by experience and by both formal and informal history “lessons” was that conducted by Seixas (1993a). Seixas attempts “to explore the interaction of family and school as sources of historical understandings” (p. 303). In this study, Seixas interviewed students about a specific task they had completed: a family oral history project. (It appears as if this was actually part of their teacher’s lesson planning rather than a task designed by the researcher.) Two sets of interviews with six students - one occurring before the project and one taking place after the project was completed - comprise the bulk of the data for this study.

For most of the students, family experiences were important in so far as they shaped “the students’ underlying approaches to history” as opposed to acting only as important sources of information. Students relied on family histories and
experiences to help them process historical information and thus these “had a profound impact on how many of these students understood history” (p. 319). And while one student found that the family oral history project enriched the knowledge she acquired in school and thus felt “more confident vis à vis her own ethnic community” (p. 308), another student “found it difficult to make any connections between the Canadian history she was learning in school and [the] Chinese history” (p. 316) with which she was well acquainted.

While this study focuses on multiple aspects of historical understanding and not just students’ understanding of historical significance, it offers several important insights into this discussion. Seixas (1993a) reports that, although “the students in this sample identified plausible areas of significance in history ... [for all but two students]...these themes and events generally bore little correspondence to what they studied in social studies classes” (p. 318). Unfortunately, Seixas does not pursue an in-depth discussion about the relationship between the students’ ethnic backgrounds and their ascription of significance to historical events. However, he does note that, for some students, family histories provide a framework for organizing the history they learn in school, and he suggests why continued research into the relationship between students’ historical understandings and identity is vital to the work of critical pedagogues:

These six students’ historical understandings and historical deficits suggest a reformed history curriculum that includes explicit attention to historical method, encouraging a classroom pedagogy that unites the potentially disparate areas of historical significance to the various students in a multicultural setting into a meaningful discussion – a discussion that has the potential to set contemporary questions of political morality, social activism, and empathetic understanding into their necessary historical context. Far from exacerbating ethnic tensions, such multicultural
historical education would provide a common public forum for the
discussion of divergent historical experiences. (Seixas, 1993a, p. 322)

Later work by Seixas (1994b; 1997a) does focus explicitly on students’
conceptions of historical significance but not on the relationship between these
conceptions and the students’ ethnic identities. There are instances when “ethnic
communities surfaced in some students’ explanations” (1994b, p. 292) of why
significance was ascribed by them, but these only appear sparsely in the
reported data.

Epstein (1998; 2000) continued this line of work with an examination of how
students’ racialized identities affect their construction of the history of United
States. Epstein performed a case study analysis of an 11th grade US history
class in the Midwestern United States over a two year period. The case study
involved collecting data from a classroom, a teacher and ten students, five of
whom were of European descent, and five of whom were African-American. The
students in the study were asked to perform a specific task, which consisted of
choosing twenty (out of a total of fifty-one captioned pictures cards) of the most
significant actors and/or events in US history. The students were then
interviewed by either the researcher or a graduate student and were asked to
elaborate on their choices.

Data were collected over a two year period, with the first year (1993-94)
consisting of classroom observations that occurred twice a week. In the second
year (1994-95), the researcher took field notes on the classroom itself, the
students, the teacher (the same teacher for both years) and the units studied.
The researcher described both the teacher and the students involved in the study
in great detail. In May 1995, an African-American graduate student interviewed
five African-American students, while Epstein, a European-American, interviewed
five students of European descent. The interviews were very structured, with
original task and analysis being performed by both groups. The students in each group were matched by gender and by academic achievement, and all came from approximately the same socio-economic status (SES), which was determined by a student questionnaire. All ten of the interviews were transcribed, put into tables, and termed “national narratives” (Epstein, 2000, p. 191).

For within case analysis, Epstein used matrices to code two conceptual categories (race and nation) each of which were then re-coded into subcategories. Each cell of the matrix was also coded by racial group. Both the graduate student and the researcher separately coded all ten interviews and narratives, and came to agreements (if necessary) through discussion. The cell codes were then analyzed chronologically to detect patterns. Cross-case analysis was also performed to clarify and increase meanings and to confirm or reject any hypotheses of similarities and differences which occurred both within and between the two interview groups. From all of this, the author was able to generate descriptions of students’ conceptions and determined that there were four general perspectives on racial diversity in US history held by the students in her study.

The four perspectives can be subdivided into two groupings: those held by students of European descent and those held by students of African-American descent. Students of European descent tended to see American history from either a “traditional” Eurocentric perspective or a “revisionist” Eurocentric perspective (pp.192-194). Students who held a traditional perspective on US history only ascribed significance to those people and events that could be connected to the accomplishments of Europeans and/or European-Americans. In general, students with this perspective envisioned the history of the US in a positive manner and failed to mention any bleak spots on their nation’s past. The revisionist perspective differs from this only slightly in that it at least acknowledges the negative effects (i.e.: colonization, racism) of European
exploration. In both perspectives, European-American students felt that Europeans and/or European-Americans alone were responsible for shaping the nation’s development and that the nation was based on a solid ground of democratic ideals that were available to most, if not all, citizens.

Students of African-American descent perceived US history from either an “Afrocentric” or a “double historical consciousness” perspective (pp.198-200). Students who saw the history of the US from an Afrocentric perspective believed that traditional democratic symbols (freedom, rights, democratic rule) upon which the history of the US is based (at least the US history they encounter in schools) actually enabled the enslavement of African-Americans by European-Americans. As such, these students constructed a collective racialized identity based on what they saw as African-Americans’ fruitless struggles for freedom and democracy. Those who interpreted the history of the US from a double historical consciousness perspective understood that the nation began with European exploration and colonization of Native Americans and African-Americans. These students constructed a view of nation where White racism played a significant role in its formation and development, and continues to influence contemporary conditions.

According to this study, European-American and African-American students approach US history from entirely different perspectives. As Epstein (2000) explains, history teachers need to be aware of “the difficulties of teaching history to students who had constructed perspectives based primarily on the historical experiences of the racial group with which they identified” (p.204). She suggests that teachers incorporate the differing logics of representation into their teaching so that students can begin to wrestle with the often contradictory historical perspectives they bring to the classroom. Embracing a critical pedagogy, Epstein advocates “infusing our understanding of [US] national history with the assumption that particular forms of democracy and racial inequality existed in
every historical period” so that “teachers and students, as well as the culture at large, can explore the two themes” (p.206).

Following a similar thread, Barton and Levstik (1998) “investigate how early adolescents (fifth through eighth grade) evaluate significance in American history, and how they use history to create a sense of collective identity” (p.479). Concomitant with these research goals is a desire to “understand how students mediate the demands of the ‘official’ story of American history and their own, frequently more ambiguous, knowledge of the past” (p.480).

These researchers asked 48 students to perform a task much like the one Epstein required of her participants. In this case, students, working in small groups, were asked to select, “from among a set of twenty captioned historical pictures,” (p.481) eight people and/or events that they consider to be the most significant people/events in US history over the last 500 years. Upon completion of the task, the researchers interviewed the groups of students to explore both their explanations for their choices and to discuss possible alternatives and selections that the students thought no one would pick. They also asked students about “what they had learned about history both in and out of school” (p.481).

The findings from this study can be divided into two broad themes. First, students understood the significance of history as a way of legitimizing contemporary society. Historical significance could be found in people and/or events that focused to a large extent on the origin and development of the United States as a social and political entity, on the creation and development of what they perceived as uniquely American freedoms and opportunities, and on the beneficial effects of technological change. Students generally excluded, on the other hand, pictures of people and events that they recognized as having widespread impact but could not assimilate to their image of the country’s continuous and beneficial progress (p.482).
The second major theme evident in the students' responses was “an alternative story in which the promise of the Bill of Rights was thwarted” (p.490). Barton and Levstik (1998) have termed this “vernacular history,” and posit that vernacular histories “often arise from the perception on the part of community members that their values and first-hand experiences are ignored or discounted” (p.491) by the dominant group.

In general, there was little discrepancy among student responses, regardless of ethnic identity, when it came to categories of significance related to “the origin of the US,” “American exceptionalism,” “progressive expansion of rights, opportunities, and freedom,” “technological progress,” “change and controversy” and “war” (pp. 483-490), all of which the students used to legitimize contemporary society and locate the United States in relation to the rest of the world, i.e., at the centre.

When it came to vernacular histories, however, differences amongst students were revealed. For example, “for European-American students, the continuation of racism was a puzzle” (p.491) given their understanding of the universality of rights and freedoms. African-American students, on the other hand, were not puzzled by this at all. They understood that, “while there had been progress...the problems that remained were daunting” (p.492). One student felt the same way as the African-American students in Epstein’s (2000) study, noting that the Bill of Rights “just protected wealthy, white, male landowners” (p.493).

Barton and Levstik (1998) also discuss vernacular history in terms of students’ understanding of the Great Depression and the Vietnam War - two moments in history that students found confusing and that seemed to conflict with the mechanisms they use to legitimize their place in contemporary society. Despite their confusion with such moments, however, the authors conclude that “students
of all racial groups maintained faith in the image of an idea of expanding rights and progress” (p.500).

One criticism I have of this particular study is the reluctance of the researchers to group students by ethnic groups during the assigned task and subsequent interviews. On a number of occasions they note that ethnic minority students, when interviewed with European-American students, were noticeably quiet and reluctant to voice their opinions, particularly when their European-American counterparts’ beliefs appeared to be quite strong and different than their own. I question whether the statement made above, which alludes to the fact that there was little discrepancy amongst the students’ understanding of historical significance, would continue to hold had the ethnic minority students been interviewed together.

Levstik (1999) brings her experience interviewing American students about their understanding of historical significance to New Zealand, a country that has significantly different relationships with ethnicity and history than the United States but which is somewhat similar to Canada in this regard. The government of New Zealand has made explicit attempts to recognize the historical, social and cultural contributions of both Maori and European (Pakeha) peoples; this commitment is reflected in educational policies and school curricula to the extent that “instruction is supposed to connect history to current concerns by examining issues of social justice, the welfare of others, cultural diversity, and respect for the environment in historical context, and by suggesting possible strategies for dealing with these issues” (p.3).

Data were collected following the same interview protocol established by Barton and Levstik (1998). For this study, Levstik (1999) chose 23 pictures representing various components of New Zealand’s history and spanning some 3,000 years. Students between the ages of eleven and thirteen were asked to work “together
as a group to decide which eight were important enough to include on a time-line of New Zealand history” (p.6). Levstik then interviewed the students to probe their understandings of historical significance. Levstik’s data suggest that the New Zealanders’ “global position frames how they think and learn and how they assign significance to what they learn just as surely do the more ‘local’ elements of race, class, gender, and ethnicity (among other things)” (pp.14-15). Findings from the data were organized into several broad themes: the purposes of studying history, the relationship between history and New Zealanders’ perceptions about their place in the world, fairness, peaceful coexistence, and staking a claim on the world stage.

The students in Levstik’s (1999) study claimed that studying history served two purposes. First, it provides a link to the past and an ability to understand who they are and where they came from. Maori and Pacific Islander students held this belief most strongly, with one student noting that “history is a big part of knowing who you are” (p.6). Levstik relates this understanding to the cultural traditions of both of these groups, traditions which rely heavily on ancestry and traditional practices.

The second purpose of history, according to these students, is to instill a sense of national pride in New Zealanders. Many lamented the fact that they did not actually study much New Zealand history in school, that they had to rely on mostly anecdotal, family histories and that the rest of the world had little knowledge about their country. In an interesting contrast, however, some “students reported that they were less interested in studying New Zealand’s history than in learning about other parts of the world” (p.7) because other countries’ histories would likely be “more interesting” than New Zealand’s histories. It seems that, while their own history served as a source of national pride, it was nevertheless not as interesting or informative as the history from “really different kinds of places” (p.7).
The New Zealand students’ perceptions of their country’s place on the world stage constitute the second theme evident in the data. In contrast to their American counterparts, “the New Zealand students described their country as distant from centers of influence and assumed their nation to be somehow ‘behind’ the rest of the world” (p.8). Levstik surmises that “the centrality of the colonial experience, the continued friendly relations with their former colonizer, and the current political, social and economic influence of the United States” influenced this perception of historical significance (p.9). Students seemed to understand that New Zealand would largely be understood by both New Zealanders and others in terms of its relationship with the rest of the world. Thus, they tended to ascribe significance to events that connected their country to the world at large (for example, students ascribed historical significance to New Zealand soldiers’ participation in World War II). Perhaps this explains their perceived disinterest in New Zealand history (as mentioned earlier) in that studying their country’s history from an inward-looking perspective does not accord with this second understanding of the significance of historical events.

Students felt that several of the choices for the timeline were significant because they dealt with the concept of fairness. For example, Levstik (1999) reports that “every group identified women’s suffrage as one of their choices for the timeline” (p.10; original emphasis) and related this choice to equal opportunity and fairness. In addition to the suffrage movement, education, the pension and the Treaty of Waitangi “were ultimately about fairness” (p.10) and were significant because they contributed to the fair treatment of all New Zealanders.

There was a significant difference in the students’ perceptions about the fairness and historical significance of the Treaty of Waitangi, however. Pakeha students viewed the Treaty as a instrument for the fair distribution of land, whereas the majority of Maori and Pacific Islander students saw it as a struggle over land that was rightfully theirs in the first place and an “opportunity lost to greed” (p.12) that
resulted in the land being wasted by the Pakeha. Interestingly, Maori students were less interested in land claims than their Pakeha counterparts and wished, simply, to continue to develop their relationship to the land. Whereas Pakeha students saw the Treaty of Waitangi as a current component in their continued understanding of New Zealand history, Maori students located the Treaty in their past.

Peaceful coexistence emerged from the data as a fourth theme useful for explaining New Zealand students’ understanding of historical significance. In this case, “events that brought diverse people to live together in New Zealand” were ranked as historically significant (p.13). Students saw the importance of these events in terms of promoting understanding and knowledge among diverse peoples both within New Zealand and around the world. Given this viewpoint, it is interesting that negative conceptions about immigrants informed some students’ viewpoints. These conceptions are similar to those unearthed by Varma (2000), who found that the Canadian students in her study perceived immigrants as refugees who had little to offer their new home, were uneducated or were criminals. It is interesting that, in two studies located in countries that were largely developed due to the contributions of immigrants, students had negative perceptions about them and failed to note their own immigration history.

The final theme emerging from Levstik’s (1999) data involves “marking New Zealand’s place in the world” (p.14). To do this, students selected events or people that established New Zealand as the “first” country to accomplish something (such as the suffrage movement). The students’ reasoning lay in the fact that being the first country to do something meant that it would be noticed by the rest of the world.

Levstik’s (1999) study sheds light not only on the influence of ethnic identity on understandings of historical significance, but also on how a country’s global...
positioning can affect how students ascribe significance to historical events. For these students, ascribing historical significance required a constant negotiation with their own ethnic, cultural and national identities, their country’s past in and of itself, and their country’s past in relation to the rest of the world.

In later US work Levstik (2000) continues to investigate the relationship between students’ ethnic identities and their understanding of historical significance. Levstik notes that “students in multicultural societies may be faced with reconciling widely varied accounts of the past” (p. 285). She situates this study in the findings of previous research which found that “students from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds experienced difficulty fitting their own perspectives on historical significance with those presented in the school curriculum” (p. 285).

Following an approach similar to her earlier work, Levstik (2000) interviewed 48 students in grades five through eight, twenty pre-service teachers and twelve teachers. All participants were asked to complete a similar task. Using a set of 20 – 25 captioned pictures⁹, participants were asked to select those events that were important enough to include on a timeline of United States history and justify their selections.

Findings indicate that all participants ascribed historical significance to those events that contributed to the collective identity and social unity of the United States. This factor emerged as the participants’ central criterion for ascribing significance to events in United States history. Events that depicted the expansion of rights and freedoms, and that contributed to a narrative of progress also met this criterion as these qualities are seen as central to the collective identity of the United States.

⁹ The students worked with a set of 20 pictures, the pre-service and in-service teachers with 25.
Students experienced some difficulty using the criterion of collective identity when confronted with events (such as the Vietnam War and Japanese Internment) that were thought to have had negative influences on the United States’ collective identity or social cohesion. Students found such events, especially those related to racism, confusing and were unable to reconcile them with the narrative of progress they were taught in school and had encountered elsewhere. This was true for most students, although African American students demonstrated a more nuanced understanding of the tension between a dominant story of progress and the continuation of racism in society. Despite displaying differences in understandings of a more complicated progress narrative, Levstik (2000) reports that all students were interested in such issues and wanted to learn more about them, particularly in schools which were highly ethnically diverse.

Teachers and teacher candidates, on the other hand, were prone to avoid such controversial (or at least negative) issues. These participants viewed such events as divisive to national unity and collective identity and therefore did not ascribe significance to them. In addition, Levstik (2000) notes that teachers and teacher candidates avoided these issues because they felt they were too complex for elementary students, were aberrations on an otherwise positive past, and that knowledge of such events could threaten students’ national identity.

The participants in the study described above relied on their ideas about progress, United States national identity and unity in order to select events that were historically significant. There were few differences in the ways in which students from different ethnic groups ascribed historical significance. The African-American students in the study had a more complicated understanding of progress-oriented narratives than their European-American counterparts but still selected events based on a notion of progress. Levstik (2000) notes that this
finding is similar to other history education research with African-American students. She also notes a dilemma inherent in this finding:

A national story of progressive emancipation without attention to the coercive elements of nation building … fails to provide teachers or students with a framework for making sense out of much of history and leaves them vulnerable to myth and manipulation. (p. 298)

Levstik (2000) reveals an important gap between student interests and teacher (and teacher candidate) beliefs in the purpose of teaching United States history. The students in her study were interested in studying the very aspects of United States history that teachers wanted to avoid. The students wanted to know more about events that contradicted their understanding of the development of the nation and their own sense of collective identity. The teachers saw these events as divisive and not in the interest of national unity. Levstik also offers a glimpse into the role that ethnic identity might play in students’ understanding of, and ascriptions of, historical significance but her study design prevented further exploration of this issue. Once again, Levstik notes that while some ethnic minority students challenged European-American students who described US history as a narrative void of substantial struggles for rights or equality, other ethnic minority students often fell silent during the interviews, even if only temporarily. Future research involving ethnically diverse students will want to take this into consideration when forming interview groups.

Almarza’s (2001) case study research on conceptions of historical significance held by Mexican-American students found that the students were so detached from what was happening in the classroom that “the exclusively white oriented American history curriculum even failed to convey to Mexican-American students the significance of the contributions of white people to the historical evolution of the American society of which these Mexican-American students were part” (p.
13). This is a racialized critique levied at the curriculum, not a commentary that the Mexican-American students were bored by “bland” history.

Almarza (2001) found that the Mexican-American students' understanding of historical significance was affected by a number of intersecting factors. First, in their classroom, history was taught from a White-American perspective, to the extent that “the perspective and participation of Mexican people was either ignored or presented ‘as the bad guy’” (p.12). The students’ teacher, Mrs. Perryman, did not regard minority groups' contributions to the history of the United States as significant and therefore failed to include these perspectives in her history lessons. Several students in the study noticed this, and as a result interpreted the history being taught to them as exclusionary, irrelevant and detached from the history of Mexican-Americans. In other words, White-American history held little significance for the Mexican-American students.

Secondly, the teacher taught using a cultural transmission model, an approach that placed the teacher in the position of knowledge-holder and the students in the position of knowledge-receivers. This approach, according to Almarza, “made it even more difficult for those [Mexican-American] students to attach any significance to the curricular content of American history” (p.14). The Mexican-American students in this study were attuned to the impact of this approach on their learning of American history. While their initial response was one of disinterest, another of their responses is perhaps more telling in terms of why they failed to attach significance to the US history they were being taught - they “interpreted the [transmission model] approach as creating a hostile learning environment for them” (p.14) and thus disengaged themselves from the material being taught.

The potential for a positive learning environment was further hampered by “both the pattern employed by Mrs. Perryman for calling on students and her
“allowance of ‘improper’ behaviour by White students toward Mexican-Americans” (p.14). The Mexican-American students recounted that they chose not to participate in class (by volunteering to answer questions, for instance) because their teacher did not call on them and because the White students in the class harassed them when they did attempt to contribute to class discussions. One student summed up how this atmosphere affected how he and his fellow Mexican-Americans felt about American history: “We don’t want to study American history! That’s the history of a bunch of people like Mrs. Perryman who just hate us!” (p.15)

The students in this study attended a school that employed an assimilation policy for all students, meaning that all instruction was in English regardless of a student’s maternal language. Despite the fact that none of the eighteen students in this study attended Special English Language instruction (ESL), their teacher’s assumptions about English language proficiency among Mexican-American students influenced the way in which she interacted with them. Mrs. Perryman doubted her Mexican-American students’ English language capabilities and also devalued their mother tongue and culture. They interpreted her actions and attitudes as racist and thus resisted the history taught by her.

This study is important because it amalgamates a number of contexts affecting minority students’ understanding of historical significance to demonstrate how they overlap and intersect with one another. Rather than focusing on what parts of history the students ascribe significance to, Almarza investigates why the Mexican-American students fail to attach significance to the American history they are being taught. However, through conversations with the students, he is able to elicit what they do regard as significant as well, although these findings are not the main focus of his study. This is an example of a comprehensive approach to researching students’ understanding of historical significance that
addresses multiple factors that may influence how and why they ascribe – or do not ascribe – significance to historical people or events.

In a study comparing conceptions of significance among eighth grade students in England and the United States, Yeager, Foster and Greer (2002) found evidence to support the contention that “class, race, family history, popular culture, the media, and other social and cultural forces are important influences” (p. 202) that affect students’ understanding of history, including historical significance. Yeager, Foster and Greer interviewed students to assess their prior historical knowledge, had students generate a list of the ten most significant events in the twentieth century (and explain the most important one on the list), and then had students choose, and then rank, ten significant events out of a list of forty-seven from a researcher-generated list.

Most of the English students’ choices reflected their English background and this seems hardly surprising. Some students were “influenced by their own cultural [non-English] upbringing” however (Yeager et al., 2002, p. 207). For instance, a student whose father lived in Iraq considered the Iran-Iraq war significant. For another born in South Africa, the end of apartheid was significant. In these cases ethnic identity played a key role in determining the significance of events for these students.

Identity was important for the American students in this study as well. While their “choices were somewhat less culture bound than the English students” they tended to view events “in terms of American involvement or effects” on the world (Yeager et al., 2002, p. 209). And like the students in Barton and Levstik’s (1998) work, these students also used pronouns such as “we,” “our,” and “us” when referring to the history of the United States, thus making clear their identification with and claim to the history of their country.
Protestant and Catholic students in Northern Ireland also identify with the history of their country. As Barton and McCully (2004) discovered, however, students from these two religious groups identify with different aspects of Northern Irish history and this has important implications both for the students’ identities and for history teachers in the country.

This study aimed to examine students’ “constructions of historical themes or concepts and the connection they made between those and their own identities” (Barton & McCully, 2004, p. 6). Data were collected through a picture sorting task similar to those describe earlier, usually with pairs of students ranging in age from 11 – 14 years. The students were asked to arrange pictures into groups in a way they thought made sense and then to explain their method of organization to the researchers. Then the researchers asked the students, “which of the categories, or which individual pictures, ‘have the most to do with you or who you are’?” (p. 8). This was an attempt to elicit the students’ understanding of “identify with” without using that exact phrase (for the reasonable fear that the phrase would confuse students).

Several important findings emerged from this study, the first being that, although students often identified with pictures “that related to their national, religious, and cultural backgrounds,” their “responses contradict any simplistic generalizations about their historical identifications” related to these themes (Barton & McCully, 2004, p. 23). Rather, “the vast majority of students’ responses “involved identification with events other than those related to Protestant/Unionist or Catholic/Nationalist history” (p. 23).

The authors note a disturbing finding in their research and it is one that relates to the sources and interests that influenced students’ historical identifications. In year one of the study these sources and interests were wide ranging but by the third year, students’ “choices and explanations had narrowed considerably, and
they were much more likely to focus on pictures related to their own national, religious, and cultural backgrounds” (pp. 23 – 24). This may speak to more clearly defined historical reasoning but the evidence seems to suggest that it is a case of narrow thinking on the part of the students – or more narrowly defined teaching objectives. Or perhaps both.

Of the many recommendations that can be drawn from this study, two are of particular importance to the current discussion on the relationship between students’ ethnic identities and their historical understandings. At a policy level, Barton and McCully (2004) suggest that individual history departments be given more latitude in developing programs “that take account of individuals and their needs in the communities in which they live” (p. 26). This is not an easy task. Canadian history teachers are already challenged by demanding curricula that span hundreds of years and a multitude of topics. It is impossible to study everyone and everything. Yet, research suggests that students in multi-ethnic societies would be better served by curricula that are tailored to their needs, interests and prior experiences.

Barton and McCully (2004) also suggest that “history educators need to examine more closely the unintended consequences of their choice of content, particularly the ways in which students from diverse backgrounds may interact differently with the same curriculum” (p. 27). Their suggestions seem particularly relevant to students and teachers in the Canadian context, given Canada’s diverse society. With the multitude of identities and individual histories teachers meet in their classrooms, these seem like logical suggestions.

Lévesque also (2005b) notes the importance of understanding the relationship between ethnic identity and students’ understandings of historical significance:

Teachers, students and people in general, no less than historians, confront the study of the past with their own mental framework of historical
significance shaped by their particular cultural and linguistic heritage, family practices, popular culture influence, and last, but not least, school history experience. (¶ 2)

Relying on the work of Phillips (2002), Lévesque contends that historians generally draw on the following five criteria when determining whether or not an event is historically significant, although he acknowledges that there is disagreement amongst historians about these criteria: importance, profundity, quantity, durability and relevance. However, Lévesque argues that “these familiar criteria in historiography have never been fully articulated outside the history community” (¶ 9). He goes on to describe alternative criteria that “can be seen as identifiable contemporary reasons for ascribing significance to events of the past. They help explain how and why people from the education and public communities establish few disciplinary connections of significance with the collective past” (¶ 9) and include criteria such as “intimate interests,” “symbolic significance,” and “contemporary lessons.”

Lévesque (2005b; 2008) adapted the methodology established by Barton and Levstik (1998) to conduct his research. He administered a questionnaire to Francophone and Anglophone Ontarian high school students (grades 10 – 12), asking them to select five (out of a possible 24) historically significant events in Canadian history and to justify their choices. He followed this with semi-structured interviews with a sub-sample of participants, in order to further explore their understandings of historical significance.

Lévesque (2005a) found differences in the events chosen by students in each linguistic group and the criteria used to determine the significance of the events. Anglophone students did not typically rank Francophone events high on their list of significant events, even though the list was entitled “most significant events in Canadian history.” A parallel finding held for the Francophone students – they
had more invested in events that predominantly featured Francophone history and identity, such as the Franco-Ontarian Resistance, or the 1995 Referendum. In terms of criteria used to ascribe significance, Anglophone students tended to use disciplinary criteria whereas Francophone students used more personal criteria such as “symbolic significance” and “intimate interests.” Lévesque posits that they “were more likely to use ‘intimate interests’ than Anglophone students precisely because the minority culture in which they find themselves endorses such connectedness to the collective past – a Canadian past that was traditionally taught by British Canadian authorities” (p. 38). In other words, the Francophone students in his study ascribed significance as a function of – or an expression of – their Francophone identity.

Lévesque’s (2005a; 2005b) research is significant for a number of reasons. It represents the first study in English Canada to replicate well-established research methodologies (Barton & Levstik, 1998; Epstein, 1998, 2000; Levstik, 1999, 2000) in order to investigate Canadian students’ understandings of historical significance. It also attempts to understand the role that ethnic identity might play in these understandings. However, although Levesque attended to the importance of ethnic identity in the analysis of his data, like other researchers he missed an opportunity to overtly ask participants how they believed their ethnic identity influenced the ways in which they selected and ascribed significance to historical events.

Terizan and Yeager’s (2007) research methodology closely mimics that employed by Lévesque (2005a). Using an open-ended questionnaire, Terizan and Yeager asked 70 urban Latino students in their junior year of high school to identify ten significant events, ten significant people, and five significant documents in United States history. Unlike Lévesque, Terizan and Yeager did not provide examples from which the students had to choose. Students were asked to provide a written justification for their choices. In addition, the
researchers conducted semi-structured interviews with a sub-sample of fifteen students and with the history teacher who taught AP American history to all students in the study.

Findings from Terizan and Yeager’s (2007) study closely match findings from similar research conducted in the United States (detailed above). Students typically designated those events, people and documents as historically significant if these phenomena were seen to contribute to a narrative of national unity, freedom and progress. In addition, significance was ascribed if these phenomena contributed to the students’ sense of national identity. The researchers noted the possible influence of the teacher on students’ conceptions of historical significance, noting that the teacher also held similar beliefs about what counts as historically significant in US history. Consistent with earlier research, students “did not attempt to resolve conflicting questions in American society about the meanings of freedom and unity or how the two ideas should be balanced” (p. 73). Perhaps even more interesting, the authors report that these ethnic minority students “did not question official themes in American history” (p. 74). The authors contend that the Latino students in their study were more like the European-American students than the African-American students in Epstein’s (1998) study, in that “both groups [European-American and Latino] viewed examples of inequality and racism as aberrations, and they emphasized examples of progress and worthy intentions throughout US history” (p. 74) and conclude by questioning the “salience of regional and cultural settings in attributing historical significance” (p. 74).

This study is interesting in that it contradicts some earlier work that found that ethnic minority students often challenge the narrative of progress, unity and equality that tends to dominant mainstream US history. Terizan and Yeager (2007) claim that very few students saw the need to incorporate more Latino history into their high school history course. The authors posit that cultural and
economic factors may explain this but their findings remain somewhat puzzling nonetheless. Would the researchers have noticed differences had they conducted a comparative study, like those discussed above? What would have been the impact of directly asking students if and in what ways their ethnic identity impacted their ascription of significance to phenomena in US history?

2.8 Summary

Scholars note the complex nature of ethnic identity, both at the individual level and when thought of more broadly, in terms of ethnicity within Canadian society. Currently, we have very little information on the relationship between students’ ethnic identities and the sense that they make of the history they learn in school in the Canadian context and, given the findings of the international research reviewed here, it would seem that this is a research program that merits close attention.

Seixas (1994b) alerted history education researchers over a decade ago that close attention must be paid to the connections between students’ identities and the history education they receive in schools. He wrote:

> In view of the fact that students occupy a variety of social positions with respect to class, gender, ethnicity, and nationality, future research also should explore how such positions affect reasoning about historical significance. Such research might provide a foundation for curricula that build student understandings of the links between their more particular histories and a larger historical narrative. (p. 300)

After reviewing the research presented above, Seixas’ suggestion bears repeating. This research has shed light on some aspects of the relationship between students’ ethnic identities, their historical understandings and, by extension, their relationship to the nation. We know that students rely on their identities to help shape their understandings of history and conversely, we know
that they rely on their understandings of history to help shape their identity. What remains unclear is a more precise understanding of these processes.

While these studies do not inform us specifically about what pedagogies would be effective in establishing connections between a student’s own framework for negotiating identity and history, they appear to reinforce the fact that, if students are to progress in their historical thinking, such relationships need to be investigated. Sonia Neito’s (2004) work could be particularly helpful here, for her suggestions regarding critical multicultural pedagogy focus on and affirm the social, political and cultural elements that impact students’ learning.

What is needed first, however, is a research agenda that seeks to understand the relationships between students’ ethnic identities and their understanding of historical significance. Metacognition, a key principle in student learning, involves “an awareness of the need to ask how new knowledge relates to or challenges what one already knows” (Donovan & Bransford, 2005, p. 11). The missed opportunity of directly asking students to reflect on the relationship between ethnic, cultural or national identity and their understandings of historical significance is common to all of the studies reviewed here. This represents a significant gap in research design, particularly with older students who are likely capable of articulating such connections. Such questions might provide new insight to a question that interests more and more researchers. This is not to say students’ ideas about the relationship between ethnic identity and understandings of historical significance do not require further analysis by the researcher; only that such questions should be posed to them in the first place.
CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHOD AND PROCEDURES

In this chapter I explore the research method chosen for this study: phenomenography\textsuperscript{10}. I begin by delineating the ontological and epistemological assumptions in phenomenographic research. I then outline the development, purpose and methods of phenomenographic research, including data collection and analysis procedures. I also address a number of concerns related to qualitative research more generally, such as the role of the researcher in the research process and the factors that should be taken into consideration when conducting research in cross-cultural settings. Finally, I conclude with a detailed outline of the research design used to conduct the study.

3.1 Ontological and Epistemological Assumptions of Phenomenography

At the heart of phenomenographic research is the nature of conceptions\textsuperscript{11}. According to Svensson (1997), “conceptions are not entirely naturally given entities neither are they totally subjectively constructed entities” (p. 166). That is, conceptions do not exist in and of themselves – people ascribe meaning to phenomena in the world through thought processes and the production of knowledge. In this section I explore the ontological assumptions of phenomenography (which rest on the nature of conceptions) and the epistemological position from which phenomenography operates. Since

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\textsuperscript{10} This marks the second time I have used phenomenography in a major research study (See Peck, 2003).

\textsuperscript{11} According to Marton and Booth (1997), "... terms such as ‘conceptions’, ‘ways of understanding’, ‘ways of comprehending’, and ‘conceptualizations’ have been used as synonyms for ‘ways of experiencing’; they should all be interpreted in the experiential sense and not in the psychological, cognitivist sense" (p. 114). See also Linder & Marshall (2003).
conceptions are closely tied to knowledge, the ontological and epistemological assumptions in phenomenography are also closely related (Svensson, 1997).

Svensson (1997) argues that “the most fundamental assumption [in phenomenography] is that knowledge and conceptions have a relational nature. Conceptions are dependent both on human activity and the world or reality external to any individual” (p. 165). That is, conceptions are dependent on human thinking and the context in which this thinking occurs; their construction is subjective. Conceptions neither exist only in the world nor are they entities that exist solely in the mind. Rather, conceptions are the product of “an internal relationship between the experiencer and the experienced” (Marton & Booth, 1997, p. 113). Conceptions of phenomena in the world are constructed in the mind and this construction is influenced by the world (surroundings) in which one lives. As Marton and Booth (1997) aver, “we cannot describe a world that is independent of our descriptions or of us as describers. We cannot separate out the describer from description. Our world is a real world, but it is a described world, a world experienced by humans” (p. 113). This differs significantly from a positivist ontological orientation, which asserts that “facts,” “truth” or reality, are real (not constructed), “apprehendible,” and can be objectively observed and which assumes that a researcher’s observations of the world are equal to the conceptions of the world held by those being researched (Guba & Lincoln, 2005).

Phenomenography is “grounded in the principle of intentionality, which embodies a non-dualist view of human cognition insofar as it depicts experience as an internal relationship between human beings and the world” (Pang, 2003, p. 145). In other words, the conception of knowledge that underpins phenomenographic research posits that thinking and experience cannot be separated. Marton (1995) provides an example:

If we reflect on how we experience these kinds of situations we can conclude that, when we speak, for instance, we may occasionally reflect
or focus on what we are going to say, but mostly we have an experience of the words coming by themselves. ... And when we do something we experience both the situation in which we do it and that (or whom) in relation to which we act. But we hardly experience any conceptions guiding our acts. (p. 171)

The nature of phenomenographic research is such that its focus is on second-order descriptions of phenomena (as opposed to first-order descriptions). That is, phenomenography focuses on people’s descriptions of their experiences. Whether these descriptions are accurate or can be verified is not the goal of phenomenographic research. Rather,

Judgments of this kind belong to the first-order perspective. When adopting a second-order perspective, we have to bracket such judgments. We have to look at the statements, acts, and artifacts [emanating from the research] to find out what ways of experiencing particular aspects of the world they reflect, regardless of their validity, skilfulness or functionality. (Marton & Booth, 1997, p. 120)

Marton’s (1995) response to the epistemological problem of how it is possible to reveal or understand people’s conceptions of the world is simply that researchers must inquire about them. Taking a non-dualist perspective, Marton understands the world and people’s experiences of (or conceptions, or ways of understanding) it as intertwined, or “internally related” (p. 172). Understanding the nature of conceptions from this perspective is the central concern in phenomenographic research.

12 First and second-order phenomenographic descriptions are not related to first and second-order concepts in history, discussed in Chapter 2.
3.2 Development and Purpose of Phenomenographic Research

In this section I explore the development and purpose of the phenomenographic research method. International theoretical and empirical literature will be reviewed in order to trace the chronological development of this research method.

The term “phenomenography” was first used by Sonnemann (1954), in “an attempt to distinguish between the phenomenologies of Karl Jaspers and Martin Heidegger, as applied within psychopathology” (Dahlin, 2007, p. 327). The term is rooted in the Greek words “phainemenon” and “graphein” which mean, respectively, appearance and description (Pang, 2003). Almost thirty years later, the term was appropriated by the Göteborg Group and most notably, Ference Marton, to describe a novel approach to educational research.

As a research method, phenomenography “deal[s] with both the conceptual and the experiential, as well as with what is thought of as that which is lived. We would also deal with what is culturally learned and with what are individually developed ways of relating ourselves to the world around us” (Marton, 1981, p. 181). It was initially employed to discern students’ conceptions of learning but has since been used to investigate diverse research interests centred upon people’s conceptions of various phenomena. Researchers in a wide variety of fields such as health care, nursing, civil engineering, physics, geography and physiotherapy (to name but a few) have employed phenomenography as a research method. Phenomenography has emerged as a well-established method in educational research (Chareka, 2005).

Marton (1994) defines phenomenography as follows: “the empirical study of the limited number of qualitatively different ways in which various phenomena in, and aspects of, the world around us are experienced, conceptualized, understood, perceived, and apprehended” (p. 4424). A central tenet in phenomenography is
that there are a limited number of ways in which people understand a given phenomenon: “Phenomena are understood in a limited number of common qualitatively different ways ... there is at any one time a finite number that are experienced” (Barnard, McCosker, & Gerber, 1999, p. 218). The goal of phenomenographic research is to map these conceptions and to delineate the variation between and among conceptions. Martin and Booth (1997) explain that phenomenographic studies “seek the totality of ways [for a particular group of people and phenomenon under study] in which people experience, or are capable of experiencing, the object of interest and interpret it in terms of distinctly different categories that capture the essence of the variation, a set of categories of description from the second-order perspective” (pp. 121-122), although they note that “the system of categories presented can never be claimed to form an exhaustive system. But the goal is that they should be complete in the sense that nothing in the collective experience as manifested in the population under investigation is left unspoken” (p. 125). Phenomenographic research aims to map people’s conceptions and then describe the variations of these conceptions in such a way that distinct categories of description are produced and employed to demonstrate how a target population understands a particular concept.

The product of phenomenographic research is a set of categories of description of people’s conceptions of a particular phenomenon, often called an “outcome space” (Marton & Booth, 1997). An outcome space is “a diagrammatic representation of the logical relationships between conceptions” (Barnard et al., 1999, p. 220) and is a visual representation of the qualitatively different ways in which people understand a phenomenon (it can be as simple as a table outlining the conceptions or something more graphic in design). The outcome space is often characterized as hierarchical or horizontal in nature. A hierarchical outcome space occurs when one conceptualization is considered more advanced or developed than the rest of the outcome space (Webb, 1997). Horizontal
categories occur when different viewpoints emerge which are of equal importance in relation to one another (Hyrkäs, Ästedt-Kurki, & Paunonen, 1999).

As noted earlier, the end product of phenomenographic research, the categories of description, are considered second-order descriptions, or descriptions constructed by the researcher from the first-order descriptions gathered in the data collection process (Marton, 1981). Larsson (1986) clarifies the difference between first- and second-order perspectives: A first-order perspective is oriented toward “the world as it is” whereas a second-order perspective focuses on “the world as it is conceptualized” (p. 37). According to Larsson, a phenomenographer’s “focus is on the pure description of a conception and not, as in ideographical studies, on the genesis of that conception” (p. 37). Second-order descriptions, or descriptions of the world (or phenomena in the world) as experienced (not as it is) are at the heart of phenomenographic categorizations.

In phenomenographic research it is the conceptions themselves that are the focus of research, not the individuals who hold the conceptions. Phenomenographic research does not have as its goal the documentation of an individual’s experience with a phenomenon. Rather, the focus is on mapping the collective experience and understanding of the phenomenon under study (Liu & Lesniak, 2006). In other words, “the objective of a study is to reveal the variation, captured in qualitatively different categories, of ways of experiencing the phenomenon in question, regardless of whether the differences are differences between individuals or within individuals” (Marton & Booth, 1997, p. 124). In a study of forty Canadian high school students’ conceptions of price and trade, Marton and Pong (2005) found that students exhibited both inter-contextual and intra-contextual shifts in their understandings of the concepts under study. They found that, in the first instance, “many of the interviewees used more than one conception for a particular phenomenon. Some of them shifted from one conception to another as they addressed different [interview] questions…Thus,
we cannot ascribe a certain conception of price or trade to a particular individual” (p. 342). In terms of intra-contextual conceptual understanding, the authors also found that “many students expressed more than one conception even when answering any given question” making “it even more difficult to tie a particular student to a particular conception” (p. 344). This is a common characteristic of research findings in many phenomenographic studies.

3.2.1 Phenomenography in Education

Beatty’s (1987) early work utilizing phenomenography to conduct both summative and formative evaluations on two Social Science courses at the Open University demonstrates its usefulness in educational settings. In terms of the summative evaluation, Beatty hoped to employ phenomenography to discern changes in students’ conceptions by comparing data collected before and after an introductory level Social Science course. She found that this particular course was not terribly successful in the development of students’ conceptual understanding as the educators did not reform their teaching styles or curricular materials after the initial data had been collected.

However, by the time a new introductory level Social Science course was proposed, Beatty (1987) reasoned that if phenomenography could be used to find out what students knew about social science concepts prior to the beginning of the course, “the team members, when writing the course, would use the data … to confront and challenge students’ conceptions directly” (p. 354). The results of this section of the study were favourable; students performed much better than previous students who had not benefited from the new strategies and materials employed by the instructors of the newer course. Phenomenographic data was effectively used as a form of formative evaluation to help develop course materials and teaching strategies in order to successfully develop students’ conceptual understanding of social science concepts.
More recently, Bowden (2000) described a branch of phenomenography called *developmental phenomenography*, or the vein of phenomenographic research devoted entirely to studying conceptions of educational concepts. According to Bowden, developmental phenomenography is intended to be used to improve teaching strategies and instructional materials, to help the participants of the study become more effective learners, as well as to plan “learning experiences which will lead students to a more powerful understanding of the phenomenon under study, and of similar phenomena” (p. 4). In addition, developmental phenomenography can instruct educators on how to structure and sequence learning experiences in such a way as to most benefit the learner. This differs from *pure* phenomenographic research (Barnard et al., 1999; Bowden, 2000), whose “ultimate goal is to develop full descriptions of the range of ways of experiencing that phenomenon, with no intention of using those outcomes to effect change” (Bowden, 2000, p. 5).

The purpose of phenomenographic research in education is therefore to map the content of the aforementioned outcome space, with the end result being an understanding of how students conceptualize the phenomena under study. Once this information has been established, educators ought to be able to design teaching materials and instructional strategies which aim to advance learners’ understanding from the novice to more sophisticated stages. According to Webb (1997), “phenomenography has played an important role in suggesting to educational developers an agenda for researching and improving educational practice” (p. 196). Phenomenography offers a method for understanding the ways in which people, and in particular students, conceptualize various phenomena of the world. As such, it holds great potential for educational researchers wanting to identify students’ conceptual understandings.

Recently, Pang (2003) has noted a shift in the primary objective of phenomenographic research. Most phenomenographic research is descriptive in
nature; its goal is to describe the range of conceptions held by a group of people, and to delineate the relationship between and among the conceptions. Pang explains the shift as one "in primary emphasis from questions concerning how different ways of experiencing something can be captured methodologically to theoretical questions about the nature of the differences" (p. 147). This signifies growth in the field, as researchers try to delve deeper into their participants' conceptualizations in an effort to deconstruct their understandings, perceptions, or ways of knowing about the phenomenon under study.

3.3 Data Collection in Phenomenography

The primary data collection technique in phenomenographic research is the use of semi-structured interviews. This is the most commonly employed strategy noted in all of the literature referenced in this review of phenomenographic studies. Although some authors (H. Francis, 1996; Hyrkäš et al., 1999; Pramling, 1995; Richardson, 1999) acknowledge the use of drawings, dramatizations, writing, symbolizing, observations, questionnaires and analysis of historical documents as feasible research tools, the majority depend heavily on face to face interviews. In this section I explore the central components of the phenomenographic interview as well as certain research procedures that are central to phenomenographic inquiry.

The most difficult component of phenomenography is staying on task during the interview. Bowden (2000), building on Marton (1981), offers some suggestions to prevent the researcher from wavering off course: First, “let the subjects choose the dimensions of the question they want to answer. The dimensions they choose are an important source of data because they reveal an aspect of the individual’s relevance structure” (p. 9). Once the initial responses have been discussed by the interviewee and the researcher, the interviewer should probe the interviewee in an effort “to get interviewees to reflect on what they have
expressed, to explain their understanding more fully, and to reveal their way of understanding the phenomenon” (p. 10).

Often, at the core of each interview is a specific stimulus, chosen purposefully to engage the participants in a discussion pertaining directly to the phenomenon under investigation. Marton and Booth (1997) describe the following process which, they argue, should be employed in phenomenographic interviews: The interviewees are first asked to undertake a task (reading a text or solving a problem) and report on it, and then to describe how they had gone about the task. In the first part the researcher had formed the situation, the output of which was of the interviewee’s making (a description or a solution), and in the second part the output was a probing of the interviewee’s own awareness of producing it…Whereas in the first part, the phenomenon that the interviewee is being asked to handle is already brought to awareness by the interviewer in an open and concrete form, in the second part the interviewee herself has to discern the phenomenon and distinguish it from the situation as whole. (p. 130)

During this process, Walsh (2000) advises that, “it was essential that the interviewer be particularly attentive to what the students were saying but did not respond to the answers as a teacher would” (p. 31). The researcher’s main task is to ask challenging questions regarding the stimulus and to ask follow-up questions aimed at encouraging the child “to explain what they mean in several different ways” (Pramling, 1995, p. 139). Richardson (1999) refers to this process as bringing the interviewee “to a state of ‘meta-awareness’ in order to enable them to articulate their conceptions” (p. 69). Bowden (2000) looks for questions that are open-ended and diagnostic, designed “to reveal the different ways of understanding the phenomenon within that context” (p. 8).
Francis (1996) offers by far the most comprehensive analysis of the phenomenographic interview. Since “the aim of the interview” according to Francis, “is to have the interviewee thematize the phenomenon of interest and make the [sic] thinking explicit” (p. 38), the researcher needs to take care not to influence the thinking of the interviewee throughout the process. It is therefore important to avoid leading questions that indicate the researcher’s perspective or lens. Francis recommends that phenomenographic researchers demonstrate in some way (in the written analysis) the measures they have taken to ensure that what they gathered is as true to the participants’ conceptions as possible. For instance, although Francis acknowledges that, “some pre-determined ‘leading experiences’ and ‘leading prompts’ are required to focus the interview appropriately for the aims of the study” she advises that, “these ‘leads’ should be reported and their effectiveness and effects should be estimated in such a way as to inform the analysis of the data and the reporting of findings” (p. 39). The clearer a researcher can be when reporting her/his findings the more likely the research will stand up to critical examination. Clarity and thoroughness are the researcher’s responsibilities.

It is also advisable to report on how the researcher kept the interviewee focused on the phenomenon in question, by providing a full interview protocol, for instance. As Francis (1996) frames it, the reader wants to know “that what was learned by the interviewer was what the interviewee actually said” (p. 46) about the phenomenon. Francis also suggests that the researcher “could specifically aim to take steps to ensure that the outcome data is the best record they could achieve for another person to appreciate the nature of the interviewee’s conceptions of the reality at stake” (p. 41). Sandbergh (1997) concurs, noting that, “the researcher must demonstrate how he/she has dealt with his/her

13 Questions around validity and trustworthiness will be addressed in a later section.
intentional relation to the individual’s conceptions being investigated” (p. 209). This involves maintaining precise records throughout the research process, especially in the data analysis stage. It is important to demonstrate the degree to which the categories of description (or “outcome space”) generated by the researcher correspond to the conceptions expressed by the interviewees.

3.4 Data Analysis in Phenomenography

As noted earlier, the goal of phenomenography is to thematize the complex of possible ways of viewing various aspects of the world, the aggregate of basic conceptions underlying not only different, but even alternative and contradictory forms of propositional knowledge, irrespective of whether these forms are deemed right or wrong. (Marton, 1981, p. 197)

In phenomenography the categories of description “should emerge from comparisons conducted within the data” (Richardson, 1999, p. 70).

Once analysis has begun, phenomenographers are no longer interested in individual transcripts per se. Rather, it becomes increasingly important to examine the data as a whole, particularly when on a quest for emergent themes or categories. Barnard et al. (1999) alert phenomenographers to the fact that “one or two statements selected without consideration to an entire transcript (or any other form of data) and the intended meaning are inadequate” (p. 216) for a comprehensive analysis. Because phenomenographic work focuses on the variation of experiences or understandings, the objective of a study is to reveal the variation, captured in qualitatively distinct categories, of ways of experiencing the phenomenon in question, regardless of whether the differences are differences between individuals or within individuals…To the extent that the group [of study participants] represents the variation of individuals in a wider population (or is a theoretical sample of that population), the categories of description can
also be said to apply to that wider population. (Marton & Booth, 1997, p. 124)

Although phenomenographic researchers do not claim to know how people conceptualize a phenomenon in an absolute sense, the method allows researchers “to differentiate between a number of different ways of seeing the phenomenon” (Bowden, 2000, p. 16) in question.

When analyzing data, Francis (1996) advocates the “sorting of expressions in terms of similarities and differences between them, with iteration to arrive at the most satisfactory outcome” (p. 43). Others have labeled iteration the saturation point (Hyrkäs et al., 1999). However, Marton and Booth (1997) outline the complexity of arriving at this outcome:

The way in which a person experiences a phenomenon does not constitute the phenomenon itself. It rather constitutes one facet of the phenomenon, seen from that person’s perspective, with that person’s biography as background. In contrast, when the researcher describes the differing ways of experiencing a phenomenon, the researcher is describing the phenomenon, again, no more than partially, from the reports or inferences of the subjects, and it is this partial constitution of the phenomenon that is the researcher’s description. (pp. 124-125)

Thus, Walsh (2000) advises the researcher to examine the organization of the categories of description and the data on a continual basis in order to ensure that the categories represent the data in an accurate fashion.

As noted earlier, some researchers actually use graphical representations to transform the categories of description and outcome space. These concept maps enable phenomenographic researchers to visualize the outcome space of the particular phenomenon under study. It may also empower the phenomenographers to note more readily the inter-relatedness of the categories
of description. Moreover, the hierarchical and horizontal traits existent in the outcome space may be made more evident once the categories have been illustrated.

3.5 Role of the Researcher

No research approach is without areas of concern and phenomenography is no exception. The most commonly cited concerns are related to the construction of categories of description and the location of the researcher in the research process. These issues are elaborated in this section.

With regard to the construction of the categories of description, Säljö (1996) raises the concern that, in phenomenography, the assumption seems to be that what is meant by what is said can be construed as representing a conception of the phenomenon which one – according to the interviewer – is talking about. The researchers hardly ever analyze the possibilities that differences in conceptions represent variations in interpretations of the questions asked, or that the very act of combining utterances into phenomenographic conceptions imply manipulations of the original message and, in a sense, problems of translation …. Phenomenographers alienate individuals from their own utterances by reducing these into statements and by systematically disregarding the contexts in which they were uttered and the work they are doing when produced in communicative practices. (pp. 24-25)

Webb (1997) follows suit:

What are the ‘prejudices’ of phenomenographers as they construct and interpret categories of understanding: What is the ‘something theoretical’ which informs their observations? What else can it be but their own historically and socially informed understanding. (p. 200)
Clearly, the role of the researcher is paramount in phenomenographic research, in that the researcher’s lens determines the distinguishing features of the findings. Like all qualitative researchers, phenomenographers must be acutely aware of how they conduct the interview and how they interpret the data (Beaty, 1987; Bowden, 2000; H. Francis, 1996; Larsson, 1986; Richardson, 1999; Säljö, 1996; Walsh, 2000; Webb, 1997).

As discussed earlier, Marton and Booth (1997) acknowledge that any descriptions generated by the researcher can only ever be partial descriptions. However, they contend that, through a thorough documentation of the research and data analysis processes, this concern can be addressed. One way to do this, they argue, is for the researcher to delimit

the phenomenon that is central to her interest, be it learning as such, or the nature of matter, or whatever. The researcher has a responsibility to contemplate the phenomenon, to discern its structure against the backgrounds of the situations in which it might be experienced, to distinguish its salient features, to look at it with others’ eyes, and still be open to further developments. There are various ways of going about this. One way is by considering the phenomenon’s treatment in other research traditions: how it appears in literature, in treatises and in textbooks or how it has been handled in the past and in different cultures. If the researcher is to be able to meet the people she is interested in and take part in a discourse that attempts to reach their unreflected experience, that she might herself be aware of the many possible starting points, they will have, the sorts of situations in which they have met the phenomenon before, and the range of ways in which they might handle it. (p. 129)

Notwithstanding Marton and Booth’s advice, Walsh (2000) wonders what would happen should the researcher think s/he knows the phenomenon better than the interviewees: What if the researcher decides not to use some data if it does not
fit the categories in her/his mind? Walsh notes that the researcher must be mindful of the need to “adjust and restructure the categories in order to represent the data faithfully” (p. 21).

Francis (1996) offers a final piece of cautionary advice for phenomenographic researchers, demanding that researchers make procedural and decision-making criteria as clear as possible in their writing. She reasons that if these aspects of the research process are documented, “the reader of the research report will be able to judge on what grounds and in what sense they can accept that the final categorization is the most satisfactory” (p. 44). While this type of procedural advice may seem routine to some readers, it has been identified as an important concern for phenomenographic researchers and should be addressed in future research.

In phenomenographic research, the researcher is in a position of relative power vis à vis the researched:

The question of balance in terms of overcoming defenses and the issues of distance versus closeness is ever present in the more reflective parts of an interview, in which the interviewer could easily destroy the relationship by pressing too hard or not enough, or by getting too close or not close enough. In contrast, the interviewee always has the power to refuse, to deny the interviewer access to thoughts and reflections, or even to mislead. (Marton & Booth, 1997, p. 131)

Ashworth and Lucas (2000) offer some practical advice for researchers wishing to refrain from dominating the interview process:

In essence, the interview should be regarded as a conversational partnership in which the interviewer assists the process of reflection. To this end the researcher should…engage in empathetic listening to hear meanings, interpretations, and understandings; consciously silence his or her concerns, preoccupations and judgements [sic]; and use prompts to
pursue/clarify the participant's own line of reflection and allow the
participant to elaborate, provide incidents, clarifications and, maybe, to
discuss events at length. (pp. 302-303)

As with all interpretive research, the role of the researcher is critical in
phenomenographic studies in that the researcher’s worldview determines the
distinguishing features of the findings. Phenomenographic researchers must pay
close attention both to how they conduct the interviews and to the lenses they
use to interpret the data.

3.6 Research Procedures
In the following sections I outline the research procedures used during this study.

3.6.1 Geographical Setting of Study
This study took place in an urban centre in the Lower Mainland region of British
Columbia. The Lower Mainland region of British Columbia is ethno-culturally
diverse, with 37.5%\(^{14}\) of the population members of a visible minority, 36.9% of
the total population immigrants to Canada, and a little less than 2% of the
population Aboriginal\(^{15}\) (Statistics Canada, 2002).

This study took place in three secondary schools in the Lower Mainland. All
schools share a similar socio-economic status, are located in similar working-
class neighbourhoods and are in close proximity to one another. “Eastside A” is
an “outreach” school providing rich, alternative educational services to Aboriginal
students, grades nine to twelve. Approximately 20 students attended Eastside A

\(^{14}\) Statistics current at time of study. More recent figures indicate that the population of the Lower
Mainland region of BC is now comprised of 41.7% visible minorities, 39.6% immigrants and just under 2%
Aboriginal (Statistics Canada, 2007).

\(^{15}\) Usage of the terms visible minority, immigrant and Aboriginal are consistent with terms and definitions
employed by Statistics Canada (see http://www.statcan.ca/english/concepts/index.htm).
secondary school. A modified academic program is supplemented with outdoor education and counseling, and is largely designed around Aboriginal cultures, knowledge and epistemologies.

Approximately 930 students attend “Eastside B,” the second school from which participants were drawn for this study. Eastside B offers a range of programs to its students, including an Alternate Program and a “Mini School,” the latter of which offers an enriched and accelerated high school program to selected students. Mini Schools are quite common in the Lower Mainland region of BC.

The third school from which participants were drawn, “Eastside C,” is a school that serves approximately 1050 students. Like Eastside B, Eastside C offers a range of programs to its students, including a Fine Arts program and a Culinary program. In addition, and largely through the dedication of two Aboriginal Support Workers and the school’s administration, Eastside C has developed a substantial support network for its Aboriginal students.

3.6.2 Study Participants

This study had two important dimensions to consider in the selection of participants. One, students needed to have enough background knowledge to perform the research task. Second, because I was interested in the relationship between a student’s ethnic identity and his/her ascription of historical significance in Canadian history, and my desire to perform a comparative analysis of their conceptions, it was important to have participants from a range of ethnic groups.

Because this study focused on students’ conceptions of historical significance within the context of Canadian history, it was important that students had some background knowledge of Canadian history in order to participate in the research.

16 Numbers provided reflect the enrolment status at the time of the study (Vancouver School Board, 2006).
because they may have wanted or have needed to draw on that knowledge in the main research activity, the small group, timeline task (described in “Phase Two,” below). All students in British Columbia must take either Social Studies 11, BC First Nations Studies 12 or Civic Studies 11 and in this case, all participants had taken one of these courses in the year prior to the study (24 students had taken Social Studies 11 and 2 students had taken First Nations Studies 12). The target population for this study was grade twelve students who attended schools in the Lower Mainland.

As already described, the population in the Lower Mainland region of British Columbia is ethnically diverse and the schools from which participants were drawn reflected this diversity. Participants were drawn from a cohort of 16-18 year old students at the end of secondary school (grade 12). Four entire grade 12 social studies classes were invited to participate in the research (N of students = ~120). The response rate was approximately twenty-five percent (N=29) and meant that all of the students who volunteered were able to participate in the study, although three students chose to withdraw from the study due to prior commitments. Thus, a total of twenty-six students participated in the study. Most (n=17) of the participants were born in Canada. Seven of the participants were immigrants to Canada, and two were Aboriginal. A range of ethnic identities was reflected in each of these sub-groups.

In order to gain a deeper understanding of the students’ current social studies environment, grades ten, eleven and twelve social studies teachers in the students’ schools were also asked to provide information in the form of a questionnaire. Questions included the use of teacher and student materials, teaching approaches and activities, and the teachers’ understandings of historical significance. While social studies teachers were not the focus of the study, the information provided by the teachers enabled me to locate the findings
from the student-generated data within the context of the students’ social studies education. Tables 2 through 6 provide a summary of the study participants.

Table 2: Participants by school

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of School</th>
<th>Number of Student Participants</th>
<th>Number of Teacher Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Eastside A</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastside B</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastside C</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: Aboriginal students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age 18</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ES-A1</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ES-A2</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The relatively low number of Aboriginal participants (compared to Canadian-born and immigrant student participants) is, in part, a reflection of the significantly high (approximately 60%) attrition rate of Aboriginal high school students in British Columbia (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2006a). Following the principles of respect, relevance, reciprocity and responsibility outlined by Pidgeon and Hardy Cox (2002), I strove to create meaningful relationships with the Aboriginal Support Workers and professionals at two schools, Eastside A and C, before engaging in the data collection stage of my research. For several months,

17 As noted earlier, teachers were not the focus of this study. They were, however, asked to provide some contextual information with regard to the Social Studies/History program at their respective schools.

18 Information on students’ “Age” and “Years Lived in Canada” were obtained at the time of the study (2005-2006) and have not been updated to reflect a later publication date.
I met regularly with and received advice from two Aboriginal Support Workers at Eastside C in an effort to develop a rapport with them and the Aboriginal students at the school. I attended several informal and formal social gatherings, such as meetings with students and an Aboriginal family night, which brings members of the wider school community and the school’s Aboriginal community together in an effort for all to gain a better understanding of Aboriginal cultures. On one occasion, I presented my research project to a group of approximately ten students; however none were in Grade 12, which was one requirement of my study. I chose not to involve younger students so as to not disadvantage them in terms of the exposure to background knowledge on Canadian history required for my study.19 I had hoped that some students at the end of grade 11 might volunteer; however none were forthcoming. The end of the year is a busy and stressful time as students prepare for provincial exams so it is understandable that students might have been reluctant to participate. Therefore, one of the Support Workers from Eastside C referred me to personnel from Eastside A, an outreach school whose entire population is composed of Aboriginal students. Two grade 12 students from Eastside A volunteered to participate in my study.

19 This is not to say that exposure to Canadian history in Grade 11 meant that all students who participated in the study would have an equal footing in that knowledge. However, I used completion of Grade 11 as a delimiter in order to select study participants.
Table 4: Canadian-born students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ES-B1</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>ES-C13</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ES-B7</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>ES-C14</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ES-B8</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>ES-C17</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ES-C1</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>ES-C18</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ES-C3</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>ES-C19</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ES-C5</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>ES-C20</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ES-C8</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>ES-C21</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ES-C9</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>ES-C24</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ES-C12</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>17</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5: Immigrant students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Country of Immigration</th>
<th>Years Lived in Canada</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ES-B3</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Philippines</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ES-B4</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Hong Kong</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ES-B5</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ES-B6</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>China</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ES-C2</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>United Arab Emirates</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ES-C15</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Republic of Korea (South)</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ES-C22</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>China</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

20 For the purpose of this dissertation, first-generation Canadian means someone who is a child of immigrants to Canada, second-generation Canadian means someone whose parents were born in Canada and third-generation Canadian means someone whose grandparents were born in Canada.
Table 6: Number of student participants by gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th># of Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.6.3 Data Collection\(^{21}\)

Data were collected in two phases and included document analysis, questionnaires, and both focus group (2) and individual interviews with students. In addition, the Social Studies/History teachers in each school were asked to complete a questionnaire. Figure 1 provides a graphic representation of the data collection process.

\(^{21}\) All research materials can be found in Appendices A – L.
PHASE ONE

• Analyze provincial curriculum documents
• Develop and refine data collection instruments based on well-established models
• Administer demographic questionnaire, including descriptive paragraph on ethnic identity

PHASE TWO

• Formation of focus groups
• Focus Group 1: Timeline Task
• Observations
• Memoing

• Focus Group 2: Follow-up interviews with same groups of students as in Focus Group 1
• Memoing

• Individual interviews – connecting data from questionnaire to entire process with central question: In what ways do you think your identity as [x] influenced the decisions you made during the Timeline Task?

Social Studies teachers complete questionnaires.

Figure 1: Overview of data collection procedures
3.6.4 Phase One: Document Analysis, Development of Research Materials and Administration of Questionnaire

During the first phase of the research I examined British Columbia Social Studies 11 curriculum documents, textbooks and teacher-prepared materials. These were examined to determine which events, developments and people were emphasized in the Grade 11 Social Studies curriculum. This curriculum focuses on the rights, responsibilities and practices of active citizenship, 20th century Canadian history, environmental issues and global development, and the concept of “Canadian identity” (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2005). Small group interview tasks (timeline activity) and protocols modeled on well-established American and European research (Barton & Levstik, 1998; Epstein, 2000; Lee & Ashby, 2000; Levstik, 1999) were developed and refined at this time.

3.6.5 The Research Stimuli

Stakeholders in history education – teachers, curriculum developers, textbook publishers, educational researchers and students – have long recognized the influence of visual texts on students’ historical understanding (Clark, 1997; Fresch, 2004; Werner, 2002). History education researchers in particular have employed a wide variety of visual texts to investigate students’ knowledge and understanding of historical concepts: film and/or television (Lévesque, 2003; Seixas, 1993b), murals (Seixas & Clark, 2004), art (Hughes & Sears, 2004; Pazienza & Clarke, 1997), photographs (Barton & Levstik, 2004; Epstein, 2000; Lévesque, 2005a), “keepsakes” (Kölbl & Straub, 2001), written documents (Lee & Ashby, 2000; VanSledright, 2002), or combinations of these (Booth, 1980; Holt, 1990; Wineburg, 1991a, 1991b).

Since phenomenographic interviews are often focused on a semi-projective stimulus meant to provoke the interviewee into speaking about the phenomenon under study (Webb, 1997), considerable time was spent in the construction of the
stimuli that were used in this research. In order to produce the desired results (i.e., a vibrant discussion about the phenomenon under study) the stimuli had to be engaging and the captions had to provide enough detail to enable students to make informed decisions about the significance of the event under consideration.

Table 7: Summary of interview stimuli

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Ethnic/National Groups</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Region</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Granting of Royal Charter for Fur Trade</td>
<td>1670</td>
<td>Aboriginal, European</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Central &amp; Western</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Expel Acadians</td>
<td>1755 – 1758</td>
<td>European-descent, Acadians</td>
<td>M, F</td>
<td>Atlantic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Siege of Québec</td>
<td>1759</td>
<td>European, European descent</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Québec</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Europeans arrive on west coast of Canada</td>
<td>1778</td>
<td>European, Aboriginal</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>West Coast</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

22 Ethnic/national groups listed here as they appear explicitly in the stimuli. If no people are shown, or if the images do not clearly identify specific ethnic/national groups, or no ethnic/national groups are explicitly mentioned in the caption, this is left blank.

23 Gender (M = male, F = female) is listed here when it is explicitly shown or mentioned in either the image, title or caption. If no people are shown, or if the images do not clearly identify men or women (or boys or girls), or if gender is not mentioned in the caption, this will be left blank.

24 Explanation of regions: Atlantic = Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, and Newfoundland and Labrador (or any part therein); Central = Quebec and Ontario (or any part therein); Quebec = Quebec; Western = Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta (or any part therein); West Coast = British Columbia; Canada = all parts of Canada
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Ethnic/National Groups</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Region</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>The War of 1812</td>
<td>1812</td>
<td>European-descent, Aboriginal</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Central</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Creation of Indian Residential Schools</td>
<td>mid – 1800s</td>
<td>European-descent, Aboriginal</td>
<td>M, F</td>
<td>Canada</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Fraser River Gold Rush</td>
<td>1858</td>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>West Coast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Confederation</td>
<td>1867</td>
<td>European-descent</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Central &amp; Atlantic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Building of the Canadian Pacific Railway</td>
<td>1881 – 1885</td>
<td>European-descent</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Canada</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Recruitment of Chinese workers to build the Canadian Pacific Railway</td>
<td>1880s – 1890s</td>
<td>European, East Asian</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Western &amp; West Coast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Imposition of the Chinese Head Tax</td>
<td>1885</td>
<td>European descent, East Asian</td>
<td>M, F</td>
<td>Canada</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Louis Riel and the North-West Rebellion</td>
<td>1885</td>
<td>European descent, Aboriginal</td>
<td>M, F</td>
<td>Western</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Anti-Asiatic Riots, Vancouver</td>
<td>1907</td>
<td>European descent, East Asian</td>
<td>M, F</td>
<td>West Coast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Record Immigration Numbers</td>
<td>1913</td>
<td>Various</td>
<td></td>
<td>Canada</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Ethnic/National Groups</td>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Region</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------------</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Komagata Maru Incident</td>
<td>1914</td>
<td>European descent, South Asian</td>
<td>M, F</td>
<td>West Coast</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Britain (and Canada) enters WWI</td>
<td>1914 – 1918</td>
<td>European, European descent</td>
<td>M, F</td>
<td>Canada</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Women’s Suffrage Movement</td>
<td>1916 – 1918</td>
<td>European descent</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Canada</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Halifax Explosion</td>
<td>1917</td>
<td></td>
<td>M, F</td>
<td>Atlantic</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Winnipeg General Strike</td>
<td>1919</td>
<td></td>
<td>M, F</td>
<td>Western</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Persons Case</td>
<td>1929</td>
<td>European descent</td>
<td>M, F</td>
<td>Canada</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Great Depression</td>
<td>1929 – 1939</td>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Canada</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada enters WWII</td>
<td>1939 – 1945</td>
<td></td>
<td>M, F</td>
<td>Canada</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japanese interment during WWII</td>
<td>1942</td>
<td>European descent, East Asian</td>
<td>M, F</td>
<td>West Coast, Western</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pearson wins Nobel Peace Prize</td>
<td>1957</td>
<td>European descent, European, West Asian</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Canada</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Ethnic/National Groups</td>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Region</td>
</tr>
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<td>---</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>25.</td>
<td>The October Crisis &amp; The War Measures Act</td>
<td>1970</td>
<td>European descent, European</td>
<td>M, F</td>
<td>Québec</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27.</td>
<td>Canada Act Passed</td>
<td>1982</td>
<td>European descent, European</td>
<td>M, F</td>
<td>Canada</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28.</td>
<td>Collapse of the “Meech Lake Accord”</td>
<td>1990</td>
<td>Aboriginal, European-descent</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Québec &amp; Canada</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29.</td>
<td>The Québec Referendum</td>
<td>1995</td>
<td>Various</td>
<td>M, F</td>
<td>Canada</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Participating students were asked to complete a questionnaire on their demographic information. VanSledright, Kelly and Meuwissen (2006) contend that "studying ideas about historical significance among learners remains only a partially successful endeavour without collecting sufficient data on their biographies" (p. 227). As a White researcher, I did not want to make assumptions about students' ethnic identities (Carr & Lund, 2007; Dei et al., 2004; Delpit, 1995; Tyson, 2006). Therefore, I also asked students to write a paragraph describing their ethnic identity. This proved fruitful and worthwhile because many students’ descriptions of their ethnic identities were different than

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25 This is consistent with the principles of phenomenographic research; that is, a person’s understanding of a phenomenon is set against the backdrop of his/her biography (Marton & Booth, 1997, See also Section 3.4, above).
their responses to closed questions related to identity on the questionnaire. For instance, in response to a question about place of birth one student answered “Hong Kong.” However, when asked to describe her ethnic identity in her own words, she wrote the following:

Ethnically, I would consider myself Vietnamese, but culturally, because almost all my life was spent here in Canada, I would call myself a Canadian. Knowing both languages, Vietnamese spoken at home and English at school, probably accounts for my reasoning of being a Vietnamese Canadian among many other reasons of my personal values, and not necessarily what I was taught at home or at school. (ES-B4)

As discussed in Chapter Two, identity is a complex, fluid and subjective concept and the descriptions the students provided should be regarded as provisional. That is, students’ perceptions of their own ethnic identity likely changed over the course of the study and will have continued to develop since that time. Therefore, before beginning the final stage of data collection (the individual interviews) I conducted member-checks with students and provided opportunities for them to elaborate on their identity descriptions as desired. VanSledright, Kelly and Meuwissen (2006) counsel that no method for collecting biographical information is completely foolproof, but insist that “the effort must be made, as a means of providing some sociocultural context within which to situate” the data (p. 227). The students’ perceptions of their ethnic identities will be discussed in Chapter 5.

3.6.6 Phase Two: Focus Group and Individual Interviews
Following the phenomenographic procedures described earlier in this chapter, Phase Two of the study involved a three step process. First, I reviewed the content of the demographic information and student-generated descriptive paragraphs in order to form focus groups for the next stage of data collection
(timeline task). As much as possible, groups were constructed according to the following guidelines:

- Students who self-described as Aboriginal (or a synonym for this term) were interviewed together.
- Students who were immigrants to Canada were interviewed together.
- Students who were Canadian-born were interviewed together.

However, as is typical when conducting research in schools (and not wanting to overly disrupt the teachers’ and students’ schedules), these desired groupings were not always obtained. Table 9 outlines the various interview groupings that were formed for the purpose of the timeline task and follow-up focus group interviews.
The timeline task was modeled on well-established American and European research (Barton & Levstik, 1998; Epstein, 2000; Lee & Ashby, 2000; Lévesque, 2005a; Levstik, 1999). Each timeline task focus group followed the following procedure:
1. Students were asked about their familiarity with timelines. I asked for brief explanations of what a timeline is, why someone might create a timeline, and invited any other information students wanted to offer about timelines.

2. Students were then asked to create a timeline by discussing and selecting, out of a possible thirty, ten significant events in Canadian history. I used the same script to describe the task at the beginning of each focus group.

3. Once I handed the set of 30 pictures to the students, I sat in the background, observed the group work and took notes to record body language, sorting techniques, and to aid in the development of questions that I asked in the follow-up focus group interviews. I did not speak during the process unless asked a specific question by one of the students, and then only gave definitive answers to questions requesting clarification of the task. That is, I did not respond to questions concerning content knowledge (e.g., “What was the Siege of Québec about?”). On rare occasions, I intervened very briefly to ensure that all group members were participating in the timeline task (e.g., “ES-C3, what do you think about that?”).

4. Once the students had constructed their timeline, I asked them to explain each of their choices. I asked probing questions in order to explore the students’ reasoning more deeply.

The focus group interviews were digitally recorded and typically lasted approximately 60 minutes.

In order to bring students to a state of meta-awareness regarding their conceptions of historical significance, in the second part of the timeline task I
conducted follow-up focus group interviews with each of the groups of students to further probe their understandings of historical significance. The following procedures were followed for the follow-up focus group interviews:

1. Students sat around a table and reconstructed their timeline with the event cards they had selected during the timeline task.

2. I asked students if they were satisfied with the events they had chosen, and asked them to explain why or why not.

3. I then asked a series of questions to further probe their understandings of historical significance, such as: Did they think other people might make similar or different choices, and if so, why? Would someone younger/older than them make similar or different choices, and if so, why? Did they think a group of students from a different ethnic group than them might construct a timeline similar to their’s and if so/not, why? I probed the students’ responses to further explore their thinking about historical significance.

The follow-up focus group interviews were digitally recorded and typically lasted approximately 30 minutes.

Focus groups have the potential to “produce data that are seldom produced through individual interviewing and observation and that result in especially powerful interpretive insights. In particular, the synergy and dynamism generated within homogeneous collectives often reveal unarticulated norms and normative assumptions” (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2005, p. 903). Assumptions and unarticulated norms emerged in several of focus groups in this study, and in particular in those groups which were composed of all Aboriginal students, all immigrant students, or all Canadian-born students (although these groups were not homogeneous in terms of other factors, such as gender and ethnic identity).
In some cases, assumptions about “what counts” as historically significant in Canadian history were revealed as groups work together on the assigned task. These assumptions will be examined in Chapter 5.

Kamberelis and Dimitriadis (2005) also note that the use of focus groups helps to “decentre the role of the researcher” and create a more democratic research process, “providing participants with more ownership over it, promoting more dialogic interactions and the joint construction of more polyvocal texts” (p. 904). This was a fundamental goal for me as I engaged in this research project. Nieto’s (2004) work was particularly influential in terms of recognizing the importance of creating space for a multiplicity of student voices throughout the study (See also Diaz Soto & Swadener, 2005).

Similar to individual interviews, in a focus group interview situation the researcher “must be flexible, objective, empathetic, persuasive, a good listener, and so forth” (Fontana & Frey, 2005, p. 704). However, there are specific concerns related to focus group interviewing. These are:

- the interviewer must keep one person or a small coalition of persons from dominating the group
- the interviewer must encourage recalcitrant respondents to participate
- the interviewer must obtain responses from the entire group to ensure the full list coverage of the topic (Fontana & Frey, 2005, p. 704).

In response to these concerns, and especially during the follow-up focus group interviews, I ensured that each student had an opportunity to respond to questions posed by making eye contact with students (indicating my interest in their responses), providing sufficient time for all students to respond, moderating (as needed) to lessen the occurrence of interruptions, and providing opportunities for students to ask me questions.
An additional concern is that individuals may feel overwhelmed or silenced in a group setting (Fontana & Frey, 2005). To counter this concern, in the final step in Phase Two of the data collection process I triangulated data by following the two focus group sessions with individual student interviews, in order to create a space where students could freely comment on the decisions around historically significant events arrived at during the focus group sessions. I interviewed students individually in order to probe their understandings of how their ethnic identity may have influenced the decisions they made in the timeline task. The following procedures were followed:

1. I met with each student individually and began by explaining that the purpose of the individual interview was three-fold: First, this was the final stage of data collection and, in essence, brought the process full circle by returning to the idea of ethnic identity that was first explored on the questionnaire they completed at the beginning of the research project. Second, I wanted to hear the student’s own ideas about how they think their ethnic identity impacted the decisions they made during the timeline task, if at all. Finally, I wanted to create a space where individuals could openly discuss their ideas and offer their opinions about the timeline task and historical significance without worrying about what their peers might think or say.

2. At the beginning of the individual interview, I read to each student the paragraph he/she had written on the questionnaire describing his/her ethnic identity. I asked if he/she wanted to add or change anything that he/she had written, and provided each student with an opportunity to do so.

3. During the individual interview students were asked questions such as: Are you happy (satisfied) with the timeline your group created?, Is
there anything you would change about this timeline?, Given that you described yourself as [x], do you think your identity as [x] impacted the decisions you made during the timeline task?, Is there anything you’d like to add or take away from this timeline? If students made changes, they were asked to explain their decisions. I also asked them some questions pertaining to their ideas about history.

These interviews were also digitally recorded and typically lasted approximately 20 minutes.

Grade 10, 11 and 12 Social studies teachers in each school were asked to fill out a questionnaire in order to place the students’ data within the context of their social studies environment. Questions included level of education, teaching materials and strategies most often used in their classes, and an open question asking teachers to describe their understanding of the second-order concept of historical significance.

3.6.7 Data Analysis

Data from eighteen focus group interviews and twenty-six individual interviews were professionally transcribed, after which I reviewed them for accuracy. All data were analyzed using ATLAS qualitative analysis software, using the analysis procedures describe below.

After a thorough reading of all transcripts, I followed a dialectical approach to data analysis. This involved an iterative process of going back and forth between an a priori theoretical framework of historical significance (Cercadillo, 2001; Counsell, 2004; Hunt, 2000) and “a more grounded approach” which allowed me to develop codes as they emerged from the data itself (Weston et al., 2001, p. 382-386). This enabled me to develop codes that were informed by theory which, as Barton (2008a) notes, “is indispensable for analysis, for it provides the most effective means for sorting through data” (p. 153). However, I also remained
open to emerging codes so that I could also “pursue several constructs that were explicit in the research questions” (Weston et al., 2001, p. 386). Although theory guided my analysis, I remained open to the possibility that new and relevant codes could and would emerge from the data.

Both approaches to coding (applying an *a priori* framework and inductively constructing codes) required the use of the constant comparative method of data analysis, which demands that one begin by identifying examples of codes; compare similar codes to each other, thereby creating categories; describe the categories; and refine these definitions by further comparing new excerpts from transcripts to those previously coded (Merriam & Simpson, 2000). The principles of data analysis described by Cunningham (2006) served as a guide for the procedural task of coding my data:

As I approached the task of formulating and assigning codes, I found it necessary to compile a set of principles to guide my work, ensuring consistency, validity, and rigor. I adopted the following rules: Codes had to be clear and applied coherently and systematically to the data. Data would be grounded in evidence, not forced to fit preconceived constructs. In some cases, concepts were brought in from the literature, but only if they were also substantiated by the data itself […] Adequate account would be taken of all data of relevance, and the comprehensive system arrived at would suffice to represent the thinking of those studied. Although [participants] were not asked to validate the coding system as respondents, constructs needed to be recognizable in their connection to their practices and thinking […] Coding categories had to be relevant to the research questions, and named precisely to capture the essence of their content […] Furthermore, each code would be assigned to an independent unit of meaning (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This unit might range in length from a word to an exchange of several paragraphs,
depending on the content; typically in this study, it involved a phrase to a few sentences. Finally, codes must be applied with *economy*, meaning in mutually exclusive fashion […]. (pp. 198-199; original emphasis)

These principles guided the establishment of theoretical and inductive codes; these were refined until a saturation point was reached (Merriam & Simpson, 2000). Saturation means that no new codes can be established, and that the coding framework is sufficiently developed and can be applied to the entire data set.

Following Marton and Booth’s (1997) advice to familiarize myself with the phenomenon under study, the theoretical work of Cercadillo (2000; 2001) formed the basis for the development of the *a priori* codes used to analyze the data (See Table 10). I employed the same terminology for the codes as those described by Cercadillo (contemporary, causal, pattern, symbolic, present-future). Table 11 outlines the codes which were inductively constructed from student responses. Excerpts from student responses are used to illustrate all codes. It is important to note that students rarely employed expressions such as, “it is significant/important because…” to explain the significance of the events chosen for their timeline. Rather, it is in the explanation of the event itself, oftentimes in relation to previous and/or subsequent events or developments, that the students’ understandings of historical significance were revealed.
Table 10: *A priori* data analysis codes. Adapted from Cercadillo (2001).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code Name</th>
<th>Description of Code</th>
<th>Example of Coded Text from Student Data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| CONTEMPORARY| Event is seen as important by people at the time, “in the context of their perceptions, beliefs and view of the world” (Cercadillo, 2001, p. 126) | *RE: The Great Depression*  
ES-B3: it affected us as well as other places…  
ES-B5: Maybe the fact that it really originated in the States and we felt maybe a really strong…aftershock of the Great Depression. |
|             | Key questions/indicators:                                                           | *RE: Fraser River Gold Rush*  
ES-A2: and they also took out jobs from First Nations – because then they - they could have been there to do gold searching too but they hired the Europeans and stuff more frequent and then once the gold was gone they all scattered I think and married Native women and stuff - yeah  
(last half of this quotation is also “causal significance”) |
|             | • Who were/have been affected by event?                                             |                                                                                                         |
|             | • Why was it important at the time/to them?                                         |                                                                                                         |
|             | • How were people’s lives affected (in immediate circumstances, not future)?        |                                                                                                         |
|             | • Can/do students see different viewpoints of contemporaries?                       |                                                                                                         |
|             | • What effect did it have at the time?                                              |                                                                                                         |
| CAUSAL      | Student situates an event in relation to its causal power – significance depends, in part, on later events/ consequences. | *RE: Repatriation of Constitution*  
ES-B6: It’s ah, we brought Canadian Constitution to Canada so we can amend that without any consent from the, from Britain so we are more as an individual country…independence. (2 causal factors) |
|             | Shows some awareness of historical context and how event shaped future.             | *RE: Person’s Case*  
ES-B4: …after they are declared persons then they are entitled to more rights… (Political/Cultural/Legal aspects of causal significance) |
<p>|             | Key questions/indicators:                                                           |                                                                                                         |
|             | • Key verbs: help, make, benefit, enable, change, achieve, instigate, result, allow |                                                                                                         |
|             | • Expressions: have an influence, due to, contribute to                             |                                                                                                         |
|             | • Consequential links: therefore, so, that is why, in that way                      |                                                                                                         |
|             | • Use of counterfactuals: If “a” had not occurred, “b” wouldn’t have happened.      |                                                                                                         |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code Name</th>
<th>Description of Code</th>
<th>Example of Coded Text from Student Data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
|           | • Nature of causal significance:  
             • **Aspect**: economical, social, political,  
                religious, cultural, legal\(^{26}\)  
             • **Space**: geographic locators  
             • **Time-scale**: immediate, short-term, long-term  
             • **Scale**: # of people affected  
             • **Depth**: Impact of event on people’s lives (e.g., inconvenience vs. torture)\(^{27}\) | |

**PATTERN SIGNIFICANCE**

- Is a “pattern” in the sense that the event/development/person provides a model for something, sets an example, or acts as a template for future actions/events/understandings.
- Historical phenomenon is always situated in its historical context, and is usually associated with other historical thinking concepts, such as progress and decline.
- Usually some reference made to a **turning point** or **trend**.
- **Key questions/indicators:**  
  - Use of term “milestone,” “beginning,” “first”  
  - Expressions: world might not be the same as it is now, he broadened the horizons, he achieved new things, he opened up the world, it was a first step, he was ahead of his time, it marked a beginning, from then on, it was the start of, since then, that way it started

**RE: Person’s Case**

ES-B6: …that redefined the person

**RE: Granting of the Royal Charter for Fur Trade**

ES-B6: The Hudson Bay Company first discovered a lot of territories in the country, right. They are the pioneers, actually, and um...the whole reason why the British and the French came to Canada was for economic expansion and that is the most important aspect of that – economic expansion. (Last half of comment is “causal significance.”)

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\(^{26}\) I added “legal” to Cercadillo’s list of possible aspects of causal significance.

\(^{27}\) “Depth” was added to Cercadillo’s original list and is similar to Hunt’s (2000) and Phillips’ (2002) “profundity” criterion.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code Name</th>
<th>Description of Code</th>
<th>Example of Coded Text from Student Data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SYMBOLIC</td>
<td>• Significance is ascribed from the perspective of the past or “from the perspectives of subsequent presents” (Cercadillo, 2001, p. 127)</td>
<td>RE: Granting of the Royal Charter for Fur Trade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• “is attached specifically to notions of moral example (lessons from history) and mythical past” (p. 127)</td>
<td>ES-B4: I agree, cause that [Granting of Royal Charter for Fur Trade] really traces back, like really far back into where Canadian roots became, and, like you know, how we came to be and that. (&quot;shows us” our roots)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Is a particular use of history</td>
<td>RE: Louis Riel and the Métis Resistance/Rebellion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Key questions/indicators:</td>
<td>ES-B5: …He [Louis Riel] helped define the whole aspect of what it is to be a traitor to your government or not…&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Can be related to issues of national identity and partisanship, but also more general concepts or ahistorical concepts</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Uses the past to steer us away from “errors” of the past – event's significance lies in the fact that it can help guide our actions in the present (or presents closer to the event)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Expressions: it showed, gives an indication, it proved, it highlighted, it teaches us, set a good example for others, he was an inspiration for, was a role model, indication that something was/is good (or bad)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Students may make analogies with the event/development/person.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SIGNIFICANCE FOR</td>
<td>• Only operates in the long-term</td>
<td>RE: Pearson wins Nobel Peace Prize</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THE PRESENT-</td>
<td>• Tied to/emphasizes the future</td>
<td>ES-B4: And it’s still present today, even if you look at Afghanistan or the…situation right now, Canadians are always trying to, I mean, you don’t see us going to make friends and buddying up with George Bush or anything. We’re sticking to our grounds about being peacekeepers and like, internationally we are well known for being peacekeepers. (This is also <strong>Symbolic</strong> because the “Canadians are always trying to” statement – peacekeeping and Canadian identity are linked.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FUTURE</td>
<td>• Key questions/indicators:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Student uses contextual information to describe long-term effect of event. Information usually used as a form of evidence to support their claim.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Student indicates the event’s importance today/in future: “We still think he’s quite a big figure today” (Cercadillo, 2001, p. 128)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Enduring issues – does event still have implications for today/the future?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Code Name</td>
<td>Description of Code</td>
<td>Example of Coded Text from Student Data</td>
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<td>RE: Siege of Québec</td>
<td>ES-B6: …it’s like the initial reason why English Canada and French Canada have that tension between each other [still]. (This is also “pattern significance” because of the “initial reason” statement.)</td>
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<td>Code Name</td>
<td>Description of Code</td>
<td>Example of Coded Text from Student Data</td>
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| IDENTITY               | • A definitive link is made between personal identity and why [X] is significant.  
• For some students, a hybrid identity is explained (Bhabha, 2001).                                                                                                                                           | *RE: Asked which, if any, phenomena on timeline is most important in terms of his identity*  
**ES-B1:** the Confederation and the multiculturalism one  
Interviewer: okay-can you talk about those two for me  
**ES-B1:** okay-the Confederation-that’s really important to me because it’s like my Canadian side  
Interviewer: yeah-great  
**ES-B1:** Canada becoming as a country – and the multiculturalism one is my Cambodian side and just yeah so basically those 2 are important because they really had like a-like a dramatic effect on-like everything for me |
| IDENTITY – LOSS        | • Student describes a sense of loss directly related to his/her identity, in relation to an event (and/or in relation to the research task as a whole)                                                                 | **ES-C5:** when I see no Vietnamese events here-I feel-I feel detached from it [Canadian history] – like I’m seeing it through a TV screen-like I don’t really see it as part of me-like I feel like it’s far away |
| ORGANIZING FRAMEWORK   | • Student describes how they shaped timeline                                                                                                                                                                          | **Explanation of timeline organizing framework:**  
**ES-C8:** You’d have to explain to them that it was a timeline of multiculturalism instead of just a timeline of Canada. |
| INTRINSIC              | • Significance of historical phenomenon is an inherent condition of phenomenon. No one determines whether or not [X] is historically significant; it just is.                                                                 | **RE: Confederation**  
**ES-C3:** oh yes-I don’t have to say anything-this is Confederation-it’s-it’s great |
| FIXED/CONTEXTUAL       | • Significance is described as something fixed and unchanging or variable, that is, dependant on context (what was happening at the time, or changes in perceptions of significance over time). “Fixed” significance may be directly related to the “intrinsic” code. | **RE: Louis Riel**  
**ES-C15:** plus Louis Riel he went from the mad terrorist back then in the Civil War-to a now cultural figure who was a hero that defended rights of the Aboriginal people so it shows it’s pretty important, and a symbol too  
Interviewer: okay  
**ES-C:** yeah  
**ES-C:** The change of Canadian government’s attitude |
3.7 Ethics and Trustworthiness

Ethical considerations must always be taken into account when conducting research with people, and especially youth. In this section I will describe steps taken to ensure that this study was conducted in an ethical manner. I also describe steps taken to ensure trustworthiness of the research findings presented in chapters four and five.

3.7.1 Ethical Considerations

The three most common ethical concerns in qualitative research are informed consent, right to privacy and protection from harm (Fontana & Frey, 2005). To obtain informed consent from students, I first met with two social studies teachers in two schools, as well as Aboriginal support workers in two schools, in order to discuss my proposed (at the time) study and to solicit feedback regarding the suitability of my study vis-à-vis the teachers’/support workers’ goals for their students and their current programs of study.

Upon receiving expressions of support from the teachers/support workers, I met with approximately 120 students (during school hours), described my study, invited participation and distributed an information sheet and consent/assent forms (see Appendix A.). At this time, I reassured both the students and their teachers that neither they nor their schools would be identified by name. This information was also provided in the written information distributed to students and parents. All participants were assigned code numbers and these were used in all aspects of the research process, including during the student interviews. (For example, instead of saying, “I agree with [name of student], students were advised to say, “I agree with ES-B10”). Data were kept in a locked filing cabinet and/or in password-protected computer files. In addition, participants were assigned pseudonyms which were used in all written work related to this research.
This study met all requirements regarding protection from harm and was approved by both the research committee in the school board in which this study took place and the Behavioral Research Ethics Board at the University of British Columbia.

As Hong and Genishi (2005) note, “when we show children the purposes of research, they may feel empowered to follow our lead and voice what they have learned” (p. 173). I told the students and teachers who participated in my study that their contributions were very valuable because their thoughts and ideas would help me understand their thinking about Canadian history. This, I told them, would help me become a better teacher and could possibly have implications for curriculum development in the future.

3.7.2 Trustworthiness

According to Ely, Anzul, Friedman, Garner and Steinmetz (1991) trustworthiness in qualitative research is achieved when the entire research process is “grounded in ethical principles about how data are collected and analyzed, how one’s own assumptions and conclusions are checked, how participants are involved, and how results are communicated” (p. 93). Steps taken to ensure that these criteria were met have been detailed in earlier sections of this chapter. As discussed above, people’s ways of understanding social phenomena are subjective and are set against the backdrop of their own biographies and their socio-political milieu. Therefore, I also employed the following criteria and strategies to ensure, to the best of my abilities, trustworthy research findings:

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28 Trustworthiness has emerged as an alternative to “the usual positivist criteria of internal and external validity, reliability, and objectivity” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 24).
Table 12: Trustworthiness criteria. Adapted from: Shenton (2004) and Chareka (2005)

<table>
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<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Strategies Used to Achieve</th>
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| Credibility  | • Adoption of well-established research methods  
                • Familiarity with culture of schools  
                • Prolonged interview engagement  
                • Triangulation of data sources  
                • Tactics to help ensure honesty in participants  
                • Iterative questioning during interviews  
                • Memoing  
                • Creating files for data storage and organizing the materials  
                • Peer debriefing  
                • Member checks  
                • Thick description of phenomenon under study  
                • Examination of previous research to frame findings |
| Dependability| • Detailed description of the research method and research procedures  
                • Employment of overlapping methods  
                • Constant comparative method of data analysis |
| Confirmability| • Audit trails  
                • Use of diagrams to illustrate data collection procedures  
                • Admission of researcher’s background, assumptions  
                • Inclusion of data collection instruments used during research in appendices  
                • Detailed excerpts from interview transcripts included in data analysis |
| Relevance    | • Literature review (identified gaps in literature)  
                • Consultation with research supervisor  
                • Consultation with community stakeholders  
                • Explanation of significance of study  
                • Connection between finding, implications and recommendations |
| Transferability| • Provided sufficient background information to establish context of study and participants  
                • Description of the research framework and stages followed in data analysis  
                • Findings compared to previous research  
                • Note: Findings are specific to the participants interviewed though similar results might be found with similar participants. |
3.7.3 Credibility

According to Shenton, credibility refers to the level of congruence between research findings and participants’ descriptions of the phenomenon under study. Both Shenton (2004) and Chareka (2005) propose numerous procedures which can enhance the credibility of a research project. These include:

- Adoption of well-established research methods: as described earlier, the research methods used in this study were developed based on well-established protocols in the history education research community. Significantly, I modified these to include a component related to students’ ethnic identities.

- Familiarity with culture of schools: before beginning graduate school I was a teacher for five years in New Brunswick. I am familiar with school culture and procedures. In addition, I taught several curriculum and instruction in Social Studies undergraduate courses at the University of British Columbia and was therefore very familiar with the BC Social Studies curriculum.

- Prolonged interview engagement: students were interviewed on three occasions; twice in a focus group, and once individually. The complete set of interviews took place over ten months, from September 2005 – June 2006.

- Triangulation of data sources: three different data sources pertaining to students’ conceptions of historical significance were collected. These include the two focus group interviews and the individual interviews. On each occasion, conceptions related to historical significance, and the relationship between ethnic identity and historical significance, emerged.

- Tactics to help ensure honesty in participants: this measure refers to ensuring participants are aware of their right to withdraw from the study at
any time as well as creating an open environment in which to conduct the research (Shenton, 2004). This has been described in detail above.

- Iterative questioning during interviews: as can be seen in the interview protocols, similar questions were asked in different ways in order to elicit students’ understandings of the phenomenon under study. In addition, the same questions were asked repeated times; for instance, during the follow-up focus group interview and during the individual interview.

- Memoing: during both focus group interviews and the individual interviews I took notes related to body language, actions, tone of voice, and made note of questions I wanted to return to in subsequent interviews.

- Creating files for data storage and organizing the materials: files containing students’ identifications were password-protected and kept separate from all other data files. Each interview was recorded in a separate digital file, and these were downloaded to my computer and converted to a different digital format, thereby ensuring I had a backup copy of each interview. In addition, password-protected files were created for each interview transcript. Finally, separate analysis files were created.

- Peer debriefing: I met with members of my supervisory committee and other graduate students to discuss my data, data analysis procedures and preliminary findings. In addition, I presented preliminary findings to colleagues at scholarly conferences.

- Member checks: because some time had passed from the time students wrote the paragraph describing their ethnic identity, I began the individual interview by verifying that what they had written previously was satisfactory to them. I also offered students the opportunity to modify or expand on the description. In addition, I verified students’ explanations of historical
significance through the follow-up focus group interviews and the individual interviews.

- Thick description of phenomenon under study: in the review of related literature (Chapter 2) I provide a detailed explanation of the theoretical and empirical work on historical significance. In addition, in Chapters 4 and 5, I provide detailed descriptions of the relationship between students’ ethnic identities and their conceptions of historical significance and provide extensive excerpts from student interviews.

- Examination of previous research to frame findings: see above explanation on thick description.

Finally, I wanted to pay specific attention to Aboriginal students, to try to avoid the problem that Pidgeon and Hardy Cox (2002) identify, namely, research findings that “combine Aboriginal students with other minority students, resulting in inaccurate Aboriginal perspectives and often treating Aboriginal peoples as outsiders” (p. 98). Therefore, when analyzing the data gathered from Aboriginal students, I did not combine it with that collected from other students.

3.7.4 Dependability

Each of the following suggested methods for ensuring dependability of research findings – detailed description of the research method and research procedures, employment of overlapping methods and the constant comparative method of data analysis – has been described in detail in this chapter.

3.7.5 Confirmability

- Audit trails: all documentation used in this research study have been organized and maintained. Data collection instruments, data collection procedures and the development of analysis codes have been documented in detail.
• Use of diagrams to illustrate data collection procedures: see Figure 1 for a graphical representation of data collection procedures.

• Admission of researcher’s background, assumptions: in an earlier section of this chapter, I described my position as a White researcher working in a cross-cultural setting. Naming my own Whiteness reveals the privileged position from which I conduct this study. It also confirms the need to be vigilant in ensuring that my reporting of the findings from this study was congruent with the conceptions expressed by all participating students.

• Inclusion of data collection instruments used during research in appendices: complete interview protocols have been included in this dissertation.

• Detailed excerpts from interview transcripts included in data analysis: as described above, I have included detailed excerpts from interviews in order to provide thick description of students’ conceptions of historical significance as well as the impact of ethnic identity on these conceptions.

3.7.6 Relevance
Relevance refers to whether or not this study and its findings have any bearing on the research community and/or the community in which this research took place. In Chapter 1, I justify and explain the significance of this study by explaining how it addresses an issue that has been under-researched in the academic community to date: namely, the relationship between students’ ethnic identities and their understandings of historical significance generally and in Canadian history specifically. However, the study also has relevance to the wider education community, in that its findings and recommendations shed light on the ways in which students living in a multicultural society engage with their country’s past. Teachers and curriculum developers may find these findings helpful in terms of their day-to-day teaching practice, and/or the development of social studies curricula.
3.7.7 Transferability
Unlike much quantitative work, which relies on large participant pools to generate statistical information which can be generalized to a larger population, the issue of transferability is more complicated in qualitative research. According to Shenton (2004), complete transferability of qualitative research findings to another setting is an unrealistic goal because findings are particular to the specific research participants and the social milieu in which they live. However, there are measures that can be taken in order that the reader of qualitative research can use his or her judgment about the transferability of research findings to her/his particular context. These include providing sufficient background information to establish the context of the study and the study participants, sufficiently describing the research framework and the stages followed in data collection and analysis, and comparing findings to previous research (if applicable). As Shenton (2004) notes, “after perusing the description within the research report of the context in which the work was undertaken, readers must determine how far they can be confident in transferring to other situations the results and conclusions presented” (p. 70). However, the above criteria of credibility, dependability, confirmability and relevance should also instill confidence in the reader of this research.

3.8 Limitations and Assumptions
It is important to make the reader aware of the limitations of this research project. The first limitation concerns the stimuli used in the timeline task. Students were provided with picture cards, containing images and captions, of 30 events in Canadian history. The task they were given, and therefore the timelines they created, were necessarily bound by the fact that they were only given 30 events with which to work, and that these events were all related to Canadian history. In an effort to address this limitation, students were asked several questions that provided opportunities to challenge the given task during the follow-up focus
group interviews and the individual interviews. For instance, all students were asked if they would like to change the timeline, if they would like to add or remove anything from the timeline, or if there was anything else they could think of (in all of Canadian history) that was not represented on the cards but that they would like to add to their timeline. Several students took this opportunity to challenge the narratives that were created during the timeline task. Others did not.

An additional limitation is related to the prior knowledge that students brought to the research task. In almost every case, whether the students were Canadian-born, immigrants to Canada, or Aboriginal students, there were some events with which the students were not familiar. Contrary to this, there were some events with which almost all students were familiar. Students' reliance on the captions included on the picture cards varied greatly. Lack of knowledge of some events, and strong knowledge of other events, in all likelihood affected the decisions the students made during the timeline task. To address this, I asked students about the events they did not select, in an effort to further probe their understandings of historical significance and to further understand the criteria they used to make their decisions.

In the case of the two Aboriginal students, they had taken a First Nations history course instead of the Social Studies 11 course (which all of the other students had taken) and therefore the Aboriginal students may have entered the research task with less prior knowledge about Canadian history than the other students who participated in the study. The Aboriginal students’ teacher (who is also Aboriginal) sat in on the timeline task in an effort to make the students feel comfortable while working with a complete stranger (me). She also provided some background information on events with which the students were not familiar. In my opinion, she did this in an informative as opposed to impassioned manner, and I feel that the students were not overly influenced by the information
she provided. This was evidenced in the selections they made for their timeline, most of which did not reflect the information provided by their teacher. In addition, the students’ explanations did not rely on the teacher’s descriptions of the events.

It is conceivable that beginning the data collection process by having students provide a written description of their ethnic identity created a lens through which they viewed the rest of the data collection procedures. It is possible that this could have had an effect on the students’ thinking during the timeline task however, by the time of the individual interview many students indicated that they had forgotten about the questionnaire and descriptive paragraph they had written at the beginning of the research project. In addition, the relationship between students’ ethnic identity and their conceptions of historical significance was the phenomenon under study and phenomenographic research procedures aim to bring students to a state of meta-awareness vis-à-vis the phenomenon. For this particular study, students were required to think about that relationship. The degree to which they did so (during various stages of data collection) will be explored in Chapter 5.

Finally, as has been discussed at length above, it is impossible to detach myself (and my own prior conceptions) completely from the data analysis process. My experience as a teacher, as a teacher educator, as a graduate student, and as a researcher, have all contributed to my belief that ethnic identities play a role in the development of students’ historical understandings. The efforts described above, including efforts taken to reveal my own background, are steps I have taken to define the influence of my assumptions on the entire research project.

3.9 Summary

In this chapter, I examine the phenomenographic research approach. Marton (1981) first coined the term “phenomenography” in the early 1980s, and since
that time it has been used extensively in many fields, and particularly in educational research. The purpose of phenomenographic research in education is to map students' conceptions of phenomena and to describe the variation of these conceptions.

In this chapter I also described the research procedures used in this study. Data were collected in two phases, with the bulk of data collection occurring in Phase Two. Data were collected from 26 students through questionnaires, focus group interviews and individual interviews. In addition, eleven Social Studies teachers also completed questionnaires in order to provide some context pertaining to the students' Social Studies educational environment. A unique characteristic of this study is the collection of students' descriptions of their ethnic identities in conjunction with an exploration of their understandings of historical significance in Canadian history.

Lastly, I explored in detail ethical and validity issues pertaining to this study. Multiple approaches were taken in an effort to ensure (and assure the reader) that this study was conducted in an ethically and methodologically sound fashion.
CHAPTER 4

STUDENTS’ CONCEPTIONS OF HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

In this chapter I discuss the results of deductive\textsuperscript{29} data analysis. I begin by describing each of the categories of historical significance, which I developed based on the work of Cercadillo (2000; 2001). I then draw on excerpts from interview transcripts to illustrate and discuss the nature of students' conceptions of historical significance in relation to each of the categories. Such an exploration will help researchers better understand the different conceptions students hold about historical significance, as well as differences in the way students ascribe significance to historical events.

4.1 Deductive Codes Employed in Data Analysis

In Chapter 2 I described several theorists’ work on the concept of historical significance (See Sections 2.5 – 2.7). There is little agreement or consistency among historians or history educators in terms of how criteria used to ascribe significance to people, events or developments in the past are applied to research findings or emphasized. In addition, Lévesque (2008) notes that criteria for ascribing historical significance “have not necessarily been fully articulated outside the history community” (p. 56). However, a closer look reveals that some

\textsuperscript{29} According to LeCompte and Schensul (1999), data coding occurs primarily in two ways. Deductive coding is a process of developing and applying data analysis codes “by choosing a set of concepts first and then sorting out the data in terms of which of the concepts they fit best” (p. 46) whereas in inductive coding, researchers examine “the data first to see into what kinds of chunks they seem to fall naturally and then choosing a set of concepts that helps to explain why the data fell that way” (p. 46). However, they note that qualitative researchers (and in their case, ethnographers) “use both induction and deduction throughout their analysis” (p. 46). What differentiates deductive from inductive coding is that the former is considered a “top down” approach wherein codes are developed based on a theoretical framework or hypothesis. Inductive coding, on the other hand, is more a “bottom up” approach to data analysis, in which codes are said to “emerge” from the data.
criteria for significance, including those emanating from historians' work and the work of educational researchers, do appear to overlap in terms of what they designate.

As shown in Table 13, several terms employed by historians and/or educational researchers in studies on students' conceptions of historical significance overlap in meaning. Those used by Cercadillo (2001) appear to be the most comprehensive, in that they include criteria specified by the greatest number of theorists.

After having read through two or three of my transcripts (approximately 90 pages), I became aware of some work on students’ conceptions of historical significance in Britain and Spain, conducted by Liz Cercadillo (2001). I realized that, in many ways, my own data was mirroring her data. Her work was particularly instructive because in the description of the findings of her research she included key words or phrases that characterize each of the criteria for historical significance identified in her study. Using these key words and phrases as a guide, I began to code my own data with Cercadillo’s coding typology and found that my students were using virtually the same words and phrases as those with whom Cercadillo had worked even though the task my students had completed was quite different than the ones she had employed in her study. Following Barton’s (2008a) and Marton and Booth’s (1997) advice about the importance of familiarizing oneself with theoretical aspects of the concept under study, I examined Cercadillo’s work and my own data more closely. LeCompte and Schensul (1999) note that, “frequently, researchers borrow a coding system developed by others at another field site and use it in their own study” (p. 52). Using the constant comparative method of data analysis, I found that the typology of historical significance generated by Cercadillo was reflected in my own data and therefore proceeded to employ it to analyze my data.
The use of Cercadillo’s (2000; 2001) typology to analyze the data was important for two central reasons. First, as explained above (and as outlined in Table 13), I believe it synthesizes and provides a comprehensive and coherent framework of criteria for ascribing historical significance that have emanated from other theorists' work thereby enabling researchers and others interested in students’ historical understandings to work with a common vocabulary of historical significance.

Secondly, using such a framework addresses the concern expressed by Lévesque (2008), who noted that,

> To this day, studies that have looked at the notion of historical significance have largely ignored the criteria of historical significance. Rather, the focus has been on the substance (or selected topics) of historical significance (e.g., freedom, justice, nation-building) without an analysis of the procedures that illuminate how and why people’s explanations have focused on certain topics of the collective past. (p. 45)

In the data analysis that follows, I address these interrelated research foci by employing Cercadillo’s (2000; 2001) typology as a frame for understanding students’ procedural attempts (or, their use of criteria) to categorize substantive aspects of Canadian history.
### Table 13: Criteria for ascribing historical significance

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<tr>
<td>Resonant</td>
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<tr>
<td>Contemporary lessons</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
In the sections that follow I use Cercadillo’s (2000; 2001) typology of historical significance to explore the findings of the present study. The typology consists of: contemporary, causal, pattern, symbolic, and present-future significance. These are described in detail in chapter three (Table 9) and are further articulated below. It should be noted that in many cases, students employed multiple reasons or criteria for ascribing significance to events in Canada’s past. This in and of itself is a key finding for it demonstrates a multi-layered understanding (or at least use) of the concept of historical significance. In each of the following sections excerpts from student interviews will be used to further describe the categories of historical significance in the typology. Due to the nature of students’ explanations some excerpts contain more than one type of significance and this will be noted.

![Figure 2: Historical significance codes employed by all study participants (# of coded quotations)](image-url)
### Table 14: Distribution of historical significance criteria

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code (Type of historical significance)</th>
<th>Total # quotations coded with this code (all transcripts)</th>
<th>% of all quotations coded</th>
<th>Canadian-born (14 students)</th>
<th>Cdn. born %</th>
<th>Immigrant (4 students)</th>
<th>Immigrant %</th>
<th>Aboriginal (2 students)</th>
<th>Aboriginal %</th>
<th>Mixed groups (3 Cdn. born, 3 immigrant)</th>
<th>Mixed groups %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Contemporary</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>4.96%</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>5.85%</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3.92%</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9.52%</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1.92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Causal</td>
<td>430</td>
<td>31.39%</td>
<td>267</td>
<td>32.56%</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>23.53%</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>44.05%</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>28.75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pattern</td>
<td>239</td>
<td>17.45%</td>
<td>151</td>
<td>18.41%</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>18.95%</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>14.29%</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>15.02%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Symbolic</td>
<td>466</td>
<td>34.01%</td>
<td>271</td>
<td>33.05%</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>35.95%</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>22.62%</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>38.66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Present-Future</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>12.19%</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>10.12%</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>17.65%</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9.52%</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>15.65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>1370</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.00%</strong></td>
<td><strong>820</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.00%</strong></td>
<td><strong>153</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.00%</strong></td>
<td><strong>84</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.00%</strong></td>
<td><strong>313</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.00%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 14, above, and Figure 3, below, provide a breakdown of the frequency of types of historical significance employed by the three sub-groups of participants (Aboriginal, Canadian-born, immigrant students), including the groups of students who participated in “mixed” groups.30

As shown in Table 14, a total of 1370 quotations (from all data sources) were coded as instances of student usage of contemporary, causal, pattern, symbolic or present-future significance. I will use the second and third columns (“Total # of quotations coded with this code” and “% of all quotations coded”) to illustrate how the data is employed in this table. In the second column, the number to the right of each type of historical significance (Cercadillo, 2000; 2001) represents the total number of times a specific type of historical significance was coded in the data. For example, “contemporary significance” was coded 68 times, whereas “symbolic significance” was identified 466 times in the data. The numbers in the third column represent the percentage of usage of each type of historical significance. So, using the examples of contemporary and symbolic significance again, 4.96% out of all coded quotations were coded as contemporary significance (or, 68/1370) whereas 34.01% (or, 466/1370) were coded as symbolic significance.

The data in the remaining columns report the frequency of each type of historical significance criterion employed by students according to type of interview group (Canadian-born, Aboriginal, immigrant and mixed-group). Thus, out of 820 total quotations coded as instances of Canadian-born students’ usage of various criteria for ascribing historical significance, 48, or 5.85% of those were coded as

30 Students were placed into groups of 2 – 4 for the timeline activity, as well as for the follow-up focus group interviews. Some groups contained only Canadian-born students whereas others were composed of only immigrant students. “Mixed groups” were composed of both Canadian-born and immigrant students. The two Aboriginal students formed their own group.
contemporary significance, 271 or 33.05% were coded as symbolic significance, and so on. Figure 3 provides a visual breakdown of the frequency (in percentages) of student usage of the historical significance criteria.

Figure 3: Usage of codes (percentage) by student group

A reminder of the research task will help orient the reader. In small groups (2 – 4 people), students were asked to discuss and select, for the purpose of creating a timeline, the ten most significant events in Canadian history. Students were given thirty captioned picture cards depicting events in Canadian history from which they were to make their selection. Following this task, I interviewed the students in their groups and again individually, to ask them to explain their selection of the ten most significant events in Canadian history and to further probe their conceptions of historical significance. In what follows, excerpts are taken from all transcripts (group task, follow-up focus group interview, individual interview) in
order to explore and explain students' thinking about historical significance.

4.2 Contemporary Significance

According to Cercadillo (2000; 2001), contemporary significance is a criterion that refers to the significance of past events as seen through the eyes of contemporaries to the event. Student responses coded for contemporary significance are those that present "the perspective of people at the time" (2000, p. 120). More sophisticated student responses reflect multiple perspectives held at the time of an event.

This criterion for ascribing historical significance was the least employed in the present study. Out of 1370 coded quotations, only 68 (or 4.96%) were coded as occurrences of contemporary significance. Aboriginal students in this study were most likely to employ the contemporary criterion to ascribe significance to events in Canada’s past, with 9.52% of all their responses falling into the contemporary category. Canadian-born students in this study employed this criterion 5.85% of the time; immigrant students in this study did so 3.92% of the time and students in mixed groups (Canadian-born and immigrant students) in this study employed this criterion 1.92% of the time.

Table 15: Distribution of quotations coded as contemporary historical significance by student group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Aboriginal Students</th>
<th>Canadian-born Students</th>
<th>Immigrant Students</th>
<th>Mixed-Group Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td># and % of quotations in each student group</td>
<td>8/84 9.52%</td>
<td>48/820 5.85%</td>
<td>6/153 3.95%</td>
<td>6/313 1.92%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

An example of student use of contemporary reasoning is found in the following excerpt, when Ariana was asked to explain why she felt Indian residential schools should occupy a place on her group’s timeline. She said:
Didn’t they cut all their hair too in residential schools – like the kids all had long hair and they cut them all off…stuff like that. Because they really tried to take away the culture and when they spoke their language…I heard some people got beat. (PD3, 245-250)  

In this example, the significance of the Indian residential schools, according to Ariana, lay in the impact the school had on the culture and lives of the people who attended them. What makes her explanation of the historical significance of Indian residential schools an example of contemporary significance is that it is temporally located in the past, without reference to the impact of the event on the future of residential school students or Aboriginal communities (and Canadian society) more broadly.  

The following exchange between Annabelle, Armand, and Shen (all Canadian-born students) about the treatment of Chinese workers during construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) exemplifies student usage of contemporary reasoning to ascribe historical significance to past events. In the following excerpt, students employed some contextual knowledge of the past to explain the historical significance of the recruitment of Chinese workers to build the CPR:  

Shen: Anyhow, I guess it’s true because they – they were asked to come and they did say yes.  

Armand: Yeah, but that’s only because China’s conditions weren’t any better.  

Shen: Yeah, but if they knew that, you know, it was poor conditions and they chose to stay – cause they knew there was racism, right? [everyone agrees] And they chose to stay and live as members of society, I guess...

31 The first number in parentheses (PD3) indicates from which transcript the excerpt is taken. The second number(s) indicate transcript line numbers.
Armand: But they were drawn in by, like, government propaganda, weren’t they?

Shen: Yeah, they were.

Armand: So that was, like, them [Canadian government] trying to lure them [Chinese workers] into Canada thinking it was like great, but then when they came is was, like, it was…it was a different story, like, they had to get to work on the Canadian Pacific Railway and like, wages were low.

Annabelle: But then other people came to work on the railway too, like Italians.

Armand: Yeah, but…

Annabelle: And Indian people and they were treated…

Armand: the same way

Annabelle: …the same way pretty much. (PD16, 597-617)

In this example, the students attempt to understand why the Chinese workers decided to move to Canada and stay despite less than desirable circumstances. The students locate their explanations in the historical time of the event itself and therefore this was coded as an example of contemporary significance.

Finally, in an exchange over the inclusion of World War I on their group’s timeline, Teresa, Mark and Sam32 (all immigrants) employed contemporary reasoning to exclude the event from their selection:

Teresa: “Britain and Canada enters WWI”?

Sam: No, not that one. Definitely not that one.

Mark: Because wasn’t Canada forced to join WWI, in a sense?

32 Vincent was also a member of this group but was quiet during this exchange.
Teresa: Yeah.

Sam: They entered by default because Britain entered...

Teresa: Were obliged...

Sam: …the Commonwealth

Mark: It didn’t really serve Canadian interests at all.

Sam: It raised controversy within Canada whether we’re going to enter or not and the French Canadians opposed the conscription... (PD44, 1370-1389)

In the above example the students discussed World War I from at least two perspectives: Canada (Canadian interests) and the perspective of French Canadians at the time of the event. Sam’s final comment is indicative of the fact that there were multiple perspectives surrounding the decision to enter World War I. The students viewed this event as one that Canada was “forced to join” and that did not “serve Canadian interests” at the time. Therefore, they opted to exclude it from their timeline.

These last two examples demonstrate a particular usage of contemporary significance in that the students’ explanations comprise their attempts to understand the actions of historical actors. Ariana’s statement, on the other hand, demonstrates another usage of contemporary significance. That is, her explanation focused simply on her attempts to understand (and explain) what it must have been like to attend an Indian residential school. These findings are consistent with those of Cercadillo (2000) who delineated two distinct characteristics of contemporary significance: “issues of empathy that emerge in pupils’ responses when they just refer to people in the past” and “contemporary significance in a narrower sense, when they grasp what the event or the process meant for the contemporaries” (p. 214). Although used relatively infrequently by
the students in this study (as compared to the other criteria for ascribing historical significance), the use of the contemporary significance criterion may serve as a starting point for empathetic historical understanding, particularly of agency, as students try to understand the actions and/or mindset of historical actors. Also note that, in each of the examples provided above, students’ explanations work on the assumption that the event in question is historically significant in and of itself (or inherently significant), not recognizing that others may interpret its historical significance differently.

4.3 Causal Significance

According to Cercadillo (2001), causal significance is recognizable in student data when their explanations of historical significance situate “an event or process in relation to its causal power; hence its significance is in part dependent on later events or consequences” (p. 126). She notes that “particular features and uses of language may act as rules to systematize data coding”33 (p. 126) and that students may also employ counter-factual arguments when ascribing causal significance. Finally, Cercadillo suggests that causal significance “may be defined in pupils’ answers by aspect (economic, social, political, religious, cultural), geographical space (England, Spain, Greece, Persia) and time-scale (immediate, short-term, long-term)” (p. 126).

In addition to these markers of causal significance, analysis of data in the present study revealed that students identified legal aspects of causal significance, indicated that scale (or, the number of people impacted by an event) was reason to ascribe causal significance, and considered depth of impact of an event as a factor in ascribing causal significance.

33 See Table 9 in Chapter 3 for a detailed list of key words and phrases.
These causal factors describe various types of change that resulted from an historical event, person or development. The former, offered by Cercadillo (2000; 2001), provide qualitative descriptions of the type of change that occurred. That is, these aspects of causal significance focus on the kind of change which occurred. The legal aspect (which emerged in this study) functions in this way as well. However, scale (number of people) and depth of impact provide more quantitative evaluations of the resultant change. Rather than focusing on the kind of change, scale and depth focus on the degree of change that occurred.

Causal significance was one of the most frequently employed types of historical significance in this study, with 430/1370 quotations (or 31.39%) coded as occurrences of causal significance. Aboriginal students in this study were most likely to employ causal reasoning to ascribe significance to events in Canada’s past, with 44.05% of all their responses falling into the causal category. Canadian-born students in this study employed causal reasoning 32.56% of the time, immigrant students in this study did so 23.53% of the time and students in mixed groups in this study employed causal reasoning in 28.75% of their responses. In the following sections I will delineate each of the aspects of causal significance listed above.

Table 16: Distribution of quotations coded as causal historical significance by student group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Aboriginal Students</th>
<th>Canadian-born Students</th>
<th>Immigrant Students</th>
<th>Mixed-Group Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td># and % of quotations in each student group</td>
<td>37/84 44.05%</td>
<td>267/820 32.56%</td>
<td>36/153 23.53%</td>
<td>90/313 28.75%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.3.1 Economic Aspect of Causal Significance

Students employed a range of aspects to ascribe causal significance to events in Canadian history. Sometimes, a singular aspect was ascribed to an event
whereas in other cases multiple aspects were used to explain why an event was historically significant. Some explanations were very simple, such as Canadian-born Ethan’s justification for including an event about the fur trade on his group’s timeline: “Um…the fur trade, that goes down to the economy” (PD29, 217). Other times explanations were more detailed in nature. For instance, in the following example Sam explained the economic significance of the fur trade:

The Hudson Bay Company first discovered a lot of territories in the country, right. They are the pioneers, actually, and um…the whole reason why the British and the French came to Canada was for economic expansion and this is the most important aspect of that [Granting of the Royal Charter for the fur trade] – economic expansion. (PD44, 835-843)

When asked if there was anything he would change about his group’s timeline, Sam argued that the signing of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) is something he would have liked to have seen amongst the choices given at the start of the timeline task. However, his argument soon shifted to the topic of Confederation, and he successfully linked the two events. The core of Sam’s argument regarding the historical significance of NAFTA lay in his use of causal reasoning:

NAFTA, of course. I would say economic companionship with Canada and…the United States (causal) because the US is still our largest trading partner (present-future). So that’s kind of very important to our economy and…Even before Confederation – the reciprocity – I think it was one of the main reasons why the colonies got together to form the country, because the States stopped reciprocity and the prov – the colonies needed to trade within themselves so that’s also the reason why we joined together to form this country (pattern, causal). And even now, we still have that softwood lumber kind-of-thing around Canada-United States economic relations (present-future). (PD12, 25-35)
Armand's explanation of the significance of Confederation also lies in economic causal reasoning:

Well after Confederation…they built trade with each other and they made some of…like, they built the economy together. Before it was just every colony for itself kind-of-thing. And they got little Maritime colonies that were like, scraping by, and then you’ve got what's going on in these bigger colonies and they’re all helping each other out. (PD15, 129-134)

Not surprisingly, students applied economic explanations of causal significance to those events that had a distinct economic characteristic, such as the fur trade, building of the CPR, the Fraser River Gold Rush and the Winnipeg General Strike. For instance, Ben's comment about the significance of the building of the CPR clearly relies on economic reasoning: "I think it’s very important to Canadian development and economy." (PD18, 287-290) However, sometimes similar explanations were used to describe the causal significance of events that might not necessarily be considered economic in nature, such as Shen’s comment about the Québec referendum: “…in terms of our economy, it would be a lot weaker if Québec had, like, broken off of Canada” (PD16, 497-499).

Even when students acknowledged the economic impact of an event, however, they sometimes used other aspects of causal reasoning to exclude an event from their timeline. This was evident in an exchange among Vincent, Teresa, Mark and Sam:

Teresa: Ok, this [Fraser River Gold Rush] again is one of those issues that happened way back in the boons.

Mark and Vincent: Yeah!

Sam: Yeah, yeah but…

Mark: The Yukon…ah…
Sam: But that accelerated the development of British Columbia. (PD44, 1318-1329)

Teresa: But again, [it’s a] small section of Canada. (PD44, 1336)

In this exchange we see a confirmation of the positive economic (and possible demographic) effects of the Fraser River Gold Rush on the development of British Columbia. However, Teresa suggested that because the event occurred “back in the boons” (time scale) and occurred in a small region of Canada (geographic or spatial) it should not be included on her group’s timeline.

4.3.2 Religious, Cultural and Social Aspects of Causal Significance

In Cercadillo’s (2001) study, students sometimes referred to religious, cultural and social aspects in order to explain the causal significance of an event. Students were less likely to refer to religious aspects of the historical events employed in the present study. Cultural aspects were used by some students to explain the causal significance of the creation of Indian residential schools and the arrival of Europeans to what is now Canada. Social factors used to determine causal significance emerged largely in relation to events that depicted issues related to minority rights such as immigration, imposition of the Chinese Head Tax, the suffragette movement, the Japanese internment and the passing of the Multiculturalism Policy and (later) Multiculturalism Act.

Dao-Ming’s comments about the impact of record number of immigrants flocking to Canada in the early 20th century exemplify students’ use of the social aspect of causal significance to explain the historical significance of an event:

Immigration numbers really went up, like, SO much around 1913-ish. So yeah, it [immigration policy] attracted a lot of people but it also brought a lot of problems ‘cause it wasn’t…Canada was sort of a pretty new country – there weren’t a lot of jobs and there was a lot of competition. People were poor and stuff. So when a new bunch of people came to Canada to,
seemingly, like, steal their jobs and people take over their country...you know, with different cultures and stuff, people were intimidated and all kinds of fears started happening. (PD24, 977-987)

Dao-Ming’s ideas about the historical significance of immigration indicate a nuanced understanding of the topic; immigration was not simply a benign event that resulted in a larger populace. Rather, with the influx of immigrants came a host of complex societal concerns.

Adélie picked up on Dao-Ming’s ideas with the following comment. Note the use of a counter-factual statement near the end of Adélie’s commentary, a characteristic that is common to students’ causal explanations:

So all of these people were coming in and we were getting all of these little...like there were little bunches of people traveling all over the country and settling down in different areas. So different areas have these different types of people and that’s kind of what made us as being a mosaic thing. And so, if it weren’t for immigration being, like, so huge, then we wouldn’t be multicultural at all. (PD24, 1023-1029)

Ariana’s explanation of the significance of the arrival of Europeans on the west coast of what is now Canada rests on her understanding of the cultural changes that occurred as a result of European exploration:

I think this is an important time because it’s when a lot of stuff changed in the Aboriginal history...where we were colonized and had to be assimilated into mainstream society. It had great effect on Aboriginal populations. (PD3, 232-236)

Canadian-born Eliya offered the following explanation of the causal significance of the recruitment of Chinese workers to build the CPR:
There’s a lot of places [sic] that have immigrated here but the recruitment of Chinese for the CPR brought a lot and that’s had a huge impact on our society and culture. (PD43, 58-60)

When asked to explain why he thought the women’s suffrage movement should be included on his group’s timeline, Canadian-born Aidan based his explanation on social factors:

I think it’s good, actually. I’d agree with it ‘cause it makes a more even amount of people voting in our country so it’s not just men voting for who they want. Women can vote for who they think should be in [political office] too. (PD6, 170-173)

Social justifications were also used to explain the causal significance of World Wars I and II, as is evident in Aakil’s analysis of the impact of the wars on Canadian society:

I’d say that because of the magnitude of… you know, it actually – the wars changed our population – they are somber points in history because thousands and thousands of Canadians died – but something like that of course would have a dramatic effect – it changed – it shook up entire populations – you know women went to work in factories, you know, because the men were away fighting the war – thousands and thousands of war brides immigrated to Canada who, you know, women who helped, you know, change the face of Canada – becoming something more multicultural – so I think, you know, of course the actual event of the war is important – but I think it also has – it has such sweeping effects on later history especially more recent history which might be why, even though none of us were alive to remember either of the wars, we still feel they need to be included [in our timeline]. (PD20, 481-495)
In this response, Aakil refers to several changes that occurred in Canadian society as a result of the two World Wars. Although he notes that “thousands and thousands” of Canadians died (scale – number of people affected by an event), the thrust of his argument for including both wars on his group’s timeline rests on social changes that occurred during and after the wars.

Social aspects were also used to explain the causal significance of the passing of the Multiculturalism Act:

Mae: it would make them [immigrants] feel more included and equal

Carla: okay

Eliya: And it might be something that brought them to Canada

Mae: Yeah

Eliya: …knowing that it’s so multicultural and knowing that we’re open to everybody

(PD21, 457-463)

Canadian-born Will also reflected on the causal significance of the Multiculturalism Act on Canadian society:

I mean the Multiculturalism Act sort of allowed people to be their own, like…I guess independent in Canada. Like the different races and stuff. It wasn’t all a white man’s country. (Will, PD27, 148-151)

Dao-Ming also noted the impact of the Multiculturalism Act on the social fabric of Canada. As can be seen in the following excerpt, she employed causal reasoning to explain why the Multiculturalism Act merits a spot on her group’s timeline of the ten most significant events in Canadian history:

No one in Canada – except for the Natives – is truly Canadian. Like even the people…the Europeans that first came to Canada – they’re not really,
like, native Canadian, right? So they basically come from other ethnical
groups and the Multiculturalism Act really, like, expressed the different
views of people living in Canada and it, like, it really defined Canada (also
pattern significance) as this really special country that’s willing to accept
people from, like, basically all backgrounds – all ethnical groups – and
that’s really something… (PD42, 206-214)

In the above examples, students explain the historical significance of the
Multiculturalism Act on two levels. Eliya and Mae discuss the impact of the Act on
immigrants’ decisions to move to Canada. That is, by passing the Act Canada
signaled to the world that “we’re open to everybody.” Will and Dao-Ming theorize
that the Act changed the fundamental nature of what it means to belong in a
multicultural Canada. It is not necessary to assimilate; rather, people are
encouraged to maintain their first culture. Will’s response also indicates
knowledge about dominant groups (“white man”) in society. He posits that, as a
result of the Multiculturalism Policy and Act, immigrants were not socially or
legally required to assimilate to the dominant group’s standards.

4.3.3 Political and Legal Aspects of Causal Significance
Students’ use of causal significance based on political or legal factors fell (not
surprisingly) on events with an explicit political or legal dimension, such as
Confederation, Canada Act Passed, Multiculturalism Policy/Act, Louis Riel and
the Northwest Rebellion and the October Crisis.

Students explained the historical significance of Confederation and the Canada
Act in very similar ways. A typical explanation of the causal significance of
Confederation was that it was when Canada took “the steps to become an
independent nation” (Jessica, PD5, 340-341). Aidan described the significance of
the Canada Act in analogous terms: “the Canada Act – it gives us, like, a self-
governing country. And we’re actually our own country now” (PD14, 72-74). The
key to students’ causal explanations (political aspect) about the historical significance of Confederation and the Canada Act is that both events resulted in the formation of the country, albeit at different stages of its history.

Sam, Mark and Teresa’s exchange about the significance of Louis Riel and the Northwest Rebellion provides another example of how political/legal aspects can be used to ascribe causal historical significance to an event:

Mark: I think the Louis Riel one should be left in just in the sense that this was shortly after Confederation and there was a challenge to the newly established government whether or not it could fulfill its policies and whether it was actually connected with the people. So, though the issue that it arose over may not have been so important…or not “important” but not as major (the whole Métis thing)...the whole aspect that the Rebellion was stopped eventually by the government and how that was handled – I think that’s important.

Sam: Let’s think about the consequences of his rebellion. Well, because of the rebellion, Manitoba was established and the Métis were recognized as Aboriginal people. What else is there?

Teresa: Basically, he just stood on behalf of, and he voiced a lot about the, um, the western and the...interior of Canada. And before that you know...Canada had always been really based out back east, right, and suddenly there’s this more, I guess more of a bridge or a link. You have better representation of people out west who might not have had that much influence in politics or in government at the time. (PD44, 1033 - 1041; 1191 - 1203)

The October Crisis and the Trudeau government’s use of War Measure’s Act during October and November 1970, the only time the Act was used domestically during a time of peace, were also identified as historically significant due to
political and legal factors. As Eliya notes, “that’s important because that gives the government the right to suspend civil rights” (PD22, 756-757).

Students used political or legal factors to ascribe significance to several events or people that were also identified as historically significant for social reasons. For instance, in explaining the historical significance of the Multiculturalism Policy (and then Act), Mark wonders how Canadian society might be different today had the philosophy of multiculturalism not been enacted into law:

If they [government] didn’t, like, enable that [Multiculturalism] Act – it’d be different when they [immigrants] came here now. It would…probably Canada would be a lot different than it is right now, if it wasn’t put out in the legislature. (Mark, PD5, 311-314)

Although also significant for social reasons, Eliya argued that the struggle for women’s rights holds important legal ramifications: “I think this [Persons Case] is more important [than the Suffragist movement] because you’re gaining more rights this way because now you’re considered a person under the law and this – the women’s suffrage movement is just the vote” (PD22, 485-488). Jessica also argued for the causal significance of the Person’s Case, noting that “after that, women were treated somewhat as equals” (PD5, 179). The use of the qualifier, “somewhat” is interesting in Jessica’s response. It denotes a measured evaluation of the effects of the Person’s Case, an evaluation that equality between men and women was not fully achieved despite the ruling arrived at by the judicial committee of England’s Privy Council.

4.3.4 Time-Scale and Spatial (Geographic) Aspects of Causal Significance

Time-scale, or an assessment of the immediate, short or long term effects of an event, was employed by students in their evaluations of historical significance. When asked to consider how he decided which events are historically significant, Kyung suggested that, “recent events tend to have to prove they’re important”
He added, “Like, older events will have more chance to be proven as important or not. [There’s] less chance for the recent ones to be proven.” (PD18, 104-106) Kyung seems to understand the importance of including a temporal dimension in assessments of historical significance. One cannot assess the historical significance of an event without some temporal distance from the event (Peck & Seixas, 2008). What Kyung defines as an “older” versus “recent” event is unclear, however. It should also be noted that, in more simplistic responses (an example was given in section 4.1.2.1), if a long time had passed between an event and the present, this could provide enough of a reason to preclude it from a group’s timeline. Some students had difficulty understanding the significance of an event if it was, temporally-speaking, too far removed from their current circumstances. In cases such as these it is important to help students understand that, although the effects of an event may not extend to the present-day, the event may still be deemed historically significant due to other factors.

In his assessment of the historical significance of the 1995 Québec Referendum, Sam employed his understanding of the event to argue that the lasting effects of tense French-English relations merit its inclusion in his group’s timeline: “That tension between French-Canadians and English-Canadians started all the way from the… it goes back all the way to 1758, I think…. Tension always did exist, like, over a hundred years – oh, so that’s 200 years even – yeah, so it’s very important.” (PD12, 114-118)

Some students employed geographic indices as factors in ascribing historical significance to events in Canada’s past. In some cases, if an event was (in the

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34 The example in Section 4.1.2.1 was from Teresa, whose argument included her assertion that the Gold Rush happened “back in the boons” and therefore was not historically significant.

35 As will become evident later, Sam also employed spatial (or geographic) indices to ascribe significance to this event.
students’ view) restricted to a small spatial region, students usually did not ascribe significance to it.

Rather, students tended to ascribe significance to events that affected the majority of, or the entire, country. Aakil’s explanation of some of his group’s decisions about historical significance underscores this point:

Like basically all of these…they’re….everything we’ve picked here are national, affecting the whole country whereas, more or less, the Northwest Rebellion affected more of the prairies and eastern Canada – it didn’t affect Atlantic Canada, Northern Canada or Western Canada….That would be my justification. (PD20, 416-422)

Sam offered two contrasting thoughts about the relevance of geography on an event’s historical significance. The first concurs with Aakil’s statement: “Louis Riel – that’s more of regional issue so when I tell the history of Canada, I won’t include that” (PD12, 89-91). However, when considering the historical significance of the Québec Referendum, Sam offered this observation: “Well, you might say the Québec Referendum is a regional issue but it’s so important that the country – the whole country almost split up because of that regional issue so the significance towards the whole nation’s history is undeniable” (PD12, 96-101). In this statement, two factors combine to influence Sam’s understanding of the historical significance of the Québec Referendum. The first is that the event affected the entire nation. The second factor – depth of impact – emerges in Sam’s description of what could have happened had the majority of Québeckers voted in favour of seceding from Canada. The combination of these two factors, combined with how the research task was framed (that is, historical significance in reference to the nation) influenced Sam’s understanding of historical significance of this particular event.
4.3.5 Scale (# of people) and Depth of Impact

Scale, or the number of people affected by an event, and an assessment of the profundity of an event's impact both provide quantitative explanations of historical significance. In other words, these two aspects of causal significance rely less on the quality of the causal aspects and more on how many, or how deeply, people were affected by the event in question.

In addition to mentioning particular groups (e.g., Chinese, Aboriginal, Japanese, women) implicated in an event, students also assessed the historical significance of an event based on the number of people involved with, or affected by, it. In some cases, such as in assessing the historical significance of the Halifax Explosion, students determined that not enough people were affected by the event to warrant its inclusion on their timelines. Similarly, Ben thought that Lester B. Pearson winning the Nobel Peace prize in recognition of his peace keeping efforts during the 1956 Suez Canal crisis was insignificant because, “it’s just one person winning the Nobel Peace Prize” (PD18, 238-239). In some groups, however, students argued that Pearson was indeed historically significant because he initiated the first use of United Nations peacekeeping forces and helped put Canada on the map as a peace-keeping nation (pattern and symbolic significance). However, Ben did not extend his thinking about Pearson beyond the immediate event described on the picture-card and therefore did not ascribe significance to this event, which, in his opinion, was only about one person.

There were events that were denoted as historically significant due to the number of people involved. For instance, Ariana noted that the Canada Act was significant because “that’s for, like, all the rights for everybody in Canada” (PD3, 380-381). Annabelle and Shen’s explanation about the importance of immigration also rested on the number of people affected by it:
Annabelle: Well, it certainly brought a lot of farmers. Cause like, if you look at Saskatchewan and Manitoba – not so much Alberta – but Saskatchewan and Manitoba, now there’s a lot of people who are of eastern European descent who still live there. Like maybe more than, say, in BC and stuff. And then there seems to be less (maybe not a lot less, but less) Asian people and stuff [in the prairies] because all the farming people went to that one place.
Shen: It kind of brought the diversity too, because you got the Ukrainian people coming. (PD16, 701-714)

Finally, some students noted that the creation of Indian residential schools was historically significant “because there are so many Natives in Canada” (Emily, PD38, 19).

Interestingly, few students ascribed historical significance to either world war based on the number of people involved, although surely that argument could be made. Instead, students drew on other criteria for ascribing significance to these events, as was noted in section 4.1.2.2. Other factors related to students’ determinations of the historical significance of the world wars will be described in later sections of this chapter.

Depth of impact was widely used by students to determine the historical significance of an event. Student used words or phrases such as: “harsh,” “it had a big impact,” “severe,” “influential,” “shocking,” “dramatic,” “huge,” “a lesser versus well-known event,” and “extreme” to describe, in their estimation, the depth of impact of an event. A sample of events denoted as historically significant due to their depth of impact is: the women’s suffragette movement, the building of the Canadian Pacific Railway, Japanese internment, the October Crisis, Indian Residential schools, implementation of the Chinese head tax and the 1995 Québec referendum.
Mark’s explanation about how to determine if an event is historically significant is emblematic of this aspect of historical significance:

I think that, um, the ones we should look at are the more consequential ones….Like if it happened a long time ago…maybe there’s some consequences from that [event]. Not like an event, say, like the Halifax explosion. Like, it was a, you know, tremendous explosion and everything – like a big event at the time, but it doesn’t really affect anything. (PD44, 293-298)

Mark’s comments demonstrate his understanding that, in order to make decisions about historical significance one must take into consideration a number of factors. In using the word, “consequential,” Mark signifies the importance of assessing an event’s depth of impact. According to Mark, one indicator of depth of impact is the subsequent consequences of the event. Mark also seems to understand that, while an event may be considered important at the time that it occurs, later generations may not deem the event historically significant. This once again raises the need for temporal distance from an event in order to make an assessment of its historical significance.

Two students’ views on the October Crisis shed some light on their application of depth of impact as a criterion for historical significance. Eliya noted that it was the extremity of the event that caused her to mark it as historically significant: “Québec always wanted independence, but now, this [October Crisis] is when it got so extreme that a terrorist group in favour of independence kidnapped a British diplomat [and] a provincial minister and one died, right? One was killed” (PD22, 1201-1206). It was Minha’s incredulity combined with her interpretation of “how far” people were willing to go “to get their voices heard” that caused her to ascribe significance to it: “Some of these are really shocking. Like the October Crisis. Like, I can’t believe that actually happened and I couldn’t believe you [they] would go so far as doing that to get their voices heard. So yeah, it’s how
people responded, or like, the amount of response from other people” (PD28, 555-559). For both students, the extreme nature of the event merits its designation as historically significant. On the other hand, Annabelle didn’t think the October Crisis was historically significant. She said, “Yeah, well…it didn’t have, like, it impacted Canada but then it’s not like it changed everything that ever happened” (PD16, 297-298). In this example, the fact that Annabelle did not believe the October Crisis had any lasting effects meant that she could not rule that it was historically significant.

Students’ ideas about Indian residential schools also shed light on their understandings of depth of impact and how this criterion can be used to ascribe historical significance:

Armand: We definitely disrupted their [Aboriginal peoples’] way of life.
Annabelle: Yeah, like why did they have to be educated and live the way we do, you know?
Armand: Yeah, right.
Shen: It’s kind of so they could live in the city.
Annabelle: Who said they wanted to live in the city? (PD16, 870-875)

The key word here is “disrupted,” and recognition by the students that “we” – in this case the dominant social group – tried to assimilate Aboriginal peoples to a White, or European/Western way of life. What is interesting about this exchange and others like it is that contrary to Barton and Levstik’s (2004) research, students in this study did not see these so-called “dark spots” on Canadian history as aberrations in an otherwise positive past. Rather, most of the students (and especially those attending Eastside Secondary School C) possessed emergent frameworks for understanding the complex and contested history of Canada and it is highly likely that they developed these frameworks at least in part through their experiences at school. For example, the students at Eastside C
were taught by the same teacher, who expressed her understanding of historical significance as follows:

I suggest historical significance is ideologically constructed. For example, only recently have the achievements, work and problems of women (as a gender) and workers (as a class) been regarded by mainstream academic histories as significant. The generals, presidents and corporate leaders of Europe and North America have told “the story” of a particular worldview for many generations. They have valued war preparations over peace movements and corporate expansions over workers’ gains. The democratizing of the historical enterprise has begun to alter how “significance” is seen. For instance, groups such as women, in many feminist incarnations, have challenged patriarchal structures and values, compelling significant changes in what historians regard now as historically significant. I suppose I am most interested in the details of these challenges (diaries, letters, minutes of meetings, other “ordinary” artifacts) and the ways they have shifted the mainstream to accept a broad view of the landscape of history, so it complexly reflects the struggles of the many, not just the few. (Agnes, Teacher questionnaire, question 9)

On each visit to Agnes’ classroom I saw students engaged in analyses of marginalized groups’ histories and why these have been, for so long, pushed to the margins – of school history textbooks (literally) and society (symbolically). Agnes constantly encouraged her students to question and critique dominant narratives, a skill many used during the research task.
Rosa’s thoughts about the historical significance of the Komagatu Maru incident36 are indicative of the larger framework she brought to the task of ascribing significance to events in Canada’s past:

I just think it was a big event and I remember learning a lot about it and being really fascinated by it. I mean, I know it didn’t really, like, effect Canada, like, over a long period of time – like, it was just one single event….But I think it was huge and it adds to the whole topic of racism.

(PD39, 57-62)

Rosa’s group decided, in the end, not to include this event in their timeline. However, embedded in Rosa’s response is an awareness of several factors related to decisions about historical significance. First, she acknowledges that this was a topic she’d learned “a lot about” in school and this has clearly had an impact on her ascription of historical significance. Second, she is aware that length of time might be a criterion in determining the historical significance of an event, although she recognizes that it does not, in fact, apply in this case. Third, her use of the qualifier “huge” signals depth of impact. Finally, Rosa connects this incident to a narrative – or framework – of racism in Canadian history.

To understand and ascribe causal significance, students need an understanding of the historical context in which a single event is situated. Ben’s dismissal of the historical significance of Pearson winning the Nobel Peace Prize, above, is an example of the importance of locating an historical event within a context and within a narrative. Students who were more knowledgeable about an event, including what happened before and after it, offered stronger arguments about its causal historical significance. Clearly without at least a moderate knowledge of

36 In 1914, the Canadian government denied entry to more than 350 Punjabis who had arrived on the Komagatu Maru, despite the fact that the passengers were British subjects. Upon its return to India, the ship was met by Indian police and violence erupted. Twenty passengers were killed.
the surrounding history, students are entirely unable to make any arguments about historical significance. Knowledge is a key factor in ascriptions of causal historical significance for it enables students to understand the causal linkages related to an event. In addition, the students who approached the task with frameworks (albeit emergent) for understanding the complexity of history seemed to be more adept at understanding causal relationships. Therefore, these students were well equipped to offer sound arguments regarding the historical significance of particular events.

4.4 Pattern Significance

The word pattern has several meanings, two of which include: “a model or design from which copies can be made” and “an example of excellence; an ideal; a model” (Barber, 1998). It is in this sense that “pattern” is used to denote a particular usage of historical significance. In other words, when students ascribe significance to events, people or developments based on the latter’s propensity to serve as a model for future events, people or developments, it is called pattern historical significance. According to Cercadillo (2001) pattern significance is always allied with contextuality, and usually refers to concrete models of emplotment, such as the concepts of progress and decline. Markers for data coding within this category are those terms which allude to the event or process as a turning-point or a trend in a developmental account. (p. 127)

Key terms and phrases (in the study reported here) indicative of student use of pattern significance include: “it was the start of,” “it was the beginning of,” “that’s when everything changed,” “it was a big/the first step,” “it’s a marking stone,” “landmark,” “trigger,” “turning point,” “precedent,” “first sign,” “it created,” “it established,” “he was the founder,” and “it was the original.” Cercadillo argues that use of pattern significance “indicates a higher level of sophistication in students’ answers” (p. 127) because students must situate an event, person or
development in relevant contextual information and because this mode of understanding of historical significance involves the use of narrative structures to understand the past.

Out of 1370 coded quotations, 239 (or 17.45%) were coded as occurrences of pattern significance. Aboriginal students in this study were least likely to employ the pattern criterion to ascribe significance to events in Canada’s past, with 14.29% of all their responses falling into the pattern category. Canadian-born students in this study employed this criterion 18.41% of the time; immigrant students in this study did so 18.95% of the time and students in mixed groups (Canadian-born and immigrant students) in this study employed this criterion 15.02% of the time.

Table 17: Distribution of quotations coded as pattern historical significance by student group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Aboriginal Students</th>
<th>Canadian-born Students</th>
<th>Immigrant Students</th>
<th>Mixed-Group Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td># and % of quotations in each student group</td>
<td>12/84 14.29%</td>
<td>151/820 18.41%</td>
<td>29/153 18.95%</td>
<td>47/313 15.02%</td>
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Students employed pattern significance to denote the historical significance of 17 of the 30 events used in the timeline task. They most frequently used pattern significance to discuss the following events: the building of the CPR, Confederation, the women’s suffrage movement, the Person’s Case, the Canada Act, Canada’s involvement in both World Wars, and the passing of the Multiculturalism Policy and Act.

Some examples of pattern significance are fairly simplistic in that students do not include much contextual information in their explanations. For instance, Ethan argued that the significance of the women’s suffrage movement was that “it spurred other people… it spurred Emily [Murphy] here to start the movement, right?” (PD26, 557-558). The fact that Ethan recognizes that the women’s
suffrage movement “spurred” the beginning of women gaining the right to vote makes this an example of pattern significance. He seems aware of some contextual information – he is aware, for instance, that Emily Murphy was a suffragette and that the movement was indeed that, a movement, and not a one-time event – but his answer lacks deeper contextual knowledge.

Other examples show more sophistication. An example of student usage of context and emplotment to ascribe pattern historical significance can be found the following two excerpts:

“The Europeans arrive on the west coast of Canada” – I think this is an important time because it’s when a lot of stuff changed in the Aboriginal history, where we were colonized and had to be assimilated into mainstream society. It had a great effect on Aboriginal populations….They brought a lot of the diseases over – so that’s what devastated the First Nations.” (Ariana, PD3, 232-236, 253-254)

The 20th century for Canada is a process – Canada being more and more independent. Like the First World War we had our own troops – not a part of the British force – and then we had an individual seat in the Paris Peace Conference. And then in the 30s we had the Westminster Statutes…. So we have – foreign policy – we can decide on our foreign policy without British influence so this Charter – or Canada Act – is actually a marking stone for Canada being fully independent. (Sam, PD7, 152-161)

One can infer from Ariana’s statement that, in her opinion, European arrival (to Canada) marked the beginning of decline for Aboriginal peoples. She employs the concepts of colonization and assimilation to partially explain this decline (here we also see causal significance). She clearly associates devastation and change with European expansion to the Americas and this narrative of decline that
begins with the arrival of Europeans makes this an example of pattern significance.

In the second example, Sam uses a sophisticated understanding of Canadian history to plot the development of Canadian political independence, beginning with World War I and continuing to the signing of the Canada Act, including the adoption of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. In so doing, he notes a number of “marking stones” (Canadian troops in WWI, the Paris Peace Conference, the Westminster Statutes) on the pathway to Canadian independence from Britain, a clear indication of pattern significance. Events that exemplified Canadian independence from Britain (Confederation, World Wars I and II, the Canada Act) emerged as key examples of pattern historical significance in this study.

An important aspect of students’ use of pattern significance is that, like Levstik’s (1999) New Zealand students, they often used this kind of historical significance to explain events that marked Canada’s emergence as a player on the world stage. Events that were ascribed pattern historical significance for this reason include: World War II, Multiculturalism Policy/Act and Pearson winning the Nobel Peace Prize. For instance, Will argued that WWII was historically significant because it “is where we stood up for ourselves for the first time” (PD26, 1276). Ben noted that, “we’re one of the few countries that has multiculturalism, like a multiculturalism policy” (PD18, 536-538). Dao-Ming also explained that “Canada became the first country in the world to adopt the multiculturalism policy” (PD24, 1049-1050). Binh argued that Pearson winning the Nobel Peace Prize was significant because the event marked “our first peace-keeping mission” (PD22, 136).

In summary, students most often ascribed pattern historical significance to “firsts” in Canadian history, to events that they understood to be exemplars for future people and/or events, and to events which, for the students, marked Canada’s
place in the global community. In the more sophisticated explanations, students constructed a narrative in which the historical significance of the event in question was situated.

### 4.5 Symbolic Significance

Symbolic significance, according to Cercadillo (2001), is attached specifically to notions of moral example (lessons from history) and mythical past. It implies a particular 'use of history,' related to issues of national identity and partisanship, but it can also be connected to more general or a-historical concepts, such as piety or transcendental moral ideas. (p. 127)

It may “operate from the perspective of people of the past and from the perspective of subsequent presents” (Cercadillo, 2000, p. 123). Key terms and phrases (in the study reported here) indicative of student use of symbolic significance include: “it shows,” “it’s symbolic,” “it defines,” “it shaped [Canada]” and “it teaches.” Implicit symbolic reasoning occurred in statements in which students made judgments about certain events (e.g., “it’s good because…”).

Symbolic significance was the most used criterion of historical significance employed by the students in this study. Out of 1370 coded quotations, 466 (or 34.01%) were coded as occurrences of symbolic significance. In this study, Aboriginal students were least likely to employ the symbolic criterion to ascribe significance to events in Canada’s past, with 22.62% of all their responses falling into the symbolic category. Canadian-born students employed this criterion 33.05% of the time; immigrant students did so 35.95% of the time and students in mixed groups (Canadian-born and immigrant students) employed this criterion 38.66% of the time.
### Table 18: Distribution of quotations coded as symbolic historical significance by student group

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Aboriginal Students</th>
<th>Canadian-born Students</th>
<th>Immigrant Students</th>
<th>Mixed-Group Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td># and % of quotations</td>
<td>19/84 22.62%</td>
<td>271/820 33.05%</td>
<td>55/153 35.95%</td>
<td>121/313 38.66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in each student group</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

Students used symbolic reasoning to ascribe significance to events which: are symbolic of the development of the country, are emblematic of Canadian unity, are symbolic of Canadian identity, involve iconic individuals and offer a lesson for future generations.

#### 4.5.1 Development and Growth of the Nation

Students ascribed symbolic historical significance to events which, in their opinion, are symbols of the development and growth of Canada. The most prominent events to receive such a designation were Confederation, Canada’s involvement in World War I and the building of the CPR.

When asked to explain the historical significance of Confederation, Aidan argued that it was historically significant because, “it’s showing the steps that occurred to help assist Canada into becoming its own country and to be able to rule itself” (PD5, 333-335). For Aidan, the historical significance of Confederation lay in its symbolic power because it demonstrates, or acts as a symbol for, the formation of the country.

Aakil noted that World War I is historically significant for Canada because,

> You know, a lot of people recognize that, possibly even more than Confederation, it was a nation building event for Canada. Not...in the most ideal sense, because it happened in one of the worst wars (well, the worst war today in history) but you know, battles like Vimy Ridge...where, you know...one of the offshoots of battles like Vimy Ridge was that Canadians
from all across the country, you know, forged a national identity out of … fighting for their country. (PD20, 442-451)

Aakil’s explanation is typical of other students’ ideas about the historical significance of World War I. What makes his answer an example of symbolic significance is that he aligned Canada’s participation in the war with the concepts of nation building and the formation of a national identity. This message of nation and identity building is consistent with popular media and school textbook rhetoric surrounding Canada’s involvement in the Great War.

Students also designated the building of the CPR as historically significant due to symbolic factors. Mark argued to include the building of the CPR on his group’s timeline because of “the symbolic meaning of the CPR, really – which is tying Canada together” (PD11, 270-271). In the following excerpt one can see that Aidan imbued two symbols in the building of the CPR. The first part of his argument was very similar to Mark’s reasoning, described above. The second symbol – and reason for ascribing symbolic significance to the building of the CPR – lay in what this event reveals about Canada’s past treatment of visible minorities:

It [CPR] spread across Canada from the east to the west. And then it [CPR] also shows how…Chinese people were used as slaves – you know they paid [them] a dollar per day to build the CPR on the west coast so I think it shows how racist Canada – Canadians used to be – and how we are all joined as one country through the CPR. (PD6, 455-460)

Missing from Aidan’s analysis is an awareness that racism in Canada is not a thing of the past. Although his explanation does not quite provide a lesson about racism, Aidan uses the building of the CPR as a symbol of racism in Canada’s past.
Adélie holds up the building of the CPR as a symbol of racism in Canada as well. Included in her explanation of the significance of the CPR is the idea of growth—that racist attitudes have changed over time. It is in her belief that attitudes towards minority groups have changed in Canada that the heart of her argument over the significance of the CPR is found. In addition, her explanation of the significance of the building of the CPR and the treatment of Chinese workers included an understanding that ascriptions of significance do not inhere in an event itself. Rather, ideas about “what counts” change over time and with society:

What I argued basically is there was—or there were basically two opinions that came out of the same event. One was then and one is now and it kind of shows how Canada’s developed…like how it, like, influenced then as compared to now. Cause then it was, “they’re stealing our jobs—those filthy Chinese—I can’t believe they’re such…. you know…., that they’re working for dirt and now what are we supposed to do?” and it was just kind of bitter and jealousy. And now when…multiculturalism has been embraced throughout-like most Canadians—in most Canadians’ minds it’s, “Oh, I’m so glad that they built that railway cause it linked the whole country and it made sure we spread out and it made us the great country that we are today.” And so now we’re grateful but then we were bitter and spiteful so it’s an interesting switch and it really shows how Canada’s changed. (PD24, 863-877)

Adélie’s group-mate, Minha, concurred, noting that the building of the CPR is historically significant because it “just shows that Canada has really, really leaped forward in multiculturalism, not just like, encouraging it, but embracing it and educating people that, so people would actually be more open-minded” (PD24, 883-886).
Armand’s explanation of the symbolic significance of the CPR follows a similar thread, and demonstrates his understanding that historical significance is not fixed or inherent in an event itself. That is, depending on a variety of contextual factors (passage of time, perspective), ascriptions of significance may change:

Armand: Today, the Chinese workers is [sic] still in the news.
Carla: Okay
Armand: It’s still being discussed.
Carla: Right
Armand: And the railway now is becoming more obsolete almost.
Carla: Okay
Armand: Cause recently they sold [the] BC railway. So it shows that the railway is less and less important now, and the controversy of the Chinese workers is more and more – is growing.
Carla: Ok, and why do you think that is?
Armand: Because times have changed…Back then people cared about the railway and now people don’t care about the railway. They care about the social issues. Back then they didn’t – they had all kinds of prejudice and didn’t care about social issues but now they do. Our society matured, I hope. (PD15, 247-270)

For Armand, the significance of the CPR is not only that it is symbolic of past racisms, but also that it symbolizes a change in attitudes as people in the present weigh the significance of the CPR in Canadian history. Similarly, Binh argued that the treatment of Chinese workers (who worked on the CPR) by members of the dominant society, “wasn’t considered bad back then. It’s considered bad now. It shows how we developed, like morally and racially along the way” (PD22, 1279-1281). Armand and Binh appear to understand that ascriptions of historical significance can change over time and due to a variety of factors.
4.5.2 National Unity

Dao-Ming’s argument about the historical significance of the building of the CPR also relies on symbolic reasoning, particularly in terms of national unity:

The building of the Canadian Pacific Railway – because it sort of interlinks Canada as a country and it made Canada feel like a country. Because before this was made, every province was kind of isolated from one another and the building of the Pacific railway kind of linked everyone together and it created a feeling of nationalism in Canada. (PD42, 112-118)

Key phrases in Dao-Ming’s response that signal this as an example of symbolic historical significance include: “it made Canada feel like a country” and “it created a feeling of nationalism in Canada.” She knows that the CPR connected the east and west coasts of Canada but for her, the significance of the building of the CPR represents much more than this; it symbolizes a feeling of nationhood.

Another event that students designated as historically significant due to its unity symbolism was the Québec Referendum. For instance, Shen argued that it was historically significant because it “is, like, symbolizing the unification of Canada because if Québec wasn’t – like if it did split from Canada it would….it wouldn’t be good on our economy and, like, other aspects of Canada.” (PD41, 264-267). Aidan offered a similar justification for his ascription of symbolic significance to the Québec Referendum: “The Québec Referendum is important because it shows that Québec wants to separate for reasons that…it should be over now cause obviously Canada doesn’t want them to separate…and yet a lot of the French still want to separate. It just makes a huge, like, hole in Canada” (PD14, 52-570). In both of these examples, students argued that the Québec Referendum is historically significant because it represents a threat to Canadian unity.
4.5.3 Canadian Identity

Students also ascribed historical significance to several events that, in their view, are symbolic of Canadian identity. That is, events that contribute to their own, or other’s, image of Canada as a country. These include: Canada Act Passed, Multiculturalism Policy and Act, World War II and Lester B. Pearson’s Nobel Peace Prize.

Jessica argued that the Canada Act is historically significant because, “it seems like it helps make Canada the country that it is today” (PD6, 192-193). Aakil, drawing on his extensive knowledge of the Canada Act and the Charter of Rights and Freedoms (which was an integral part of the Act), offered an in depth explanation of the symbolic significance of the Canada Act:

> You know to me it’s one of the most important events in Canadian history because I see its effects every single day – positive effects that is. First of all it does – it did finally conclude our sovereignty over ourselves – our final complete independence from Britain (aside from the fact that we still have a monarch but nevertheless that’s important). But not as important to me as I would say – like the Charter of Rights and Freedoms – which I think is just – I couldn’t imagine…. I mean I’ve lived in Canada ever since it existed but I couldn’t imagine living in Canada without it and I couldn’t imagine how people did live here without it because it… I think it sets a common set of values for Canada that are, you know invaluable to me. Inalienable rights that – that I think every human being should have and I see it’s effect you know – I take law and I see how it’s been applied to the law—to improve, you know, rights for people, you know, including more restorative justice. You know – things like that. Or just, you know, everyday un—unfair laws that are overturned—new laws that are passed consistent with it—so—I mean, that being said, I don’t think it’s perfect but it’s such—I think it’s an important step in Canada’s history—into creating
the new kind of nation that you know we want it to be—we want it to be multicultural—inclusive—fair and just for everyone so I think it’s—one of the most important steps—towards recognizing that, yeah, we didn’t come from a perfect nation but let’s try and set a common set of ideals we can strive to achieve. (PD33, 238-264)

Although it could be argued that Aakil’s explanation of the historical significance of the Canada Act is also an example of causal significance (“it did finally conclude our sovereignty over ourselves”) and pattern significance (his reference to the Act as “an important step”), the crux of his argument rests in the symbolic power of the Canada Act and The Charter of Rights and Freedoms in terms of nation building, Canadian identity and societal ideals to which the nation can strive.

The Multiculturalism Policy and Act were often cited as symbols of Canadian identity. Students noted that, not only do Canadians view Canada as an officially multicultural nation, so do those living in other countries. For instance, Jessica argued for its inclusion on her group’s timeline on the basis that, “it’s important…just because Canada is so multicultural compared to other countries that…I don’t know…it’s kind of, it’s part of Canada’s identity – just being multicultural.” (PD6, 354-356). Aidan argued that multiculturalism is important because, “it shows that Canada’s accepting different cultures now and …they’re allowing diversity inside the country” (PD14, 255-256).

In terms of Canada’s image to those outside of Canada, Teresa noted that “we’re renowned for our multiculturalism” (PD7, 182-183) and therefore the Act is historically significant. Kyung offered a similar argument, claiming,

I’m very glad that Canada actually has this Multiculturalism Act which protects each culture and we should respect them [other cultures]. Most importantly, and [it’s] something that I don’t take for granted because I feel
– I feel that it’s not something that’s everywhere – it’s kind of rare in the world. (PD36, 352-356)

For Kyung, an immigrant from South Korea, Canada’s Multiculturalism Policy is a key component of Canada’s identity for the rest of the world:

Like I don’t think any other country in the world has this Act….I think it really defines Canada and it shows that we’re like, better than others. That’s a good way of putting it….so we’re willing to compromise or willing to share our place with other people and that’s like, that’s really big. (PD24, 214-219)

Canada’s involvement in World War II also emerged as a symbol of Canadian identity. According to Aakil, WWII is historically significant because,

That was probably one of the most – if we want to say ‘justified’ wars – because it was fighting against…you know, our limited democracy (it was nevertheless some form of democracy) fighting against, you know, the ideals of fascism and totalitarianism. So, I think that also really gave Canada a strong sense of identity and helped it establish some core values that it went on to build upon in the postwar period and up until today. (PD20, 452-459)

Aakil’s explanation, which refers explicitly to the development of a national identity and the establishment of “core values,” clearly points to symbolic historical significance.

Finally, several students pointed to Pearson’s Nobel Peace Prize as emblematic of Canadian identity. For instance, Teresa noted that, “Canadians are big peacekeepers…that’s one thing that really strikes [me] about Canadian identity, right? Because that’s where we have the whole ‘Canadians are peacekeepers thing”’ (PD44, 315-326). The latter part of Teresa’s statement is crucial to our
understanding of her use of symbolism to understand the historical significance of Pearson and his Nobel Prize. It is in the second half of her response that a mythical Canadian identity emerges, a characteristic of students’ explanations that, Cercadillo (2001) argues, is a key determinant of symbolic historical significance.

4.5.4 Iconic Individuals

Students rarely named specific historical actors during the research task and that is due, in large part, to the fact that the timeline exercise was organized around events and not people. However, two figures were named as historically significant for symbolic reasons: Nellie McClung and Louis Riel.

Nellie McClung was a suffragette in the early twentieth century. She was an integral actor in The Person’s Case, a lawsuit filed by “the Famous Five” that eventually resulted in women being declared “persons” under the law. Her image and deeds appear in many Canadian history and social studies textbooks. Although not given any more prominence than her contemporaries in the picture cards given to students, Teresa named McClung specifically as an icon in Canadian history:

"Historically, Nellie McClung...she was a pretty big mark in like, women’s history (pattern significance). Like look at this – this case wasn’t passed until 1929, and our country was formed before that. I mean, for 100 years women are...not being able to pick up [enter] all these positions in Canada. And, like, we are known as a pretty democratic society with lots of like, grace and suddenly, like...women are not allowed to take up higher positions. And here, now you can see, suddenly you have a woman, like, being able to take it to the level of judge. I think that’s like, you know, to the judicial level – I think that’s very, um, eye-opening (symbolic significance)." (PD44, 685-696).
In this example, the symbolic significance of McClung’s achievements rests, in part, on Teresa’s understanding of Canada as a democratic society. The fact that McClung could not vote and was not considered a person under the law serves as a point of conflict with this conception of Canadian society. Therefore, McClung’s ability to overcome such challenges makes her, for Teresa, a historically significant symbol of both the challenges she faced and her ability to triumph over them.

Louis Riel was also touted as an iconic individual in Canadian history by several students. Conor argued that Riel was historically significant because “he defended Aboriginal people against the Canadian government” (PD3, 149-150). For Conor, Riel is a symbol of the struggle for Aboriginal rights in Canada. After a lengthy discussion over the inclusion of Louis Riel on her group’s timeline, Adélie argued that Louis Riel is historically significant because, “people still refer to him, like, when arguing about rights for [the] Métis or the Aboriginals or the French…he’s kind of become a symbol—for all three sides” (PD24, 952-955).

Vincent, on the other hand, thought it important to include Riel on his group’s timeline because, “Riel was a bit of a bad guy…we can’t make Canada seem to be, like, such a good place. We need, like, a little bit of the negative” (PD9, 40-42). This is an interesting argument and one that students employed frequently throughout the research exercise. As was noted earlier, many students pointed to the need to include what they perceived of as “negative” events in order to more accurately depict Canada’s history regarding minority rights. Unlike students in studies conducted elsewhere (Barton & Levstik, 1998), many students in this study did not view racism, discrimination or other examples of decline as aberrations on an otherwise positive narrative of Canadian history. Rather, they considered these events to be an integral part of telling Canada’s history and chose, more often than not, to include them rather than discard them.
4.5.5 Lessons from the Past

In some cases, students ascribed symbolic historical significance to events that, in their opinion, provided lessons for future generations. This is a particular use of history, in that students make moral judgments on past events and state the importance of learning from past mistakes. It is through the use of symbolic significance that students justify why history is important (as a school subject and more generally). The following conversation between Jessica and Munny about the historical significance of the Japanese Internment is an exemplar of this use of symbolic significance:

Jessica: I think it’s important. I guess because Canada is known for being like such a peaceful and likeable country but in this case they actually did, like, a really horrible thing – and there’s not really that many horrible things that they did in history – not that I know of…but this seemed like one that was like, a really mean thing to do.

Carla: okay

Jessica: And I guess it’s important to learn from it. Like not to do something like that again…not to just stereotype people like, under the same like, I don’t know…they stereotyped them as all the same because of what was going on with Japan and Pearl Harbour and everything, when really most of them were Canadian born and they think of Canada as like their home. (PD6, 392-406)

[...]

Munny: I think it would be really cool cause if you put this one before the Multicultural Act then, you know, it might just show how Canada grew. (PD6, 416-418)

The above conversation includes at least three types of symbolic historical significance. Jessica notes a contradiction between Canada’s reputation as a “peaceful and likeable country” and the government’s decision to intern people of Japanese descent during WWII. This is an example of students ascribing...
significance to events because they believe they are symbolic of Canadian identity. Jessica’s statements also clearly indicate however, that the significance of the Japanese Internment lies in future generations’ ability to “learn from” the event. Finally, Munny’s suggestion, which comes at the end of a dialogue about whether or not to include the Japanese Internment on their timeline, implies that he thinks the event is historically significant because it represents growth, or a change in attitudes toward minority groups, in Canadian society. Munny’s contribution is also important because it implies a particular use of the timeline exercise to construct a specific kind of narrative of Canadian history, that is, a narrative of progress.

Kyung also suggested that the purpose of studying events like the Winnipeg General Strike and the October Crisis is to learn from them and, he argued, it is in the lessons drawn out of such events that their symbolic historical significance can be found:

Because we realize that not everything was quiet – not everything was peaceful in the beginning - this - Canada’s reputation as a - as a country that would take everything – that would resolve things peacefully - didn’t come - didn’t - wasn’t granted in the beginning - it didn’t exist - it wasn’t, um - I don’t know - that there were times when things got violent there were times when things got radical but we always uphold the value that things must be done peacefully - and when a group or ... um ... when a force would - when a group would try to resolve with violence .... Um ... Canada ... um ... not always by government - but the people of the mainstream flow suppressed it. All these radical events were suppressed and the legacy of that was that violence was not the solution - and ...the efforts were made to give that lesson to leave that as a legacy - and that’s what we have - that’s what formed the reputation now - that’s what formed
the policy now - that's why these two events - these two radical events are important. (PD36, 203-219)

The excerpt above includes several key ideas related to symbolic historical significance. Kyung notes that Canada’s reputation as a peaceful country was achieved over time. The narrative he has woven is a triumphal story of progress, particularly the section: “there were times when things got violent – there were times when things got radical – but we always uphold the value that things must be done peacefully.” Here, he invokes a mythical history of how conflicts were resolved in Canada and points to the legacy of such events for future generations. For Kyung, the October Crisis and the Winnipeg General Strike become symbolically historically significant because of the lessons they provide about “Canadian values,” particularly as they relate to conflict resolution.

Students ascribed symbolic historical significance to events in Canada’s past that, for them, were examples of progress, were symbolic of Canadian identity, uncovered an aspect of the past that, in their opinion, merited investigation (such as racism) and inclusion in narratives of Canadian history, and to events from which lessons could be drawn. Use of this criterion of historical significance also involves an understanding that historical significance is not an intrinsic quality of any particular event. Rather, it is people who ascribe significance to events, people or developments and these ascriptions may change over time and depending on context.

Whereas symbolic significance is used to denote a phenomenon’s significance from “the perspectives of subsequent presents” (Cercadillo, 2000, p. 230), significance for the present-future is employed to describe the historical significance of past phenomenon on current and future perceptions and happenings.
4.6 Significance for the Present-Future

Seixas (1997b) argues that a fundamental aspect of a person’s ability to think historically is that person’s ability to make connections between past events and themselves, the person doing the historical thinking. The BC history curriculum argues that one of the aims of studying history is to prepare students “to recognize bias, weigh evidence, and evaluate arguments, thus preparing them to make informed, independent judgments” so that they “can evaluate current events and challenges with a deeper awareness of alternatives” (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2006b, p. 3). In order to become effective stewards of society it is essential that students understand the past and its implications not only for themselves, in the present, but also for future generations.

In significance for the present-future students ascribe historical significance to people, events and/or developments that have relevance for present and, perhaps, future generations. An important characteristic of significance for the present-future is that, although it may, at times, be confused with causal historical significance because of the emphasis on causal factors apparent in students’ explanations, significance for the present-future is distinct because “it only operates in the long term, when the bond with the future is emphasized” (Cercadillo, 2001, p. 128). According to Cercadillo (2000) “a distinction may be made [in students’ explanations] between: posterity as an absolute; different futures at different moments in history; and ‘our’ present” (p. 240). It is also distinct from symbolic significance in that significance for the present-future operates exclusively from the point of view of the present (with an eye to the future). Symbolic significance, on the other hand, does not necessarily extend its analysis of history to the present day.
Key terms and phrases (in the study reported here) indicative of student use of significance for the present-future include: “it’s still happening,” “it’s still an issue today,” “it affects me/us now” and “it’s still current/relevant.” Students sometimes use far-fetched counterfactuals in their arguments about the present-future significance of past events (e.g., “If Canada didn’t have multiculturalism I might not have been born”) and this tendency was largely in evidence when students attempted to make personal connections to events. Students’ explanations of the significance for the present-future of events in Canada’s past often also included a justification for studying history.

Out of 1370 quotations, 167 (or 12.2%) were coded as occurrences of historical significance for the present-future. In this study, Aboriginal students were the least likely to employ this criterion to ascribe significance to events in Canada’s past, with 9.52% of all their responses falling into the significance for the present-future category. Canadian-born students employed this criterion 10.12% of the time, immigrant students did so 17.65% of the time and students in mixed groups (Canadian-born and immigrant students) employed this criterion 15.65% of the time.

Table 19: Distribution of quotations coded as historical significance for the present-future by student group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Aboriginal Students</th>
<th>Canadian-born Students</th>
<th>Immigrant Students</th>
<th>Mixed-Group Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td># and % of quotations in each student group</td>
<td>8/84 9.52%</td>
<td>83/820 10.12%</td>
<td>27/153 17.65%</td>
<td>49/313 15.65%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Although students deemed several events historically significant for the present-future, I will explore student responses to three events in order to map the characteristics of this category of historical significance: the creation of Indian Residential Schools, the Québec Referendum and the Canadian Multiculturalism Policy/Act. These three events were selected because students cited them fairly
frequently as examples of events that are historically significant for the present-future.

Ariana employed present-future reasoning quite often in her explanation of the historical significance of Indian Residential Schools:

After contact came along then, ah, we had to change the way of living, speak English, Residential Schools and what not…and then we had – our culture was taken away, the powwows were banned, our potlatches were banned – and then…we had to fight for everything to come back and now we’re just learning how to get involved with our culture and history…cultural history again. (PD2, 65-71)

The first part of Ariana’s explanation of the historical significance of Residential Schools could easily be considered an example of causal historical significance because in the first few phrases she describes the effects of European contact with Aboriginal peoples. However, in using the word “now” in the last part of her explanation, Ariana connects the causal effects of contact to the present day thus making this an example of historical significance for the present-future. She later expanded her argument about the significance of Residential Schools for the present with the following explanation of the impact of the schools on contemporary Aboriginal peoples and society: “even though that…all of what happened way back then – all the abuse that the kids had to suffer and stuff – even though it doesn’t happen anymore we’re still mixed in….We’re still mixed in with a bunch of cultures – assimilated into the mainstream” (PD2, 173-181).

Other students noted the historical significance of Indian Residential schools for the present-future. Armand and Annabelle argued that the legacy of the schools directly affects Aboriginal peoples today:

Armand: Yeah, I think it’s important because you’ve got…it shows the attitude of, of, you know – the treatment and it explains, you know, the
situation now between the First Nations people and the government because…a lot of their culture is gone, or endangered…

Annabelle: Also too – they have to – because of what the government did then they have to struggle now – against the odds that kind of got created – in order to succeed again. (PD16, 821-829)

Armand's explanation may seem, at first glance, to be an example of symbolic historical significance, particularly with his use of the phrase, “shows the attitude…the treatment....” However, even before Annabelle articulates the effects presently felt by Residential School survivors by noting that some Aboriginal people “have to struggle…to succeed,” Armand argues that “a lot of their culture is gone, or endangered,” thereby providing a present-day connection to an event that began in the late 1800s.

Adélie also explained the significance of Indian Residential schools by relying on present-future reasoning to make her argument: “We picked [it] basically cause it’s still in debate today – it was a big – it’s like, obviously still a source of anger and, like – it’s still a source – a reason that there’s still a split between the First Nations people and the rest of, like…[Canada]” (PD24, 801-804). Adélie’s explanation of the historical significance of Indian Residential Schools is an exemplar of an important characteristic of students’ use of this type of reasoning to ascribe historical significance. That is, students are highly likely to ascribe historical significance for the present-future to unresolved events, or events that are discussed currently (by government, or society in general) and considered “an issue,” at least in the students’ opinion. If students are unaware of public debates over such issues (such as Indian Residential schools), it is highly unlikely that they would be capable of making such an argument.

Another event that garnered much attention due to its significance for the present-future was the Québec Referendum. Munny made an interesting
conjecture after having reviewed all of the events that his group chose for their timeline:

Like the rest of the stuff – like Confederation and stuff like that – was just all good stuff, right? So like it’s [the timeline] all positive…or it turns into a positive. But then the Québec Referendum, like…I don’t know…just to me everything else was positive and then this [Québec Referendum] is like…like it’s still an issue…(PD8, 74-79) …and maybe in the future there will be something that makes that better too.” (PD8, 101-102)

Implicit in Munny’s statement is a narrative of progress – one that he felt was reflected in his group’s timeline – until he realized that the timeline ended with the Québec Referendum. He states that the other events on the timeline were positive or eventually had positive outcomes and he projects the possibility of a positive solution to the Québec Referendum which, he argues, is “still an issue” today. This is an interesting dimension of Munny’s response because it implies an understanding that the outcome of history is not predetermined and that future events can sometimes resolve earlier problems.

Teresa noted that the reason she felt the Québec Referendum was historically significant was because, “it’s something that’s happened for a very long time that still happening today. I just think that’s one of the things that makes it important – for the fact that we still have to face it – we still have to deal with it – or the consequences are still living with us” (PD10, 232-236). Although the phrase, “it’s something that’s happened for a very long time” does seem to indicate causal significance (time-scale) Teresa also notes the impact of the event on contemporary Canadian society, making this an example of historical significance for the present-future. Eliya also argued that the historical significance of the

37 See Appendix J.
Québec Referendum is due to its connection to the present-day: “it is something that has stuck with the nation – like the country – forever. Like the question of Québec being independent – like, it’s been an issue” (PD22, 1053-1055).

Some students argued that the historical significance of the Multiculturalism Policy and Act was due to its connection to the present. For instance, Teresa argued that, “I think that would be very important. Like, that structures the way, how Canada, a lot of the way our system is today” (PD44, 738-740). Likewise, Adélie explained that “the Multiculturalism Act…basically defines the way we live today” (PD31, 332-333). In addition to viewing Canada’s policies on multiculturalism as foundational to the country (pattern significance), students also recognized that those policies have shaped present-day society and government and therefore ascribed historical significance to the Multiculturalism Policy/Act on that basis.

During the individual interviews, I asked students if they could explain how they made their decisions about which events to put on the timeline. Specific criteria for ascribing historical significance to events based on their impact on present or future events emerged in students’ responses. Some students suggested that they weighed the personal relevance of an event during their deliberations over whether to ascribe historical significance to it:

“I guess…how it will affect me in the future…or future generations.”

(Ariana, PD2, 229-231)

Others suggested that significance for the present-future was determined through a consideration of the event’s impact on present-day circumstances:

“I think the criteria for important and not important is about how much they affect us even until today.” (Kyung, PD18, 218-219)

“The ones that have the biggest impact for the future, um, would probably be what I would say because, um, the more you can relate to it at this
point, the better it is to study it – because if - if there’s a dead issue – I mean there are very rarely dead issues but there are some – but if there’s a dead issue you should touch on it but not put any sort of focus on it – but things that are still an issue and are going to continue to be issues – it’s so important to make people learn about those so they can actually understand what’s going on in the news today – because without that kind of base of knowledge about what’s going on in the – like in the country you can’t understand what – or like or what’s gone on in the country – you can’t understand what’s currently going on in the country” (Adélie, PD31, 71-83)

Adélie’s argument – that the advantage of studying events that “are still an issue” is so people can better understand current events – is, in essence, a justification for studying history and gets close to the justification provided in the BC history curriculum, as noted earlier. Annabelle’s ideas about the impact of past events on the present-future and the purpose of studying history take us all the way there:

Things in the news…like, just anything on the TV – it’s usually got a connection to the past. The First Nations dispute in Caledonia right now – people turn on the news and [if] you didn’t know about treaties or about First Nations relations then you’d be really confused and when you turn on the news you’d be like, “What’s going on? This is ridiculous!” But if you had some sort of background it helps you be more informed…and more educated. And then I think if you’ve got more information, the more open you can be and kind of [the] more tolerant you are and you can make better decisions. (PD37, 433-444)

Annabelle provides a sophisticated reading on the importance of understanding how the past shapes current thinking, in this case, about relations between
Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals in Canada. Her explanation of the purpose of studying history mirrors those offered by Seixas (1997b) and the BC Ministry of Education (2006b) and relies on her understanding of ascribing historical significance to events based on their relevance to present and/or future generations.

Students ascribed historical significance for the present-future to events that, in their estimation, continue to have relevance to their own lives, to Canada generally, or both. Students who were unaware of, or did not believe there to be, lasting impacts of an event did not employ this type of reasoning to ascribe historical significance to moments in Canada’s past. In the more sophisticated responses, students understood that their ability to connect and recognize the relevance of the past to current and future events is essential for effective and informed citizenship.

4.7 Conclusion
In this section I provide a summary of the chapter, explain three ways that I have expanded the use of Cercadillo’s (2000; 2001) typology of historical significance to analyze students’ conceptions, and discuss three factors that are, I argue, crucial in the development of sophisticated understandings of historical significance.

4.7.1 Summary
In this chapter I presented and discussed findings resulting from deductive analysis of my data. To perform data analysis, I adopted a framework of historical significance previously developed by Cercadillo (2000; 2001) and extended its usage to the Canadian context. In Chapter 3 (Section 3.2) I noted that the product of phenomenographic research is an “outcome space,” in which the categories of description of students’ conceptions of the phenomenon under study (in this case, historical significance) are organized (Marton & Booth, 1997).
In this study, the outcome space is comprised of the categories of historical significance I employed to organize my data: contemporary significance, causal significance, pattern significance, symbolic significance and significance for the present-future. Each type, discussed in detail above, comprises a different conception of historical significance and thus this typology represents a “horizontal” outcome space. That is, one type (or conception) of historical significance is not more sophisticated than another. I return to the question of sophistication in Section 4.7.3.

I began each section of this chapter by describing a category of historical significance and then used excerpts from interview transcripts to illustrate and discuss the nature of students’ conceptions as they related to that category. Contemporary historical significance was the least used type of significance employed by students involved in this study. Contemporary significance is distinguished by student explanations that simply describe what occurred during an event rather than explanations that include causal factors. Explanations of contemporary historical significance are temporally located in the timeframe of the event in question and may include multiple (contemporary) perspectives on an event. Contemporary historical significance may be a precursor to the development of historical empathy as students’ explanations typically included attempts to understand the actions of people in the past.

Causal historical significance can be defined by aspect (economic, social, political, religious, cultural, legal), geographic factors, time-scale, number of people affected by an event and by an event’s depth of impact. Causal historical significance requires an understanding of the historical context in which a particular event is situated. Students who possessed more contextual knowledge about an event offered stronger arguments about its causal historical significance. Background knowledge is crucial if students are to be able to ascribe causal historical significance to an event. Some students approached the
timeline task with emergent frameworks for understanding the complexity of history and these students made more sophisticated arguments about an event’s causal historical significance.

Knowledge of historical context is also an important factor in students’ ability to ascribe pattern historical significance to events in Canada’s past. Pattern historical significance was ascribed to events that students understood as “firsts,” as groundbreaking or turning points, or to events that marked Canada’s place in the world. In their ascriptions of pattern historical significance, students usually located an event in a narrative of progress or decline.

Students ascribed symbolic historical significance to events in Canada’s past that were symbolic of the development and growth of the nation, portrayed Canadian unity, were symbolic of Canadian identity, revealed the accomplishments of iconic individuals, and offered a lesson. In many cases students ascribed symbolic historical significance to events that revealed negative aspects of Canada’s past, such as racism. Unlike previous research, many students decided to include such events on their timelines precisely because they were symbolic of the “warts” of Canadian history. Students argued that they did so for three reasons. First, they felt that it was important to portray all aspects of Canadian history and not just the “positive” side. Secondly, some argued that doing so demonstrated growth in terms of societal attitudes about equality and human rights. Thirdly, students felt that a lesson could be learned from such events and therefore they should be included on a timeline of Canadian history. Students who demonstrated this understanding of historical significance also understood that historical significance is not an intrinsic quality of any particular event but something that human beings ascribe to events. There is some indication that students understood that ascriptions of historical significance may change over time and depending on context.
Students ascribed historical significance for the present-future to events that continue to have relevance today. Some students drew personal connections to past events whereas others established connections between historic and current events. The more sophisticated responses included students’ ideas about the importance of understanding the relevance of the past to current and future events as essential for effective and informed citizenship.

It is important to remember that, in many of the examples drawn from the data, several different conceptions of historical significance were in evidence. So, for example, an excerpt used primarily to illustrate a student’s use of pattern significance may also include causal reasoning. These instances should not be read as cases of “mistaken identity” but rather as indicative of the complicated terrain, to use Seixas’ (1997a) analogy, of students’ understandings and use of historical significance criteria. Consistent with phenomenographic work in general and work I have conducted previously, “students were pushed to think about their own thinking during the interviews, and the majority of them offered statements from a range of categories” (Peck & Sears, 2005, p. 104). In this study, it was quite common for students’ explanations to include multiple criteria of historical significance.

4.7.2 Extending Cercadillo’s (2000; 2001) Typology

The typology used in this research offers a useful framework for understanding the ways in which students make decisions about historical significance. Through the analysis of my data I have provided what I believe to be a more nuanced understanding of the five types of significance articulated in Cercadillo’s (2000; 2001) work. I did this in three important ways. First, I extended certain aspects of the framework by identifying key terms and phrases employed by Canadian students to explain the historical significance of an event, adding to those previously elucidated by Cercadillo. These terms and phrases will be helpful for future researchers, teachers, teacher educators and students in terms of better
understanding the language of significance, or at least the language used by high
school students. There was remarkable consistency between the terms and
phrases employed by the students in Cercadillo’s study and my own, an
indication, perhaps, that the language that students use to denote significance
crosses international and cultural/ethnic borders as well as research tasks. This
is a very interesting finding and points to the possibility of building a common
lexicon for historical significance based on (a) terms and identifiers already in use
(by students) and (b) on more discipline-specific vocabulary. However, as
Levesque (2008) argues, such a lexicon is only useful if it is actually employed by
teachers and students (and the history education community more broadly), thus
it also becomes important to incorporate a vocabulary of historical significance
into curricula and teaching materials. Any lexicon should not, however, be viewed
as “concrete” or “written in stone.” Such a lexicon needs to be flexible enough to
accommodate findings that occur as a result of more research on how historians,
politicians, teachers, students and the general public employ criteria for ascribing
significance to historical phenomena.

The second contribution that can be drawn from this study is a more detailed
articulation of the typology of historical significance first outlined in Cercadillo’s
(2000; 2001) work and employed in the data analysis discussed above. In this
research I extend Cercadillo’s description of several criteria for historical
significance. For example, in describing the criterion of symbolic significance I
delineated particular aspects of the criterion that emerged from my data.
Specifically I argued that, for the students in this study, symbolic significance was
employed to ascribe historical significance to events that: marked the
development and growth of the nation, were indicative of questions around
national unity and Canadian identity, showcased the accomplishments of iconic
individuals, and provided lessons from the past. I did this for other criteria in the
typology as well, as discussed in detail above.
The third way I provided a more nuanced understanding of Cercadillo’s (2000; 2001) typology was by exploring both the procedural aspects of students’ ascriptions of historical significance (that is, the criteria they used to denote significance) and the substantive aspects of Canadian history that garnered such ascriptions. Thus, I attend to Levesque’s (2008) critique that previous studies on students’ conceptions of historical significance have focused primarily on the substantive aspects of students’ understandings (the content of their choices) without paying as much attention to the procedures students used (the criteria they employed) to denote historical significance.

Cercadillo (2000; 2001) framed her study around two topics: the campaigns of Alexander the Great and the defeat of the Spanish Armada. In so doing, she gathered rich data on students’ conceptions of historical significance, situated in these two events. In my study, I gathered data on students’ conceptions of historical significance on thirty events in Canadian history, thus providing a panoramic picture of Canadian students’ understandings of historical significance across a broad range of substantive topics. In so doing, I explored how students could employ multiple criteria for explaining the historical significance of a single event, such as World War I. For example, some students explained its significance in terms of pattern significance whereas others saw it as historically significant due to symbolic reasons. Findings such as this further illustrate the contextual nature of historical significance and the importance of understanding the lenses through which students (and others) come to the study of the past.

One such lens is a student’s ethnic identity and the relationship between this and a student’s understanding of, and ascription of, historical significance. In this chapter I have provided data on the frequency of students’ uses of the various criteria for historical significance, broken down by the groups in which the students participated in the study. I am not making any claims about the statistical significance of this data; indeed, the data set is too small for any such
claim. The descriptive statistics do provide some indication of the range of responses provided by the students in this study however I do not contend that these can or should be generalized beyond the participants of this study (Lane, 2003). A further and more detailed exploration of the relationship between ethnic identity and students’ ascriptions of historical significance follows in Chapter 5.

4.7.3 Engendering Sophisticated Reasoning about Historical Significance

The research process suggests that three factors are necessary for students to develop a sophisticated understanding of historical significance. The first is that students must understand the aspects and purpose of each type of historical significance describe above. Students must understand that people employ criteria to make judgements about an event’s historical significance and that these judgements may change over time and due to a variety of factors. Students need to know the vocabulary of historical significance and need opportunities to recognize its use in historical narratives. Students also need opportunities to employ and justify their own ascriptions of historical significance.

Second, students must have adequate background or contextual knowledge of an event in order to make sophisticated arguments about the historical significance of the event. Those lacking even a basic understanding of an event’s adjacent history were unable to move beyond contemporary significance and struggled to offer causal explanations. This does not mean that students need copious amounts of information before they begin to make decisions about historical significance but some front-loading may be required. This does not necessarily have to be provided by the teacher. Students should be encouraged to suspend judgement about the historical significance of a person, event or development until conducting appropriate and sufficient research.

The third is directly tied to the first and second. The students who offered the most sophisticated arguments about historical significance were able to weave
an event into a narrative of Canadian history. The most sophisticated narratives included elements of progress and decline. Background knowledge alone does not enable students to weave such narratives, however. To make the most sophisticated judgements about historical significance students need to understand narrative structures and how historical narratives are constructed, and for what purpose. Narrative frameworks are critical to the construction of historical accounts. As Cronon (1992) demonstrates in his examination of Great Plains histories, a simple list of events does not suffice when it comes to understanding the histories of this region of the United States. Such a list is essentially a chronicle and, according to Cronon, it is difficult to care much about a simple list, unless one is able to draw connections between the items it contains:

When we encounter the past in the form of a chronicle, it becomes much less recognizable to us. We have trouble sorting out why things happened when and how they did, and it becomes hard to evaluate the relative significance of events. Things seem less connected to each other, and it becomes unclear how all this stuff relates to us. Most important, in a chronicle we easily lose the thread of what was going on at any particular moment. Without some plot to organize the flow of events, everything becomes much harder – even impossible – to understand. (p. 1351)

In this study, the most sophisticated responses came from those students who possessed sufficient contextual knowledge and who had the ability to organize their selected events into more than a timeline – into a coherent narrative of Canadian history. Implications for teaching include teaching students to analyze the various components of historical narratives (the use of evidence, evaluations of significance, continuity and change, cause and consequence, historical perspective-taking and the moral dimension) and providing opportunities for students to construct narratives of history themselves.
Two important limitations must be discussed at this juncture. First, I am not making any claims about progression in students’ thinking about historical significance. Unlike Cercadillo (2000; 2001), who studied student responses across a range of grades (and countries, and educational contexts), I worked with participants who were all in grade 12 and who followed similar (but not exact) educational programs. Even with her ample data, Cercadillo’s claims about progression are tentative at best:

Analysis suggests, then, that pattern and symbolic notions of significance and significance for the present and future may be considered as possible indicators of progression in historical understanding. Usually, pupils who mention some of those three types do mention contemporary and/or causal types as well. Contemporary and causal notions may be seen as a prerequisite for a more complete perception of significance in history. (p. 131)

I do concur with her when she writes that, “It is not asserted here that pattern, symbolic and present/future types themselves are higher levels than contemporary and causal, but that possession of a richer armoury of concepts to handle significance certainly is” (p. 143; emphasis in original). My data do seem to support this conclusion.

Second, it is important to note that the very nature of the research exercise, which asked students to create a timeline of the most significant events in Canadian history, already imposed a framework of “the Canadian nation” on the end product produced by students. Other exercises might be shaped without the nation as a meta-organizing framework. In a tantalizing example of how this might occur (even within the confines of the research exercise employed in this present study), one group of students with whom I worked made a conscious choice to construct a timeline that presented a variation on the grand narrative of
Canadian history, using the same picture-cards as the other students in this study. These narratives will be discussed in detail in the next chapter.
CHAPTER 5

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN STUDENTS’ ETHNIC, CULTURAL AND/OR NATIONAL IDENTITIES AND THEIR ASCRIPTIONS OF HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

Although the central research activity in this study was presented to students in terms of “creating a timeline,” in essence what I asked students to do was construct narratives of Canadian history. The students’ ethnic identities influenced both the shape of the narratives they constructed and their use of particular types of historical significance to locate themselves within those narratives. Using Wertsch’s (1998) concept of narrative templates, in this chapter I analyze the relationship between students’ ethnic, cultural and/or national identities and their use of the five types of historical significance (Cercadillo, 2000, 2001) discussed in the previous chapter, in the construction of narratives of Canadian history.

5.1 Students’ Ethnic Identifications

In Chapter 2, I briefly outlined the demographic profile of the 26 students who participated in this study (see Tables 2 – 5). To recap, 17 students were Canadian-born, 7 were immigrants to Canada and 2 were Aboriginal. Two of the immigrant students had emigrated from China, and one each from Hong Kong, the Philippines, Russia, South Korea and the United Arab Emirates. At the time of the study, 18 of the students were 17 years old and 8 were 18 years old.

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38 See Appendix E.

39 The reader is reminded that, for the purpose of this study, students were asked to focus exclusively on their ethnic, cultural and/or national identities (hereafter shortened to “ethnic identities”). It is understood that other aspects of one’s identity, such as gender, sexuality, and/or socio-economic status may also influence understandings of historical significance. However, these were not the focus of this study.
Tables 20-22 provide a summary of the students’ citizenship status, the languages spoken by the students and their religious affiliations. As can be seen in Table 20, all but two of the students who participated in this study were Canadian citizens.

**Table 20: Students’ citizenship status**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Holds Canadian Citizenship</th>
<th>Does not hold Canadian Citizenship</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Canadian-born students</td>
<td>17</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigrant students</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aboriginal students</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fifteen of the twenty-six students reported that they speak two or more languages (including English). Two of these 15 indicated that they speak three languages. Eleven students reported that they speak English only.

**Table 21: Languages spoken by students**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Languages Spoken</th>
<th># of Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arabic</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cantonese</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khmer</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Korean</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mandarin</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The majority of students (n=14) answered “no” to a question asking them if they consider themselves to be a member of a religious group. Table 22 summarizes the religious affiliations of the remaining 12 students.

Table 22: Students’ religious affiliations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Religion</th>
<th># of Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aboriginal</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atheist</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anglican</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buddhist</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orthodox</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protestant</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>13</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

One student selected both Catholic and Aboriginal, which explains why there are 13 responses from 12 students.
A wide range of ethnic and cultural ancestry was reported. Table 23 summarizes the ethnic and/or cultural origins of the students’ ancestors, as reported by the students.

Table 23: Students’ ancestral ethnic and cultural origins

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Ancestral Ethnic/Cultural Origins</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Munny</td>
<td>Cambodian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jessica</td>
<td>Irish, Estonian, Norwegian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aidan</td>
<td>Irish, Chinese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will</td>
<td>English, Scottish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethan</td>
<td>Jamaican, Dutch, Scottish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Binh</td>
<td>South Vietnamese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adélie</td>
<td>French Catholic, Russian Mennonite, British</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mae</td>
<td>Chinese (Hong Kong)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aakil</td>
<td>Punjabi, Polish, Ukrainian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victoria</td>
<td>English, Scottish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ben</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annabelle</td>
<td>Chinese (Hong Kong), Scottish, English, French, Russian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emily</td>
<td>French, English, Irish, German</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rosa</td>
<td>English, El Salvadorian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Armand</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shen</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eliya</td>
<td>Finnish, Swedish, Norwegian, Scottish, English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vincent</td>
<td>Filipino</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teresa</td>
<td>Vietnamese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark</td>
<td>Russian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student</td>
<td>Ancestral Ethnic/Cultural Origins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sam</td>
<td>Eastern Chinese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minha</td>
<td>Filipino, Spanish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kyung</td>
<td>South Korean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dao-Ming</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conor</td>
<td>Nis ga’a, Gitxsan, BC First Nations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ariana</td>
<td>BC Coastal First Nations, Nuu-Chah-Nulth Nation, Cowichan Tribe</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A number of interesting observations arise from the above table. No students, even those students (n=9) who reported that their grandparents were born in Canada, listed “Canadian” as the ethnic or cultural origin of their ancestors. According to the Association for Canadian Studies (Jedwab, 2008), “Canadian” emerged as an ethnic designation to describe one’s ancestors on the national census in 1991. Beginning with the 1996 census, respondents were asked to list up to four ethnic backgrounds to describe their ancestral heritage. Respondents were required to choose these four from a list of 24 ethnic backgrounds provided in the Census material. “Canadian” was listed in sixth spot amongst the 24 possible choices provided to respondents. In 1996, 31% of the country’s population listed “Canadian” as the ethnic origin of their ancestors (alone, or combined with other origins); in 2001 that number was 39%. By the 2006 census that number had dropped by almost 15%, possibly due to a rewording of the relevant question which clarified that “ancestors” refers to people older than one’s grandparents (Jedwab, 2008).

Six of the Canadian-born students and six of the immigrant students listed only one ethnic or cultural origin. All other students (11 Canadian-born, 1 immigrant, 2 Aboriginal) reported that they descend from two or more ethnic or cultural origins.
As will become evident in the following sections, understanding a person’s country of origin and his/her ancestral background does not translate into an understanding of the person’s own ethnic identity. Although none of the students listed “Canadian” amongst their ancestral heritage, a number of students did use “Canadian” in their description of their own ethnic identities.

5.1.1 The Ethnic Identity Question
An important feature of this study, and one that differentiates it from previous similar work, is the data collected on students’ perceptions of their ethnic identities. On the questionnaire administered at the beginning of the study, I asked students to respond to the following question, which was based on a question asked by Statistics Canada on the Ethnic Diversity Survey administered in 2002:

I would now like you to think about your own identity in ethnic, cultural and/or national terms. This identity may be the same as that of your parents, grandparents or ancestors, or it may be different. Your ethnic, cultural and/or national identity is the ethnic, cultural and/or national group or groups to which you feel you belong.

Using the information you provided so far, as well as any other personal information that will help you, please write a paragraph describing your ethnic, cultural and/or national identity.

It is possible that you could describe yourself has having more than one type of (cultural, ethnic or national) identity. For instance, one person might describe his or her identity as “Greek,” even though they were born in Canada. Another person might describe their identity as “Canadian,” even though he or she was born in Greece. Someone else might decide that they are both of these: “Greek-Canadian.” There are no wrong
answers – describe yourself the way that makes the most sense to you.  
(Student questionnaire, p. 3)

In April 2008, the Association for Canadian studies reported that 12.9 million Census respondents indicated they had multiple ethnic backgrounds, an increase of 15% from 2001 figures (Jedwab, 2008). The report stated that, “at this rhythm, by 2021, should the question on ethnicity remain unchanged, the majority of Canadians will likely be ‘hyphenated’” (p. 8). Half of the students (n=13) in this study chose to identify themselves in terms of multiple ethnic identities. Table 24 summarizes students’ responses to this questionnaire item.

Table 24: Types of responses to identity question

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Responses to Identity Paragraph Question</th>
<th># of Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Single ethnic identity responses</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Canadian born</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Immigrants</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Aboriginal</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple ethnic identity responses</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Canadian born</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Immigrants</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Aboriginal</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither single/multiple ethnic identity responses</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Canadian born</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Immigrant</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Sections 5.1.2 – 5.1.4, I analyze student responses to the ethnic identity question. Responses are categorized according to whether the students offered single, multiple or neither single/multiple ethnic identity responses. In addition to organizing the data this way, I also draw on the theoretical framework on ethnic identity that I discussed in Chapter 2. There, I argued that ethnicity and ethnic identity are complex concepts that defy attempts to define them (Rattansi, 1999). Theorists recognize ethnicity/ethnic identity as fluid, plural (or at least potentially plural) and dynamic. Expression of ethnic identity may vary depending on social, political and/or cultural contextual factors. Individuals look within themselves to define their ethnic identity but also look beyond themselves (to individuals,
societal groups, institutions) for identity cues. Bhabha’s (2001) hybridity theory offers one possible explanation for how this identity construction occurs, drawing particular attention to the tensions and ambivalence people may experience in ethnic identification processes. Kymlicka’s (1998) conceptualization of Canadian society as composed of people of British (and White European) settler origins, national minorities (“nations within”) and immigrant/ethnic groups provides an additional lens through which the data are examined.

5.1.2 Single Ethnic Identity Responses

Of the 11 students who describe themselves in terms of a single ethnic identity, 9 described themselves as Canadian, 1 as Filipino and 1 as First Nation. In this section I will summarize the key elements of the students’ descriptions.

All nine students who described their ethnic identity as Canadian also made reference to their ancestral ethnic/cultural origins. For example, Canadian-born Will wrote, “most of my ancestors are Canadian, including my great grandparents. However, I consider myself a Canadian with British heritage” (Student questionnaire, ES-C 1, p. 3). Canadian-born Emily wrote, “I mostly identify myself as Canadian with French ancestry. My last name is French: [students’ last name]. My mother speaks French and I have mostly French and German ancestry. I say I’m Canadian, when people asked me where I am from because I was born here” (Student questionnaire, ES-C 18, p. 3). Emily makes specific reference to her French and German ancestry, yet largely connects her identity as Canadian to the fact that she was born in Canada. Two other Canadian-born students, Eliya and Jessica, offered similar descriptions of their ethnic identities. For Will, Emily, Eliya and Jessica, their identification as ethnically and culturally Canadian could be traced at least as far back as their grandparents and in Will's case, to his great grandparents. These four students are second- or third-generation Canadians and, while they might acknowledge
their ancestral heritage as something other than Canadian, they solidly identify themselves as Canadian.

Ethan, a second-generation Canadian, also self-identified as Canadian as can be seen in the description he provided on the questionnaire:

> I would describe myself as Canadian. For reasons or because of my personality [sic] qualities I've inherited from living here. I, myself, as being a person with many different racial origins feel as if I am the epitome of Canadian culture. I feel as [if] I am a mosaic, which is what Canada is on a national level. (Student questionnaire, ES-C 3, p. 3)

Although Ethan does refer to his ethnic background (“being a person with many different racial origins”) he does not see it as distinct from his Canadian identity. In other words, unlike the four students discussed previously, who describe themselves as Canadian with a particular ancestry, Ethan describes himself as Canadian because of his ancestry. It is a subtle but interesting distinction.

Canadian-born Annabelle began her own self-description by offering a similar explanation of her understanding of her own ethnic identity. She wrote:

> Since I am of a very mixed ethnic background, I consider myself “Canadian” firstly. I identify with my Chinese background more than my Caucasian background because I participate in cultural Chinese activities such as the lunar New Year and moon festival and I can understand some Chinese, although I can’t answer back in Chinese. My Caucasian background is very mixed and very Canadianized/North Americanized. (Student questionnaire, ES-C 17, p. 3)

However, unlike Ethan, Annabelle points to a tension she feels as she attempts to negotiate this complicated identity terrain:
I sometimes feel out of place because I cannot fully identify with my Chinese side because I carry many North American traditions and traits around with me and I find it very difficult to fully embrace Caucasian culture because there is so much Chinese culture influencing my lifestyle. I guess I consider myself multicultural because both parts of my ethnicity influence my life. (Student questionnaire, ES-C 17, p. 3).

Mae, a student who provided a similar self-description to that of Annabelle, did not express an experience with this tension (although this does not necessarily mean that she has or does not, only that she did not report experience with tension on the questionnaire). Mae explained her ethnic identity as follows:

I dominantly identify myself as Canadian because not only was I born here and lived here my whole life, but the Canadian culture influenced me. At home, however, my Chinese roots still play a big part of me. As the traditions (eating rice for dinner, talking in the native language, etc.) are still to be done under the roof because my parents’ identity are still for the most part how they were before they came to Canada. I also identify myself mostly with Canadian because my strongest language is English and religiously, I don’t practice Buddhism or feel superstitious like most of the other people like me. (Student questionnaire, ES-C 9, p. 3)

Both Annabelle’s and Mae’s descriptions are interesting because in them we can see several factors that emerge as key identity markers for each student. For instance, both Annabelle and Mae refer to other individuals and societal influences as factors that have marked the development of their own ethnic identities. For Annabelle these factors were cultural Chinese activities, North American traditions and both North American and Chinese culture. For Mae these factors included Canadian culture, her parents and “other people like me.”
In addition, both students refer to markers such as language, food and religion as components of their ethnic identities.

In both cases, Annabelle and Mae’s self-identifications appear to describe identities that are in transition. Bhabha’s (2001) hybridity theory, including the concept of the “third space” – an identity space that opens up when two or more identities “meet” – provides one explanation for the identification processes Annabelle and Mae seem to express. Certainly, both students have tried to explain an identity that is neither wholly Canadian nor wholly Chinese; they are somewhere in between, and perhaps leaning more toward the “Canadian side” of their identity for the reasons they indicate, including societal, cultural and familial influences.

Canadian-born Binh also noted that family influences impacted his sense of his ethnic identity. He wrote:

I was born in Canada. Both of my parents are from Vietnam. My aunt is a Buddhist and so is my grandmother. Half of my relatives going from parents to grandparents are what I would call “casual Buddhists.” Like, they have the Buddhist statue and the incense but no robes. I know nothing about Buddhism or my culture so I consider myself Vietnamese only in technical terms. I guess I’m what you would call “white washed.” So I consider myself mostly Canadian with a hint of Vietnamese. (Student questionnaire, ES-C5, p. 3)

Binh relied heavily on religion to explain his ethnic or cultural identity even though he states that he does not understand or practice Buddhism. His use of the phrases “Vietnamese only in technical terms” and “white washed” imply an understanding of the influence of being born and growing up in Canada on his ethnic identity. Like Annabelle and Mae, Binh’s interpretation of his ethnic identity seems to indicate that he is cognizant of specific influences that have influenced
his sense of self. Binh also seems to be living in an "in between" space, that, at
the time that he completed the questionnaire, was dominated by his sense of his
“mostly Canadian” self.

The final student who described his ethnic cultural and/or national identity as
Canadian had immigrated to Canada at the age of five. Vincent began his self-
description with the following:

Culturally, I am Canadian. Although I am full Filipino, it is been so long
since I’ve gotten in touch with my roots. I’ve been brought up to live by
Canadian standards. I was taught to only speak English in this country.
(Student questionnaire, ES-B 3, p. 3)

He then shifts his description from culture to ethnicity with the following: “right
now I am trying to get in touch with my ethnic side by learning to cook the food
that my ancestors cooked.” Vincent is the only student who self identifies as
Canadian to make a distinction between culture and ethnicity. He points to
“Canadian standards” and speaking English as markers of his cultural identity.
Conversely, he points to specific foods and his ancestors to locate his ethnicity.
At the time of the study Vincent had lived in Canada for most of his life (13 years)
and had obtained Canadian citizenship at the age of 8.

An interesting contrast to Vincent is the case of Minha. Both students identified
Filipino as part of their ancestral background (Minha also included Spanish).
Unlike Vincent, however, Minha had lived in Canada for only two years and did
not have Canadian citizenship. Minha described herself as follows:

I culturally identify myself as a Filipino. Even though I was neither born in
the Philippines, nor did I grow up there, I’ve always felt a distinct
connection to it. My parents made sure I value my cultural background
and raised me accordingly. I never felt any connection towards my cultural
background until I vacationed in the Philippines and experienced firsthand what it was like being a Filipino. (Student questionnaire, ES-C 2, p. 3)

Minha was born in Saudi Arabia and grew up mostly in the United Arab Emirates. Her parents were born in the Philippines and this might account for her comment regarding her parents “making sure” she valued her culture and raising her “accordingly.”

Finally, Conor also offered a single ethnic identity response:

I would have to say that being First Nation in Canada has made me into the person that I have learned to be and act when I respond to others, and how I would treat them, so being a Canadian citizen is one of the best part [sic] of living in Canada. (Student questionnaire, ES-A 1, p. 3)

Conor identified himself as First Nation, which, according to Kymlicka (1998) is a national minority group. It is unclear from Conor’s statement, however, whether he considers himself to be part of a nation in the same sense that Kymlicka implies especially since Conor also refers to Canadian citizenship as part of his ethnic identification.

Eleven students in this study offered a “single ethnic identity” response to the questionnaire item which asked them to describe their ethnic identity. Students’ ideas about what it means to be “Canadian” (or Filipino, or Aboriginal) are as numerous as the number of students who responded with a “single ethnic identity” response. This became particularly clear upon examination of the nine “Canadian” responses. Not one response was like the others in this category, with each student pointing to a wide variety of identity markers and influences on their perception of their ethnic identity. The students who described their ancestral roots as entirely or partly European (Will, Emily, Eliya, Jessica and Ethan) solidly situate their ethnic identity as Canadian and did not indicate that
there might be “sides” to their identities. Conor, on the other hand, did refer to Canadian citizenship as a part of his ethnic identity but his description primarily emphasized his identity as First Nations.

The students who described their ancestral roots (in whole or in part) as Asian (Annabelle, Mae, Binh, Vincent and Minha) expressed an awareness of transition; that their identities have been heavily influenced by not only their ethnic ancestry but also by contemporary social and cultural influences on their lives. There is a strong hint of Bhabha’s (2001) hybridity theory at play, particularly in the responses provided by Annabelle, Mae and Binh. These students’ descriptions appear to indicate that they are aware of particular “sides” to their ethnic identity, that they are somewhere “in between” identities and are in the process of negotiating the boundaries between them.

5.1.3 Multiple Ethnic Identity Responses

In total, 13 students offered multiple ethnic identity responses on the questionnaire: 8 Canadian-born, 4 immigrant students and 1 Aboriginal student. In this section I analyze the central characteristics of the 13 students who offered multiple ethnic identity responses in their descriptions of their ethnic identities.

Of the 13 students who described themselves in terms of multiple ethnicities, 7 explicitly used a hyphen to designate their identity. Four students described themselves as Chinese-Canadian, and one each as Korean-Canadian, Cambodian-Canadian and French-Canadian. Six of the eight students who hyphenated their identity descriptions were immigrants to Canada.

The students were asked to provide more than just a label, however, and it is in the written descriptions where they expressed more complex perceptions of their ethnic identities. The four students who labeled themselves “Chinese-Canadian” share some similar ideas about what it means to be Chinese-Canadian but there are differences in their self-descriptions as well. For instance, both Shen and
Ben, two Canadian-born students, note the influence of being born in Canada and being surrounded by Canadian culture on their identity. They also note the influence of their parents and Chinese cultural traditions on their conception of themselves as Chinese-Canadian. However, Ben writes, “I think of myself as Canadian first and Chinese second because of how much I’ve adapted to the culture of this country” (ES-C 14, Student questionnaire, p. 3). The phrasing of his sentence is very interesting; in particular, the last half of the sentence: “…how much I’ve adapted to the culture of this country.” Ben was born in Canada and has lived in Canada his whole life, yet he still thinks of Canadian culture as something to which he has adapted. It implies that the influence of his Chinese-born parents and Chinese culture on his sense of his ethnic identity has been quite strong.

Armand, also Canadian-born, describes himself as “Chinese-Canadian but with a capital ‘C’ on Canadian.” He explains:

Both my parents came from China, met here [Canada] and started a family. When I was born both my parents were Canadian citizens with a dual citizenship. I grew up and was born in [Lower Mainland region of BC]. I spoke and speak English at school and to friends and family (my generations) my entire life. I took Cantonese and Mandarin high school language classes. By [My] culture is Canadian, that is what I believe to be – I watch North American media and listen to English songs while some people like me embrace a more Asian pop culture. I am not a ‘banana’41 but I am not like most people who have the same age/skin colour as me. (ES-C20, Student questionnaire, p. 3)

41 A ‘banana,’ Armand explained, is someone who is “yellow on the outside and white on the inside”. (Field notes, May 1st, 2006.)
Armand’s self-description is laden with clues to his perception of his ethnic identity. He refers to both internal and external influences on his sense of self, including the fact that he was born in Canada (internal) and various societal and media influences (external). He points to language, age and skin colour as markers of his and others’ ethnic identity.

The final student who referred to himself specifically as Chinese-Canadian was Sam, an immigrant to Canada who, at the time of the study, had lived in the country three years and did not have Canadian citizenship. Like Armand, he refers to internal and external factors that have influenced his understanding of his ethnic identity:

I still feel my pride as a Chinese. I defend Chinese history. I am still living in a typical Chinese family, eating typical Chinese food and learning the history of China. But as I live in Canada longer, I think I also have absorbed some Canadian North American culture. But here it comes – a question: What is Canadian culture? I think it is multiculturalism. So as I become more Canadian, I am more and more tolerant to other cultures. I promote both Canadian and Chinese cultures. So it would be best to describe me as a Chinese-Canadian. (ES-B6, Student questionnaire, p. 3)

What is most interesting about Sam’s description, in addition to the specific markers he references (food, family, “Canadian North-American” culture, tolerance towards diversity) is his perception that his ethnic identity is undergoing change the longer he lives in Canada.

Kyung, also an immigrant to Canada, offered a completely different perspective. At the time of the study Kyung had lived in the country for six years and had had Canadian citizenship for two and a half years. Kyung described himself as follows:
I am Korean-Canadian. As in I am a Korean person but I have Canadian citizenship. I do not feel that I am a Canadian. I strongly feel that Korea is my country. I’m more fluent in Korean and I know more about Korea that I do about Canada. I also care more about issues in Korea. I eat Korean food, have Korean friends, which I feel more intimate than I feel with Canadian friends. I look like Korean. I was born in Korea. I was raised in Korea by Korean parents. My father was extremely nationalistic. (ES-C15, Student questionnaire, p. 3)

Kyung’s self-description is rooted in his connection to Korea. Although he has what he describes as “Canadian friends,” he reported that he feels less connected to them than he does to his Korean friends. Kyung relies strongly on markers such as food, language, and appearance to describe his ethnic identity. His self-description also indicates that his knowledge of and interest in Korea as well as familial influences have impacted his sense of his identity. Kyung would have to have had some knowledge of Canadian history, society and culture in order to obtain Canadian citizenship but this does not appear to have influenced his sense of self beyond his use of the label “Canadian” in the first statement of his response.

Teresa had immigrated to Canada at the age of four and had obtained Canadian citizenship when she was six years old. In her description of her ethnic identity, she draws a distinction between ethnicity and culture:

Vietnamese-Canadian. Ethnically, I would consider myself Vietnamese, but culturally, because almost all of my life was spent here in Canada, I would call myself a Canadian. Knowing both languages, Vietnamese spoken at home and English at school, probably accounts for my reasoning of being a Vietnamese Canadian among many other reasons of
my personal values, and not necessarily what I was taught at home or at school. (ES-B4, Student questionnaire, p. 3)

Teresa perceives that length of time spent in Canada, language and values have influenced her sense of her ethnic identity. Like Vincent, discussed in Section 5.1.2, Teresa perceives a difference between ethnicity and culture. Teresa’s described her ethnic and/or cultural ancestry as Vietnamese and this may also account for her decision to describe her own ethnicity in these terms.

Contrast these descriptions with that offered by Canadian-born Munny: “I feel like I am a Canadian and also a Cambodian. So basically a Cambodian-Canadian. I was born in Canada but my roots are Cambodian. I’ve never been to Cambodia before. I’ve been in Canada all my life” (ES-B1, Student questionnaire, p. 3). Despite never having been to Cambodia, Munny reported that his “roots” are Cambodian and therefore chose to self-identify as Cambodian-Canadian. This is also an interesting contrast to the descriptions provided by Annabelle and Mae (Section 5.1.2), both of whom identified Chinese and Canadian “backgrounds” but explicitly chose not to describe their ethnic identity (Canadian) in hyphenated terms.

Canadian-born Adélie did claim a hyphenated identity; in this case, French-Canadian. Adélie could trace her ancestry as far back as 1628, when, she reported, her “strongly Roman Catholic” ancestors (on her father’s side) moved from France to settle in Québec and later the West (Student questionnaire, ES-C8, p. 3). Adélie noted that familial influences, particularly about religion, influenced her perception of her identity: “I don’t feel religious, thanks to my dad’s extremely anti-Catholic stance, but I am highly political and would most definitely call myself a socialist” (Student questionnaire, ES-C8, p. 3). Her description of her ethnic identity includes her political stance, further illustrating the multi-layeredness of identity (ethnic or otherwise). The importance of this stance will
become clear in the later half of this chapter, in which I explore her group’s approach to the timeline activity. Adélie’s multi-faceted description of her identity seems to indicate an awareness on her part of the complexity involved in processes of self-identification.

The six other students who offered multiple ethnic identity responses provided equally complex self-descriptions. For instance, Dao-Ming wrote, “I think I belong to both groups, Canadian and Chinese.” She points to markers such as food and traditions to explain herself, and also points to the “national pride” she feels for both Canada and China. Finally, she writes, “I don’t think I can really identify myself as one ethnic group because I love both groups equally” (Student questionnaire, ES-C22, p. 3).

Victoria began her description of her ethnic identity with the following: “I am a proud Canadian British subject” (Student questionnaire, ES-C13, p. 3). The description that followed explained her opening statement:

I identify myself as a Canadian because I have grown up in [the Lower Mainland of BC] and regularly travel throughout the country to see my family. I am also proud of what the maple leaf stands for. We are peaceful, generous and layed [sic] back. I am very proud and comfortable with this reputation. I also identify myself as a British subject because of many reasons. Not only do I have dual citizenship but many traditions have made their way into my daily life. I can’t imagine my family life and personal life without these influences and I enjoy practicing them, all thanks to my family. (Student questionnaire, ES-C13, p. 3)

Victoria’s self-description contains elements of ethnic, cultural and national identities. Certainly, her reference to Canadian citizenship, her pride in what she sees as Canada’s reputation, and her use of the term “British subject” would
imply national identifications (Canadian and British). However, she also suggests family traditions have had an impact on how she views her ethnic identity.

Finally, Ariana also provided multiple responses to the question about her ethnic identity: “An urban Aboriginal who learns about other Aboriginal culture because my own isn’t offered. Multi-cultural Canadian Aboriginal I see myself” (Student questionnaire, ES-A2, p. 3). Although brief, Ariana’s response indicates that she is aware of several aspects of her identity: First, she specifically identified herself as an urban Aboriginal, indicating that she lives in a city and does not live in a rural Aboriginal community (or reserve). Second, she uses the term “multicultural” to describe herself in addition to identifying herself as Canadian and Aboriginal. These latter terms imply some sort of national identification on Ariana’s part although it is not clear to what extent she identifies herself as both Canadian and Aboriginal. In other words, whereas some students (like Binh, above) claimed he was “mostly Canadian,” Ariana makes no such claims about the prevalence of either her Canadian or Aboriginal identifications.

Half (n=13) of the students in this study offered “multiple ethnic identity” responses on the questionnaire, with seven of these students consciously employing a hyphen to designate their identity. Like the students in the previous section, all of the students profiled in this section appear to be cognizant of a range of factors that may influence their sense of their ethnic identity. Importantly, many of the students who offered multiple responses to the ethnic identity question indicated an awareness of transition between identities, employing phrases such as “adapted to” or “absorbed [x] culture.” Again, Bhabha’s (2001) hybridity is relevant here, in that a hybrid identity seems to be at play in some students’ responses.
5.1.4 The Resisters

Two students chose not to identify themselves according to the parameters set out in the question. Canadian-born Aakil offered the following response:

Being of mixed ethnic background, I would contend that I choose to withdraw from being categorized in any sort of ethnic, cultural or national identity. I feel no strong sense of duty or loyalty to my parents’ ethnic groups, nor the state. I would characterize myself as a purely individual person who retains no allegiances. I find national and ethnic backgrounds to be a source of friction and confrontation in our world and wish to adhere to the view that the human race shares a common history and identity and that it should be thus far more concerned with where it is going than where it is coming from. My identity then is human, but none other. Legal definitions, i.e., that I am Canadian, mean little to me, for although I recognize the state as necessary and useful, it does not by default command my loyalty. (Student questionnaire, ES-C12, p. 3)

Mark, who immigrated to Canada from Russia at the age of 9, wrote:

Though there were and still are strong influences exerted on me by my conservative and quite traditional parents, I feel that I’m almost fully integrated into Canadian society; however, I’m afraid to adopt any strong Nationalistic motives from either side [Russian or Canadian], as I’m confident that this will lead to subconscious discrimination against other cultures. To put it bluntly, I’m hesitant to become “too Canadian” as this may cause a conflict between my ethnicity and this new culture into which I’ve fit in quite nicely. As it stands, I’d like to continue to benefit from and contribute to our Canadian society, while keeping an open mind of other cultures and traditions, specifically that of my parents. (Student questionnaire, ES-B5, p. 3)
Whereas Mark acknowledges that his parents’ culture and traditions are a part of who he feels he is, Aakil feels “no strong sense of duty or loyalty” to his parents’ ethnic groups. In addition, a rejection of nationalism runs through both responses (for Aakil this appears as “the state”) and both students express a desire to reject nationalist identifications. What is most interesting about these responses is Aakil’s and Mark’s awareness of choice – that they are able to take an active role in how they self-identify in that they are able to select factors that are important to them in their self-identification processes (Hall, 1991). That is, ethnic identities do not inhere solely based on to whom one is born or where one lives, but involve an active (subconscious or not) process of boundary formation (Barker, 1999) and the negotiation of identity spaces (Bhabha, 2001).

5.1.5 Summary

The students in this study recognized and employed several markers of ethnicity, such as religion, cultural practices and traditions and language, to describe their perceptions of their ethnic identities. As noted in Chapter 2, Carr and Lund (2007) argue that members of the dominant White society tend not to conceive of themselves as “ethnic.” This does not appear to be the case for the students in this study. Even though none of the second or third-generation Canadians (descended from White European ancestors) named themselves as “White,” they were, for the most part, adept in describing their ethnic identities and drew on many resources to do so.

The data detailed above demonstrate that students’ perceptions of their ethnic identities are complex and fluid. Even those who described themselves in terms of a single ethnic identity drew on several factors to explain themselves and some indicated that they recognized that their identity was “in process” and still developing. This is a key point in the literature on ethnic identity and is reinforced by the data presented above. Many of the students who described themselves in terms of multiple ethnic identities (and even the so-called “resisters”) articulated
complicated notions of their identities, and some referenced particular “sides” to their identity or expressed that a particular aspect of their ethnic identity was more dominant than other aspects. If this is indeed the case, this raises important questions about the ways in which students’ self-identifications influenced their ascriptions of historical significance in the construction of narratives of Canadian history.

5.2 Students’ Ethnic Identities, Narratives and Explanations of Historical Significance

One might have thought that students who responded with a single ethnic identity response would have employed a particular narrative approach and those who offered a multiple ethnic identity response another; however this was not necessarily the case. Students who worked in the same group for the timeline task did not always explain their timeline narrative the same way during the individual interviews. For example, and as will be explored in later sections of this chapter, students who self-identified as “Canadian” often chose to employ different narratives of Canadian history and different types of historical significance, due, in part, to the way in which they understood themselves as “Canadian.” Simplistic assumptions about the relationship between students’ ethnic identities and the narratives they locate themselves in are misguided. Nevertheless, significant and interesting relationships were discovered in the data.

5.2.1 Types of Narratives Constructed by Students

The construction of historical narratives involves, among other things, the purposeful selection of historical people, places and events and the explanation of the relationships between them. Barton and Levstik (2004) argue that historical narratives are “constructed sequences of events that are both causally related and chronological” (p. 132). Historical narratives also have purpose. At a very basic level, historical narratives answer the following questions: who, what,
when, where, why and how? In consideration of these questions, historians mobilize evidence, establish causation, and make decisions about historical significance. “What is the narrative about?” is the essential starting point. Establish this, and historians can more easily answer questions about timeframe (beginnings and endings), actors and their actions, and context. This approach (to narrative construction) has as its starting point a specific narrative in mind. Events, people and developments are carefully selected to fill out a narrative precisely because they fit the story the historian wants to tell. An example of this is Lester’s (2002) “counter-polemic,” entitled The Black Book of English Canada, which serves as a record of historic “offenses” against French Canadians. In the prologue to the book Lester sets his agenda: “This book is…a journalist’s investigation of the dark and bloody side of Canada’s history, and a refusal to put up with this organized lying by omission” (p. 27). This approach begins with a larger narrative and its larger themes, and places the particular within them.

Another approach to constructing historical narratives is to focus on a particular event and then build a narrative around it. Instead of starting with the question, “What is this narrative about?” some may begin by noting their interest in “X” (an event, a person, or an artifact, e.g.), moving from the interest to the question, “why am I interested in it?” As they answer these questions, they may begin to construct a larger historical narrative, linking the particular event (or person, or artifact) to a larger set of developments and themes. The second approach starts from the particular and builds toward the larger narrative and its themes. An example of this in Canadian history is the World War I Battle at Vimy Ridge. For decades, historians and Canadian history textbook authors have pointed to this battle as the precise moment that a modern Canadian identity was formed; an identity based on collaborative achievement and sacrifice. Vimy became the anchor to which historians and textbook authors hung narratives of the forging of Canada’s national identity.
With both approaches, the historian’s central concern is historical significance. According to Seixas (1997a), decisions about historical significance involve understanding the connections people in the present establish with people, places and events of the past. Questions about historical significance are not asked and answered in a vacuum, devoid of the context in which they are asked. They are answered by every generation in response to the question, “how is this moment in history relevant (or not) to me/us/our time?”

Barton and Levstik argue that, from an early age, most North American students are very familiar with historical narratives because of frequent encounters with them. Students read, construct and repeat narratives without necessarily recognizing them as such. Narratives of Canadian history permeate Canadian society. They appear on television and movie screens, in books and newspapers, in museums, in textbooks, and as stories passed down through generations. White (1998) argues that “no given set of causally recorded historical events can in itself constitute a story; the most it might offer to the historian are story elements” (p.18; original emphasis). He further asserts that the same events can be viewed as either comic or tragic, “depending on the historian’s choice of the plot structure that he [sic] considers most appropriate for ordering events of that kind so as to make them into a comprehensible story” (p. 18). Progress (comic) narratives are common in Canadian mythos (see the Dominion Institute at www.dominion.ca and the Historica Foundation at www.histori.ca for popular and widely known examples). Narratives of decline (tragic) are equally prevalent in Canadian society, however. For instance, Létourneau’s (2004) research demonstrated that “melancholic,” decline oriented narratives abound, particularly in and about Québécois history. In the past quarter century, several Canadian Prime Ministers have apologized, and in some cases offered redress, for the internment of Japanese Canadians during World War II (1988), the imposition of the Chinese Head Tax (2006), the creation and effects of Indian Residential
Schools on Aboriginal peoples (2008) – and the list goes on. The apologies are part of Parliamentary record and the Canadian news media gave them wide coverage, ensuring them a prominent place in public discourse. All of these topics also receive treatment in school history or social studies texts and in social studies and history curricula (Lévesque, 2008). The wide publicity around such events and their inclusion in social studies curricula across Canada ensures them a prominent place in public narratives of Canadian history.

In this study, three narrative templates (Wertsch, 1998) course through the data. These are:

(1) The “Founding of the Nation” narrative: This narrative recounts the history of the first inhabitants of Canada (before it was a nation) and the events that “built” the country. It is characterized by an explicit focus on the history of Aboriginal peoples and the ways in which contact with European explorers affected them, the arrival of Europeans and their accomplishments, and events considered pivotal in the founding of the nation. Some of these include: arrival of Europeans, Confederation, the building of the CPR, World War I and II and perhaps the Canada Act, which saw the Canadian Constitution repatriated from Britain in 1982. In most cases, the stories of Aboriginal peoples seem to disappear after Confederation (1867) in this narrative template. The “Founding of Canada” narrative is exemplified in school history textbook titles such as: Canada: The Story of a Developing Nation42 (Deir & Fielding, 2000), Canada: A Nation Unfolding43 (Newman, 2000) and Horizons: Canada Moves West44 (Cranny, 1999).

42 Ontario (ON), grade 9; British Columbia (BC), grades 10 and 11.

43 ON, grade 10.
In this narrative template, students rely on pattern and causal types of significance to explain the historical significance of events in Canadian history. These types of historical significance are concerned with “firsts” (pattern) and consequences (causal), and align logically with a narrative that focuses on events that resulted in the beginning of the country and the effects of such events on the country’s development. In many cases, students employ this narrative and these types of historical significance to explain not only the country’s development but also how they (or their ancestors) came to Canada.

(2) The “Diverse and Harmonious Canada” narrative: This narrative recounts the history of Canadians overcoming prejudice and discrimination in order to establish a positive, multicultural, multinational Canadian identity. Conflicts might be included in some versions of this narrative but if so, are viewed as aberrations in an otherwise positive and progress-oriented history of Canada. This narrative is exemplified in school history textbook titles such as: *Defining Canada: History, Identity and Culture*45 (Brun, 2003) and *Canada: Face of a Nation*46 (Bolotta, Gerrard, & Shortt, 2000).

In this narrative, students rely on symbolic significance and significance for the present-future to make their arguments about the historical significance of particular events. Symbolic significance, which is used to ascribe significance to events symbolizing a mythic past, Canadian

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44 BC, grade 10.

45 ON, grade 12.

46 ON, grades 9 and 10; BC, grade 11.
identity and/or students’ ideas about what lessons can be drawn from history, seems especially relevant for a narrative that portrays Canada’s past as “diverse and harmonious.” Significance for the present-future is also relevant here, in that students make connections between past events and contemporary times, including their own lives.

(3) “The Diverse but Conflicted Canada” narrative: This narrative recounts the history of multiculturalism in Canada, with an explicit focus on conflicts and tensions that have arisen as a result of society and government’s responses to the nation’s changing demography. This narrative provides a template for critiques of societal and systemic racism and discrimination and traces the origins of contemporary ethnic and cultural tensions. An example of a school history textbook that offers this approach is *Canadian Issues: A Contemporary Perspective*47 (D. Francis, Hobson, Smith, Garrod, & Smith, 1998). This text employs case studies to examine the legacy of past social, cultural, political, legal, economic and environmental events on the present-day.

In the “Diverse but Conflicted Canada” narrative, students also rely on symbolic significance and significance for the present-future to ascribe historical significance to events in Canada’s past. However, students seem to put more emphasis on significance for the present-future and make explicit statements about the legacy of past racisms on contemporary society.

During the timeline activity, most of the groups of students did not identify (to me or to their group members) a specific narrative before sorting through the event cards and selecting ten for their timeline. For most of the students in this study, it

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47 BC, grade 11.
was only after I asked, “What story of Canada’s past do you think your timeline tells?” that they seemed to recognize that they had constructed a specific narrative during the research exercise. Very few student groups began the task by agreeing upon a narrative and only then selecting events in support of it. Students in the same group sometimes interpreted their timeline in different ways due, in part, to their ethnic identifications. In addition, some students drew on more than one narrative template to locate themselves in the history of the nation.
Table 25: Narratives of Canadian history constructed by students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Founding of the Nation</th>
<th>Diverse &amp; Harmonious Canada</th>
<th>Diverse but Conflicted Canada</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Single Ethnic Identity</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annabelle (C)</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Binh (C)</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conor (Ab)</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eliya (C)</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emily (C)</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethan (C)</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jessica (C)</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mae (C)</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minha (I)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vincent (I)</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will (C)</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Multiple Ethnic Identities</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adélie (C)</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aidan (C)</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ariana (Ab)</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Armand (C)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ben (C)</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dao-Ming (I)</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kyung (I)</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Munny (C)</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rosa (C)</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sam (I)</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shen (C)</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teresa (I)</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victoria (C)</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Neither Single nor Multiple Ethnic Identities</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aakil (C)</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark (I)</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

During the individual interviews, students were asked which events in Canadian history (from their group’s timeline or from Canadian history writ large), if any, were important to them in terms of their ethnic identities. Previous studies that examined the relationship between identity (ethnic or otherwise) and students’ conceptions of historical significance have not directly asked students to reflect on the intersection between their identity and their historical thinking. The present

48 Ab = Aboriginal, C = Canadian-born (non-Aboriginal), I = immigrant
study seeks to fill this gap by purposefully and explicitly asking students to reflect on how their ethnic identities may have impacted their ascription of significance to events in Canada’s past. Metacognition, or the ability to think about one’s own thinking, is recognized as a significant factor in student learning. According to Donovan and Bransford (2005), metacognition involves “an awareness of the need to ask how new knowledge relates to or challenges what one already knows” (p. 11). Even the students who would or might deny a relationship between their ethnic identities and their ascriptions of historical significance came to recognize there was one when they probed their thinking more deeply or were provoked to do so.

In the following sections, I present vignettes of four groups of students. The four groups are representative of the way in which students were grouped in this research. That is, Vignette 1 profiles the work of the two Aboriginal students in this study, Vignette 2 profiles the work of two Canadian-born students, Vignette 3 profiles the work of 4 immigrant students and Vignette 4 profiles the work of a mixed-group of students (Canadian-born and immigrant). In the discussion that follows, I analyze the students’ explanations of their timelines and the relationship students established between their ethnic identities and their narrative constructions of Canadian history, including their use of particular types of historical significance. In Chapter 3, I noted that phenomenographic researchers are turning toward theoretical questions concerning the differences in students’ conceptions (Pang 2003). In the remainder of this chapter I take up this challenge and explore the nature of the differences of students’ conceptions of historical significance.

5.2.2 Vignette 1: Conor and Ariana

When they began the timeline activity, the two Aboriginal students gravitated immediately toward every event that had an obvious connection to Aboriginal history. Conor explained why he took this approach: “everybody likes to see
something about them displayed somewhere, so that’s why I chose these ones… I wanted to show and I wanted to know more about my own history” (PD1, 16-18).

Ariana was also able to articulate why she thought she and her partner began the timeline activity with an almost exclusive focus on Aboriginal events: “Because we like to learn about the history of Aboriginals…and so when we seen all – most of – a lot of these were with Aboriginals or Aboriginal related…we thought we should grab them” (PD4, 129-135). For each of the events shown in Table 26, Ariana and Conor were able to provide an Aboriginal-focused rationale for its inclusion in their timeline.

Table 26: First timeline created by Aboriginal students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1778:</td>
<td>Europeans Arrive on West Coast of Canada</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid 1800s:</td>
<td>Creation of Indian Residential Schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1858:</td>
<td>Fraser River Gold Rush</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1881 – 1885:</td>
<td>Building of the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1885:</td>
<td>Louis Riel and the Northwest Rebellion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1913:</td>
<td>Record Immigration Numbers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1929-1939:</td>
<td>The Great Depression</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1982:</td>
<td>Canada Act Passed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990:</td>
<td>Collapse of the Meech Lake Accord</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999:</td>
<td>The Marshall Decision</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For example, with regard to the Fraser River Gold Rush, Conor argued that, “the Fraser River Gold Rush – it’s about the time when they – when more Europeans came over – and like 30,000 gold seekers – so and when they all came over, they brought a lot a lot of the diseases over – so that’s what devastated the First Nations. (PD3, 251-254)

However, as the students worked through the task, Ariana worked with Conor to expand the selection of events for their timeline (Table 27).
Table 27: Revised timeline created by Aboriginal students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1778</td>
<td>Europeans Arrive on West Coast of Canada</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid 1800s</td>
<td>Creation of Indian Residential Schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1858</td>
<td>Fraser River Gold Rush</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1885</td>
<td>Louis Riel and the Northwest Rebellion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1916 – 1918</td>
<td>Women’s Suffrage Movement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1919</td>
<td>Winnipeg General Strike</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1892-1939</td>
<td>The Great Depression</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>Collapse of the Meech Lake Accord</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>Québec Referendum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>The Marshall Decision</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ultimately, the timeline created by the two Aboriginal students included six events with a very specific Aboriginal focus (such as the creation of Indian residential schools and Louis Riel) and four that expanded into the broader context of Canadian history (women’s suffrage, the Winnipeg General strike, the Great Depression, and the Québec referendum). When asked to reflect on why she thought they changed their timeline Ariana said, “My perspective of Canadian history is different than everybody else’s….I think if I was born and raised on my reserve I’d try to find all Aboriginal [events] or something. But since I live in an urban setting I’ve tried to include all of them (PD2, 51, 134-137).

Whereas her partner was drawn almost exclusively to events depicting Aboriginal history, Ariana consciously selected events that reflected her urban Aboriginal identity, noting that she lived in a multicultural urban centre and that the timeline should reflect that. Ariana’s opinions had considerable influence on Conor’s ideas about the shape of their timeline, as can be seen in the final decisions about which events to include.

Although Conor and Ariana agreed on the final version of their timeline, they used different narrative templates (and, consequently, different types of historical significance) to explain the timeline and their relationship to it. Conor described the timeline in terms of the “Founding of the Nation” narrative, which, as described above, focuses on people and events responsible for the
establishment of Canada. Conor noted that the timeline included “the important stuff that, like, happened through the years – like with the first arrival of the Europeans – and then what they did…like the different stuff we had to go through...like the big changes, like, with losing our culture” (PD4, 6-12). In this explanation, Conor relies on pattern significance (“first arrival of Europeans”) and causal significance (“big changes...losing our culture”) to ascribe historical significance and construct his narrative.

Conor’s decision to explain his narrative in terms of the “Founding of the Nation” narrative is grounded in his ethnic identity (“First Nations”) and his understanding of the effects of European arrival on Aboriginal people in the past. Using this narrative template, Conor locates himself in the trajectory of Canadian history that he and Ariana had mapped through the timeline exercise. His use of pattern and causal significance is tied to both his understanding of this narrative template and to his sense of his ethnic identity; this is particularly noticeable in his use of the word “our” when describing the causal effects of European arrival on Aboriginal culture.

Unlike Conor, Ariana employed the “Diverse but Conflicted Canada” narrative template to explain the timeline they had created together. Ariana argued that the creation of Indian Residential Schools was historically significant because: “Even though all that happened way back then – all the abuse that the kids had to suffer and stuff – even though it doesn’t happen anymore – We’re still mixed in...with a bunch of cultures. Assimilated into mainstream society” (PD2, 177-181). Critically connecting the legacy of residential schools to the present day, Ariana employed significance for the present-future to explain the significance of this event to her.

Conor and Ariana’s ideas about the relationship between their ethnic identity and their ascriptions of significance to events in Canada’s past can best be described as a sense of loss. For Conor, this was expressed through the sentiment that if
only an event had (or had not) happened, he would be a different person; he would have stronger sense of his Aboriginal identity. For instance, Conor’s explanation for why he felt it was important to include an event related to European arrival to Canada on their timeline reflects his impression on how his ethnic identity today might be different had the Europeans not come to Canada: “If Europeans didn’t come here then, like, I’d be a different kind of person. I would know how to hunt and trap and fish and provide for my whole family. Now I can’t do any of that stuff” (PD1, 85-88). Conor’s use of a counter-factual statement (an indicator for causal historical significance) embeds his understanding of events that founded the nation (in this case, the arrival of Europeans) within his ethnic identity.

When asked how her ethnic identity may have affected her decisions during the timeline task, Ariana commented that “I didn’t really know how to identify myself [on the questionnaire] but I knew I’m Aboriginal but that’s all I knew….The choosing of the timeline was hard too because…I’m not really sure who I am, you know…I’m lost.” (PD2, 147-149, 154-157) Ariana’s statement reveals much about the connection, for her, between ethnic identity and history. Castenell, Jr. and Pinar (1993) argue that,

“We are what we know.” We are, however, also, what we do not know. If what we know about ourselves – our history, our culture, our national identity – is deformed by absences, denials, and incompleteness, then our identity – both as individuals and as [Canadians] – is fractured. (p. 4)

Ariana acknowledged that she struggled when she tried to explain her identity on the questionnaire. In her statement, above, we can see that she struggled with the timeline task, in part because she is also struggling with her sense of self.

At the end of the task, once Ariana and Conor had reconstituted their timeline to be “more multicultural,” Ariana noted that she was satisfied with the end result
and, in her words, felt less “selfish about – concerning – my history because Canada is a multicultural country now” (PD4, 381-383). Remembering that Ariana reported learning about other Aboriginal culture than her own, her comments may be read to mean that she could not really see herself or her identity reflected in some events depicting Aboriginal history but could make connections to some events that depicted Canada’s multicultural history. This is in stark contrast to Conor, who would have been very satisfied with a timeline that depicted only Aboriginal history because he saw a relationship between his identity and these events.

It is worth reminding the reader that both Conor and Ariana were the only students in this study who did not take “Social Studies 11,” a required Social Studies course for students in British Columbia. Social Studies 11 focuses on twentieth century Canadian history (with some geography). Students do have the option of taking First Nations 12 instead, a course that focuses on Aboriginal history in Canada and this is the course that Conor and Ariana had taken. They noted that they did not know of some of the thirty events from which they were asked to choose ten. Although this was true for many students in the study, it is possible that Conor and Ariana were familiar with fewer events. It is probable that Conor’ and Ariana’s interpretations of the narrative they created was somewhat affected by the background knowledge they brought to the exercise. That said their ethnic identities also had an important role to play in the process.

5.2.3  Vignette 2: Will and Ethan
Will and Ethan, two Canadian-born students, completed the timeline task together. As noted earlier, Will was third generation Canadian. He reported that his great-grandfather was one of the first people to ride the railway in Canada from coast to coast, and reflected that he (Will) was “so Canadian” because of this (PD26, 349).
Table 28: Timeline created by Will and Ethan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1670</td>
<td>Granting of Royal Charter for Fur Trade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1759</td>
<td>The Siege of Québec</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1778</td>
<td>Europeans Arrive on the West Coast of Canada</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1881-1885</td>
<td>Building of the CPR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1867</td>
<td>Confederation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1916-1918</td>
<td>The Women’s Suffrage Movement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1939-1945</td>
<td>Canada Enters World War II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1957</td>
<td>Pearson Wins Nobel Peace Prize</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971, 1988</td>
<td>Canada Enacts Multiculturalism Policy and Act</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1982</td>
<td>Canada Act Passed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When asked to reflect on if and how his ethnic identity may have influenced the kind of timeline he and his partner constructed, Will drew on the “Founding of the Nation” narrative:

So I found a lot of the original establishing things important but – I mean, I can look back and see maybe, maybe some of the stuff in the 20th century is just as important or more important – But for me, cause this [referring to the first five events on their timeline] is sort of when my ancestry came and started to do things, it’s important. (PD27, 261-265)

Will’s identity as “so Canadian,” and the fact that he could trace his roots back to early Canadian history, meant that he selected events related to the development of the nation during the timeline activity (Founding of the Nation narrative). His reference to when his “ancestry came and started to do things” is an example of pattern significance. That is, he denotes the arrival of his ancestors as a starting point for his own family’s history and involvement in the development of the nation, and a reason for ascribing pattern historical significance and constructing the narrative he did.

When I asked Ethan to reflect on the role, if any, his ethnic identity may have had on the decisions he made during the timeline task, he argued that, “I wasn’t really thinking about myself, I was thinking more on how people were perceiving
Canada; I was thinking of Canada more on a general level” (PD29, 128-131). However, when asked if he could explain his thinking further, Ethan referred explicitly to his own identity as a visible minority: “When I was going through [the picture cards]...I took out all the racial things right – because it didn’t bother me, right, and hopefully it doesn’t bother people now because Canada was in a different place 100 years ago...Canada now is a multicultural place...and that is the most important thing” (PD160-166). This statement reflects Ethan's earlier comment on his identity (“a person with many different racial origins”) being the “epitome of Canadian culture” and is an example of symbolic historical significance in that his explanation is tied to a mythic Canadian identity. For Ethan, what was paramount in his decision-making process was that the timeline reflect the multicultural nature of Canadian society and therefore he constructed Canadian history using the “Diverse and Harmonious” narrative. This, in turn, reflects both his perception of his ethnic identity and his understanding of Canadian history.

Ethan suggested that he bracketed his identity in favour of a timeline that would represent a broad spectrum of Canadian society. However, when pushed to think about the relationship between his ethnic identity and the events he selected for his and Will's timeline, his response indicated that he had invested much more of his identity in the selection process than he was conscious of doing. Ethan’s attempts to bracket his ethnic identity were not entirely successful because ultimately he selected events that reflected his sense of self back to him.

Ethan and Will’s ascriptions of historical significance were affected by their ethnic identities. As mentioned earlier, Will’s identity as “so Canadian,” and the fact that he could trace his roots back to early Canadian history meant that he used pattern historical significance to select events related to the beginning of the nation. And while Ethan argued that he “tried to step out of my own sort of bias...to make it [the timeline] represent everyone” (PD25, 384-385) he also
remarked that Canada’s passing of the Multiculturalism Act was the most important event for him because of his ethnic identity: “Where would Canada be if it wasn’t multicultural, right? Like I might not be able to live here if it didn’t accept multiculturalism” (PD29, 195-197). Throughout the interviews Ethan was quite adamant that his ethnic identity did not really have any influence on his selection of events. Nevertheless, when asked to explain which one was most important to him, he expressed quite a different viewpoint. Ethan was not fully aware of the disjuncture between his earlier statements about setting aside his “bias” (as he put it) and the significance he placed on multiculturalism in Canada.

5.2.4 Vignette 3: Sam, Teresa, Mark and Vincent

This group of four immigrant students spent almost an hour debating which 10 events should be placed on their timeline of Canadian history. The discussion was very animated and almost heated at times. At one point, noting that his group had not selected any events explicitly related to ethnic minority issues (such as, “recruitment of Chinese workers to build the Canadian Pacific railway”) Sam stood up and asked the group the following question, “All four of us are from ethnic minorities, our ancestors, right? [Mark responds: “In a sense.”] So why shouldn’t we look at that aspect?” (PD44, 720-725). The other members of his group argued that they preferred selecting events that could apply to a more “general” population – events that would have universal appeal to a broad spectrum of society. They expressed concern that if the group focused too intently on events directly related to ethnic minority issues they would have to choose all events related to ethnic minority issues for fear of leaving someone out of their timeline:

Personally, I just didn’t want to focus too much on minority issues because I think it…once you get into the nitty gritty it becomes, like…you have to include every other minority group. I mean, we can’t talk about how the Japanese were once discriminated against in our society without
mentioning the Chinese, and then we can't talk about that without mentioning the Aboriginals. (Teresa, PD7, 410-416)

Mark concurred, and added the following: “Since we’re all from different minorities we kind of reached a consensus that, like, [an] all inclusive topic like multiculturalism would probably be better suited to our purposes” (PD7, 431-433). Vincent agreed, noting, “I think it’s safe to say that multiculturalism speaks for all of us” (PD7, 482-483).

Table 29: Timeline created by Vincent, Teresa, Mark and Sam

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1867</td>
<td>Confederation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1881-1885</td>
<td>Building of the CPR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1913</td>
<td>Record Immigration Numbers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1919</td>
<td>Winnipeg General Strike</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1929</td>
<td>The Person's Case</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1939-1945</td>
<td>Canada Enters World War II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1957</td>
<td>Pearson Wins Nobel Peace Prize</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971, 1988</td>
<td>Canada Enacts Multiculturalism Policy and Act</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1982</td>
<td>Canada Act Passed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>The Québec Referendum</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Teresa, who had lived in Canada for 14 years (at the time of the study), noted that she found it

a little surprising myself that I didn’t, like, advocate so much to put minority issues, like as one of my, like, first couple of selections…but definitely I think it’s just because of how much of a Canadian I consider myself – I chose not to choose those ones and go for ones that, like, generally apply to the history of Canada, not necessarily a specific background or ethnic group. (PD10, 98-106)

Vincent and Mark, who had lived in Canada thirteen and eight years, respectively, agreed with this stance. Length of time in Canada may have been a determining factor in this group’s selection process, as Sam had spent little time
in Canada, at least compared to his group-mates. He was particularly drawn to issues related to minority rights. Although minority rights were a concern for his group-mates, they preferred to create a timeline that would appeal to a broader spectrum of society. The group’s solution was to include an event that, they felt, acted as an umbrella event for all ethnic minority issues – Canadian multiculturalism.

Sam was not entirely happy with this decision and argued that the selection process should involve the following consideration:

> We should think about the present and then consider what event has contributed to the present and those events should have the biggest impact because we are still feeling that impact, right? So of all of these, I think minority rights shouldn’t be excluded, since we already have multiculturalism [on the timeline] – that’s actually a solution to that issue. We have a solution, but we don’t have the issue. (PD44, 1188-1193)

The group reached a compromise by adding an event that described Canadian immigration in the early part of Canada’s history, with Vincent noting that, “that represents, to me, the ethnic minority” (PD9, 176). Upon further examination of Sam’s position, it seems clear that he employed the “significance for the present-future” criterion for historical significance in order to construct a “Diverse but Conflicted Canada” narrative.

When asked to identify an event that was most significant to her in terms of her ethnic identity, Teresa selected both Confederation and Multiculturalism. She explained:

> Because I consider myself with more of a Canadian background…even more than my own ethnic background – my parents’ background – I just believe Confederation is important….I think it’s important to the –
generally for our country and how we came to be...the beginnings of our country and the unity of our country. (PD10, 141-150)

And with the multiculturalism policy – I think as – as part of the being Canadian – that’s something – it’s probably one of the things that I’m most proud of...of our country being so multicultural and like I'm here – I'm able at the same time to grow up Canadian but in the back of my head there’s still my own ethnic background that I still want to, like, I still want to remember – that I still learned about through my parents and it’s probably things that I'll pass on to my children later on but at the same time...living in Canada I don’t have to be – I don’t have to feel ashamed of what it is – what my identity is and like, it’s okay to have a mix I guess. (PD10, 169-179)

In the first excerpt, Teresa identified Confederation as a landmark moment in Canadian history ("how we came to be"), making this an example of pattern historical significance. She also noted that Confederation was a marker for the beginning of the nation and unity, firmly establishing this aspect of her explanation in the “Founding of the Nation” narrative. In the second excerpt, Teresa referred to Canadian identity (“being Canadian”) and a sense of pride in Canada’s multicultural history, both of which point to symbolic historical significance and the “Diverse and Harmonious” narrative. She also indicated that this is a part of Canadian history that she would likely “pass on” to her future children, an indicator of significance for the present-future.

The relationship between Teresa’s identity as “ethnically Vietnamese” and “culturally Canadian” also emerged in her discussion of the historical significance of Confederation and Multiculturalism. She reported that she had “more” of a “Canadian background” and this is what prompted her to identify with Confederation. However, she also noted the influence of her ethnic identity and
her feeling that she does not have to “feel ashamed” about her ethnicity precisely because of the Canadian government’s approach to multiculturalism.

Sam’s case is quite different than his group-mates’. As mentioned earlier, Sam had lived in Canada for a considerably shorter period of time compared to Vincent, Mark and Teresa. When asked how his ethnic identity may have impacted the decisions he made during the timeline task, he had the following response:

As I was deciding on these pictures I was kind of putting myself in the mindset of a Canadian instead of a Chinese. So I fought for the events that are important for Canadians in general – they may not be typical Chinese-Canadian, but Canadian in general – so like all the native born people or the immigrants from Britain/France…So that partly explains why we didn’t…why I didn’t choose a lot of minority rights because…I don’t think there’s any…my Chinese background had any influence on my decisions. (PD12, 213-224).

However, as he thought more about this question his response became more intricate and revealed his understanding of the complicated relationship between his ethnic identity and the decisions he made about historical significance: “So in some ways during the process of choosing these I shifted my own identity, so not a lot of these things really represent my true identity” (PD12, 236-238). Sam was the only person in his group who argued (in vain) to include more issues related to minority rights in their selection of events. Because his group decided to create a “general” timeline, Sam reported that he emphasized his Canadian identity while making decisions about which events were significant. Importantly, Sam also added that, “it’s not like [I’m] Chinese and Canadian. I am in between – but I’m actually, I’m constantly shifting between the two” (PD12, 377-379). The notion that one’s ethnic identity is always a process – that it is not fixed – is apparent in
Sam’s reflections on the relationship between his ethnic identity and his ascriptions of significance to events in Canada’s past (Barker, 1999; Hall, 1991; Nagel, 1994; Rattansi, 1999) and has important implications for educators working in pluralist societies. These will be discussed in detail in Section 5.5.

5.2.5 Vignette 4: Adélie, Dao-Ming and Minha

From the outset of the timeline task Canadian-born Adélie and immigrant students Minha and Dao-Ming chose, very consciously, a specific plot structure for their timeline. Indeed, theirs was one of only a few groups who selected a narrative and then selected events in support of it. Most groups simply dove into the task at hand and selected or eliminated events without considering the kind of narrative they wished to construct.

Adélie, Minha and Dao-Ming began the research task with the following conversation:

Adélie: It depends like—cause we have to pick what we have or what we’re going to put it in relation to, right? Cause it’s like—are we talking about social development or are we talking about political development or are we talking about—what are we talking about?

Minha: I think we’re just talking about how Canada’s been changed like…

Dao-Ming: But she’s [Adélie] saying politically and socially and stuff.

Adélie: Yeah—how is it being affected—like what are we focusing on? But there’s a lot of things here and like they can be like—depending on what we pick we could fit each into some sort of timeline but—because otherwise I would just kind of pick all of these but you know if there was like something specific that I could like focus on?
Minha: I don’t know but for me, it’s usually, for the changes—it would be—social change.

Adélie: Okay

Dao-Ming: Cause like for me what changes the country is mostly what social changes are.

Adélie: That works—I can pick social events, social changes. (PD24, 77-96)

A bit later Adélie added: “Now we’ve got to talk about what kind of social change are we focusing on? Because we could create a social change regarding minorities, we could talk about how multicultural we are now…” (PD24, 115-118).

To clarify my understanding of their process, I asked them to explain further:

Carla: Can you talk a little bit about what’s happening in this pile [of cards] here—just so that I understand your thinking on that?

Adélie: Well the pile is – at least in my understanding—is supposed to be like everything to do with like multiculturalism or like the development of multiculturalism in Canada because that’s become such a like—a figurehead of Canadian society.

Carla: Minha, do you want to add to that?

Minha: Mostly of minority groups and what happened and how they become accepted or the issues that they faced early on before they became accepted

Carla: Okay. Dao-Ming, did you want to add to that as well?
Dao-Ming: Yeah I guess—because Canada is [seen] in the world as a multiculturalism country—I think that’s a really big important part of Canada. (PD24, 171-185)

The students then proceeded to select events that suited this purpose. Using symbolic historical significance, Adélie, Minha and Dao-Ming engaged in the creation of a very specific plot structure; in effect demonstrating White’s (1998) thesis that, “most historical sequences can be emplotted in a number of different ways, so as to provide different interpretations of those events and to endow them with different meanings” (p. 18). The resultant timeline can be seen in Table 30. Adélie’s explanation of multiculturalism as “a figurehead of Canadian society” and Dao-Ming’s reference to how “the world” imagines Canada are symbolic justifications used to explain the historical significance of multiculturalism in Canada.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 30: Timeline created by Adélie, Minha and Dao-Ming</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mid 1800s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1880s – 1890s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1885</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1885</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1913</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971, 1988</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In her interpretation of her group’s timeline, Dao-Ming employed the “Diverse and Harmonious Canada” narrative. Dao-Ming was clear about the influence her ethnic identity had on the decisions she made during the timeline activity:

Dao-Ming: I think I said last [time] that I fought really hard to keep the two Chinese ones—the Chinese workers on—working on the Canadian Pacific Railway and the Chinese head tax cause that’s like—that has to do with
Chinese people and that also has to do with Canada—so yeah I really wanted to put those in there…

Carla: Okay—and did your—do you feel that your identity had a role to play in the selection of the other ones?

Dao-Ming: Oh yeah—maybe if I weren’t Chinese I wouldn’t have…I wouldn’t have put those two in the timeline…because we were only allowed to choose 10 right? So if I weren’t Chinese I probably wouldn’t have deemed these two important enough …to put in the timeline…because I—I do love China and I also love Canada—like I really wanted to put—to include these two. (PD42, 140-159)

The excerpts, above, demonstrate that Dao-Ming’s Chinese identity influenced her decision to advocate the inclusion of events related to Chinese-Canadian history on her group’s timeline. She argued that the CPR and the Chinese Head Tax were representative (symbolic) of Chinese history in Canada and noted the strong influence her identity had on the selection of these events. Dao-Ming also drew on her Canadian identity to explain the symbolic significance of the Québec Referendum. She said, “I love Canada…I don’t want Canada with a chunk missing cause that would just totally separate what we are. I don’t want Canada to break into pieces…I want Canada to be whole and good and happy” (PD42, 239-242, 247). Dao-Ming’s explanation is tied to a mythic idea of Canadian identity as “happy” and united, which, interestingly, could also characterize her own description of her ethnic identity. Dao-Ming’s explanations provide examples of how a student’s ethnic identity can dictate which type of historical significance – in this case, symbolic – he/she may use to explain the significance of moments in Canada’s past.

Dao-Ming’s group-mate, Adélie, described herself as French-Canadian and reported that she could trace the arrival of her ancestors to North America as far
back as the 17th century. Adélie explained her perception of the relationship between her ethnic identity and the events on her group's timeline as follows:

The French stuff – I mean I wouldn't have fought nearly as hard if it wasn’t significant to me, right? Because, I mean, it's significant to Canada but because we're in British Columbia...there's a very, very, very small French population...so I wouldn't particularly care if I was British or something but I'm very, very French on one side so....yeah, it's pretty important. (PD23, 293-295, 302-307)

Adélie located herself in the nation's history using both the “Founding of the Nation” narrative and the “Diverse but Conflicted Canada” narrative. The former helped her explain the arrival of her ancestors to Canada, thereby enabling her to locate herself within this narrative. The arrival of her ancestors is particularly important to her because, she notes, BC has a small French population and therefore the knowledge she has of her ancestors helps her understand her identity and her place in the nation's history. The “Diverse but Conflicted” narrative helped her explain her perception of the legacy of European arrival on Aboriginal peoples and cultures:

We headed the colonialists – and that ...and – and that could have been good because we could have cooperated with people here but instead there's the residential schools and all those things…but that wasn't really the French but that's only because the French lost – because the French would have done it if the English hadn't. (PD31, 292-297)

In this excerpt, Adélie employs significance for the present-future to explain the lasting impact of colonialism on Aboriginal peoples and Canadian society more broadly. In employing the word “we,” she does not exclude herself from this narrative. In other words, she acknowledges that she has descended from ancestors who may have been responsible for colonialism. In Section 5.1.3, I
noted that Adélie expressed a strong, leftist political identity as part of her response to the ethnic identity question on the questionnaire. It is not surprising that, combined with her ethnic identity, Adélie’s political identity influenced the degree to which she advocated for the inclusion of minority rights issues on, and her critical interpretation of, her group’s timeline.

5.3 Conclusion

In this section I provide a summary of the chapter and propose a process in which the students in this study engaged to explain how they employed certain types of historical significance when they constructed their narratives of Canadian history.

5.3.1 Summary

In this chapter I have brought together two significant areas in the literature on students’ historical understandings. The first involved an analysis of students’ ethnic identifications. This analysis comes with an important caveat, however. Just as ethnic identity is in a constant state of flux, so must students’ identifications be regarded. Any descriptions students provided of their ethnic identities must always be considered tentative and open to revision and elaboration, depending on a wide variety of factors, including but not limited to the students’ increased awareness of how they self-identify and the context in which students are asked to describe themselves (in this case, a school setting). Otherwise, we run the risk of returning to the problem of essentialized conceptions of identity.

The second issue I addressed was the need for researchers to more directly attend to the relationship between students’ ethnic identities and their understandings of historical significance. Previous studies that examined the relationship between identity (ethnic or otherwise) and students’ conceptions of historical significance have not directly asked students to reflect on the
intersection between their identity and their historical thinking. My own research with students in a highly multicultural urban centre sought to fill this gap by asking students to reflect on how their ethnic identities may have influenced their ascription of significance to events in Canada’s past.

Students employed three different narrative templates to construct the history of Canada and in the process employed specific types of historical significance depending on the narrative(s) they used. The first narrative template is the “Founding of the Nation” template, which focuses on the establishment of the country. Some students employed this narrative to help them understand not only the nation’s history but also their place in it. This was exemplified by Will and Adélie, who pointed to the arrival of Europeans as the beginning of their families’ histories in Canada. Conor also drew on this narrative but marked the arrival of Europeans as historically significant in that this event marked the beginning of decline of Aboriginal peoples. Students who employed this narrative drew on pattern and causal historical significance to make their arguments.

The second narrative template is the “Diverse and Harmonious Canada” narrative, which casts Canada’s multicultural history in a mostly positive light. If negative aspects of Canada’s history are raised (such as discriminatory acts) they are seen as passing moments and that have been “solved.” This narrative was best captured by Ethan, who argued that Canada is “better” now that it’s “more multicultural.” Ethan employed symbolic historical significance to locate himself in this narrative, noting that he felt he was the “epitome” of Canadian identity due to his own multicultural ethnic identity. Sometimes, students also employed significance for the present-future in this narrative.

The third narrative template employed by some students in this study is the “Diverse but Conflicted Canada” narrative. This narrative offers a critical evaluation of Canada’s multicultural history and draws particular attention to
negative aspects of this history. Sam’s reading of Canadian history is a good example of this. Sam drew on significance for the present-future to argue that, although Canada may have adopted an official stance on multiculturalism, what matters are the events that precipitated this move because, in his words, “we are still feeling the effects” of such events. Students also employed symbolic historical significance to ascribe significance to events in this narrative.

5.3.2 Processes of Students’ Narrative Constructions

In examining the examples discussed above, what becomes clear is that the students’ ethnic identities influenced both their decisions about significance and the narrative template they used to locate themselves in the nation’s past. Several students, notably Sam and Teresa, and many not profiled above, referred to a particular “side” of their identity that came to the fore during the research exercise. Both Bhabha’s (2001) hybridity theory and Dei, Karumanchery and Karumanchery-Luik’s (2004) theory of the salience of certain identities in specific contexts are relevant here. I propose that the grade 12 students in this study engaged in an iterative process whereby they constructed narratives of Canadian history according to the process outlined below:

The students:

- Analyzed (consciously or subconsciously) public narratives of Canadian history in order to locate themselves (vis-à-vis their ethnicities) in relation to one or more of these narratives.
- Selected historical phenomena and employed criteria for historical significance to create their own narratives of Canadian history.
- Analyzed the narratives they produced in terms of:
  - The extent to which they reflected their understandings of Canadian history
  - The extent to which they reflected their ethnic identities
Modified their narratives to better reflect both their understandings of Canadian history and their understandings of their ethnicities.

Figure 4: Processes of narrative development in this study

In presenting Figure 4, I do not assert that the students in this study engaged in the process of narrative construction in a linear, sequential manner. It is possible that the students in this study engaged in this process in different ways. For instance, one student might begin by analyzing one or more public narratives of Canadian history and proceed (clockwise) to create his/her own narrative, analyze and then modify it. Another student might begin in the same way but might then choose to modify the narrative, then analyze it, then continue to create his/her own version of Canadian history. Key is the role of a student’s ethnic identity in these processes. In this study, the student’s ethnic identity played a central role in determining the shape of the narrative he/she ultimately created and the criteria he/she mobilized to defend the events he/she selected for his/her narrative.
Teachers and students can begin to develop an understanding of how ethnic identity can impact one’s understanding of history by first identifying the point in the cycle (presented in Figure 4) at which the students began constructing historical narratives. If, through an analysis of their narrative, students discover that they have reproduced a grand narrative of Canadian history or created an alternative narrative, it is important that teachers ask students to think about why this might be so.
That is, students need to repeat the process by asking such questions as:

- In what way do I understand my ethnic identity?
- With what narratives of Canadian history am I familiar?
- What connections (vis-à-vis my identity) have I established with one or more of these narratives?
- How did my identification with a particular narrative shape the way in which I selected and omitted events for my own narrative of Canadian history?
- How did this shape the ways in which I selected and employed different types of historical significance?
- How did my understanding of my ethnic identity shape the narrative I constructed and/or the ways in which I selected and applied criteria for significance?
• How does my understanding of this process influence the kind of narrative I ultimately produced?
• What other narratives are possible?

Thus, students need to take the cycle proposed in Figure 4 and extend it through a deeper engagement (represented by the inner arrows in Figure 5) with the processes they used to construct their narratives.
CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

In this dissertation I investigated the interaction between students’ ethnic identities and their production of narratives of Canadian history through the ascription of historical significance to moments in Canada’s past. Key questions that guided this investigation were: In what ways did students understand their own ethnic identities? What was the relationship between students’ ethnic identities and their use of different types of historical significance? Did certain aspects of students’ ethnic identities take on more salience (Dei et al., 2004) than others when they participated in the research task? In what ways did students’ ethnic identities influence the types of narratives they created, the events they designated as historically significant and the means they used (types of historical significance) to defend their choices?

Students’ perceptions of their ethnic identities were complex and fluid. Students knew and utilized several markers of ethnicity, such as religion, cultural practices, food and language to describe their ethnic identities. Some students self-identified in terms of a single ethnic identity whereas others described themselves in terms of multiple ethnic identities. Only two students resisted the category “ethnic,” preferring instead to describe their identities entirely on their own terms. All students drew on several factors to explain themselves and some indicated that they recognized that their identity was “in process” and still developing. Many students articulated complicated notions of their identities, with some perceiving that particular “sides” of their identity were at play, or in use, during the research task.

The students in this study employed several types of historical significance to explain their understanding of events in Canada’s past. It was quite common for
students’ explanations to include multiple types of historical significance. These were: contemporary significance, causal significance, pattern significance, symbolic significance and significance for the present-future (Cercadillo, 2000, 2001) and are summarized below:

1. **Contemporary Significance:** Explanations of contemporary significance are temporally located in the timeframe of the event in question and may include multiple (contemporary) perspectives on an event. Contemporary historical significance may be a precursor to the development of historical empathy.

2. **Causal Significance:** Causal historical significance is defined by aspect (economic, social, political, religious, cultural, legal), geographic factors, time-scale, number of people affected by an event and by an event’s depth of impact and requires knowledge of the historical context in which a particular event is situated.

3. **Pattern Significance:** Knowledge of historical context is also an important factor in students’ ability to ascribe pattern historical significance to events in Canada’s past. Pattern historical significance was ascribed to events that students understood as “firsts,” as groundbreaking or turning points, or to events that marked Canada’s place in the world. In their ascriptions of pattern historical significance, students usually located an event in a narrative of progress or decline.

4. **Symbolic Significance:** Students ascribed symbolic historical significance to events in Canada’s past that were symbolic of the development and growth of the nation, portrayed Canadian unity, were symbolic of Canadian identity, revealed the accomplishments of iconic individuals, and offered a lesson. In many cases students ascribed symbolic historical significance to events that revealed negative aspects of Canada’s past, such as racism. Students who employed this type of
historical significance understood that historical significance does not “naturally” inhere in an event but is something that people ascribe to it. There is some indication that students understood that ascriptions of historical significance may change over time and depending on context.

5. **Significance for the Present-Future**: Students ascribed historical significance for the present-future to events that they deemed relevant today and/or to which the students were able to establish relevance to their own lives. Sometimes significance for the present-future was ascribed to events that the students considered unresolved. Sophisticated student responses linked an understanding of past events to effective and informed citizenship.

Students employed three different narrative templates to construct the history of Canada and used specific types of historical significance depending on the narrative(s) they used:

1. The **“Founding of the Nation”** narrative focused on events related to the establishment of the country. Students used pattern and causal historical significance to construct this narrative.

2. The **“Diverse and Harmonious Canada”** narrative told the history of multiculturalism in Canada and presented this history as a story of progress. Students employed symbolic significance and significance for the present-future in this narrative.

3. The **“Diverse but Conflicted Canada”** narrative recounted the history of multiculturalism in Canada but from a more critical perspective than the Diverse and Harmonious narrative. Students drew on significance for the present-future and symbolic historical significance to ascribe significance to events in this narrative.
Students’ ethnic identities impacted both their decisions about significance and the narrative template they used to locate themselves in the nation’s past. The student’s ethnic identity played a central role in determining the shape of the narrative he/she created and the criteria he/she employed to select the events for his/her narrative. Students who collaborated during the research exercise (and therefore reached a consensus) often interpreted the end product (the timeline) using different narrative templates. **Implications for Teaching**

Given the complexity of student ethnic identifications and the salience of certain identities over others in particular contexts, it is important that teachers\(^{49}\) become – and provide opportunities for students to become – aware of how ethnic identity can impact learning history. Although a teacher may be teaching one topic to the twenty-five students in his/her class, students will understand that topic in twenty-five different ways. Although there are many factors that can contribute to this difference in learning (prior knowledge, interest), the relationship between a student’s ethnic identity and his/her learning of history must also be attended to by both the teacher and the student. Students also need to be taught that, “*How a given historical situation is to be configured depends on the historian’s subtlety in matching up a specific plot structure with the set of historical events that he [sic] wishes to endow with a meaning of a particular kind*” (White, 1998, p. 19, original emphasis). This opens up many new learning opportunities, such as investigating why different people, or different groups of people, have differing ideas about what is historically significant. Why are there competing accounts of the past? Why do ideas about significance differ? These questions can lead to deeper historical understanding.

Gee (2006) posits that individuals use “identity kits” with which they “live out [their] social lives as different and multiple kinds of people” (p. 33). According to

\(^{49}\)I include pre-service teachers here, and throughout the remainder of this chapter.
Gee, students use identity kits to interpret texts. Identity kits involve socio-culturally situated identities, the performance of identities, the use of cultural tools and particular ways of acting and interacting with others (See also Appiah, 1994; Rice, 2005). Adélie, Minha and Dao-Ming’s ethnic identities (or “identity kits”) influenced their selection of significant events for their timeline. The most striking example of this is Dao-Ming’s comment that she would not have selected events related to Chinese history in Canada had she not self-identified (in part) as Chinese.

Wertsch (1998) argues that historical narratives are “cultural tools” that people use to understand the past. He notes that “the task of a sociocultural approach [to research] is to explicate the relationships between human action, on the one hand, and the cultural, institutional, and historic contexts in which this action occurs, on the other” (p. 24; original emphasis). In his work with American college students, Wertsch found that the “quest-for-freedom” narrative of US history was so dominant that even those students who tried to resist it situated any criticisms they had about this narrative within it, rather than offering an alternative narrative. This suggests not only the ubiquity of the quest-for-freedom narrative in American society but also its dominance. The students in Wertsch’s study were, seemingly, powerless to resist it.

In contrast, Wertsch’s (2000) work in Estonia demonstrates that it is possible to know but not believe (or appropriate) dominant historical narratives. Wertsch found that the Estonians with whom he worked were fluent in at least two accounts of the past: the state-controlled, public, official, Russian version of history that was taught in schools and the unofficial, private version that “consisted of loose collections of counter claims to assertions found in official texts” (p. 39). He concludes that “texts [such as narrative texts] serve as ‘identity resources’ to be mastered and to be employed in particular contexts in a variety of flexible ways” (p. 45).
The students in this study employed specific narratives as “identity resources” in order to better locate themselves in particular narratives of Canadian history. For Adélie, this meant constructing two narratives simultaneously: The “Founding of the Nation” narrative and, alongside it, the “Diverse but Conflicted Canada” narrative, which she employed to offer a critical reading of French-English relations and to shed light on the persecution of Aboriginal peoples by European newcomers. Due to her recent arrival to Canada, Minha did not connect with the ‘Founding of the Nation’ narrative. Rather, she drew on her experiences living internationally to conclude that in Canada, although multiculturalism might be official government policy, Canadians have not always embraced diversity. Dao-Ming used her identity kit as Chinese-Canadian to help her interpret the timeline she and her group mates created. However, her choice of narrative – the “Diverse and Harmonious” narrative – also served as an identity resource, to help her understand her own identity.

A key principle of constructivist learning theory is that students bring prior conceptions with them to every learning situation. The data in this study show that students are using criteria to ascribe historical significance to events and are constructing narratives of Canadian history even if they have not been explicitly taught how to do so. Given the role of ascriptions of historical significance in the construction of historical narratives, it is extremely important that teachers uncover students’ prior conceptions, or existing frameworks, of historical significance so that they can be built upon. In order to develop more complex historical understandings, teachers need to know what criteria students are using and the ways in which they are using them.

As noted in Chapter 4, there is a strong indication that the terminology students employed to ascribe historical significance crosses international and cultural/ethnic borders as well as research tasks. This is a significant finding and points to the possibility of building a common framework for historical significance.
based on (a) terms and identifiers already in use (by students) and (b) discipline-specific vocabulary. Such a lexicon is, however, only useful if it is actually employed by teachers and students (and the history education community more broadly). It is therefore important to infuse curricula and teaching materials with a vocabulary of historical significance. This has started to happen in Canada through the work of the Benchmarks of Historical Thinking Project, with researchers, teachers, curriculum developers and textbook publishers explicitly and deliberately using specific vocabulary to teach and write about historical significance (Peck & Seixas, 2008). Such a lexicon needs to be understood, however, (and, much like the concept of ethnic identity) as flexible, fluid and subject to revision.

An important but understudied aspect of students' prior conceptions is their understanding of their ethnic identity and how it may influence learning. Teachers and students need to explore links between ethnic identity and prior historical understandings, including which aspects of, and in what ways, the students' identities influence the narratives they construct and their use of particular types of historical significance. Sociocultural studies in education posit that a student's identity plays an integral role in how he/she learns (Nieto, 2004). This has been explored by a few history education researchers but remains an underdeveloped field of study, particularly in Canada.

In order to teach students about the relationship between ethnic identity and ascriptions of historical significance in the construction of historical narratives, teachers need to understand the nature of historical inquiry generally, and the nature of historical significance in particular so that they can communicate this to students. It is important that teachers think about their own prior conceptions of what historical significance is and the criteria they use to ascribe significance to past events. Agnes, profiled briefly in Section 4.1.2.5, brought a sophisticated understanding of historical significance to her history lessons. She and her
students engaged in questions about the complexity of historical interpretations and explored how the ordinary, the marginalized, the excluded can, in fact, become historically significant. Some students did this more successfully than others. Those students who employed the “Diverse but Conflicted Canada” narrative placed more emphasis on events that documented the trials of marginalized groups; such events became historically significant precisely because of the students’ decision to emplot them within this particular narrative. Teachers need to teach students about the complexity of historical interpretation and that ascriptions of historical significance vary and are contingent on a variety of factors, including ethnic identity.

Students need to learn, however, that personal interests (including interest in one’s ethnic identity) need to be balanced with a deeper engagement and understanding of the nature of historical inquiry. Seixas’ (1997a) subjectivist–objectivist framework, discussed in Section 2.6, might be helpful here. In the present study, several students attempted to negotiate the tension inherent in Seixas’ subjectivist-objectivist split, a negotiation characterized by the ability to weave events of personal significance into a larger historical narrative. Both Will and Sam constantly strove to balance what was historically significant to them, personally, with the historical significance of events in Canadian history writ large. For example, Will connected the history of his ancestors coming to Canada with the history of the development of Canada, including the building of the Canadian Pacific Railway. Sam argued fervently (yet in vain) for his group to consider events related to ethnic minorities, noting that as members of ethnic minorities in Canada, he and his group-mates are still affected by such events. With this argument, Sam connected events of personal significance to the history of the struggle for minority rights in Canada.

It is also important to interrogate existing narrative templates (e.g., in texts, movies, etc.) as well as the ones students bring to the study of history – where
do these narratives come from? What is the perspective of the author of these narratives? How do students’ ethnic identities influence the narratives they build? Students need to identify and explore the reasons why they are drawn to particular narrative templates; which narratives they take for granted as the status quo. If dominant narratives are reproduced, students need to be taught to question the dominance of such narratives and how they have permeated students’ lives. Do other students understand Canadian history in the same way? If not, why not? What is the nature of the differences in understandings? Specifically, how does one’s identity influence one’s understanding of Canadian history? An exploration of this type will help students understand that narratives can be emplotted in different ways (White, 1998).

Shemilt (2000) tentatively suggests a four-stage framework of progression of narrative frameworks that ranges from a simple chronological ordering of events to more coherent narratives that embrace multiple dimensions (such as economic, political and social history) and propose alternative trajectories. I do not propose to evaluate the narratives that students constructed in this study based on Shemilt’s framework of progression but I do think that it is important to teach students the difference between simplistic and complex historical narratives so that they can evaluate their own and other narrative constructions.

Shemilt (2000) argues that, “to be truly useful, the frameworks employed by pupils must not just be ordered and coherent, complex and multidimensional; they must be polythetic and admit of alternate narratives” (p. 98). It is important to help students locate particular narratives within “the whole of the past” (p. 92) “but also to understand…how one or another narrative is prominent at different times” (Trofanenko, 2008, p. 599).

There are many ways this can be done. One way is to replicate the timeline activity from this study in the teacher’s own classroom. Instead of teaching
students the “five most important events that led to [x]” why not have students identify what they believe to be the most significant events leading to [x] and then unpack the students’ decisions? The teacher and students then become more aware of the prior conceptions influencing the students’ decisions and the teacher has more information on which he/she can base future lessons.

There is a danger, here, of course. Social studies curricula in Canada have begun to attend to “dimensions of thinking,” with historical thinking taking on a prominent role as curricula are revised. However, in most curricula, historical thinking is not clearly articulated, or it is broken down into a discrete set of skills. Consequently, many teachers are not sure what it means to “think historically.” Long-term professional development based on a framework of historical thinking (Peck & Seixas, 2008) could help teachers better understand how to engage their students in sophisticated historical inquiry.

I have recently completed a year-long project (five full days of professional development) on historical thinking with kindergarten – grade twelve teachers and found (anecdotally) that many teachers involved in the project have completed such an exercise but then became disappointed when their students did not select the “right five events.” So they repeated the exercise, “guiding” students to the “right” answer. The teachers with whom I have worked are still grappling with the complexity of historical significance as a second-order concept in history. Their understanding that events are not historically significant in and of themselves and that ascriptions of significance vary contradicts their experiences in the classroom, where the “one right answer” philosophy seems to dominate. My experience with these teachers demonstrates the need for sustained professional development on historical thinking.

The suggestions detailed above demand that history teachers consider the content and pedagogy of their history courses simultaneously; that to “teach
content” means also teaching the way in which historians arrive at the content – the processes they engage in and the decisions they make in crafting historical narratives and conclusions (Seixas, 1999). Shulman (1986) argues that effective teachers employ three forms of knowledge when planning and teaching their courses: subject matter knowledge, which includes both disciplinary content knowledge and the organizing framework(s) that guide the discipline; pedagogical content knowledge, knowledge such as analogies and exemplars which enable the teacher to communicate the central ideas of the discipline; and finally curricular knowledge, which involves decisions around what to teach, how to teach it and how to assess student learning. For Shulman, the first two, subject matter knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge, are the most critical because taken together, they comprise a deep understanding of what is to be taught.

The importance of teachers’ subject matter and pedagogical knowledge on their teaching practice is not entirely uncontested, however. Although Barton and Levstik (2004) agree that disciplinary and pedagogical knowledge are important understandings for history teachers, they also question if it is enough. Does a sophisticated disciplinary understanding, combined with a deep understanding of historical content automatically ensure good history teaching? Not necessarily. Both Wineburg (2001) and Barton and Levstik (2004) note that a high degree of subject matter and pedagogical knowledge does not guarantee effective history teaching: “Unless they have a clear sense of purpose, teachers’ primary actions continue to be coverage of the curriculum and control of students, no matter how much they know about history, teaching, or the intersection of the two” (Barton & Levstik, 2004, p. 258). What might be more (or at least equally) important, then, are the rationales and goals that teachers bring to their teaching of history.

Deng (2007) presents another contesting viewpoint, arguing that scholars need to distinguish between academic disciplines and the corresponding school
subjects when discussing teachers' subject matter and pedagogical content knowledge. According to Deng, “school subjects and academic disciplines are significantly different. School subjects come first and academic disciplines later in one’s learning journey from school to university” (p. 510). Drawing on the work of John Dewey, Deng argues that teachers need knowledge of the school subject they will be teaching so that they will be able to modify and adapt it according to the needs and interests of their students. He views the academic discipline “as the ‘culmination’ or ‘completed outgrowth’ of the school subject” (p. 511) and argues that it is knowledge of the school subject that differentiates a science teacher from a scientist, whose knowledge resides in the discipline alone. The central thesis of Deng's argument is (again, he draws on Dewey) that in practice, teachers recreate the school subject, as written in curricular documents, vis-à-vis the needs and interests of their students and in so doing, do not draw on academic disciplines. Instead, teachers observe their students to see how, for example, geography or science is reflected in their interests and develop the school subject accordingly. However, what Deng does not acknowledge is that, in order for teachers to “see” the geography or science that students are interested in, they must first have an understanding of what geography or science is – teachers will only be able to recognize students' interest in these (or other) disciplines if they have an understanding of the disciplines themselves.

6.2 Policy/Curricular Implications

Canada’s experience with and policy towards ethnic diversity is different from other pluralist societies where some of the research on identity and students' understandings of historical significance has taken place. This experience and policy must be taken into account in any discussion on the nature of ethnicity and ethnic identity in Canada. The first difference is rooted in the country’s demographics. On the 2006 Census, more than 41 percent of Canadians listed multiple ethnic groups when asked to describe their ethnic background (Statistics
Canada, n.d.). This is quite different, for example, from the Black-White dichotomy that dominates discussions of ethnicity in the United States (Kymlicka, 1998; McLaren & Torres, 1999).

Kymlicka argues that, although other countries have also begun to wrestle with the tensions associated with living in a pluralist society, Canada is unique in this regard both in terms of the range of diversity present in the country, and “in the extent to which it has not only legislated but also constitutionalized practices of accommodation” (Kymlicka, 2003, p. 374, original emphasis). While the Canadian experience is held up by some as a model for multicultural societies, others argue that Canada’s approach to ethnic diversity has caused disunity, conflict, and has threatened Canadian identity (Bissoondath, 2002; Granatstein, 1998). Kymlicka posits that policy development related to diversity in general and with regard to Aboriginal groups, French Canadians and immigrant/ethnic groups in particular has resulted in three “vertical silos” and notes that “there is no superministry of diversity – no diversity czar who oversees the federal ministries that administer policies relating to these groups. There are just the three silos, with their own separate histories, discourses, legal frameworks and governance structures” (Kymlicka, 2007, p. 41). Provincial control over education further complicates the ways in which educational jurisdictions have responded to the increasing diversity in Canadian schools (Hebert, Wilkinson, & Ali, 2008; Sears & Hughes, 2008).

Across Canada, curriculum developers have placed identity as a core concept in social studies curricula at all grade levels (Gibson, 2009; Hebert et al., 2008). For example, in the BC grade 11 social studies curriculum, “Society and Identity” is one of several concepts around which curricular topics are organized. The BC Ministry of Education stipulates that, by the end of grade 11, students are to understand “what it means to be Canadian” (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2005, p. 29).
Like the BC example, in other Canadian social studies curricula identity is typically discussed in a unidirectional fashion. That is, curricula instruct teachers that a central purpose of Canadian social studies is to help students develop a sense of Canadian identity. What social studies curricula do not address is the way in which a student’s identity may help him/her understand Canadian history or other social studies subjects. Identity, as encapsulated in Canadian social studies curricula, is articulated as something that students can acquire by studying curricular topics but not as something that influences learning. This articulation requires a radical rethinking.

In Chapter 2, I noted that Barton and McCully (2004) suggested that teachers and schools should take into account student identities in order to customize curricula to better address student needs and interests. But is it possible or even desirable to integrate the histories of an entire area, province or country’s ethnic groups into social studies curricula? I do not think so. With increased mobility and ever-changing demographics, school districts and teachers could never keep up with the curricular changes such a policy would demand. As Partington (1980a) observed almost 30 years ago, “a willingness and concern to take into account the characteristics of the total population should not be identified with a search for a calculus with which to quantify syllabus content proportionally to group membership” (p. 129). This approach, Partington noted, could result in breadth and not depth of historical knowledge and could also misrepresent the past in so far as “important and significant events or processes have not necessarily been distributed evenly and equally between peoples (and not even among the same people at different points of time)” (p. 130). What is more important, therefore, is to build awareness that narratives taught in school and/or espoused in society represent only possible narrative interpretations of the past. Curricula must include investigations of other possible narratives including ones that include and exclude particular groups in the trajectory of history.
6.3 Future research

In order to gain a deeper understanding of the relationship between students’ ethnic identities and their understandings of historical significance, more studies that provoke students to think about such relationships are required. The students in this study were able to engage in metacognitive thinking because of a research question that pushed and challenged their prior understandings; that pushed interviewees to articulate their beliefs about the relationship between identity (self-ascribed) and the narratives they constructed.

Further research investigating whether a common lexicon of criteria for historical significance is tenable across ethnic groups and research tasks is also merited. The inclusion of a detailed explanation of the typology of significance presented in Cercadillo’s (2000; 2001) research enabled me to assess the degree to which such a typology was useful for my own work. A noteworthy finding from this research is the degree of consistency of terms and criteria between the Canadian students in my study and the Spanish and English students in Cercadillo’s research. I have added to Cercadillo’s typology in important ways detailed in Chapter 4 and suggest that more research into the application of such a typology in a diverse range of settings is warranted.

Crucially, researchers must also investigate teachers’ understandings of historical significance, including the ways in which identity impacts these understandings. As noted earlier, teachers’ subject matter (and pedagogical) knowledge can have a significant influence on student learning and therefore it is important to understand the ways in which teachers understand the concept of historical significance and the influence identity may have on such conceptions.

Although this research focused solely on the influence students’ ethnic identities may have had on their conceptions of historical significance, glimpses of the influence of other aspects of one’s identity emerged in this research. For
instance, Adélie’s strong political stance also influenced the decisions she made during the research task. An investigation into the relationship between other aspects of one’s identity (e.g., class and gender) and conceptions of historical significance would enrich our understandings of the complicated interplay between identity and conceptions of history. Indeed, Barton (2008b) notes that, when it comes to gender, “few researchers have explored these differences in depth or attempted to explain them theoretically” (p. 250). Further, given the fluid, complex and overlapping nature of identity (Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, & Taubman, 2000), research that investigates the salience of particular aspects of one’s identity over others during particular research tasks would be especially interesting: “There is no single way in which students negotiate the competing demands of differing historical discourses, and therefore much more research is needed to illustrate the specific ways in which students of given backgrounds learn history both in and out of school” (Barton, 2008b, p. 250).

What might be helpful in this endeavor, for both teachers and students, is a typology of conceptions of identity. In Chapter 2, I articulated one conception of ethnic identity formation; a conceptualization grounded in the understanding of ethnic identity as complex, fluid and (potentially) plural. Hybridity theory (Bhabha, 2001) provides further dimension to this conception of ethnic identity in that it reveals the power relations and ambivalence at work in ethnic identity formation. Several theorists note the social dimension of ethnic identity construction (Bannerji, 2000; Barker, 1999; Jenkins, 1996; Nagel, 1994), that certain aspects of one’s identity may be more or less salient depending on context (Dei et al., 2004) and that individuals actively engage in their own ethnic identity construction (Hall, 1991), either consciously or sub-consciously making choices about aspects of their identity.

A typology of identity construction should also include the work of other scholars who conceptualize identity in other ways: as subjectivity (Butler, 1997; Taubman,
1993); as a project (Ryan, 1998); as agency (Côté & Levine, 2002); as dialogism (Holquist, 2004) or as essence (Levinas, 1981); to name just a few. Such a typology would extend beyond ethnicity to other aspects of one’s identity and would be helpful in that it would constitute a conceptual framework that teachers and students could employ to help them understand their own identity. Such a typology should be clearly written and malleable to allow for revision as new understandings of identity emerge.

Finally, I concur with Barton (2008b), who recently called for longitudinal research into students’ historical understandings, claiming that “the greatest need in the area of research on students’ ideas about history is for long-term classroom studies of how students’ ideas change as a result of instruction” (p. 248).

6.4 Conclusion

As noted above, social studies and history curricula across Canada include “identity” as a core concept and seek to help students understand how their own and other’s identities are shaped and nurtured, and how identities change over time. Key to developing these understandings is providing opportunities for students to articulate their ideas about their own changing identities (ethnic and otherwise) and the ways in which identity can influence their understandings of educational content generally, and historical content more specifically.

In this dissertation I have addressed what I see as two significant gaps in the literature on students’ historical understandings. The first is an articulation of the nature of ethnicity and ethnic diversity. This articulation comes with an important caveat, however. Just as identity, and ethnic identity in particular, is in a constant state of flux, so must be attempts to define these concepts. Any definitions or other such understandings of ethnicity (and related concepts) must always be
considered tentative and open to discussion and elaboration. Otherwise, one runs the risk of returning to the problem of essentialized definitions of identity.

The second issue I addressed was the need for researchers to more directly attend to the relationship between students’ ethnic identities and their historical understandings. Doing so has important ramifications for critical pedagogy:

The development of the individual coupled with the construction of a democratic community is central to a transformative social education. Embracing a critical alterity (awareness of difference) involving responsiveness to others, the new social education works to cultivate an intersubjectivity that develops both social consciousness and individual agency….Understandings derived from the perspective of the excluded, or the culturally different, allow for an appreciation of the nature of justice, the invisibility of the process of oppression, and the difference that highlights our own social construction as human beings. (J. L. Kincheloe, 2001, p. 179)

Why should history educators and researchers care about the complex relationships that exist between students’ ethnic identities and their historical understandings? I, along with others, believe there are important implications for citizenship for this work. Kymlicka (1998) argues that, although

history is a source of division between national groups…the fact that English, French, and Aboriginal people share a history in Canada has helped to shape a shared Canadian identity – an identification with Canadian political institutions and symbols – even though each of these groups has very different interpretations and assessments of that history. (p. 174)

Similarly, Barton and Levstik posit that,
identity anchored in history provides a more durable commitment to our nation and our fellow citizens...Regardless of our political inclinations, when our identity is grounded in the nation’s history [histories], we have incentives for shared action and public responsibility that would be lacking if we lived only in the present. (Barton & Levstik, 2004, p. 60)

Barton and Levstik’s argument is that students will have a greater sense of belonging to the nation if their history lessons provide them with opportunities to understand both how the nation developed and how that development has impacted the students’ own identity formation. Gutmann (1994) writes: “if human identity is dialogically created and constituted, then public recognition of our identity requires a politics that leaves room for us to deliberate publicly about those aspects of our identities that we share, or potentially share, with other citizens” (p. 7). Studying history and identity can provide students with opportunities to historicize identity – individual identity, (ethnic) group identity and national identity, among others – thereby enabling them to understand “identity” as a historically situated concept. In addition, students can also gain a better understanding of themselves as historically situated subjects. This is particularly important in the Canadian context, where arguments about what it means to “be Canadian” have been, and continue to be, endemic.
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APPENDIX A: CONSENT FORM (STUDENT)

Multi-Ethnic High School Students’ Conceptions of Historical Significance: Implications for Canadian History Education

Principal Investigator: Dr. Peter Seixas, Dept. of Curriculum Studies, 604-822-5277

Co-Investigator: Ms. Carla Peck, PhD student, Dept. of Curriculum Studies, 604-822-4331

(Note: The information gathered from this project will be used for Ms. Peck’s PhD dissertation.)

Dear Parent/Guardian: The purpose of this letter is to invite you to provide your approval, or consent, for your child to take part in a research project.

Purpose: This project has 2 goals: (1) To explore how adolescents decide what events from Canada’s past are important and should be remembered. (2) To assess the relationship (if any) between a student’s ethnic, cultural or national identity and the decisions he/she makes about which historical events are important and should be remembered. The results of the study will help educators develop strategies for improving the teaching of history in multicultural societies.

Research Procedures: The research will be carried out in four separate sessions, between March – May 2006: A questionnaire and short written task (30 minutes), a small group timeline task (60 min.), a small group interview (60 min.), and a follow-up individual interview (15 min.). Total time for data collection: 2 hours, 45 minutes (maximum)

The first activity (questionnaire and short written task) will take place during social studies class time as a part of the regular class routine. The small group timeline activity and small group interview, and the final interview, will take place either before or after school, in the school, at the mutual convenience of the students, researcher and school staff. These will be audio-recorded.

Confidentiality: Students’ identities will be kept strictly confidential. Each student will be given a code number. It is important to note that confidentiality amongst students participating in the small group timeline task and small group interview cannot be guaranteed simply due to the fact that the students will hear each others’ responses. However, student statements and all research materials will be identified only by code number and no computer files will include any student’s names. All documents will be kept in a locked filing cabinet. Students will not be identified by name in any reports of the completed study.
Contact for information about the study: If you or your child has any questions or wants more information about this study, you may contact Carla Peck, PhD student, at 604-822-4331 or her research supervisor, Dr. Peter Seixas at UBC at 604-822-5277.

Contact for concerns about the rights of research subjects: If you have any concerns about your child’s treatment or rights as a research subject, you or your child may contact the Research Subject Information Line in the UBC Office of Research Services at 604-822-8598.

Consent: Your child’s participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You or he/she may refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or jeopardy to his/her class standing.

Instructions:

• Please fill out numbers 1 and 2 on the next page.

• If you would like to receive a summary of the research findings, please also fill out number 3 at the bottom of the page.

• Detach Pages 3 and 4 and place the completed form in the envelope provided, seal the envelope and have your child return it to the school secretary. Only Ms. Peck will open the returned envelope.

• Please keep pages 1 and 2 for your records.

• Remember, your child’s participation in this research is optional. If you or he/she decides not to participate, or wants to stop participation once the study has started, you or he/she will not be at risk of jeopardizing his/her grades or standing in the school. This project has nothing to do with marks and will not influence his/her grades or report cards in any way.

Thank you very much for your consideration of this request.
Page 3 – Consent Form:

Please complete the following form. Your signatures below indicate that you have received a copy of this consent form for your own records. (Please keep pages 1 and 2 for your records.)

**NOTE: In order for a student to participate in the study, a parent/guardian AND student must indicate their consent/assent by signing this form.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(1) For Parents/Guardians: Please circle one of the following options:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>YES, I consent (or, agree) to my child’s participation in the research study, “Multi-Ethnic High School Students’ Conceptions of Historical Significance: Implications for Canadian History Education.” I understand that portions of this research will be audio-recorded.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NO, I do not consent to my child’s participation in the research study, “Multi-Ethnic High School Students’ Conceptions of Historical Significance: Implications for Canadian History Education.”</td>
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</table>

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<th>Parent or Guardian signature</th>
<th>Date</th>
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Printed name of Parent or Guardian signing above.

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<th>(2) For student: Please circle one of the following options:</th>
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<tr>
<td>YES, I assent (or agree) to participate in the research study, “Multi-Ethnic High School Students’ Conceptions of Historical Significance: Implications for Canadian History Education.” I understand that portions of this research will be audio-recorded.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NO, I do not assent (or, I do not agree) to participate in the research study, “Multi-Ethnic High School Students’ Conceptions of Historical Significance: Implications for Canadian History Education.”</td>
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</table>

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<th>Student signature</th>
<th>Date</th>
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Printed name of student signing above.
Page 4 – Consent Form:

(3) If you would like a summary of the research findings, please print your mailing address here:
APPENDIX B: CONSENT FORM (TEACHER)

Multi-Ethnic High School Students’ Conceptions of Historical Significance: Implications for Canadian History Education

Principal Investigator: Dr. Peter Seixas, Dept. of Curriculum Studies, 604-822-5277

Co-Investigator: Ms. Carla Peck, PhD student, Dept. of Curriculum Studies, 604-822-4331

(Note: The information gathered from this project will be used for Ms. Peck’s PhD dissertation.)

Dear Grades 8 – 12 Social Studies Teachers: This purpose of this letter is to invite you to participate in a Social Studies research project.

Purpose: This project has 2 goals: (1) To explore how adolescents decide what events from Canada’s past are important and should be remembered. (2) To assess the relationship (if any) between a student’s ethnic, cultural or national identity and the decisions he/she makes about which historical events are important and should be remembered. The results of the study will help educators develop strategies for improving the teaching of history in multicultural societies.

Research Procedures: The research with social studies teachers will take the form of a questionnaire, to be filled out by Social Studies teachers (individually) at his/her convenience. While teachers are not the focus of this study, they can provide useful information that will help situate the research findings in the broader context of the students’ social studies education environment.

The research with students will be carried out in four separate sessions, between March – May 2006: A questionnaire and short written task (30 minutes), a small group timeline task (60 min.), a small group interview (60 min.), and a follow-up individual interview (15 min.).

Total time for data collection: 2 hours, 45 minutes (maximum)

The first activity (questionnaire and short written task) will take place during social studies class time as a part of the regular class routine. The small group timeline activity and small group interview, and the final interview, will take place either before or after school, in the school, at the mutual convenience of the students, researcher and school staff.
Confidentiality: Teachers’ identities will be kept strictly confidential. Each teacher will be given a code number. All research materials will be identified only by code number and no computer files will include any teacher’s names. The questionnaires will be kept in a locked filing cabinet. Teachers will not be identified by name in any reports of the completed study.

Contact for information about the study: If you have any questions or want more information about this study, you may contact Carla Peck, PhD student, at 604-822-4331 or her research supervisor, Dr. Peter Seixas at UBC at 604-822-5277.

Contact for concerns about the rights of research subjects: If you have any concerns about your treatment or rights as a research subject, you may contact the Research Subject Information Line in the UBC Office of Research Services at 604-822-8598.

Consent: Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You may refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any time.
**Teacher Consent Form:**

Please complete the following form. Your signature below indicates that you have received a copy of this consent form for your own records. (Please keep pages 1-2 for your records.)

Please circle **one** of the following options:

**YES, I consent (or, agree)** to participate in the research study, “Multi-Ethnic High School Students’ Conceptions of Historical Significance: Implications for Canadian History Education.”

**OR**

**NO, I do not consent** to participate in the research study, “Multi-Ethnic High School Students’ Conceptions of Historical Significance: Implications for Canadian History Education.”

________________________________________________________________

Teacher signature      Date

________________________________________________________________

Printed name of teacher signing above
APPENDIX C : STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRE

Research Identification Code # ______________ Date: ______________

Part 1

(Using your research identification code # helps keep your information confidential.)

1. Date of birth: ____________________________ (Month, Day, Year)

2. Gender: ___________________

3. Place of birth: __________________________ __________________________________________________________
   town/city __________________________ country

4. Parents’/Guardians’ place of birth (leave blank if not known):
   (a) Mother/Guardian: __________________________ __________________________________________________________
      town/city __________________________ country
   (b) Father/Guardian: __________________________ __________________________________________________________
      town/city __________________________ country

5. Were your grandparents born in Canada?
   Mother’s parents: YES NO DON’T KNOW (circle one)
   Father’s parents: YES NO DON’T KNOW (circle one)

6. Have you lived in Vancouver all your life? YES NO (circle one)
   If YES, skip to question 7. If NO, what year did you move to Vancouver? __________

7. How many years have you lived in Canada (total number of years, even if you lived outside of British Columbia)? __________

8. How often do you see relatives other than your mother, father, (or guardians), sisters and brothers?
☐ everyday
☐ one or more times a week
☐ one or more times a month
☐ one or more times a year
☐ very rarely or never

9. Are you a Canadian citizen? YES NO (circle one)
   If YES, how many years have you been a Canadian citizen?
   ☐ All my life OR _________________ (years)

10. Did you take Social Studies 11 or First Nations 12 last year? YES NO (circle one)
    Which one did you take? __________________________

11. What is your postal code? _______________
Part 2

1. Do you consider yourself to be a member of a religious group?  
   **YES NO** (circle one)  
   If **YES**, please put a ✓ next to your religious group:

   - □ Aboriginal  
   - □ Anglican  
   - □ Atheist  
   - □ Baptist  
   - □ Buddhist  
   - □ Catholic  
   - □ Hindu  
   - □ Jewish  
   - □ Muslim  
   - □ Protestant  
   - □ Sikh  
   - □ Other (please specify): _______________________

2. What languages do you speak at home? (Please ✓ all that apply)

   - □ Cambodian  
   - □ Cantonese  
   - □ Chinese  
   - □ Dutch  
   - □ English  
   - □ Finnish  
   - □ French  
   - □ German  
   - □ Greek  
   - □ Hebrew  
   - □ Hokkien  
   - □ Japanese  
   - □ Khmer  
   - □ Kurdish  
   - □ Korean  
   - □ Mandarin  
   - □ Persian  
   - □ Punjabi  
   - □ Spanish  
   - □ Tagalog  
   - □ Taiwanese  
   - □ Tamil  
   - □ Tutchone  
   - □ Vietnamese  
   - □ Yiddish  
   - □ Other: _______________________

   Of the languages you checked above, which one do you use most often?

   At school: _______________________  At home: _________________________

3. Please list any sports teams, hobby clubs, community organizations or ethnic organizations or associations that you belong to:

   __________________________________________
   __________________________________________
   __________________________________________
4. I would now like to ask you about your ethnic ancestry, heritage or background.50

This question refers to the ethnic or cultural origins of your ancestors, including ancestors from both sides of your family. An **ancestor** is someone from whom you have descended and is usually more distant than a grandparent. Ethnic or cultural ancestry refers to your “roots” or cultural background and should not be confused with citizenship or nationality. (Continued on next page.)

What were the ethnic or cultural origins of your **ancestors**?

___________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________

5. I would now like you to think about your **own** identity in ethnic, cultural and/or national terms. This identity may be the same as that of your parents, grandparents or ancestors, or it may be different. Your ethnic, cultural and/or national identity is the ethnic, cultural and/or national group or groups to which you feel you belong.

Using the information you provided so far, as well as any other personal information that will help you, please write a paragraph describing your **ethnic, cultural and/or national identity**.

It is possible that you could describe yourself as having more than one type of (cultural, ethnic or national) identity. For instance, one person might describe his or her identity as “Greek,” even though they were born in Canada. Another person might describe their identity as “Canadian,” even though he or she was born in Greece. Someone else might decide that they are both of these: “Greek-Canadian.” **There are no wrong answers** — describe yourself the way that makes the most sense to you.

___________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________

**50** Questions 3 and 4 on Part 2 of the Student Questionnaire are adapted from *The Ethnic Diversity Survey* conducted by Statistics Canada in the summer of 2002.
(You may use the back of this sheet if you need more room.)
Thank you very much for your answers! All information will be kept confidential.
# APPENDIX D: TEACHER QUESTIONNAIRE

Teacher ID Code: ___________

1. How long have you been a teacher? ______ years

2a. Please list the Social Studies courses (i.e., Social Studies 11, etc.) you have taught in the past:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course 1</th>
<th>Course 2</th>
<th>Course 3</th>
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2b. Please list the Social Studies courses you are currently teaching:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course 1</th>
<th>Course 2</th>
<th>Course 3</th>
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3a. Do you also have an administrative position (i.e., Department Head, Vice-Principal, etc.) in your school? Yes No

3b. If YES, what position do you hold? _______________________________________

4. Of the following teaching approaches and/or activities, which ones have you used when teaching Social Studies? **Please check all that apply.**

- [ ] Lecture
- [ ] Group work
- [ ] Copying notes from board/overhead
- [ ] “Jigsaw”
- [ ] Internet research
- [ ] Web-Quests
- [ ] Cooperative learning
- [ ] Film/Television programs
- [ ] Field Trips
- [ ] Teaching with artifacts
- [ ] Document analysis
- [ ] Games
- [ ] Library research
- [ ] Read & answer textbook questions
- [ ] Problem-based learning
- [ ] Role play/simulation
- [ ] Other: ________________________________

5. Of the responses you checked in question #4, above, which THREE would you say you use most often when teaching Social Studies?

(1)
6. What textbook(s) are you using in the courses you are teaching right now?

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<th>COURSE</th>
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7. What other materials (supplementary texts, information books, handouts, etc.) do you use when teaching Social Studies? If you would like to provide examples (of handouts, for instance), please attach them to this questionnaire when you return it. Thank you.

8. How do you usually organize your course (chronologically, thematically, etc.)?
   ______________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________

9. What is your understanding of the concept of “significance” in history? How do you decide what is and is not historically significant (in your courses, or just in general)?
   ______________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________
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   ______________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________
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   ______________________________________________________

   (You can use the back of this page if you need more space.)

10. What is your academic background? **Please check all that apply.**
<table>
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<tr>
<th>11.</th>
<th>Is there anything else you would like me to know about you (in terms of teaching Social Studies)?</th>
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Thank you very much for taking the time to complete this questionnaire. Your responses will be very helpful to me. **All information will be kept strictly confidential.**
APPENDIX E: TIMELINE TASK INTERVIEW PROTOCOL: PART ONE

(Adapted from studies conducted by Barton, Epstein, Levstik and Seixas)

(Script)

Have you ever seen a timeline like this in your classroom or in books (show sample timeline)? Do you know what they are for? (If necessary, explain that a time line is a way of showing some important things in history and when they happened.) I’m going to give you a blank time line and as a group, you get to decide what should be on it.

I’ve brought with me 30 pictures showing different events in Canadian history. Some of the pictures are from a long time ago, some from a little while ago, and some are very recent. Each picture has a caption underneath it that explains a little bit about it. You can decide to read the caption or not – it’s up to you. You’re going to work together to decide which of these are important enough to put on a timeline. You can only pick 10, so you have to talk with each other and make a decision about which ones are the most important. Please record the 10 you pick on the sheet provided.

Do you have any questions before you start? (Allow time for students to reflect on the task and ask questions.) Remember, when you start, you’ll need to look over all of the events and then talk to each other about which ones are important enough to put on the timeline and why. If there are any words you don’t understand in the captions, I will help you with them.

Sample (blank) timeline:

…_____________________________________________________________...

(years)  1500    1750    2005
Our 10 Most Significant Events in Canadian History

Research identification numbers: ________, ________, ________, ________

Date: _______________________

Please list below the 10 events your group chose as significant and worthy of putting on your timeline. You can list them by the titles given in bold on each page.

_____________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________
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_____________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________

311
APPENDIX F: FOCUS GROUP STIMULI (TIMELINE ACTIVITY)

1. Granting of Royal Charter for Fur Trade, 1670

On May 2, 1670, King Charles II of England granted British merchants a royal charter giving them control of all the trade in the British North American territory drained by rivers flowing into Hudson Bay. The company was called the Hudson’s Bay Company (HBC). In 1821 it took control of its rival, the North West Company. The HBC soon had trading posts all the way to the Pacific coast.

Text adapted from: http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com/

2. English Expel Acadians, 1755 – 1758

Acadians (people of French descent) who refused to swear an oath of allegiance to British King George II were sent away from the Minas Basin area (in Nova Scotia) and over the next few months most of the Acadian population of Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island was rounded up and transported away. Some records suggest that at least 10 000 Acadians were deported and that about one half of the Acadians died in the process, many at sea.

Text adapted from: http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com/

3. The Siege of Québec, 1759

One battle of the Seven Years' War was the Battle of the Plains of Abraham. Major-General James Wolfe (British) planned an attack on the city from a secluded cove three kilometres west of the city walls. Wolfe and 4800 troops landed undetected there on the night of 13 September 1759. They scaled the cliffs and advanced to the Plains of Abraham. The Marquis de Montcalm (French), fought Wolfe and his troops with an army of 4500. The British won and both Montcalm and Wolfe were fatally wounded. Québec surrendered a few days later.

Text adapted from: http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com/ and http://www.warmuseum.ca/
4. Europeans arrive on west coast of Canada, 1778

On March 30th, 1778, British Captain James Cook sailed his ship Resolution into Nootka Sound for the first time. Spanish Captain Jose Maria Narvaez explored the Strait of Georgia in 1791. In the following year, 1792, the British naval Captain George Vancouver sailed his ship Discovery and joined the Spanish expedition based at Nootka Sound on Vancouver Island’s west coast and explored the Strait of Georgia, as well as the Puget Sound in the present day Seattle area.

5. The War of 1812

The War of 1812 lasted from June 1812 to December 1814. Most of the fighting took place in the border regions between the U.S. and Upper and Lower Canada [Ontario and Québec]. British soldiers stationed in Canada were supported by Canadian militiamen and also by native warriors. The native fighters included Chief Tecumseh and others from the Ohio Valley, and Mohawks from the Grand River in Upper Canada and from Caughnawaga in Lower Canada.

Text adapted from: http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com/

6. Fraser River Gold Rush, 1858

The first wave of miners from California arrived at Victoria on their way to the Fraser River Gold Rush. Some 30 000 gold seekers flooded the banks of the Fraser River.

Text adapted from: http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com/

7. Confederation, 1867


Text adapted from: http://collections.ic.gc.ca/
8. Creation of Indian Residential Schools, mid 1800s

The Indian residential school system predates Confederation and in part grew out of Canada’s missionary experience with various religious organizations. However, the Indian Acts of 1876 and 1880 ensured that control of finances and social services, including education, were controlled by the federal government. In 1920, Canada amended the Indian Act, making it mandatory for aboriginal parents to send their children to Indian residential schools. Although many aboriginal parents recognized that their children could benefit from European-style education, many also disagreed with the way the residential schools were run.

9. Building of the Canadian Pacific Railway, 1881-1885

A group of Montreal businessmen formed the Canadian Pacific Railway Company (CPR) in 1881. They received generous help from the government in the form of land, money, and a monopoly over rail transport between the CPR main line and the U.S. border for 20 years. The CPR was completed on November 7th, 1885.

Text adapted from: [http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com/](http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com/)

10. Recruitment of Chinese workers to build the Canadian Pacific Railway, 1880s-1890s

During the late 19th century agents from Hong Kong (a British colony at the time) went from village to village in south China to recruit laborers for shipment to Canada.

Approximately 7,000 were recruited to work on the Canadian Pacific Railway with promises of good money and permanent settlement. Those who came were grouped into workgangs of 30 for the construction of the CPR. They worked for about $1/day.

11. Imposition of the Chinese Head Tax, 1885

When the Canadian Pacific Railway was finished, the Federal Government decided to restrict the immigration of Chinese to Canada. The first federal anti-Chinese bill was passed in 1885. It took the form of a head tax of $50 imposed, with only a few exceptions, upon every person
of Chinese origin entering the country. No other group was targeted in this way.

Text adapted from: http://www.ccnc.ca/

12. Louis Riel and the North-West Rebellion, 1885

Louis Riel’s role in history is disputed even today. To some, he defended aboriginal people against unfair treatment by the Canadian government. To others, he is a traitor for having instigated Canada’s only civil war (the North-West Rebellion). As well, he is seen by many as the founder of Manitoba and as a defender of western Canada’s interests in the new Canadian nation. After the North-West Rebellion, Riel was tried and found guilty of high treason, and he was hanged in Regina on November 16, 1885.

13. Anti-Asiatic Riots, Vancouver, 1907

In 1907, Vancouver was in an economic slump. Unemployed whites were competing with the Chinese for work. September 8th, 1907 started out as a parade staged by the Asiatic Exclusion League (AEL). Eight or nine thousand turned out at city hall for a series of inflammatory anti-Asian speeches about the “yellow peril”. The leaders of the AEL encouraged people to march through Chinatown, where they looted and burned thousands of dollars worth of Chinese property.

Text adapted from: http://collections.ic.gc.ca/

14. Record Immigration Numbers, 1913

In 1913 an all time record of 400 870 people entered Canada. Many immigrants left their homelands to escape from urban slums or rural poverty. Others sought temporary employment to support families left behind. Some came to Canada in search of wealth and adventure. Freedom from religious or political persecution in their countries induced many other immigrants to come.

Text adapted from: http://www.ucalgary.ca/applied_history/tutor/canada1891/5frame.html
15. The Komagata Maru incident, 1914

The Komagata Maru was a ship that arrived in Vancouver in May 1914. On board were 376 South Asians, mostly Sikhs. As members of the British Empire, they were legally allowed to enter Canada, but in 1908 the federal government had passed a law aimed at preventing South Asians from immigrating to Canada. Canadian officials in Vancouver would not let the South Asians land. In July the ship was forced to leave for India. The passengers were met by Indian government officials and police, who saw the passengers as dangerous political activists. Shooting broke out and 20 passengers of the Komagata Maru were killed.

Text adapted from: http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com/

16. Britain (and Canada) enters World War I, 1914-1918

World War I began on August 4, 1914, and ended on November 11, 1918. Canada was automatically at war because its foreign policy was then controlled by Great Britain. Canadians were involved in many battles, including the battle of Ypres in 1915, the battle of the Somme in 1916 and the battle of Vimy Ridge in 1917. At Vimy Ridge, all four Canadian divisions attacked together for the first time. Canadians also participated in the air war. Canadian women also participated in the war, many as army nurses in Europe or as workers in war-supply and munitions factories in Canada.

17. The Women’s Suffrage Movement, 1916-1918

In January 1916 Manitoba passed a law that granted women the vote. It was soon followed by other provinces. These laws permitted women to vote in provincial elections, but not in federal elections. The federal vote came in two stages. There was the Wartime Elections Act of 1917, which gave the vote to women serving in the forces and to female relatives of men in the forces. In 1918, there was the Women’s Franchise Act, which permitted all women citizens aged 21 and over to vote in federal elections after January 1919.

Text adapted from: http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com/
18. The Halifax Explosion, 1917

The Halifax explosion took place at 9:06 AM on December 6, 1917, in Halifax Harbour, Nova Scotia. The French vessel Mont Blanc, loaded with munitions, blew sky high after being struck by the Belgian Relief ship Imo. The result was the world’s greatest man-made explosion before the atom bomb at Hiroshima in 1945. Over five km² of the north end of the city was destroyed by the blast and by the tidal wave and fire which followed. Over 2 000 people died and 9 000 were injured. About 6 000 people were left homeless. The total damage amounted to $35 million.

Text adapted from: http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com/

19. Winnipeg General Strike, 1919

The Winnipeg General Strike lasted from May 15 to June 25, 1919. It began when about 30 000 Winnipeg workers left their jobs in support of building and metal workers who wanted the right to form a union. It came at a time when workers across the country were organizing to fight massive unemployment and rising prices. Factories closed; streetcars stopped running; telephones did not ring; the mail stopped; even the police voted to support the strikers, though they stayed on the job.

Text adapted from: http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com/

20. The Persons Case, 1929

In 1928, the Supreme Court of Canada unanimously decided women were not “persons” who could hold public office as Canadian senators. Five Alberta women did not accept this decision and appealed to the Judicial Committee of England’s Privy Council, the highest Court of Appeal for Canada at that time. On October 18, 1929, the five Lords of the Judicial Committee came to the unanimous conclusion that “the word ‘persons’ in Section 24 includes both the male and female sex.” The Persons Case resulted in a 1929 decision declaring that women were “persons.”

Text adapted from: http://www.collectionscanada.ca/
21. The Great Depression, 1929-1939

The Great Depression was a severe, world wide economic crisis, initiated by the collapse of the stock market in the United States on October 24th, 1929. This was followed by bank failures around the world, falling prices for most goods, massive wage cuts, and unemployment.

The Canadian West was stricken as hard as anywhere in the world. In addition to falling prices for grain, the Prairies suffered from almost ten years of drought. Prairie winds stripped off the dry topsoil and blew it away in huge black clouds that darkened the sky as far away as Halifax, N.S.

Text adapted from: http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com/

22. Canada enters World War II, 1939-1945

Canada declared war on Germany on September 10, 1939, seven days after Britain and France. Canadian men and women were involved in many different aspects of the war, including a raid on Dieppe in 1942 and the Normandy invasion (also known as D-Day) in 1944. “Juno” beach was assigned to the 3rd Canadian Division and the 2nd Canadian Armoured Brigade. More than 45,000 Canadian women volunteered for military service. Women also participated at home, through volunteer organizations and by entering the workforce, thus enabling servicemen to leave Canada.

Text adapted from: http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com/ and http://www.gov.on.ca/

23. Japanese internment during World War II, 1942

On February 26th, 1942, the Canadian government announced that all people of Japanese origin living in the coastal regions of British Columbia would be relocated to the BC interior or inland farming areas. 20 881 men, women and children were removed from their homes and shipped to detention camps in the interior of BC or to sugar beet farms in Alberta and Manitoba. The federal government sold off all Japanese-Canadian-owned property. Even those Japanese who were Canadian citizens were sent to internment camps.
24. Pearson wins Nobel Peace Prize, 1957

On the morning of November 4, 1956, at the United Nations General Assembly, Canadian Minister for External Affairs, Lester B. Pearson put forward a resolution calling for the creation of an Emergency Force to secure and supervise the end of hostilities in the Suez Canal area. (The United Kingdom, France, and Israel had invaded the Egyptian territory. The dispute was over who should have control of the waterway.) It passed 57 to 0 (19 other United Nation member-states did not vote). This was the first United Nations force to be established for peacekeeping purposes. In recognition of his efforts, Pearson was awarded a Nobel Peace Prize in 1957.

25. The October Crisis and the War Measures Act, 1970

The October crisis of 1970 began when the Front de Libération du Québec (FLQ), a terrorist group in favor of Québec independence, kidnapped British Diplomat, James Cross and a Québec provincial minister, Pierre Laporte. On October 16th, 1970, Prime Minister Pierre E. Trudeau stepped in and proclaimed the War Measures Act. The War Measures Act assigns emergency powers to the federal government when it perceives a real or suspected threat of war, invasion or insurrection. This act limits citizens’ civil rights.


In 1971, Canada became the first country in the world to adopt a Multiculturalism Policy. It was designed to provide programs and services to encourage the full participation in Canadian society of all of Canada’s people.

In 1988, Parliament passed the Canadian Multiculturalism Act. Canada was the first country in the world to pass a national multiculturalism law. The Act acknowledged multiculturalism as a fundamental characteristic of Canadian society. The Act guaranteed that people could identify with the
cultural heritage of their choice and still be able to participate fully and equally in all aspects of Canadian society.

Text adapted from: http://www.parl.gc.ca/

27. Canada Act Passed, 1982

The Canada Act 1982 was an Act of the British Parliament which ended the power of the British Parliament to make laws for Canada and made Canada a fully self-governing country. The Charter of Rights and Freedoms, a key part of the new constitution, was also enacted at this time. Queen Elizabeth II signed the proclamation in Ottawa on April 17. Pierre E. Trudeau (seated) was Prime Minister of Canada at the time.


The Meech Lake Accord was an agreement reached by Prime Minister Brian Mulroney and the ten provincial premiers in 1987. Its purpose was to persuade Québec to sign the constitutional agreement. The original constitutional agreement was reached in 1982 between the federal government and nine of the ten provinces (not Québec).

In 1990 Elijah Harper became well known for his opposition to the Meech Lake Accord. Harper created delays in the Manitoba legislature that threatened to extend Manitoba’s vote on the accord beyond the deadline that had been agreed upon. As a result, the deadline expired and the accord was not successful.

Text adapted from: http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com/

29. The Québec Referendum, October 30, 1995

The 1995 Québec referendum was the second referendum in Québec (there was one in 1980) that asked people living in Québec whether Québec should negotiate with the Canadian government to become an independent country. By October 27th, 1995 thousands of Canadians had traveled to Montreal for what became known as the “Unity Rally.” The final results of the referendum were very close: 49.4% of Québec voters voted yes to negotiating separation from Canada and 50.6% of Québec voters voted no.

In 1999, Donald Marshall Jr., a Mi’kmaq from Nova Scotia, took the Government of Canada to court over Aboriginal treaty rights. On September 17, 1999, the Supreme Court of Canada released a landmark decision, recognizing the constitutionally protected treaty rights of the Mi’kmaq Indians in Nova Scotia to catch and sell fish. Since that time, a number of other aboriginal groups throughout Canada have claimed similar rights.
APPENDIX G: TIMELINE TASK INTERVIEW PROTOCOL: FOCUS GROUP TWO

(Adapted from studies conducted by Barton, Epstein, Levstik and Seixas)\textsuperscript{51}

On a different day, conduct a focus group interview with the same groups of students (each group to be interviewed separately). Possible questions include:

1. For each of the selected pictures (hold up picture, read caption): Why did you decide to include this on your timeline? (If needed, prompt with): Can you tell me a bit more about how you made your decision about this one?

2. Do you think other people would agree with your choices? Why or why not? (If yes, follow-up with): What kinds of differences might there be? Why? and Who might make different choices? Why do you think this might be so? If students answer “no” to question 2, prompt with the following:

3. If a group of (opposite gender: girls/boys) were doing this, do you think they might make different choices? Why?

4. If a group of (little kids, like third or fourth graders / older people, like your parents’ or grandparents’ ages) were doing this, do you think they might make different choices? Why?

5. If a group of students from another ethnic group were doing this, do you think they might make different choices? Why?

6. If a group of students who are (new immigrants / 3rd generation or more Canadians) were doing this, do you think they might make different choices? Why?

7. Are there any pictures that you think no one would pick? Why?

8. Is there anything in Canadian history that’s not in any of these pictures that you would add to your timeline?

\textsuperscript{51} Similar interviews conducted by these researchers, with a similar number of questions, have averaged between 35 – 45 minutes. I have allotted 60 minutes for this interview.
9. Of all the pictures you picked, and of the things you would add to your timeline, is there one that you think is the most/least important? Why?

10. Do you think this task was easy or hard to do? What things made it (easy/hard)? What kinds of things did you have to think about while you were looking at the pictures and deciding which ones would go on your timeline?

These are all the questions I have for you. Do you have any questions for me, or about the pictures?
APPENDIX H: INDIVIDUAL STUDENT INTERVIEW

Questions may need to be added, deleted or revised, depending on the substance of the other data collected (student questionnaire, and relevant timeline task and follow-up, focus group interview).

Note: The responses from the timeline task (from the student’s group) should be available during this interview. The interviewer and/or the student may wish to refer to them.

1. How satisfied are you with the 10 events chosen by your group to put on your timeline? Do these 10 events tell the story (or history) of Canada as you would tell it?

2. Is there anything missing on your timeline? If so, what, and why do you think it should be added?

3. Is there anything on your timeline that you would change? If so, what would you change and why would you make that change?

4. In the short paragraph that you wrote about yourself, you described yourself as _______. In what ways do you think your identification as _______ influenced the decisions you made in the timeline task? (Question may need to be repeated, depending on the different identifications evident in the student’s descriptive paragraph).

5. Which one of the 10 events chosen by your group is most important to you in terms of your identity? Please explain how it is important to you.

6. Which one of the 10 events chosen by your group is least important to you in terms of your identity? Why?

7. Is there another event in Canadian history (that is not on your timeline) that is more important to you, in terms of your identity? What is it? Can you please tell me why it is important to you?

8. What types of things were you thinking about during the timeline task that influenced your choices for the “top 10” events in Canadian history? What kinds of things do you think other people might think about if they were making their own timeline?
9. Some people come from families where the past is actually quite important because of experiences they've had, and their families talk about this. Are there any stories about the past that have been handed down in your family? Why do you think these stories get handed down?

10. Why do you think history (or, history within social studies) is a subject you have to take in school?
APPENDIX I: LETTERS OF INITIAL CONTACT

Centre for the Study of Historical Consciousness  
Faculty of Education  
2125 Main Mall  
Vancouver, BC, Canada V6T 1Z4  
Tel: (604) 822-8104  
Fax: (604) 822-4714

Carla Peck  
604-822-4331  
peckc@interchange.ubc.ca

Teacher/Administrator  
Eastside A High School  

RE: Research Study of Grade 12 Students’ Understanding of Significance in Canadian History

Dear _________:

Thank you for helping me find students to work with for the purposes of my PhD research. The purpose of this letter is to tell you a little bit about my study, and how I became interested in it. The study is entitled: *Multi-Ethnic High School Students’ Conceptions of Historical Significance: Implications for Canadian History Education*, and, as the study’s Co-Investigator (with Principal Investigator, Dr. Peter Seixas), the information gathered from this project will be used for my PhD dissertation.

This research project emerged from my interest in how young people understand the past, and in particular, how their identities shape their understandings of Canadian history. This is particularly important given Vancouver’s and Canada’s demographic layout – we are only becoming more and more diverse as a city and a nation. How does this increasing diversity affect what goes on in our history classrooms? Do students with diverse identities make connections to our history curricula and if so, what is the nature of these connections? What interests me is exploring how students negotiate the relationship between their identities and their understanding of Canadian history.
Although I am working within a multicultural context, I do want to pay specific attention to First Nations students, to try to avoid the problem that Pidgeon and Cox (2002) point out, that is, research findings that “combine Aboriginal students with other minority students, resulting in inaccurate Aboriginal perspectives and often treating Aboriginal peoples as outsiders” (p. 98). Therefore I will take care when analyzing the data gathered from First Nations students, in that I will not combine it with that collected from other students. It will not get “lost in the crowd.” Their voices will be heard, should they give me the right to tell their stories.

Let me give you some more specifics about my research. The purpose of this study is (1) to explore how adolescents decide what events from Canada’s past are important and should be remembered and, (2) to assess the relationship (if any) between a student’s ethnic, cultural or national identity and the decisions he/she makes about which historical events are important and should be remembered. The results of the study will help educators develop strategies for improving the teaching of history in multicultural societies.

As we have discussed, the research with students will take place the morning of June 7th, 2006 (from 10am – 12pm). The data collection procedures are as follows: A questionnaire and short written task, a small group timeline task, a small group interview, and a follow-up individual interviews. All activities will be audio-recorded.

Students’ identities will be kept strictly confidential. Each student will be given a code number. It is important to note that confidentiality amongst students participating in the small group timeline task and small group interview cannot be guaranteed simply due to the fact that the students will hear each others’ responses. However, student statements and all research materials will be identified only by code number and no computer files will include any student’s names. All documents will be kept in a locked filing cabinet. Students will not be identified by name in any reports of the completed study.

Besides being used for my dissertation, the information gathered from this project will also be used for instructional purposes and for future presentations of the project at academic conferences and in journal articles.

I have attached a copy of the Certificate of Approval from the UBC Behavioural Research Ethics Board and a letter from the Vancouver School Board granting
me permission to complete my research in Vancouver schools (subject to permission of the schools, of course).

I would be happy to meet with you to discuss my project at your convenience, and/or meet with students to discuss my project and answer any questions you and they might have. Please feel free to contact me at (UBC) 604-822-4331 or (home) 604-872-6790.

Sincerely,

Carla Peck
Dear ________:

My name is Carla Peck and I am a PhD candidate in the Department of Curriculum Studies in the Faculty of Education at the University of British Columbia. I am writing to you in regard to a qualitative research project I would like to introduce and invite grade 12 First Nations students enrolled at Templeton Secondary School to become participants in. The study is entitled: Multi-Ethnic High School Students’ Conceptions of Historical Significance: Implications for Canadian History Education, and, as the study’s Co-Investigator (with Principal Investigator, Dr. Peter Seixas), the information gathered from this project will be used for my PhD dissertation.

This research project emerged from my interest in how young people understand the past, and in particular, how their identities shape their understandings of Canadian history. This is particularly important given Vancouver’s and Canada’s demographic layout – we are only becoming more and more diverse as a city and a nation. How does this increasing diversity affect what goes on in our history classrooms? Do students with diverse identities make connections to our history curricula and if so, what is the nature of these connections? What interests me is exploring how students negotiate the relationship between their identities and their understanding of Canadian history.
Although I am working within a multicultural context, I do want to pay specific attention to First Nations students, to try to avoid the problem that Pidgeon and Cox (2002) point out, that is, research findings that “combine Aboriginal students with other minority students, resulting in inaccurate Aboriginal perspectives and often treating Aboriginal peoples as outsiders” (p. 98). Therefore I will take care when analyzing the data gathered from First Nations students, in that I will not combine it with that collected from other students. It will not get “lost in the crowd.” Their voices will be heard, should they give me the right to tell their stories.

Let me give you some more specifics about my research. The purpose of this study is (1) to explore how adolescents decide what events from Canada’s past are important and should be remembered and, (2) to assess the relationship (if any) between a student’s ethnic, cultural or national identity and the decisions he/she makes about which historical events are important and should be remembered. The results of the study will help educators develop strategies for improving the teaching of history in multicultural societies.

The research with students (those who volunteer to participate in the study) will be carried out in four separate sessions, between March – May 2006. The data collection procedures are as follows: A questionnaire and short written task (30 minutes), a small group timeline task (60 min.), a small group interview (60 min.), and a follow-up individual interview (15 min.). Total time for data collection: 2 hours, 45 minutes (maximum).

The first activity (questionnaire and short written task) will take place during social studies class time as a part of the regular class routine. The small group timeline activity and small group interview, and the final interview, will take place either before or after school, in the school, at the mutual convenience of the students, researcher and school staff. These will be audio-recorded.

Students’ identities will be kept strictly confidential. Each student will be given a code number. It is important to note that confidentiality amongst students participating in the small group timeline task and small group interview cannot be guaranteed simply due to the fact that the students will hear each others’ responses. However, student statements and all research materials will be identified only by code number and no computer files will include any student’s names. All documents will be kept in a locked filing cabinet. Students will not be identified by name in any reports of the completed study.
Besides being used for my dissertation, the information gathered from this project will also be used for instructional purposes and for future presentations of the project at academic conferences and in journal articles.

I would be happy to meet with you to discuss my project at your convenience, and/or meet with students to discuss my project and answer any questions you and they might have. Please feel free to contact me at (UBC) 604-822-4331 or (home) 604-872-6790.

Sincerely,

Carla Peck
Dear Social Studies Teacher,

My name is Carla Peck and recently, I have been working with some of Mr. [X]'s grade twelve students on their understanding's of the concept of “significance” in Canadian history as part of my PhD research. It has been a delightful process and both Mr. [X] and the students were absolutely wonderful to work with.

To complement the student data, I would like to draw on some limited teacher data as well – thus the reason for this letter. This will take no more than ten minutes of your time and is in the form of a questionnaire. I am also a teacher (I taught in New Brunswick before moving to Vancouver) and realize how busy you are – especially this time of year. That said, I hope you will be willing to help me complete my data collection.

Enclosed is a teacher consent form, which explains my study in more detail and then includes a place for you to sign, indicating your consent to participate in the study. I have also included the questionnaire for you to fill out. Once you have completed both (consent form and questionnaire), place them in the envelope provided and post it to me (I have provided the postage).

I truly appreciate your support!

Sincerely,

Carla Peck
APPENDIX J: FOCUS GROUP TIMELINES

Vincent, Teresa, Mark, Sam (Immigrants)

- Confederation (1867)
- Building of the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) (1881-1885)
- Record Immigration Numbers (1913)
- Winnipeg General Strike (1919)
- The Person’s Case (1929)
- Canada Enters World War II (1939-1945)
- Pearson Wins Nobel Peace Prize (1957)
- Canada Enacts Multiculturalism Policy (1971) and Multiculturalism Act (1988)
- Canada Act Passed (1982)
- Québec Referendum (1995)

Munny, Jessica, Aidan (Canadian-born)

- Confederation (1867)
- Recruitment of Chinese workers to build the CPR (1880s-1890s)
- Britain (and Canada) enters World War I (1914-1918)
- The Women’s Suffrage Movement (1916-1918)
- Winnipeg General Strike (1919)
- Canada Enters World War II (1939-1945)
- Japanese Internment (1942)
- Canada Enacts Multiculturalism Policy (1971) and Multiculturalism Act (1988)
- Canada Act Passed (1982)
- Québec Referendum (1995)
Annabelle, Armand, Shen (Canadian-born)

- The Siege of Québec (1759)
- Creation of Indian Residential Schools (mid 1800s)
- Confederation (1867)
- Building of the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) (1881-1885)
- Record Immigration Numbers (1913)
- The Women’s Suffrage Movement (1916-1918)
- Canada Enters World War II (1939-1945)
- Canada Enacts Multiculturalism Policy (1971) and Multiculturalism Act (1988)
- Canada Act Passed (1982)
- Québec Referendum (1995)

Ben, Kyung, Emily (Canadian-born, Immigrant, Canadian-born)

- The Siege of Québec (1759)
- Creation of Indian Residential Schools (mid 1800s)
- Confederation (1867)
- Building of the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) (1881-1885)
- Imposition of Chinese Head Tax (1885)
- Louis Riel and the North-West Rebellion (1885)
- The Women’s Suffrage Movement (1916-1918)
- Canada Enters World War II (1939-1945)
- Canada Enacts Multiculturalism Policy (1971) and Multiculturalism Act (1988)
- Québec Referendum (1995)
Binh, Mae, Eliya (Canadian-born)

- Europeans arrive on west coast of Canada (1778)
- Confederation (1867)
- Recruitment of Chinese workers to build the CPR (1880s-1890s)
- Louis Riel and the North-West Rebellion (1885)
- Britain (and Canada) enters World War I (1914-1918)
- Winnipeg General Strike (1919)
- The Person’s Case (1929)
- The Great Depression (1929-1939)
- The October Crisis and the War Measures Act (1970)
- Canada Act Passed (1982)

Minha, Adélie, Dao-Ming (immigrant, Canadian-born, immigrant)

- Creation of Indian Residential Schools (mid 1800s)
- Recruitment of Chinese workers to build the CPR (1880s-1890s)
- Imposition of Chinese Head Tax (1885)
- Louis Riel and the North-West Rebellion (1885)
- Record Immigration Numbers (1913)
- The October Crisis and the War Measures Act (1970)
- Canada Enacts Multiculturalism Policy (1971) and Multiculturalism Act (1988)
- Collapse of the “Meech Lake Accord” (1990)
- Québec Referendum (1995)
Will, Ethan (Canadian-born)
- Granting of the Royal Charter for Fur Trade (1670)
- The Siege of Québec (1759)
- Europeans arrive on west coast of Canada (1778)
- Confederation (1867)
- Building of the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) (1881-1885)
- The Women’s Suffrage Movement (1916-1918)
- Canada Enters World War II (1939-1945)
- Pearson Wins Nobel Peace Prize (1957)
- Canada Enacts Multiculturalism Policy (1971) and Multiculturalism Act (1988)
- Canada Act Passed (1982)

Aakil, Victoria, Rosa (Canadian-born)
- Confederation (1867)
- Creation of Indian Residential Schools (mid 1800s)
- Imposition of Chinese Head Tax (1885)
- Britain (and Canada) enters World War I (1914-1918)
- The Women’s Suffrage Movement (1916-1918)
- Winnipeg General Strike (1919)
- The Great Depression (1929-1939)
- Canada Enters World War II (1939-1945)
- The October Crisis and the War Measures Act (1970)
- Canada Act Passed (1982)
Conor, Ariana (Aboriginal)

- Europeans arrive on west coast of Canada (1778)
- Creation of Indian Residential Schools (mid 1800s)
- Fraser River Gold Rush (1858)
- The Women’s Suffrage Movement (1916-1918)
- Louis Riel and the North-West Rebellion (1885)
- Winnipeg General Strike (1919)
- The Great Depression (1929-1939)
- Collapse of the “Meech Lake Accord” (1990)
- Québec Referendum (1995)
## APPENDIX K: FREQUENCY OF EVENTS SELECTED FOR TIMELINE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th># of Times Selected (out of 9 focus groups)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Confederation (1867)</td>
<td>7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Canada Act Passed (1982)</td>
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<td>Canada Enacts Multiculturalism Policy (1971) and Multiculturalism Act (1988)</td>
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<td>Canada Enters World War II (1939-1945)</td>
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<td>Québec Referendum (1995)</td>
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<td>Creation of Indian Residential Schools (mid 1800s)</td>
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<td>Winnipeg General Strike (1919)</td>
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<td>Louis Riel and the North-West Rebellion (1885)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Britain (and Canada) enters World War I (1914-1918)</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Europeans arrive on west coast of Canada (1778)</td>
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</tr>
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<td>The October Crisis and the War Measures Act (1970)</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Siege of Québec (1759)</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Collapse of the &quot;Meech Lake Accord&quot; (1990)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pearson Wins Nobel Peace Prize (1957)</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Marshall Decision (1999)</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Person’s Case (1929)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

52 Five events were not selected by any of the groups: English Expel Acadians (1755-1758); the War of 1812 (1812); Anti-Asiatic Riots, Vancouver (1907); the Komagata Maru Incident (1914) and the Halifax Explosion (1917).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Count</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fraser River Gold Rush (1858)</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Granting of the Royal Charter for Fur Trade (1670)</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Japanese Internment (1942)</td>
<td>1</td>
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</table>
APPENDIX L: UNIVERSITY ETHICS APPROVAL

(Follows on next page.)
# Certificate of Approval

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR</th>
<th>DEPARTMENT</th>
<th>NUMBER</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Seixas, P.C.</td>
<td>Curriculum Studies</td>
<td>B05-0603</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**INSTITUTION(S) WHERE RESEARCH WILL BE CARRIED OUT**

UBC Campus, Vancouver School District Schools,

**CO-INVESTIGATORS:**

Peck, Carla Lee, Curriculum Studies

**SPONSORING AGENCIES**

Social Sciences & Humanities Research Council

**TITLE:**

Multi-Ethnic High School Students' Conceptions of Historical Significance: Implications for Canadian History Education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>APPROVAL DATE</th>
<th>TERM (YEARS)</th>
<th>DOCUMENTS INCLUDED IN THIS APPROVAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**CERTIFICATION:**

The protocol describing the above-named project has been reviewed by the Committee and the experimental procedures were found to be acceptable on ethical grounds for research involving human subjects.

*Approval of the Behavioural Research Ethics Board by one of the following:*

- Dr. James Frankish, Chair,
- Dr. Cay Holbrook, Associate Chair,
- Dr. Susan Rowley, Associate Chair

This Certificate of Approval is valid for the above term provided there is no change in the experimental procedures.