TEACHING CANADA'S MILITARY HISTORY AND THE MEANING OF REMEMBRANCE

ABSTRACT

Canada's military history and heritage form a large part of Canadian Studies. This text provides excerpts from a final report on recent consultations with Canada's foremost history teachers. Based on 76 completed questionnaires it was concluded that while current knowledge/understanding of military history is only moderate, there is a strong interest among educators and students to learn more. Individual comments on the part of the teachers are particularly insightful.

Earlier this year, the Association for Canadian Studies completed an examination of the receptivity of educators to assessing and increasing the knowledge of youth about Canada's military history. This project contributes directly to the work of the ACS by furthering its efforts to promote and advance the military history aspect of Canadian Studies. The ACS shares a common objective of encouraging a greater understanding of our country's history and heritage with the Department of Veterans Affairs Canada. The project has allowed the ACS to engage Canada's foremost teachers in a dialogue about the future teaching of Canada's participation in 20th century conflicts, and how best to approach the teaching of the contributions of those who served and the impact of those contributions on the nation today in their classrooms.

The ACS has gathered quantitative and qualitative input from leading educators across the country. With its vast network of educators across Canada, the ACS has contacted 300 educators from every corner of the country to encourage dialogue and meaningful discussion about teaching aspects of Canada's military history. Among the educators targeted were recent recipients of the Prime Minister's Awards for Teaching Excellence, the Governor General's Award for Teaching, other leaders in the educational field and those within the vast ACS network of top-notched historians. This report has helped to identify trends, barriers and perceived barriers to educators related to the teaching of Canada's military history in the country's K-12 classrooms.

Quantitative questionnaire / Questions quantitatives

The following 12 questions were evaluated by teachers according to the following scale:
1) Strongly disagree, 2) Somewhat disagree, 3) Somewhat agree, 4) Strongly agree
Les 12 questions suivantes étaient évaluées selon l'échelle de valeur appropriée :
1) Totalement en désaccord, 2) Plutôt en désaccord, 3) Plutôt d'accord, 4) Tout à fait d'accord

Q: The study of Canada's military history is a significant part of the curriculum that I teach.
L'étude de l'histoire militaire du Canada représente une partie importante de mon programme d'enseignement.

CANADA	EAST/*EST*	QUÉBEC	ONTARIO	WEST/*OUEST*
3.0	3.2	1.7	3.5	2.7

Comment: Though it must be remembered throughout any analysis of these results that the sample from Quebec is small, these numbers demonstrate the beginning of a trend of a greater importance placed on the study of Canada's military history in the all other regions of Canada as compared with Quebec.

Q: Learning materials which supplement the provincial curriculum are valuable in helping me teach students about Canada's military history.
Le matériel d'apprentissage supplémentaire au programme provincial m'aident de façon significative à enseigner l'histoire militaire du Canada à mes étudiants.

CANADA	EAST/*EST*	QUÉBEC	ONTARIO	WEST/*OUEST*
3.3	3.5	3.0	3.6	3.0

Comment: Strong responses across the country for the value of learning materials in support of teaching students about Canada's military history. One grade 10-12 teacher from Manitoba remarked that he finds his own materials such as news magazines and book excerpts for classroom use.

Q: My students currently have a good understanding of Canada's military history.
Mes étudiants possèdent présentement une bonne compréhension de l'histoire militaire du Canada.

CANADA	EAST/*EST*	QUÉBEC	ONTARIO	WEST/*OUEST*
2.5	2.5	1.7	2.9	2.2

Comment: One of the lowest results. Understanding of Canada's military history is soft among students in much of the country. However, the questionnaires demonstrate clearly that the level of understanding increases with older students. As will be explored further with the qualitative answers, teachers generally view the study of Canada's military history as more relevant and appropriate for senior high school students. Some teachers were mindful of the breadth of material to cover in Canadian history.

Q: My students are receptive to learning more about Canada's military history.
Mes étudiants se montrent intéressés à en apprendre davantage à propos de l'histoire militair du Canada.

CANADA	EAST/*EST*	QUÉBEC	ONTARIO	WEST/*OUEST*
3.6	3.6	3.6	3.6	3.5

Comment: One of the highest results. Despite concerns about existing levels of understanding, teachers everywhere notice a strong receptivity among students to learn more about Canada's military history.

Q: Any learning materials on Canada's military history should include background historical information on Canada's participation in the First and Second World Wars, the Korean War and global peacekeeping operations.
Tout matériel d'apprentissage sur l'histoire militaire du Canada devrait comprendre de l'information historique sur la participation du Canada à la Première Guerre mondiale, à la Seconde Guerre mondiale, à la guerre de Corée et aux opérations globales de paix.

CANADA	EAST/*EST*	QUÉBEC	ONTARIO	WEST/*OUEST*
3.8	3.8	3.7	3.9	3.8

Comment: The highest positive response. Teachers want comprehensive learning materials that are broad in their historic scope. One teacher from Quebec noted that the study of global peacekeeping operations is especially appreciated by teenagers. A francophone teacher from Manitoba suggested that the curriculum include the study of today's wars as well. A teacher from Alberta pointed out that peacekeeping is being added to the Alberta curriculum in 2006.

Q: The study of Canada's military history will raise the social conscience of students by connecting the contributions of veterans to the lives of Canadians today.
L'étude de l'histoire militaire du Canada augmentera la conscience sociale des étudiants en créant un lien entre la contribution des anciens combattants d'hier à la vie des Canadiens d'aujourd'hui.

CANADA	EAST/*EST*	QUÉBEC	ONTARIO	WEST/*OUEST*
3.7	3.7	3.6	3.8	3.7

Comment: Across Canada, teachers see an extremely positive correlation between study of Canada's military history and the raising of a social conscience among students. This is part of a clear trend where teachers see the value in making connections between the past and the present and giving contemporary meaning to the stories of the past.

Qualitative questionnaire / Questions qualitatives

Teachers were asked for written comments on six general questions. General comments and selected representative responses are provided below.

Q: Do you already teach your students about the contributions of Canada's veterans? If so, how would additional tools related to Canada's military history complement your learning modality?
Enseignez-vous actuellement à vos étudiants la contribution des anciens combattants du Canada ? Si oui, de quelles façons des outils d'apprentissage supplémentaires viendraient-ils compléter votre programme d'enseignement ?

General comment: Overall the questionnaires demonstrate that students are indeed being taught about the contributions of Canada's veterans. This is being conducted to varying degrees, with significant focus on remembrance and Remembrance Day, particularly with younger students. Some teachers mentioned that they try, but that there are so many other important topics to cover. Quebec teachers report lower levels of teaching in this area. Additional tools would be very helpful if they hit the right approach. Students need to 'touch' or 'see' history come alive before them. They need to be able to connect the past with their lives, with current events, and with the future. In short, learning modalities need to make the past relevant. Visual, tangible stories need to be told. More contact with veterans and current peacekeepers, including guest speakers and letter-writing campaigns might be effective. E-mail correspondence with current peacekeepers was suggested. Missing stories, such as those of women's contributions and aboriginal veterans, might reach students otherwise disconnected from Canada's military history.

Quotes from teachers:

- « Oui, mais parce que je le veux bien. Car ce n'est pas au programme. » (Québec)
- "Approved curriculum has very little on Canada in WWI, a bit on WWII, nothing on the Korean War. Any tools (additional or otherwise) would have to include a significant amount of material on Quebec's role in Canadian military history." (Quebec)
- "As my school is a multicultural, ethnically diverse one, would like more material on contribution of all races to the war effort. Your videos tend to show only white students – would not fit in well in our school." (Ontario)

• "We do teach the contributions of Canada's veterans during Remembrance week but I feel we do not stress very much more how important they are. The difficult thing is that it is not that Canadian history teachers do not want to teach more of this, it's time allocated in the grade 10 program is too heavy to include much more. Maybe at a grade 11 in world history more could be done." (Quebec)

Q: Are pedagogical tools that connect the past with the present the best way to engage youth to learn about the contributions of Canada's veterans? What other approaches would you propose?
Est-ce que les outils pédagogiques qui relient le passé et Àle présent représentent le meilleur moyen d'impliquer les étudiants à en apprendre davantage sur les contributions des anciens combattants du Canada ? Auriez-vous d'autres approches ?

General comment: Though textbooks must not be discounted in their classroom importance, especially as they lend validity as to what subjects are historically important, the modern student benefits from additional pedagogical tools that add dimensions to learning. Again, contact with veterans was stressed. Personal experiences and stoties/testimonials count heavily. Other tools worth considering include interactive computer materials, interesting Internet materials, online Q&A with current military personnel, visual aids such as 3-D overviews of battlefields, documentaries, quizzes, thematic debates, role-play situations in the classroom, the presentation of artefacts, photos, crosswords, songs, poems, puzzles and posters. Though they expanded on this in later questions, teachers began to suggest that a contextual approach could succeed, where students would learn about the contributions of veterans for the purpose of learning about immigration in Canada or problem-solving for the future to avoid the ravages of war.

Quotes from teachers:

• "A fair amount of secondary source materials on our military history is readily available. There is need for more interesting primary sources. Take a look at the Beglie Canadian History Contest essay question. There are 10 interesting primary sources dealing with one topic. If there were collections of primary sources like this dealing with military topics teachers would use them." (British Columbia)
• "I suspect they are, but if I were to teach military history I wouldn't do it for this reason. I would use it to develop analogies; as a way to look at antecedents to current issues, or with a historiographic approach. The cultural literacy approach you seem to be suggesting doesn't engage students." (Alberta)
• "We use a lot of videos and classroom discussions. It is then summarized in a written presentation by each group of students." (Quebec)

Q: Please provide any other comments on the importance of today's students learning about Canada's military history and remembering the contribution of Canada's veterans.
Veuillez s'il vous plaît émettre tout commentaire pertinent sur l'importance pour les étudiants actuels d'apprendre l'histoire militaire du Canada et se souvenir des contributions des anciens combattants du Canada.

General comment: Answers to this request ran from the specific to the general. Teachers repeated the importance of studying Canada's military history and the meaning of remembrance and of the openness of students to learning about them. Responses here often stepped back to assess how best to approach classroom study of these topics. Several suggested linking them with broader educational goals such as engaging students with the study of general Canadian history, with current foreign affairs, with the UN and other organizations dedicated to avoiding and dealing with future conflicts, with domestic and personal issues such as the values of citizenship, freedom, sacrifice and democracy. Closer ties with local legions and the contributions of local communities to military conflicts were stressed. The "Canada Remembers the Korean War 1950-1953" kit is a positive example of the kind of tool which could be helpful to teachers. Generally, students need to be able to touch history. If travel to foreign land where Canadians fought is not possible, efforts should be made to personally connect students to that history in the classroom setting.

Quotes from teachers:

• "My son was a peacekeeper in Bosnia and he provided my class with booklets/information on his job, as well as what the children in Bosnia experienced and learned at school. I found this to be a valuable tool in my classroom as they could relate in a personal way to other children of the same age." (British Columbia)
• "You can't blame teenagers for not knowing the importance of remembrance if they don't know what is being remembered. If they don't know about the contributions made by Canada and its soldiers, how can they be asked to make their own sacrifices and contributions to Canadian society?" (Manitoba)
• "At a time when the idea of individuals contributing to a public good is diminishing, it's very important to show our veterans as role models for breaking the emptiness of 'Me! Me! Me!' values. Also, with ageism, it's important for our teens to have a sense of what many of our elderly endured and contributed, and hearing veterans' stories is very good for this." (Manitoba)
• "My favourite projects involve meeting veterans or active soldiers, or those that involve [the students] investigating their family's history from the respective time periods." (Ontario)
• "It is important that Canadian History teachers connect with past conflicts. It should triggers explanations on current events and conflicts. Students today are very aware of the effects of world conflicts because of media coverage. Many of my students have relatives in those parts of the worlds and those students are keenly aware of the role of peace keepers. Many students also lost grand parents during WWII and are also very aware of the role of allied forces delivering Europe, so for them studying the contribution of Canadian veterans holds a special place in their learning about Canadian history." (Quebec)