

*Traces of the Past:  
Raising the Allumettières (Matchworkers)  
in Sites of Collective Remembering*

*Conrad McCallum  
&  
Lorna R. McLean*

*University of Ottawa*

**Abstract:**

Engaging with historical events, people and places encourages students to envision history as a dynamic process where individual, group, and national identities are reproduced. These types of educational interventions can foster recognition that history—both past events and our records about them—result from a process of authorship. The recent surge of interest amongst history educators and within recent publications of provincial curricula that focus on historical thinking concepts—historical significance, primary source evidence, continuity and change, cause and consequence, historical perspectives, and the ethical dimension of historical interpretations—encourages educators to consider ways to integrate these concepts within their teaching practice. Our case study of the narrative account of the *allumettières* (matchworkers) of Hull, Quebec is an example of one type of classroom inquiry into local places of remembering that could be taken up in the context of recent developments in, and aspirations for, the history curriculum. Our project invites readers to engage in the historical process of understanding the past within contemporary classrooms by drawing upon a range of interdisciplinary approaches including web-based exhibits and artefacts, visits to historic sites, published accounts and dramatic representations to meet these curriculum expectations.

**Keywords:** historical thinking concepts; historical consciousness; history education; history curriculum, women, pedagogy, technology

## Traces of the Past

Given the current infusion of historical thinking in the curricula across Canada and the ongoing curriculum-centred debate on content versus skills, as educators, we were prompted to ask, what might be a meeting point between historical thinking skills and content? To investigate this question, we selected a local history topic to explore how the history of the *allumettières* (matchworkers) could become known through engagement with local traces and sites of remembering. In developing our project, we drew upon six well-recognized historical thinking concepts (as outlined in The Historical Thinking Project, <http://historicalthinking.ca/>; see Appendix) to invite secondary students and teachers to participate in the construction of a narrative-based inquiry into a local place of remembering in the Canadian province of Quebec. Our project invites readers to engage in the historical process of understanding the past through the use of a range of interdisciplinary approaches including web-based exhibits, archives and artefacts, visits to historic sites, published accounts and dramatic representations to meet curricula expectations. Educational interventions of this kind can be effective in encouraging students to envision history as a dynamic process whereby individual and group identities are produced and reproduced and to foster the recognition that history—past events and our records about them—result from a process of authorship in shaping, selecting and writing the text (Werner, 2001). Local history can be a promising possibility arising within historical thinking because the subject matter is often underdeveloped or flounders in competition with mainstream histories emphasizing nation-building and national progress (McLean, et al, 2014).

The methods of inquiry to achieve historical thinking skills and content continue to be a topic of active debate among history educators. Scholars have long emphasized the need for students to acquire both historical knowledge and knowledge about history while making a distinction between the two. Lee (1983), for example, described a line between what he called substantive and procedural knowledge. An approach emphasizing only procedural knowledge, or the conceptual scaffolds of the historical discipline, can run the risk of being knowledge poor (Osborne, 2006). Conversely, according to other historians of education, when lacking an opportunity to use conceptual tools, students are left to passively absorb the stories in their textbooks as though they represented irrefutable knowledge (Lévesque, 2011; den Heyer, 2004). Passive encounters with the narratives of history are limiting for students, denying them the opportunity to examine how stories are constructed.

The content versus skills debate has often arisen in conversations about the need for students to challenge the “official” knowledge contained in history textbooks. In the traditional textbook, the omniscient author(s) “assumes a powerful, third-person voice that appears to be beyond question, or at least discourages questioning by the reader” (Paxton, 1991, p. 326). On the development of history textbooks, Foster and Crawford have gone further, stating that “while many national stories exist, powerful individuals and groups, in their pursuit of particular hegemonic goals, always construct what is presented as the national story” (2005, p. 6). More recently, Cutrara (2009) challenged the disciplines-based approach to history curricula, which takes up historical concepts as a pedagogical practice.

Other scholarship from the past decade, though unlikely to resolve the content versus skills debate conclusively, nonetheless helped to refocus it in productive ways. In particular, there are “new possibilities for the past” emerging within historical thinking as claimed by Clark (2011), and they can enliven discussions of broad questions about identity and citizenship. Promising possibilities are not always apparent for educators and students in

their engagement with historical thinking concepts. One of those under-exploited opportunities is to bring into focus the significance of local histories, especially as this subject matter habitually remains underdeveloped, or competes with national narratives. Yet, this approach helps students to recognize that history is grounded in the specifics of place. As Kincheloe and Pinar (1991) opine, "A novelist or a historian cannot remove a story from a particular place; it would no longer be the same story" (p.5). Situating curriculum in a place, Farley (2010) reminds us, "returns knowledge to the particular context of its construction and that endows its significance" (p. 8). Our project responds to a revitalized concern for "local acts of placing and remembering" that lead to innovative forms of engagement with the past (Opp & Walsh, 2010, p. 3). Furthermore, engaging with local traces of the past invites students to gain a knowledge of places "closely linked to knowledge of the self, to grasp one's position in the larger scheme of things, including one's own community, and to secure a confident sense of who one is as a person" (Basso quoted in Osborne, 2006, p. 6).

Engagement with local traces of the past, facilitated by historical thinking, is at the heart of this paper which draws on our experience and readings as educators and historians and observations from teaching pre-service teachers. We propose a framework for analysis by designing a module that invites students and teachers to reflect on the concepts and content related to the *allumettières* (matchworkers) of Hull, Quebec, recognizing the importance of avoiding what Lévesque terms, "a simplistic dichotomy of content versus skills" (2011, p. 118). To address the complexity of the debate, we turned to a recent and prominent example of pedagogically-based scholarship on historical consciousness, proposed by Seixas and Morton (2013). These scholars build on current trends of historical thinking that have been articulated by a number of educational historians and variously called historical consciousness, historical thinking or historical mindfulness (Lévesque, 2011; Osborne, 2006; Seixas, 2004). Local history, based on the narrative accounts of the *allumettières*, provided the theme for the project. The pedagogical approaches referenced in this article are informed by the literature on inquiry-based learning, which calls upon students to explore processes of authorship (Lévesque, 2011; Seixas, 2006; Seixas & Morton, 2013), and by research that underlines how meaning-making in the classroom is shaped by the combined effects of reader and text (Werner, 2000).

Seixas (2006) has articulated a position that focuses on the resurgence of interest among curriculum authors and history educators. This is evidenced in the recent provincial curricula documents across Canada that have adopted a disciplinary approach to teaching history based on variations of the six historical thinking concepts: historical significance; primary source evidence; continuity and change; cause and consequence; historical perspectives; and, the ethical dimension of historical interpretations. Central to the thesis of Seixas is that historical thinking is the intersection among and between public memory, citizenship and history education (2006). This intersection is best understood through a series of questions that connect to the past, enhance our understanding of the present, and promote explorations of the conditions or circumstances under which historians of education have come to interpret events, people and places (McLean et al., 2014; Sandwell & von Hekking, 2014; Hawkey, 2013; den Heyer, 2004; Reisman, 2012; Collishaw, 2013). Our choice of a local-history case that concerns the history of women is integral to the project. Equally important, the history of women lacks sources, and here we profile primary resources about the *allumettières*, the female employees of the former E. B. Eddy match factory (1854-1928).

In 1869, approximately 60 of the 70 matchworkers were women, rising to 200 between 1910 and 1928 (Bourgon, 2007). Match production was but one of the company's

operations, although a highly successful one, responsible for 90% of the matches used in Canada (Bourgon, 2007). In 1911, women in Hull accounted for 781 of the 1,288 workers in manufacturing (Gaffield, 1997, p. 288). By 1921, more than 17 percent of all Canadian women and 19 percent of Quebec women over the age of 15 were members of the paid labour force. The formation of the *syndicat catholique des allumettières* in 1919 coincided with an important period of nascent labour activism for the town's working class population and, more generally, among women workers in Canada. As a case in point, women were the first employees to walk out in the Winnipeg General Strike of 1919, when telegraph workers left their jobs early in the morning (Lalonde, 1985; Lapointe, 1979; Prentice et al, 1996). Given women's low wages, and despite their vulnerability, they played an active role in the labour unrest that swept across the country after the war. However, in organizing for better wages and improved working conditions, the *allumettières* of Hull were taking on that city's largest employer. In a 1919 dispute with E. B. Eddy, they signed a contract that provided a modest increase in wages and recognition of their union. In 1924, a second confrontation arose when the company, under new ownership, failed to honour the terms of the 1919 agreement (LeDroit, 1924; Lapointe, 1979; Bourgon, 2007; Ouimet, 2010). Notably, these two labour disputes were the first in the province of Quebec to involve a women's union (Réseau du patrimoine gatinois, 2014).

The contribution and significance of this paper is to profile this history to highlight what the teaching of the six historical thinking concepts might look like when applied in practice. Our objective, therefore, is to approach the history of the *allumettières* against the background of the literature on historical thinking, rather than to provide a study of the history of the *allumettières* on its own. We contend that students' inquiry-based learning can be supported using published accounts and artefacts available on history websites and online exhibits, such as those of the Virtual Museum of Canada, and by providing opportunities to reconstruct the past through historical site visits and dramatic representations. Moreover, connections to larger national social themes emerge as a key strategy for teaching history to students. Teaching local history is offered as a promising entry point not only to understand the national grand narratives of Canadian history represented in textbooks, but also, at times, to disrupt them (Stanley, 2011).

The critical framework we put forward summons students to problematize the narratives offered in the range of media about the *allumettières*. As Werner asserts, "[r]eflective and critical readings matter because embedded in the social practices of producing and reading texts are assumptions, values, and storylines that position readers to engage the world in taken-for-granted and unquestioned way, and that do not serve the interests of all groups evenly" (Werner, 2001, p. 215). Engaging with historical events, people and places urges secondary students to envision history as a dynamic process where individual and group identities are reproduced. These types of educational interventions can foster recognition that history—both past events and records about them—result from a process of authorship. In taking up the solicitation of scholars such as Straub (2005) and Lee (2005), we encourage educators to consider ways in which historical consciousness is connected to narrative acts and to recognize that "in understanding students' prior conceptions of history and the past we need to be able to pursue different kinds of questions" (Lee, 2004, p. 37).

Our approach builds on the idea that educators and students can create opportunities for engagement in the skills, content and challenges to understand, as Cutrara (2009) proposes, "the power and privilege imbedded in historical narratives" (p. 101). To achieve this objective, teachers and students must open "a space for what history should do: transform" (Cutrara, 2009, p. 101).

## I. Establishing Historical Significance

How do we decide what is important to learn about the past? The historical significance of any event can change over time; it can appear self-evident in one locale, while in another, claims need to be supported with substantial contextual information. In Hull, the central narrative of a region focusing on the creation of its economic base might highlight the contributions of industrialists like John Rudolphus Booth (lumber), John and James Maclaren (lumber), and Ezra Butler Eddy (wood products and pulp and paper). But the history of this economic development is likely to be far less well-known outside of the regional context.

The historical significance one could attach to an event—and the linkages that can be made to the wider context—can also vary among and within different groups in society. A historical thinking encounter with the *allumettières* is linked to questions of *collective* agency and of two groups with limited power in Canada—women and labourers—and the intersection of those groups. Understanding the national context is essential to understanding the historical significance of the *allumettières* and the first strike by a women’s union in Quebec in 1924 (Réseau du patrimoine gatinois, 2014). National themes provide a window on two important and, as some have argued, disruptive narratives: women’s history and labour history (Stanley, 2011; Brandt, *et al.*, 2001). In this instance, the “match girls” narrative falls outside a 21st century pan-Canadian story of trailblazing pioneers, politicians and entrepreneurs. The *allumettières’* history, in relation to mainstream historical narratives, and its potential to *intrude* on those narratives, brings to mind the need for a different set of methodological approaches. Tupper (2005), for example, contends that historians and history educators should re(hi)storicize dominant narratives through the pedagogical process of interruption. This important work brings into view those who have always been there, in this case women, but who have been sidelined within the historical record.

Students’ perspectives on whether an event, person or place is historically significant are also influenced by traces of that past that survive in the present day. It is difficult to recreate the world of the *allumettières* because few traces of the city’s early industrial past remain. The local city historian, Roger Blanchette, noted that Hull looks nothing like it once did. It is no longer the “match capital of Canada,” nor the third most important industrial city in Quebec; a position that it held at the end of the Second World War (quoted in Lamontagne, 2011). While the building that formerly housed a part of E. B. Eddy’s factory operation still exists, gone are other examples of physical evidence that might have provided a window on the matchmakers’ time and place. So historians, teachers and students must form their impressions about the period from photographs and documents that are retained by local archives. The digital realm has made this material available more widely, and this is extremely important, given the lack of other kinds of artefacts such as clothing or everyday objects that might have made possible a traditional museum exhibit. The *allumettières* in fact provide a good illustrative example of the many ways in which the digital realm has supported opportunities for local museums and archives to produce an extensive record of events and people. For this reason, there has never been a better time to explore the multiple ways in which the *allumettieres’* story continues to resonate in digital collections of documents and photographs such as those reproduced in the Virtual Museum

of Canada.<sup>1</sup> Digital technology has the potential to offer powerful tools for inquiry-based learning in the classroom (Lévesque, 2006).

In approaching these historical documents and exhibits, the historical significance of the subject cannot be taken for granted; in effect, it must be continually established at new points of inquiry. Historical significance comes from a process of authorship, arising "as the historian writes or tells the story" (Seixas & Morton, 2013, p. 20).

## II. Using Primary-Source Evidence

How do we know what we know about the past? Educators are encouraged to use historical thinking concepts to help students work out a *meaningful* place in the historical narrative for events, people and places. However, students' ability to do so can be constrained when opportunities to access historical artefacts and primary sources are lacking. Fortunately, in the digital realm, many organizations have worked diligently to offer salience to local historians of education. In our case, examples of primary sources or traces are available on the Virtual Museum of Canada website (in particular, the exhibit titled "Donalda Charron and the E.B. Eddy Match Company" developed for the museum by the National Capital Commission in 2013, hereinafter NCC). The exhibit invites readers to review photos and biographical material and a narrative about the *allumettières*. As a possible follow up activity, the exhibit invites students to develop personal Facebook pages about one or more of the principal characters in the narrative, based on the evidence that they have located. Digital resources provide opportunities for students and educators to access and engage with multiple authorial perspectives to develop their own narratives about matchworkers.

The skills of engaging with primary evidence are enhanced by using photographs for research. As Spike asserts,

[L]ike other kinds of historical sources, photographs are the products of innumerable choices, interpretations, technological processes, and circumstances of chance. But, it is also important to note that photographs were themselves historical actors, circulating and signifying in the time under discussion. Rather than focusing on what they *show*, it is more importantly the work of historians to consider what photographs have *meant* and how they have produced those meanings (2013, p. 53).

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<sup>1</sup> The Federal Government transferred responsibility for this web-based museum to the Canadian Museum of History in 2014.



This rare photo of workers inside the E. B. Eddy match factory in Hull was taken around 1906-1907. Few photos of the interior were taken because flashes could trigger a fire.

Source: Gabrielle Phillion-Lévesque. Permission: Anne Lauzon.



In a historic strike at E. B. Eddy in the fall of 1924, the editors of the newspaper *Le Droit* sided with the *allumettières*.  
Reproduced with permission of the *Confédération des syndicats nationaux* (CSN).



Matchworkers outside the Eddy match plant in 1924.  
Reproduced with permission of the *Confédération des syndicats nationaux* (CSN).

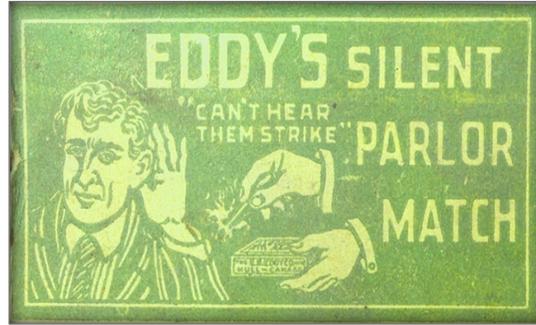


Illustration of the cover of a box of Eddy "Silent Parlor" matches from around 1920.

Source : Collection Pierre Louis Lapointe. Photographer unknown.



Ezra Butler Eddy (1827-1906), 1890.

Source: Ville de Gatineau, Collection iconographique de la Ville de Hull, H012-01/0008.



Wooden houses in Hull, Quebec (193-?).

Fires were common in Hull, and the prevalence of these "*maisons d'allumettes*" ("matchstick houses") were often a factor in the magnitude of the damage.

Source: Ville de Gatineau, Collection iconographique de la Ville de Hull, H012-01/0077.

Reproduced with permission.



W. L. Mackenzie King, Deputy Minister of Labour, 1905.  
Credit: William James Topley / Library and Archives Canada / PA-027975



R. B. Bennett, Owner of E. B. Eddy, 1924  
Source: Topley Studio Fonds / Library and Archives Canada / PA-043019  
Credit: Virtual Museum of Canada.



Abbé Joseph Arthur Carrière  
Source: Centre d'archives de l'Outaouais, fonds Marcil Champlain (P174, S1, D8359).  
Photo: Marcil Champlain. Credit: Virtual Museum of Canada.

The photos above include three images of the *allumettières* taken inside the match factory, at the picket line, and outside the offices of *Le Droit* newspaper. Note that although the names of the matchworkers are not identified in these photos, from the other three photographs, we can identify key individuals linked to the *allumettières*: the company's founder, E. B. Eddy (1827-1906); the union leader Donald Charron (1886-1967); R. B. Bennett, an owner of the E. B. Eddy Match Company at the time of the 1924 dispute and later prime minister of Canada; and, another future prime minister, William Lyon Mackenzie King, who in 1911, as the federal labour minister, condemned the use of a cancer-causing product used in Canadian matchmaking, white phosphorus.

The above-mentioned exhibit provides a good example of the importance of making primary evidence available through photographs. As Seixas and Morton contend, "by teaching students how to think like historians, we enable them to engage with history by seeking appropriate sources, analyzing those sources and considering the context. Students learn not only how to make inferences about their sources but also how to corroborate those inferences" (2013, p. 42).

Furthermore, while discussing primary sources, it is helpful to keep in mind Werner's caution: "Information and its meanings are mediated through the very practices of amassing and putting them together, and this transformation largely remains invisible within a completed text" (Werner, 2000, p. 211). Given the opportunity to develop as critical readers, however, students can identify the biases or assumptions that may be operating behind a text. Students must be encouraged to assess the texts and images in terms of the processes of authorship that they identify.

### III. Analyzing Cause and Consequence

Why do events happen, and what are their impacts? Historical developments have multiple causes, arising from the interplay between historical actors and the conditions in which the actors operated, including economic, social, political and cultural circumstances (Seixas and Morton, 2013). The process of identifying events as the beginning or end of a particular narrative helps manage the "contingency" of events and shapes the random past into historical experience (Straub, 2005). Straub writes, "every temporal and narrative order...as well as connections of meaning and causality, is formed from the standpoint of the present, from a narrator's perspective, and according to the current priorities and interests of human agents" (2005, p. 80). Similarly, the work of inferring causality that is essential to the discipline of history is influenced by individual acts of interpretation. While students might organize themes of cause-and-consequence from a range of perspectives, here are examples of three areas of focus.

#### i. Cause and consequence...for the young, female worker

In an era when working class households sent all able-bodied members to paid work, from the adults in the family to the children, young working women from Hull and the surrounding areas found jobs in the town's clothing, textiles, meat packing and paper products sectors (Gaffield, 1997, p. 287). Children were often in demand for their "nimble fingers" and factory work to support the family was not uncommon. As Lapointe (1979) observed, it was only in 1915 that the final two years of primary school (Grades 7 and 8) were mandatory in the province of Quebec. These insights provide an opportunity for students to discuss early 20th century conditions of work with reference to concepts of children's educational rights and the more stringent prohibitions against child labour that

came later. The *History of the Outaouais* (1997) records that child labour occurred in pulp and paper plants, including night shifts, years after the minimum working age legislation (14 years old in 1907). A matchworker named Adèle started working at the match plant even though she was below the legal age: "We would make ourselves older, [the hiring officer] didn't ask for our baptismal certificate. We were needy. We didn't earn much. I said I was 14 years old." (ANQ-Hull, *Fonds Mémoire d'une époque*, interview 84-076, quoted in Gaffield, 1997, p. 287.)

ii. Cause and consequence ...for the community.

The labour dispute in the fall of 1924 lasted nearly three months. The *allumettières* held fundraisers, spoke at public meetings and, in general, tried to mobilize public support for their cause. They gained the backing of influential publications such as *L'Action Catholique* and *Le Devoir*. Henri Lessard, editor of the Hull pages of *Le Droit*, wrote on October 2, 1924:

Translation: Having received benefits it had no right to expect and which, perhaps, ought not to have been granted, the E.B. Eddy Company is in the process of alienating the entire population of Hull. In contravention of the contract that was agreed to, the Company refuses, should it need workers, to re-employ members of the union, and it leaves all hiring decisions with the supervisor; moreover, the Company refuses to recognize the longstanding authority of the forewoman (quoted in Théorêt, 2013).

Within the context of the community, the region's bilingual character stands out. Hull's working-class population was predominantly Francophone; the company owners and managers were Anglophone. Adding to the acrimony was the sense that the Anglophone newspapers had adopted a pro-business stance in their coverage of the strike, siding with E. B. Eddy and focusing their concern on the economic impact of the labour dispute (Lapointe, 1979). In this instance, "[b]y introducing students to historical thinking, we teach them to think beyond the immediate, to consider the interplay of causal factors ranging from the influence of the choices made by historical actors to the broad influence of prevailing social, political, cultural, and economic conditions" (Seixas & Morton, 2013, p. 104). As in the third example cited below, we see the influence of religious groups to shape the historical narrative.

iii. Cause and consequence for...religious groups.

The influence of the Catholic church and its role in trade unionism in Hull during this period (Lapointe, 1979) is critical to understanding the nature of the dispute. The *Catholic Association ouvrière de Hull*, out of which arose the *Syndicat catholique des allumettières*, was in fierce competition with the American Federation of Labour and other powerful unions that were aggressively recruiting workers. The clergy seized on the company's opposition to the forewoman at the factory, framing it as a moral issue (Gaffield, 1997; Lapointe, 1979; LeDroit, 1924; Bourgon, 2007). Called *contremaîtresses*, the forewomen had had the power to hire and fire workers, prior to the dispute. The owners of E. B. Eddy wanted to replace the *contremaîtresses* with men and bring in employees of other faiths to weaken the union: "With the very survival of the union at stake, the union supporters made this an issue of morality" (Gaffield, 1997, p. 298). The clergy charged that the company was irresponsible to propose that men work alongside the *allumettières*, in a position of authority over them, as this put the morals and even the virtue of the young women at risk (NCC, 2013; Lapointe, 1979).

The above examples represent just three instances where students have opportunities to develop their understanding about the role of collective or individual agency alongside structured, social conditions. This multi-layered understanding is critical to the *cause and consequence* dimension. Considering collective and individual agency is necessary to grasp the multiple perspectives that shape historical developments (Seixas & Morton, 2013).

#### IV. Identifying Continuity and Change

How can we make sense of the complex flows of history? Prior practices of memorizing dates or events runs the risk of conveying a notion of history as a series of discrete disconnected events or changes that focus on political actors and broad economic shifts. This historical thinking dimension of continuity and change directs students to question history as a process and to evaluate “change” in terms of progress or decline (Seixas & Morton, 2013). By identifying key events and turning points in a timeline, students develop skills in periodization when determining which occurrences to group together. In our description of the *allumettières*, students can use the information provided on the Virtual Museum of Canada website and other sites to identify and discuss the “big themes” in Canadian society such as industry and policy history by exploring continuity and change in timelines. Juxtaposing timelines invites connections and provokes disruptions among narratives as demonstrated in the following timelines.

##### Part I of E. B. Eddy Storyline (1870s-1919)

Sources: Virtual Museum of Canada, 2013

- 1870’s – Factory owned by E. B. Eddy is producing a million matches per day
- 1886 – Donalda Charron b. (future strike leader)
- 1890’s – E. B. Eddy match factory expand and the employees are mostly young women; some as young as 12 or 13
- Late 1800’s – Hull is truly a company town. For more than a century, E. B. Eddy’s total operations in Hull make it one of the town’s largest employers (NCC, 2013)
- 1900 – Fire destroys most operations at E. B. Eddy
- Early 1900s – The plant has been rebuilt. The *allumettières* continue to work. Health hazards from working at the plant include exposure to white phosphorus
- 1906 – E. B. Eddy dies
- 1911 – Canada bans white phosphorus, decades after countries first began banning its use. But other hazards of matchwork remain: fires are a common occurrence
- 1912 – Approx. date when D. Charron begins working at the factory
- 1919 lockout – The matchworkers seek guaranteed hours and wages. Company moves to impose double shifts and the flexibility to adjust employee hours in response to production demand. Through their negotiators, workers secure union recognition and a wage increase but must work double shifts for 4 months.

A second timeline could focus on the broader context of labour reform. Taken together, the first two timelines illustrate that some dimensions of the history that unfolded at E. B. Eddy might have been particular to Ottawa-Hull or to E. B. Eddy, while other dimensions reflect broader trends in Canadian society.

## Labour/Industry in Canada

Sources: Palmer et al., 2006/2013; PSAC, 2014; Library and Archives Canada, n.d.

- 1816 – Few Canadian jurisdictions have any provisions for unions. Nova Scotia makes it illegal to organize for better wages
- 1850s – Most industrial centres have local unions
- 1872 – Federal government introduces *Trade Unions Act*: unions are no longer to be regarded as “illegal conspiracies”
- 1889 – Royal Commission on Labour and Capital
- 1894 – “Labour Day” introduced
- Late 1800’s and early 1900’s – Child labour reaches its historic peak in Canada
- 1900 – Creation of the first federal labour department
- 1905 – The International Workers of the World founded in Chicago
- 1907 – Ottawa introduces *Industrial Disputes Resolution Act*
- 1911 – White phosphorus finally banned in Canada (W. L. M. King is an early advocate for the ban)
- 1918 – W. L. M. King publishes *Industry and Humanity*
- 1919 – The Winnipeg General Strike
- 1924 – First strike by a women’s union in Quebec is launched at E. B. Eddy
- 1930’s – Great Depression
- 1940’s – Family allowance, EI, proposals for health insurance introduced.

Finally, a third timeline focuses on the complex theme of women in the labour force in Canada drawing upon primary source evidence to support the students’ arguments.

## Women in the Labour Force

Sources: Connelly, M.P (2006/2013), Virtual Museum of Canada, 2013; McCullough, A.B., 2001.

- 1800s and early 1900s – Women are expected to be in the labour force until they married
- 1901 – Women comprise 13% of total Canadian workforce
- Early 1900s – Many women at this time work as milliners, servants, dressmakers, teachers, seamstresses, tailors, and saleswomen
- 1914-1918 – WWI accelerates labour-force participation by women, including recruitment of female bank clerks (McCullough, A.B. 2001, p. 326)
- 1911-1931 – In Quebec’s cotton industry, “74 per cent of female workers but only 42 per cent of male workers were between the ages of fifteen and twenty-four (McCullough, A. B., 2001, p. 326)
- 1921 – Female supervisors – the “*contremaîtresses*” – play a central role in the E. B. Eddy strike
- 1922 – Women are permitted to vote in federal elections as well as in provincial elections – but not yet in Quebec
- 1922-1931 – 65 per cent of employees in the clothing sector and 50 per cent in the textile sector were women
- 1940 – Women in Quebec win the right to vote in provincial elections
- 1970 – Tabling of the Report of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women
- 1996 – Women make up 45% of the labour force and 40% of union membership in Canada.

The focus of the above exercise provides students with an opportunity to witness how different timelines are constructed, depending on the historical perspective they adopted

and the primary sources that they analyzed. *Students* become the authors, playing an active role in filling in the context for their historical narrative.

## V. Understanding the Ethical Dimensions of History

Learning to think critically about the horrors of the past as well as the heroism among ordinary people contributes to the development of students' historical consciousness (Seixas & Morton, 2013). A key aspect of examining the history associated with the *allumettières* is to look at the circumstances for women in the workplace from an ethical perspective. To identify ways to teach the ethical dimension, we propose touring the former E. B. Eddy factory and surroundings to offer students a chance to reconsider an historic site as a *worksite* where women laboured in very dangerous conditions. Giving students an opportunity to understand and interpret the local context is critical. Vincent-Domey (1991) has written that a tradition of employing women and girls was well established by the last decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in Hull as factory operations (matches, paper products, sawmills, mica plants) sought labour at the lowest cost. Other scholarship has shown that, in sectors where they found jobs, unmarried women "were often confined to tasks regarded as requiring 'feminine' skills: dexterity, delicacy, precision" (Gaffield, 1997, p. 288); this included packing matches into small boxes at the Eddy match factory. Prevailing attitudes that a woman's paid work was "supplementary" to her family's income intersected with labour market demands, producing a gendered division of labour that consistently disadvantaged women (Gaffield, 1997, pp. 288-290). Questions establish the importance of the era of the *allumettières* with regard to pay equity, working conditions and labour activism so that students can consolidate their understanding about the ethical dimension.

One of the most important aspects of the *ethical dimension* is the way in which historical narratives are connected to the implicit or explicit ethical judgment of their authors. In the case of the *allumettières*, one way in which public observers have responded to the history is to rename a well-travelled street in Hull—in what is now part of Gatineau—the *Boulevard des Allumettières* (Buzzetti, 2011). And the emphasis on sites of collective memory in our article raises an important question about the need for an educator to connect a local history topic to the present day, directly or indirectly. The importance and the need to establish such connections—or to call attention to the connections that have been proposed to date by others—is a topic of debate among scholars; however, based on our research, we reflect on the position of some scholars who claim that when contemporary observers *cannot* make a link to the historical actors, it can be difficult to establish empathy. As Lévesque (2011) observes, "People cannot entertain the possibility of empathizing with others if they do not see some transhistorical commonalities or forms of life between now and then" (p. 132). Empathy and distance are important concepts that emerge in relation to each of the historical thinking concepts, but especially, we argue, here, under the ethical thinking dimension.

## VI. Taking Historical Perspectives

How can we better understand the people of the past? Thinking about historical perspectives involves trying to understand past events through the experiences of people whose lives were very different from living today. It means, in part, recognizing the different objects or material culture that made up everyday lives—the technology, housing, games, transportation and food, for example. This material culture, along with the larger social, political, cultural and economic forces, gives rise to the question: *what was it like to live in the past?* (Seixas & Morton, 2013). This line of inquiry can be supported using tools

such as dramatization. Dramatization creates a synthesis of important themes and enables students to engage with historical thinking using their imagination (Otten, Stigler, Woodward, & Staley, 2004; Drake & Corbin, 1993). Based on primary sources, for example, students could write monologues or diary entries (i.e., Donalda Charron to W. L. M. King; the union chaplain to Donalda Charron). Students could also imagine the correspondence between a matchworker and a Hull city councilor, or between a city councilor and E. B. Eddy's owners.

Complementing the classroom activity, a visit to the former factory site provides opportunities for students to develop their own understanding of historical perspectives, to imagine what the matchworkers thought and felt about working in a factory with the ever present threat of "phossy jaw" from exposure to white phosphorus and the constant risk of fires—fires that were so common, the matchworkers kept pails of water within easy reach to douse the flames.

Although few of the homes from that period have survived, maps and archival photos supplement these missing traces. The capacity of history to "break in on the present," Simon (2000) argued, holds potential insofar as it works against the grain of present assumptions and opens onto unknown corridors of significance, enabling "any given moment to bear a new meaning" (p. 17, cited in Lisa Farley, 2014, p. 71).

## Conclusion

Our efforts take seriously Osborne's call for "historical mindfulness" to maintain an emphasis on content and conceptual development (2006). By applying the six historical concepts to a local story such as the *allumettières*, this study has brought into view a past that has always been there but has been neglected and forgotten. In addition, we have highlighted new opportunities in the digital realm for students to access and interpret evidence and to develop evidence-informed positions on historical events, people and places. Throughout these activities, an important goal for educators is to foster critical reflection, drawing upon historical concepts to probe how the *allumettières* are part of both "hidden" history and public history.

We have seen in our analysis that knowledge of place can inform historical thinking encounters. Historical thinking encounters in the case of the *allumettières* cannot escape constructions of the local community nor, for that matter, the national capital space. Moreover, attention to content and narrative responds to the critique expressed by Osborne that focusing solely on a historical thinking concepts can run the risk of being knowledge-poor.

In performing narratives about the *allumettières*, an historical treatment based on six historical thinking concepts could either succeed in making a given period *more* or *less* familiar to modern observers, depending on the objective. If the aim of the project is to abolish any illusions about the difficult conditions of factory workers in the early twentieth century, then making that history feel "unfamiliar" to students may be exactly the point. A familiarization strategy, on the other hand, might be useful to foster historical comparison discussions on a particular issue; i.e., modern versus past perspectives on women's negotiating power. One or the other approach, in theorizing one's "distance" to a particular historical event, might be appropriate to the lesson at hand, and it would be unreasonable for educators or students to seek out a "universally privileged" vantage point (Phillips, 2004, p. 95). It requires acts of the imagination to consider how particular events and places were actually experienced by people of the past. Historians refer to this as the problem of

interiority, and it remains as elusive as ever among the historical thinking concepts. There simply are too few direct clues as to how an individual or group approached the issues that we can now study with the benefit of hindsight. Did they feel times were getting better or getting worse? And what was *their* historical thinking? Such questions are sure to produce doubt and uncertainty for critically thinking students of history—as well, perhaps, they should.

Hobsbawm (2014) writes, “there is a major difference between the traditional scholar’s question about the past ‘What happened in history, when and why?’ and the question that have, in the last forty years or so, come to inspire a growing body of historical research, namely ‘How do or did people feel about it?’” (p. 159). As we have proposed, an educator might use critical guideposts framed within the six historical concepts to engage with, in this case, in the story of the *allumettières*. It remains to be seen, however, if such efforts can inspire new perspective-making on the part of the students of a kind that responds to social history and national narratives in all their complexities. Students have opportunities to engage with processes of authorship, and in the history classrooms this is fundamentally an authorship of narratives that explore the “constitutive and central function of the narration of stories for the creation, transmission and reception of history” (Straub, 2005, p. 62).

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## Appendix

The Historical Thinking Project (<http://historicalthinking.ca/>) provides a brief outline of each of the six historical thinking concepts:

- Establish Historical Significance
- Use Primary Source Evidence
- Identify Continuity and Change
- Analyze Cause and Consequence
- Take Historical Perspectives
- Understand Ethical Dimensions of History