Pandemic Pedagogy

SAMANTHA CUTRARA

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Contents

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In conversation with Neil Orford

NEIL ORFORD AND SAMANTHA CUTRARA

Pandemic Pedagogy Conversation #1

Neil Orford

Neil Orford is a retired history teacher based in Ontario as well as the president of The Defining Moments Canada which features the Spanish Flu. You can connect with him on Twitter at @neilorford1.

The very first one! We talked about the Spanish flu and the importance of understanding the Spanish flu for us to navigate COVID.

We spoke March 27, 2020.

Video posted March 30, 2020.

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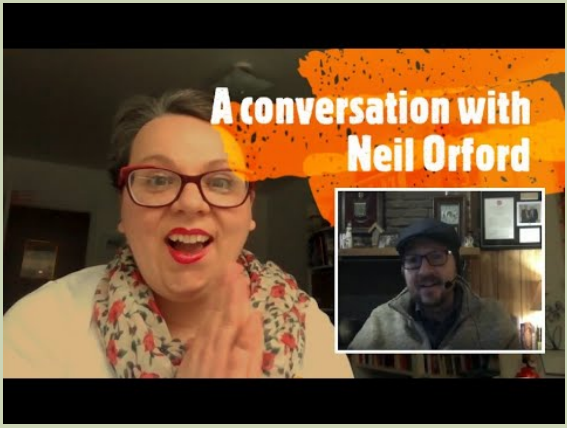
Video:



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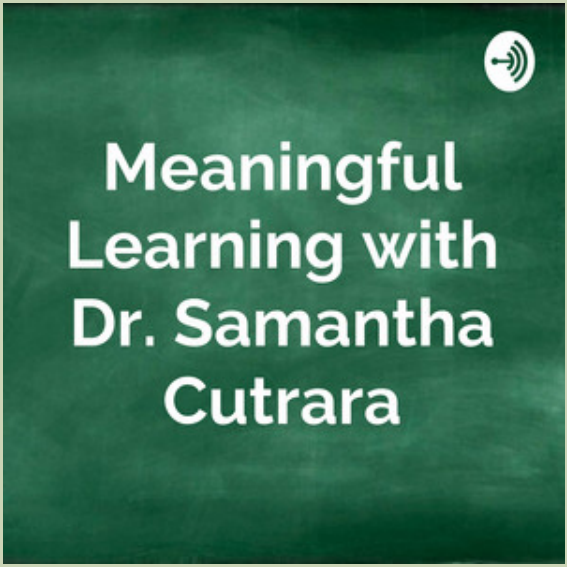

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TRANSCRIPT

All the Pandemic Pedagogy conversations revolved around three questions:

- Question 1: Have you thought of history any different *because* of this moment?
- Question 2: Do you think we would teach history *after* this moment?
- Question 3: Do you think we can "imagine a new 'we'" during/after this moment?

Dr. Samantha Cutrara: I'm so glad to talk with you today, Neil. Thank you so much for getting in touch. I've been thinking about you so much because of the resources that you've created regarding the Spanish Flu. So I was hoping we could talk about that in the Defining Moments Project today. But before that, do you want to introduce yourself to everyone?

Neil Orford: Sure. It's great to see you, Samantha. I've been wanting to talk to you for a long time. I love the videos, and thank you for producing them, especially at this time when a lot of teachers are thinking about getting back to the classroom and considering what they're going to do and how they're going to approach their subject and approach their classes because it's going to be a little bit of not just catching up, but a little bit of reframing what classroom practice looks like when everybody gets back together. However it is that we get back together.

NO: So this is a cool opportunity for me. So the most important

thing about me is that I was a history teacher for 31 and a half years in the Ontario system teaching high school in a small town. Not an urban setting at all. Small town setting. And that over the course of those years, I spent a lot of time developing practices that I thought were going to be needed for the future. So as much as I was in the present, I was always trying to look for what the next wave was as it were. And towards the end of my career, I started a project called The Digital Historian Project, which was a blended learning experience for history students to actually take them out of the school and put them in the environment of a museum and practice digital curation around important points in Canadian history. And that kind of became —

SC: And that's where we met. The beginning part of that project.

NO: That's where we met.

SC: Yeah, because I was at the Archives of Ontario and you were just starting that. So I think I got to see your students, or was it one of my colleagues to just do that introduction to the archives before getting into the digital stuff?

NO: That's right. No, it was you. And so you were right there at the ground floor of everything we were doing and, of course, the Archives of Ontario became a really important inspiration for the work we were doing. And so that lasted for about four years and it really became the genesis for Defining Moments Canada when I retired and the work that we're now doing under contract with the Federal Government of Canada.

SC: Yeah, that's really exciting. And like you have been awarded for this work, right? Like, don't miss that part. Like you won the Governor General Award for history teaching.

SC: Was it related to the digital history work?

NO: It was at the time — and thank you, that was very nice. At the time that that award came my way found me, it was largely because of a project that we were doing through digital historian to honor veterans. And we were using really the first roll-out of robust data from Library and Archives Canada and from other sources to put in front of

students. And we also utilized a lot of existing databases that were at University of Guelph and a couple of other universities where a lot of historians had been working on ways in which they could isolate subsets of the First World War soldiers and develop inferences and develop whole understandings based upon the data and making as many conclusions as we could come to from data that was now increasingly available online.

And so that really became a really important backdrop for what we were doing in digital historian. And we ended up being able to utilize a lot of that data for the work that students were doing and actually turn it into really cool data management projects for grade 12 data management mass students. And so there was this neat little marriage of history and math that we were doing in digital historian for about four years.

SC: Yeah, I always thought that was really cool. I love that part of your project. That integration of the different subjects, different disciplines because so often we keep things separate. And one of the things I talk about in a lot of the videos is ways to have increasing circles of inclusion, and I think part of that is these different subjects as well.

SC: One of the videos I was actually going to post like during March break, which became the "pandemic pause" was about digital history because I was working with York on the digital humanities book, and so we should talk about that more and that might be a really interesting conversation to continue. But let's switch over to the Spanish Flu, shall we?

NO: Yeah. Yeah, it's very timely, isn't it?

SC: Yeah, it is. So I'm going to make a confession. I only heard about the Spanish Flu when you started talking about it and that was like around the World War I commemoration. So 2014, 2015, but I don't think I ever really learned about it or know about it. And so when all the discussion about pandemic started and that word was being used, I immediately thought of your project and I immediately thought of link-

ing people to it. And so there's another video that has resources related to the Spanish Flu and your resource is a very prominent one.

Because you know the topics so intimately, what do you think about the knowledge of — like what did we learn about the pandemic — the Spanish Flu in 1918? How can we use some of that knowledge to help students now understand this pandemic moment that we're in?

NO: Well, thanks, Samantha. I would say that you're in the 99% of Canadians, maybe 99.5% of Canadians, who if they were asked, would confess the same thing about the Spanish Flu pandemic before the last three weeks.

SC: Right, right. Sadly. Sadly.

NO: I think it would be difficult to argue now that it isn't a defining moment in Canadian history. It always has been, but one of the great lessons for teachers in working with students is this notion of amnesia, of cultural amnesia in history that there are moments that we, for one reason or another or a multiplicity of factors, find very convenient to forget.

The Spanish Flu is perhaps in the 20th century one of the most prominent defining moments not just in Canada, but around the world that suffered from that public amnesia. Now there's all kinds of scholarship that's been written about that sense of amnesia around it and I think that's really poignant now in 2020 to reflect upon. Most of those authors, most of those scholars would argue that there is a tremendous amount of shame that — well, let's be specific about it and say tremendous amount of shame that Canadians felt after the pandemic because of their inability to manage it. Their inability to deal with it. Their inability too in the 20th century have predicted it. Have managed it. Have come through it without the kinds of tragic consequences and tragic statistics that we experienced.

And of course, for teachers, I would always encourage them to approach a topic like the Spanish Flu using the historical thinking concepts and really target continuity and change with the Spanish Flu pandemic. There's a tremendous amount of continuity to researching and

understanding the pandemic, and also a tremendous amount of change.

There are lots of things that are similar that we can draw parallels to with COVID-19. It was also a tremendous amount that's different. The context of 1918, 1919 was a wartime and the post-war disillusionment that a lot of Canadians were experiencing into which this Spanish Flu happened, whereas today we're largely at peace in Canada. So there are differences there. And of course, the world of 1918, people were transporting themselves by train, there wasn't the kind of social media that there is today. So there are tremendous differences. So I would always try to emphasize a topic like the Spanish Flu refracted through the lens of continuity and change.

SC: That's really interesting. And I'm sharing the screen right now about the teaching, about the Spanish Flu.

SC: You know, I was thinking about and this comes up in the video about like how do we go about teaching history after this is like we can say we teach history to like learn the lessons from the past, and it's interesting because you didn't really say that. In that video too, I also said like, okay, we can say that, but like we're in it now. So what do we do now that we're in it now? And so could you like name a couple or a few different lessons that history teachers can share with their students to understand this? And I know we can bring in the historical thinking concepts in continuity and change, but like what are some like distilling, some key lessons that we can really pull from this?

NO: Sure. I think — I mean, we have a lot of lessons from a lot of different subject disciplines on the website because we really understand — we want everybody to understand the Spanish Flu refracted through an interdisciplinary lens. That we can approach it from multiple perspectives. It's not just a historical experience, it's also an experience of scientific achievement and medical breakthroughs. It's an experience of reconsidering food and nutrition. There's no question that people who were physically healthier had a better chance of survival from the

Spanish Flu. So there's all kinds of different lenses that we can look at Spanish Flu through.

SC: Yeah, I love that. Like I know that it's just the beginning of your answer, but I love that as a way to like to again think about bringing down some of those barriers between like history and then other things.

NO: Yeah. And you know, Samantha, I mean, if I was coming back to the class with students, I probably would bring in Alice Munro's short story about the Spanish Flu or Albert Camus' play about the Spanish Flu and I'd bring in some literary experiences. And of course, from an artistic standpoint, that great iconic painting by Edvard Munch of The Scream was set in the context of how the pandemic was ravaging Scandinavia at the time.

NO: And Munch himself was afflicted by the flu, although did not perish from it. So I think there's a lot of angles that we can come to for understanding the flu. That's the first thing. I would also say to teachers that a lot of our lessons on the website are about the successful management of coming through the flu.

From a history teachers' point of view, one of the ways that Canadians were so successful at managing and surviving the Spanish Flu pandemic over the course of its three successive waves was that we have been on a wartime footing for five years. So what we're experiencing today with Quarantine Act and the Emergencies Act, which of course was once known as the War Measures Act, Canadians were very familiar with in 1918 and 1919 because the whole country had been living under the government's controls and really severe regulation for four or five years. So when health care professionals, and hospitals and nurses, and the early forms of public health institutions in 1918-19 came to dealing with the flu, they were very well-prepared to tackle it because of that war footing that Canada had been on.

And we don't want in a democracy to be thinking about that kind of

severe restrictedness, but when it comes to understanding the pandemic that we're in right now, it's really important to go back to moments in our history such as the First World War, where Canadians did survive. To a certain extent, they thrived, and they came through the experience of the other end perhaps the better for the kind of regulation and restrictions that they were experiencing at the time.

Now, there's a big downside to that and we certainly don't want to forget the implications of wartime restrictions, and those are very important lessons for what we're living through right now as well because there is a downside to it. And for many communities in Canada, they experienced the blunt edge of the force that came through governmental restrictions.

NO: One hope is that isn't going to be the case today, but it is within the realm of possibility. So I would certainly be talking about that with my students when I get back. I also would encourage you as teachers to pay attention to the remarkable stories that we have on our website of the women who were asked in many cases from their communities to volunteer to step up and become nurses. And although many of them had no formal training whatsoever, some of them had done that role informally through activities involved in the war. Through the IODE or the Women's Institute. But when it came to the pandemic in communities across Canada, a lot of women were called upon to step into the breach and become volunteer nurses and triage communities on their front porches in church basements, in community halls.

All across the country, there are stories of women really taking leadership roles. Well, men are still off at the front and they're slowly starting to come back, but they're really in no position to perform the duties that women were asked to perform in helping Canadians get through the pandemic.

SC: But I think though, and like I really appreciate you bringing that up because I don't think it's just because men were away at war,

which is often how we include women in narratives related to like the homestead, right?

SC: But that this was care work, and that women have always been at the front lines of care work.

SC: So it was a way to expand a lot of the care work that they were already doing, but in a more structured way.

SC: And I've done another video about how do we bring in more women? Well, we talk about experiences and we acknowledge their work as central, as central to the functioning of society. So I appreciate you bringing in that example of this kind of ad hoc nurses because that is a way to be able to really acknowledge women's work. And there's so many articles going around online right now. You probably have seen them. About women who work full-time, who are mothers who might be doing care work as a parent and they're facing a lot of extra stress than certainly men are as well. But I think that probably a lot of people watching this video can appreciate like how all of a sudden this new care work gets brought — all this assumption about care work often can be brought into women's lives, and that is an interesting like way to think through the continuity and change of 1918 with now.

NO: Yes. Yeah, very important.

NO: And the last thing I'll just emphasize as well because I think the inclusiveness element that you speak about so often is so important here. And we spent some time doing the best we could with Defining Moments Canada to identify a really strong indigenous narrative for how the pandemic played out in communities that live very precarious lives. Very precarious existences across the country. And, you know, it was really tough. I mean, this is another sort of subsequent lesson that we could talk about, but how difficult it was for us to establish those narratives because the data is so fractious. The data is so flawed. The data is so absent in many cases.

We have a lot of great historians in the country; sociologists, epidemiologists, historians who have written about the impact of the flu pandemic on indigenous communities across Canada where they're

doing it really absent a lot of good data. We're doing the best we can.

NO: And what is really instructive given the climate that we're in right now with COVID-19 is that Canadians need to appreciate how the pandemic devastated indigenous communities 100 years ago. Like just devastated the communities. And I think we're hearing a lot today about the potential impact not being that different from indigenous communities across Canada where COVID-19 to make their way into indigenous communities. And we've seen none of it essentially close its borders for a very good reason. And if we go back 100 years, there's a lot of lessons there as to why that's a very wise idea.

SC: Mm-hmm. That's so important to bring in. I think of this article I read in 2005 around the election, the federal election in McLean that said like, we're not really a nation unless we care about the fact that so many first nations don't have running water. And I think that so many of us that have a relative amount of privilege that we can hoard toilet paper if that is how we're choosing to deal with our anxiety to be able to really think about people that just don't have the structural resources to be able to fight this in the ways that we might be gravitating toward. So thank you for that, and I'll make sure to put the links to everything that you're talking about below the video so that people can explore that a little bit more.

NO: Thank you.

SC: So before we wrap up, maybe you could talk a little bit just really quickly about the Defining Moments Project and its approach to history teaching generally? I know I really advocate for like emotional affective teaching and learning connection, complexity, and care, and when I see your Seven Sentence Story Structure, for example, and I'm going to flip over to my screen right now, I find a lot of resonance in that. I really like this idea about story. And so maybe you can talk a little bit more about Defining Moments just as a way to kind of conclude our talk for today.

NO: Sure. Well, thank you for concentrating on Seven Sentence

Story Structure. We designed that actually at the very start with ESL students in mind.

SC: Interesting. That's really interesting.

NO: I mean, story. You're absolutely right. Story is so important to everything that we do in history, but we also felt that if we were going to approach these moments in Canadian history that largely have gone unnoticed or, and this is sort of circling back to where we started with so many Canadians not knowing about the flu pandemic. If we were going to introduce these moments in Canadian history that have been overlooked or suffered from public amnesia or cultural amnesia and spend time with our students on it, we needed to make sure that every one of the students in our classrooms regardless of whether they were in urban settings or rural settings, had a model or a methodology or pathway to approach good storytelling.

So the Seven Sentence Story Structure came out of that. And we felt very strongly that if we could work with teachers to develop this as a protocol, as a habit of mind, you know, a good metacognitive strategy for students to really concentrate on building story around seven building blocks, then any topic that a student approached whether it was in history, or language arts, or in science, or in food and nutrition class, it could be approached the same way. So we really saw this is a transferable skill. And that's foundational to what we do at Defining Moments Canada is we want to put 21st-century digital learning tools in the hands of teachers so that we can help students become what we're calling the most competent digital curators in Canada. We want every one of the students who engages with our projects to become citizen curators. We want them to go out into their communities across Canada and find the stories about the topic we're concentrating on and build a narrative with their teachers about it as a form of commemoration.

So if it's about our new project on the discovery of insulin, which is coming up next year and we're already building that project right now, we know that across Canada, diabetes 100 years ago was ravaging this

country. And we know that in communities, large and small from precarious lifestyles right through to the more affluent Canadians, middle-class Canadians, we understand that there are stories that need to be retrieved from our archives, from our newspapers, from our libraries, even from our knowledge keepers.

SC: From our memories?

NO: From our memories.

NO: And we want students to become our citizen curators to bring those to their classrooms and begin to tell those stories. So the Seven Sentence Story Structure becomes the methodology that we want every student to become comfortable with.

So Defining Moments Canada is an interdisciplinary approach. We want as many science teachers, and math teachers, and food nutrition teachers to be utilizing our resources as we do history teachers. Everything there on our platform is designed for the intermediate level student right through to the senior student across the country. We have a real social studies approach with some of our younger age products. And as we start to develop our new projects over the next few years, we're really going to be rolling out a lot of new tools for teachers to use.

So the approach that we have is about taking our historical narrative that is popular and has driven the settler culture in Canada for all these years and unpack it. And discover the stories that are shared amongst Canadians in communities right across the country that do not get the kind of popular attention. And the flu probably was the first example of that, but we know that there are so many more.

SC: Yeah. And I mean, I know you know some of my work, and a lot of the stuff I do is around historic space, which is a methodology for teaching history and exploring history where students like map out through a concept map, for example, key concepts or key ideas from a historical period. They like organize it. They learn about a couple of those things, but then most of the time was spent challenging that narrative through artifacts, through oral histories, through primary sources.

And so, I mean, just selfishly, I love this approach because it involves some of that challenge as like a key element for approaching history in a way that, I know this is important for you too, that is really manageable for history teachers and kind of non-threatening for students, right, but also provides like a lot of really cool opportunities to go deeper because we do know that students like to go deeper, but they need to feel safe, and they need to feel supported, and they need to feel like it is meaningful for them.

NO: You're so right, Samantha. And working with students around asking some fundamentally simple, but fundamentally important critical inquiry questions to shape that understanding. And if you're using a concept, that's a perfect way of approaching it for kids, and engaging also conversation. And we want the kids as much as possible to be talking about this in class as they challenge the narratives, as they develop new thinking, as they branch out into different realms to be chatting about this, talking about this, constantly conversing about it. Otherwise, well, I should be — that's another video. I'll go otherwise in another video.

SC: Otherwise, otherwise.

NO: But I mean, I talk a lot about connection, complexity, and care, right?

SC: Like those are the three foundations for meaningful learning, and that the Defining Moments approach really allows for all three of those things in really substantial [crosstalk 0:27:56.0*phase though.]

NO: It does.

SC: Thank you for your work on this. So glad you put so much effort into it two years ago or four years ago. Who knew? I mean, I guess we all just should have known or whatever. But it's been so great talking with you today. Thank you so much.

NO: You're so welcome, Samantha, and keep doing all that you're doing. It's so good.

SC: Well, that's great, and hopefully, we'll have more opportunities to collaborate.

NO: You betcha. Take care.

SC: Bye.

In conversation with Dr. Mary Chaktsiris

MARY CHAKTSIRIS AND SAMANTHA CUTRARA

Pandemic Pedagogy Conversation #2

Dr. Mary Chaktsiris

Dr. Mary Chaktsiris is a historian, educational developer, and online teaching resource expert. You can connect with her on Twitter at @marychakk.

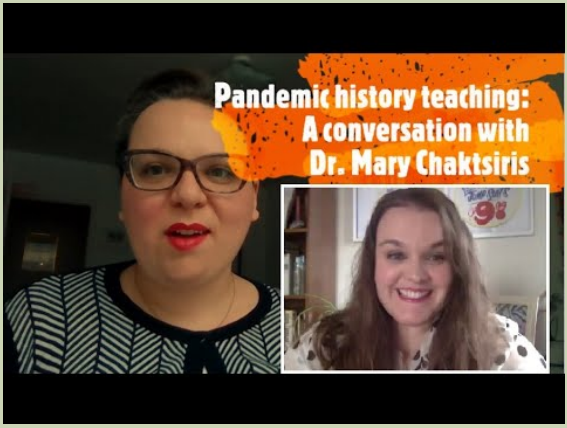
Mary was in the thick of remote teaching when we spoke, but she was still able to reflect upon how this moment can help her communicate the importance of historical agency to her students

We spoke March 27, 2020.

Video posted March 31, 2020.

QUICK LINKS

Video:



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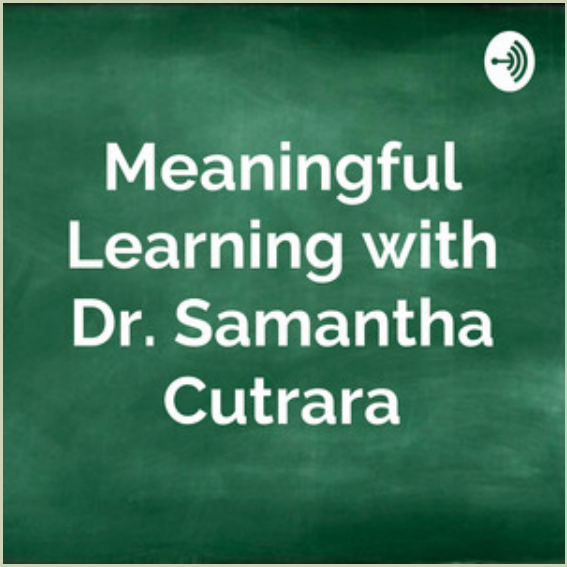

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- Question 2: Do you think we would teach history *after* this moment?
- Question 3: Do you think we can "imagine a new 'we'" during/after this moment?

Dr. Samantha Cutrara: Hi, Mary.

Dr. Mary Chaktsiris: Hello!

SC: How are you? How is social isolation going on your end?

MC: It's feeling pretty socially connected virtually because I'm running three online courses. So my day is filled with Zoom meetings and it's all good. Virtual marketing, all that kind of stuff.

SC: Even though like this isn't the main thing we're going to talk about, how have your students been doing with the quick move to online?

MC: I think there's been a range of responses. Like overall, students are really patient, responsive, adaptive. They're all dealing with different circumstances depending on whether they're international students, where they live, what their family responsibilities are, what the work responsibilities are. So I've taken it upon myself to think about my role as providing students with lots of choice with how to engage in my courses, but not necessarily a lot of requirements to do so. Stu-

dents are invited to engage as much as they'd like or as little as they'd like as they kind of cope with the changing circumstances around us.

SC: Yeah, it's interesting because I think that this blend of both *stability*, like they're still going to be a class, but *flexibility* is important as we kind of navigate this.

So to start the formal part of our conversation, in my video I posted last week, I questioned how we would move forward in teaching history from here. Even just thinking about history for me has really changed. **So, from your perspective of being a history professor, has the idea of teaching history, or the notion of history itself, changed at all during this weird time?**

MC: You know, there's that saying when you're in the weeds, you can't really see past them. And I think that's part of what the experience feels like right now in the rush of getting everything online, in the rush of like coping with all the changes around us. I'm not sure how much more reflection I've actually like had to do, if that makes any sense.

SC: Yeah, of course. Yeah.

MC: But I think that's part of the feeling right now, like in teaching history more generally, whether we're teaching it virtually during a pandemic or not, is that sometimes we feel so like crushed for time because of the approaches that we use. So it's like the **tyranny of content**. Like being so tied to the amount of content that you feel like you have to share with students and the ways in which you share that responsibility with students. Like, **to what extent have you positioned yourself as the only person whose view matters and to what extent have you been sharing that platform with students?**

And I think that when you've been sharing that platform with students, and what I mean by that is inviting them to reach their own conclusions and present their own ideas of what's meaningful to talk about within your course, then transitioning or flexibility is easier, right? But when you're tied to this idea of 'I need to be lecturing to you two or

three times a week. And if I don't do that, then you're not going to learn what you need to learn,' then that is harder.

So I don't know if COVID has changed the way that I teach history, but **it's reminded me that we are all historical actors in our contemporary periods** and that we can't expect that to be any different, right? So just because you're in a history course, you're still a person living in the present and that those two things are always connected, right?

SC: Yeah. I really love this notion of like thinking about that content because I think, especially for history and history teachers and history professors, because, sometimes it's an implicit, sometimes it's an explicit, expectation that we know everything and that we are there to bestow content. And while there is a big movement in K-12 to move away from that, and there's certainly some discussions with professors as well, I think that there still is this big idea that we need to impart the content to students, and so this COVID moment is where we can think more about like our learning outcomes.

You kind of talked about this a little bit already, but maybe we could just pull out a couple things: How do you think, starting in September or in the summer, but let's say September when at least things have cooled down in terms of our anxiety even if we're still socially isolated, which seems terrifying, **how do you think you would approach teaching a course?** Would it be the same? Would it be different after this moment?

MC: In my courses already, what I've tried to think about is **how we can acknowledge and value the thinking and learning that students bring into our classroom.** This idea of like, I'm not the only person who knows anything about Canadian history – So how can we design our courses and design our assessments so that students are actually invited to develop and create their own sense of meaning and perhaps like their own sense of self as a result, depending on what kinds of histories you're teaching.

So this is kind of where like I've been so inspired by your thinking, like methodologically and theoretically —

SC: Oh, thanks, Mary.

MC: — around this idea of — I know. I'm plugging you. And I don't even mean to, but it's true, about this idea of "who is in the 'we?", the national 'we' that we talk about when you're teaching nationally minded courses. And I think when you start to break that down, it's like, how do you share the content creation of your course with students? How are you inviting them to engage and create narratives that complement a more central narrative in the course or that may critique the essential narrative in the course or bring attention to silences or absences in the stories that you're telling?

I don't know if that answers your question. It's like, I think that that approach makes more sense in this period in time that we're living through right now. **What we could do a better job of is trying to encourage students in all of our classrooms to view themselves as historical actors in the present.** So what is the historical context that you, as a student, is living through? What is the archive that you're keeping? Sometimes I say to students, what is in your archives? Like your Facebook photos, are they an archive? Is your Instagram account an archive? What accounts are part of an archive?

And so I think if we can try to bridge those relationships between past and present more clearly, that might be helpful. But part of that involves teachers and professors being willing to share the spotlight. Not to shine that spotlight directly on them as the educator, but to be at once the 'guide on the side' and the 'sage on the stage,' you know? Can you be a coach to your students while also being a leader, because students do look to their educators for guidance and clarification. And so, how can you bridge that role so that if you can't be in lecture with students for three weeks, does that really impact their learning all that much? And I think if you're designing your course through like a more layered pedagogy that shares that spotlight, you'll find that the lectures disappear. Not having lectures may not actually impact the learning outcomes as much as you think.

SC: There are so many things that you said there that were really

great. But just to pick up on that last point about like sharing the stage with students: and, I know you. I know that you are coming from a perspective of a history professor where this perspective may be new or a challenge to a lot of your colleagues, whereas the K-12 teachers that I talked to, like that wouldn't be new to them necessarily. And, when I talk about connection, complexity, and care, that's what I mean by "care." Because even though a K-12 teacher may already see themselves as a coach or a facilitator, I think that sometimes we can care about our students in ways that don't allow students to share the stage. Even when we know that we should be coaching and facilitating them, we might care in ways that we're still like, 'we need to make sure that they get that content.'

And so a question that I always ask, which might resonate with you as a history professor working with other professors is: What does it look like in our classroom to care about the content? What does it look like in our classroom to care about the profession? And what does it look like in our classrooms to care about the student? Because if we care about the content and the profession, then we are *teaching*. But if we are focusing on the student, then we can focus more on *learning*.

MC: So I try to focus on like all those things at one time because why not multitask?

The thing I continue to learn, and it's a constant challenge that I still grapple with, is this idea of less is more approach. It's always less, less, less. I always find myself grappling with trying to do too much. And so it's always about removing and refining rather than adding, is I what I find.

So what I've started to challenge myself to do is think, 'okay, so for every course, **what is one central idea that I want students to walk away from knowing more about?**' And then I try to thread all of my content around that idea. That approach can more clearly allow you to see what to drop and what to keep. So, for example, in my Canadian history modern survey courses, the course idea that I designed that course around is that I want students to walk away knowing more about the

idea that **Canada is now and was always built out of conflict rather than consensus.** It's in all of our national symbols, all of the governance structures that we take for granted were born out of conflict rather than consensus. So that's a story that I tell throughout this course. Like, every single class answers that question to a certain extent in a different way.

So, to me, I care about students because I'm making a decision as the leader of that course, the person who's developing it, what I think they need to learn in order to be successful in the other courses they're going to take, right? How it contributes to the curriculum of the department more generally.

I care about my profession because I want students to know the most up-to-date thinking on these different periods that we're talking about and how they can also enter into conversation with those thinkers through the assessments. So it's not just about consuming this knowledge and thinking, oh, well, the prof told me so. I read about it in the reading, so it must be true or it must be right. And then what was the third one we cared about? I care about my profession. I care about my students. What else was I to care about, Samantha?

SC: Discipline, content, and students.

MC: So I think that's how I weave together the three, right?

SC: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

MC: So through the content, I try to show care to students and to my discipline.

SC: Right, right. No, that's really awesome. One last question if you have a second. So in this video series, it's imagining a new we to teach history in ways that are more meaningful, transformative, and inclusive for their students. And I was saying last week like, not only our notions of transformative, and meaningful, and inclusive look different now, but so **does the notion of imagining, and so does the notion of we.** Could you maybe comment on that? And like no pressure to have this like amazingly solid answer, but like any thoughts on what this new we looks like in this new we that we are in or even like this

notion of imagining when the way we're interacting with the world is so different these days?

MC: So I think if I can build up this idea of imagining, I think that one of the things that we can really learn from history embracing all of its complications and difficult stories, and maybe even especially in those difficult stories is this idea of like resilience, perseverance, and hope, right? And the amazing capacity of historical actors to make meaningful change in the spaces that they're in. So some of us have a big platform. Like sometimes we often like to talk about prime ministers, and government officials, and like people who we think are significant historical actors. But what history also tells us about is that there are important historical actors in everybody's home. Like in your family, right?

SC: Yeah.

MC: And that reminds us that we are also actors in our present moment. So maybe we can't go out and change everything, right? But there's something that we can do today that might be able to enact meaningful change in the spheres where we have influence, right? So I think thinking about systems, thinking about stories, thinking about complexities in some ways can help with this imagining and reminding us that like, yes, history, we need to learn from it. But one of the things I think we can learn is hope, right? And the importance of building relationships and of coming together and finding a way through very different points of view, which is pretty much like what I think the study of history is in a nutshell.

And then the idea of imagining a new we, there is a great possibility that will come out of this period with a better understanding of our interconnectivity. Like that is the hope that I see, right, when I try to find a way to cope with our current world. And so I wonder if the new we will in some ways be us all. And by us all, I mean like everybody who's in your classroom. I don't know who the we is in that context, right? Entering into the future with more willingness to accept the uncertainty that defines not just our present, but also the past. Like I tell students

all the time, think about how you're feeling. Well, all the time in the last week which feels like two decades.

Think about the uncertainty that surrounds us right now. We don't know what this is going to look like, right? We don't know what's going to happen, when it's going to happen, exactly how things will unfold, but yet people are making decisions that have impacts, right? And it's the same thinking that applies to the past. So when you look at the past and you say, well, they should've known better, it's like, really? How could they have known better, right? Should they have known better? How can we learn from the present and also apply it to our understanding of the past? I think that's also like an interesting thing to think about.

SC: Mary, that's so wonderful and that's such a wonderful way to end. Thank you so much. I love this notion of really focusing on imagining by like remembering our connectedness. Remembering the we and that notion of resilience, and hoping like the things that we can all do because we are all historical actors in framing what this story is going to be about.

So thank you so much. This was really great. And you know, I've been saying in all of these videos that you and I posted about like, what are we going to do after this? I just felt like, you know, I had so many questions. And in talking to everyone, it's been so wonderful to think about how important history is at this moment to be able to navigate our way through. So thank you so much for spending the time today to talk with me.

MC: My pleasure. Thank you for having me.

SC: No problem. So maybe we'll have a chance to talk about the digital humanities work, but like right now, we'll just say goodbye. Bye.

MC: Buh-bye.

In conversation with Jan Haskings-Winner

Pandemic Pedagogy Conversation #3

Jan Haskings-Winner

Jan Haskings-Winner is a former president of the Ontario History and Social Studies Teachers Association. You can connect with her on Twitter at @OHASSTA.

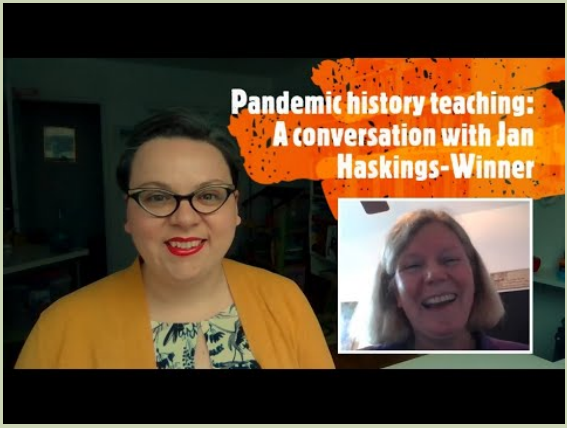
Jan didn't want us to jump too forward in historical interpretation before we experienced this moment. Such a good reminder!

We spoke March 31, 2020.

Video posted April 1, 2020.

QUICK LINKS

Video:



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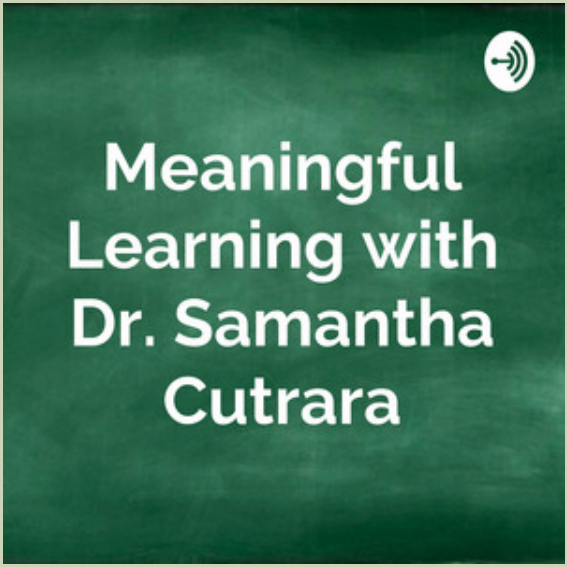

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TRANSCRIPT

All the Pandemic Pedagogy conversations revolved around three questions:

- Question 1: Have you thought of history any different *because* of this moment?
- Question 2: Do you think we would teach history *after* this moment?
- Question 3: Do you think we can "imagine a new 'we'" during/after this moment?

Dr. Samantha Cutrara: Jan, thank you so much for making the time to talk with me today. I feel so lucky to have some of your time. And I know that you are so busy right now because you are still a principal in St. Lucia while being in Canada. But thank you so much for talking with me today.

Jan Haskings-Winner: Well, I've been thinking about these questions a little bit anyway because I'm about to — I mean, I have a teacher in St. Lucia teaching history, which I'm very excited by and jealous of. But I'm also about to start teaching an online course in AQ question history. So I'm really thinking about how does the current influence how I'm going to support teachers based on the courses written a while ago, right? I mean, so how does that change our understanding of what's going on? And I don't know the answer to that exactly, but it's something I've been thinking about.

SC: Well, what I have found with these interviews is that nobody has the answers, but like the fact that we're having the conversation

has been really great for everyone. So anyway, I hope we could help you, but I know it's been really valuable for me.

So let's start the first question. I know I have really changed the way I just think about history itself. Has that been the case for you? **Are you thinking about your social studies subjects any differently because of this?**

JH: I mean, yes and no. I mean, you can always tell when something big is happening. I mean, I remember 9/11. I was teaching — I had a period once prepped when 9/11 happened. I'm teaching in a small — not a small. A large school in Scarborough. And like you don't know what was happening. You know something is happening, but you don't know what's happening, right?

I mean, I have an American history class in the afternoon and I had to move classrooms because my class didn't have cable. Like the classroom I was in, I had to switch classrooms so I could actually get a classroom with cable so I could turn on the television with my American history students to try to figure out what was going on, right? And I said to them, well, I actually have no idea why or what this means, but I guess we'll try to figure out [inaudible 0:02:09.5 *with a non-semester school] to how we could figure out what the significance of that day was like a little bit by the end of the semester.

I don't know that we've actually figured it out how many years later, right? So I think we have to think about when we're trying to say, yes, this is historically significant. It's also economically significant. It's also from a social science perspective significant. So I think, yes, it's significant, but from a historical point of view, we need the concept of hindsight to be able to put things in perspective. And I think we have to be careful not to rush into historical significance all the historical thinking concepts, but historical significance jumps up too fast. And that's my sort of worry that we go, this is historically significant. This is never — well, actually, no, there had been pandemics in the past, right? There have been events that we knew at the moment we're going to be significant because things were going to change, but how is it significant?

I mean, I just watched the Prime Minister's daily briefing a little bit ago, which it also helps us understand continuity and change comparing to World War II, but also perspective like the country itself at the border and how they are responding to the same situation in a different way, and that's from a political side, that's from an economic side, that's from illegal side.

A recent post I just saw from Canadian Civil Liberties Association around rule of law, right? I mean, we have to have laws before we make people do things kind of stuff, but you can't just willy-nilly make people do things kind of stuff, right? I say this as I'm under voluntary quarantine and supposed to be required quarantine —

SC: Right, right.

JH: — and those different kinds of things, right? So I can go out into my yard with my puppy who's being cooperative right now and not barking.

SC: That's too bad. I was hoping she'd make a cameo.

JH: She will. She will. So back to like has my perspective changed? Only a little bit I think in the fact that we know we're living through a moment, but I think it's the difference of [inaudible 0:04:29.4*what do history means in the past, right?] The past is everything and history is what we construct. And where is our evidence so far beyond social media memes about what is historically significant, right? And I think that is something I think we have to kind of keep in mind as we kind of — as historians, but mostly as history educators because that's the lens I come from.

And both as a principal, but also as a teacher because I still think of myself as a teacher first, and then now when I'm going to be teaching an AQ course, how I'm going to navigate that with my keen students who want to be history teachers.

SC: You can just show them this video and be like, take your lessons —

JH: Yes, exactly. Done. Yeah, here it is, done. I need say no more, yes.

SC: Yeah, I think that's really interesting to like not jump to particular conclusions. And some things that I was talking about with some other videos is that your students are going to be experiencing things differently than you are as an adult, right? And so to like think about teaching history when we get back into our classrooms, whether they're virtual as like your classroom will be for your AQ course, whether they're virtual or in person, **do you think about teaching history will shift because of our experiences of this moment?**

JH: Yes and no. I mean, I think good educators always try to make connections to the current, to the present, right?

SC: Yeah, yeah. Right.

JH: With whatever they're teaching, right? And it doesn't have to be — like, there used to be a whole thing when you're talking about the 1920s and prohibition, then marijuana was against the law. Well, now it's not, right?

SC: Right, right, right.

JH: You can always find those examples of continuity and change. And I think that's the bigger piece that we can use in the present whether we are online in our class or in September, hopefully, in a real person where we can use those examples of continuity and change. I mean, like it wasn't like 9/11. No kid in high school I think was alive in 9/11, but, you know, I mean — I know. So we need to kind of figure out when you want to make those, yeah. When you want to make those connections. We always want to make connections to the present to help students understand the past.

This one is just rather big and in your face, so kids will remember it for a while. But even when there was the power outage in August [inaudible 0:07:13.7] 2003 or something like that, right? I mean, I remember it like vividly. But, of course, nobody else that I teach does because they were not alive at the time. Or maybe they are results of that power outage. Who knows, right?

SC: Yeah, that's right. That's right.

JH: They're predicting a baby boom in nine months, which I

believe is Christmas. So Christmas will be new different kinds of packages will arrive.

SC: Well, I saw people are predicting a baby boom just for like couples that don't have children because couples that do have children are —

JH: Yeah.

SC: Like, yeah, they're just like, please no more. I remember, Jan, you had said at one of the OHASSTA Conferences once like, the children entering or like your grade 10 students this year were born on 9/11. So like we need to really think about how we position our own kind of historicity because these students won't have the same touchpoint, right?

JH: That's right. Yeah.

SC: So I mean that kind of — so my last question is, this video series is called "Imagining a New 'We'" about ways to make history more transformative, meaningful, and inclusive for their students. And I say that we need to keep imagining these greater circles of inclusion. And so the last question is about **how do you think that this we might look like after this moment? Do you think the we would change? Do you think the imagining could change?** Do you have any thoughts on that?

JH: I mean, I don't know. I mean, I think the we — I mean, it's an interesting question because this is also reinforcing the difference in terms of people who don't have online access, for example.

SC: Right. Yes.

JH: And I think 30% of Ontario families do not have access. 30%, right?

SC: 30% is a lot.

JH: And my cousin lives in not that far north of Toronto. About an hour and a half north, right? They're comfortable financially, right? And she cannot depend that her Wi-Fi works. And it's not that they're not paying, right? It's not an economic argument for her, it's just that it doesn't work, right? Where they live. Forget the economic argument as well, right? I mean, we don't have in Ontario forget the rest of the

world or the rest of the country. We don't have that kind of universal access on that issue. So I think that's a dividing line kind of stuff, right, in terms of the we part. Because this is a concern I see posted online constantly about how are teachers supposed to support their kids when we're not allowed and can't see them? And it's not going to be like two weeks obviously because it's already extended beyond that. And I just saw in the UK, they expect six months, which is [inaudible 0:09:57.6] depressing.

SC: Wow.

JH: And I mean, it's a moving target. Like every day, it's a different kind of thing. So in terms of the we thing, I also think — so the divisions I think are greater. I also think when we close borders, right, and I was called back to Canada. So I didn't stay where I was. We all have to kind of go back to our home where we have a passport basically, right?

SC: Right.

JH: I think that becoming less of a we and more of an us in them in a kind of a definition. Now, whether we can find a solution once we kind of get through, I mean, everybody claims their own mostly because everybody else is kicking them out as much as anything else, but again, that's not a we. That's an us and them, right?

SC: Yeah, yeah.

JH: The difference I think is that we have a shared experience, right? And I think that, whether you are in Italy or New York or in [inaudible 0:10:56.2], right? I mean, like we all have that shared experience of living through this as educators and the students that we teach will have that different experience than their perspective as well.

One thing I've seen posted is that teachers should assign kids to kind of create, like keep a journal which will become a future primary source, right? In that kind of — so allowing them to kind of think through a.k.a. Anne Frank who lived in a box this big for how many years without access to anything kind of stuff. We can survive in our relatively more comfortable and with social media access at a very minimum kind of stuff, right? So I think — but I do worry that it's not going to be a we.

It's going to be more of an us and a them and we're going to make those lines clear and who gets access to come across. We already cut off access for irregular migrants coming across because how do you support kind of stuff, right?

And I think that worries me in the sense that we're not a we. We've become much more an us than them in this current — we have a shared experience, but it's all different. I mean, like if you live in a family of five and you all have to share the one bathroom suddenly 24/7, not just breakfast rush —

SC: Right, right.

JH: You know, versus at the same time, I mean, I live in my house with my puppy kind of stuff, right? I mean, and it's a different — there's issues of isolation and resources. I mean, people have to deliver — a dog food delivered by a friend yesterday, right, because I can't go out.

SC: Right.

JH: But I have a community of friends, so I feel very blessed that I have neighbors and friends who are questioning me, but not everybody has that network I think. I mean, the government today is looking, or yesterday I guess. I lose track of their announcement. To support, I mean, to give credit to the government. They're really looking ahead and trying to figure out how to cushion all of the different groups who need to be cushioned, whether it's seniors or indigenous groups, and like it's imperfect. And as I say to my staff, this is an imperfect experience. We're not going to get it right. It's okay to make mistakes. We just have to do our best.

SC: Yeah.

JH: And I think in the teaching of history, it's going to take a while to figure out beyond superficial the historical significance. Like what's going to change? Are we going to change so that a universal basic income is now an assumption, right? Because the government's support that they're providing is predicated on the idea of a universal basic income. So if that's a turning point, right, then I would argue back to the idea of historical thinking, then I think we can look back and say,

yes, something changed. Because if it's just survival, we lived through it like the power shut out in 2003, then it's just a moment, right? It's not important. 9/11 changed something, so then why is it historically significant? And then this event, does it change anything or we just kind of live through it and then everything goes back to the way it was? And that I think becomes a question to think about whether when we teach history through this, when we look at the idea of us and them, are we going to just build up our walls as that leader south of the border wants to do? Or are we going to make it bridges instead of walls?

SC: Yeah. You know, when I posed those questions initially and I recorded that video initially, I too had some serious concerns. Like what can we look like? Like for me, energy, and affect, and emotion is really important and it's hard to communicate that over a screen. And so I also was really kind of worried about what this we could look like. And in a lot of the videos that I've done, people have been really optimistic. And I think that you raised some really important points about — like for me, what I hear from what you're saying is like how important it is to recognize our connections because they are going to be so different and that we don't want it to exacerbate any more than it already will do this kind of goals.

And, yeah, I think that's such an important point to think about and I really appreciate you bringing it up. Thank you.

JH: I'm trying to figure out — I mean, [inaudible 0:15:46.4] daily survival and I have no idea what I'm making for dinner tonight kinds of questions, right?

SC: Yeah.

JH: But also on the bigger issue how do I support — like my students in my school, so we are experimenting with Google meeting and we're having a Google Hangout Google meeting. We're doing it by grade. And the kindergarten and the grade two class had one this morning and I attended, and it was kind of — it was very messy because they keep talking over each other, but that's what they do when they're at that age, right?

SC: Yeah, yeah.

JH: But mostly, it was just as important for them to see each other, right?

SC: Yeah, yeah.

JH: And to realize that they're not kids that are home alone, right? And they co-get work to do, but it's basically they're home — I mean, they have parents, but I mean there's no other kids, right?

SC: Right, right.

JH: Unless they have a sibling. But mostly, they're home alone. So part of that reaching out which we are experimenting with is how can we use something like, credit to Google here or Zoom, but we're using Google to kind of connect, right? I mean, and if they have a question about math, that's a separate question kind of stuff, right? But just to kind of build community, and we're a small school so it's a little easier. Like if I was in my previous school, you could never bring all the 11s and 12s in the same meeting because they give just not — that it's not that much of a platform kind of stuff, right? But we're a smaller school.

And when this message starts, I was in the middle of inviting because I'm hosting the 11s and 12s this week, like myself. So it's just complicated how we're going to kind of — like it's messy, it's imperfect, and I think the best we can do is just to try our best and figure out the next steps the next time kind of stuff because I think this is going to last.

SC: Yeah. Like I think that it will shape things for while to come in a way that we can't predict, right? Especially when you are in a teaching and learning sector because you know — like all of a sudden, these new things pop up that you're like, oh, right, there's that to think about because we've organized so many of our decisions or so many of our ideas within a particular structure, right?

So anyway, thanks for taking the time, Jan. I know your time is so valuable and this has been so great. Thank you so much.

JH: My pleasure.

SC: And we should stay connected. So if I can help you, like if I can reciprocate, that would be great because I think it is important to

like keep talking about — and like keep talking in these ways that I think that we can explore ideas and not just be like, I don't know what to do, you know? I think that is going to really help us get through this. So thank you. Thank you.

JH: Thank you. Thanks for inviting me.

SC: No problem. Bye.

JH: Okay, buh-bye.

SC: Thank you, Jan.

In conversation with Dr. Sean Carleton

Pandemic Pedagogy Conversation #4

Dr. Sean Carleton

Dr. Sean Carleton is a history professor. He has written some awesome things in popular media like Canadian Dimensions. You can connect with him on Twitter at @SeanCarleton.

Sean wanted us to ensure our ideas of COVID and post-COVID life centralized nation-to-nation relationships among Canada and First Nations.
We spoke April 1, 2020.

Video posted April 2, 2020.

QUICK LINKS

Video:

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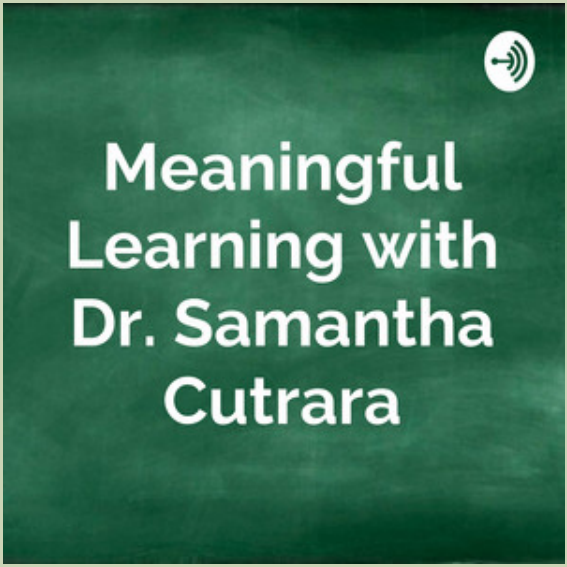

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TRANSCRIPT

All the Pandemic Pedagogy conversations revolved around three questions:

- Question 1: Have you thought of history any different *because* of this moment?
- Question 2: Do you think we would teach history *after* this moment?
- Question 3: Do you think we can "imagine a new 'we'" during/after this moment?

Dr. Samantha Cutrara: Hi everyone and welcome to the "Imagining a New 'We'" video blog with me, Dr. Samantha Cutrara. A video series designed to help history teachers and other history educators teach history in ways that are more transformative, meaningful, and inclusive for their students.

During these pandemic times, I've been doing a series talking with people in the history community; Historians, archivists, comic book creators, museum people about what it might be like to teach history in these pandemic times both during the moment we're in right now and after when we get back into our more like formal classrooms.
And today, we have another amazing guest. I just feel so privileged to be able to talk with so many awesome people. We're going to talk to Dr. Sean Carleton.

Sean is a historian. He's a history professor. He has written some awesome things in popular media like Canadian Dimensions. His particular focus is on settler colonial relations and also the history of

schooling, which I just feel like it's such an awesome moment right now to be able to talk about those things. So let's go over to Zoom and talk to Sean.

Hey, Sean, thank you so much for chatting with me today. I know that you're busy teaching, and so it's been great to be able to schedule a time to talk. So thank you so much.

Dr. Sean Carleton: Oh, thanks for the invitation really. Really happy to chat.

Dr. Samantha Cutrara: So I've been asking people three questions and it's really about like our present about teaching history, the future of teaching history, and then like this notion of imagining or kind of community history. So let's just dive right into the first one, but we can kind of take some, like some roots back and forth between the three if you want.

Dr. Sean Carleton: Sure.

Dr. Samantha Cutrara: So, **have you thought of history any differently because of this moment?** Because I know I have. Have you?

Dr. Sean Carleton: Yeah. I mean, that's an interesting question. You know, as a historian of indigenous/settler relations, I'm always trying to guide students to a better understanding of the present and dreaming of what might be in terms of the future, how to improve indigenous/settler relations? How to work towards reconciliation? Whatever that would look like, and grounding that in an awareness of the past. So in some ways, I'm always thinking about the present and the future through the lens of the past and asking students to do that.

I think what's so unusual about this situation is that the future that — the future seems so uncertain. And in terms of indigenous/settler relations, when I'm trying to lead students for the most part from not knowing a lot about indigenous/settler relations, these founding agreements nation-to-nation and I'm trying to get them to the point where in the present, they can see how understanding all of that history can help them do better and work towards something attainable.

Right now, it seems like the future is so uncertain that it's hard to fig-

ure out like what's the future of indigenous/settler relations post-pandemic? What will that look like? How can Canadians prioritize rebuilding society in some ways that don't leave indigenous/settler relations and those founding agreements behind? I don't know. I don't know the answer to that, and I think that's what's so unsettling in maybe a good and a bad way.

Dr. Samantha Cutrara: You know, something we talked about offline was that during these moments of crisis, you can really see how like Canada is structured, right? And you brought up how important it is to recognize this indigenous/settler relations in these moments. And it's kind of interesting that it might not have shifted your perspective of history, but if we think of that lens, then we can really see how history is playing out in the present because of these absences, these silences and things that we are hearing and the things that we aren't.

Dr. Sean Carleton: Absolutely. I think moments of disaster, of crisis sort of reveal who you are. How society works. What its priorities are.

And I think teaching indigenous/settler relations this semester has been very interesting, because we're in the midst of [inaudible] in solidarity protest shutdown in the history that we were teaching through come to life the kinds of core issues. And it was a really fertile moment I think for me and my student to kind of walk through and understand how an awareness of that history can really help us kind of think through the present and dream of better futures. And then very quickly, indigenous/settler relations got lost in the pandemic, which I thought was quite interesting because I was trying to make arguments in February and March about shutdown Canada being an opportunity for Canadians to learn about these core issues and understand how colonialism continues to influence the present and not just the past, right? And yet, when the pandemic broke out, Canadians' attention very quickly moved away from issues of the environment and our fundamental relationships to these lands and I think it revealed a lot about our priorities in sort of uncomfortable ways. And I felt like students really wanted to

talk through that, but in the shift to online learning, I was still developing and delivering content, but I didn't have the opportunity to really talk with students about some of those really interesting issues about what this says about indigenous/settler relations because colonialism doesn't stop because there's a pandemic. The coastal gaslink work is continuing under the cover of the Coronavirus crisis and most Canadians don't know — a lot of mainstream media aren't paying a lot of attention to that. So I think that that does say something interesting about the relationship between history, the present, and the future and what our priorities are in these moments.

Dr. Samantha Cutrara: But also, it's — you know, when you're saying colonialism, it doesn't stop. It's also a matter of things like access and equity, right? What are the assumptions that we are making about who and what a Canadian is or a person in Canada is and what they need right now, those are facing very colonial assumptions about a Canadian community and that is not many people's experiences. It wasn't before, but it certainly isn't now.

Dr. Sean Carleton: No, I think you raised something really interesting in the sense that what I was trying to teach students about shutdown Canada was that the way that people talk about these kinds of issues is that it's Canada versus indigenous people.

Dr. Sean Carleton: And the only way to that kind of rhetoric gains traction is by people's own ignorance around how Canada is structured, right? To think that Canada is a country of two founding people, French and English, and like indigenous people are like sort of a colonized subordinate minority. That's not how Canada functions, right? Canada is built on these nation-to-nation relationships that include indigenous people as part of that kind of that fabric of what peaceful coexistence was supposed to look like, and shutdown Canada kind of showed us that that poor relationship of working nation-to-nation isn't working. And yet, the pandemic is an interesting example where people are able to come together and make sacrifices and try and think in more compassionate ways about who is included and yet, indigenous

people not surprisingly to me are being left out of that conversation. You know, it's, "Okay, now we have to focus on the health of Canadians," and indige8nous communities are saying, "Okay, well, you need to honor your nation-to-nation agreements where many communities are vulnerable, we need help. And it's like, "Okay, we'll send you some tents. Good luck." I think again, that shows that there are gaps in how we think of Canadian society and how indigenous people are often left out of those conversations to the detriment of working together in peaceful and reciprocal ways in these lands.

Dr. Samantha Cutrara: You know, I think of another video that we did right at the beginning of this series with Neil Orford about the Spanish flu and how he was saying how important it was to talk about indigenous peoples and their experiences with the Spanish flu in the defining moments Canada project. And he brings up the historical thinking concept of continuity and change. And so did Jan Haskings winner, who's another person that — who's another educator that I interviewed. And people that watched the video know that I kind of have issues with historical thinking concepts, but if we are just going to use the continuity and change one, this is an interesting moment to do the continuity and change of a kind of Canadian nation-to-nation response to pandemic issues and the support of different nations. But, I mean, this is kind of separate from this conversation. One of my issues with the historical thinking approach is that it doesn't really incite action, and I think that we can be in it to be able to look right now for, sure, continuity and change, but then we need to take that extra step for action. And I think that teachers can really connect with their students right now about doing some of that research and looking at ways to advocate for greater indigenous and settler relationship right now in order to have that kind of greater understanding of what Canada could be with greater nation-to-nation relations.

I know that, like, historical thinking isn't like you're not in that world as much. But I don't know if you have any kind of thoughts on that.

Dr. Sean Carleton: Well, I mean, I guess my response would be

that the way that we teach Canadian history often marginalizes indigenous people even if we're trying to foreground that history.

Dr. Samantha Cutrara: Yes, good point.

Dr. Sean Carleton: The way that we teach Canadian history places an emphasis on Canada, its structures, its development. And I think that that's — constitutionally, that's not even accurate in terms of understanding the Royal Proclamation, the Treaty of Niagara, the establishment of this nation-to-nation relationship that is the core, the bedrock of what this country was supposed to be and yet in practice, has never really actually emerged as that, and it's just another opportunity to showcase how things like the pandemic show us that the way that Canadians think of Canada continues to deviate from that kind of nation-to-nation relationship. How many health officials, premiers, politicians were first and foremost having conversations about maintaining our treaty responsibilities in these times. Instead, indigenous people continue to get kind of marginalized. It's like Canadians become focused on themselves in these times, which is true. I mean, like, everybody is worried, I'm worried about the health of myself and my family, but I think it does show that our commitment to reconciliation is pretty shallow in this moment. Because as soon as something else happens, we completely ignore those responsibilities. We couldn't — I think it would have been an interesting moment if coming out of shutdown Canada going into the pandemic, if politicians had said, "We're wanting to maintain those relationships as we respond to this pandemic talking about treaty responsibilities." I mean, there's a cause in treaty six that many treaty people in that territory we're trying to invoke saying, "We have treaty responsibilities here in terms of medical visions that most people have — I mean, they don't even know there's a treaty let alone intricate —

Dr. Samantha Cutrara: Yeah. Yeah, yeah.

Dr. Sean Carleton: And I think that that reveals something perhaps unsettling about our priorities as Canadians, as settlers in these moments that we say we're committed to doing different, and then

when we're given the opportunity whether it'd be shutdown Canada or now our response to the pandemic, it just reveals that that is fairly surface level and shallow, which is both disappointing and an opportunity to perhaps change that.

Dr. Samantha Cutrara: And so, like, the second question is about teaching history after this. And **do you think there will be a change? Do you think that — I mean, in terms of content or delivery or having more fodder to explore this, do you think there'll be a change after this? Or what will that change be?**

Dr. Sean Carleton: Yeah. I mean, I try to think of the way that I teach history kind of pessimism of the intellect optimism of the will trying to get students to understand that history can teach us a number of different lessons that can guide us in terms of a response to the present and try and create better futures. And I think in that way, I don't really see the way that I teach history changing and yet, it seems pretty unlikely that the way that I teach won't be affected.

Dr. Samantha Cutrara: Right, right.

Dr. Sean Carleton: Because as historians, as people, we make our own history, but not in conditions of our own choosing so we respond to what we're going through. It does shape the way that we do what we do. And so, I mean, I think in terms of how the pandemic will shape the way that we teach history, I think there will be some delivery changes and how we prepare for those in some ways. Sort of the nitty-gritty of the mechanics of the way that we teach. But I guess my core teaching that I try to infuse whatever I'm teaching is kind of learning from the past to better understand the present, to create a better future, I think in some ways, that will make that core idea that we need to continually learn from the past to try and think of better futures. I think that that teaching is more relevant coming out of the pandemic. And I've been recently reading Jones' book on the 1918-19 influenza and I see that teaching in this book, which is what happened was devastating particularly to working class or marginalized communities and yet, there is inspiration after the influenza working class people were more willing

to fight for a better future in the streets of Winnipeg in the 1919 general strike, that a lot of that organizing and wanting to dream of a better world inspires political organizing in the '20s and into the '30s and '40s. So I think there's lots of examples of teaching through crisis that can provide some hope and inspiration and try and getting people to think about if you want to dream of a better world, you first have to understand how that world was created and what — in some ways, how it works so that you can figure out ways to make it work better.

Dr. Samantha Cutrara: Yeah. And I think it's also about, like, pulling new stories. Like being open to finding and looking for and pulling those new stories from the past, right? Like, sure teachers might come in now and teach them of the Spanish flu, but those links between working class struggles afterwards, is that going to be brought up as much? Because that can really align with a lot of students' experiences with their own families. Like, I think that this pandemic demonstrates a real failure of or could demonstrate, for some people, a real failure of capitalism to take care of like small businesses, to take care of a large population and that we can use history to demonstrate working class struggles, for example, always in identifying where the issues that we're having now, where the roots of that history is too.

Dr. Sean Carleton: Yeah. And I mean, I think in listening to the conversations that have been going on the past couple of weeks, I think that this debate over is our society structured around the idea of people before profit or profit before people?

Dr. Samantha Cutrara: Yeah.

Dr. Sean Carleton: And I think we're seeing that there's actually a tension that I think a lot of people want to prioritize society over profit and yet, the way that we've structured our society makes that very difficult in many ways.

Dr. Samantha Cutrara: Mm-hmm.

Dr. Sean Carleton: And I think the pandemic might provoke some interesting questions both within the present and future, but also of the

past. I mean, I'm reading a Zilt's book and thinking, "Wow, it's so different than what we're going through now and yet, people a hundred years ago we're asking very similar kinds of questions.

Dr. Samantha Cutrara: Yeah, yeah.

Dr. Sean Carleton: Like, if you don't have a properly functioning health care system, when a crisis hits, things are gonna get pretty bad, but not bad for everybody. Some people will be able to afford better kinds of care, and the people that are affected most by the pandemic will be marginalized vulnerable communities.

So I think that the kinds of questions that people are raising now and in trying to think through in terms of what kind of future we want to have, I think we can learn a lot from the past and applying some of those same questions to grapple with how people responded to moments of crisis and disaster that might give some clues about how we might grow up towards a better kind of future today. I'm hopeful that that can happen.

Dr. Samantha Cutrara: Yeah, I'm hopeful too and that leads to my last question about this notion of imagining a new we. What **do you think this imagining or this we might look like if it all, if that's a concept that resonates with you after this moment.**

Dr. Sean Carleton: Yeah. I mean, I guess as a bald white guy teaching indigenous/settler relations, I'm always acutely aware of the we. Who's included in that. And I guess part of the teaching that I do is understanding how the we is complicated in colonial settings. Who's included? Who's not included? When and why? And who benefits most from those kinds of exclusions and exclusions? And I guess my view is that the we, both in the past, present and future, in indigenous/settler relations isn't a sort of melting pot we, but rather a sort of nation-to-nation peaceful coexistence we. That we — that Canadians settler society and indigenous nations exist in parallel and that we doesn't collapse that, but rather maintains that parallel nature and find ways to mutually reinforce it rather than abandon it, which I think we're seeing in these kinds of moments. We're making some progress, although we

can debate that towards reconciliation and then all of a sudden, the pandemic breaks out and we're sending body bags and tents to indigenous communities. That isn't kind of reinforcing of that kind of parallel nation-to-nation relationship, it's sort of like, well, we're gonna double down on protecting Canadians first.

So I think in coming out of this pandemic, it might be an opportunity. That's what I'm trying to argue is that the pandemic is another opportunity at least in terms of indigenous/settler relations to say that our response to the pandemic needs to also ensure that our treaty responsibilities, our nation-to-nation relationships are being up capped that Canadians are also, though they're looking around the world in terms of what can we do to help places like Italy or Spain, the United States even, how can we help their response? Okay, well, what about your treaty partners? What about indigenous communities?

Dr. Samantha Cutrara: Right.

Dr. Sean Carleton: We, Canadians society, needs to understand that in these moments, Canada also has responsibilities to indigenous nations. That's what this country is supposed to be founded on and yet, we don't do that often. And I think that that's sort of that double-edged sword. We can either say, "Well, I guess we'll just abandon it and we'll pick up reconciliation in 18 months." But I think more optimistically, it's an opportunity to ensure that those responsibilities don't get dropped in times of crises. That we don't get distracted by worrying just about our own family, but in trying to think of our relations more broadly to ensure that our commitments to reconciliation and nation-to-nation relations can actually be strengthened in these moments, you know. Like if we can find a hundred billion dollars to ensure that businesses can pay out their workers, well, then our arguments about not being able to find money for clean drinking water and working nation-to-nation to ensure that indigenous kids aren't being discriminated on reserve, we can do that.

Dr. Samantha Cutrara: Right, right.

Dr. Sean Carleton: That's a decision we can make if we prioritize

it. And so, I like to think that pointing out the gaps in our response isn't just because I'm a mean person or I want to make Canada look bad, it's an opportunity to say, "I like that there's more — we need more —

Dr. Samantha Cutrara: Sorry, we did just get a visitor, yeah. Sorry.

Dr. Sean Carleton: I was wondering what if one of my two would come, but now it's nap time. I guess to kind of wrap that up, I hope that this isn't an opportunity to push snooze on another opportunity for Canadians to respond differently. We didn't do very well, honestly, as a country during shutdown Canada. We resorted to ignorance, misinformation, not learning the lessons of the past to respond in gracious ways. But we can learn — we can continuously learn to respond in different ways. And I think that during a pandemic, my hope is that nation-to-nation relations isn't something that seems marginal, but can continuously be brought in as a priority and that might be a stepping stone, and once we get out of the pandemic, that we can point to that as something that has changed since the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

Dr. Samantha Cutrara: Yeah. I mean, all of that is so — it just brings up so many interesting things to think about and also, I think, to act upon. And during this moment when teachers, for example, aren't seeing their students face-to-face and that they have time — I mean, although a lot of teachers are also parents, and so like, you know. But to be able to do some more research and like think about their own narratives and how that can be brought into the classroom in order to advocate for greater action and greater advocacy for what a nation-to-nation relationship would look like and our responsibilities as Canadians to push our governments to kind of ensure that.

So, thank you so much for really being such a — being so clear in bringing those issues to the fore. I really appreciate that. Thank you.

Dr. Sean Carleton: Yeah. I mean, it's an opportunity I think — it's an opportunity to envision the kind of society that we want to build after this.

Dr. Samantha Cutrara: Yeah. Yes.

Dr. Sean Carleton: And my hope is that nation-to-nation relationships don't get abandoned in that. That we can include that in our conversations. And if we can do that, I think we will continue to make progress towards reconciliation. If not, I'm worried that all of the work that we've done in the last 10 years that Canada will teach indigenous communities, that when push comes to shove, they're not really interested in strengthening those relationships, and I worry about that. So I hope that we can take this opportunity to focus, to ask new questions, to learn more, read more, but also to widen our ability to be compassionate around the world, but also to indigenous communities across Canada.

Dr. Samantha Cutrara: Yeah, that's great. I think that's really — I think it's useful, and like useful in the way that you're articulating it and I think it's gonna have a live resonance for teachers and other people watching this video. So, thank you so much for taking the time to be able to talk with us and to be able to, like, explore these issues more during these times, these odd times that we're all trying to get our footing on and thinking about using this as a way to build a stronger future, I think, is such an important takeaway.

Dr. Sean Carleton: Yeah, thanks for the invitation. I really appreciate the opportunity to do something other than Zoom lectures and respond to panicked emails. I really appreciate the opportunity.

Dr. Samantha Cutrara: Well, let me know if there are — or let me know what resources you want to share with teachers. I'll provide a link below. And, of course, we can always keep this conversation going because I think this will be really useful and I can only imagine how useful teachers will find it. So, thank you so much. Have a great rest of the day. I hope your cats wake up from their nap so you can talk —

Dr. Sean Carleton: Yeah, they still gonna want some treats, yeah.

Dr. Samantha Cutrara: Yeah. Okay, see you later. Bye.

Dr. Sean Carleton: Okay. Thanks, Samantha.

Dr. Samantha Cutrara: Wow, what a great conversation. It was so awesome to talk with Sean and to be able to really, like, think about

settler and indigenous relations in this moment. I don't know if you heard that cat behind me. You know, one of the things that I took from it is about, like, we can really use this moment to think about how the world is changing because of something we didn't expect and how our expectations of what the world is supposed to be like. How that can shift to. And that we can use this moment to be able to do more research and more thinking. Like, just were thinking about this. And then think about ways we can bring this into our classrooms because it will be stressful going back into the classrooms and it will be — it's like, what's the word I'm looking for? There'll be this desire to kind of get back to normal in a way that could gloss over the real learning opportunities that this moment shows. And if we go back to Neil's video about the Spanish flu, like indigenous/settler relations, like that was an issue then and how can it be — how can we leave this moment even stronger than when we left in 1918 related to these things.
So, I hope you took that too and how useful this moment can be for rethinking the world that we want. Let me know if it does. It'd be great to have a conversation with you just like I had it with Sean, and Neil, and Jen and all these other great people and great people I have lined up as well for next week. So let me know if you want to be one of them. Three questions. What do you think about now in terms of the present in teaching? What do you think about the future? And how or if we can imagine a new we in different ways because of this. Have a great day, everyone, and stay home. Bye.

In conversation with Chris Sanagan

Pandemic Pedagogy Conversation #5

Chris Sanagan

Chris Sanagan is an archivist, the co-creator and writer of the Group of 7 comic books, and so he's going to have a lot of really great insights based on both this very formal background as an archivist, but then this imaginative background as a comic book creator. You can connect with him on Twitter at @Chris-Sanagan.

Chris and I got to talk about the glut of records we'll have after this moment AND we got to talk about comic books. It was so great!

We spoke March 31, 2020.

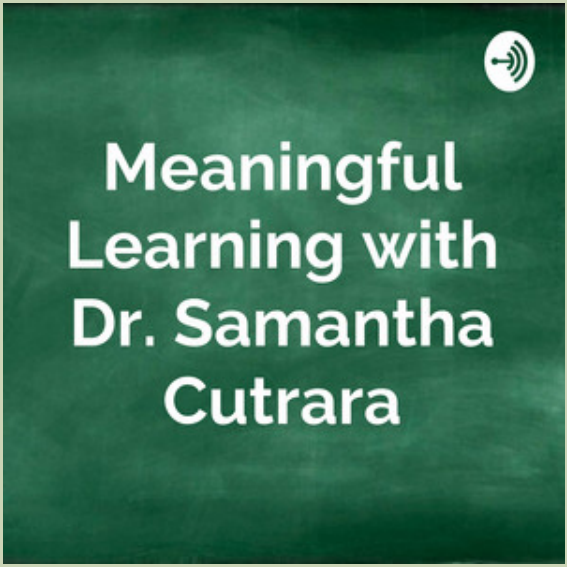
Video posted April 6, 2020.

QUICK LINKS

Video:

A YouTube element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: https://press-books.library.yorku.ca/pandemicpedagogy/?p=44

Audio:



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TRANSCRIPT

All the Pandemic Pedagogy conversations revolved around three questions:

- Question 1: Have you thought of history any different *because* of this moment?
- Question 2: Do you think we would teach history *after* this moment?
- Question 3: Do you think we can "imagine a new 'we'" during/after this moment?

Dr. Samantha Cutrara: Hi everyone and welcome to the "Imagining a New 'We'" video blog with me, Dr. Samantha Cutrara. A video series designed to help history teachers and other history educators teach history in ways that are more transformative, meaningful, and inclusive for their students.

We are in week three of social distancing, social isolation because of the COVID-19 pandemic, and I posed a question on week two, social isolation, that said like how do we teach history after this? And that has led to some really, really great conversations. And so I'm going to be doing a video series having conversations with historians, with educators, with archivists, with creators about what history might look like after this moment once we get back to our classrooms whether that is virtually or in person.

Today we're going to be talking with Chris Sanagan. Chris is an archivist, the co-creator and writer of the Group of 7 comic books, and so he's going to have a lot of really great insights based on both this

very formal background as an archivist, but then this imaginative background as a comic book creator. So let's go over to Chris.

Chris, it's so great to talk with you today. Thank you so much for making time.

Chris Sanagan: Yeah, thanks so much for having me. I'm happy to join.

SC: I've been thinking about you a lot because of both your role as an archivist and your role as a comic book creator because this notion of both like documentation and also this artistic response to this moment I think that you have a lot of experience that like kind of brings in both of those things. So I'm really hoping that we'll be able to talk about kind of both those areas of your life today.

CS: Absolutely. Happy to chat about both for sure. Yeah.

SC: That's awesome. Oh, sorry, that was a cat.

So the first question is, I was saying to people that I've really been thinking about history itself, like history as a discipline and like the stories that we tell as history differently because of this like, are we able to capture, for example, like the anxiety of this moment or the anxiety of any moment in the histories that we have? And a lot of that comes down through records. So **have you thought of history differently because of this moment?** Is that something that you've been thinking about at all?

CS: Yeah. Yeah, absolutely. I've been thinking a lot from the archival perspective about the documentation of this event specifically and just general response because historically at least when I think of archives, I think of what first attracted me to archives and why I decided to pursue a career in archives was there was a level of removal of myself from the documentation. There was like a gap. There was a literal time gap. And so we think of items or artifacts of 'the past'. They were interesting, and they were attractive, and they were fascinating. And so the challenge I think that we are going through now at least from I think that archivist they're going to have and certainly archivist I

know are currently in the works on is having that sense of removal from the content currently to which we're working on.

So there is a real — when I think of the projects, for example, the archival projects that I worked on, there's a real physical and time removal from working on records from 20, 30, 100 years ago, and so now we are currently in the moment of working on records, but also living that life at the same time.

So I think there's a challenge. There's a challenge of — I don't think we're in the point now of thinking of being impartial to the records that we are trying to capture. I think as this is currently — we're in the early stages generally speaking of thinking about how to best document what's happening right now and that is a new experience for me as an archivist because I've never been in the moment in which I'm trying to document I guess is the way —

SC: Right, right. Yeah.

CS: No, go ahead.

SC: Well, because I'm thinking too about like one of the historians I talked to, she said that in her history classes, she's a history professor, well same students, like what is an archive? Like is your Facebook an archive? It's kind of interesting now because we are creating so many digital records like for young people to really think about their documentation and their records and like what that looks like, and then in 100 years, what will be the most valuable in capturing this moment?

CS: Right. Because that other piece too is the value question, right?

SC: Right.

CS: Because we are constantly documenting – well, I should say that through various channels and technologies, we have the ability to continuously document and curate, and our responses, our lives, what else is going on, some of the more interesting responses I've seen to this particular event I think only an advantage. This is called Coronavirus or COVID-19. Like I said, I can't talk about it, right? But really what

I certainly know is I've seen [inaudible 0:06:04.0] oh, you know, you grab a pen, start a diary, like do a daily log of what you're seeing, what you're experiencing, what you're feeling which are the types of primary sources that end up in archives at some point, right? They tend to be the real rich sources of social history or have been in the past.

The interesting challenge of that is, and this might be something — this is a great question for certainly demographics that use these channels more often whether their younger or [inaudible 0:06:40.4*whatever happens to be] is I don't know if they think of what they're doing when I think of like my Instagram feed or I think of my Twitter feed or whatever it is, capturing those moments, capturing those feelings everything from anxiety and anguish to regular daily silliness and rigmarole — really the full scope, the full spectrum of life during living in through COVID-19 pandemic.

SC: Mm-hmm.

CS: And I'm not sure if there is a realization generally of what we're doing in terms of capturing, sharing, documenting that these will be the artifacts depending on their survival, depending on how technology changes, and depending on how we can capture it and maintain the quality of the information and the access to the information that these will be the artifacts and the items that in 5, 10, 15, 25 years we'll look towards in some capacity to give us an idea of what we were feeling, what we were thinking to remind ourselves and then to use those as resources.

The thing that I'm finding interesting though is we don't know a timeline yet, right? So we don't have a sense of — and in fact, I mean, this is not unique to our time or our age. During times of a global calamity and crisis, there have been multiple documentary efforts I think because we don't know or we have a — it's interesting because we have a pseudo timeline where we understand what's happening in the world, we get daily updates on response, how things are tracking hopefully, positively. So there is something of an assumption within I think

society that hopefully we will see the end of this in two to three months, I'll just say that. That's kind of —

SC: Fingers crossed.

CS: Fingers crossed, that's kind of what we're doing. Now, the interesting thing is I marry that against the first assumptions of when the first World War would have ended, and it was oh, by Christmas. Like things [inaudible 0:09:02.2*are great.]

SC: Yeah, yeah.

CS: So obviously, it's a different extreme, however, we are experiencing a bit of the same kind of I think feeling towards engaging with the future possibility of this being over sooner hopefully rather than later. And in the meantime, our daily documentation of this is going to provide that recap. That now, the secondary question moving on that is the value piece. Like what is valuable? What will be valuable to preserve for long-term to represent what would be going through?

SC: You bring up some really interesting things here, and I want to like say like how you talk about the event, right? Like you keep saying that this is an event and then also that we want a timeline. And for me, that really highlights like how much we think of history, for example, as like these spaces, these bound spaces. And I'm just going to bring in some postmodern theory right now, but like Foucault, for example, said that we should always strive for a messy history because life is messy. And like being in this moment right now, this moment we don't know how long it's going to be I think demonstrates that messiness and all these different pieces because I too have been seeing, for example, things that are saying like pick up a pen and write a diary, which is so interesting because of how much we're on our computers and our phones.

And when I think about like students in K-12 classes and like how we bring them more into the conversation of history, like is that the media that they are going to be gravitating towards? Are we going to be able to capture like their experiences? And so you bring up some really kind of interesting elements of how we think of history as very kind of neat

and clean, and even archives as neat and clean, but of course, as an archivist, you know that's not true. But like, how can we teach a more messy history?

And then like I think that is a more rhetorical question, but maybe a better question is **how do you think we would teach history after this moment?** And I mean, you do teach history a little bit because you do a workshop with your comic book, but can you think about maybe like in the future what this might look like? Like this teaching history, this presenting history after this moment?

CS: You know, you bring such a great point of the messiness of history, or at least how certainly versus the nice streamlined approach perhaps we've taken certainly to this point or in the past. I think it's interesting because when you talk about like events or timelines or those kind of pieces, it's going to really take a change in perspective going from teaching moving forward. A real paradigm shift in, or at least I know it's already out there and there's been excellent thinking about it, but really compartmentalizing in your head that that activity is not clean and is very much —

SC: Yeah, yeah.

CS: Right? And that brings in other pieces too because there's a real mental health response to this event as well.

SC: Right, right.

CS: And we will talk about anxiety and all these pieces too or working from home and trying to juggle the kids as well and like how do you compartmentalize that. And so I think moving forward, the challenge is really going to be getting to a place of understanding and comfort mentally with dealing with the fact that we don't know the answers, we don't have the information, and even the information that we do document is representative of say someone's experience, which is valuable, but may only be represented of their experience, and so it's not necessarily the narrative.

Like I think when I was thinking of this, when the questions you were thinking where you had sent earlier was oh, well, you could say one

could argue that, well, I know exactly what's happening because I'm looking at my feeds, my social media feeds, and at any point in time, I can understand what's going on in Italy, I can understand what's going in China because I'm getting fed information and I see that oh, well, — I mean, I could certainly comment on it or of review point. But really, those are just based on assumption because these channels that we interact with are almost 100% self-curated. So we're choosing.

SC: Yeah.

CS: We're choosing the stories we want to hear. And again, I think that probably goes back to the mental part of it as well in the compartmentalization and somewhat of an order perspective of having that information, the dissemination of that information. But I was thinking about this, just thinking about how my feeds are absolutely curated towards what I want to hear my friends, my family and so the future, the challenge will be how are we documenting the stories or the activity of what's going on that we're not assuming it's coming through our chance.

SC: Sorry, I'm laughing because the Internet just loads, so it was just like stories and I just thought really slow.

CS: Well, it's noon here too so, you know.

SC: I think that brings up such a great point. So I wrote an article a couple years ago called The Subjectivity of the Archives based on my work with the digital humanities at York and about like, and how — for example, in history teaching, we're like when we use primary sources, we can bring in this history that we can now like explore as evidence, but that there's all subjectivities. It's a choice of what you're choosing, it's a choice that what was saved, it was a choice that what was reported, it's a choice of what the archivist thought was important. And I think I love this idea — well, I mean, I love the idea that you're bringing up, not the idea that we're all just in our little mini curated bubbles, but we are in our little mini curated bubbles, right? It'll be interesting the kind of the narratives that float to the top.

And something that came up with another video was like how much

do you as a history teacher, and I know you're not necessarily a history teacher, although you do do some teaching is how much do you share the stage with your students? And so if you're just thinking about your own experiences and what you saw through your own feed, then you are ignoring the fact that your students had a much experience because of their own kind of curated bubbles. So anyway, just like thanks for bringing that up.

CS: No problem. There's also the point too that archivists try to — I mean, generally speaking, I think certainly when I joined the gig 15 years ago, the teaching was that archivists need to be impartial and unbiased and all these great things about attempting to document human activity or the scope of human activity. The reality in certainly there's been much more thinking and much more I think general dissemination of the idea that we absolutely carry our own biases regardless of being archivist for humans so we bring those forward.

So to your point, not just what's being documented, but the access tools, how we describe all the discoverability of these pieces moving forward are really fascinating challenges to deconstruct.

SC: No, that's really interesting and like I think those are kind of cool questions for teachers to post to their students too like what is a value to keep to record this moment. And the decisions that we make a month out from being back in the classroom, will those be different than if it was a year out? The answer is yes, of course, but to like think about that. Yeah, that's really interesting.

Maybe we can just turn to our last question. So as you know, the video series is "Imagining a New 'We'" and the idea is that with this imagining a new 'we', I argue that we need to find ways to be able to have greater circles of inclusion and that we need to imagine a more cohesive kind of multicultural, but like so many different cultures, not just like racial or ethnic cultures to think about like new ways and imagine new ways of being together.

And so I talk a lot about connection, complexity, and care, I talk a lot about using creative nonfiction, I talk a lot about affective emotional

responses to history. **Could you comment maybe about this notion of imagining and this notion of 'we' right now?** And I am bringing up imagining in particular because of your own work as the co-creator of The Group of 7 comic books and being the writer of them. Maybe we can talk about that a little bit about do you think that creative nonfiction, for example, comic book responses, artistic responses is going to be a way that we can keep imagining 'us' together?

CS: Yes.

SC: Okay, great. Question done, like we can just move on.

CS: Simple. Yeah, I think imagining, reimagining thinking of future approaches to this and current approaches, it really is I think, for lack of a better term, interdisciplinary in the sense where I think —

SC: [crosstalk 0:19:41.5] so much. I'm sorry to interrupt you like mid-sentence, but that's coming up so much and I love that. I love this notion that we need to think of this in more interdisciplinary ways because the more disciplinary things, the more things get chopped up, but imagining a new 'we' can really be these circles of inclusion. So anyway, I just wanted to — anyway, just I like that part, so keep going.

CS: Nope, that's good. I'm glad, I'm glad.

SC: Great, great. That, we agree.

CS: Yeah. I just feel like, for example, writing Group of 7, which is an alternative history comic book featuring tropes and events and personalities from Canadian history thrown together in a narrative that is completely fictional, yet is inspired by real history I think is an example of certainly the — it's an example of the — what I'm trying to think of? Not impact, but it's just an example of — sorry?

SC: Response?

CS: Yeah, response could be, yeah. Or just even as an artifact maybe even going back to the documentary piece that engages in a different manner, but share some of the same objectives as traditional teaching of history would be I think, I would argue in the sense that the response it often gets or it has received when we talk about, you mentioned earlier, we've done some in-class sessions with teachers work-

ing with different — whether it's younger grades or, in fact, actually the Comics in the Classroom working specifically with tying into say the grade 10 history curriculum currently in Ontario, we've seen just the emotional response that students have given us from picking up the comic book the artifact itself as opposed to picking up a textbook.

SC: Great.

CS: Now both have their merits one should not replace the other, but going back to your question about what is the future kind of look like in reimagining a we, I think this is where art and culture have a lot to say with delivering impact upon these resources to different audiences. One thing that I'm really noticing being part of this — you know, this is something that I've only been doing for the past three to five years, so I still consider myself a bit of a newbie at it, but it's opened up this other community for me that I was never part of. And by that, I mean other creators. Other cultural creators.

And certainly every day when I check my feeds going back to our conversation throughout channels, the amount of art that's coming out of, in my case, graphic art about feelings towards COVID-19, dealing with it, isolation, physical distancing, what I'm seeing the artistic response to it, it's a really nice compliment to the news feeds that I receive.

SC: Mm.

CS: So it's a real, it just makes the whole experience richer and it really — I mean, it feeds into this tapestry of what we're experiencing, or at least personally what I'm experiencing absolutely. And so seeing that — and this is again early days. I mean, generally speaking, to see what artistic endeavor culture response will come out in the next six months to a year to this will be both — is really enticing and exciting, and I think will also — it's a different kind of documentation. So whether folks are writing a diary or keeping a log or recording video chats or whatever happens to be, we're going to see even more personal response through artistic needs.

SC: Mm-hmm.

CS: And I think it's only going to add to our interpretation of how this is impacted transnationally.

SC: Yeah, I think that's really great and it's been really cool to see how many artists in a variety of different media are sharing and want to share. And so I'm going to provide some links at the bottom of the screen to your website, but maybe you can also share with me and then I can share below the video too some creators that you are following right now that you think that teachers might kind of be interested and also like seeing their responses.

CS: Sure. I'd also say too that [inaudible 0:24:53.5] sharing a website I think is part of this response. For example, we made all six issues of Group of 7 free to digitally download. So now —

SC: You should have just started with that and then we could have been like, that's great! Everyone, go make comic books.

CS: I should have started with that. I know. Right, go make comic books. But that came from a place where Jason and I, the co-creators, we were seeing what was going. For us, the digital artifact itself is out there already. Why don't we just don't take the price off it and say, hey, during these times, just enjoy. Whatever. Enjoy this — this is something that we've created, we're putting this out, please take it as you see fit and enjoy.

And what that echoed, we got the idea from another comics creator which I saw, but instead we put it on. I've seen other comic creators also do the same thing whether just making content available. And what I'm seeing is it's been an effort to provide art back into the world and to remove any kind of barrier. Now, of course, [inaudible 0:26:05.6*it's not a barrier,] it's technological access to network, but it's a different conversation. But literally — so I've seen people like we talk about other creators who certainly I think fit into this mold and certainly take the — have done work in the history space as well. I know you're familiar with Scott Chantler as well.

SC: Yeah.

CS: He just put up — for example, he has a Canadian hero called

The Red Ensign and he just put a 56-page PDF for free on his website for download which is a story that you actually can't get anywhere else, if you're even a fan to begin with. And so again, but it's an idea to put content out without any kind of thought as to how it might be used as opposed to just here.

SC: Right.

CS: People I think, you know, just here's a contribution. If this brings you any kind of joy or relief or maybe feeds into your thinking or teaching or learning, awesome, but it's again removal of barrier I think is the real — or as many barriers as possible is the real attempt.

I've seen also another comic artist named Jay Stephens who does work for OWL Magazine.

SC: Mm-hmm.

CS: It has a regular feature in OWL Magazine called Arrowhead which is geared at 9 to 12 to 14-year-olds as a — and it actually does have a historical element to it as well going back to [inaudible 0:27:43.4] arrow program, but the point is again, then I saw him released the whole Arrowhead comic, you know. And it's again free download. Take it. Do what you want to do.

So certainly there are specific things being released in the Canadian comics using history as inspiration space that are, hopefully, teachers can use as I mentioned Scott Chantler and Jay Stephens, but I am just seeing general art being produced. And whether it's a one-page web-comic or whether folks are going back into their catalog and repurposing art in pages, that's a really fascinating thing. I've seen people release comics that they did three years ago, but now have a different feel because it's a different light and it's a different event.

SC: Right, right.

CS: So it's again, it's just an interesting response. And then, you know, I'm very excited selfishly because I enjoy the work of all these people to see what else will come out of this because I think times like this do often spur creativity. The other thing I'm also seeing, which again goes into this art space is I've seen some responses online to,

"Oh, this is your time to create," and counter-responses to say, "Hey, at the same time, you're under no pressure to create." This is not, "Oh, you have all this time, suddenly you should put it into this other activity." It's a really interesting balance of productivity and mental health and creativity. Anyway, sorry. You're going to say.

SC: I mean, that's what I was going to say because what I'm hearing are two different things because it's like, one, there is this moment for this active creative response, but then also in releasing these things, that is also an acknowledgment of the kind of passive response and like just like consumed because like that's all you can do right now and that's totally [crosstalk 0:29:52.1], right?

CS: Right.

SC: And I think that the more things that are out there that we can — and I say possibly consumed like that sounds judgier than I'm intending it, but like —

CS: Right. I know what you say.

SC: Okay. That it can then like spur this connection to be able to do more when you feel like you're in your best space to do it. And that's actually kind of the point of these videos too, right? Because when I had started, I recorded a video at the end of the second week of social isolation, and I was like, how do we teach history after this? So many people came to me with such great responses that I was like, I don't know really what online teaching resources that teachers need, but like, if you want to listen to some people talk about it, let's have these really cool conversations. And so I'm glad we got to talk today because, like I said, I was thinking about this mix that you have in your life between being an archivist and being this comic book writer that I thought would provide a lot of valuable insights, and I was right. So thank you.

CS: This is doing great. Thank you, Sam, and I really appreciate you reaching out.

SC: Yeah, thank you. Yeah, of course. And hopefully, we can find some other opportunities to collaborate and to be able to talk about the Group of 7 comic books. So thank you so much, Chris, and have a

great rest of the day. Stay home as you should, especially because it's raining.

CS: Thank you. I will, and I look forward to seeing you in person again in the future if it will come.

SC: Yeah, it will come. Okay, see you later. Bye.

CS: Bye.

SC: I just feel so privileged to be having these conversations. Thank you again to Chris, and thank you to all of you for watching. I think one of the lessons that I'm really learning is that we get through this the best together. And so please let me know if you want to be a part of this conversation. You can comment below, of course, but you can also — let me know if you want to do a Zoom talk and we can have this conversation to be able to share with other history teachers. So thank you again, and look forward to a video tomorrow. I'm really excited about this series. Bye, everyone.

In conversation with Dr. Nathan Smith

Pandemic Pedagogy Conversation #6

Dr. Nathan Smith

Dr. Nathan Smith is a history consultant for his company Applied History. He's also a history professor at university and college level. You can connect with him on Twitter at @nsmith241.

Nathan spoke about his experience teaching in college classes – Will the medium change the message? Should it?

We spoke April 4, 2020.

Video posted April 7, 2020.

QUICK LINKS

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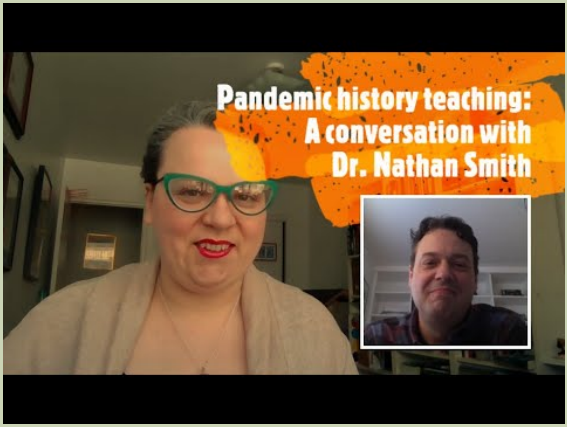

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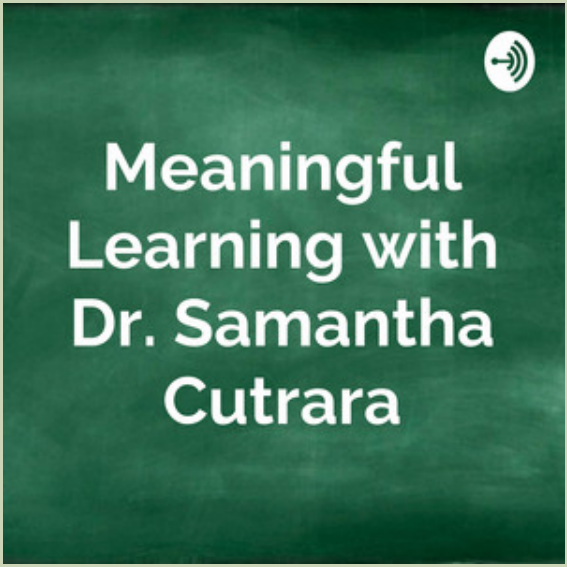

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TRANSCRIPT

All the Pandemic Pedagogy conversations revolved around three questions:

- Question 1: Have you thought of history any different *because* of this moment?
- Question 2: Do you think we would teach history *after* this moment?
- Question 3: Do you think we can "imagine a new 'we'" during/after this moment?

Dr. Samantha Cutrara: Hi everyone and welcome to the "Imagining a New 'We'" video blog with me, Dr. Samantha Cutrara. A video series designed to help history teachers and other history educators teach history in ways that are more transformative, meaningful, and inclusive for their students.

Today we're continuing the series of amazing conversations I'm having with people in the history and heritage fields about how or if they see history and the teaching of history changing after this moment. And today we have another amazing guest. Dr. Nathan Smith is a history consultant for his company Applied History. He's also a history professor at university and college level, and I think that his perspective teaching at a college level is really going to add a lot of dimension to this conversation, so I'm really excited about that.

Nathan is also a writer, editor, another renaissance man and has done so many different projects that I'm sure that you have seen his hands, especially related to the World War I commemoration that went

from 1914 to 1918 as I'm sure you know. Anyway, let's go over to Nathan. I have a cat at my feet. I have a feeling she's going to make an appearance during the video, but we'll see. Okay, let's bring it over to Nathan.

Hi, everyone. A real quick post-interview note before you actually watch the interview. Nathan and I had more of a conversation than an interview, so our screens are side by side rather than just like his screen and my screen. What that means is that I wasn't able to add text at the bottom of the screen in a way that doesn't like block out one of our faces. So anyway, just know that that's missing from this video because of the way that we have the video structured. But a cat does show up and look very grumpy. So that's something to look for. Anyway, enjoy. It was such a great interview.

Hi, Nathan. Thank you so much for speaking with me today. I know that you are so busy with your consulting work and your teaching work, and it's been such a struggle for so many of us to kind of figure this new timing and this new world. So thank you so much for making time to talk with me today.

Dr. Nathan Smith: Oh, happy to be here. Hi, Samantha.

SC: Hi. So with everyone, we have been talking about three different questions. Kind of like the present, future, and perhaps the like imagining our community part of what could happen with this moment. So let's just dive right in.

So I have personally thought of history differently because of what we're going through now. It's really made me think of things like afect, and emotion, and how our historical record is really like imperfect in kind of capturing that. **Have you thought of history any differently?** So many people I spoke to, especially history professors have said not necessarily, but have you thought of history any differently because of this moment?

NS: I guess I haven't like overall. I haven't thought of history as something different, but what you just said about thinking about different themes, thinking about emotion, thinking about affect, I think the times that you live in do make you emphasize aspects of the past or

make you think about topics or approaches to thinking about the past in different ways. So it certainly has made me think about other times in the past where there has been a lot of anxiety in society, a lot of the commentary you read in the news, reporting, journalism and whatnot are things like the flu epidemic in 1919, the influenza, and also crises in the past.

A lot of the articles I've been looking at from Toronto media have been talking about the world wars and how government should be approaching the management of this crisis. So it does make me think about those sorts of things as a way of emphasizing themes about the past, but it hasn't made me think about history as something different or imagining history in a different way.

SC: I want to pick up something that you said at the beginning and I want to know if I am hearing what you said right. And if I'm not, then maybe you'll still agree with it. But like, how our current moment makes us or really shapes the way we think of the past —

NS: Mm-hmm.

SC: Which then makes me think of like how so much of our history is really a reflection of the present because we're pulling —

NS: Yeah.

SC: — really the past that help us understand this moment. Did I get that right?

NS: Yeah, I think so. I think definitely, the topics that we choose to write about I think as historians and what teachers often choose to emphasize is often influenced by the present. I don't think that's a bad thing. I think we want to explain the present and talk about why the past is relevant for it. I know that I definitely do it in teaching Canadian history.

A couple years ago, the prime minister issued an official apology for the rejection of the St. Louis, the ship carrying out Jewish refugees from Europe to Canada and into other countries in 1939 which was turned away, and I saw that as a great opportunity to talk about something that happened in the past in the way that it's relevant for the present.

And it was in a Canadian studies class in which the issues of immigration, multiculturalism were really big themes in the class. So that's one example of the way that the present I think can shape the way that we teach history.

SC: Yeah, I don't think it's a bad thing at all. I think that it's important in this moment, and maybe I guess that's what I mean when I've been thinking of history differently because of this. Maybe the how subjective our history is. Like it [inaudible 0:06:35.7] understand how our histories are not objective. And so rather than to kind of go closer to objectivity, but to really understand that subjectivity of the moment that we're in and how and what we teach.

NS: You know, one thing I think it does is, in the present, it makes a far larger part of society think about society. Because the way that our lives have changed, in part have changed because of the disease that society is experiencing, it's forced government to take action to make all the different levels of government in Canada to take action. Some of them are recommendations other than others are legal regulations that we have to abide by.

It's forced I think for a much larger proportion of society to think about how society is structured, to think about the role of government, and to think about relations between individuals and society, which we wouldn't normally think about. So to that extent, I think that really is different. We don't normally I think — I mean, we're accustomed to thinking about it because we teach histories of Canadian society or maybe some other courses that are similar to that, and often our research I think is related to those questions too.

So I'm used to it and I find it a challenge in classrooms to get students to think about not only their own perspectives or some sort of mainstream kind of ways of seeing things, but try to think about society overall. The connections between individuals, the different ways that we can organize society, and to also think about the role of the government plays in society. I think it definitely makes us think about that a lot more right now.

SC: You know, this really reminds me of the conversation I had with Dr. Sean Carleton last week about, he said that these moments of crisis really show you how the structures work.

NS: Yeah.

SC: And he was saying in particular, this is really showing how a nation-to-nation relationship between the Canadian government and different indigenous peoples fail to hold the weight that it should. And so I appreciate you also saying that about we understand our structures differently because we are seeing how they operate or how they fail to operate as effectively as we might want them to in these times.

NS: Even more fundamentally, we're just more aware of them, you know?

SC: Right, right.

NS: We're just more aware of them. So I totally agree with that view that you just expressed. Disaster or crisis reveals fault lines in society. Reveals tensions that exist in society. So I think we're definitely seeing that. Like if you're just to take a class perspective on the effects of dealing with the Coronavirus, it's clearly something that falls in terms of risk. Falls more heavily on people who are frontline workers and people with lower incomes that don't have as many options about self-isolating and things like that.

So it very quickly — it doesn't take very long, does it? Before we start seeing those realities and things like that.

SC: Right.

NS: [inaudible 0:10:20.5] already there, but we just notice them.

SC: Right. So I was saying to Chris Sanagan, who's an archivist and comic book creator, when he was talking about archiving, like what this is going to mean for the archives community, I was like, I want to bring in post-modern theory, but I'm going to bring it in right now because Foucault says that we should really strive for a messy history because that is more aligned with how society functions.

And with what you're saying and what Sean was saying, I also think of Derrida's notion of deconstruction. That it's not just pulling things

apart, but rather deconstruction is watching the fault lines that are already there, right?

NS: Mm-hmm.

SC: What is going to come out from those fault lines. I mean, we don't need to go into a big post-structural discussion, but I actually, just as an aside, I think that might be an interesting thing to do for the video because it is coming a lot. Up a lot. This notion of messiness, this notion of structures crumbling, this notion of seeing a different world because of this fault line, because of this crisis. So [inaudible 0:11:34.5*in fact, just thrown out there a little _] with modern history.

If you like, you kind of touched upon this, but **do you think that teaching of history will shift after this in big ways?** Do you think that this kind of revealing of fault lines will be present in the classroom? Do you think that it will? Do you think that it should?

NS: I mean, just based on the people I know who teach history at the college and university level, I think they would choose to use this, for example, in the classroom, that it would be a touchstone that they can use with students to make comparisons with things that happened in the past or realities from the past. Certainly anybody teaching sociology or social science, which are topics I've taught at college, it's a great way of reflecting on social structure and social relations. So I think that's true for history classrooms also.

In terms of what teachers choose to teach about the past, I don't know if it will change, but I think it's a subject matter and a shared experience that teachers can draw on and use that to teach other things that they're interested in. I mean, we don't really know exactly where this is going in the next few months, but I guess my sense is is that it won't lead to a transformative sort of approach to what teachers choose to teach in history classrooms. On the other hand, it might change a lot about how teachers choose to teach because so much of teaching and the immediate future is now online, there is a possibility that there will be more of that in the future. And I don't have any predictions to make about that, but that's always been of interest, right?

To education institutions, that there's always been an interest in providing online instruction. There's a great hope that it's a technique that can be more cost-effective, but also a way to reach students.

I'm a lot more skeptical about that. I think it's extremely useful, but I don't see it as any kind of a replacement for face-to-face teaching. I've done online teaching too and there's things I really like about it. So I see that question that you're asking in two ways. I see the what teachers choose to teach and how they choose to teach it. I'm not sure the what is going to change overall, although obviously this is a collective experience that we all have that we can draw on and make use of. But the how of how teaching happens in the near future has completely changed. And maybe down the road —

SC: Whether we wanted to or not.

NS: Yeah, exactly. Yeah.

SC: I mean, I would like to maybe challenge you a little bit that the content won't change because also you're saying that like there might be more opportunities to bring in these current events. And I think that if you're bringing that in, wouldn't that then shifts how you're demonstrating particular elements of history? Or you don't necessarily see those two things happening hand-in-hand?

NS: I guess I think about if I'm say teaching about social inequality in the past, I mean, there's lots of different topics that reveal that in Canadian history, you could draw on this experience that we're having in 2020 that demonstrates social inequality in our own society. For my own teaching, that's not a new topic, right?

SC: Right.

NS: So, but drawing on that shared experience, drawing on examples or any way themes that students will be more familiar with because they live through it, I think would be a really good technique to make use of to engage students. But the topic itself for the kind of teaching I do, and I imagine for a lot of teachers too, —

SC: Yeah, yeah.

NS: — not so much.

SC: So one of the first conversations I had is with Dr. Mary Chaktsiris, who I know that you know very well.

NS: Yeah.

SC: And she was saying that because the mode of teaching history is going to change, that also then for her at least changes some of the structure of her teaching [crosstalk 0:16:33.4]

NS: Yeah.

SC: — you have to do everything. And so it really talked about like a co-creation of some of the content. This isn't one of the like official questions, but do you want to comment a little bit about how someone whose teaching has changed because it's moved online?

NS: Yeah. I think that's a good point. And I think that probably does overlap with the question of how teaching changes. You can't translate face-to-face teaching exactly to online. There's all kinds of parallels. Almost any issue in the classroom exists in an online environment, but it gets dealt with in different ways.

So I think one reality of the online, for example, is it's possible to produce an online class for a very large class, right? With numerous students. But you don't get any — it would be extremely difficult to get interaction. Teacher-to-student and student-to-student interaction in a class like that. So ideally, I guess what I'm trying to say is you don't want that kind of class online. Very large groups I think would produce a sort of a learning experience where basically its content on the screen that students have to interpret and then report on in assignments and they get graded, we don't want that. We want to be able to engage with students.

SC: Yeah, yeah.

NS: So creating ways of doing that can take a great deal of time to create interesting experiences that students can access online and have some discussion between themselves and some to the teacher as well. So I think Mary is right, that it will cause us, if we continue with this online approach, it will cause us to craft our way of introducing topics and getting students to think about topics. I think it'll push us to try

to create those sorts of discussions, assignments, and learning activity assignments that then lead to their own written assignments and reading that they do rather than say talking, right? In a kind of a lecture and engagement talking and discussion fashion, which I do pretty informally. But you got to formalize that and craft something online that can produce that. That would feel different to me creating something like that. That's hard work, and you can certainly do it and do a good job of it, but it is different.

SC: Well, I think for me, that's one of the reasons why I was so — I mean, the word confused is coming to me, but that's not really the word that feels right. But that's one of the reasons why I was so confused about this notion of imagining a new 'we' during this time because I see classroom-based connection is so important to hearing stories and exploring stories. And I guess part of my panic was like, what does that look like if we are all in our homes because that is literally siloed thinking, right?

So I mean, a lot of the other interviews we had have been very like positive about what that might mean and it's given me a lot more like hope.

NS: Yeah.

SC: **Can you comment about if you think that this notion of imagining a new 'we' or a 'we' or even just this notion of imagination could shift and change because of this moment?**

NS: Yeah. Like I said earlier, I have done online teaching. It was some years ago, but I've become a little bit familiar with in the past month because there's a lot more tools available now, and I think there is a greater recognition from, again, colleges and universities, that's what I'm familiar with, and the fact that the designing of online classes requires a lot of people in order to produce something that's good.

NS: So anyway, you need to create something that's quite rich and that takes a great deal of time. All of your class design, your assignment design, your content design, learning activity, stuff like that, it's all front-end loaded. So it's a huge amount of time. You will

spend more time doing that. And if a good actual online class is produced, it's going to require the assistance of web designers and other content creators to maybe create brief videos of yourself that introduce topics. So it's more of a team effort than I think what we're familiar with [crosstalk 0:21:53.0] classroom teaching.

SC: And yet those teams aren't really like available to us, right? Because everyone is doing this right now. It's not like we can work with a really great team or work with our IT even if we have those because I know — I mean, this was a while ago, but when I was going around to all these different school boards in Ontario, some school board still all had like overhead projectors in classrooms and other ones had full like smart boards, you know?

NS: Yeah.

SC: Online teaching does not look the same for everyone because of notions of access. And I think that developing a course always takes a lot of time. But the thing is when we are imagining developing a course, we imagine it in a traditional class setting often.

NS: Yes.

SC: For so many of us [crosstalk] that work of developing a course and then also learning the technology and what would work best for our students is such a mammoth task. All of us educators right now that have moved to this know that. Know that way that front-end.

And I was talking to a student who was saying that her — can you just see that cat? Sorry. That saying that one of their online classes interrupted by what is now called 'Zoombombing' of people coming on in masks and yelling racist words or like feeling —

NS: Oh, you're kidding me.

SC: Yeah, yeah, it's crazy. And I've mentioned it to other people and people either don't know about it at all or like, oh, yeah, that happens a lot. And so the point I'm trying to say is that, I mean, other than like watch [inaudible 0:23:46.7*for fun,] but that we can do all these frontloading things, but we are never going to know how students are going to react or how the work is going to land. And in the formal

classroom, we can often read the room and know how to shift, but will or how our students respond to this I think will be so interesting to see if we can build a class community because that's difficult in an online space.

I think, I don't have a lot of experience teaching online, but I think it's difficult to build community. Thoughts on any of that?

NS: I think it is. I don't think there's any doubt. I think it is. One thing that I think is also true is an online experience, maybe there's more acknowledgment from a student's perspective that they need to commit to actually being in the classroom, so to speak. I'm not saying that that will lead to more commitment necessarily, but if people or students are there, they might be more present while you are — if you're doing [inaudible 0:25:00.2*asynchronous,] meaning people log in at different times.

NS: Their choice of want to login might assist them in being more focused on course material rather than on traditional classroom where it's at 2 o'clock on a Wednesday or whatever, and they can sort of tune out. I'm here. I made it. So this is the commitment I've made.

NS: And if you want to get me, then you got to do something special today because I'm just —

SC: Yeah. I mean, that's a good point. When you're self-directing learning, you can self-direct it at your own speed, right? [crosstalk 0:25:38.1]

NS: But you're right. I think you're very right about knowing reading the room. We don't have that ability online. I think in all those respects, those are big differences in terms of teaching, and they apply to any subject, right? Not just history.

SC: Yeah. And so it will be interesting about, you know, in how the summer progresses. What or if the ways we're thinking about history does shift because of the delivery, right? Like, the medium is the message. And so I am really interested in maybe coming back to some of these conversations to reflect on how or if because of this digital teaching.

NS: Here's one thing I thought of when I saw these questions from you is — one thing I think is different about the online, it's possible to teach in a traditional sort of lecture-based way university and colleges, and do a good job that still allow for classroom engagement, but deliver really good lectures. Anyway, what you're doing in that circumstance is you're sort of delivering your narrative or at least your narrative shapes the direction of the class.

I think producing narratives is more difficult in an online environment. If you did that, it would require a fair bit of text, right? Your own text or recorded lectures or something like that. That's not very engaging. If you got to read five web pages of text before you get to learning activity, before you get to the discussion, and then there's still readings you have to do for the week and report on, that's not great.

So I think it might reduce that and maybe it does encourage a different approach in which students are exposed and encouraged to engage with some issues in a few different ways, and then you see what they bring to it. That's possible

SC: Yeah. And I think that that's something that Mary had talked about too. So I think that watching these two videos together is really helpful in thinking about these different ways of translating the type of cheating that we want to do into a media that we didn't necessarily choose, right?

SC: Thank you so much for sharing these perspectives. I think it's really useful and really thought-provoking. And again, it's so nice to do so many of these because the conversation just builds on each other. And yeah, that's fantastic.

NS: Well, thanks, Samantha. I enjoyed the conversation too.

SC: Yeah, good. Okay. Well, we'll say goodbye. I know you got your classes to work on. So anyway, until next time. See you later.

NS: Bye, friend. I'll see you.

SC: Bye.

In conversation with Dr. Andrea Eidinger

Pandemic Pedagogy Conversation #7

Dr. Andrea Eidinger

Dr. Andrea Eidinger is a historian. She had a blog called Unwritten Histories that was so foundational for so many in the Canadian history education community. You can connect with her on Twitter at @AndreaEidinger.

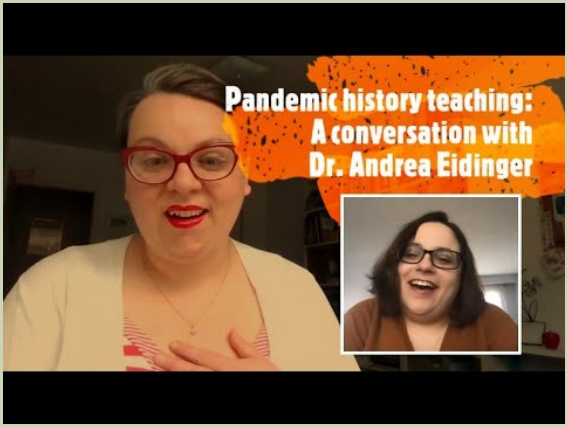
Andrea brought such dimension to our conversation by talking about the grace we can give our students in our classes during this time.

We spoke April 1, 2020.

Video posted April 8, 2020.

QUICK LINKS

Video:



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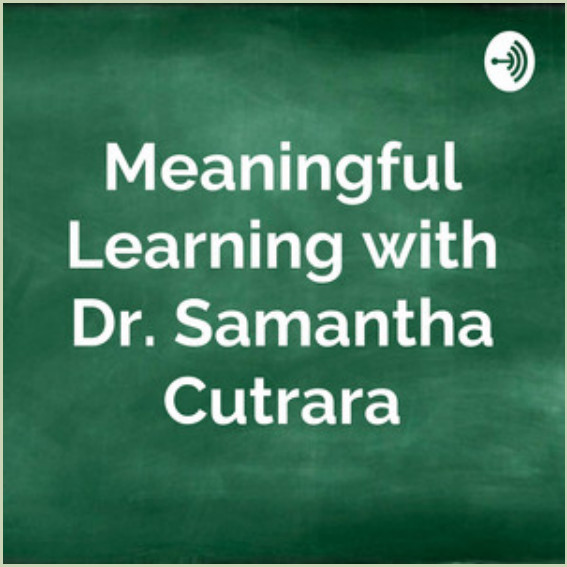
Audio:



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TRANSCRIPT

All the Pandemic Pedagogy conversations revolved around three questions:

- Question 1: Have you thought of history any different *because* of this moment?
- Question 2: Do you think we would teach history *after* this moment?
- Question 3: Do you think we can "imagine a new 'we'" during/after this moment?

Dr. Samantha Cutrara: Hi everyone and welcome to the "Imagining a New 'We'" video blog with me, Dr. Samantha Cutrara. A video series designed to help history teachers and other history educators teach history in ways that are more transformative, meaningful, and inclusive for their students.

Today we are continuing the series that I'm doing talking with different people in the industry; History teachers, history educators, museum professionals, historians about what it might mean to teach in these pandemic times and hopefully these post-pandemic times.

Today we have a real treat, although I feel like I say that every time. We're talking with Andrea Eidinger. She's a historian. And just like a renaissance woman, like she does so many things. She had a blog called Unwritten Histories that was so foundational for so many in the Canadian history educa — not education community. The canadian history in community. She's also done work for Canada's history, the CBS. She is the consulting historian on The Secret Life of Canada podcast,

which is a great podcast. You should check it out. She has so many perspectives that I know are going to be really valuable for this conversation. So let's go over to Zoom and say hi to Andrea. Hi, Andrea.

Andrea, thank you so much for talking with me today. It's such a pleasure to be able to talk with someone with so much different experience in this field. Like someone like yourself. And so I am really excited to hear your perspectives on, like, teaching in these pandemic times. So, hi. Thank you.

Andrea Eidinger: Hi, thank you for having me.

SC: I've been asking everyone three questions. One is about like, if your current — like your current thoughts have changed? The other one is about how you might think if it all will, like, change teaching after the history teaching? And then the third one is about imagining a new 'we' and things about, like, imagination and this notion of like 'we', if that's going to change it all. So let's just get right into it, shall we?

AE: You're awesome.

SC: I have been saying that my perspective of history has changed a lot because I, you know — well, I guess it has confirmed the things I think about history. Like we need to think about emotion, we need to think about connection. **Has this moment, this pandemic moment changed thinking of history for you at all?** And like, no pressure if it doesn't.

Mary Chaktsiris was saying like, "I'm just too busy to teach to think about that." But have you thought about teaching history or history itself differently in these days?

AE: I think that there are a lot of potential avenues that we could take teaching. And in terms of changes that were arising from the pandemic situation, I think that there is probably going to be a lot of changes in terms of what's offered online. And I think we — there's definitely room for an interesting discussion about how we are all adapting to these particular situations.

Well, I find that my particular approach hasn't really changed just because I've already spent a really long time trying to figure out how to

teach in a way that made me personally feel comfortable. And you know, it's designed in a way that kind of works with what's going on in the world as it stands right now.

So I am technically trained as a social historian, and that's what I love the most. And as a social historian, I always — and this is a terrible admission, but I hate political history. And whenever I was —

SC: Valid. So valid admission. I don't love it myself.

AE: In terms of political history, it's the form of politics like the policy legislation and all that kind of stuff is not as interesting as opposed to power dynamics. But what I like to do is focus very much on the kind of history that I would have liked.

So when I took the survey classes as an undergrad and in high school, I slept through them. I thought that they were really boring because they were essentially the history of dead white men, which I now facetiously call dead white dudes. And it just I wasn't — I didn't find that I was able to connect with it on an emotional level or basically any kind of interest and all, but as I got higher in terms of my education, I was able to do more of the kind of history that interested me, which was the history of ordinary people.

So when I became a professor, most of us start out teaching the surveys and that's what I taught the most. I went into it with the intention of creating the Canadian history survey in a way that I would have liked it to look. So rather than doing it in a very traditional style, I was going to do it in a style that I found interesting and that meshed well with my training. So I focus very much on the social history of people and this idea that all people's stories have equal value and that we need to understand many different aspects of the past as opposed to just focusing on this one straight narrative that we are always encountering.

So I mean, I've talked about pandemics in previous classes because I think that we do a disservice if we talk about World War I and we don't really talk about the Spanish flu pandemic. So that has sort of this focus on social history, this focus on the experiences of individuals, this idea that people in the past are a lot like people today. They have hopes,

dreams, fears has stuck with me and I think is very appropriate for this particular time that we're going through because I see a lot on social media and on the media that we're all in this together and there are a lot of stories of also individuals and those are the things that I find the most compelling.

So my perspective hasn't really changed so much as it just confirmed that I'm comfortable doing the kind of history that I'm doing and I think that it's appropriate to equip my students with the tools that they need to understand what's going on.

SC: Yeah, I love that. I think that this notion of social history as a way for us to really think through this moment allows us to kind of be grounded in this moment because we all are social actors and we can think about the social and the cultural part of right now because the political part is all — like, that I think is the thing that we learn in hindsight more when we see like this cohesive political plan or just like what became something like a cohesive political fan. But I think that like really demonstrating or like appreciating a commitment to social history helped us think through this.

Do you think that this will shift our teaching of history after this? Do you think maybe more people will be bringing up social history? Or do you think that this will shift teaching after this history teaching?

AE: I hope it does.

AE: I don't know if it will, but I hope that it is sort of the wake-up call about the extent to which inequalities in our society are embedded in the very fabric of everyday life and can be the difference between life and death for a lot of people. And I think that those kinds of dynamics, those kinds of experiences are essential to history. So I would like to see that happen. I don't know because Canadian history — a history in general is a field that I think evolves very slowly.

AE: And I don't know if we'll really see any significant changes for quite some time. I do hope that one of the things that we really do focus on is having a much more compassionate and kind approach to teaching. There's been a lot of discussion about how we need to

account for the fact that students are going through a lot right now. They're dealing with family members being sick, friends being sick, maybe they're sick. Having to deal with having lost jobs. So the goal for many professors right now is to focus on providing students with the support that they need to get through this the rest of the semester, but in a way that is kind and understanding of how students are really struggling. And I hope that that emphasis or kindness and compassion is something that follows through.

I have something that I decided to do last year, which has worked really well is actually getting rid of due dates completely. And no, that has not resulted in me getting a whole wave of stuff at the end of this semester, but I recognize that students have a lot on their plates even under normal circumstances and that school might not necessarily be their top priority and that they have to shuffle home responsibilities, work responsibilities along with school. So I try to be as flexible as possible and accommodate that.

So I provide them with suggested due dates, but this way I don't have to — or I give students the ability to feel free to submit later if they feel that they will produce a better paper as opposed to sitting and worrying about certain arbitrary dates. Because like I said, life is complicated. School is not the be all and end all as much as we might like it to be. And I think that the end result is that students learn a lot more when they're given that kind of space to just be in that kind of accommodation. So I would like to see. Maybe not everybody get rid of due dates because I know that's not what everybody would love to do, but just to be kinder.

SC: Well, that's really interesting. And I know that you're talking from the perspective of somebody that — like a history professor, right? Somebody that's teaching in undergrad setting. And I'm thinking about K-12 teachers and how much in, like, their bachelor of education, for example, they're introduced to so many different types of assessment methods. And I know a lot of them are introduced to like having students make a choice about the type of assessments that they do.

And I think that, like, to bring some of the things that you were saying to a K-12 audience, I think that like this is a good opportunity, well for professors as well, to explore different assessments and to be able to explore with their students and like, to just be honest. Like, we're all trying to figure this out and like, what does this mean? Because we all know that when something ends, it never really ends, and so we're going to be dealing with this afterwards. So this idea about kindness, and compassion, and also inequity, which I think those things work so importantly together, right, to have kindness and compassion for the fact that people don't have experiences like you and that you might not even recognize them I think is really interesting. So thank you for bringing that in.

AE: I think that when it comes to the reality is that five years from now, none of my students are going to know my name. They're not going to remember what course did they took. But if they can come out of courses that I give them with the ability to think critically and compassionately and have that sort of flexibility, then I'm happy with that. And that's not so much about needing particular targets, and deliverables, and due dates so much. It's just the learning experience. And I think that that's something that's really gotten lost over the past few years. It's been less of a focus on just learning and growing and seeing education at all levels as an opportunity to do that. And there's been less of a focus on that and more of a focus on sort of standardized testing and getting good grades.

Like my students are so anxious about the grades that they get. And I keep telling them like, yes, they're important, but when you're finished school, no one's going to care if you've got an A or C. They just want to know that you went through the experience and have the skills that you need or that you would get from completing an undergraduate education. So I would like to see or it would be great if more people will be focusing on that unless in terms of like, can my student appropriately format a footnote? Which of course, I hope that they can.

SC: Well, I love this notion about thinking about history critically

and compassionately, because to me, that really brings up this — brings up like the emotion and the affect of both the past, but also the present and to learn meaningfully about the past. To learn history meaningfully involves compassion, involves that emotion, as well as this notion of critically exploring how and what we remember. So thank you for that. Yeah, I really like that. Compassionately and critically.

Speaking of like compassion and criticalness, although that word never translate over that well, but like —

AE: Criticality?

SC: Criticali — yeah. I can't even say it, but that's cool.

So my work is about imagining a new 'we' and ensuring that, like, when we think about Canada, we are having these increasing circles of inclusion of what it means to be Canadian? What a Canadian experience is? What it means to teach and learn history? And **I've been really interested in people's responses about whether or not that this will change a 'we'? Whether this will change how we imagine?** Do you have any thoughts about that?

AE: I have hopes. So the way that you're sure of talking about how you teach in terms of questionings, idea about what it means to be Canadians, I mean that's something that I really do as well.

In fact, the first lecture of every Canadian history course I give is what does it mean to be a Canadian and who counts? And how the histories that we tell ourselves that we learn in school are very much an important part of shaping what it means to be Canadian. And for a really long time, that story was very much focused on the history of white men almost exclusively. And it created this perception or was paired with this perception that a Canadian person is a white person and everybody else is kind of something else.

AE: Is Canadian and something else. And personally speaking as myself, I'm Jewish. And a Jewish girl growing up in Montreal, I didn't really see myself, my history reflected in what I learned in school. So when I am trying to teach Canadian history, my goal is to teach the truth of our history, which is that Canada has always been diverse both

in terms of Canada as the entity that we know today, but also the space that we call Canada prior to the arrival of Europeans has always been a place of many different people, many different cultures, languages. And sometimes we get along, sometimes we don't get along. That we're all complicated, but we're all enmeshed together in this kind of web that makes up this country, but that also connects us to the past, the present, and the future.

So when I'm teaching Canadian history, this is what I'd like to focus on is that the stories that we tell ourselves about the past matter. They shape who we see ourselves as and how we relate to the rest of the world. And also, that the future of our country is in our hands and we can shape it however we want to shape it. And we can look to the past to learn what happened. Did it work? Did it not work? But we can change what happened and make a better future. That doesn't sound too corny.

SC: Oh, it sounds like 100% corny, but in, like, a really good way. Like in a really inspiring way, because I think that's what we all kind of want from our teaching and learning history. But it seems like sometimes we can get into these, like, these role models of just teaching the old white dudes and forgetting the fact that we can keep writing and rewriting these stories.

When I talk about history, and I talk about this in the book and I haven't done a video on it yet, but I say like, I think that we should think of history more as a magnetic poetry kit than —

AE: Ooh, I like that.

SC: — than like a book, because with a magnetic poetry kit, like, we still have all of the words and the ideas, but we can rework them to identify particular ideas that we want to explore. And so I think that you leaving on this corny note provides a lot of, like, hope for what a critical and compassionate history might look like. So thank you for sharing that with us today.

AE: Oh, my pleasure. I think that when we're going through this tough or times like this, hope is really important.

SC: Yeah, and that's come up in the other videos as well, and like this notion of connection. And so it's been great to be able to do these to connect together. So thank you so much for making the time to talk and for connecting and sharing this sense of hope with us.

AE: Okay, my pleasure. Thank you.

SC: Yeah, you're welcome. See you later. Bye.

I remain so humbled and in awe of all the people that have taken the time to speak to me today. That was such a — that was like another great, amazing conversation. I hope you're getting as much out of it as I am. Please let me know if you want to talk. It would be great to interview more teachers about what they are thinking about, especially now that there are so many more resources now from our provincial governments about online learning and online teaching. All right, everyone, have a great day and we'll see you tomorrow.

In conversation with Kat Akerfeldt

Pandemic Pedagogy Conversation #8

Kat Akerfeldt

Kat Akerfeldt is the executive director and postmistress of the Toronto's First Post Office Museum in Toronto, Canada. You can connect with her on Twitter at @KatofTO.

Holla to Toronto's 1st PO! Kat talks about the challenges small museums will face, but the opportunity there is to redevelop the museum's narratives during this time

We spoke April 4, 2020.

Video posted April 9, 2020.

QUICK LINKS

Video:

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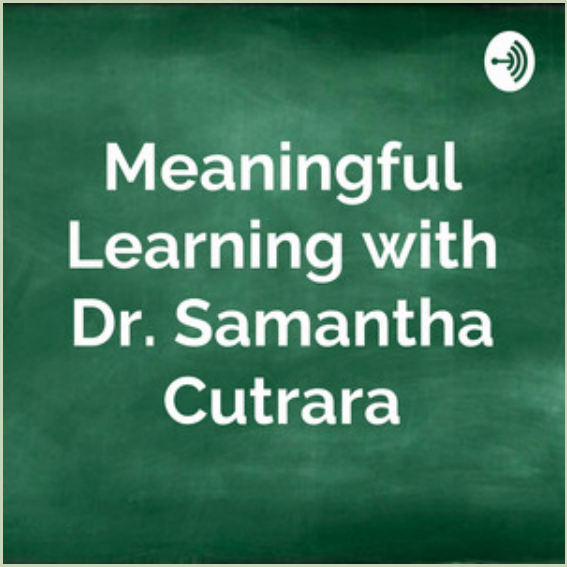
Audio:



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TRANSCRIPT

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- Question 1: Have you thought of history any different *because* of this moment?
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Dr. Samantha Cutrara: Hi everyone and welcome to the "Imagining a New 'We'" video blog with me, Dr. Samantha Cutrara. A video series designed to help history teachers and other history educators teach history in ways that are more transformative, meaningful, and inclusive for their students.

We are continuing our series on "Pandemic Pedagogically" if you will talking with different people in the history and heritage communities about what they think about history and teaching history during these endemic times. We have another great guest today. I'm going to say that every time because I just feel so lucky to have so many of these people share their time with me and their opinions and their expertise with all of you, and I hope you appreciate them too.

Anyway, we're talking with Kat Akerfeldt today. Kat is the executive director and postmistress of the Toronto's First Post Office museum in Toronto, Canada. The Toronto's First Post Office is a small independent museum in Toronto. This also is still a working post office. It has a

museum, it has a learning program, it has an amazing social media presence, but it is also still a post office, so it's actually open during these times because it is an essential service. It is going to be so awesome to talk with Kat today to be able to learn about her experience in both this heritage field, but also this essential service field, and what that has been like for her. So let's go over to Zoom and say hi to Kat.

Hi, Kat. Thank you so much for talking with us today. I thought before we start, you could just tell everyone a little bit about Toronto's First Post Office before we just like dive right into the question. So you're the executive director of the Toronto's First Post Office. It's a small independent museum. What else can you tell us about it?

Kat Akerfeldt: Oh, my gosh. Well, yes, it's a small museum with a small staff. So it's basically myself, and my job is to keep the doors open and keep things running as smoothly as possible. And we have Zoey, who's our curator, and her job is to keep the museum going. So she does all the good stuff like our social media, she does education programming exhibits basically, and she is an entire museum to herself. And then we have a group of post clerks as well because within our museum, we have a postal counter, which goes back to the 1980s as part of our fundraising to — like I said, we're an independent museum, so we really rely on grants, donations, and all kinds of fundraising including having a post office within our museum.

SC: As you know, I did a couple tours back in the day when I was an interpreter there, and I always thought it was so great the type of learning activities that you have in such a small space. Could you talk just a little bit again before we get started about some of the learning activities that you have when we aren't in this pandemic pause?

KA: Yeah. Well, our standard program involves writing letters. The way they did when our post office, which is a national historic site, when it first opened in the 1830s, people in Toronto were writing letters to family that they had left behind. This was a city of very recent immigrants at that point, so communication was really important. And that's

actually part of our museum mandate is to talk about the history of communication, especially around the early part of the city's history.

So when we have programs here, we have students write — it's really hands-on. They are writing with quills and ink, and even the kind of paper that they would be using in the 1830s, sealing it with a sealing wax and a seal and then mailing it using our post office. So we also do — that's, like I say, our standard program which we do with usually grade threes, grade fours, but we have other programs for younger students for mixed age groups like we would usually see in the summer with day camps and so on, and for adults as well.

So one of the nice things about being an independent museum is we're very adaptable to different kinds of groups and we can experiment. So if a group comes to us with special requirements, special needs, we can usually make that work for them. We do walking tours in the old town neighborhood. And I remember, actually, you and I worked together in education programming for a while. And I remember, Sam, I think some of the ideas that you brought in back then are still with us today. I remember you bringing in like movement. So we're not just sitting for an hour and a half. Yeah.

SC: Well, that's so great. I mean, I didn't do a lot, but it was so great to see how an independent museum runs and then like the openness for experimentation like you said. And what's been really great is that since you came as executive director, like the social media presence has increased, there's so many cool things happening like the bullet journals, and the letter writing, and like a paper fair. Anyway, it's just been really cool to watch, and I guess that leads into a less than like exciting conversation about then how does this shift with the pandemic.

So the first question I've been starting with for a lot of people is like, I think that my view of history has changed a bit during this time because we can't just think of it as this kind of, for lack of a better word, like this leisure activity that we can pick up and put down when we want, but rather it's this thing that needs to live and breathe if it's going to be

useful during this moment. So I don't know if you want to comment a little bit about whether or not **your vision of history has changed much in thinking about your museum during this time?**

KA: Definitely. Like I say, it's something that we're grappling with right now, especially as we're looking farther into the future than we had hoped that the museum is going to be closed. We had hope that maybe it would just be a month or two of canceling events and we would catch up. And then we're starting to think about how do we do what we do, which is such a, like I say, hands-on and experiential activity, how do we do that virtually? Does it doesn't have the same kind of value? Does it have the same kind of lessons as it would? I think it really makes a difference and that's something that we're grappling with right now.

We are setting up online workshops going forward. We're starting with workshops that are geared to adults just to kind of stick our toe in the water a little bit. That seems to be a little bit easier to manage, and then we'll see what we can do for teachers and for students after that. Whether it's like a recorded session, but yeah, it's really — it's going to involve a lot of experimentation in itself figuring out what value we can bring.

SC: So this is going to be like a real meta observation and questions, so I apologize in advance. But like we initially met as interpreters of Black Creek Pioneer Village, a living history museum that's like about 'pioneer' days. And a lot of these like pioneer type museums started in the 1960s and like through the 1980s that was a real like this nostalgia for particular moment in the past.

And so I feel like a lot of pioneer museums have really been struggling with how to update the work that they do, which is analog, for lack of a better, in this world. But I feel like this is going to force it even more. Could you maybe talk a little bit about how you're thinking of bringing these lessons from the 1830s to this 2020 audience because we can't interact in person anymore, but that so much of your work is

based in this like original kind of nostalgic interpretation. I have a whining cat. I don't know if you can hear that.

KA: Well, what we've always done is — you know, the experience of a student in the 1830s in a lot of ways is really removed. And even in the last, I don't know how old are millennials now, like 30 years, these digital natives, they are so far removed in that experience. So really, I've noticed the change in the last few years when if I'm doing education programs, you really have to start with what is the common experience between somebody living in Toronto in the first year that it was a city and Toronto in the 186th year that it's a city, and that's how you make that connection for a child and then they kind of have somewhere to get a foothold if you see what I mean. They can see that this is a real person.

I remember a few years ago now explaining I think, well, this is why this paper is made from wood pulp and this paper is made from cotton rag and we can feel the difference in looking at that. And I had a student in kind of the front row put up her hand and say to me, "Okay, but how you're telling me no Internet?" And I said yes, and she's like, "But then how did people know things?" And that really kind of I think I maybe just stood there for a few minutes like, okay, that's it. You know, it's, well, I got to take a few steps back here and start with a much bigger picture, than okay, well, here's a big pen, here's a feather. You know, that's —

KA: Yeah, it's really not. I shouldn't be starting with a tiny little detail. So we need to be looking bigger picture. And so it's sometimes hard, especially when we're talking to grades threes, grade fours, you don't really want to start with talking about like kind of the immigration experience or like big topics like that. Cholera, you know. But when we're talking about kind of big experiences like that, it is a little bit easier for the students to kind of find themselves in there. So I think that's kind of a good sign when we're going into, like I say, not so much a hands-on, not so much connected experience. Person-to-person in the same room sort of experience.

If we can start with these big ideas, maybe it's a little bit easier to make those connections, if you see what I'm going for [crosstalk 0:12:10.2]

SC: Yeah. No, totally. And I think that — I mean, I guess that was kind of what I wanted to like get at when I was saying this element about nostalgia. Like I think in the — I mean, again, this is kind of a bigger picture, but I think in the 1960s, it was like, let's just revere these old timey ways without these like bringing in about how your current experience can help you make sense. And so I think that's really useful because I remember when I was working at Black Creek and I was in the Manse and I had said to a group of students like, this is the minister's house. And a grade three student said to me, "Well, how does the prime minister get elected?" And I was like, what now?

But it was because he was — like the young boy was an immigrant, he probably wasn't Christian, right? So he wasn't thinking of like minister, he was thinking of prime minister. And that was like, okay, that's right. We have to like keep shifting our points of reference for these students.

So do you think your points of reference when you're going to be teaching history after this or during this is going to shift? **How do you think you're going to or do you think you're going to teach history differently after this?**

KA: Definitely, it's always shifting. I know when — for a while, I was working at Gibson House up in North York and we talked a lot about toys and children's activities there. And I think that started in exactly, like you say, the kind of a nostalgic look at like, these are the games of our past. But I always kind of use that as a way of asking the students like, hey, what's the big gift this Christmas? Like, what do you all looking for us? That I could use that with the next group to say, "Oh, this is the, I don't know, whatever the [inaudible 0:13:59.7] this year. [inaudible 0:14:01.5*I heard a lot of that] of the past just to kind of make that connection for them, yet here I'm always talking about just to go up on this little [inaudible 0:14:13.3].

I'm always talking about Jenny Lind singing at St. Lawrence Hall. And, of course, I'm like, Jenny Lind, the Swedish Nightingale, right?

SC: Oh, right. Swedish Nightingale.

KA: Yeah. And so for a while, I'm like, she's like the Britney Spears of her day. Now, if I say that to a kid today that's Britney Spears, what?

SC: Yeah. And just like that is also old. Yeah.

KA: Yes, I know, I've been there a while. It's always kind of updating, but also, that is for less frivolous topics too. I do talk about [inaudible 0:14:52.4*Colorado] often a lot. If I'm doing walking tours, we go to St. James' Park and, of course, they had the Colorado burial grounds behind there. And so I'm talking about what that experience is like, and kids, they love that kind of gore and grossest of it. So sometimes I really lay it on unless we're just doing it right after lunch or anything or something. But now that's going to be harder because definitely, if the news is correct, these kids that if I ever see them in person again are going to have connections with somebody.

SC: [inaudible 0:15:30.4]

KA: No, no, no. You know, knock on wood. But they might have somebody in their family who had suffered from a big pandemic of medical disaster that affects communities. And so I'm not going to approach it in the same kind of like, oh, here's the gross out sort of way.

KA: You know, I like I said, I'd been here forever, so we went through that same thing when we were talking about Cholera, oh, how many years ago was this now that I was in Haiti? And you know, Toronto is still a city of immigrants. And so I was having kids in my group that had close connections with Haiti. So it was, you know, you have to think about where your audience is coming from for sure.

SC: You know, that's interesting that you say that, and I really appreciate you bringing that up. It actually hasn't come up in the conversation before. So one of the academic papers that I've done, that — actually, the first one that I filmed, so I'm just plugging another video on my YouTube thing right now about connection, complexity, and care. But I was saying that I went to the African-American National History

Museum in Washington DC. And I was standing in line to see Emmett Till's coffin, which is an amazing artifact that they have. And I was standing behind a group of five students and three of them were white students, one of them looked like a South Asian student who may have been a first-generation American, and then another student who was African-American. And the paper was just like all five of those students are going to be dealing with this topic in understanding so much of this history differently that what experience do we ensure is held and is safest?

And I think that for you highlighting that like, yeah, I talked about Cholera, but then I had to realize I was connecting with students in ways that I didn't realize and I had to like figure out how that works, I think bringing in — like being thoughtful about that afect is really useful. So thank you for that. Because I think too when we get back, 'back', right? Whatever that looks like, anxieties are going to be so, so high, right? And that we really need to be thoughtful about that. So I just —

KA: Yes.

SC: Sorry. Yeah.

KA: So I was just going to say to you that like, when we're thinking about history and especially with topics that draw such a clear line to what's going on today, you're talking about what happened then and you're also talking about what happened next back then, right?

KA: So, yeah. So you are playing a big part in the students' mind, like how do they think about what is happening now with that knowledge of what happened then and what happened next back then, if you see what I mean. So yeah, like they [crosstalk 0:18:38.0

SC: Yeah. Like these moments in history have these different threads from it and those threads don't lead to the present — they all lead to the present, but they don't take the same route for everyone, right? That we have to kind of acknowledge that.

SC: So I guess — so anyway, thank you for that. Because again, no one has really highlighted that, and I really appreciate that perspective.

So that then leads to my next question about imagining a new 'we'. So I like to argue that it can be very easy for people to say like, this is Canadian history and this is other. And that one way that we need to build a more transformative, meaningful, and inclusive version of the future is to think of that as the past. So also these like increasing circles of inclusion. And I was really wondering how or what that might look different when we get 'back' or during this time. Does imagining change? Does a 'we' change? I don't know if you want to comment on that at all about whether or not **you think we will imagine a new 'we' or we should be imagining a new 'we' differently during or after this moment.**

KA: Oh, I definitely think so.

SC: Yay. Good.

KA: We have been — yeah. Well, we have been working —

SC: Me too.

KA: Yeah. I have been working with our board here on — for the past couple of years, we've been looking at our strategic plan and looking at our kind of big vision. And every time it comes time to renew that plan, we go back to our original mission statement and our original mandate and think about is it still applicable? Is it time to change this? It is time to expand it?

And you're exactly right, we're a young-ish Museum. We were established in the 1980s, but there was still a lot of that kind of nostalgic looking back in a very — like our mission statement is looking at the history of communication in the town of York period and the early city, so that's a very short period of time. And also looking at postal history up until the 1850s, again, it's a very short period of time. It doesn't say anything about whose experience it is, and this is something that they weren't thinking in the '80s because like you say, they're thinking a pioneer in a funny hat that everybody would have known who they're thinking of, and so it wasn't really explicit.

I think the problem right now, even before this happened was that we understand that that's what they were thinking back then. We

understand when this museum was set up, whose stories they were telling. And I think now it's time to expand that because we still have, if you look at the makeup of the community that we're serving, it's really similar to the experience of the community that was here in the 1830s, and we haven't been telling all of those stories. We've been telling the stories of like the accepted pioneer the stories that we've been told for so long. So I'm looking at this as an excuse to kind of like expand that vision or expand that mandate a little bit and tell similar stories.

SC: Yeah, because I think that, especially with like the history — sorry, I just have my cat that brought me a ball to play fetch with. So I'm just letting you know, I have that at my feet. I think that like the history of communication can really help us explore the communication between and amongst cultures. They don't just mean like racial or cultural cultures, you know what I mean, but like a variety of different types of culture.

And I think of a Black Creek Pioneer Village, for example, where there is a house that is — like a house with something that Scottish, and Irish, and English, and German and like to talk about how there are still these cultural differences even when everyone looks white. And I think that like you wanting to expand who we talk about in the 'we' for your museum, I'm really excited to see what that looks like. When and how that gets developed.

KA: Yup, so am I. We have items in our collection —

SC: No pressure.

KA: Yeah. I mean, that it's been brewing for a while. Like I say, even before this, we have items in our collection, some of which we've only just acquired in the last year or so that tell, like I say, the stories of these people of the early town that don't [inaudible 0:23:40.0] told a lot.

Here in this neighborhood, we had experiences of the Irish who were escaping famine, we have the stories of the — there seem to be an awful lot of black entrepreneurs who set up shop here and a lot of great stories there, as well as the story that kind of we've been telling

so far, which is of the dozen or so names that we can all run off. The wealthy guys who were basically taking all the jobs.

SC: Right. You know, like so often people will be like, "Oh, well, those people were in the past." And it's like, well, do we actually know their stories? Like, they might not be in history, but they certainly were in the past. Like, do we know their histories? Do we look for them? Do we have the artifacts and the records to show? Do we have the oral histories that show? So it's awesome that your collection is wealthy.

KA: Yes. The nice thing about being a postal museum is a lot of stuff is written down.

SC: Right. Yeah. Kat, this has been so amazing. This has been a really great and invigorating talk, and such a wonderful way to end the week. Before we say goodbye, do you want to talk about how people can support your work at the Toronto's First Post Office?

KA: I certainly do. That would be fantastic. So our website is thetownofyork@ — sorry, townofyork.com. And at the bottom of that page, you can find a nice, big red support Donate Now button. But even better — Oh, sorry, not red. Green. My goodness.

SC: Oh, no. If that I put my little cursor on it. You are correct.

KA: There you go. So that's a really quick and lovely way to support us. But even more than that, we love expanding our community. So right beside that, there's a Join Our Mailing list. If you sign up there, you'll hear about all of our activities whether they're virtual or in person, fingers crossed, and all our updates as we go forward into this unknown.

SC: Yeah, I have always just loved the work that you all do at the Toronto's First Post Office. I'm so glad that we were able to talk about it and share this work today. This has been such a great talk. Thank you again. And yeah, let's stay connected. I've been ending all the talks like that just because, to me, this has really been such a great moment to show the type of community that we can build to help support these uncertain times. I have like — I just want to highlight that I've just this

happening right now. So I feel like, anyway. So thank you so much, Kat. This has been great.

KA: Thank you, Sam, and that it's good to talk to you. We'll talk again soon.

SC: I know, I know. Let's do that. Okay, bye.

KA: All right, bye.

SC: Thank you.

In conversation with Dr. Kristina Llewellyn

Pandemic Pedagogy Conversation #9

Dr. Kristina Llewellyn

Dr. Kristina Llewellyn is a history of education historian. She is an expert in history education. So we're so lucky that she comes with so many different lenses to this conversation. You can connect with her on Twitter at @krllewellyn.

Kristina brought her passion and experience in oral histories to remind us of the importance of history during this time and the political commitments we can develop from the stories we listen to.

We spoke April 5, 2020.

Video posted April 13, 2020.

QUICK LINKS

Video:

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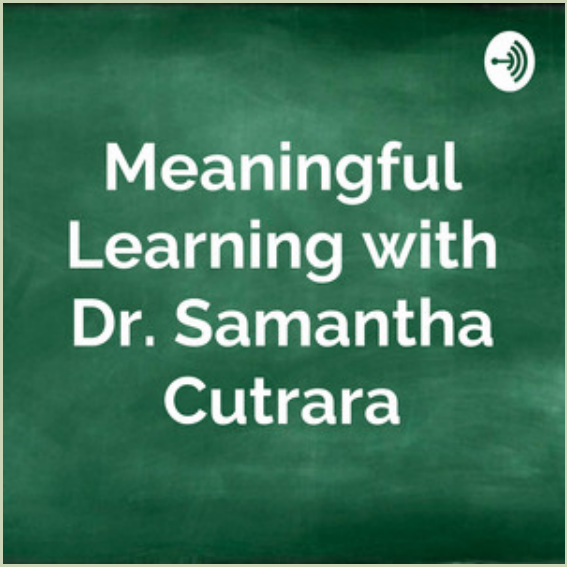
Audio:



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TRANSCRIPT

All the Pandemic Pedagogy conversations revolved around three questions:

- Question 1: Have you thought of history any different *because* of this moment?
- Question 2: Do you think we would teach history *after* this moment?
- Question 3: Do you think we can "imagine a new 'we'" during/after this moment?

Dr. Samantha Cutrara: Hi everyone and welcome to the "Imagining a New 'We'" video blog with me, Dr. Samantha Cutrara. A video series designed to help history teachers and other history educators teach history in ways that are more transformative, meaningful, and inclusive for their students.

We're continuing our "Pandemic Pedagogy" series today by talking to another wonderful, exciting speaker. Dr. Kristina Llewellyn is an expert in oral history. She is a historian, but she's a history of education historian. So she, like, looks at the history of education. This has also led her to be an expert in history education. So we're so lucky that she comes with so many different lenses to this conversation.

Kristina is also the director of, and I'm going to read this to get it right, the Digital Oral Histories for Reconciliation project for the Nova Scotia Home for Colored Children History Education Initiative. That is a mouthful, but you can abbreviate it with a DOHR. It actually has gotten a lot of media attention, so you may have heard about it because it

uses virtual reality to teach people about these experiences in the Nova Scotia Home for colored children in ways that are really transformative, and meaningful, and inclusive. So I am so excited that she is going to be talking about her experiences today and hopefully, talking about this project a little too. So let's go over to Zoom.

Hey, Kristina. Thank you so much for finding some time to talk with me today. I think your perspective about being like an oral history expert, a history of education specialist, and someone that is so involved with the history education community is the new — just brings so much to this conversation. So thank you so much.

Kristina Llewellyn: Well, thank you very much for having me. I've been excited to watch this series so far. So thanks very much.

SC: It's been really great to see how it develops, and all the conversations layered on top of each other have been really exciting. And so the first question that I've started with for everyone is about whether or not they see history changing or like they have thought about history differently because of this moment? Because like I have, for example, I have thought of history changing. Like I thought of the ways that I think about history differently because of this, but a lot of people said that that wasn't the case for them. Has it changed at all for you?

KL: It has changed somewhat, and it does get into a little bit about personal side of life. So like many other educators and historians, I have my kids home. So I have two children and I am now trying to support their learning at home, but I made the mistake like many parents of like suddenly thinking I had to save their school year by setting up a chatboard in my kitchen. [inaudible 0:03:13.0*I won't tell you that.] And suddenly finding some worksheets and things and finding anything I could on the web, and I defaulted as the Ontario government is doing incorrectly to this kind of literacy and numeracy of what my children needed to know. And I forgot almost in the moment everything I knew that my children could learn simply by being active in their learning.

KL: And I also underplayed, and I'm a historian, just how important it would be for them to maybe focus on social studies on history,

which would actually teach them about engaged citizenship at a time when we all — that's what we need. That's what we desperately need. We need to know how we are all connected to one another and how we have come to where we are now. We need to learn about change agents in our past, and we need to do all this in order to build a more engaged and equitable future. And we can do that by actually focusing on social studies and focusing on history and with that, will come all those other lessons.

So I really had to reassess my own defaults in this moment. And actually, I think one of the things that this moment has provided for me is how important it is that we start to reprioritize history and social studies within the curriculum and within our learning goals for young people.

So in that way, yes, it's been a reminder of something that's very important. In some ways though, I'm not sure sadly that it has changed some of my perspective. I think history is often used for young people and I think we've seen this in all the recent commemorative practices as a way sometimes of having young people forget or very selectively remember certain parts of our past.

So I think that the way we have remembered has been this sense of national togetherness where we forget about all of our differences. We forget about how contested the past is. And in many ways, it's that old adage of we only either — we only hear really from the supposed winners of history or really we hear more elite histories. And so what I am hoping will be from this moment is a different way of remembering. I'm not sure whether that will happen, but that's my hope.

SC: Yeah, I really appreciate that answer because I think maybe for me, a very similar thing happened. Like I do have a perspective of history that does encapsulate this kind of moment of crisis, but when the moment of crisis happened, I realize how many kind of defaults that I went back to that didn't prioritize those histories that focus on change agents or how 'easy' it can be to like only think of history as this bonus rather than essential for understanding ourselves and society. And so

it's interesting that you thought of those lessons while structuring the days for your sons.

KL: Yeah, it's actually been really important. And I think focusing on the ways that they can be active in exploring and examining history has been quite important. And again, that reminder came through sort of a personal situation, which I actually have seen on social media that a lot of families are doing.

So my mother contacted us and said, "Hey, in a couple of days, it will have been your grandmother's 95th birthday." And so we would like to do a Zoom call with the whole family. My sister and her family, my parents and us. And we're all going to share a virtual cake, which my mom did bake.

KL: And then we are going to share stories about her life. Her life stories and what those life stories would mean for us. And this was particularly meaningful for my children because they had never met my grandmother.

KL: It was also really meaningful for me because my grandmother was one of the first people I ever did the oral history with when I was in an undergraduate program on women's history with Karen Dubinsky at Queen's University. And it was really transformative for me what actually doing that oral history meant. And I was hoping for my children as well, that in and of itself it seemed like a small thing within our family, but the active listening too —

SC: Yes, active listening.

KL: — to these stories of other people's lived experiences. It was really important.

SC: Yeah, that is great. That is such an interesting activity. And I haven't heard of that one as much on my social media feeds. I have heard of people like creating a scrapbook. So like all the different members of the family creating part of a scrapbook that a young person can put together in a full scrapbook when they see each other again. But like, I really appreciate that active listening and the sharing of stories because — I mean, I don't know about you, but like I'm kind of sick of

staring at a screen, which is a really silly thing to say while you're filming a video series, but like, I see so many people going more to like 'analog activities' and being with our families, we can share these stories.

So yeah, I really appreciate that. I think that's a really interesting way to get your children and also your students thinking about the histories of our own families and the moment we're in our own families.

Do you think — so the second question is about kind of the future. **Do you think that the ways that we will teach history will change after this time?** Like do you think that some of these lessons that we're learning in our own homes will come into the classroom in formal and informal ways?

KL: I certainly hope so. I think there's been a movement afoot for quite some time by a number of amazing educators and scholars attempting to make history that is about our communities. It builds a sense of relevance and connection to the present and that it is active. It's young people actively creating history or actively assessing history. It's not a passive process anymore. And so those learning goals are in a lot of the curriculum guidelines across the country and how that then manifests itself into the classroom is really important. For me, as an oral historian, I would hope that we see this as a moment in which we need stories more than ever.

SC: Yes, yes.

KL: We need stories, we need stories of our community, we need to understand those stories, and those are difficult stories. So I'm interested in all the stories that come with that. With resilience of hope. I think that that emerges out of difficult knowledge, but I think we need to really prepare young people to also hear difficult stories in our community and that is going to be what then calls them to do otherwise going forward. It's that kind of listening to other people's lived experiences, what does that call us to do differently?

KL: Those kinds of questions that I hope students get. And I hope that we can do this with community. Of course, George Day talks about

oral history being the oldest part of historiography, and we know this especially from indegenous people around the importance of oral tradition for cultural preservation. It's very important that we learn from those complicated contested stories that we all live that have an individual resonance for sometimes our own family, but they're also very social stories that connect all of us.

So I guess my hope going forward for teaching, and it has been my hope before this moment, but I think it's ever more important is that we actually engage young people in oral history for a myriad of ways. I think oral history is more inclusive. I think that you hear stories of the every day. I think it's very relatable. I think when you hear someone's lived experience, it provides a very human element to what history is, right? You can't be listening and bearing witness to someone's lived history that has a legacy that lives on for them in their lives and not feel a sense of responsibility to those stories.

KL: I think also that it can be very active. We can have young people actually doing oral histories. Co-creating them with community. And that can be as simple as boning up someone who's an older member of your family, asking them so then you don't need Zoom even. But it also could be — there's a whole raft of oral histories that have been prerecorded sometimes of veterans, for example, and local libraries. I know that's the case in Waterloo, where you can listen to those stories.

For me, part of that is something that I hope does change in school sometimes. And Bronwen Low talks about this a little bit in an article that she has written before about the pedagogy of listening.

KL: And that is that we just — I heard someone say that we're hearing all new sounds now that we're all social distancing and things like this —

KL: — less hectic. Well, now is the time to listen to each other's stories, and schools can be such a loud busy place. And actually just taking the time to listen to stories, to listen to history I think is really powerful. And Bronwen Low talks about it as extending the ear to the other. As not being passive, whatsoever. In fact, it's very active because

extending that ear to the other means that you're taking the time to listen and it calls you to do something different.

So for me, I think that this kind of stillness at this time, yet it's also very difficult knowledge that we're all grappling with, I hope that we re-engage with that connectedness of listening to each other and learning from one another. And I think that that selfishly is my hope for how oral history can have a more prominent place within schooling as well.

SC: Yeah. I think — I mean, you brought up so many really interesting points. And one of the things I immediately thought of was one of the first interviews I did with Dr. Mary Chaktsiris who said that this moment can really help our students think of themselves as historical actors. And I think that because we are in this moment of crisis, in this moment of difficult knowledge, when you invite students to participate in the sharing, and telling, and listening of stories, it can help them understand themselves within a moment and then hopefully also help them understand how other historical moments get created.

KL: Yeah, I mean, one of the examples I can provide is a current project that I'm working on called Digital Oral Histories for Reconciliation. And it's actually a whole project around The Nova Scotia Home for Colored Children. So this has been co-created with the former residents of The Nova Scotia Home for Colored Children, and this was a home that was opened up in 1921. It was open for over 70 years. And the former residents started speaking out about the kind of discrimination and abuse and oppression that they had suffered within this home. And they started doing that decades ago.

And so then they actually were such incredible activists building their own networking community that they were able to have the launch of a restorative inquiry into why did this happen? And how can we build a better future? And their whole premise, their whole work is how do we reach into the past to get what we need to know in order to fly forward? It's represented with this symbol of [inaudible 0:15:28.5].

And so I've been really fortunate to build relationships with this community of former residents where myself and other groups of scholars

across Canada are working with them actually to create a virtual reality experience that grade 11 Canadian history students can have where they can actually go into the home and listen. It isn't a game where they get to interact or change the stories or play some kind of role play. That's not what this is. This is the place that the home is recreated because old students can't obviously go to the home. The home has changed over time. But the home has place-based memories that are very important to the story. So we've recreated that in virtual reality and then they go into that virtual world and hear the stories from the former residents that are so important to hear about what happened to them in the home. And the purpose of this is again, it's very [inaudible 0:16:26.4] forms and no way are we trying to get young people to put themselves in the shoes of others or of a child in any way.

What we're trying to get them to do is to listen carefully to difficult knowledge, but then compels them to ask far more deep questions like how did this happen? To ask questions of now that I know that this has happened, what does this call me to do? And those are then done is a much fuller curriculum with further lessons; building of historical thinking concepts that actually engage them with various different primary source material, which they get to compare to oral histories to other primary sources, and then they get to take an action plan.

They get to take an action plan that seeks restoration in the sense that they say, "I've heard these stories now, now I need others to know what I have learned from these stories." And it really builds a sense of connection for students who may be part of the African Nova Scotian community or may not be part of the African Nova Scotian community, but they all see the way that systemic racism within that province, which is a very long history, had led to what happened in the home and still left a legacy for how they're all living together and then how they all have to live differently together.

So that's what I mean by what stories can compel us to do? And we don't always know what that's going to be for young people and I think

that that's okay. It's really about focusing on how we build new knowledge and new relationships through our stories of the past.

SC: Yeah. And congratulations on the project. It's got such a great pres and it's so fantastic and it's really transformative in the Canadian history community. So congratulations again on that project.

So I went to the Alcatraz Museum in San Francisco, not lately obviously, and there was an audio guide in which people were sharing their stories of being imprisoned at Alcatraz, and it was one of the most transformative museum audio guides I'd ever heard because you are standing in this space, in this case, like not virtual reality, like you're in the building, and you are hearing these stories. And I remember it took time after to process and think through because it was this affective emotional history that has stayed with me longer than so many other histories, and it's really exciting that your project is able to pick up on so many of those elements related to Canadian history.

KL: Yeah. Well, interestingly, I was at that same museum in August. So I'm going to Alcatraz in August, and I had the same feeling about that storytelling within that. And again, storytelling from really diverse perspectives, which was amazing. And I think we really underestimate the kind of stories that young people can hear and what that will provoke them to want to know more about.

So we often think, well, first, we're going to teach them about Alcatraz and then maybe [inaudible 0:19:39.1] stories. It's like we'll know maybe if they hear some stories, there's some call to I want to know more about prison life, I want to know more about our judicial system, I want to know more about how it's developed the way it has. Those, I think, story kind of allows for more questions to emerge, and so for me, it's a really amazing starting point even.

SC: Yeah, I think that teachers can be really nervous about bringing in difficult knowledge, but I have found, and this is something I talk a lot about in the video series, that students want connection, complexity, and care. And that complexity is often what might some students have said like the 'gruesome stories'. The ones that are difficult. The

ones that — or seemingly, the ones that young people shouldn't hear, but those are the ones that they want to hear and have questions about because they also know those histories. Sometimes they know them just like embodied and they don't even — like they can't articulate them, but they also know them just being in the world and seeing movies.

And I think the more that we allow students to engage and explore those stories, the more it will lead them to want to take action, and so that's such a great element of your project as well. The action part of it.

KL: Yeah. And I think like you said about the affect is so important. I mean, for me, the very first oral history, I did not call that of course at the time. It's only until recent that people actually call themselves oral historians far more, but when I was in — I can't remember if it was grade four or grade five, I had a teacher who just said, "Go and interview." Like, I'm going to just interview at the time or talk to like a grandparent or someone else in your family who is somewhat older and just ask them about their life history, their life experiences. And that was my like social studies project I needed to do.

Now, my grandparents lived further away, so someone who was like an uncle to me or I call them uncle, but he was like a grandparent to me who lived in Toronto where I lived at the time, like that's who I ended up going and interviewing about his life. And it provokes so many questions for me because at the time, he ended up telling me he was from the Netherlands. At the time this happened, he was living in Germany, but it was during the Nazi regime, he was actually brought in for questioning with the Nazis and was accused of being homosexual. He was homosexual. And he had to have an excuse that the butcher's daughter — he lived above the butcher's closure. He lived above that store I should say. And they then had to call in the butcher's daughter to try and see if she would cover for him, and she did.

So I am nine, 10 years old. I didn't know a lot about World War II. I didn't know a lot about the Nazis. And this person was like a grandparent to me and telling me this incredible life story for which I didn't

understand the full, the context of it and everything, but it's certainly affected me deeply that he was emotional and that this had happened to him and I cared deeply for him, and I wanted to know more. And that was when I started to ask more questions of my parents and of others. "Okay, tell me more." And I started to dig to want to know more about that. It affected me personally. And I feel that way that we can make those connections for young people.

Even if it's not a grandparent or someone like that, we can make the connections of it could be deeply personal or it could be something that is more about your community. How is it that your community developed the way you did and provide a sense of connection to that? And I think that students more and more see the ways that stories might seem very individual, but in actual fact, they're very social stories. They're very community-based stories. They matter for why we all live the way we do in connection with one another. And then that matters for, well, okay, what are we going to do going forward?

SC: Yeah. And I think the more that we talk to people and ask them to reflect on their experiences in the past, it allows us to understand how much of what we think about the past is this created history, right?

Like, I remember being in undergrad and I was doing a lot of studying about the post-World War II period and about like this heightened anxiety about communism and nuclear war and I was telling my grandmother about that and she was raising three kids during that time. She's like,"I don't know what you're talking about." Like, I didn't think about that at all. That was not part of my life at all. And I was like, "You're wrong because I read it at school." But it was such an interesting moment to remember that our own families can challenge these big stories and sometimes they have these really interesting and amazing stories like your uncle did and sometimes they're just like, that wasn't the experience for everyone, you know.

And I also worked with another student and I talked about this in my book, so I won't spend a lot of time about this that she was supposed

to go and do an oral history with her grandmother and her grandmother refused to speak to her about that. And the assignment wasn't graded, but the teacher was like, well, you know, she would fail if she hasn't find somebody. And I think that we can also actively listen to those silences as well. Can you comment on that at all?

KL: Yeah, the silences are amazing. There's lots of reasons —

SC: Yes, yes.

KL: I mean, first of all, no one should be forced to tell their story ever —

KL: — and no one should be forced to insist on that. So Alexander Freund at the University of Winnipeg calls this our confessional culture where we kind of assume that everyone should just be spewing out every story they've ever had. And there's a lot of crowdsourcing of oral histories that go on right now. There's a lot of projects that are actually internationally North America. I know a number of them. And so we need to be very careful about what we decide to share or how we share or the how we ask the questions we do, and whether we want those to be more public. It might just be a personal encounter.

KL: There's parts of oral histories with my own families that I've done that I would never share with others, right? There is that ethical obligation. Or there might be stories that I am not ready to hear yet and they can decide that.

So those are all really important aspects to any kind of request around doing oral history. But the silence is, I think, even when doing an oral history or even when asking people's questions and respecting those, they speak volumes. There's reasons why people don't want to speak to certain aspects even decades later, right? And that tells you something.

There's also what Katherine Wheeler refers to as bad feats. Meaning, we know that there was great anxiety about the atomic bomb. We know, right? We just know that from duck and cover and all of the government initiatives, things like that. But if that's a bad feat for your grandmother's life, why? What is she trying to say was actually a prior-

ity in her everyday life that she really had to focus on far more than those concerns, and fears, and worries? She had different words on her plate, right?

SC: Well, I think actually her worries involved like dancing at the country club.

KL: Oh, good!

SC: They had a very active social life. But I think that like it does speak to your point because for her, that was like the highlight of her life. Like, why would you bring in those kind of like negative 'current events', things that are happening, you know.

SC: I think that also is a really interesting point for right now because teachers are going to want students to tell their stories about their experiences right now, but they might not be ready and they might not have figured it out for themselves yet. And I think we need to be okay with knowing that a student might just be like,"It was fine. I just played on my phone," and then in five or 10 years, they might think about it and process it in different way. So I like this idea of ensuring that we're not forcing stories too.

KL: Absolutely, absolutely. I think we do have to be wary of the confessional culture of oral histories and just grasping for everyone to share everything. Those can have some long standing consequences as well.

SC: Yeah. That was an extremely long second question, but so rich. So let's move to the third one about this notion of imagining a new 'we'. So I think of this notion of imagining a new 'we' as a way to ensure that we have these increasing circles of inclusion of who we understand to be Canadian, who we understand to have ownership or responsibility for the land that we called Canada, and this notion of imagining to have room for collaboration in community.

I really question about what this would look like when we are all in a digital space? **And a lot of people have been really kind of positive about what imagining a new 'we' might look like during and after this moment?** Do you have any ideas? Do you have any thoughts?

KL: I guess I would pull again on the idea of difficult histories and what we've done in the past with respect to youth. I think in large measure, when we've been engaging young people with some difficult knowledge, it's taken us a long time to actually get past a glossy kind of [inaudible 0:29:48.3].

KL: And so I think of the example of the North Star myth and how we actually didn't teach about slavery in Canada's own past, but instead with this land of the free —

KL: — that's a real strategic and very troubling impacts currently because what that means is that if you believe we are not like supposedly the United States with racial tensions, if you believe that that's not actually the case in Canada, then you will not commit yourself socially and politically taking action that would address those concerns in Canada. And that's all based on a historical narrative and a myth.

And so the same actually happened post-9/11. So there are some great scholarship on the kind of teaching that happened in the United States right after 9/11, and the kind of narratives that were created about that more recent past at that time, it was really very closed, it was sort of triumphalist in the sense that it led to some argue just shore up that notion of US as a militaristic state, right, and not questioning it. And that has long-term generational impacts with respect to identity when you tell those historical narratives even in more contemporary or recent history.

KL: That's what I would caution or hope would not happen with respect to the idea of a 'we'. I hope the idea of a 'we' is not something that's kind of an identity that's built up from historical narratives that we tell of kind of closed, more triumphant narratives of how we all got through this. But if we're able to also tell more a contested version of the 'we' where we had very different impacts, just like you're talking about with your grandmother or others, right? We had very different experiences. We have and will have very different lived experiences of this traumatic time, and that can really question, for example, aspects that we hold onto very dear around our Canadian identity. It could

really question or highlight the failure of capitalism. It could really highlight gender disparity of women who have the incredible burden of care providing whether it'd be in families or hospitals or other places, it could really question the idea of racial harmony in Canada again and the exacerbation of racism since the virus has emerged.

So I'm hoping that the new 'we' would be one that allows space for it to be very contested, for it to be difficult to hear, and we can grapple with all of that. And that's my sense of hope, right? That, for me, is where we have a sense of hope from the histories that we tell. And that's where I also see as an oral historian where we can have and listen to different lived experiences.

SC: Yeah, thank you. I really appreciate that answer, and it makes me — like, I would like viewers to also take a look at Dr. Sean Carleton's video about that we can't forget that colonialism is still happening and that we need to use this moment if we're going to reconfigure elements of our society to not forget things like nation-to-nation relationship. Like it's so easy in moments of crisis to gloss over in ways that don't allow us to challenge our own notions of who we are in the space and how and in what ways we think of structures in these moments of crisis. So thank you. I appreciate that.

KL: Yeah, I couldn't agree more. And I thought Sean's video as well was really powerful in that way.

SC: Yeah, it was. It was a really great addition to this conversation. Before we say goodbye, could you tell people where they can get more information about your virtual history project?

KL: Absolutely. We have a website admittedly that we're revising. It's www.dohr.ca, but dohr is D-O-H-R, which stands for Digital Oral Histories for Reconciliation. So you can get a bit more information there. We are in the stage of revising the what was a two-week curriculum that we already piloted in the fall in Nova Scotia. So we're revising that now and working with our community partners in order to figure out the next implementation stage so it'll be available more widely for

people to be able to have the VR experience and with it via company curriculum.

SC: Well, that link as well as other references that you talked about today and any other things you want to share will be in the information below. So you'll be able to click right over to that. Thank you so much, Kristina, for sharing this time. This was an amazing talk and I'm glad that we were able to do all these kind of interesting routes towards talking about the importance of oral histories and imagining history during and after this time. So thank you so much.

KL: Well, thank you so much. I really appreciate you doing this. This is fun.

SC: Yeah, great. And I was saying to a few people, it would be really interesting to check in when things get back to a different type of 'normal' to see how and in which ways our ideas might have shifted from this initial conversation. So yeah, it might be really cool to do another video and perhaps you could talk more about how teachers can work with students in collecting some oral history after this time.

KL: Absolutely.

SC: Yeah. Okay, we'll see you later. Have a great day. Take care. Buh-bye.

KL: Take care. Buh-bye.

In conversation with Dr. John Bickford

Pandemic Pedagogy Conversation #10

Dr. John Bickford

Dr. John Bickford is a professor in social studies and history education at Eastern Illinois University. His research is really about the ways that our representation of certain histories like the Civil Rights Movement or the Underground Railroad. You can connect with him on Twitter at @SSHistoryEduc.

The first American I got to spoke to! Jay talked about the polarizing politics and policies of this period and how we need to teach our students how to wade through these things for the public good.

We spoke April 8, 2020.

Video posted April 14, 2020.

QUICK LINKS

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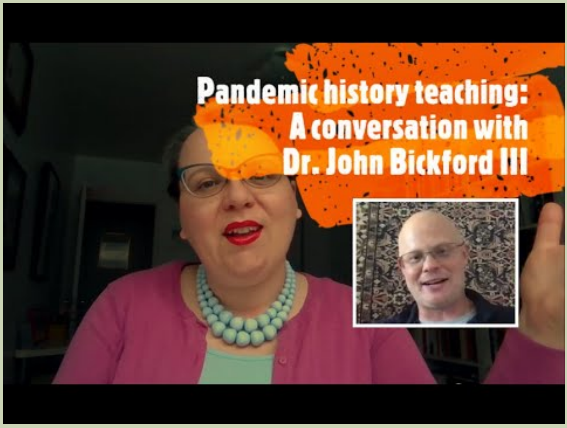

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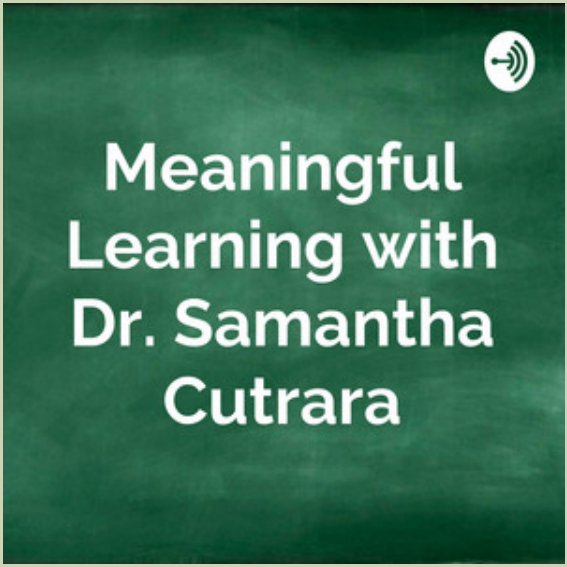

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TRANSCRIPT

All the Pandemic Pedagogy conversations revolved around three questions:

- Question 1: Have you thought of history any different *because* of this moment?
- Question 2: Do you think we would teach history *after* this moment?
- Question 3: Do you think we can "imagine a new 'we'" during/after this moment?

Dr. Samantha Cutrara: Hi everyone and welcome to the "Imagining a New 'We'" video blog with me, Dr. Samantha Cutrara. A video series designed to help history teachers and other history educators teach history in ways that are more meaningful, transformative, and inclusive for their students.

We're continuing the "Pandemic Pedagogy" series today talking with people in the history and heritage field about their perceptions or opinions about whether or not the way we understand history is going to change after this, the way we teach history is going to change after this, the way we think of a 'we' together is going to change after this. And we have had such an amazing lineup of speakers, and today is no exception.

But while I have spoken to people in a range of fields, everyone has been based in Canada. Today we're actually going to talk to someone that's based in the States. Dr. John Bickford is a professor in social studies and history education at Eastern Illinois University. His research is

really about the ways that our representation of certain histories like the Civil Rights Movement or the Underground Railroad, for example, is represented in things like textbooks or popular books that you might pick up at a bookstore.

And so I think that his perspectives about understanding and thinking about representations of history in relation to the actual past and other histories that have been written will be really like a really awesome element to this conversation and a compliment to the archivists that we've spoken to, the oral historians that we've spoken to. So let's go over to John.

I'm really excited to speak to you both because not just like your experience in this field, but also because I think it's great to talk to someone who's in the States right now and thinking of these things in a kind of a different context. Before we get started, can you introduce yourself to everyone?

Dr. John Bickford: I'm originally from New York, the State in New York, and I got all my degrees at the University of Iowa and now I'm an associate professor of social studies and history education at Eastern Illinois University, which is in the southeast part of the state of Illinois, about three hours south of Chicago. So —

SC: So you said that is — when we were talking before, you said that is quite a rural area.

JB: It is, yeah. There's maybe 20,000 folks in our town in the town of Charleston. It's a pretty small town and we're the biggest town — you got to go an hour north or more than an hour south to get to a bigger town.

SC: You know, we were talking earlier on in a video with Kristina Llewellyn about how people's experiences are all common, but they're all going to be so different. And like I am in an urban setting and so my experiences, I feel like it's the same as everyone's because I have so many people around me. Before we get started with the questions, what is it like in a rural community during something like this?

JB: Biggest concern is when there is shortages, you only have one

store for the most part for most items, you know. There's a Walmart and then one other grocery store and that's it. So if they're out of something, you've got to go quite a distance to get something — you know what I mean? To get it from somewhere else.

SC: And I think like, for me, this moment because like I said, we all think we're sharing this same experience, but it really highlights so many differences and experiences even within people's own houses. And these are the types of things that have really made me think about the history as a discipline differently, and that's why I always construct these interviews with that.

Has this moment — has the pandemic, has COVID made you think of history in different ways?

JB: Oh, my gosh, yes. I think the biggest thing — and for me, the biggest part is recognition. Recognition of things that I may have been tangentially aware of in the past or I may have been very prominent in the past, but now it's bedrock. It's foremost. It's so important to me.

JB: For instance, the tensions between expert's conclusions and ordinary individual's conclusions, I cannot stand. It's intolerable how we have regular folks on social media who think they can offer guidance to other citizens when they're not trained in epidemiology or public health or other of these fields. We're seeing a lot of what some people have referred to as the democratization of expertise where everybody's opinion matters and my opinion is just as good as somebody else even if I'm untrained in that field. Those same elements, that same democratization of expertise emerges quite clearly when it comes to this pandemic months ago, weeks ago, days ago, today. That's the first recognition, the tensions between experts' conclusions and then ordinary citizens or elected officials' suggestions.

Second recognition would be the disparities and inequalities among citizens in our country and of the world. It is startling, you know. And not that I wasn't aware of this before, but it's just become more paramount. The bedrock, so to speak, is exposed. Like when a river digs underneath the ground and pulls up some sediment that hadn't been

exposed in a while like with a flood. Not that I wasn't aware of the idea of first-world problems like weak Wi-Fi, for instance. It's not that I wasn't aware of it, but it just becomes so much more obvious.

My wife is a teacher in town. And what blows me away is how our school district still provides lunches for all these kids. How many kids are coming to school to pick up lunches because they don't have it at home. That is startling.

SC: So there are some really interesting things that I want to acknowledge there. Like when you said like weak Wi-Fi is a first-world problem and it certainly is, but it's amazing how now, we are like recognizing how the structures of needing something like Wi-Fi is so embedded. Like how that has become part of the bedrock. Because in Ontario, for example, we've all moved to online learning as of April the 6th. And the inequities within our own province, within our own cities, it's going to be so much more apparent because we are assuming that Wi-Fi is like this thing that everyone has, but it will also exacerbate the inequities that we have here.

JB: You know, and it's so concerning where something that would seem like a small nuisance a week ago or a month ago is now absolutely consequential.

JB: Absolutely consequential, you know. Yeah, it's startling. It's startling.

SC: Another thing I wanted to bring up when you had said about the democratization of expertise. When I was talking with archivist Chris Sanagan, we were talking about, like, all of the records that are gonna be created during this moment. All of the documents, all of the Facebook accounts, all of the emails, all the text messages and the archivist will really need to figure out what the value is.

And we were talking about this, of course, there's like a problem because there's going to be so many records, but also perhaps like an opportunity to have a greater democratization of the types of records. But I think you bring up a really good point. Like if we are saying we're going to 'democratize' the type of records we're going to have value to,

some of those records will demonstrate these points of view that are contrary to — I mean, I want to say fact, but I don't actually like mean it so hard, in fact, but you know what I mean. Like contrary to what is actually happening around us.

JB: National narrative? Yeah.

SC: Pardon?

JB: Perhaps the national narrative?

SC: Yes. Yeah. Yeah.

JB: Or a [inaudible 0:08:41.1] or a person or a specific histor — I'm sorry, a specific political figure's narrative or a specific political parties, commonly held assumptions are their claims, yeah.

JB: The social history that is being created, that is being documented in our contemporaneous exchanges of emails and social media posts are absolutely, absolutely astounding and wonderfully rich, you know. And they absolutely add nuance and detail that will not be seen in certain public official statements and claims and narratives. Yeah, I agree.

SC: Yeah. I talked to a few historians that said, like, "Well, my idea of history hasn't changed too much because I already was a social historian, so I had space for this." But I think that you bring up a good point. Like we are also in a moment where we are creating a social history, and that I still think it should allow us to kind of shift what and how — like, to shift our acknowledgment about what gets created in these moments, which then, to me, leads to thinking about teaching history.

Do you think history is going to — the way we teach history is going to change after this moment? Do you think it should?

JB: Well, yes, I think it should. I'm hopeful that it will. That being said, there's idealistic goals and also pragmatic measures and pragmatic elements that are beyond our control. In the United States, at least in this area of the state I should say and from talking with other folks, other professors in the United States, there is a real struggle getting social study teachers on-board with what would be considered

best practice pedagogy, inquiry, discipline specific, critical thinking, communicating understandings through different forms of text-based writing and speaking.

You see a lot of teachers at least here, they engage in what I think James Loewen first referred to as the tyranny of the text.

JB: The idea of I have to get through the textbook. And we can all have our impressions, but this textbook, that's what happened. We may think otherwise, but that's what happened. And a lot of teachers, especially in social studies, they try to complete their error in history from Lincoln till September 11th or something like that. It's very common, and you don't see a lot of teachers that are very invested in deep inquiry. And that's one of the things I worry about. They're so stressed for time. There's so little time to begin with and it gets very difficult trying to get teachers on-board.

Most of the teachers I work with are elementary teachers who have the time and the flexibility where they don't have a 40-minute class period. They can spread it out throughout the day and integrate reading and writing and thinking and language [inaudible 0:11:42.2*guards] within social studies team.

I see a lot of social studies teachers, those struggling hope that this moment would change how we approach history and ways to make social studies all the more meaningful, and I have some ideas for that.

SC: Could you please share some strategies that you think might be helpful for teachers in navigating some of these ideas.

JB: Sure. Well, I think the biggest thing — well, and there's two steps. The first part is engaging history students as if they were historians. If we could think for a minute back to what second graders do in math, two plus blank equals nine, it's a simple second-grade task, but that's pre-algebraic thinking. You don't tell the kids it's pre-algebra, but that's what two plus blank is, okay?

And as the kids are figuring it out, the second graders, they're working like mathematicians. They're using math disciplinary boundaries to answer a math question. Take the same second graders in reading and

writing word, study English language arts class, they are reading and writing and thinking like an author or a poet or a copy editor.

Take science. If they're going out to discover different types of leaves, picking up leaves on the ground and then trying to trace them to the tree from which they fell and looking at the similarities and differences, I mean, they're behaving like a botanist, okay?

JB: Just like a botanist. Now you take a second grade social studies class. Frequently, they have to memorize the capital of a state, or they have to memorize this president and that president. And in the United States, it's probably George Washington or Abraham Lincoln or some other innocuous figure where its history is reduced to a timeline and a summary, you know. And now historians don't work with summaries and timelines the way that we expect our second grade kids to just memorize.

Take those math, science, and English examples I gave. Each one of them involves critical thinking.

JB: Critical thinking intended for a second grader, but still they're critically evaluating an ambiguous situation using evidence, and then they're communicating their conclusions in a way that's discipline specific and age appropriate. I think we need to do the same thing with social studies. We need to pose consequential questions for students. And provide the resources the primary and secondary sources for them to explore on their own. To solve their own — you know, to answer the question themselves and the idea of relying on evidence and expertise, but also questioning the veracity of the experts' claims and the limitations of the evidence, you know. No primary sources of people in the past. It's not perfect. They can give you clues, but it doesn't tell you everything that happened.

A secondary source is only as good as the primary sources upon which it's based.

JB: And the idea of we need to get our students to explore these primary and secondary sources just like historians, it's not historical comprehension. That's summaries and timelines. Historical thinking is

scrutinizing the source, and the context, and the perspectives or biases, and the limitations. What were they not aware of, okay?

And I think that's what we have to do when it comes to our steps. Now, this is all integrated within at least in the United States within what is an extension of the Common Core called the C3 Framework. It's got four different dimensions. Posing questions, using disciplinary boundaries and guidelines, scrutinizing the sources, and then communicating text-based understandings. I think that's the key, you know.

I think the first thing we need to do is move back to our disciplinary boundaries and rely on evidence and logic and expertise, but to also question where does the logic fall short? Or where does the evidence have limitations? Or where are the experts perhaps blinded by their own perspectives or their own gaps? Their own gaps.

A second thing I think we need to do is look at history — oh, I'm sorry. No, go ahead.

SC: Well, sorry —

JB: Did I interrupt you? I'm sorry.

SC: No, it's okay. I'm thinking of — well, I'm thinking of Chris Sanagan's video. The archivist who said that like, we're all in these, like, curated bubbles because of our social media accounts, right? Like the way the Internet works for all of us, for example. And I think that, like, taking your idea and then thinking about this moment to how students look at like the 'evidence' that they have in their, like, social media world and then compare them with each other, it's an interesting way perhaps of being able to highlight the different types of evidence, even though like a student in a class, for example, especially in perhaps a rural area, like, a lot of their social media feeds would be very similar, but it could be a way of like bringing those two things together, for example.

JB: Sure. That was one of my key point. The second point, it's like —

SC: Oh, sorry. There you go.

JB: No, it's wonderful. It's like we planned this. But the idea of

moving beyond our bubbles, beyond the history bubble, even though I see myself as more [inaudible 0:17:11.4] studies education, the idea of the role of civics, and economics, and cultural geography, and physical geography, and sociology, and psychology and how that relates to — you know, how those understandings can impact our understandings of history.

For instance, today in the state of Wisconsin, just one state north of us, they're having primary elections. This is where they are voting on, if I understand it correctly, a state supreme court justice, okay? They need to elect one more. And it's not just for the primaries for the parties, but also for the state Supreme Court. The Democratic governor requested an extension a week ago for absentee voting to give them more than just today. Like, you know, it didn't have to be just today. They could pick up their absentee votes sometime over last week or today, and then get them in the mail and then have two weeks to make their decisions.

JB: The Republican-controlled state supreme court in this election is for — one of the things on the ballot is for another state supreme court justice. But the Republican-dominated Wisconsin Supreme Court voted no to allowing an extension during this pandemic today.

SC: Wow. Wow.

JB: They refused to. And it's the idea of, "Okay, who's more likely to vote? Who has the time," okay?

JB: When we're talking who's working in the service industry? Who has white collar jobs versus blue collar jobs? And the idea of limiting citizens' restrictions — I'm sorry, restricting citizens' decisions and their civil liberties.

JB: That's a civic issue. That's poli sci, political science. History might look at it as who won the election, you know, but in historical thinking, it takes in the case context, corroboration, credibility, all of these things, but a civics lens really changes the impact of what's happening today.

Take economics. As I understand what's happening in Canada, when

it comes to ways that the government is trying to support its citizens, I've read from some pretty credible media sites like The New York Times, Wall Street Journal, and Forbes that, excuse me, a dollar amount that citizens in Canada can expect over these next — I can't remember if it's three or four months. In the United States, it's about 60% of what Canadians are going to get in one month, the United States citizens are looking for one check. Just one check. 60% of one month in Canada. And it's not a check that they get to keep. It's an advancement on next year's tax returns.

SC: Wow. I mean, I knew some of that, but I didn't know that last part. That's sad. I mean, I have a lot of other adjectives, but yeah.

JB: It is startling.

JB: It is startling. If you were to look, there are 12 states that in the last two years have implemented very strict voting registration requirements, okay? Like throwing out all the voting records and making everybody get new IDs for new votes. You know, to get their voter ID laws up-to-date with what they say are the driver's IDs. And if you think about this, it's basically renewing your license, okay? That's where it comes down to. You renew your driver's license, then you register to vote at the same time, right? But think about when it comes to, okay, who has the time to — who has the interest in writing another $100 check, okay? And who has the time over —

SC: Who has another [inaudible 0:21:01.7] too?

JB: Exactly. It's not just $100, but it's having — like, to me, it might be an annoyance. But to somebody who has to choose between buying their grandmother's medicine for the month, paying this month's rent or spending $100 to be able to vote next election, the priorities — I mean, this is an economic decision.

JB: And you can't remove the civics from it, and you also can't remove the implications on history, you know, and it's so concerning. And when you see these states initiating these things, I mean there are certain things that are just so common. A lot of people in the United States will say things today, "My newsfeed on Twitter, on Facebook, it's

full of neighbors and family members saying things like, oh, we need to not politicize this moment. We need [inaudible 0:21:51.3]. Or we need to not worry about these other things." And there's a reason these things are happening. We've disregarded the experts. We've dismissed the evidence, you know. And we've also tried to separate or create silos around this is what you can criticize an elected official for and this is what you cannot.

And I think one way to move forward within the discipline of history is branching out to other disciplines because history impacts poli sci and economics has a huge impact on historical events. And I think broadening it to more of the social studies, I think it'll have a huge impact on the public in my thinking and in my mind anyway.

SC: Well, Neil Orford, one of the teachers that I started talking here during this series, as well as Jan Haskings-Winner, another teacher that I interviewed, both of them said interdisciplinarity is going to be so important.

And again, like one of the arguments I'd like to make in this series is that we need to have increasing circles of inclusion. And I think when we even think about interdisciplinarity, we can do that more because we are allowing different disciplines and greater types of knowledge to come into our conversation.

And one of the things too about — you know, I was saying to people before we went into social isolation here in Toronto, for example, that there was a real heightened anxiety about toilet paper. And I said, "You know why everyone is going to buy toilet paper? Because we can't stop Trump and we can't stop climate change." Like I think we're living in a very anxious moment right now and that this allows us to see some of those anxieties because we've all had to stop in some ways.

And so I think about what you're talking about in terms of bringing in evidence, but also combining it with things like oral histories like Kristina Llewellyn talked about as we need to pick up on some of these feelings of anxiety that so many people were feeling even before this happened.

JB: Sure. To use a phrase that I've heard you say first, and I'm going to refer to it back to you about the new 'we'. The new 'we', my first element would be an interdisciplinary mindset based on evidence and logic.

When you're talking about how can we move forward with an interdisciplinary mindset? I love the idea of exploring the details for common problems and I wish we could do this for all citizens. I wish we could send all citizens to a critical thinking class where they look at the types of — you know, they identify what are logical fallacies and how can you avoid them in your own thinking and in your own life? Like, this isn't a theoretical or a philosophical problem, this is a very real citizen's problem, you know?

JB: And when we talk about how can we imagine a new 'we' or when we're moving forward, I think there are lots of things that we can do, but one of the best things I think we can do is scrutinize the source, listen to the experts, and explore the evidence and just really make evidence-based decisions where it's not a solution in search of a problem. Or it's not one person's claim that everybody else just adapts.

JB: Or people actually — you know, they're critical consumers of the media that they produce.

SC: Yeah, because — I mean, of course, that's my last question. So I don't know if that is your answer about **how or if we can imagine a new 'we' differently.** Because for me, that really came from teachers teaching national history articulating that there is like an us versus them in terms of, like, people that know this, like Canadians and then others because we have a very large immigrant population in Canada. But even people who aren't immigrants, they're just people of color, for example, there's a bit an us versus them. And that can happen too, just like Sean Carlton talked about in his video in terms of Canadians and other people, indigenous people on this land like the nation-to-nation relationship.

So do you have any other thoughts about this notion of imagining and this notion of a 'we' during this moment?

JB: Sure. Well, the first thing I would do is bring us back to one of my favorite women in history, Eleanor Roosevelt —

SC: [inaudible 0:26:44.8]

JB: My daughter is named Eleanor.

SC: Oh, yeah? Okay, just not that much of my favorite.

JB: Yeah, my daughter is named Eleanor. But Eleanor Roosevelt used to — she used to articulate [inaudible 0:26:57.7] that government is a shield for the people. It's not a tool for the rich. It's a shield for the masses and not a tool for the rich. And that's the bedrock of my life's philosophy, my teaching philosophy, the idea of we are stronger when we work together. And our connectivity certainly, absolutely — our connectedness and our close proximity absolutely exacerbates a pandemic, okay? But it's also part of the solution.

JB: When we've got all these problems, we need all the brains we can get. And it's not like there's an American notion that if we just put these big walls up around our country and don't let in any outsiders, then American exceptionalism will really flourish. But everybody knows that purebred dogs, they are the angriest.

Variety is the spice of life. Our diversity is a strength. It's our strength. And the idea of it's not the people against the government, it's how can we make the government work for the people and not just be a tool for the rich?

JB: You know, that's a huge thing. And I think that if we were — when it comes to the new we, I think a lot of this can be — a lot of these issues, we can overcome a lot of these issues if we were to recognize that we're stronger when we're together and we work towards the typical civil liberties; the freedom of speech, freedom of worship, things like that, but also more social studies-oriented freedoms. Like freedom from what and freedom from fear, you know. And everybody having clean water, or where you don't have to decide between paying rent or paying for your prescription pills. Or like you mentioned earlier. What about publicly-funded Wi-Fi, you know?

JB: In the United States, Eisenhower is credited for the national

interstate system. And I mean, giving credit, you know it's pretty impressive, but we need investments like that when it comes to 21st century avenues for creative success, and economic success, and engineering success and publicly-funded Wi-Fi is absolutely one part of that.

SC: I think Eisenhower would have been a better president if he also did national Wi-Fi as an initiative.

JB: Right. Ahead of the curve back in the 1950s. All of you '90s people will love him.

SC: Yeah. It will be interesting how this moment — and I keep saying moment, but it's a moment that teaches us things, but it isn't going to be a moment in our history. It's going to be this thing that evolves. And it will be really interesting how it continues to evolve. So thank you so much for this wonderful talk. I really, really appreciate it.

JB: My pleasure.

SC: Yeah. Until we speak next time. I will now log off. See ya.

In conversation with Katy Whitfield

Pandemic Pedagogy Conversation #11

Katy Whitfield

Katy Whitfield is a history teacher based in Toronto. She is also a governor-general award-winning teacher, and I think she started a series right now about people's experiences with the pandemic that I think that she's going to be talking about, which is really cool. You can connect with him on Twitter at @katravel.

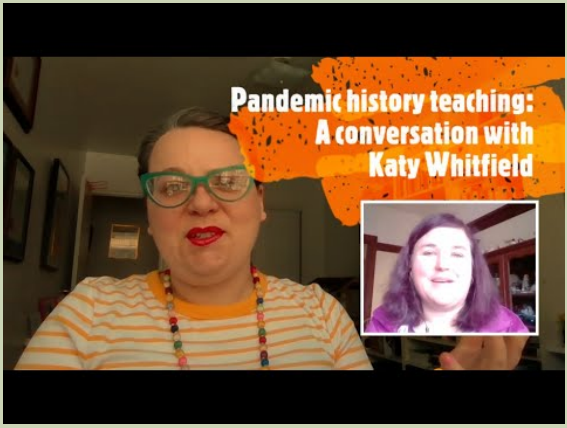
History teacher Katy shared the project she is working on collecting stories from this period. How will we teach with them in the future?

We spoke April 9, 2020.

Video posted April 15, 2020.

QUICK LINKS

Video:



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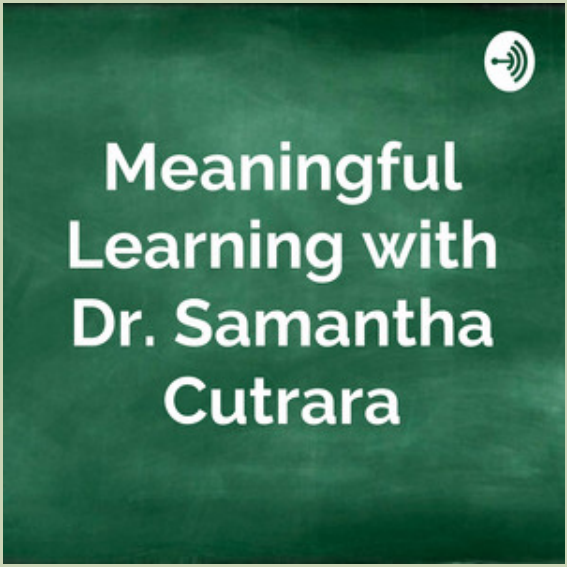

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TRANSCRIPT

All the Pandemic Pedagogy conversations revolved around three questions:

- Question 1: Have you thought of history any different *because* of this moment?
- Question 2: Do you think we would teach history *after* this moment?
- Question 3: Do you think we can "imagine a new 'we'" during/after this moment?

Dr. Samantha Cutrara: Hi everyone and welcome to the "Imagining a New 'We'" video blog with me, Dr. Samantha Cutrara. A video series designed to help history teachers and other history educators teach history in ways that are more meaningful, transformative, and inclusive for their students.

We're continuing our "Pandemic Pedagogy" series today with another amazing speaker. We're going to be talking to Katy Whitfield, who is a history teacher based in Toronto. Now, Katy connected with me because Neil Orford who did The Defining Moments Canada project related to the Spanish flu, and I'll link up above. Part of that project also did a Recovering Canada contest. And Katy was one of the successful projects. Her and her students were one of the successful projects in that contest. So that she's already been thinking about mobilizing ideas about Spanish Flu for students. And this was separate from the pandemic, so I'm excited for her to bring that in.

Katy is also a governor general award winning teacher, and I think

she started a series right now about people's experiences with the pandemic that I think that she's going to be talking about, which is really cool. So let's go over to Zoom and say hi to Katy.

Hi, Katy. Thank you so much for taking some time to talk with us today. I know that you've been so active in the work about the Spanish flu a couple years ago and now you're still active in thinking about pandemic stuff. So I think it will be really great to talk with you today. Thank you for taking the time.

Katy Whitfied: Thanks for the opportunity. I'm looking forward to sharing with you today.

SC: Yeah, definitely. And all the links to your projects and stuff will go below —

KW: Awesome.

SC: — so people can, like, follow up, which is great. So I've been asking everyone three questions.

SC: **The first is whether or not you think about history any differently because of this moment?** Because I have, but some people have said, like, "I'm already doing social history," or "I'm too busy." What do you think? Are you thinking about history any differently?

KW: I think that I always love, as a history teacher, to like seize the defining moment. So when we've got an opportunity, I see that this it's an opportunity that is ideal for critical inquiry. And my master's of education degree is focused on history education and inquiry. So the two of these things blending together creates sort of an entire treasure box of how we can sort of take this learning moving forward.

KW: Right now, we're living history. Our students are living history in a way in which they've never lived it before. And as the history unfolds, it becomes even more relevant and more relatable as the pandemic moves on and I think that it creates an interesting parallel narrative to our own lives. I usually start my day to listen to the prime minister's message followed by the premier or followed by any other medical health officer's reports throughout the day. So different points are punctuated in that way.

But I also think that it is an amazing opportunity for students, and adults, and scholars to be doing historical thinking and fieldwork in our own spaces. Often we're out doing that work outside, whether on an archaeological dig site, in a library, in an institution, but the opportunity to do that connecting and to reframe how we look at what's around us I think is really exciting for all of us. And in this movement of sort of engaging and doing historical thinking in real and relatable ways, primary source evidence is surrounding us at all points.

We're looking at what is historically significant. Is it more significant to me because it connects to me more personally or on a broader world scale? Are we connected in different ways than we ever would have been? And also, we're seeing particularly what's been most interesting to me is sort of the emphasis on women and women's leadership throughout this. There's been a lot of news articles about the leadership of the chief medical health officers across the country both provincially and locally here in Canada and also around the world. Some of the world leaders. The prime minister of New Zealand, for example, has getting a lot of air time in terms of her leadership through these crises.

So I think it allows for us to engage with big questions to dive into even bigger inquiries and to connect with other subject areas in multidisciplinary ways. I'm not an expert in pandemics, I'm not a scientist, but I have real interest in how movements of different kinds, whether they are disease or social movements, allow for us to engage our students who may not be so keen on history from the start to actually find a connection to the subject area.

So I think that we're only beginning to see how the treasures that are kind of unfolding about this learning and where this is going to take us as we move forward.

SC: Yeah. I mean, I love so much of what you're saying. And when you said, like, "We so often look outside to — like outside of ourselves to do this kind of learning," I think about Kristina Llewellyn's interview

earlier this week about oral histories and how we can talk and listen differently in our homes right now.

SC: I also really appreciate that you bring up women's leadership during this time because Neil also did that obviously in talking about nurses during the Spanish flu. And that led to a referencing, one of my videos, about how important it is to recognize care work and women as this foundation of how society functions. And I think a lot of people are feeling that and seeing that in different ways now because everything is so centralized in our home. So yeah, thank you for that.

KW: Mm-hmm, yup. And I also think that our young people are starting to see themselves represented. I mean, as I do my sort of social distancing walks up around the neighborhood, I've been sort of photographing drawings on the wall, pictures in windows.

KW: And part of the documentation of that is students seeing either within their own families or within their own communities how their communities are coming together to resolve this.

I saw a sign in a sign post yesterday of a blog that was saying , "We've created an online Facebook community group in order to help each other." And I think that that is really showing our young people like how it doesn't take a famous person or someone who's the leader of an organization to create a movement of kindness and sharing, but rather a small gesture is something that is just as important as we look at how we sort of accord the narrative of this history.

And I noticed last week, some people were posting online on some social media a Facebook post to say, "Well, a year from now, I want to remind myself this was the gas price, this is how many people had been impacted." And I think that part of that is like really a marking of the time. Like we do that in photographs and on different social media, but it's been fascinating in the story collection that I've been doing hearing from young people in Istanbul having the same reactions to social distancing as someone in Adelaide in Australia as someone in Salt Spring Island in British Columbia.

And so, sort of reactions are really common. So that idea of how

we're more alike than we are different in these kinds of crises I think is another opportunity for us to really consider. My own students have been participating in the story project as well, and I think it comes down to the big questions we ask. If you ask the right question and you provide a gateway for an opportunity for someone to share their story, that story comes out of a space where it may never have been released into the universe —

KW: — and into the conversation. And some individuals have shared sort of the catharsis of reflecting, and I know that that's part of a more old fashioned idea of like writing a journal or writing traditional letters in the ways in which people would have done during the Spanish influenza how would we have communicated without social media at the time. But even some of the project work we've been looking at this week is the Guelph Museum asked last week, if you were to curate a museum on COVID-19, what would you put into it? And that provocation came from Twitter and now, a whole bunch of us are creating a series of projects to engage our students in creating that record.

So, what would that look like? Probably a digital online exhibit and it's taking even museum education to a different level. Teachers are sending their students on virtual field trips to places around the world that they would only dream of being able to visit. And so the accessibility of history and being part of that I think is a really exciting — would have been a really exciting times.

I think unprecedented is an overused word because I think, unfortunately, the trajectory of pandemic [Video trails off 0:09:19.0] may yet again see this in our lifetime. And therefore, if that's how we're going to be and those are the realities, then we have to think about like what important lessons can we learn about community, about access, about decision-making, about sharing resources both in Canada and around the world and looking at who are our leaders who are going to lead us forward in that decision-making moving forward so that we're solution-focused and we're hearing all of the different voices in the historical conversation and in the social conversation as well.

SC: Yeah. And I think that also brings up the fact that we can be leaders in our own communities, kind of like you were saying before, because I think of Kat Akerfeldt who's the executive director of Toronto's First Post Office that I spoke to last week. And like she's running a small museum. And if we want to be leaders in our world in saying things like arts and heritage are important, then it's also up to us to engage those different rights.

SC: And I love this idea of teachers being able to take their students on these field trips to places around the world. And I also want to encourage viewers to look at the small museums too because those ones, well, first, they might actually have a lot more capacity for innovation if there's only a few people, but also, because we want to keep those smaller community stories growing as much as we can during this period. So —

KW: And I think that there's — can I just add one point there of sort of engaging the artist community as an extension to that? There's been lots of opportunities where artists and writers and musicians are using historic spaces as well. And so to engage them as other partners in this conversation I think is really important, particularly as there are group of individuals who are really experiencing hard times.

KW: And so, to find ways of engaging that community because it will be the playwrights, and the singers, and the poets that are going to add to the narrative as they have in many social movements and in many crises historically. So I would encourage people to think about how could they engage in their community with those voices and add them into the conversation too?

SC: Yeah, I think that's a great point. I think that it's a moment where we can realize that we shouldn't be taking for granted that these artists, musicians, heritage creators still also need to eat and pay their bills during this time. And I think when everything is so normal and everything is moving, we can kind of miss those lessons and this is an important reminder that if we want to be leaders, that we can engage this.

KW: Absolutely.

SC: So this leads me to my second question, which is about **do you think that teaching history is going to change after this?** A lot of people said that it should. I'm interested to know if you think that it will.

KW: So I think that the sign of a good history class is when stories are in the room.

KW: And whether those are stories that are provoked by teachers, whether or not that is allowing for a pause in the conversation for a student to reflect on their own stories or their own experiences, I don't think that we're going to lose that sense of story.

KW: I do think, however, that when you experience periods in time like pandemics, the opportunity for connecting to the wider world is even more possible. And so, the incorporation of those voices. And I know that some of the work that The Ontario History Association has been doing as well as other organizations in 'bringing experts' into the room whether that's Skyping in a professor or Skyping in a community member, I think that they'll be greater opportunity for doing that because we don't know long term. How long our school system is going to be in a state of remote learning. We just don't know.

KW: But I think it also allows for us to — and we were talking in the last question about connecting to your place and space. I think that we're going to be looking more at relationships with the land, relationships with environment. I mean, if you go back to the trajectory of what the last three months have looked like, we started January with a more loud conversation about the West Witton pipeline issue and how that became part of our media with the disruption of railways and sort of the relationships between government and indigenous people. That's not a new issue. That's one that just came to the surface yet again.

So looking at the land and the environment and the climate crisis that we continually are on. And how, as historians, are we looking at how previous generations and indigenous people have cared for the land and our relationship to it. How do we care for the environment? And how can we take lessons out of the environment when we're in

this period of pause. A friend of mine was calling this the pandemic pause. And every once in a while, I catch myself and I feel like I'm too frenzied to actually pause and think about that.

But I think that also oftentimes in history class, we think that our students find conversations about government boring.

KW: On March 13th, when the World Health Organization made the declaration that this was an international pandemic, I walked into my civics classroom and the prime minister of Canada was giving his address to the nation and I just let it run. I just let him run for about five or six minutes. And he finished at the end and he said, "Ladies and gentlemen, Canadians, we will get through this together." And I thought, "Okay, there is my launch into this lesson. We have no idea what's going to happen next."

KW: And then we looked at the provincial government, and we were at the time in our unit looking at ministry responsibilities. So I provoked my students to look at particular ministries, how is the ministry impacted by this particular issue, and what suggestions might we give to that ministry? So it takes looking at government and sort of like jazzes it up for lack of a better expression of making government in decision-making something that's worthy of our consideration.

And finally, I think that there's sort of a surge of new energy to sort of like fight and rise up and advocate for issues of any quality and inequity around issues of education and access. Do people have the resources that they need? How do we continue to do teaching in spaces that are online when access to Wi-Fi or access to resources, when multiple children in the home who also may have a parent who needs this technology or who might be an educator themselves has to share all those resources.

And I know that a lot of my colleagues who have young children have taken this as an opportunity to teach their kids about things that they're interested in. It's like the home is the kindergarten classroom, you know?

KW: Like a big question, and then we go on this investigation.

And so I think that that energy is giving us an opportunity and finally, we're being given a pause. A pause that we may not see like this again, or not for a long time. But it allows for us an opportunity to take stock of what we have to knowledge with gratitude the basic human needs that we have, the rights that we've been given, the hard work of our essential service workers in order to give us the things that we need and to care for us, but also, it gives us the impetus to sort of stand up and wright, and acknowledge, and ask for the things that even the vulnerable people in our communities may not have access to.

So it's motivating us to care for ourselves and to care for each other in ways in which, hopefully, will lead to a positive change in our society here in Canada, but also internationally about how we think about our neighbors and the things that they need as well.

SC: Yeah, I really appreciate that. And I want to kind of blend some of those ideas together because this moment of 'pause' can also help us do things like engage in research about things we don't know. And so if we are, for example, interested in greater understandings of the land and greater understandings of indigeneity of this place, then I think of Sean Carlton's video about having a better understanding of nation-to-nation relationships and how that is playing out in this moment.

SC: So I think it's a great opportunity to be able to also take stock of what we still need to know in order to, again, like to move into the future together.

And so then that brings me to the third question about imagining a new 'we'. That for a lot of people that brings up ideas of community and collaboration and community — and for me, I am really interested to hear more about your story project. So maybe you could talk a little bit about that as a way to kind of think about this notion of imagining a new 'we'.

KW: Absolutely. So the story project started about two and a half weeks ago now. And —

SC: And then how like an official name?

KW: Yeah. It's called Stories from Self Isolation. And the project itself is a Google form. And basically, it just started off with an idea of if I was to be teaching this history next year, five years from now, 10 years from now, where am I going to collect the primary source documents that I'm going to want in order to tell these stories? And so, I threw it out to the social media universe and thought, "Well, if I gather sort of five, 10 stories, that'll kind of be excited. This will be kind of cool."

And then as the stories were ready to roll in and colleagues had been sharing it, basically the first bit of the questions was sort of a little description of who are you? What's your age? Where are you coming up from? Sort of that basic demographic information. And I was curious in the first bit to find out what people were eating, what people were doing, what people were listening to. Like, what was the major headline of what was going on? In my teacher brain, I was thinking about what kind of tasks could I have students do with this data? We're always thinking about keeping the end in mind and how the collection of that data would fuel inquiry or fuel our own research.

And so, in addition to that, there were questions about how people were spending their days. So that was sort of the first bit. The second collection of questions is focusing on settling in and staying home. And this particular set of questions is focusing on do you have personal family connections or relational connections to essential workers? How is your relationship with those individuals was impacting your day? How now that we're being asked to stay home, how are you accessing your groceries, and your food and other services? But how are you also helping local businesses?

And then in addition to that, some of the questions are asking — I mean, some little interesting things like what's your go-to snack? Which I think is quite interesting. As we're looking at sort of the pop culture around this, I'm quite fascinated by that. I was looking for a lot of really cool —

SC: That's your [inaudible 0:20:37.0]

KW: — I thought people are saying, "Oh, I can't go [inaudible

0:20:38.1]. So my go-to snack, I would say, are some Cool Ranch Doritos and Diet Pepsi. Those are like my standards, but I also have been eating a lot of gummy worms. That's something I would never buy, but it's kind of the luxury — at this time, I'm not sure why. But anyways.

And so this last part of the questions are also asking about how people's attitudes changed in terms of the pandemic as we sort of settle in looking at opinions around social distancing, looking at opinions about sort of following regulations, looking at quarantine and so on. So, so far, we have 177 responses. They come from all around the globe. There are very large number of them that are coming from students whose teachers are having them participate, and all of the data that I've been collecting has been populated on the websites that I have created. A simple website that sort of gives you a summary of some of the stories that are being shared.

All of the information thus far is being shared anonymously, but the idea in the end is to create a resource. Sort of a source book of sorts with the permission of the participants so that that could be shared within the school system here and around the globe for people who are interested. And I'm interested to see whether when we collect the data, I'm sort of looking at a chapter three and a chapter four. We'll see how long this goes on. But what's been interesting to see is somebody who participates in chapter one, how their experience is changing?

People have talked about how we're complaining about our self isolation and then I'm reminded of Anne Frank. And Anne Frank writing a diary in an upper room in the Netherlands in the midst of the Holocaust. And I mean, obviously, she didn't live long enough to know how famous her words would be of words of inspiration, but it has been particularly interesting to me the international stories that I've been collecting. I've had a response from Costa Rica. I've had a response from Australia. One from New Zealand. I've traveled to Myanmar, so I have a response from Myanmar and Burma. I have also received some from the United States, which is representing some interesting contrast to

our North American experience. Within Canada, I received one amazing story from Salt Spring Island in British Columbia —

SC: Cool.

KW: — from one of the Governor General's History award winners. And then within sort of Ontario and parts of the Maritimes, a colleague of mine, his father is leading the medical charge at the hospital in Truro, Nova Scotia. And so it's so interesting how the sort of fabric of these stories are coming together. So what's needed I think of that data is I could see an artist, a member of the artist community being inspired by that data.

KW: Could we make theater with it? Could we use music? Could we set it to music? Could we paint something? Is it now allowing for lesser, more vulnerable voices to be at the table? A 15-year-old kid who's being honest about their experience of life, "This is driving me crazy! I need to get out of here," versus the young woman from Turkey who I heard from this morning who said, "I just don't get it. People know they need to stay home, and why are they still walking on the boardwalk?" There's a voice that's sort of screaming to the world like, we need to be in this and we need to be committed together.

KW: But I think what it's also raising for me are sort of some different considerations about addressing isms. People have been talking about racism and discrimination. People have been talking about access. People have been talking about their political systems, their feedback about their governments. They've also been talking about this idea of what they are contributing to the story project is leaving a record of their experience, but also a legacy for others to be able to tap into.

Fortunately, only one of the respondents so far has identified as being personally infected by COVID-19.

KW: So it's quite remarkable, particularly amongst that group that is — all who has been impacted. But I think it's causing people to consider their own individual stories and their own individual connections to the narrative, but also taking stock of their expressions of grati-

tude, of sort of acknowledging. I mean, I think good life coaching would say acknowledge the things that you have and the time that you have. And I keep thinking if my grandparents had lived through this, what stories would they be telling?

My grandmother was a great storyteller. My grandparents, all four of them, told stories around the table all the time. I think I'm thinking a lot about them this week because their birthdays and their anniversaries all fall in this one chunk of April.

KW: And if they'd be alive today, they would be 101 and 102 years old and would have lived or would have been married for 78 years, but how their resolve, and their courage, and their bravery to have lived through all these experiences, I think that their wisdom is guiding a lot of us. Or like, their generation is kids that grew up during the depression or during the war years. My dad and I were talking about this and he said, "You know, our generation –" even his generation. My dad is 71. He said, "Even our generation hasn't had to experience something of this magnitude."

KW: They've obviously lived through sort of some international conflicts around them, the Cold War and so on and so forth, but this is going to be really defining. I think about how we look about — look at the world. A colleague said one of their students is describing, is this potentially we're going to talk about pre and post pandemic as sort of how events happened as a course of history? Which is I think we'll see how long that lasts, you know. I mean, it creates sort of this new era.

But I think the other thing that is kind of reassuring through story projects like this is that there are lots of unknowns, but the knowns are that your story exists, your feelings matter, your experience matters. And even just launching the opportunity for others to contribute is giving people the sense of purpose and connection to a greater experience, you know? And I mean, I get obviously so excited when there's a new message in my inbox saying a new one has been added. But the diversity of their responses and to your question about imagining a new transnational 'we', the similarities that I'm finding in the stories,

the access and the space to share those conversations. Even posting the list of what we're all reading and connecting not to the second question sort of about how are we pausing and sort of rethinking.

This is a really exciting opportunity for us to not be so dwelling on the isolation and the sadness, but what opportunity does this give to us as educators and as people who study history to engage people in doing that historical thinking work so that future generations can learn that we got through it in multiple different ways? Some days were up, some days were down. But that those experiences that we have potentially may be used to inform policy in the future, how communities operate and exist within themselves and in the broader conversation, and that perhaps that we may just smile a little bit more when we pass the people down the street or that will make greater connections with our neighbors and our friends, and with people around the world, connecting students and scholars and so on. I'm hopeful. I'm hopeful about it. and I think that this is an exciting time.

SC: Yeah. You know, and it's interesting for those of us where it is spring right now for this to be happening during spring because I think spring is always a time for us to kind of regroup and to reassess, and to be able to see things growing, and to be able to see this new layer of beauty. And I really appreciate your response 'cause I think that really echo spring. So thank you, this has been really fantastic. I think that you've provided so many, like, really helpful suggestions, but also some really transformative ideas for people to think about it.

KW: Oh, thanks.

SC: And all the links, of course, that you have talked about will be shared with all the viewers. So hopefully, you'll get some more people responding —

KW: Awesome. That's amazing, thank you.

SC: — and it would be really great maybe to touch base afterwards and, like, to see what came up. So thank you. This has been really, really great.

KW: Yeah, I've been really thrilled to be able to talk with you

today and I'm really excited about adding more stories. I'm particularly excited about stories from different parts of the world. So the international listeners, I would love to hear from you. Thank you. Take care. Buh-bye.

SC: Bye.

In conversation with Aaron Stout

Pandemic Pedagogy Conversation #12

Aaron Stout

Aaron Stout was a high school social studies teacher in Lethbridge for 11 years. And he just finished his master's, where he thought about social studies, and citizenship, and like humanism. You can connect with him on Twitter at @Stoutaar.

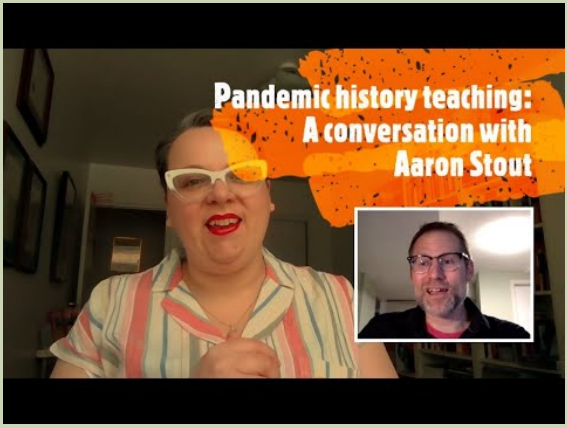
Aaron was so thoughtful in discussing why history should be thought of as a humanity and not a social science. What do we gain by "breathing with" stories during this time?

We spoke April 9, 2020.

Video posted April 16, 2020.

QUICK LINKS

Video:



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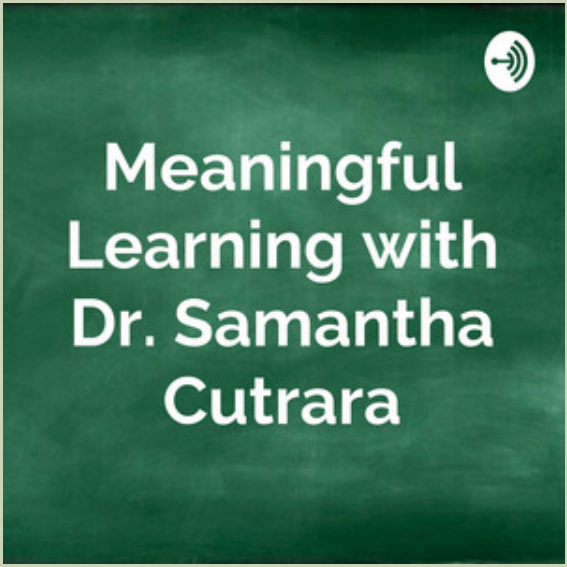

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TRANSCRIPT

All the Pandemic Pedagogy conversations revolved around three questions:

- Question 1: Have you thought of history any different *because* of this moment?
- Question 2: Do you think we would teach history *after* this moment?
- Question 3: Do you think we can "imagine a new 'we'" during/after this moment?

Dr. Samantha Cutrara: Hi everyone and welcome to the "Imagining a New 'We'" video blog with me, Dr. Samantha Cutrara. A video series designed to help history teachers and other history educators teach history in ways that are more transformative, meaningful, and inclusive for their students.

We've had a fantastic, another fantastic week talking to people across Canada and the US about whether or not they think that teaching history will change after this. And we continue our series today by talking with Aaron Stout.

This is another fantastic conversation that we get to have. I met Aaron at a conference last summer, actually. And if you go back into my old YouTube videos, you'll see me doing a conference presentation called Connection, Complexity, and Care and Aaron is actually sitting at the panel, because that's where we first met. He also presented a paper at that panel. He was a high school social studies teachers in Lethbridge for 11 years. And he just finished his master's, where he thought

about social studies, and citizenship, and like humanism. Like the humanities, which is something he's going to talk about today.

He also is really active in the ATA, the Alberta Teachers' Association. And I think that he'll be able to bring a lot of really valuable insights as everyone has to this conversation. So, let's go over to Zoom and say hi to Aaron.

Hi, Aaron. Thank you so much for taking the time. I know that you are busy teaching, being coordinator at the university, being a parent right now, so thank you for taking the time.

Aaron Stout: Thank you very much. It's nice to have something different to do with today, and it's good to see you there in Ontario.

SC: Yeah, thank you. It's nice seeing Alberta. How's the weather?

AS: Not great, you know. We've got more snow. It's going to be 14 degrees tomorrow, and then it's going to be snow and minus four or five on the weekend, so you know. You know, spring would be good.

SC: We've had a very kind of nice sunny spring, and I keep talking about that in the video that people are like, "Uhm, just so you know it, snowing here, so."

You know, I'm glad that we have this opportunity to talk because other people are also saying that we're so busy now trying to, like, adjust to this new normal, especially when our work interacts with other people, that we aren't having chances to kind of think through this big ideas in these thoughtful ways. So I hope this conversation can be part of that. And that's why I always start with this big question about history, **will we think about history like the actual subject, the actual discipline of history different after this moment?** What do you think?

AS: I think this moment helps us pause, and I think that's amazing when we look at the context that we're in. I think that the rethinking about history and history education by extension has been something that we've really been doing over the last 10 years trying to understand, and trying to structure, and trying to revisit. And so, I'm hoping that this

pause helps us rethink, and restructure, and reprioritize what history education is and what history education can actually do.

And my hope is that we can not only look back, but look ahead and start thinking about how does history education take a different structure when we're meeting face-to-face with our students again? When we're seeing them. When we're able to see the light turn on, or when we're able to see them struggle. I think that's a wonder, but what we present to them is history. I think it's inherently connected with the awe and wonder that history can present our students in the field, in classrooms, and in our university classrooms as well.

SC: Yeah. You know, it's interesting because the conversation I had with Andrea Eidinger, for example, who we were talking about do you think history is going to change after this or history teaching? And she spoke from her perspective as being a history professor and she said, "I have hopes." And her answer reflected the longer conversation that she has seen and has been a part of in the field of history. And so when you say history is already changing, it's been changing over the last 10 years, it really makes me think of all these conversations we're having about these moments of crisis help reveal structures. And people may or may not have seen a lot of these changes in the field of history or the field of history education, but now we can see, "Oh, yeah, this conversation feel different because of this moment."

So thanks for, like, historicizing the conversation. Because other people have done it, but I think you said it in a really, like, clear stitched way. So thanks.

AS: You're welcome.

SC: See? It's nice to be like the glue that holds on the conversations together because I could be like, "Oh, look at what you did there? You didn't even see that."

So then, to me, this brings up a question of **are we going to teach history differently after this?** And I think of the video that I did with Dr. Nathan Smith, and he said, "I don't think it will change, but like, the mode will change. I think teaching, they'll be more online forces." But

then to me, history will have to shift and change if the mode is changing too. Do you think the teaching of history is going to change after this?

AS: I don't know. And [inaudible 0:06:09.6] doing that by just going back, we've got a model of history education that really is content-centric, right?

AS: And so, when we look at that, you know it comes from really this positivistic stance where we can know history and we transmit the story, and content really becomes the anchor. And that professionalization of history that we see in the early 1900s and it's kind of extended all the way on is still a prominent understanding of history that we see in curriculum, and especially K-12 programs.

That content doesn't seem to be open for debate. And when you talk to teachers — so the Alberta Teachers' Association actually surveyed our social studies teachers in 2016. And a lot of them still looked at the content aspects of the program of studies as being really important. They saw it as a struggle, but they see it as being really important. And so, this content delivery model of history education, I think, is deeply ingrained in our education system as we have them.

Now, in the discipline of history, we see that sense of content being rethought. And we see this in gender historians, we see this in post-modern historians, we see this in post-colonial historians where we're starting to bust apart some of those grand narratives. But if you take a look at K-12 curriculum, it's still really ingrained this content delivery this is the content that we need to know. And I don't think that content isn't important, but it's a pillar or it's conceptualization of history education that still exist.

AS: So, will this moment change that conceptualization? It will if we offer a different framework for people to think out.

SC: Yeah. I mean, I really like that framing because I also think that content as much as people want to — sorry, the cat here. As people in the field want to talk about skills, I think that that teacher still gravitates towards content. And while I hear you framing it in a way

that's kind of negative, I've always felt that if we recognize that and acknowledge that, it gives us greater opportunity to bring in content that can then challenge us.

SC: And so, I see this and I would love your response to it. I see this as an opportunity to be open to more content that can be transformative, that can help mirror the questions about family, and care work, and isolation, and public health, and inequity that this moment is showing. Do you have thoughts about that?

AS: Well, I think the content is significant. I think my previous comments really deal with this idea of content as uncritically transmitted.

AS: And I think that's a problematic feature in our approach to [inaudible 0:09:35.5].

AS: I think the procedural approach that we see within — and especially in Ontario, you've got historical thinking concepts that are built into your curriculum. I think the procedural aspects try to break apart that content to look at what you're talking about in the sense of what voices were missed, or why was this voice really trumpeted above other voices, right?

I think understanding the structure of history and the procedural concepts to build history give us the ability to highlight these aspects or these stories or these considerations that maybe were missed. My fear that's echoed by a number of social studies teachers at least here in Alberta is the idea that when we get content dance programs within the K-12 teaching life, it becomes very difficult to reveal to our students the nature of what history is and what history is not.

AS: And I think that's where you get to the stories that you're talking about, is this idea of history as a construct, history as a narrative, history as a story that has been put together for purposes. And it's really important to understand those purposes to understand that history.

And so, I agree. I think there's wonderful content that we have. But I think there's work to be done by curriculum framers and curriculum

writers to give teachers the opportunity to follow these big questions. And I think we create opportunities in a K-12 system within that framework.

SC: Yeah, that's really great. And I just want to flag that you are smiling because a cat like literally crossed across the screen.

AS: Yeah, yeah, yesh.

SC: Yeah, I think that's really great and really — a thoughtful way to think about something that I think we all balance because research shows that teachers will teach for the purpose in their history classes that they defined before becoming history teacher.

SC: And that purpose and that way of thinking about history, it's often based on what they learned. And if they learned this content reached transmission framework, then they may revert even without realizing it to that. So I appreciate you bringing up some of these things for everyone. Like, everyone to think about how can we ensure that we aren't just transmitting these things that we are identifying as the most important facts, and instead thinking about construction.

And I appreciate that you brought in post-modern historians because I do like post-modern work and I didn't — it was never intended for this video series to, like, focus on that, but it's been amazing how it has come up things about revealing structures in so many video. So — Anyway, I just wanted to shoutout that link because it has been coming up a lot. And I don't necessarily think that a lot of these post-modern ideas get enough due in these conversations because they can seem really inaccessible.

AS: Mm-hmm. And I think you're hitting on something here in the sense that I think there's been a lot of work done that tries to understand what narrative is.

AS: What perspective is. What a historical voice is. And I think in some ways, that's really important work. And now I'm going to balance that with another comment. I think that's really important work, but my fear in that work is we prioritize those procedural considerations and

we miss the voice of the individual behind the source, or behind the story, or behind the perspective.

I think it's easy for us to get into an analysis of what a primary source is and what it does and miss what it says, or miss what it reveals about humanity.

AS: And I think that balance is a tough balance that we trend. Because on one hand, content by itself is a grand narrative that's not critically approached. Procedural approach is whether that's through evidence, whether that's through judgments about continuity and change or even the construction of a narrative that prioritizes a certain perspective again aggregates data to be able to create something that resembles a coherent kind of idea. But at the core of all of that are people's lives and experiences. And if we miss that it's people's lives and experience, then we miss the depth of what history is.

And I think that, as educators, we need to come back to the idea that history is about people's lives and experiences.

AS: We need to find ways to make selections, both of content and procedural concepts, that help us unearth these stories. Help us understand these people. Help us appreciate the lives that they lived and the decisions that they made. I think that becomes a really powerful position for what history education can be.

SC: Yeah, I agree with you. I think that's a really thoughtful way to put it, because a lot of people that have watched these videos know that it take some issues with historical thinking. And for me, it's because it does mimic a procedural approach in ways that doesn't allow things like affect. It doesn't allow for emotion. It doesn't allow for that humanity.

And so, I think that thinking about it as this procedural approach does help us remember. It's not like this notion of thinking historically, it's this notion of having things in a procedure in a way that can divorce us from that humanity like you said.

AS: I think it becomes our goal, right?

AS: So instructionally, we talk about what is my purpose instruc-

tionally with the students? I think we really need to sit down and think about what is the purpose of history education?

AS: That we can see that within the big six historical thinking concepts that these procedures, that these historical thinking concepts help us frame how researchers might take documents and make judgments about them and those judgments ultimately become the narratives that we look at.

AS: Not sacrosanct in and of themselves. Their judgments that people have made to make the best sense that they kept out of the source evidence that they have.

AS: There's nothing wrong with that. But if my purpose is I want my students to understand what evidence is, which has value, then that becomes the focus pedagogically.

AS: If our focus becomes let's take a look at this letter and just listen to what this letter says, I think that becomes a powerful moment. I did a workshop not too long ago with a number of teachers and we looked at just a letter from the frontlines in World War I. And it was a letter from an individual. His name was Harry Morris. And in the letter, it talks about his experience in the trench and getting injured in the trench.

AS: And he talks about them sitting and they're in kind of a dug out that they've created in the side of the trench. Him and his buddies, they're having lunch. He talks about what they're eating and then they talk about how the shelling starts. And he reflects on this experience of going, "Wow, it's going to be a busy night," and it hits just right beside their hole. And so they all get out and they're like, "Ah, well, let's just finish the last bite of this before we go," and I was sitting down, "Okay."

And then they get into this big firefight and another shell goes off and it goes through his leg and he's sitting reflecting on this experience in this hospital bed talking about how fast shrapnel flies.

AS: And a great experience for — the story was a great experience, not only to say what were the trenches like, but how is this individual internalizing this experience.

AS: How is he telling it back? Why is he telling it back? What would it be like to be there in the trench with him at that period and at that time? There's so much richness that we can find in that source that spurs the imagination. And by selecting something like that, you can engage your students in.

Okay, we know that the trenches are bad, but what would it be like? What would it sound like? What would it feel like? What would be — what is this individual saying about that experience that gives us a window in who they are and into how they [inaudible 0:19:10.0*proceed.]

AS: I think that can be a really powerful moment for our students. I think it can be a powerful moment for us as individuals to sit, to imagine, to breathe —

AS: — years ago. And I think there's merit to that. And then we can sit down and we can talk about, well, he was in this hospital bed. How fresh would these memories be? We can talk about contextuality. We can talk about the nature of the letter being sent back home, and that he probably had an intention for this letter to be shared around with the peer group, right? How does that change, right? We can talk about those things. That's okay. But first, can we breathe with it?

SC: Yes. I love that so much because, yes, we can have those conversations, but let's also just take a minute or a few to just internalize it and just think about it in ways that aren't going to be assessed and evaluated, but to allow us to recognize the humanity of people in the past just so that we can also recognize value, our humanity in the future and in the present.

AS: Absolutely. Absolutely. I think — sorry, go ahead.

SC: Oh, no, no. Continue.

AS: What I was thinking about it is so often we've seen history in curriculum documents and we can say it history, we can also lump in social studies. And I know that's a little bit of a hybridization and I'm tensed about that. That's another [crosstalk 0:20:49.4]. That's another conversation. But when we look at it from its earliest inclusions in public education, it has been seen as a pathway toward citizenship. But that

pathway toward citizenship has somewhat been clouded in the sense that early on that pathway as seen as very much a pathway that was directed. Here is what it means to be a British citizen in a British empire, and we're going to own that. And all of you immigrant populations coming to Canada are going to learn what it is to be a Christian, what it's going to be, you know, learn what it is to be a British citizen, learn how to relate to that.

That has since changed. We've seen a change in that in some ways. Though the grand narrative is still present in some ways, we've seen a shift and we've seen that change, and we've seen a greater movement towards inclusion within our school systems and that. History opens the window for us to really start to see citizenship through the idea humanizing content trying to understand perspective. Trying to appreciate the perspectives of the past in a real and meaningful and in a deep way. And it's these skills that help us understand the perspectives of the past that actually foster in us a desire to understand the perspectives in our present.

AS: And I think those attitudes of being open-minded, fair-minded, full-minded, if we can apply those into a historical context, those become aptitudes and attitudes that we bring into our modern context, especially when we consider the global nature of our world, especially when we consider the multicultural and pluralistic sense of our society. These skills are essential and we foster them in the history classroom.

SC: Yeah, that's so wonderful. Thank you so much. And I think it leads to our last question about imagining a new 'we'. But before I ask that question, I just wanted to show you the irony of you talking about purpose right now. So before the pandemic happened, I mapped out all these videos I wanted to do for the spring and summer. And like, this week literally was on purpose. I've already recorded and edited two videos on teachers thinking about their purpose. And so I think what I'll do is I will package them up and I will post them for next week because I do think, especially in moving remote.

So part of what I do is I work in higher education settings and things like learning objectives, and learning outcomes and curriculum, the way we understand it in K-12 is not as ubiquitous a concept as we are familiar with. And so one of the main things about moving online I keep telling people is you need to be even more clear about what you want students to learn, not just what you're going to teach.

And I think that when you clarify your own purpose of running a course, it helps with that. So thank you for bringing that up. I think that's a really useful way when teachers right now are trying to figure out how to negotiate this new identity that they have and being a remote teaching teacher can — it will help to help them think about why are they doing this? What does history mean to them?

AS: Yeah, absolutely. That would be great.

SC: So that does lead to the last question, which is imagining a new 'we'. So I often will see this divide, whether or not people wanted it or not, between like us that know Canadian history and those that don't. And whether that is cultural or racial or, like, generational divides, that can be an implicit purpose that teachers come in with. And I think that can be really problematic, right?

So the idea about we need to imagine these greater circles of inclusion in our classrooms, in what we consider to be Canadian history has really been important to me. And I have been interested in whether or not people think this notion of imagining or this notion of a 'we' might shift and change because of this moment. Because for me, things like community and collaboration and even creativity, I've always imagined it in face-to-face basis. And, like, maybe it will be online too, but it's predominantly face-to-face. So, **do you have any thoughts about imagining a new 'we' after this moment?**

AS: Well, I think the idea of imagining a new 'we' is — with your permission, I think I want to take it in a different slant —

SC: [inaudible 0:26:03.9]

AS: — in a sense that I think this idea of 'we' and a future 'we' that is more inclusive, that is multicultural, that embraces diversity

directly happens within the context of our history classroom because like the antecedents that we look at are really in the way we approach and understand the past. But approaching and understanding the past in a structured timeline becomes really empty and meaningful.

So I think our pathway to this new 'we' of understanding complexity, and citizenship, and individuality is really something that prioritizes the choices that we make as history educators.

AS: How do we champion microhistory? How do we let diaries really speak from the past into our present that gives a window into the expressions of other people? I think that becomes an essential component.

So even more than conducting the structural components of our classrooms, it comes down to how do we engage in history that captures our imagination and our emotions that then propels us into the critical thinking that we need to engage with with any historical source? And I think that's turning the pedagogical structure around a little bit from what many of us have experienced as far as history education.

So I've looked at doing that in a couple of different ways. And again, this is like expe — I'm experimenting all the time and I'm not sure if it works. But one of the ways is taking resources like autobiography. So at the [inaudible 0:27:51.8*uovel], they actually champion the idea of every student reading The Education of Augie Merasty.

AS: And it was done through our Department of Liberal Education, but it's a really powerful piece in that — it's an autobiography that was written between an Indigenous man that went through a residential school system thinking about those experiences as he's older.

And working with David Carpenter, who is an English professor in order to kind of cobble this together. So really, it's a work of two people working together to put together this memoir. And it's really powerful when you read it. It really shares a voice. Now, how much that voice has been moderated? You'd have to ask the two participants to really know that. But the powerful piece in this book comes out at the end when David Carpenter is reflecting on his experiences in this relation-

ship to create this product. And he talks about how we can look at differences or how we can create what might be the norm and the other in society, but he talks about how his experience really humanized his understanding of just being a person and how overwhelmed he was by the welcome, by the compassion, and by the generosity of these people that he was working with.

And I think we need to see history as an engagement that brings us to that insight, right? That we're not talking about a group of people that we can other because they exist in the past, or we can other because they share different gender, racial, or ethnic perspectives. We need to choose pieces that help us see humanity in a clear way.

And so when we talk about that practically, that might be engaging students in historical stories that are put into different formats. Historical [inaudible 0:30:05.1] can be really powerful because it entrenches the reader within the idea of human agency and intentionality. We can use picture books. There are some really fantastic picture books that tell historical stories. They really work for younger students, but bring up all of these key questions.

There was one that came out about Viola Desmond —

AS: — that I read to my kids. And my kids were six at the time that I read it to them. And the story of Viola Desmond being a black woman who goes to the theatre and is asked to move because she's sitting in the wrong section becomes a profound story of civil rights within Canada, and I think that's significant. But my kids looked at that and said, "Well, why did that happen to her? And why are they treating her differently? And why are there all these issues around different standards of behavior? And what did it mean to be a black woman at this time?"

My six-year-olds are coming up with questions like that. It just floored me that they were inherently interested in this story of injustice and it opened up a wealth of questions out of that that require historical thinking concepts to be able to answer, but what enraptured them

was this story of injustice why it would be that way? And almost this sense of appreciation for who this person was.

And so, I think we need to blow off the doors, as far as material that we challenge our students with. And I think we need to be broad, and I think we need to see diversity, and I think we need to seek this disillusionment, that especially white settler populations like my own, we don't need to be comfortable.

AS: We need to hear somebody's voice that makes us sit down and go, "Whoa, why would people treat people that way?" And then give us the tools to be able to answer those questions. Give us the tools to be able to struggle with those realities.

SC: And to also say to our students or our children, like, "I don't have the answer. Let's look that up together," right?

SC: To be able to say, like, "Yeah, these are questions we all have," and not to have that fear of not knowing, because the more we recognize what we don't know, the more we can learn from it, right?

I think about the conversation I had with Dr. Kristina Llewellyn about oral histories, and she said that, "I think that students can handle a lot more than we give them." And this is something I found too and I appreciate you saying this, and that's why I always say that students need connection, complexity, and care because, yes, the connection element is very important and that's often what teachers will bring to their classrooms, which is great, but to acknowledge the complexities , the complexities of emotion, of structural inequity, of experiences, of the fact that not everyone in this classroom is going to hear it the same way or understand it the same way because of their own lived experiences and their family's lived experiences I think is so important.

So, I mean, I don't think that that went off the question at all. I feel like that, for me, is exactly what I imagine when I'm saying imagining a new 'we', how can we allow for greater space in our classroom for these connections, and complexities, and the care for the other even when and especially when we don't know what the other or how the other is going to think or react. And it does come down to being okay

with a little bit of discomfort, and sometimes a lot of discomfort. But to go back to your other point, if you think of your own purposes of teaching history as just being the expert in the room, you don't have space for that. But if you allow space for your purpose to be able to have some of that complexity and that ambiguity, you can bring up a lot of that.

So thank you so much for that thoughtful answer. I hope that really shapes the way people might want to approach some of these ideas. And the books that you mentioned, just like any other references, are in the links below our video for people maybe to read those sources as well to be able to think about their own responses to them. So thank you for that.

AS: Not at all. Can I add one thing just on the basis of —

SC: Yeah. Of course.

AS: In Alberta, we really had a mandate from about 2016 on where Indigenous education has become part of the teacher quality standards that have been adopted. And out of Faculty of Education, we're working at incorporating that.

One of the things that really has been profound in that work that we've been engaged with has been this question of reconciliation through relationship.

AS: And the importance of that relationship with the idea of conversation. And although it becomes hard to have a conversation with somebody in the past, when we choose sources that reflect that conversation, that reflect that level of engagement, that personal kind of connection, I think we get closer as close as we possibly can to understand the depth of feeling and to understand the importance of the mandate to seek to understand this full mindedness that becomes really important.

And so, I just wanted to add that piece to it because I think it's more than knowing facts and dates. I think it's cultivating that characteristic that I want to know. I want to know something that I don't understand.

I want to know people that aren't like me. And I think that can be a powerful thing that happens in our classrooms.

SC: And I'm open for that knowing to change me.

SC: Right?

AS: Absolutely. Yeah, thank you.

SC: I'm glad that you brought up the element of reconciliation in our curriculum because I always start by talking about the fact that, like, the TRC was very clear that it's not teaching residential schools. That is what reconciliation means. Reconciliation is an ongoing relationship that we have to understand our own epistemologies, our own colonial structures to be able to develop those relationships. And so, thank you for bringing that up as this notion of relationality, and this relationship, and the fact that we need to be open to what this might look like.

AS: Thank you.

SC: Well, this was such a wonderful conversation. Thank you so much, Aaron. I think that you brought a lot of perspectives that did bring together a lot of different interviewee's ideas, but in ways that are new and fresh, and this is such a great way to end the week. So thank you so much.

AS: Well, thank you very much for having me and I look forward to seeing more of your work and more of your interviews as they come out. So thank you for doing this.

SC: Oh, of course, of course. All right, we'll see you later. Bye.

AS: Bye.

In conversation with Dr. Andrea Hawkman & Dr. Sarah Shear

Pandemic Pedagogy Conversation #13

Dr. Andrea Hawkman & Dr. Sarah Shear

Dr. Andrea Hawkman & **Dr. Sarah Shear** are editors of this collection called Marking the Invisible: Articulating Whiteness in Social Studies Education. You can connect with Andrea on Twitter at @amhawkman and Sarah at @SBShear.

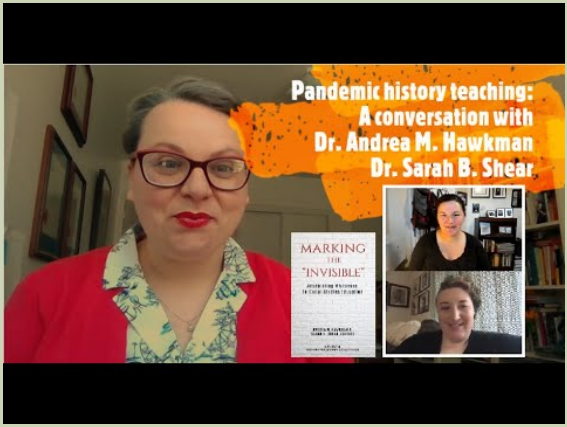
I was able to speak to both editors of the "Marking the Invisible: Articulating Whiteness in Social Studies Education" about why we need to think about whiteness in our SSedu.

We spoke April 23, 2020.

Video posted May 4, 2020.

QUICK LINKS

Video:



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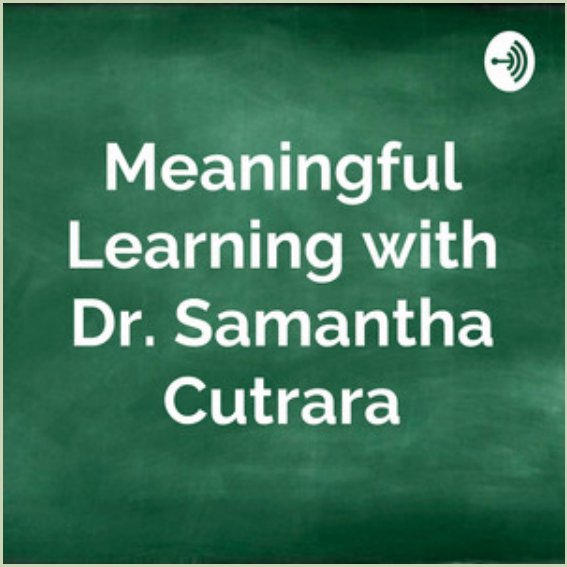
Audio:



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TRANSCRIPT

All the Pandemic Pedagogy conversations revolved around three questions:

- Question 1: Have you thought of history any different *because* of this moment?
- Question 2: Do you think we would teach history *after* this moment?
- Question 3: Do you think we can "imagine a new 'we'" during/after this moment?

Dr. Samantha Cutrara: I'm so glad to talk with you today, Neil. Thank you so much for getting in touch. I've been thinking about you so much because of the resources that you've created regarding the Spanish Flu. So I was hoping we could talk about that in the Defining Moments project today. But before that, do you want to introduce yourself to everyone?

Dr. Samantha Cutrara: Hi everyone and welcome to the "Imagining a New 'We'" video blog with me, Dr. Samantha Cutrara. A video series designed to help history teachers and other history educators teach history in ways that are more meaningful, transformative, and inclusive for their students.

We're continuing our "Pandemic Pedagogy" series today, and what has been so amazing about this series is how unique all of the speakers have been. And that hasn't been by design. It's just been by happenstance that everyone is able to contribute such unique perspectives to this conversation. And as always, today is no different. What is extra

special about today's talk is that there isn't just one scholar I get to talk to. I get to talk to two scholars at once.

So today, I'm talking with Dr. Sarah Shear, as well as Dr. Andrea Hawkman. I got to meet both of them because they were editors or they are editors of this collection called Marking the Invisible: Articulating Whiteness in Social Studies Education. I contributed a chapter to that collection. It is now out for pre-order. And this collection looks at this notion of whiteness. White teachers, white narratives, and how it becomes so invisible in our teaching and learning that we fail to trouble it. And that's why things like anti-racist theory, critical race theory are ideas that can really help shape how and in what ways we are embedding whiteness in ways that we don't even realize into our work. In a way, that can be really detrimental to all of our students, not just our racialized students.

So it's really exciting to be able to talk about this collection and to talk with two American scholars. So let's go over to both Andrea and Sarah at the same time. I'm very excited. Hopefully, the technical part works. Let's go over to our conversation.

SC: Hi, Andrea and Sarah, thank you so much for agreeing to talk with me today. It's so wonderful to have both of you here to be able to talk about the book and talk about teaching history during this time, especially from both of your perspectives being in the States, but being in different state. So, thank you again.

Dr. Sarah Shear: Thank you.

Dr. Andrea Hawkman: Yeah, thanks a lot.

SC: Could maybe we just do some introduction since there's both of you. Andrea, do you want to start?

AH: Sure, yeah. I'm Andrea Hawkman. I'm an assistant professor of social studies education and cultural studies at Utah State University. And I'm a former high school social studies teacher, coach, curriculum designer. I kind of did it all. Wear all the hats in a small school in Missouri in the United States. And my research explores how teachers in

social studies and students in social studies talk about racism and white supremacy.

SC: Great, thanks. Sarah?

SS: I'm Sarah Shear. I'm an assistant professor of social studies and multicultural education at University of Washington-Bothell. Currently living in Seattle, where kind of all started here for us in the US.

SC: Right. Great.

SS: So we've been homebound for a while teaching online and [inaudible 0:03:20.8] to whatever a "new normal" is. I am a member of the Turtle Island Social Studies Collective. So my work is primarily in looking at the ways of representations, largely misrepresentations, erasures. I write lies about indigenous peoples and native nations in relationship to US history and US native relationships looking at civics and history standards primarily, but then advocating, of course, across all social studies curriculum and all curriculum to have an anti-colonial approach to our teaching.

SC: That's great. Thank you both for bringing your perspective to this conversation, and I'm excited to draw on both of those expertise, but also to talk about the book that you two co-edited. So let's see how and in what ways that we'll be able to —

When this first started, I really got to think about history differently. And in some ways, I guess it, like, reaffirmed things I already thought about history in terms of we need to focus on [inaudible*effect] and how it's easy to miss perspectives and to miss particular experiences. So I start these conversations by asking whether or not the idea of history has changed at all for you because of this moment?

AH: Yeah, I think about how in moments that are challenging like the one we're experiencing right now, and there's a lot of social and emotional issues that folks are dealing with, and how communities are struggling and dealing with the challenges in different ways. How history is taught within these times. And that there are sometimes a push to think to focus on the good and the positive to kind of uplift us out of these times that are challenging outside of content. And I think we have

to really — well, that's appealing. I think we have to be willing to resist that in some ways, because what can happen is the stories tend to get told wrong, the stories are inaccurate, the stories leave out communities that, or struggles that communities were forced to face due to large scale issues at a certain time.

So I think we really have to be careful when we're talking about history in moments like this because we don't want to sugarcoat or hide problems that we have faced because we're currently feeling problems as well. So I think we have to be kind of careful about managing that load with students to make sure that we're not making everyone feel better by our content, because that's not really the purpose of history teaching.

SS: Yeah, I think I've been thinking a lot about history and relationship right now to the ways, which historically and even just in parts contemporarily, when there is something that's scary such as COVID-19 or any other thing that we don't understand and can't control the ways in which narratives can be used, have been used to manipulate people in order to seize greater power, in order to manipulate legislation in different ways towards not so good ends because people are afraid. And we've seen that in history.

People will take out of fear and desperation for an answer and for a solution. Whatever the easiest most [inaudible 0:07:26.2*palable] what is, and oftentimes that's not for the good of the people and it's not even accurate. So just even thinking about the ways that the news media have even started to push back now and stop airing some of the administration's briefings in order to fact-check them before they show them. Just really thinking about the ways that power operates in these kind of scary times I think is going to shed a whole new conversation for students now and in the future.

AH: And there's a lot of great opportunities to make connections to how power has been manipulated in the past and also right now, right? So if we look at how Asian-Americans and people from the continent of Asia are being discussed and treated in our current context in

relation to previous examples of ways that racial and ethnic groups have been marginalized and targeted during times of crisis, there's not an insignificant connection there.

The fact that this continues to happen is relevant and speaks to the larger system it gets used of oppression that are present in both the United States and international context. So I think using modern contemporary examples to make those connections and historical context can be a really powerful way to show systems of oppression, which oftentimes are difficult to put your finger on in a single lesson because systems are often difficult to see. But when we have these really obvious examples, it kind of highlights these — what some people would call invisible, though we know that they're not. The systems of racism, anti-immigration feelings, those sorts of concerns of white supremacy in a way that is really concrete. So I think we have an opportunity to really dive in.

SC: One of the things that has come up in a lot of the discussions is that this moment really has or can allow for the unearthing of structures. Or, and I've brought in some post-modern theory about that we can really witness the deconstruction of structures that already were broken, but we can pretend that they were very stable. And what I'm hearing from both of your answers is really the importance of doing that in this moment and not just use history as a draw to be like, people got [inaudible 0:10:07.4] before and everything will be okay, but to really help us challenge the things that we are thinking about and dealing with right now. Am I getting that right?

AH: I think you're right, samantha. And that we can highlight the seemingly brokenness, but it's not broken. Like, the system is operating exactly how it was designed to operate, which means it's letting down communities that are often marginalized. Workers who are working paycheck-to-paycheck, communities that have been forgotten by the social safety net.

The problems that we're seeing highlighted right now, why people are demanding to go back to work so they can get their hair cut is

because we have a system, at least in the United States, that doesn't support anyone except the elite. So I think we've been given some opportunities now if we're really being honest to recognize that things are operating exactly as they were intended to be operating. It's what we have to decide as a country, as teachers, like, what does that mean for us? Are we going to take the opportunity to make change to talk to our students about ways that they can make change or to recognize the problems that exist? Or are we just going to lament how difficult it is and be grateful that we have whatever level of privilege that we have that allows my family to be home and to be safe and be comfortable while others aren't? What level of engagement are we willing to take? If we're going to recognize that the problems are there, we have to also think about what happens next.

I think that's an important part of the conversation too that we want to think about agency and activism coming out of the times that we're in.

SS: And I think just going to something that you were saying, Andrea, about the teachable moments and really this whole conversation about really just kind of opening up, exposing, challenging our students to think about the system has been working the way the system wants to work, right? The way that this system has been set up.

I think something important right now, I don't know how much either of you have been engaged in hearing from teachers or hearing stories across the wires, but teachers being policed right now because they're teaching via Zoom or other online platforms where they're being recorded, I just recently heard about a teacher asking a question of how can I teach difficult history and challenge my students to think critically about our curriculum when we're being surveilled via video by administration?

So thinking about advocacy, thinking about the work moving forward, how do we do that in support of teachers, in support of our students to do the type of teaching and learning that all three of us advocate for, and teachers protecting themselves and protecting each

other and addressing the problems of oppression within our education system?

SC: To me, this also — seems like a good segue to think about if we are going to ensure that we keep challenging our practice that this notion of understanding critical race theory to understand the ways whiteness gets embedded into our teaching and learning can be even more important and might be more important for this moment for teachers to think thoughtfully about. Could you maybe talk a little bit about the collection in **how you envisioned it helping to shape teaching and learning**, even though you didn't know that this moment was going to be something that was going to be this moment?

AH: Sure, yeah. So the book Marking the Invisible, which is out now we're so excited about.

SC: So exciting. [crosstalk 0:14:01.5]. Recognition.

AH: Yeah, we're super excited about it. And I think — when we started the project, I think Sarah and I were both — there needs to be a recognition of the ways that whiteness has permeated social studies and history teaching because we all kind of know it's there. At least critical scholars in the field have acknowledged that, "oh yeah, race is a thing that we have to talk about."

But I think the depths to which whiteness has invaded and informs the field doesn't get acknowledged, hasn't been acknowledged formally within the field. I think some scholars of color have always been kind of knocking on the door, saying, "Hey, you need to do a better job about this." But for a long time officials, leaders in the field have ignored those calls. And I think we're at a point now where we can't just pull the curtain over our eyes anymore. We have to be willing to recognize the institutional ways that social studies is wrapped together with whiteness and white supremacy. And the ways in which social studies promotes white norms, white ideas, white concern, white beliefs.

SC: Like white stories, white narratives, right?

AH: Right. Exactly. Yeah. So the volume really does tackle that,

and we try to curate chapters that do it in a variety of spaces. So in teacher ed, in K-12 classrooms, in teachers and curriculum through own personal reflections.

SS: So I was thinking just to add to what Andrea is saying. When we were working on the book and starting to conceive of the idea of it, one of the things that was also really at the forefront of our mind was there's a handful or several, many, to pick an adjective, white scholars in the field of social studies who proclaim to be doing this type of critical work and advocate for the changes that we've been talking about, but really don't take the time that is absolutely essential to [inaudible 0:16:18.9*to do the system very hard self-reflection] and really think about our own positionalities if we are identified. And so that was something else we really wanted to amplify in the book is that positionality and doing the work we do whether it's museums or curriculum or with teachers being like we are not outside of the critiques of whiteness talking about the power that we have in these spaces and how that is really is.

It's that elephant in the room when you go to a session at CUFA or NCSS and it's 98% white people talking about race issues, and it's like, hello. Are we going to talk about the fact of who's in the room? So I hope that the book really spark some really important conversations that our scholars of color in social studies have been calling for way longer than we conceived of the book.

So if this contributes to pushing that forward and being an ally to that cause for social studies to finally deal with itself, that would be great because we haven't. I'm sorry. Sorry, social studies, we haven't.

AH: Yeah, I was thinking about students that I have in my future ed program, and we talk about what is the job of social studies teachers? And how do we talk about complex issues? One of the first things that comes up is their belief that they should be neutral in the classroom.

AH: You know, we spend a lot of time wrestling with that idea, that concept. And the quote from Howard Zinn always comes up, "How you can't be neutral on a moving train," something like that.

SC: Yeah, it's a great quote.

AH: Paraphrasing poorly, but. And, you know, I think for history and social studies teachers, for so long, they've been programmed that neutrality is the goal. And the neutrality promotes whiteness. And I think this book really tries to acknowledge the role that neutrality plays. I don't think that was ever a stated goal of ours, disrupting neutrality, but I think in a sense, that's what the text does is that it shines a light on the fallacy that neutrality can exist. Any push towards neutrality is really a push towards promoting whiteness in the field.

So I think through reading the chapters, like, you can't help but come away with a recognition that neutrality isn't possible, and anyone who pushes towards that is, whether they know it or not, promoting a goal of white supremacy. And I think — so the chapters I'm thinking of are specifically are ones dealing with curricular documents.

National Council for Social Studies, statements that they've made, that they've released that are very clearly true that the analyses of our authors promoting white ideals. So I think the volume really does make you come away thinking, "Okay, the system is really rooted in this whiteness and now that we know that, we have to do something about it." And we try to push — we end the text in our concluding statements trying to push readers towards it's beyond recognition. This book is on the recognition part, now we've got to move on.

And we've built from the foundation that's been laid from dozens of scholars, mostly of color, that have come [inaudible 0:19:59.2*before us.] But now, we've got to keep going and continuing to find ways to push whiteness from the center of the field.

SS: Yeah. And just to kind of add to that, that what you're saying, Andrea, wasn't really making me think about the numerous ways scholars, social studies and in other fields. And particularly white scholars, the kind of like pat on the back and like, "Oh, look at the great job I did. I did this critical analysis and [inaudible 0:20:31.7]

SS: You know, yeah [crosstalk]

SC: Like, that was meant.

SS: Right, right. And I'm not saying that we shouldn't be proud of the work that we do when it comes out and things like that, but it's we can't just sit back on our laurels after we've done a curriculum analysis or a study with teachers. It's like what Andrea is saying and what we've talked about in the conclusion, and we even call it in lieu of a conclusion. It's a call to action. It's what are we going to do next? Like this is the work. We can't just be, "yay, we did a book." Everything is fine. Everything is fine, everything is not fine.

Publishing a book is not the panacea, right? Publishing a study is not the panacea. It's the these all contribute to actionable changes we can make, but we have to stay vigilant and we have to keep working. We have to keep dedicated every day in the various ways that we are capable from a day-to-day to work against the system that will continuously change itself because that's how colonialism works and that's how white supremacy works. It will adjust itself to stay in power. And so we have to be vigilant, and keep working, and support each other in those ways.

And that's one of the things I loved most about working on this book with Andrea and with the authors was just that [inaudible 0:22:00.6*each other through this.] Whether it was through providing feedback in the review system that we set up or people just checking in in various ways. It felt really powerful to have scholars and not just be like, "Oh, here's my chapter," and then ghost for three months until they get their edits back. It was really — there was a lot of checking in across various spaces. And so I think that was a really powerful moment for me in that occasion. "Okay, what are we going to do next?" Because that's what we need to do.

SC: I want to think about the last question right now because it actually really draws from the chapter that I contributed to the collection about whiteness. So I found in research that I did how easy it was for white Canadian history teachers, for example, to really identify that like they were doing the work of telling immigrant students of color

what the Canadian story is. And once they do that, everything else will be fine.

And one of the many problems with that was that these students were not even immigrants. They were first, second-generation Canadians. Some of them much longer than that, but because they were students of color, they were read as immigrants. They were read as non-Canadians. And this really was so complicated for me to be able to watch what was happening because the teacher was very awarded in a lot of other context.

And I really advocate in my own book "Imagining a New 'We'" about how important it is to challenge our own perceptions of what and who is in our countries, on our land, and to really broaden this notion of we to be more inclusive. Although, to be more critically inclusive. To be able to challenge what we already anticipate. So we're not just saying, "Okay, yeah, we'll bring these people in, but I'm going to challenge you I am in this space in order to develop a greater sense of we.

So the last question that I end with is this notion of imagining a new 'we'. Do you think that this notion of imagination, which can also be about creativity and collaboration, do you think this notion about we, which can also just mean about community, **do you think this notion of imagining a new 'we' will and should change after this moment?** Well, I think you both would say yes. In what ways can we make that happen? What are those calls to action that we can help expand this work even more?

AH: So I think a general answer to your question is yes, but I think —

SC: Okay.

AH: Done. But I think about who do we — who is at the center of the we? Who gets to decide? And from whose perspectives are — yeah, and whose perspectives are we generating this collective, right?

And when you mention the word imagination, I immediately thought of the concept of the black imagination and how that, in contrast with the white imagination, allows for certain things to be seen and unseen.

And that there are some things from the white perspective that are difficult to grasp, but you have to find ways to step outside of through literature, through research, through perspective sharing to be able to gain a glimpse on the ways that the white imagination has limited your ability to see things.

So, if the imagination is only grounded in whiteness, I would say that no. That it doesn't offer us any opportunities to craft a new 'we'. But if we are intentional about the voices and the centering of non-whiteness in that configuration, then I think, yes, there's a lot of possibility there. But we have to be honest about that work and about who's taking credit for it. And it's not like that you were talking about this teacher in your chapter. I think a red flag always pops up in my head when someone seeks credit or validation, particularly a white teacher scholar. And I'm a white teacher and scholar, so I'm throwing myself in here, and it's something that I always think about in terms of in my own personal reflection.

But if someone is seeking validation as the number one goal, then I think they need to reprioritize what their mission is either what their outcome — their intended outcome is, right? So it's not about me being this great, good white person. It's about recognizing that there's problems, and that the problems have harmed people who are not like me. And it doesn't make me any better to work to solve those problems because the problems need to be solved. It's not about how good I feel, it's about rectifying these problems that I am in part responsible for.

So I think it really depends on our willingness to acknowledge the ways that whiteness has influenced the definition of we and the imagination that we use. And if we're willing to step beyond that, then absolutely I think there're some hope there for the future.

SC: Yeah, thank you for that.

SS: Yeah, everything Andrea said is just — yeah, I totally agree. And a lot of what was being said there made me kind of think, Andrea, about the ways that multicultural education has kind of been taken up

by whiteness and continuing to center a white imagination, but under the cloak of something, of a we. So I really just want to amplify that I think a 'we' as possible if we are vigilant to decenter whiteness and we remain vigilant to the ways that white supremacy will remake itself to look differently, sound differently, and that we keep working at that.

I think another important aspect of a 'we' that I want us to attend to is that, I think there is a 'we', I think that we can move together as a humanity by relocating who we are as humans in relationship to each other, but also not requiring people to give up what makes them who they are, right? In order to be part of that 'we'.

So thinking about the need to continuously learn and be part of the celebrating and upholding indigenous sovereignty as one example, and the ways that that has oftentimes been pushed aside, erased, minimalized in the efforts towards multicultural education [inaudible 0:29:24.8], which are very important. But when we're talking about [inaudible 0:29:28.5*indiginate,] for example, citizenship as members of tribal nations is essential, and that is different than culture, right?

So what are the layers of 'we' that we need to identify, and celebrate, and push that doesn't lose who people are. And I think another aspect of the 'we' is, particularly in the context of the United States and Canada, is really having this conversation about what democracy is because it doesn't work for everyone, it hasn't worked for everyone, and it wasn't set up for everyone.

So I see a lot of scholars and teachers talking about, "You know, we live in a democracy. We're free." No, we're not. So if we are going to have a 'we', which I would love to have a 'we', that's an essential component of what kind of world do we actually live in and want to live in?

SC: Thank you both so much for this really great and powerful talk. I think it really complements so many of the things that we have talked about. I'm thinking particularly of Shaun Carlton's work about how important it is that we can't remember, or we can't forget that nation-to-nation relationships, and Canada is still an important ongoing thing. Colonialism hasn't stopped. I think of Dr. Geoffrey Reaume's

talk about the importance of understanding critical disability studies at this moment for being aware of things like vulnerability and access for the majority of the population, as well as for people that have always had these issues with things like vulnerability and access.

Yeah, so many of these ideas have come together in this. So thank you both so very much.

SS: Thank you.

AH: Thank you. I really appreciate the conversation.

SC: Where can people get the book?

AH: So, it's a variable for pre-order right now on Information Age website, hardcover and paperback. And then also, the Kindle version is available on Amazon right now. But I believe that May 1st is the rollout date. So very soon, it should be available in a lot more venues.

SC: I think by the time this video gets posted, — actually, I might even post it on that rollout date. So that would be kind of an exciting way. So everyone should go out and look for a copy, and read it and explore it and see the amazing work that both Sarah and Andrea — the conversations Sarah and Andrea were able to put together in this collection, and I was so excited to be a part of it. So, thank you both so much for speaking, as well as for doing this important work.

AH: Thank you.

SS: Thanks so much.

SC: Bye, everyone.

AH: Bye.

SS: Bye.

In conversation with Dr. Geoffrey Reaume

Pandemic Pedagogy Conversation #14

Dr. Geoffrey Reaume

Dr. Geoffrey Reaume is a professor at York University. He is a historian in the field of critical disability studies. He has been an activist in his public history work for over 20 years. His particular focus is on psychiatric history and people that have been diagnosed with psychiatric illnesses.

We spoke April 22, 2020.

Video posted May5, 2020.

QUICK LINKS

Video:

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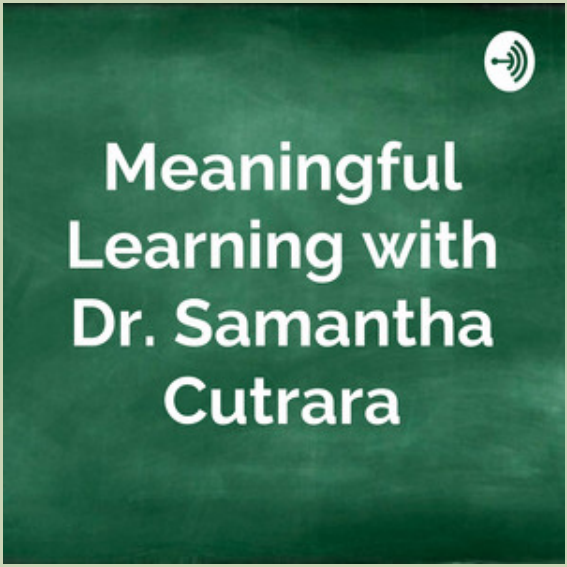

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- Question 1: Have you thought of history any different *because* of this moment?
- Question 2: Do you think we would teach history *after* this moment?
- Question 3: Do you think we can "imagine a new 'we'" during/after this moment?

Dr. Samantha Cutrara: Hi everyone and welcome to the "Imagining a New 'We'" video blog with me, Dr. Samantha Cutrara. A video series designed to help history teachers and other history educators teach history in ways that are more meaningful, transformative, and inclusive for their students.

We're continuing our amazing series today on "Pandemic Pedagogy" thinking about history, and teaching history, and community, and collaboration related to history both during this moment and after this moment. And it's been so amazing to be able to talk to so many different people in this field, and today is no exception. Today, we're going to be talking with Dr. Geoffrey Reaume.

Geoffrey is a professor at York University. He is a historian in the field of critical disability studies. Critical disability studies is a field of study that really challenges what we in society understand to be illness, what we understand to disability, what we understand to be normal. He teaches disability history, for example, at York University, but he's also

a public historian. He has been an activist in his public history work for over 20 years right now. His particular focus is on psychiatric history and people that have been diagnosed with psychiatric illnesses. And so a lot of his work is on mad people's history. This notion of madness to really challenge what that looks like.

I got to know Geoffrey, gosh, about 10, 15 years ago in doing a history project or doing an history education project related to bringing notions of mad people's history into classrooms, and it was such a transformative moment for me to be able to think in different ways because of this field. So I hope that you enjoy this talk as much as I have enjoyed learning about critical disability studies and the critical disability history field. So, let's go over to Geoffrey.

Thank you so much for speaking with us today.

Dr. Geoffrey Reaume: Hi. You're welcome.

SC: I'm so excited for you to be able to bring your perspectives of being a historian in the field of critical disability studies to this conversation. So thank you so much.

GR: You're welcome. Thanks for inviting me. I look forward to participating. I'm glad you're running this series as well.

SC: Yeah, it's been really great, the people's responses. And I can imagine that this conversation will be no less amazing. So let's start with our first question. And in the first question, maybe we can kind of segue into an introduction about critical disabilities studies and what it's like to be a historian in this field. So the first question I ask people is if they think about history any differently because of this moment, because I have. Not everyone has kind of shifted and changed, but I think that there's so much room here to think about so many things about history differently. Have you thought about history any differently in this moment? And how does your perspective of being a historian in the field of critical disability studies shape that?

GR: Well, yes, I have in some ways because it's been such an astonishing few weeks, hasn't it? It's been quite astonishing. March was — I don't think I've ever seen a month with such colossal changes all

over the world so quickly and so catastrophically. I mean, millions of people lost their jobs in a matter of a few weeks in Canada and all over the world and so many people having to be quarantined on a scale that we've never seen before in our world.

GR: So it's stunning. All of this I think makes you realize history is not just the past, it's what's going on right now.

GR: And a lot of people are experiencing what disabled people have experienced on an individual level in their own communities throughout modern history is now being experienced by a lot of people who don't consider themselves disabled. So it's in some ways, it's in a mass experience of disablement.

GR: A lot of people have taken for granted things that you can walk down the street, for example. Of course, not all disabled people can walk or get out basically. Some people can — most of us took for granted just going to the park or going out to the cafe or what have you. And, of course, that's no longer — so irresponsible anymore in social distancing. Many disabled people, even if they could get out, often couldn't get into the cafe because it's not accessible.

So a lot of things that aren't accessible to the vast majority of people now, in many cases, haven't been accessible to disabled people in the past and in the present as well. So in other words, it's a mass vulnerability that lots of disabled people experience all the time. And I think that's something that, as a historian, I think that's worth reflecting upon.

SC: Yeah, that's really interesting and I think really powerful. And maybe this moment is a way, or maybe we can help understand history in this moment by being challenged by the work of critical disability studies; scholars, historians as a way to understand the historicity of isolation, and access, and vulnerability that disabled people have always faced as a way to understand how we can challenge this notion of what it means to be disabled in a society in a way that can bring greater understanding to what it's like with these [inaudible 0:06:11.4] society and economic vulnerabilities.

GR: Yes, very much so. And in fact, that so many people are also being scapegoated as the other, so to speak.

SC: Yeah. Yes.

GR: Of course, we know the xenophobia that has happened, particularly towards people in East Asian descent and people that are Chinese particularly, and the racism that has occurred and being scapegoated or people being seen as a burden in another context. Disabled people have historically been categorized as a burden. And we've seen great concerns from the disability community generally about being seen as a potentially not as worth having life-saving supports in the medical emergency if they have COVID-19. Will they get a respirator or will a disabled person get a respirator and not depending on the nature of their disability and the health care workers attitude towards that person with disability?

There's been pushback. A lot of disabled activists and allies have critiqued a lot of these ideas. There was ideas around deciding who could or couldn't get certain kinds of health care treatment if they had COVID-19 and a lot of activists critiqued this and wrote to the federal and provincial governments and federal provincial governments around early to mid-April responded, of course, that they wouldn't not prioritize disabled people. So the government here in Canada, some governments have come out and said that they will make sure disabled people aren't left by the wayside.

GR: And so, that's an important change in that sense from some of the previous draft policies that were being circulated.

SC: Well, this notion to xenophobia, like, I think, and this is something that's come up in a lot of the videos that this moment has really like unearthed these structures that work or don't work. Most of the time, they don't work. And this notion of xenophobia, I think also it's identifying who we understand to be people in our country, to be people in our nation as a kind of worthy for treatment, right?

SC: Because that, to me, really highlights the fact that people can be like, well, if I don't have a disabled person in my family, like those

people can get sick, whereas I want to protect my own. And this notion of my own and others can be so much more broad because this moment is like unearthing the structures that we wouldn't have articulated that before, but now we are. And I think what I'm hearing from you is the importance — well, I mean, when I'm gathering — because I know that if you're working historian, the importance of using history to be able to challenge that, but also to rally with activists to force change in the those ideas, even if we haven't articulated them.

GR: Yes, that's right. So the whole issue of scapegoating the other, if we can go back to the middle ages, Jews were "blamed" for causing the black death in 1348 to '51 in Medieval Europe. During the black death, [inaudible 0:09:44.1] a plague, which killed one-third to half of the population of Western Europe at that time, and some Jews were burned at the stake. And so we know this prejudice bigoted attitude goes back a long time and it's literally caused their lives, who have been othered.

And of course, we know about the anti-Asian immigrant attitude. That's a long history as well. It's certainly well before this period, there were different examples of contagious diseases, outbreaks in different parts of North America. For example, in Calgary 1892 and in Chinatown in San Francisco as well in the late 19th century, where Chinese people were scapegoated and, in some cases, even attacked.

So these racist prejudices come up again and again. And of course, disabled people are very much have been part of that being scapegoated based very much on the eugenic ideas that disabled people aren't "as productive" as other people. So whole idea of notions of who is productive and who isn't, who was worthwhile a citizen and who isn't is something that factors into a lot of these prejudices and, of course, are often based on completely inaccurate ideas as well that disabled people can be as productive as anyone else.

But also, notions of productivity, we have to be careful even someone who is not considered productive in the typical economic sense under a capitalist system as everybody is worthwhile of contribution

and place in society as someone who doesn't. You don't have to be someone who writes articles or sits in an office or who works in a factory to be worthwhile person. And obviously it's very important to emphasize that we should not have economic factors as the ultimate litmus test of whether somebody belongs in society and is worthwhile contributors to society.

SC: Well, I think about what you're saying too about uncertainty, because even when and this is over, whatever that looks like, it won't be over for so many people because this moment will stay with us. And if, for example, someone couldn't get physiotherapy during this time, they might not be able to interact in society the way that they would have with consistent care, but also things like anxieties and mental health issues that are going to be a result or be exacerbated by things like the vulnerability, the uncertainty, the lack of access, the social isolation.

And so, to me, I think about students, and I think about classrooms, and I think about how this will impact, how in what ways that we will teach history after this moment. **Do you think the way we will teach history will change after this moment?** Do you think that the notion of vulnerability that we are all feeling right now to various degrees, definitely not equally, do you think this notion of vulnerability will shift the way that we teach history? Do you think it should?

GR: Yeah, that's a good question. I mean, I don't have a definite answer. I mean, of course obviously, one practical sense, it's changing for everybody teaching by being on remote distance teaching, for example. But in terms of how we conceptualize what we're teaching is very important. And the whole issue of people experiencing of mental health [inaudible 0:13:45.2*address] and anxiety, hugely important that people are experiencing it right now and will be experiencing long into the future and it will only increase as the uncertainty increases.

So the supports that we have for our students as well as faculty and staff who were engaged in all of this effort to teach differently is something that we have to think about and try to do as equitably as possible.

I think part of it is that we're going to have to understand that if we're going to be doing more remote teaching as a result of this pandemic, we need to basically make far greater accommodations for our students, and by the way, for faculty as well, in the way we teach this. And we can't be just the standard teaching process.

At York University, for example, we have a standard three-hour class. I know it's different at different universities. And I think that for a lot of people, they won't be able to do that. The childcare for one thing.

GR: Or elder care, taking care of loved ones, or taking care of oneself. People, whether they have COVID-19 or any other health condition, if you're at home, you're going to — it's not as easy to separate the classroom from home now, is it? Because it's right there.

And so, how we teach it is I think a way of trying to bring history into the home and talking about how we think about the fact that this remote teaching is being done to a greater extent than ever before of these reasons because of the emergency pandemic. But what happened in the past, in the flu pandemic of 1918 to 1920, which was a worldwide catastrophe as we all know, they didn't have remote teaching, obviously.

SC: I get it. No, their internet access was so poor then.

GR: Yeah. And for some reason, I don't know. I can't understand why. They didn't have what we have, obviously. And so this school is just to close. They have done something at home if they had the resources, but you could certainly have seen how in the flu pandemic about hundred years ago, people would have lost all that period of education that children would have lost because their parents were busy if they did have work, if they were able to go to work, of course, trying to survive or just didn't have the skills to teach a child/children or were too busy with seven or eight or 10 children, because their family is generally intend to be bigger than now.

So we have to remember that when we think of what we're trying to do as teachers, now we can try to think of how people cope with past pandemics in the family unit or in extended families or in communities,

but still figuring out things as we go along. And so, I think it's a learning curve as we go how to teach more effectively and how to engage students, and we have to figure out how to change, and to adapt, and to try to make this work in a better way for everyone. And so that's something I think that we all need to figure out including myself.

So I don't have an — basically, my answer is I don't know. I'm trying to figure it out as we go on, and I'll continue to [inaudible 0:17:36.9*as some of the others are,] and I'm reading stuff online about pedagogy to better ways of teaching online as well as we do this. So it's a question mark [inaudible 0:17:46.8]

SC: For me, I think it's so valid. I think it's a question mark for so many of us. And because it happened so quickly, and so many of us care so much for our students that we — like, I think that was just this expectation in all of our individual heads that we needed to make it perfect right away and, like, seamless. And of course, that was never going to be the case.

GR: No.

SC: And for me, I think about what you said earlier about vulnerability. Like, we could start by teaching history from this place of vulnerability to say, "What's going on? Let's figure out how this is the same and different from moments in the past and how they dealt with it to learn about, like, quarantine suits. And how they worked or how they didn't work."

I think starting from a place of vulnerability can make us all better educators, but I think also is more honest to the moment because, yeah, whether or not we know the technology or not, I think we all can agree that teaching is about this relationship between teacher and student in a way that brings out the best in what a student could learn from the information that the professor has and feels it's important to share that moment.

GR: Yes, that's right. I think, and that's a very important point about our own vulnerabilities as teachers and the student's vulnerabili-

ties who are undergoing so much stress in their daily lives. And being online a lot, glaring into a computer can be so stressful.

GR: And so we have to take account of that as well and interacting a lot on platforms where we haven't previously been — most of us haven't previously been so used to.

So all of these are things we all need to take into account as we deal with the COVID-19. I think as a historian looking back at the histories of disabled people and the experiences of mad people in particular teach a lot of forces on and to say that history of people with disabilities and mad people's history, as well as history [inaudible 0:20:05.4*about euretics.]

All of these anxieties that people are experiencing now on a mass scale is something that I think we need to place in the context of how many people have endured this in their individual lives in these different histories that are ongoing right now and that we're all living out in our daily lives in various ways. So it's something we're all trying to figure out as we go through this monumental change in everyone's life, I think.

SC: Well, and — well, I think about what you said earlier about how this moment is highlighting things that disabled people have faced for so long, things like access, isolation, and vulnerability because those things we can start our teaching from that moment to ensure that our students are able to access materials in different ways, so not just school, but like, I teach a small class right now and I — even though all the students attend, they still record it so that they can watch it later and do email summary so that they can access it differently, that we still run the class so that they don't feel isolated even when or especially when they don't feel like they're going to be successful in the course anymore, but just to stay connected. And to start from that base for vulnerability to start, we do a check-in every class just to be like, "How are you feeling? I know this is weird," you know? Because I think those things, how you started by talking about the elements we can take from critical disability histories can really help our teaching. So I

just melded them together, but like, thank you for that because I don't think we all have the answers, and using some of these histories to guide us can really help, I think.

GR: Yeah. Yes, I think that's very true around issues of feeling like you're a full citizen, for example.

GR: Some disabled people have not been made to feel a full citizen, but as well, there's a book by a disability study scholar at the University of Victoria of Michael Prince called Absent Citizens, and it talks about how disabled people have been excluded from citizenship so very often, and he's simply referring to Canadian context. But it's very true. I mean, part of it is — I think what you're pointing out is feeling whether you feel you are going to be, as you say, feeling part of the course basically —

GR: Do you really feel as much part of the course if you're just online and not in the classroom? Or to what extent can some people may feel better able to engage online, on the other hand? Two, other people make you less — like, some people may feel more comfortable engaging in the classroom than online. So all of these things are different in different contexts. And so, that comes up — brings all sorts of issues about disabled people engaging in research who often have these barriers that they experience in their day-to-day lives that are now being experienced by large numbers of people as never before.

And so again, that brings back — disablement is being experienced in different context, in different ways, but there's large scale disablement, I think, as never before. It's not equal, and I'm not saying it's the same for everyone. It's not for all sorts of reasons around class, race, gender, and ability, but nevertheless, there is a huge amount of vulnerability. I keep coming back to that word that people haven't experienced.

SC: Yeah. I mean, I would come back to that word too. And this notion of disablement, yes, it's in no way equal, but it can be this opening to be able to help us think about things differently. About history

differently, but also our society differently. So this leads to the last question. Just a quick — well, no.

I mean, we talked about a lot of these things already, but the idea of this video series, it's called "Imagining a New 'We'" because I found in history classes, specifically K-12 history classes, there can be this, like, a way to underlie this us versus them mentality. And so, the idea of the video blog generally was to challenge that. How can we challenge this notion of us versus them? How can we think more creatively and collaboratively about a we together?

And so, as a way to end, can you comment at all? **Do you think the ways that we can or should imagine a different, more inclusive, less other we will shift and change after this moment?**

GR: Well, I would hope that on the most basic level, more people will understand the need for accommodations. That's been a challenge for many disabled students and faculty and staff who've requested accommodation. And somewhere along the chain of command, so to speak, of whether it'd be a professor who is responding to a student or an administrator who is respond — a higher level administrator who is responding to a faculty member of staff is not as sympathetic. In many cases, they are.

I'm not saying that's the case always. Of course, it's not always the case. There are many people who are supportive. But there are many cases where you will hear of where there's attitudinal barrier still there that impacts people in other ways as well, of course. In fact, oh no, they should just do the course — if we give them accommodation, they will have "special privileges" compared to somebody else who doesn't have the accommodation.

Of course, that often completely ignores the fact that some people, for example, require more time to get their work done for very legitimate reasons related to their disabilities. Physical disabilities, mental health disabilities, and cognitive disabilities as well, and our sensory disabilities, as well as the fact that people, of course, have all sorts of things going on in their lives that require extra time. That is very impor-

tant. Childcare being one obviously, work schedules. Or elder care as well is very important.

So all of this brings back to the point, I think that — I would hope that there would be more understanding of accommodation for large numbers of people and that includes, by the way, people who can't do distance learning.

SC: Well, two, like even the word accommodation insinuates there is a normal standard that everyone should be looking up to, right?

GR: Yeah. Exactly.

SC: That you are now being accommodated. Something is being accommodated. And I think that this can help us push what we consider normal in a way to be more inclusive about what that might look like for all of us moving forward.

You've brought up so many really interesting elements to this conversation. I want to thank you so much. This has been really, really awesome. I've really, really enjoyed it. Will you be able to share with us some links and things like that if people wanted to engage in some activism and be an ally or be an activist in this field to help support that?

GR: Yeah, sure, I'll forward some to you very shortly if you'd like to know where people can look, particularly around COVID-19, but also more generally to students. That would be very good. I'm glad to do that. And thank you for inviting me, I've enjoyed it.

SC: Oh, it's been so amazing. And by the time everyone is watching this, those links will be below the video, so you can check those out. And, yeah, thank you again. Like I said, I really think that it helps develop this conversation out, and thank you for bringing your perspectives, and your experience, and your expertise to this conversation.

GR: You're welcome. Thanks again for asking me. All the best.

SC: All right, have a great day.

GR: Okay, you too. Buh-bye.

In conversation with Adam Birrell

Pandemic Pedagogy Conversation #15

Adam Birrell

Adam Birrell is a senior archivist at the Archives of Ontario. he also works at small and medium archives as a volunteer, both the Canadian Gay and Lesbian Archives, as well as the Thornhill Community Archives. You can connect with him on Twitter at @picturepride.

We spoke April 22, 2020.

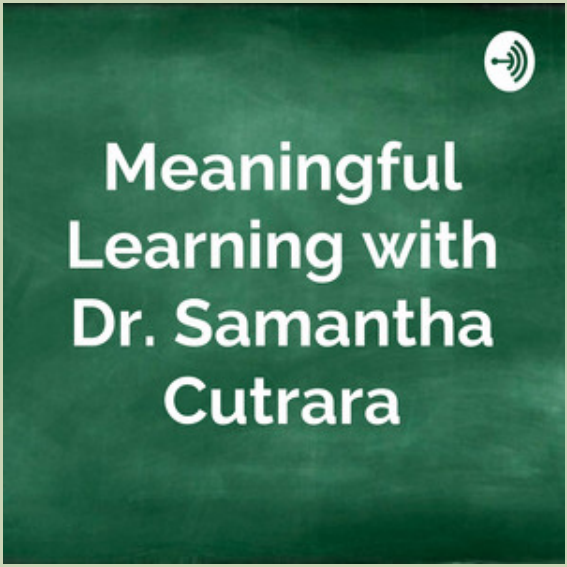
Video posted May 6, 2020.

QUICK LINKS

Video:

A YouTube element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: https://press-books.library.yorku.ca/pandemicpedagogy/?p=67

Audio:



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TRANSCRIPT

All the Pandemic Pedagogy conversations revolved around three questions:

- Question 1: Have you thought of history any different *because* of this moment?
- Question 2: Do you think we would teach history *after* this moment?
- Question 3: Do you think we can "imagine a new 'we'" during/after this moment?

Dr. Samantha Cutrara: Hi everyone and welcome to the "Imagining a New 'We'" video blog with me, Dr. Samantha Cutrara. A video series designed to help history teachers and other history educators teach history in ways that are more meaningful, transformative, and inclusive for their students.

We're continuing our "Pandemic Pedagogy" series today with another amazing speaker, who will be able to bring so many different perspectives to this conversation. Adam Birrell is a senior archivist at the Archives of Ontario, one of the largest — no, the largest provincial archives in Canada, but he also works at small and medium archives as a volunteer, both the Canadian Gay and Lesbian Archives, as well as the Thornhill Community Archives. Thornhill is a community just north of Toronto.

I was really interested in having Adam come speak to us today. Come speak to us, like, — anyway, you just gotta be mean. I don't know where he's — anyway, whatever. I was really excited to have Adam

come and talk with us because of the fact that he works with these small community organizations. And he thinks about collections and records differently because of his work in these small and medium archives, as well as his work at these large, large archives.

I really question things about, like, these small community organizations and these community archives. How are they collecting things? How are they making things accessible? How can we as history educators better use their materials? So I'm really excited to have this conversation. Let's go over to Adam.

Adam, thank you so much for speaking with me today. I think that your perspective as a senior archivist, but also someone so involved in community archiving can bring so much different depth to this conversation. So thank you so much for making time to talk with me today.

Adam Birrell: You're very welcome. Thank you for asking me. It's great.

SC: Yeah. I've been thinking a lot about small community organizations and how they are understanding their work during this time. And my first question kind of like this big question about history. Like, **have you thought about history any different because of this time?** And I wonder how that impacts or that shapes or intersects with your work both in like a big provincial archives, but also with these small community organizations.

AB: It is interesting to — in [inaudible 0:02:37.8*build] settings, we're very much surrounded by records and the legacy of previous health epidemics and pandemics in both Archives of Ontario setting, as well as the archive's setting formerly Canadian Lesbian and Gay Archives. In the provincial archive setting, we do have records that concern the 1918 Spanish flu epidemic. And kind of up until this moment for us looking at those images of people wearing masks and public notices about keeping safe and public health initiatives seem very distant and now, we're having our own moment for that, so to speak.

And so, it really brings those moments really close. It's a lot easier to relate to what people were going through then, and now we're walking

through the streets and through our grocery stores in 2020 wearing masks, seeing people wearing masks and having the same fears and anxieties that people must have experienced over a century ago. In the archive's setting; volunteer, small or medium-sized archives if you will, we have the legacy, the very tragic legacy of the AIDS crisis for that community. And as someone who is too young to remember the 1800s portion of that, it's being in — somebody [inaudible 0:04:16.7] in the newspaper pages of obituaries in 2020 and how we've never seen this before. And it's like, well, actually, we have.

AB: And kind of the LGBT community has seen this and has experienced this. And it is within living memory, and the way that the 1918 pandemic is largely not, but it is interesting to, when you haven't witnessed those personally how going through this experience brings the experiences of those two very significant events to the forefront, then you can really put them very much more readily.

SC: Yeah, it's interesting that you've brought up the AIDS crisis in the 1980s because I also have been thinking about that a lot in how the AIDS crisis put so much fear and anxiety in the gay and lesbian community. Even just about like being out, right? Like you couldn't go to the bars in the same way. You couldn't meet people, especially if you weren't out to your family. And like that undercurrent of fear and anxiety that if you are not a member of that community, you can very well not think of that history, but that this moment is so much of this fear and anxiety for so many more people.

And when I say that I think about history differently in this moment, I think about how it's so easy for us to ignore or discount this giant thing that happened in the 1980s. The giant fear, because it doesn't seem like we have the records, but we do have the records. They are just in different place of them. Places we might not think of going to get teaching and learning materials, for example.

AB: Mm-hmm. Yeah. I mean, that was true that some people will attract to draw perhaps too closely parallel connections between those, the AIDS crisis and today, and there is a lot of significant differ-

ences. Mainly the immediacy of public bonds to it was very different. And as you allude to the experiences of the individual how people — there was that added layer then of homophobia and people being positive and not being able to talk about their experiences, where today because this is a society-wide issue if you will rather than a community issue, which was ignored for a long time in the AIDs circumstance, they are very different, but there are some similarities, for sure. And it is interesting to think about that and it makes you think differently about that time period as well.

SC: And like, I think that is what is so outreached in this moment as a teaching moment how it really should force us to reconsider so many different points of history and the narratives that we think we know about them.

SC: **So maybe could you talk about if you think teaching history might change after this?** Now, I know you aren't directly a history educator, but because you are an archivist and you work with large and smaller and medium-sized archives you were dealing with, then you're exploring the stuff with so much teaching and learning. Do you think the way that we will be able to mobilize these records? Be able to teach with these records might shift and change after this time?

AB: I do. And I think the expectations around access will change considerably. They already have been engaging for a long time, but I mean, right now, we were talking now over video conference because we can't meet in person. I mean, that's an easier thing to mobilize and do. And I'm sure lots of people are using video conferencing they've never used it before. I know my parents [inaudible 0:08:24.1] their first time. But in terms of access to resources, the expectations are changing even more than they have before.

And I think I don't know that we'll go back to normal "if you will" after that. I think we [inaudible 0:08:43.3*crossed] maybe another threshold in terms of demand for online access to resources. We've seen that in libraries, we've seen that in museums, who are literally and virtually opening their doors to virtual tours of their institutions who

may never have done that before. [inaudible 0:08:59.6] none of us to the extent.

As an archivist, whether it is the collection of the size of the Archives of Ontario or medium-sized archives like The ArQuives or very small Thornhill Archives collection, which is the, by all definitions, a very small collection, each of those have their own reserves challenges. I mean, the Archives of Ontario is in many respects, very well-resourced, but it's a matter of scale. And perhaps under resource, we look at the size of the collection that we have to meet the increasing demands of providing online access to even the materials that are open access.

So it is going to be interesting to see as this continues and after the immediacy of the crisis is over, increased calls for photographs and films, and cartographic records, architectural records being put online so that our increasingly online world can meet that demand.

I mean, we have video chats every week with my colleagues. Many of them have children, and they talk about their kids using Google classrooms and other online learning modules. And so, it's only a matter of time before this demand for online learning is going to bump up against archival library museum resource of being similarly available online. And I'm not saying that's a bad thing. This is purely from approaching the — from the practical standpoint of resources and bringing [inaudible 0:10:38.2] is really. And as long as we've had a digital world whereas our collections were still majority analog, and this is going to take time. So from collections management archivist's perspective, that is it's kind of scary because we want to be able to meet those challenges, but it will take time.

SC: Well, I'm thinking about small archives like the Thornhill Archives. How does this shift how you and the other volunteers might think about your work? Because I think about how much labour and how much cost goes into digitizing things. That it seems easy because we all have our phone so close, but it's not this easy, cheap free thing.

AB: It's not. And I think it might bring calls to increase that training and capacity at different levels. And one project that we've dis-

cussed locally, which is actually been discussed at a fourth organization that I'm sort of potentially involved with sort of an advisor capacity of small house, museum, heritage center that has a archival collection that actually has been digitized through student effort a couple of summers ago. And up until now, there has been sort of casual chit-chat about involving seniors who could, from the comfort of their own home, transcribe those letters to make them more accessible. And it's something we've only talked about up until this point, but, well, now everyone is in their own home. We have those TIFF images sitting on hard drives and we're starting to talk about actually moving forward that project that's been on the backburner because everyone has been busy with their lives. And now, that we have more time at our disposal, we're actually looking at moving forward with that transcription project.

So it's been a nudge. Well, and since it's a [inaudible 0:12:38.0] example of where this pandemic which has affected many different people in different ways has pushed the project forward.

SC: This question seems like a leading question. Like we've rehearsed it before him, but it's not. So I apologize, but [inaudible 0:12:59.3], which I now realize makes it extra scary.

But I think I'd like a small community archives that if people are interested in donating their records too, especially older people, there's kind of this vision of what an archive is. Do you think it's going to — with a move online, do you think it's going to shift people's willingness, but also like understanding of what it means to donate if things are going to go up online?

AB: And that's something that we've been aware of sometime, archivist [inaudible 0:13:37.1] but aware of our public perception that the creature in the basement over the dusty records is something — is an image that we've been all too happy to shed, but there are some resistance to that. With the March tolerance, we're already in the midst of it, but with archives, everything lacks behind. We're increasingly getting electronic records more and more, and there is that fear that one of the great motivations of archival donation is the cupboards are full, the

shelves are full, the filing cabinets are fully well with digital storage becoming so cheap.

If you filled the hard drive and just buy another hard drive, where is your incentive? And so, that actually pushes us to be more — we have to be a lot more diligent and a lot more active in terms of approaching donors, whether they are new people or organizations that we want to approach or people who we haven't heard from in 10 or 20 years, and say, "Well, we want your archives and we want not only the [inaudible 0:14:42.6] they have in the door, but also the materials you have in your hard drive. Your email accounts, that's a really challenging one to motivate people because they think of their email theirs. "That's mine. Those aren't business records, that's my email."

In some cases, the distinction is very blended, especially if you're talking about volunteer organizations where the evidence of your involvement is literally intermixed with your correspondence with your family. Those are much wider challenges that have been around for longer than this moment we're in now, but it does bring to the forefront other things that have been happening.

We've seen people create records of this moment. Taking photos of boarded up windows along the streets where there used to be opened businesses and now there is a street that's empty of people. There's been such a jarring change in the accessibility and fullness of our landscape in terms of people and activity, that people are documenting that. People are taking photos of pole signs and public health notices. People wearing mask, you name it, and people are becoming much more aware of becoming record creators. And we as archivists San Diego, for instance, have been talking about the importance of documenting that this particular moment, not necessarily the full complete archival lives of these individuals and businesses, but kind of a cross-section of the documentation of this particular moment.

And T, for example, has a web-archiving initiative to document COVID-19 response in messaging and the AL has been getting involved with that to a certain extent. So I don't know if that answers your ques-

tion, but it does make you think differently of both capturing records and really to think differently about the process of archiving a particular moment, which maybe is different than approaching [inaudible 0:16:38.5] learn organization about your full archival history.

SC: Yeah. Like, I think that, like, this moment is able to reveal a lot of different things about the historicity of kind of normal interactions.

SC: And it might encourage people to want to be able to have that as a more public or open record either now or in the future as a way to identify that like, that this is who I was in this moment. This is my response.

AB: That's right. And what's interesting as I've seen sites where people have been collecting photos, you can learn some sites you can go to and submit your own photos. Photos of streets of the changing environment we're in and how people are experiencing that. And on the one hand, it's really great. People are gathering, and that people were saving it. But just like digital records and the online environment is much more fragile than the analog environments. And at least in the third term, one thing I wonder about those kind of resources, if we approach people who are building those resources and say we want to archive this and document this, I wonder about their response. Is it, "Well, that's what I've been doing. It's online. It's already documented, already captured"?

And I think it calls to us as information professionals in the widest sense to come in with wearing our preservation hat, wearing our knowledge of a lot of the risk to digital records and that, really, in a year from now, are we going to see this things surviving online? And on Facebook? On Twitter? Wherever these things have been captured in the moment, there is an adherent risk to them as resources that are not like taking a roll of film and sticking it into a drawer or saving posters in a drawer that you can find 20 years from now. There is much more immediacy to the need to preserve these digital objects.

SC: Mm-hmm. And something than [inaudible *Kristin] again, an archivist that I interviewed earlier, talked about is about the how much

there is going to be, and the value of them, and how to think through those things. To think through the meaning and significance when — like, I can literally take a thousand pictures of my day-to-day, will that demonstrate what the COVID pandemic was for everyone in Toronto? 100% no, but I still have the thousand photos, you know.

AB: Mm-hmm. Oh, yeah, that the volume is a huge factor. And as archivist, we go through a lot of process. I mean, where a government archives process is what we do. Speaking with my AL [inaudible 0:19:34.0] and we go through a lot of appraisal to determine what it is that we want to acquire. I think in order to respond effectively to this, and i[inaudible 0:19:42.9] some of this is already happening in many other institutions. I saw a National Post article that talked about the different organizations that are documenting COVID in different ways whether that's institutionally, regionally, nationally. And they are sort of have been focusing on different areas that we're not going to be looking at documenting this, collecting one person's photos or an organization's Twitter account. It's really maybe a cross-section looking about universities that document hashtags.

AB: And sometimes [inaudible 0:20:21.5]. Sometimes it's an occurrence of some kind where you actually take all the tweets or all the records that document that. And it's a different way. It's really a way that is largely foreign from an archival standpoint because we want to document all. We want to document all the activities of life and existence of an organization or a person, but that might not be the best way to document COVID-19 in 2020.

AB: And it might be a slice of how we document things differently.

SC: Yeah. And for me, as a history educator too, I think about the ways that we can link stories to these records as a way to demonstrate how — because we can be very hyper aware of this notion of reporting, that if we're attaching stories to the records that we want to make public, then we can help kind of narrate a particular version that we are trying to show even if historians down the line will challenge that and

shift that, but we can kind of connect it with that. So this leads to my third question, because for me, one of the really amazing things about primary sources is that they can really highlight how, and this is something I've talked about in a Kennedy's history webinar, which I will link above.

But like, it shows that we were there, and it shows that they were there. Like, for me, primary sources can really challenge so many notions that we expect about history, and this is why I say that we need to imagine a new we. We need to be more aware of the we together that I think we get in our heads a particular narrative about the past that primary sources can really challenge. So I end this little three-question interview by asking people, **do you think that the ways that we're going to imagine or imagine a new we will shift and change after this moment**. And if so, in what ways? And if not, why not?

AB: Yeah, it's interesting. And I think that a big part of this is not about subjects that we're documenting or, what's the best way to say this? From a provincial archives respective, I think we're pretty confident we're going to be preserving the public health, the public messaging policy behind this. But that's far from enough, and we need to make sure that we're documenting the diversity of voices here in order to responsibly capture a record of this moment in time, which can be very fleeting.

I know as we're sitting at home, working from home, hopefully working from home, it can seem like it's going on forever, but really, this is a short moment. Hopefully, will be a short moment. It is so important that we capture diversity of voices. The individual hopes and fears, whether that is on Twitter messages, people who have been responding to this from a professional standpoint; doctors and nurses, frontline people, people working in grocery stores, migrant workers who are encountering issues around protecting their own health while they're doing their jobs.

So it's really documenting a diversity of voices in this space, not just the official messaging that I think is going to be, hopefully, plentiful in

terms of what we're able to preserve for this moment. And so, that really is our challenge as well. It doesn't mean that every institution has to do everything, but there's an important element of working together. Institutions need to work with each other to make sure that, all right, maybe you've got this piece of it, maybe you've got this piece. And we're, as an organization, part of the provincial acquisition strategy with the Archives Association of Ontario. And I have no doubt that as this goes forward, there will be discussions about regional archives augmenting this regionally, local archives documenting this locally. Sort of taking the appropriate steps to capture what is [inaudible 0:24:44.0] thing in your realm, but also making sure that you're filling in the gaps that maybe you hadn't considered. So it does require a creative [inaudible 0:24:51.9].

SC: Yeah. And for me, what I heard there too is how important it is that we are aware that different archives aren't designed to archive the same material. Like, they're not designed to do everything and how important it is to work with different types of archives in order to tell a more full story of who we are together. So thank you so much about bringing those different perspectives. I think it's so important for us to be cognizant of the work of archivists in helping to shape how we mobilize history. And in essence then, the histories that we are able to teach and learn. So, thank you so much.

AB: You're welcome. Thank you for this opportunity.

SC: Yeah, this is really great. And I'm gonna provide all the links to the different organizations you work with below. And any other things that you think are useful — just got very windy here. Any other thing that you think it will be useful for people to kind of understand this moment or to record this moment? So, thank you again.

AB: You're very welcome. Thanks, Samantha.

SC: Okay, we'll talk later. Bye.

AB: All right, buh-bye.

In conversation with Joe McGill The Slave Dwelling Project

Pandemic Pedagogy Conversation #16

Joe McGill

Joe McGill is a public historian. About 15 years ago, he started sleeping in former slave dwellings as a way to connect and narrate history of slavery in the United States. You can connect with him on Twitter at @slavedwelling.

We spoke May 7, 2020.

Video posted May 8, 2020.

QUICK LINKS

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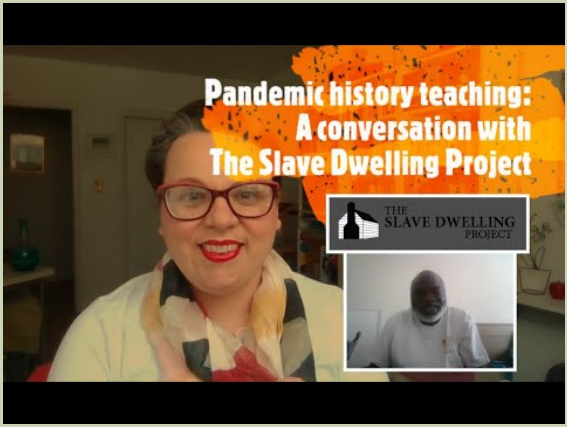

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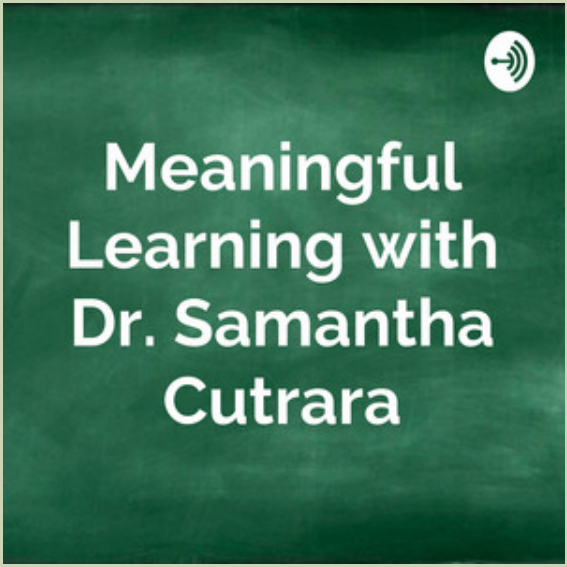

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TRANSCRIPT

All the Pandemic Pedagogy conversations revolved around three questions:

- Question 1: Have you thought of history any different *because* of this moment?
- Question 2: Do you think we would teach history *after* this moment?
- Question 3: Do you think we can "imagine a new 'we'" during/after this moment?

Dr. Samantha Cutrara: Hi everyone and welcome to the "Imagining a New 'We'" video blog with me, Dr. Samantha Cutrara. A video series designed to help history teachers and other history educators teach history in ways that are more meaningful, transformative, and inclusive for their students.

We're continuing our "Pandemic Pedagogy" series today, and I just want to thank all of you for your support. Again, such nice emails, like it's such a nice direct messages on Facebook and Twitter saying how much people like this series. And I'm glad that we've been able to bring some big ideas about teaching and learning history to this pandemic time. And, hopefully, we cn continue the conversation when we all get back to face-to-face teaching, whenever that is.

I say that I'm always excited about the speakers I get to interview. And not only is today no exception. I am especially excited to talk to today's person because it is someone that is doing such a transformative public history work in the United States, and I'm so inspired by

these types of projects because as I've said in a lot of the videos, if not every video, I think that history should be a transformative subject. I think that history should be something that drives activism. And I think of Christina Llewellyn's video when she said the different histories that you know and the different histories that you listen to help shape your political commitments, and that's why I'm so excited for these creative public history projects such as "The Slave Dwelling Project" that's created and run by Joe McGill Jr.

Joe is a public historian. About 15 years ago, he started sleeping in former slave dwellings as a way to connect and narrate history of slavery in the United States. 15 years on, he has a robust education program. "The Slave Dwelling Project" is like this thing that you can interact with for classroom use, and he's done TEDx talks. Like I'm so excited to be able to talk to him for this humble but important — humble but important, that's a contradiction. But both are true. This humble video series that aims to make history more meaningful, transformative, and inclusive for students.

One of the really exciting things about connecting with Joe today is that on May the 9th, he is going to be doing a live stream from a former slave dwelling. And because we can't be in person in the same way, this live stream is kind of a new thing for "The Slave Dwelling Project", and I'm so excited to talk with him about that. And please, please, go on Facebook, connect with the live stream and watch it on the 9th. More details will be in the video and after our interview as well. So, let's go over to Joe.

Hi, Joe. It is so wonderful to speak with you today. I'm really, really excited that you're able to participate in the "Pandemic Pedagogy" series. But before we start with the questions, do you want to introduce yourself and tell everyone about you and "The Slave Dwelling Project"?

Joseph McGill Jr.: Yes, Samantha. Thank you. Thank you for inviting me to this forum. My name is Joseph McGill. I am the founder of "The Slave Dwelling Project". And "The Slave Dwelling Project" is a very simple concept. I find slave dwellings, wherever they are in these

United States, and I ask the owners if I could spend the night in these spaces just to bring attention to the spaces, because there was a point in our history where we could go to a site where these buildings exist and learn all about the nice, beautiful big house, the architectural significance of the big house, you learn about the place settings, the bolted ceilings, the hardwood floors, the nice grand staircase. But what was missing from that is the stories of enslaved people. Who physically built this house? Who cut down those trees that made that house? Who made the bricks that's now that house? Whose labour was stolen for all that house to exist? All those elements of the story on these sites, but mainly plantations were missing.

And because at the time that I created "The Slave Dwelling Project", I was an employee of the National Trust for Historic Preservation here in the United States, and we do a beautiful job in preserving buildings, but missing element there is the enslaved people. So knowing these buildings exists and have an experience in sleeping at historical sites because I'm a Civil War reenactor and having the DNA that I have, all those things came together in this crazy idea called "The Slave Dwelling Project". And, of course, I acquired a list from the State Historic Preservation office, South Carolina State Historic Preservation office, when I told them my intent why I wanted to acquire this list, they understood because their preservation is just like myself.

Now, I got this list from them and I started making phone calls on places I could stay, and initially, it was somewhat of a hard sell trying to convince these folks that I come in peace and I mean no harm, because if you were on the other hand of such a phone call, you would have to hesitate, you'd have to pause 'cause you would want to know if I'm about reparations. Am I about looking for artifacts? Am I about looking for ghosts? Well, none of those above. None of the above things. It's all about preservation. It's all about preservation and bringing attention to these buildings where enslaved people live.

Because when the buildings are there, it's easy to tell the stories of the people who would have it those spaces. When those buildings are

gone, you would easily ignore that story. So that's basically what "The Slave Dwelling Project" is all about.

SC: Yeah, that's so interesting. And I have so many questions that — drawn from those experiences, but I really want to focus this conversation on this particular moment because your work is field-based. And so, we can't be in the field in the same way. Has this shifted the pandemic? **Has it shifted your ideas about history at all during this time because you have to rethink how to engage with these ideas for the people that you do you work with?**

JM: Yeah. Well, look, for the immediate, for the now, it is certainly has changed the way I do things, the way I do business. Yeah, as you said, I can't go physically to these places. From the middle of March up until the immediate future, actually through the end of June, all of my physicalness at these places has been eliminated. It has either been postponed or canceled. Excuse me, these have been postponed or canceled. And because of that, we have to come up with these creative ways to still engage our audience, and that creative way is social media. The way that we, you and I, are engaging right now, me still going and being at a place physically and do social media communicating with people.

So yeah, for right now, for the now, it certainly has changed drastically. I call this thing that I'm doing, I call this social distance learning.

SC: That's great.

JM: Again, giving folks the opportunity to engage with us. So, in coming out of this, I see that it's going to be different. The way we engage our audience is going to be different. And these sites are going to have to adjust accordingly, because even when we get the yellow light to go and hang out with people in places that sometimes are familiar, sometimes unfamiliar, there's still going to be skepticism there. There's still going to be those folks who are going to be a little nervous. Then there are going to be those who don't care. They don't follow the size. They just want to get out there and do what they do without regard for affecting others. But that's another story.

But these size themselves are going to have to come to the realization. If they happened already, and I'm sure they have right now, that they're going to have to change their way doing business. And the conversations I had with these sites now, the ones that want to postpone or even cancel is that we may put another date on the calendar this year, but as we get closer to that date, we may find out it's not feasible. It's not sensible. It's not wise for me to get on an airplane and come the way you are.

And if that's indeed the case, then we could still do something. We could still do social media. Still interact with an audience so we could concentrate on that particular site, and I'm experimenting with that right now. I'm going to be doing that this weekend. Just yesterday — well, maybe two days ago, also locked in another local site in Charleston, South Carolina. The Aiken-Rhett House. And on the last Saturday of this month, I'll be spending the night there all alone, solo. I'll be by myself. But that's kinda what we're experimenting with right now. I think that for the immediate future, that is going to be the way that "The Slave Dwelling Project" is going to operate.

SC: Do you think the way that people will hear and learn from your project will change the way they think about history because it is going to be a remote social distance interaction, social distance learning rather than being in the space? Do you think people will change their ideas about history? Or do you think that because the project is so transformative on its own, it will still get the same messages across?

JM: Well, I think it's going to be a little of both, because there's an element of those who engage in the history who were fed at history that was a revisionist. And then there are those elements of folks, a lot of them who look like myself, who refuse to set foot on a plantation because of the historical trauma involved. I think that through the methods, through social media, and Facebook Live, and Zoom, if those folks would let those guards down and let me be their eyes and ears, I think we can get to those folks.

And I don't know if there's anything that I can say to them at the time

that I'm saying it that would convince them that it's okay to come to these sites. It's okay to engage with these sites. And if they just want to continue to engage in remotely, then so be it. Then engage them remotely. And but it's up to those sites to make sure that they're telling the right stories. That they're telling the complete stories of these places. Not only stories about those folks who inhabit those big houses, the enslavers, but they also have to tell the stories of those who weren't slaves. So it's going to take ideas like this. It's going to take folks like myself. It's going to take other folks who live in greens. Some element of African-American history that's been neglected in the past [inaudible 11:58] of African-American history. But it's going to take those folks who's going to cover that slice, that niche, and live and breathe them that part of history like myself to make sure that despite this virus, despite all of that we're going through right now, that we build a better thing. I'll build a better method of making sure that we disseminate a history that's truthful and all inclusive.

SC: I really love what you said when — well, one of the things that I heard from what you said is how that people can engage in this work in a way that perhaps they might feel more comfortable with or safer with because they don't want to go to the site itself. And like, to me, that is so — it's such a exciting and rich kinda take away from this COVID time. That they can actually allow for a deeper interaction or an interaction that might not have happened that was in person.

I also like that you said fed revisionist history because it is so often when people are saying that, "Oh, you can't bring those histories in. You're revising history." Well, no, a white central narrative is a revisionist history, right? It's not —

JM: Yup.

SC: [crosstalk] of people in the labor that built these nations, right?

SC: **Do you think the way we teach history will and should change then after this moment?** Do you think people will pick up on those exciting opportunities to engage with different people in different

ways? Do you think that is something people will embrace after this time?

JM: Well, right now it's something that's forced upon us.

JM: Because I know that going into the school year, no teacher thought that there would be a month into having no school or in some cases, longer than a month. None of these teachers thought that the school year was over for the year when they were told three or month ago that, "You go home today and we will figure this out." I don't think anybody thought that that figuring out meant that there was not going to be any school term. And right now, there are doubts that in some places, as to the — let's see. The fall, August. Going back to school in August right now is questionable in some places. Nobody thought that. So it was kind of forced on us that we are adjusting.

If some of these things that we're doing now are going to linger, it is mandatory that they do. But one of the problem with that is also identifying some of the disparities between the haves and the have nots. In order for folks to engage in these opportunities, they have to have the technology. Their homes have to be equipped as such. See, that also addresses the economic divide. It also addresses accumulated wealth.

JM: You know, there are a lot of folks who comes from family who look like myself, that wealth is not there. Those computers are not there. That Wi-Fi is not in that home, so we have to deal with that. That if we want this to be a part of how we operate in the future, we have to address that. We have to deal with that. But I do see this method of interpreting at site that something that's here to stay. I think it should be something that should be here to stay because the physicalness of these spaces and interacting with these spaces, these people being comfortable with coming to these spaces and interacting with these spaces in a manner that they did prior to the virus. I just don't think that's going to be around, at least not in the immediate future that it is just not there and the science is [inaudible 16:05] in that. But the problem with that is not everybody believes in science. A lot of folks are thinking about this [crosstalk].

SC: I don't know why it's a problem.

JM: You're thinking about it economically. And you're thinking about it economically, that's if you want to connect the dots, you gotta look at it the way the enslavers looked at it. That's the way they looked at it. You know, they were looking at the output. What can these people, enslaved people, get me? What can they do for me? It's not necessarily what can I do for them, but what can they do for me?

Now, if you move forward with that same concept, you've got a workforce that if they expose themselves to their workplace, then they're exposing themselves to that virus. And when you look at again the economic disparities in the fact that you get more African-Americans who are affected by this or that virus is doing more to them or chilling more of them, you go back to connecting these dots. Well, why is that? Well, the reason is because they bring to the table poor health, and you could tie this poor health to, again, the haves and the have not accumulated wealth. The wealthier you are, the healthier you are because it has to do with health care. Because in the United States health care is tied in with having a job for a lot of folks. And if unemployment has always been high or if you are part of the criminal justice system, which part of what we place slavery, slavery ended yes, but we look what we placed it. Convict labor, Jim Crow laws, and redlining, and poll taxes, all of these things were elements that these aren't franchised the African-American community. So here's an opportunity to connect these dots.

SC: Yeah, I really appreciate the tie that you are making between past history of slavery in the United States with things that are happening right now politically, because I think it's those historical links that really help generate activism and change from people to say, "Right, this isn't this moment. This isn't just this thing that is happening right now, it is this longer legacy." Because like you said with accumulated wealth, it's also like that accumulated health because also of how we can get into your DNA too, right? Like a legacy of health care and nutrition and all that. So, thank you for making those links.

I have a question about the — before I get to the last question, I do

have a question about this notion of like being in the spaces 'cause I was a living history museum interpreter once upon a time, and one of the things I really loved was this interaction between people. And one of the things I'm seeing now with some museums is that they're creating videos in the spaces that there isn't the same type of interaction. What do you think about that? Like, I know you're going to do a live stream so you will be able to interact. Do you think live streams are a better way to go maybe to be able to ensure that there's a conversation about history?

JM: Well, it's better than nothing. You know, we're experimenting. We're learning as we go. Again, we're in a situation you either do this or you don't. You just — I don't mind if you don't. And what I'm seeing, I see a lot of folks out there doing this. And anytime I see somebody out there doing this, including the stories of African-Americans, I pull that out and I put it on my Facebook page because they're doing the right thing. They're calling the names of these enslaved people who were a part of that site. They are telling the real story. They're not just telling the stories about this enslaved or they are including the stories of the enslaved. So I think that any organizations that is out there doing that right now and being inclusive of the story, I think that's a beautiful thing. And this is their opportunity to do the right thing if they haven't been doing it in the past. I'm picking up on some of that too.

My prior history, pre-virus, if that's the term. I don't know if I want to start that, but I see some organizations out there that are now in these videos. They are telling those stories. The elements of the story that they should have been telling all along. And I think this opportunity of this virus has kind of put them in that place, because that old story that they used to tell, you could get on your new first few maybe one, two first videos and you could tell that story the way you've been telling it, but that's going to run out.

If you want to keep your audience engaged, you've gotta start telling them those things you weren't telling them before, and those things that you weren't telling them before includes us. Now, I hope that

you're telling it in a manner that you should be telling, and I hope you're not glorifying it in the sense that it's gone with the wind or the hoop skirt and the medulla. I hope you're not telling that element of the story. I'm hoping that you're telling the real story about these people whose neighbor was stolen, who enable these enslavers to live the lives that they lived in the fact that these folks were brought over here not only for their brute strength, but their knowledge of growing rice or whatever that enslaver brought them over here for. It was just more than the physical labor in some cases, and they contributed heavily and highly to the building of this nation. I hope you're telling those stories in this new youth that you're now creating.

SC: Yeah. And so — and actually, like, that makes me think too because sometimes those interactions with visitors are not positive ones. Sometimes there are people that really just want to stop the narrative of the particular point. So yeah, that's a really good point that the videos can allow for something else. And there is somebody from another museum in Toronto that I spoke to who also said that this is an opportunity to rethink the narrative of the museum, not just the type of programming. So yeah, thank you for that.

So I'll move to the last question. So my research is in national history classrooms. And again, I'm based in Canada. And what I found was that there are these divides that can go up, that even though Canada likes to say the word this big multicultural country and we certainly have a difference on the racial dynamics as the United States, but then no way left better that it can really exacerbate an us versus them. And one of the things that I talked about in my upcoming book "Transforming the Canadian History Classroom: Imagining a New 'Me'", which I just say for the Americans watching, it's not just about Canadian history. It's that we need to do a better job of imagining a we that is inclusive of the stories that we keep forgetting, ignoring, silencing, that we keep saying our other stories, that we keep saying our — the stories will tell after we tell the main story. And this was really influenced too a lot of these ideas by my own backgrounds living in the Caribbean as a child

and living in the southern United States for a portion of the time, because I was able to see a different integration of histories than I have in Canadian history classrooms.

So my last question is, do you think that this will bring about greater opportunities for us to imagine a new me? Sometimes people are talking about the creative aspects of imagining, sometimes people talk about the community part of the we. What do you think? **Do you think that this can provide more opportunities for us to imagine a new we during this time, as well as after this time?**

JM: Yeah, I think this is the time that we must imagine a new we, 'cause I didn't care much for that normal. That prior to this virus, hey, I could tell you a lot of bad things about that.

I often hear the term "Make America great again," and I think, "Well, when was that? There's an African-American person in my skin. Where was that?" Maybe the time right after the Civil War when the Freedman's Bureau was active from 1865 to 1867 before they made that go away, maybe that was a great time in history. At least the effort was there to make this a more equitable America at least for the African-American that recently freed people of that period. But even that went away with Jim Crow laws and convict labor and all this. Yeah, this is that opportunity to pick up on that. To right those wrongs. To correct that. This 1619 Project, The New York Times —

SC: How that surprised me, 1619 Project.

JM: Exactly, exactly. But the thing about that is when she put that out there, and I was so proud along with a lot of other African-Americans just to see that put out there, the way that was put out there, and then of course the pushback came. That pushback, these white scholars, started pushing back. But see, what that highlighted was fact that for so long, the folks who disseminated the history to us were white folks telling us the story — giving us that white storyline, a white male narrative, is slanted towards him. Well, what this gives us, it gives us the opportunity to go back, and we address those things that we didn't address before. Those things that we tried to sugarcoat in the past, like

what we did to the natives. What we did by enslaving people. What we did during World War II in turning the Japanese. We need to put these elements in into our story, and this is the opportunity to do that. This is the opportunity to correct that wrong. And I think it took this virus to present the opportunity.

Now, it's up to folks like us to make sure that none of that door is open, we walk through it. And we take advantage of this opportunity and add those elements to our narrative. It's nothing new to me because I've been at this thing for the last 10 years, "The Slave Dwelling Project". I've been doing it. It's just that we gotta find those other folks. And I know those are the folks who are running parallel tracks. Every now and then, we merge and then we get back in our lanes and we do what we do, but we gotta continue to find these places, these sites that are doing the right thing, that have been doing the right thing. We gotta praise them. Those sites on the verge of wanting to do the right thing, but they don't know how to do it but they want to, the desire is there, that's good. Yes, that opportunity has that, built on that.

And the biggest challenge is going to be convincing those sites that don't want to go there. They want to stay in that comfort zone that they're in, they want to continue to [Video trails off] Those are the ones we gotta work on. But the thing is, that group is getting smaller, the non-conformists. Conformist in the sense that they've continued to push that white male narrative, that group is getting smaller.

SC: Well, you know, one thing that you had said was like — you had said something — I can't remember the exact phrase, but something about like this is the history that, like, white men has taught us. But we're also learning history in our homes, right? And so, it hasn't been the only narrative. There have been so many different parallel narratives. And I think two, being home, being with family and this is something that came up in another video in oral history is we can listen to our own family histories differently and we can challenge our historic sites to be able to make space for that, which I hear from you is

such an exciting potential. So thank you for this. This was so fantastic. This was such a great way to spend 40 minutes.

JM: Well, it's been that long. You know, —

SC: I know. We need to keep talking.

JM: You know, I get on these calls and then I start them and then I say, "Oh, man, this is going to take a while." But then we get into the conversation that you just stated, I love talking about this subject matter, especially with folks that is knowledgeable as you. I was impressed by you when you told me that — you said you stayed in the Caribbean?

JM: And then in the south?

SC: Yeah, in Florida.

JM: Now you're in Canada? Now you're in Canada.

JM: Hey, that's an experience. That you saw this thing from some angles and you add ages enough to know your surroundings and take it in. So I admire you there.

SC: Well, I mean, thanks I didn't — I mean, I didn't pick up myself individually and go. But I was the only white student in a lot of the schools I went to. As an elementary school student, I was the only English student in a couple of the schools I went to in the Caribbean, and I was like, "Okay, if you just give me a little bit of time to understand this history, I will understand what's happening here 'cause this feels different than Canada." And then coming to Canada or coming back to Canada, 'cause I'm like Canadian. Coming back to Canada and working with racialized students, working with Black students and, like, recognizing that even though it's not like the teaching of enslaved people in the Caribbean and the United States is so well done, but there's a lot more acknowledgement than in Canada. And Canada had a history of slavery for over 200 years —

SC: — that doesn't really get talked about that much. And so, what's interesting to be able to bring these histories together, because I think the more we focus on transnational histories, the more that we can be able to talk about experiences across the diaspora, which is so

important. And I think this moment helps us do that more because we are all forced to connect to this way.

SC: Joe, it's so great to meet you. I hope we get a chance to talk more and collaborate in the future. Thank you so much, Joe.

JM: Yeah. And you know, when this thing, when the smoke, when the dust settles, whenever that is, this year, the next year, whenever, when folks are comfortable with getting more intimate and hugging and all that, maybe you can come and join at one of these states.

SC: Oh, I would love that. I was supposed to go to Atlanta in March for the public history conference.

SC: And there were a couple other things I want to do in the south. And I was just in Jacksonville and there were a couple different sites that I wanted to go visit and I didn't get a chance to because of the anxiety. So yes, I would love to go to an event of yours whenever that happens.

JM: But it's going to happen.

SC: It's going to happen. All right, I will be in touch. It was wonderful to meet you.

JM: All right, you take care.

SC: Okay. Bye.

JM: Bye.

In conversation with Dr. Funké Aladejebi

Pandemic Pedagogy Conversation #17

Dr. Funké Aladejebi

Dr. Funké Aladejebi is an Assistant Professor and a Historian from University of New Brunswick. Her works focuses around Black Canadian history and the intersections of Black Canadian history with gender.

We spoke April 30, 2020.

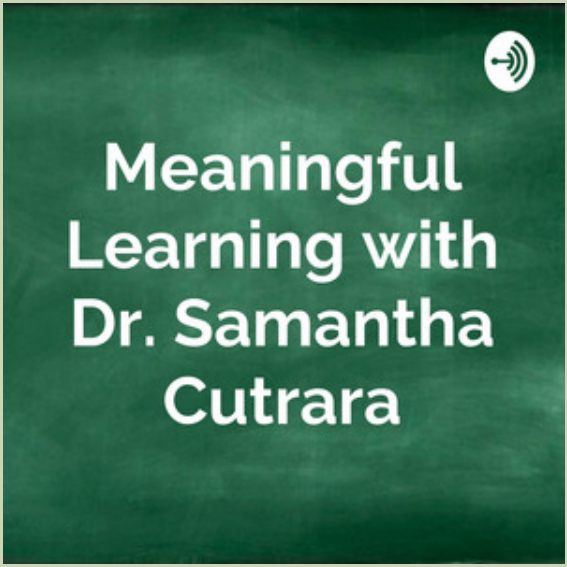
Video posted March 11, 2020.

QUICK LINKS

Video:

A YouTube element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: https://press-books.library.yorku.ca/pandemicpedagogy/?p=71

Audio:



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TRANSCRIPT

All the Pandemic Pedagogy conversations revolved around three questions:

- Question 1: Have you thought of history any different *because* of this moment?
- Question 2: Do you think we would teach history *after* this moment?
- Question 3: Do you think we can "imagine a new 'we'" during/after this moment?

Dr. Samantha Cutrara: Hi, Funke. Thank you so much for speaking with me today. I'm so excited to be able to have another historian of education talking on this series, especially because you also have a women's studies and gender studies background in both what you're teaching and in your own scholarship. And so thank you so much for speaking with us today.

Funké Aladejebi: Thanks so much for having me. I'm looking forward to like continuing some of these conversations and contributing to what I think is a series of really awesome dialogues.

SC: Yeah, thank you. I did a little introduction and I mentioned the manuscript that you're working on. Do you want to just do another little introduction of yourself before we get started?

FA: Sure. So I'm Funké Aladejebi, and a lot of my work focuses around Black Canadian history and the intersections of Black Canadian history with gender, and so a lot of my work looks at Black women teachers, their experiences in teachers colleges, teaching institutions,

but also their experiences as educators in the classroom. So a lot of this looks at race, the intersections between race and gender, and how these experiences influenced the way we think about history, the way we write history, and the way that educators experience the classroom.

SC: Yeah, those are such important intersections and I think, especially right now, to be able to think of those intersections in this conversation. **So I'll start with the first question about whether or not you have thought about history any differently from this moment?** And it's interesting because what I found is that people that already have a very intersectional understanding of history, it hasn't changed their understanding or thoughts of history right now, but it's really augmented the importance of these intersections. Any thoughts on that? Have your ideas about history changed during this moment?

FA: Yeah. I think my ideas of history have been magnified in really, really interesting ways. So in thinking about Afro-centric learning and in thinking about Afro-centric teaching, I really am thinking about this moment as a way of going back to this kind of traditional ways of learning and the way that community, for example, is so much connected to individual ideas of self. And so a lot of these kind of conversations have been forcing me to think about how Black racialized communities as people have really had to draw on these kind of traditional mechanisms of learning, traditional mechanisms of teaching, but also of community cohesion in this moment of disruption. And so I think, for me, COVID-19 has forced me to revisit these mechanisms of Afro-centric learning of even indigenous knowledges all the ways that we think in the most abstract sense and the way we [inaudible 0:07:46.7] abstract sense about history is really forcing me to think about the practical elements of that. How do communities of people who rely so much on community connection deal, right, with COVID-19 which forces a sense of individualism that is incredibly difficult for certain communities of people, or how do you grieve the loss of a community member when you can't be physically present within that, right?

So these are interesting moments that it's forcing me to think about

the historical legacies of these mechanisms and what it means in a practical way to how people live now. I've also been thinking a lot about history, and I always think about history in terms of continuity and change. So thinking about the way that the historical past informs how we think about our contemporary circumstances, and this is always been the same, but we can draw on kind of the work of historians to think about how human beings have dealt with pandemics in the past and how this particular pandemic offers a series of different things, right? So what are the changes that have been facilitated by that? And so I think history is kind of getting reinvigorated, right? It's getting like a new fancy face. A really nice [crosstalk 0:09:02.3] store, right?

And so I think that's an exciting time, is that so much of the way that people have thought about history and so much of the ways that I often teach history is to try and convince people that history is amazing. It's like really interesting. But my labor is not as much — it's not as difficult I should say because people are starting to realize the significance and the importance of looking at these histories for tracking trends, for accessing data, for thinking about what this can tell us about how we move or what our future will look like, right?

So COVID-19 has really created a situation by which people don't know what the world will look after, and I think history lends itself to that. And so I think, for me, teaching about history or trying to get people to be more engaged in history is getting them to think about what are some of the patterns, what are some of the trends that can help them think about what their future might look like and what are the things that might completely take us on a different path. So that's the thing that's kind of exciting to me about this, but I don't know if it's necessarily changed my thinking of history. I think it's just illuminated the tools that I've learned from history and has given me a better way for talking about how these historical tools cannot be applied to what we are experiencing now.

SC: Mm. Yeah, that's really interesting. And, of course, the idea of

continuity and change has come up in other videos. I'm thinking of Orford and Jan Haskings-Winner who are like a history teachers or former history teachers that have brought that up as an important element to be able to talk with K-12 students, for example. But I want to think about like the first part of your answer about this notion of kind of traditional community Afro-centric indigenous knowledges or epistemologies because I think there's this moment that can — this interesting balance because on one hand, if you are home, and this is something Kristina Llewellyn talked about withdrawal histories, you can use this as an opportunity to get to know your family and your family's history in different ways, as well as an opportunity or parents, for example, to do more "unschooling" to be able to focus on particular elements of knowledge that are important at this moment, but then there's also that loss of community and ways to kind of — that can be virtually connected. But sometimes when we are working with elders, for example, that virtual connections are either not possible or they're just not preferable because of that kind of afect that's important.

Any kind of comments about the individualism of being home, being socially isolated as a way to generate knowledge because we don't have the kind of the same community around us?

FA: Yeah, absolutely. I think persons of African descent, communities of African descent have long kind of push back against this desire to be individual to be isolated. There have been [inaudible 0:12:19.1] and important ways by which our communities have constantly worked to build those community connections, and it's still happening in the COVID crisis, right?

I'll speak specifically about what's happening in Nova Scotia in terms of like the Black community activists that are there who are still working really diligently to remind people that we are connected to one another, right, to promote and encourage race-based data. The collection of race-based data during COVID-19. They're visiting members in prison and they're practicing social distancing, but they're not forgetting about kind of this communal connectedness, this communal sense

of responsibility, and of course, accountability, right, for our governments, for our powers that'd be to ensure that communities of people who haven't had access to these things continue to be able to have the same kinds of rights as everyone else.

And so I think that racialized communities have long pushed back against this, and this is a historical legacy of the way that they advocate. And so while the platforms have changed, right? Like some of that might be driving in their cars, staying six feet apart, or whatever the case may be, but the political activism has never ended. I think the mechanisms by which they're using that community activism has changed. But I also think there's a revaluing of community connection now that we've been isolated in this really forceful way. So I'm thinking in a more practical sense about how much I'm working to engage with my nephews and my siblings, right, in a really concrete way —

FA: — to ensure that we are constantly getting together, right? We are valuing the different things that we probably would have put off into a later date. We're making sure that it's an important part of how we exist. And, of course, valuing community knowledge keepers, elders in our community trying to get them to record their stories, trying to sit with them in spaces so that they can begin to document their experiences and then share those experiences.

So in some ways, yeah, the mechanisms have changed, but I think the inherent community practices that have always been there remain, right? So I think it's been a forceful way of trying to resist this notion of individualism, but were also adhering to safety measures and making sure that what we do know of those things. So it's revaluing our community members, revaluing our community elders and the knowledges that they have and understanding that there are traditional knowledges and traditional knowledge keepers in our community that we sometimes don't gravitate too, and that maybe we should go back and revisit and talk to [inaudible 0:15:01.1] and figure out what their experiences have been throughout, right, their life story or history.

SC: Yeah. You know, that's interesting about that kind of push-

back against individualism. I posted a video last week that I actually had recorded way before this happened that asked teachers to think about what their purpose of teaching history is, and I used a book from 1990 that talks about different kind of forms of curriculum. Transmission, transaction, transformation. And this transmission is a kind of conservative, a transaction is liberal, and transformation is a more radical perspective as I'm sure you know.

And I always advocate against kind of this liberal approach to teaching history because of the ways that it is focused on individuals. It isn't focused on progress as the product, but just as like a process. Like, it's going. Don't worry, things will be fine. And that we really should advocate for more history education that is transformative, and that is based in intersections, and it's based in community, and based in making social change. And that was really cool that Kristina Llewellyn talked about in her video that if we aren't hearing stories differently, then we can't advocate for social change based on the experiences of those stories.

And so those are some of the things that I'm pulling from — like that I hear from what you're saying. **Do you think some of that will shift the way we teach history after this moment? Do you think the teaching of history will change after this moment? Do you think there will be more of a transformation, social change, political activism connecting with elders after this moment?**

FA: I hope so, right? The optimistic side of me is really, really hopeful. Yeah, and is thinking about how we have these interconnected histories that are parallel to one another, that are constantly in dialogue with one another. I think sometimes the way that Black Canadian history has often been treated in Canada has been that it's something separate, right? That it's something that people over their experience. If not something that was inherently part of the Canadian nation, it's not part of the national story. And I think the potential for this kind of moment is that it's forcing us to think about how, just how deeply inter-

connected these stories are, and how much they learn from one another, how much they are in communication with one another.

And so I think teaching history will be that. I think people will realize that these digital platforms [inaudible 0:17:50.8] have allowed us to bring community into the classroom, but also that the school, right, the physical place of the school is not just the end-all, be-all place of learning, right? That learning can happen in community, that learning can happen — and it seems simple to be [inaudible 0:18:09.2] things because I know other educators often think of this. But I think really genuinely people will — I hope people are thinking about the way that learning can happen in different places. So I think history will change in that sense.

There is also a pessimistic side of me that kind of thinks that the people who have always engaged in history and I'm thinking about the teaching of history as constantly evolving and constantly relevant to our daily life will continue to do that. And the people who haven't really thought about or cared about history and the way that history informs our present context will continue to think that way too. And so part of me kind of [inaudible 0:18:49.6] interesting input. I'm also deeply, deeply grounded in the social reality that we're in where people, given all the historical information, given all of the scientific information that we have, continuously ejects factual data and evidence for something else, right? And I think that's something that we have to be acutely aware of and combat against.

I think the way that we've taught history in the past that I think many people who are invested in social justice education often are thinking about the optimism and were not thinking about how to protect and begin to anticipate what happens if the opposite happens in our world where there's going to be a bunch of people who don't care about the relevance of historical data and evidence about what it means for the long-standing legacies [inaudible 0:19:41.1*of how people lived today.] And I think that we need to really take more proactive. So things will

change I hope. But if they don't, I think we need to be ready for the potential of that as well.

SC: Yeah, that's really important. And really, when you say like that there are people that still might not look at things like evidence, I think of the conversations I've had particularly with the American scholars, John Bickford and Andrea Hawkman and Sarah Shear, that like I've heard that more from the American scholars, but I think it's important that we need to remember that that's happening here, especially when it comes to things like inequity and things like social justice. How easy it is for us to turn our ear on or off to things that already kind of fit our world view. And so everyone that I've spoken to identifies that this can be a moment to look at and reveal the structures of inequity. But yeah, I appreciate what you're saying that we need to think about how this might not be something that everyone is going to take with it and come from it. And so, how and in what ways do we think through that?

For me, this leads to my third question, which happens to be a good segue, which is always nice when that happens, is that the purpose of the video series generally and my work generally is on this imagining a new 'we' because I have found in history classes very similar to what you said. That there is this — well, we'll do Canadian history and then we'll do the other histories after. Like those are important, but like let's first to the Canadian history. And especially when there are racialized students in the class, that that gets even more separated. The us and them. The othering of students in the narratives that they carry are even more prominent.

And so imagining a new 'we' is a huge focus of my book, but also of the series. And so I wonder how we can imagine a new 'we' during and after this moment. Will it change? Will it morph? Will there be more opportunities for creativity? In collaboration and community? **Do you have any thoughts about how we might imagine a new 'we' after this time? Do you think we even should?**

FA: Yeah, it's a good question, especially in the Canadian context. And I really love and appreciate that you make this distinction about

how in the American context, it's easy for Canadians, right, to look at the United States and how that imbalance, that inequity is so vast, right? And it's so evident that it's really hard to deny the way that disengagement happens, but in Canada, we aren't as vocal with inequity, but it's very much there, right?

FA: That we have whole communities. I remember at the beginning when scholars, academics, and activists were demanding, right, that race-based data be collected for COVID-19. And so many people, politicians particularly were saying, "We don't have a race problem here. There's no need, right, to collect this data." And I think that leaning on erasure, that leaning on silencing is something that we really need to try as much as possible to push against. And so the imagining a new 'we' for me is a complicated question, right? Because when I think about racialized communities, when I think about Black Canadian communities, I recognize that this COVID-19, the questions that have arisen as a result of COVID-19 have always been present for Black and Brown indigenous communities, right?

SC: Right.

FA: Food insecurity has always been present. Procurity of work has always been present. Lower socio-economic challenges have always been present in Black Canadian communities. And so the questions that COVID is causing mainstream Canadians to question, there are things that Black Canadians, racialized communities have always been questioning, right? The hypervigilance, the policing, all of these things have been part of their everyday experiences.

And so I hope that the 'we' is asking people what happens if we include, what happens if we consider people in our society who are different from us, right? And maybe we'll be able to tackle these questions if we consider the most disenfranchised in our communities and in our societies. And so I hope that the reimagining of the we expands who we are, right?

I think a lot of times, the definitions of we have largely been positioned as mainstream white eurocentric [inaudible 0:24:37.6*moosh-

ings] of what it means to be Canadian. And I think we really need to blow that definition up and say that we is inclusive of so many other people. And I don't mean inclusive in the superficial sense. I don't mean inclusion in the way that, woah, we have cultural diversity, yay! I mean, like we thinking about how our institutions are making people belong or unbelong, right, to how we think about citizenship and are we thinking about the people that aren't there, right? Are we thinking and considering the people who aren't part or who aren't sitting at the table to be part of that conversation.

So I hope that that's what the we will have for us, or the question or problematizing what this we actually means, and to make sure that this umbrella of we is really thinking about and considering communities of people who have often been engaging in these conversations for a really long time. So it's really about what can we learn from each other, and what have people in the past been telling us prior to COVID-19 that we refuse to listen to that COVID-19 has facilitated us to think differently about, to open our ears differently as Kristina Llewellyn was saying earlier, right, to listen truly to what it means when communities of people are saying that these things have been happening and it's not equitable, right? And it's not making us feel like we are true Canadian citizens and we need to shift that. We need to shift that conversation.

So I hope that's what the we [inaudible 0:26:11.1*changes into.] But I still don't know, right? I still don't know if that's what we will take away from it. It's really, really difficult to see what we will take away from these conversations. But also I hope that the we also allows us to understand just how much power we have as a community of people. So I think the way that we imagine a new we is to think about how each and every one of us has the ability to be knowledge producers, right, to be able to dictate and change the parameters of our society, right? That it's not so farfetched to imagine like a living we for everyone, right? That we are having a moment where we're starting to think about that. And like because I think so much we've thought of these things, of these institutions both historically and in a contemporary context as so

farfetched, so grand, right, that we can make the kinds of changes that are necessary.

But I think COVID-19 is asking us to think about how we as a community of people have a lot of power and have the ability to demand for our governments and our community agents to be accountable for the kinds of rules we want to live in after this. I hope.

SC: Yeah, I hope too. You know, there's a lot of things that I would like to respond to there because it was just so awesome. Let's just talk about the hope because I hear hope a lot in all of these conversations, and I hear people saying like, "I would like to be optimistic." And I think that this notion of hope and this notion of optimism can also be blended with these feelings of discomfort to be able to see things that, like you said, we have been trained not to see or [inaudible 0:28:08.0].

And I think also to point viewers to some other videos about Sean Carleton's conversation, who is like, colonialism hasn't stopped, Like, where are our conversations about nation-to-nation relationships? Or Geoffrey Reaume's discussion about critical disability history and how — again, there are a lot of vulnerabilities that we're feeling now that we can look at with the critical disability lens. But this notion of imagining a new 'we' that it needs to look different, I think of the conversations I had with Andrea Hawkman and Sarah Shear. It was the same video, and they were saying like, if the we that you're imagining does not make you feel — actually, I don't know if they say this, but this is what I took from it. If the we that you're imagining doesn't make you feel uncomfortable, then it's time to rethink what that looks like.

And I point to the archivists we've talked to, Chris Sanagan and Adam Birrell, were talking about the records that are being created during this time. If all those records look very similar, if all those records are saying very similar things, then we need to be able to broaden how and in what ways we are understanding and thinking of this moment and the stories that frame our lives. Like what is it that allows us to only hear a certain set of stories? So thank you for bringing all those conversations together. Although, of course, that wasn't what you intended to

do. [crosstalk 0:29:39.9] them all. So I hate to do that, but that's what I hear, like this wheeling together of so many of these different important ideas. So thank you for doing that.

FA: Yeah, I love it. And that that hope doesn't mean anything if we don't put it to practice and action, right?

SC: Yes, yes.

FA: [inaudible 0:29:58.2*That the next step at this,] I hope COVID-19 is allowing us the space to actually think really critically through how we would like to direct our activism because that's the next space, right? That it doesn't mean anything if we're having these conversations and we don't move into the next phase, which is to mobilize, right, in a really clear way that includes all of the wes we want into these conversations. The wes that make us uncomfortable. The wes that we've forgotten about.

And so, for me, that's the exciting potential of this all is that we are all what the world will look like next, but the idea after this is to be like, then we need to — we are all responsible for ensuring that that world happens, right?

SC: Yes, yes.

FA: And that that needs to be part of how we move, right? That as teachers of history, educators, it is not enough now to talk about these things. It's not enough to just say that this is what the world look like, the next step is to say, this is the we or these are the potential platforms that we can use to facilitate change in a way that truly makes you feel like you belong to the Canadian nation if you want to, or that you want something completely different. And so I hope that's where we go.

SC: Yes. No, thank you so much for reaffirming that importance that if we keep hoping for these things, that we have to act on it. We have to mobilize. We have to identify our priorities. And it's funny because I'm doing a curriculum review right now and it's interesting how often it will say like, get students to identify the different attrib-

utes of active political citizenship, but it doesn't actually ask them to do anything.

And, for me, like again, I call myself a history education strategist because I think that the strategies that we have for learning history need to mobilize us to ask for a different future because history can teach us so much about things that we don't think are possible because of the way grand narratives work. And so thank you for reaffirming the importance of activism related to hope.

FA: Anytime.

SC: This was a fantastic conversation. Thank you so much.

FA: No, thank you for having me. I had a really good time.

SC: Yeah, that's great. And I've been saying to a few people that it'd be kind of interesting to like follow up in September when our anxieties are like in a different place. Although again, that makes it seem like more work, but just to kind of see where these conversations go because we talk about this as a moment or at least I do, but it will have such lasting effects that it's kind of good to check in to where we were. So hopefully, we can do that.

FA: I would love that. I would love that, and I'd love to hear everyone else's kind of progression of their thinking or change in thinking over the next couple of months, right? Because we're kind of in the thick of it and then things will die down and we will kind of have an idea of where we're going next. So it would be kind of interesting to see how our thinking changes.

SC: I know. I feel like everyone has like said yes to the conversations and they're also signing up for months of me being like, let's do this thing too. Because I do think it's important that we stay connected and we stay talking with each other, and we have these moments of collaboration to make all of our practices better. So thank you again.

FA: No, thank you. Thank you for doing this and all the labor that comes with it because it is a lot, and I think often at times, we assume that it's just kind of easy, but I think facilitating and bringing all of us together in this kind of way is significant and important. So thanks for

all of the labor that you're putting in and making things accessible for people. So thanks.

SC: Oh, that's so kind of you. Thank you so much. I do just like having an opportunity to like get a little dressed up [inaudible 0:34:03.1*during these days.] And it is really [inaudible 0:34:06.7*nice to feel] to like connect with people and like feel a little bit normal. And so it feels like a lot of really great things. Anyway, thanks again.

FA: Anytime.

SC: Okay, bye.

FA: Bye.

SC: Thank you.

FA: No problem.

In conversation with Dr. Sarah Glassford

Pandemic Pedagogy Conversation #18

Dr. Sarah Glassford

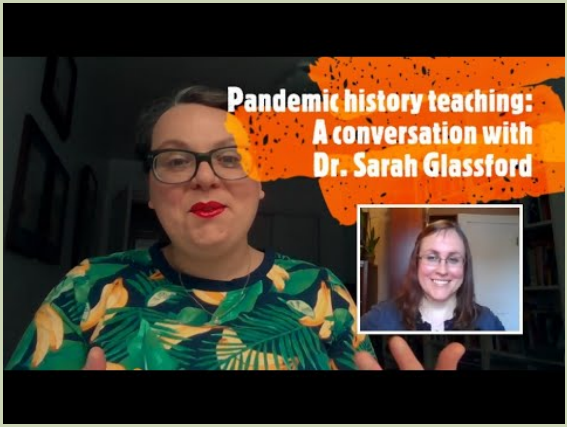
Dr. Sarah Glassford is a librarian, archivist, and historian from the University of Windsor.

We spoke April 30, 2020.

Video posted May 12, 2020.

QUICK LINKS

Video:



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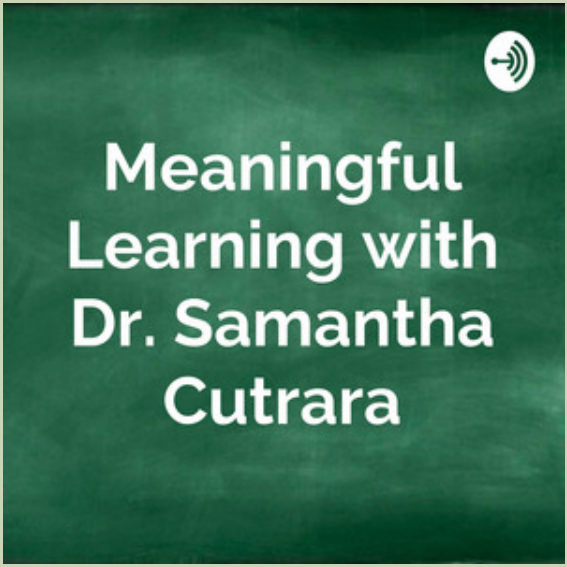

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Of Wartime, Lifeboats, and Preserving Different Perspectives: An Archivist-Historian Reflects on History and Community in Pandemic Times

Sarah Glassford

When Samantha Cutrara invited me to be a part of her Pandemic Pedagogy video series, like a number of her other interview partners I was initially hesitant. It has been a few years now since I left the teaching profession, so I was unsure whether I had much to offer her audience. She insisted that, for her, teaching history was about mobilizing the past, and that was undoubtedly part of my work as an archivist working in an academic library. That was enough to convince me, but it might be helpful to readers if I start by introducing myself, to explain the context for these reflections.

At this point in my career I wear two complementary but distinct professional hats. I started out as a social historian: I did my Ph.D. in History at York University and went on to be a History professor for about

a decade, teaching at four different Canadian universities. I loved that phase of my career path but in time I wanted greater stability than itinerant short-term teaching contracts could provide. I therefore went back to school and earned a Master's degree in Library and Information Science from Western University. That allowed me to transition to a new career as an archivist, and in that capacity I started out by working for the Canadian Red Cross and then for the Provincial Archives of New Brunswick. Currently, I'm the head of the Archives and Special Collections unit in Leddy Library at the University Windsor (Hat #1). I am also still actively researching and publishing as a Canadian historian (Hat #2).

The First Question: Have you thought of history any differently during or after this pandemic moment?

This question sent my mind off in about half a dozen directions, but my initial barely-even-had-to-think-about-it response is a result of perfect timing. Four years of editorial work with historian Amy Shaw from the University of Lethbridge happened to culminate in the publication of our book during the early weeks of Canada's COVID-19 shutdown. The book, called *Making the Best of It: Women and Girls of Canada and Newfoundland during the Second World War* (UBC Press, 2020), showed up on my doorstep about two or three weeks into my pandemic isolation. I was very excited to see it in print it, of course — not least because it felt like a reconnection to the regular world. But then it took on an additional significance and a surprising relevance to my own life as I reacquainted myself with the content and talked about it with Amy.

We were both struck by how many interesting connections existed between the overarching themes that run through our book about women's experiences in the Second World War and what we've been experiencing during the pandemic. The two most notable similarities are (1) the importance of community in shaping our experiences of massive, potentially life-altering events, and (2) the fact that we can be in the middle of a stressful, difficult event and yet have very positive

experiences as a result. It's strange, but something like wartime or a pandemic can be both a terrible time and a special time all at once. We tend (especially in this age of soundbites and Tweets) to want to weigh the evidence and then reduce our own and others' experiences to a simple "good" or "bad" assessment. But being swept up into major world events is just as likely to produce an ambivalent "yes-and-no," "good-and-bad" response in people. The human mind is complex, and it is entirely possible for one person to hold contradictory views about the same experience.

This is one of the things that Amy and I spend some time grappling with in the introduction and conclusion to our book, because it is challenging to reconcile what scholars have uncovered about the war with the contrasting popular memory of those years. Scholars have tended to take a negative view, arguing that the Second World War did not, in the long term, liberate women in any significant way from oppressive social expectations and structural inequities. And not only were many of the gains that were made in wartime rolled back as soon as the men came home from the war, but previously existing forms of prejudice and oppression against some groups of Canadians (regardless of gender) were maintained or, in some cases, exacerbated, during the war. In contrast, Canadian popular memory of women during the war years revolves around empowering iconography such as Rosie the Riveter flexing her bicep under the statement "We Can Do It!" Rosie's famous image seems to encapsulate the sense of new opportunities, community, fun, and romance that are prominent themes in how we remember the war years. So we have the positive, popular memory that's frequently promulgated in TV series, movies, and books, and then on the other hand what scholars have found – and the two don't often talk to each other.

As we went through the process of editing this book, reading the contributors' essays and immersing ourselves in memoirs and diaries from the time, Amy and I found that women of the Second World War era were talking about, and experiencing, both of those perspectives.

They were aware that, from a gender relations standpoint, perfect equality did not magically descend upon society, but they often recognized meaningful changes in their own lives. Sometimes they were having a great time and sometimes they were having a terrible time. It really depended on the communities that they belonged to – for example, their religious affiliation or what profession they were in, their linguistic, ethnic, or racial background, and whether they knew someone who was overseas or not. All of those groups – some overlapping and some separate — helped determine women's resiliency: in other words, whether the war years crushed them completely, were the greatest time in their lives, or (more likely) somewhere in between.

The contradictions and messiness of women's wartime experiences, and the importance of community in all of it, have really been brought home for me by experiencing this coronavirus pandemic. I think especially so because I spent the initial "shutdown" portion of it alone in my home. When we were urged to limit our in-person contact with others as much as possible, I had to make an effort to connect with my social communities through various forms of telecommunication. Sometimes it was wearying, but it was also a really wonderful experience to be in regular contact again with people from the different places that I've lived, and to connect with various groups I've been a part of. Normally we're all caught up in our everyday lives, or busy with activities, but for a few months everyone I knew was reaching out and trying to connect. Emotionally speaking, I benefitted from that in a big way. So working remotely and staying at home as much as possible during the early stage of the pandemic was trying in lots of ways, but it was also unexpectedly great. I feel like I understand the contradictions we identified in the Second World War so much better, now.

Samantha observed at this point in our video conversation that as teachers and mobilizers of history, the pandemic gives us an opportunity to recognize these kinds of contradictions in ourselves and then to translate that into how we teach and learn history. If we can feel anxiety and hope or loneliness and connectedness in tandem, we might

ask how people in the past have felt similarly contradictory emotions in response to the events they lived through. Can we see those sorts of impulses at work in our historical narratives?

Another train of thought that occurred to me in response to the first question arose from the fact that I spent years studying and teaching the history of medicine, and one popular approach in that field is to focus on epidemics in the past. You can fruitfully spend a lot of time examining the rich histories of cholera, smallpox, syphilis, polio, the Black Plague, or any number of other major epidemic diseases. This is because each outbreak in a particular time and place serves as a microcosm of what was going on in that society: everything from medical knowledge of the time – especially their contemporary theories of the body, and what they did or did not know about germs – to what the socioeconomic hierarchy looked like and what tensions that produced. Time and again throughout history, epidemic disease has revealed (sometimes very quickly) the hidden cracks that exist just beneath the surface of what might otherwise appear to be a smoothly functioning society. The interconnection between health and society – in other words, how historically contingent our responses to health and disease are –becomes readily apparent when you study the history of medicine.

My familiarity with health history has informed my own responses to COVID-19 (guiding me to take it seriously but also not to panic), as well as to provide a rich context in which to interpret the responses of others, from the official work of public health units to protests against mandatory closures and mask-wearing. For instance, I've found it deeply disappointing but thoroughly unsurprising to see that a historical pattern of scapegoating – identifying an individual or group to blame – has been at work in this pandemic. Pretty much every single epidemic in history has involved some group being scapegoated; those pre-existing tensions in society rear their heads, and some group of people that is already marginalized, resented, and/or feared bears the brunt of others' fears and anger. My favourite example of this tendency is syphilis, which, during the sixteenth century, was known as "the

French disease," "the Spanish disease," "the Italian disease," "the Polish disease," or "the German disease" depending on which European country was describing it. Everyone was keen to blame it on someone else.

The first reported outbreaks of COVID-19 came from Wuhan, China, and we can certainly debate whether enough information was shared in a timely way, and what actions were taken as a response, from that situation. But there's a lot more than these kinds of practical questions at play when we hear American President Donald Trump (quickly parroted by his supporters) calling COVID-19 "the Chinese disease" or "Kung Flu." The decision to refer to the disease in this way clearly draws upon pre-existing anti-Asian racism and decades of intermittent diplomatic tensions between communist China and the democratic United States – perhaps also American insecurity in the face of China's ever-growing global influence. Trump's comments take those simmering tensions and mobilize them as a way to deflect criticism from the American federal government's own bungled response to the pandemic once it arrived in North America. Whether it's blatant or subtle, this type of scapegoating fulfills a persistent desire in people throughout history to pin the cause of disease on somebody who is already perceived as (or can easily be painted as) not-one-of-us. If the presence and/or spread of the disease is somebody else's fault, it makes it seem more manageable and provides a tangible outlet for the anger, fear, and anxiety that we feel in connection with deadly diseases.

Closely tied to this idea that somebody has come into our safe little bubble and endangered us, we often see that scapegoating culminates in violence and oppression against the group blamed for the disease or its spread. So far I'm not aware of that happening on a widescale in Canada, but I have heard in more recent weeks, both here and in other countries, reports of small-scale violence or threatening behaviour in public places over the issue of wearing masks in public. There was an incident in Mississauga where a man who refused to wear a mask in a large supermarket selling primarily Asian foods became violent and ranted about the "Wuhan communist virus" being the fault of Asian

people. If enough citizens succumb to this kind of scapegoating logic, it's not outside the realm of possibility that we could see widespread violence or other forms of oppression – in any region or country. It's a pattern that has repeated itself throughout history because when we feel threatened and powerless we often lash out at others. We are certainly not immune to this in the twenty-first century.

My third answer to the first question is one that occurred to me around the second or third day that my workplace had shifted to a work-from-home model. Like many people, in those first few days of the shutdown period I was still trying to create a functional workspace in my home, and I was watching a lot of TV news and scanning social media to see how other people I knew were experiencing this. At the end of that particular day I had a minor lightbulb moment. "I bet this is what it was like," I thought, "when the First or the Second World War had been declared, but nothing had actually happened yet." My university, library, and archives were still functioning but they had closed the campus and my colleagues and I were all working from home. There was a palpable sense that things were far from normal, and it seemed like absolutely nothing was newsworthy except the pandemic but there wasn't much to report except everything shutting down. The shutdown was a pre-emptive and pro-active move, so it created a feeling of crisis... but without any actual crisis events to point to yet. (There were, of course, the examples of China, Italy, and Spain to look to, but nothing closer to home.)

It struck me as this weird little moment of unreality – a very pregnant pause as we all waited for what might happen next. That sense of waiting gave me new insight into the early weeks of both world wars – and especially of the First World War in which they had no idea what they were in for, in terms of the scale of devastation to come. I think both then and now, there was a sense of "This could get really bad, but it's not bad yet. Right now it's actually kind of fun." It's hard to explain to students why citizens in many of the combatant countries threw parades and celebrated when they declared war in August 1914,

because it seems so perverse in light of what we know about the truly horrible suffering the First World War produced. But I really felt like I understood it in the early days of the pandemic shutdown here. People were posting on social media about how they were wearing their pajamas while working at home, the panic-buying of toilet paper led to shortages which in turn led to amusing memes, novice bakers blogged about learning to bake bread, and late night TV show hosts filmed stripped-down versions of their shows from their own houses. There was a strangely festive feeling to it – a combination of novelty, nervous energy, and making the best of an unusual situation. At any rate, being in that short-lived moment of waiting for something that hadn't yet happened provided me with a point of connection to the past that I found really fascinating.

At this point in our video conversation, Samantha observed that while she too felt the novelty of that early waiting period, she also had a strong sense of what she called "responsibility to the dread." She recalled this playing out in everyday actions like not making eye contact when passing someone during a walk down the street, as a way to demonstrate her understanding that the pandemic was a serious situation. She also connected it to a project undertaken by the Archives of Ontario in which they Tweeted excerpts from a diary of someone who lived through the War of 1812. That was a war, she noted, in which the fighting was far from most people's homes, creating a similar distance between the contours of daily life and the crisis itself – the latter of which demanded a certain reverence or respect. Negotiating the social part of such situations, she said, was tricky, both then and now – offering another example of how we can use our personal experience of the pandemic present to connect with the history we teach.

There are further parallels in the way that certain countries – notably Canada, the United States, Australia, and New Zealand – participated in both World Wars. For these combatants, the home front was largely distinct from the battlefront, not just conceptually but geographically. With a few exceptions (such as the bombings of Pearl Harbour, USA,

and Darwin, Australia) the war was taking place somewhere else – a very different situation from that experienced by people in Europe, North Africa, and East Asia. That distinction defines the Canadian wartime experience: the average un-enlisted citizen was involved in the war effort, but nowhere near the fighting of it – combat something that was done by other people in a different place. I think a lot of us have felt a bit like that during the pandemic. We've conscientiously done our part by staying home, keeping our distance, wearing masks, and washing our hands, but we're also aware that there are people who have had to leave their homes regularly, working in essential services that support all of us. I remember being devastated the first time I saw images of health care professionals and support workers with scars on their faces from the face masks they had to wear non-stop as they put their lives on the line for the rest of us. Moments of recognition like that – being reminded of the far greater dangers some people are experiencing on the front lines – demand enormous respect.

Some of my family and friends really struggled with the fact that they were not engaged in any kind of essential work, during those uncertain early weeks of the shutdown. It was a sense of powerlessness, but also of ineffectualness, in the face of an emergency. As one friend put it: "I'm just at home. What the heck am I doing to help?" Meanwhile, others seemed to settle right into the situation, embracing their given role of flattening the curve by staying home and enduring a variety of inconveniences with a cheerful attitude. But regardless of how the stay-at-homes felt about their allotted role, there was still that clear distinction in terms of how different groups of people were participating in this overarching experience: the majority not directly exposed to the worst dangers or demands, and a minority risking their personal safety and being physically and emotionally drained by it. It's another of those parallels with wartime that can give us a bit of personal insight into what it might have felt like to live through historical events.

Along these lines, Samantha observed that "the public" is not monolithic, and therefore the public response is not uniform or consistent.

She was reminded of a conversation about the threat of nuclear war she once had with her grandmother, who was a housewife in the 1960s. While Samantha assumed her grandmother must have been scared about the Cold War, her grandmother's actual response was: "I have no idea what you're talking about." Some families were building backyard bomb shelters, but not hers. Rather than practicing duck-and-cover at home, they were dancing with their friends all night. This further reminded Samantha of an observation by historian Funké Aladejebi: that if the people who are experiencing some event with you are all like you, so that there is no diversity of response, you have to think differently about the media, records, and other things that you're using to make sense of the experience. There is always more than one way to view a situation, so if you're not seeing any diverging viewpoints you need to look harder.

The Second Question: In the future, do you think the ways that we will teach history or approach history as a researcher will look different as a result of this pandemic moment?

My answer this question depended on which of my professional hats I was wearing. If I was still classroom teaching, I would be working into my lessons the little personal connections and parallels between past and present I discussed in my answer to the first question. Whether I was teaching wartime history or history of medicine it would be convenient to be able to draw on the fact that, for quite a number of years to come, my students would remember their own experience of the pandemic. There are so many things about the past that are entirely foreign to students today, so having this one event that everyone went through in some way would be a useful and potentially powerful tool – even if it was just to use as the catchy "hook" at the beginning of a lecture or an introductory activity to a lesson or discussion. The diversity among the students in our classrooms is a beautiful thing, but it also means that they don't always have common points of reference with each other (let alone with the teacher). This pandemic has been so disruptive on so many levels that everyone who lived through it will remember

that it happened and will have their own insights to draw on from the experience. For teachers trying to bring the past to life and highlight its relevance to students today it would be a missed opportunity not to draw on that.

With my archivist hat on, I don't anticipate that the pandemic will change the shape of my work in the long term. In the short term archives have made adjustments, just like everywhere else. Right now Reading Rooms either aren't open at all, or only by appointment, and there are brief quarantines for physical materials before and after they are shared with patrons. In archives that have reopened, both staff and patrons in shared spaces are wearing personal protective equipment, So obviously the public-access side of our work — facilitating other people's historical research – looks a little different at the moment. But the behind-the-scenes work that we do to acquire, organize, describe, and preserve historical materials is untouched by the pandemic. Not only is it already fairly solitary work in a practical sense, but it's also deeply rooted in the kinds of materials that we have and the things we need to do to them to make sure they survive into the future, and are discoverable by researchers. The pandemic has not changed any of that.

One way by which the pandemic greatly affects archives is its existence as an event of global, national, provincial, and local significance: unless we're talking about a specialized institution like a Holocaust museum with a very narrow focus to what it collects, materials related to COVID-19 fit every archives' mandate in some way, and therefore are worthy of being archived. As a result, there are all kinds of deliberate archival acquisition initiatives going on around the world – including in my own archives. We don't always have the resources or time to go out and solicit donations, but in this instance a lot of archives (sometimes in conjunction with scholars) are doing just that. Either they are proactively collecting materials themselves, or they are soliciting the public to contribute records, images, and oral histories documenting their experiences of the pandemic.

This means that in future there will be a lot more material about COVID-19 in the archives for researchers and teachers to draw on, than there is about, say, the Spanish Flu epidemic of 1918-1919. It's quite difficult to find the Spanish flu in the archives, except in terms of governmental responses. There are newspaper reports and the odd photo of people wearing masks, but not nearly as much as you might expect – and even in letters or diaries it's rare to find any significant commentary about it. I'm not sure exactly why that is, but I a few guesses. It could be that people were already exhausted by the Great War that had just finished and had no energy to comment on or record the subsequent epidemic. It could be that the higher percentage of the population that lived in rural areas (where the impact of restrictions on the size of gatherings and cancellation of events wouldn't be as strikingly visible as in the cities) and the fact that people weren't as highly connected (through the internet and social media) as we are today, made it seem somewhat less noteworthy than it actually was. Or maybe the actual health impact was so severe and the health care system of the time so much less robust than today that people were so busy dealing with the epidemic that they didn't have time or energy to document it. To use anachronistic examples, they weren't thinking, "Hey, I should document this in a daily blog" or "Maybe I'll do a photo series of famous public places completely empty!" Not to mention, if they were laid off from their jobs or too sick to work, there was no special Spanish Flu government program designed to help keep them afloat. There are lots of potential contributing factors. But overall I suspect Canadians at the time treated the Spanish Flu epidemic as just another situation to be dealt with and persevered through – like a drought year that caused poor harvests, illnesses for which there was no vaccine or cure at the time, and other routine calamities.

By contrast, today Canadians have what we might call a "documenting" mindset. Thanks to camera phones and social media we now have a society in which people document everything from the food on their plates to their innermost thoughts about their sexuality with legions of

followers. In that context it's not surprising that people are thinking, "Hey, I'm having this interesting pandemic experience – I should record it." Scads of material is being created and shared at the grassroots, so the role of archives, museums, and similar institutions is to gather some of it into a more permanent preservation space and curate it. There will be quite a lot of coronavirus material in the archives for future generations to discover, and hopefully it will capture a diverse swath of voices and experiences in different places That's pretty exciting.

With my third hat on – that of someone working in a library context – I see the pandemic creating small changes in the relationships between university teaching faculty and my colleagues who are liaison librarians (that is, librarians assigned to a particular subject area like English, Science, or Social Work). Liaison librarians are the ones who purchase new resources related to those areas, offer specialist reference help to students and researchers working in those fields, and provide in-class sessions on information literacy for students. The idea is that there is a dedicated person (or people) in the library who can work closely with each faculty, department, or program at the university, supporting them in terms of resources and instruction. The degree to which this relationship actually works out in practice has a lot to do with the initiative of the librarian, but also (and as a former professor, I would say more so) on the awareness of faculty members and their willingness to make use of these opportunities.

When universities were forced to shift to an online teaching environment at the tail-end of the Winter 2020 semester, a lot of liaison librarians found themselves working more closely with their faculty members than they normally do. There was a large-scale turn to librarians by faculty members scrambling to reinvent themselves as online pedagogues. The challenge, of course, was: "How do I do what I already do well when I don't have the resources – when the things that I use are not digital things that I can easily translate into this new environment?" It produced a lot of fruitful discussion between librarians and faculty

members around what alternative digital (and ideally open-access) resources existed to work around those challenges. If a professor could no longer do an in-class experiment, could the librarian find a high-quality video resource that demonstrated it instead? If a professor had assigned their students a chapter from an out-of-print book on 2-hour reserve and there was no e-book version, could the librarian quickly get copyright clearance and scan the resource for digital distribution to the class?

In short, there was a lot of mad scrambling behind-the-scenes, but it demonstrated the benefits of collaboration between teaching faculty and librarians, and helped rescue the end of the semester. Similar collaborations have been going on (although thankfully at a more humane pace and with less intensity) over the summer semester, as professors prepare for what looks likely to be a fully-online Fall 2020 semester (and perhaps beyond). It's hard to say whether that kind of productive collaboration will outlast the pandemic or not. Professors tend to be very independent, so they might revert back to solo syllabus-development and last minute requests for course reserves or resource purchases, once the pandemic moment is over. Librarians certainly hope the new spirit of collaboration will continue, because they are trained information professionals with a lot to offer in support of teaching – not just a 20 minute presentation about plagiarism, but advanced searching skills and a wide knowledge of what resources are available.

Wearing her own second professional hat – as someone working in higher education – Samantha observed that librarians often struggle to work more collaboratively with faculty members who may not have understood that collaboration is the ideal model for working with librarians in a teaching capacity. She speculated that the pandemic might produce a greater understanding that teaching does not have to be a solitary activity and instead can be enriched by a collaboration between professionals who bring different skills and perspectives to the table.

This kind of shift would undoubtedly bring to the classroom greater

resources and opportunities for teaching and learning. It would be great, Samantha said, if this also lead to more collaborative teaching teams or approaches to teaching within K-12 settings as well – where teachers and teacher-librarians are facing similar challenges in the altered context of the pandemic. Ultimately, she suggested, the pandemic has prompted teachers of all stripes to recognize that teaching is changing: it is no longer just an individual task. Accordingly, the resources that teachers need in order to teach has also changed. The altered context means teachers need to think differently about the ways in which they're delivering content and how to make it the best content it can be.

The Third Question: How can we create greater circles of inclusion in the ways that we teach and learn Canadian history narratives? Not just to create multicultural narratives, but to ensure that different cultures of all kinds are able to shift and change what we understand as community.

This was the question I found most difficult to answer, because it's a little bit outside of my usual wheelhouse. I can say, however, that as someone who has studied and attempted to teach a very inclusive version of Canadian history, I'm heartened by what I've seen in the media as well as in conversation with people I know. There seems to be a pretty solid understanding of the differential impact of this pandemic: it has affected everyone, but with very different degrees of severity. I think most people understand that, and that's encouraging.

In the first weeks and months of the pandemic in North America, when the majority of people were told to shelter-in-place, there was a real sense of unity and camaraderie in the air. People expressed it different ways, but you often heard statements like "we're all in this together" or "we're all in the same boat." There's comfort and strength in that sentiment: it seems hard-wired into us as humans that it's less frightening to weather a storm with other people. But those reassuring sentiments mask the very different degrees to which people have suffered in this pandemic. The best way of phrasing it that I've come

across was somebody who said: "We are not all in the same boat, but we're in the same storm." If you take that metaphor further, it can become a call to action in the here and now, expressing a sense of moral obligation to others: those of us in secure lifeboats need to reach out to the ones clinging to driftwood; if we're well-stocked we need to share our freshwater and chocolate rations with a lifeboat full of people whose supplies were washed overboard.

What happens if we bring that metaphor back to archives and the teaching of history? Well, the story of a person's experience in a ship at sea during a storm will be very different depending on whether they were in a lifeboat or clinging to driftwood, had supplies or not, were alone or with others, were rescued by the Coast Guard or left to drown. Each of those stories is important, and needs to be recognized, valued, and told. In terms of our individual experiences with the coronavirus, we see a similar diversity. Has the pandemic primarily been an inconvenience to you? Has it made itself most felt as a mental health struggle? Neither of those things is negligible or unimportant. Quite the opposite. But those experiences have different short- and long-term effects than losing your job or small business because of the pandemic shutdown. Likewise someone whose special needs child has not been getting the support that they need in a classroom or institutional setting because schools closed and online learning was not viable for them. Those whose loved ones are most vulnerable because of age of preexisting condition, or who have had loved ones die from the virus, present yet another set of experiences. And of course people who have spent the pandemic working in health care or other essential service settings are yet another case entirely.

In other words, it's crucial that we recognize that we're not in the same boat (even it's still reassuring to say that we are). Although our catchphrases don't make it clear, I do think people have become aware over the past months of the pandemic that it has affected people in very different ways. That in turn paves the way for diversity in terms of how people will describe their experiences, how those things will find

their way into archives, and eventually into the works that will be created – from curriculum and lesson plans to museum exhibits and histories of the pandemic – in years to come. I am cautiously optimistic that this recognition of diversity will make its way all the way along the chain from grassroots documentation to interpretation and teaching.

Picking up on the storm metaphor, Samantha noted that, if we are reporting on the storm as a whole, we need to be aware of the ways that our lifeboat experience looks different from that of others. Recognizing inequity and commenting on it in our reporting can be a step toward addressing those inequities. As an example, she mentioned that both of us are single women working from home, with dedicated home office space and no childcare or eldercare demands. We have secure jobs, and therefore our experiences are very different from, say, that of her neighbour down the hall who has children.

She also mentioned reports that have circulated about female scholars not submitting academic journal articles during the pandemic at the same rate as in pre-pandemic times (or the same rate as male scholars during the pandemic) and how that will have an effect on their careers down the road, in terms of grants, promotion, and tenure. Parents generally (but especially mothers) seem to be at capacity in terms of their ability to negotiate this situation. One result of that is that the people who are documenting this moment are those with the time and privilege to do so. Samantha was able to have her Pandemic Pedagogy video conversations because she did not have children to care for, had a dedicated home office space, and owned a laptop with a webcam. For this reason we need to think carefully about the records we find in the archives: who created them, under what circumstances, and what they include or exclude.

Despite my optimism overall, there are also ways in which the diversity of people's pandemic experiences have not been recognized. I had a memorable conversation early on in the pandemic shutdown period with a friend who was in the same doctoral program as me years ago. He has ended up working completely outside of History and academe,

and in this pandemic moment specifically, has been a frontline worker in an essential service setting. When we spoke he was doing well and taking the proper precautions, but had a bee in his bonnet about how the pandemic was being presented in the public sphere. It really drove him crazy that so much of what was appearing in both social and traditional media in the early weeks of the shutdown was of the ""what are you baking during the pandemic?" variety, or people advising others to use the time at home to learn a new language or declutter. He saw this as a completely out-of-touch bourgeois experience of the pandemic, bearing absolutely no relation to the service he and his coworkers were struggling to provide so that others could have the luxury of staying safely at home, or their daily experience interacting with the public.

This portrayal maintained a tenacious hold until the death of George Floyd sparked a wave of anti-Black racism protests in the USA, Canada, and Europe and made Facebook posts about pandemic baking (etc.) seem unsuitably frivolous. I was therefore very glad to have that conversation with my friend, who was one of the few people I knew who was having a completely different pandemic experience than me and the only one with the scholarly training to analyze it in the way he was doing. His insights pretty much shattered my own previous notions of what the pandemic looked like for other people. I realized I needed to go beyond my own immediate social circle if I wanted to truly understand what was going on, how it was affecting people, and therefore what kinds of experiences I should try to collect for my archives.

Samantha rounded out our video conversation by reflecting on the fact that these kinds of insights will continue to have power to shape our understandings in future. As the pandemic continues to unfold, teachers (and others) are under so many pressures that they may not be able to engage with big ideas. But the significance of these ideas will not end whenever the pandemic runs its course. Echoes of this conversation, and others, have the potential to resonate for many months, years, and generations to come.

In conversation with Nicole Ridley

Pandemic Pedagogy Conversation #19

Nicole Ridley

Nicole Ridley is a history teacher in Hull England. She runs a blog called Tea and Learning with her friend and colleague Hannah Betts. She wrote a blog on the Women in the American West and how we can get more women into that. You can connect with her on Twitter at @RidleyHistory.

We spoke May 8, 2020.

Video posted May 13, 2020.

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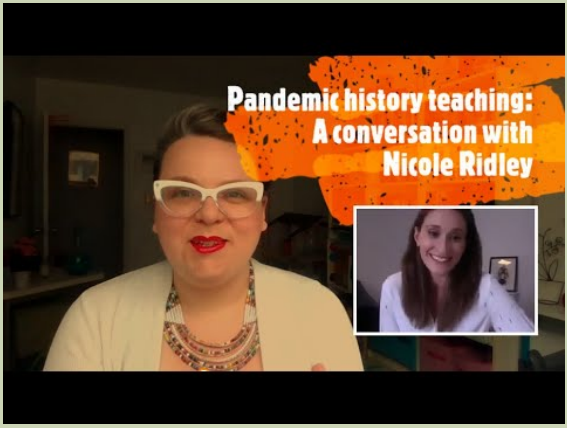

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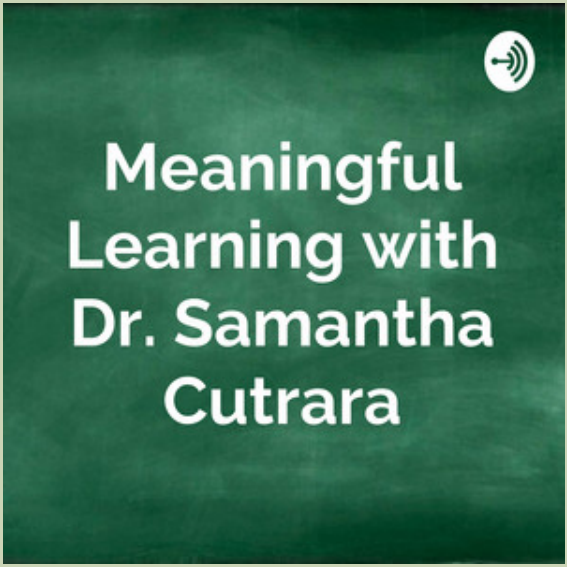

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TRANSCRIPT

All the Pandemic Pedagogy conversations revolved around three questions:

- Question 1: Have you thought of history any different *because* of this moment?
- Question 2: Do you think we would teach history *after* this moment?
- Question 3: Do you think we can "imagine a new 'we'" during/after this moment?

Dr. Samantha Cutrara: Hi, Nicole. It is so wonderful to E-meet you. I'm so glad that we connected on Twitter and that we get to have this conversation so quickly. So thank you so much for finding time, especially across time zones.

Nicole Ridley: No, thank you for having me. It's a really exciting opportunity.

SC: Do you want to really quickly introduce yourself before we get started talking?

NR: Okay. My name is Nicole Ridley. I'm a history teacher in Hull in England, and I run a blog called Tea and Learning with my friend and colleague Hannah Betts. I wrote a blog post on the lack of women in our American West specifications, which is what you saw, and how we might start to change that.

SC: Yeah. And I remember like your tweet that's something like this is going to — like part of my pandemic research project is going to be on Women in the American West. And that was so intriguing to me

because I know not everyone has time to do research. And I said in my introduction like, "No pressure for those history teachers that don't have that time", but it's kind of interesting that you thought of this time to do research.

So the first question that I'd like to ask is **how you thought about history any different because of this time?** And maybe it is, like, thinking about history differently brought you to the blog, or maybe just having the time to do other research maybe shifted your ideas about history. So, have you thought about history any differently during COVID-19?

NR: I think I have started to think about it differently. I've been focusing on trying to make the history that I was delivering diverse and representative, which is a big focus of English history teachers on Twitter at the moment, on the back of work done by people like Helen Snelson, the chair of the Historical Association Secondary Committee, the network of teachers in York (YorkClio), and lots of other fantastic practitioners online. When the outbreak started and we got put into lockdown, I picked an area that I wanted to improve my knowledge or delivery of. That was the American West so I put that diverse, representative lens on it. Does it fit? Am I being representative and diverse? The answer was most definitely no, so I started research.

SC: And so, why the American West? Because I also said in the introduction, I didn't realize you were British until we started emailing. And so, why the American West?

NR: It's the topic where I'm the weakest, as a practitioner. I know very, very little about it and shockingly little about American history in general so it was something that I wanted to spend this time strengthening. Originally, when I'd been looking through it, I did find it interesting but I felt like it was a little bit flat as a history and I wasn't really engaging with it, which I imagine the students picked up on. Then I noticed that in the textbook we use there are only 6 women mentioned by name versus over 82 men and that made me realise how much of this history and reality was clearly missing. Once I started to research women in this period, and I realized the **scope of their experience, how**

nuanced it was, and how much impact they had on the story, I connected with it a lot more.

SC: So what are some things then that you learned during your research that has helped you like — that has, like, that you've pulled out to be like these are definitely things I want to communicate to my students. These are the elements of history that my students are really going to be transformed by perhaps?

NR: I think it was the amount of agency that women had in themselves. Every time I was reading, the story was that women followed their husbands across the Oregon Trail, they went with their husbands to do this and that, men took them to those places, and I was realising that this wasn't the reality or lived experience in a lot of cases. Actually, the narrative was "I want to be a pioneer and if you want to go, I'm going to come with you." Women refused to be a left behind and had real influence on the economic and politics of settlement, which is a significant difference.

I think it's Luzena Wilson that I was reading about. When she got to California, she set up a business with her husband; they didn't manage to get gold but they set up a hotel. Then her husband left her, so she just carried on. And there were successful women all over the West that I had no idea about and wasn't teaching.

SC: To me, whenever I engage with women's history or — I mean, it's just national history. It just features women. It reminds me of how much so much of history is based on our current perceptions, right?

So we like to think that, like, women we're all docile and had no agency in the past, and then we dig into the past and we see that's not true. Has this caused you to rethink other histories that you have taught because of the learning from the American West?

NR: I definitely think it is going to. This was a moment of awakening, I suppose, for me because I was aware that I was presenting a very white and masculine space but at the beginning I thought that American West genuinley was a very white and masculine space because of

what I'd read in the textbook. So, I'm kind of at the beginning of the process – I still have so much more to learn about the American West and the women in it, and especially the racial dynamic of it as well. For example, how is the experience of white women crossing the Oregon Trail different to Native American women? How does this compare to white and Native American men? How does the gender dynamic change as the nature of race relations changes? I think this is a question that I've learnt to ask and will take further down the school.

SC: Well, and also, that there were quite a lot of black women too in the American West because — well, a migration after slavery, but also just ways to have — what's that world I'm looking for? Like free communities. And so, again, like we don't really get to hear about that. It's interesting the digging that has to be done. And like, you hear about this word of digging through history a lot, what kind of sources are you using? Are they different than the sources you would have used if you didn't have this time?

NR: Yes. Yeah, I think so. I remember getting **really angry** at the beginning because I was like, "I should not be having to work this hard just to find some women's names." And I found a lot of white women straight away, obviously. It was hard to find black women and Hispanic women. I haven't been able to find the names of any Asian women at the moment. And I was lucky in terms of sources that I have access to academic journals through my university alumni access.

So I was using a lot of them; reading academic papers, books, doing really deep Google searches into whatever primary sources I could find from American Museums or history blogs. But I think, particularly if you don't have time or you don't have access to the academic work, it's an issue. Doing this from Britain as well, where we don't have the sources coming up on a Google search, it takes a really long time to try and find any of this.

SC: Yeah. I mean, I know that's a barrier for a lot of teachers. The time to do research be like this sitting and just doing that digging and doing that exploring. And not all teachers will have time to do that, but

if there is like this kernel of thing that they're interested in, that there can be a world of stuff. And that's why I think networks are really interesting and helpful. And it's cool that you are interested in developing more of a network to share that, because you don't need to do it as well as your colleague at another school, right?

NR: Yeah. Well, Hannah and I originally trained in York where the Yorkclio network inspired us, and we want to create that spirit in Hull in a network where we can share the different experiences of the history teachers and what we're interested in to try and plug each other's gaps. There's a lot of — Hull has really strong links with slavery and abolition because that's where William Wilberforce lived, so we're quite familiar with that content, but by contrast there's the American West that Hull as a city knows nothing about, so it's useful to be able to share.

SC: Yeah, that's great. So do you think then through your networks or even just individually, **do you think that teaching history will change after this point?** Do you think that people will have had some time and space to engage differently and transform their teaching practices after this?

NR: Yeah, I think so. We've had time to reflect and get ready for next year. We have had to adapt to a different way of working and I think what the Coronavirus — what I've seen is that it shows really starkly the variety of experiences that you get when an event happens or when the government makes a decision. Everyone has suffered in different ways and everyone has contributed in different ways, and we have to be really **careful not to put a hierarchy on that and say "your contribution was better than theirs** so we're only going to talk about you" because everyone is part of the whole. And I think that applies to history teaching because we can't ignore sections of society just because we see them as secondary or not as consequential when everyone contributions to moments in history.

SC: I really love that point that we have to make sure that we're not doing this priority that some people — you know, there is this article going around in the CBC, The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation,

right now that says like, the privilege of the pandemic, right? Some people don't have time to engage in any education, let alone research projects. And that's why I think, especially being able to network in community — like, to develop community after this can, to some point perhaps, make a little bit more equitable the experiences so that everyone can kind of catch up as much as possible together.

So, to me, this goes into my third question really well about the notion of imagining a new we. So my work is about how we can think more inclusive narratives in our classes and recognize a more inclusive community of students in our classrooms as valuable knowledge holders. Has this time shifted how you think of **imagining a new we during this time or after this time?** And do you think that that will shift your teaching practices at all?

NR: I think so. It encourages you to break down the definition, I guess, in who are the we – who is included, who's contributing, and not to be judgmental about who can be included in that. It's everybody and it's everybody that's working towards whatever goals they have. I think particularly for the way that I deliver the American West, it's about recognizing that everyone has a specific role because they've chosen it and that's their area of specialty. They perform as best as they can, whether it's a woman in the home or a man going out to work, running a business or a pioneer in a homestead. Everyone performs their role. They contribute and that is what should be recognized.

SC: Yeah. And that those roles also aren't — there aren't so steadfast, that if we recognize the ways about all the roles work in society, that we also have to be aware of the ways that we have to fill in the gaps when there are gaps in the ways that we need to support each other in continuing to fulfill those goals like you said.

Nicole, this has been so interesting to talk with you and to hear your perspectives. Is there anything else you wanted to share about your hopes for history teaching post-pandemic before we close?

NR: I hope that **it can just become wider**. With the American West in particular, we really need redesign for the curriculum to be represen-

tative and diverse. At the moment, it's very — we see everything through a lens of white masculinity, particularly with this topic, and it's preventing us from teaching good history. And if — I mean, if I struggled to get over that barrier, and I'm a trained historian then 15-16 year olds are not going to be able to do it, so we need to be **delivering something that is much more obviously, starkly representative.**

SC: Yeah. I love that concept of wider. That we need to be — one second, there is a truck. I love this idea of wider. That we need to think of wider narratives and that we need to — one of the things that's coming up in a lot of the videos is how the pandemic has really shown the inequity of so many of the structures that free more lives and — did you see the cat? Anyway, the cat just [inaudible]. That shaped so many of the structures. And when you're saying wider, to me, that really demonstrates that we need to think so much beyond those structures to include more histories and to challenge the white masculinity of so much of our history.

So thank you so much for doing that research. Thank you for talking with me. Can you tell people where to find information about your blog, although I will have a link below the video?

NR: So the blog is at www.teaandlearning.com, or it can be found on my Twitter page which is @RidleyHistory or Hannah's Twitter page, which is @MissHBHistory.

SC: Can you say that one more time?

NR: All of it?

SC: Yeah, yeah. Sorry, the cat. Sorry.

NR: So the blog can be found at www.teaandlearning.com, or there are links to it on my Twitter page, which is @RidleyHistory or Hannah's Twitter page, which is @MissHBHistory.

SC: Okay, that's great. All of those links will be below the video. And so, I hope that this can broaden some of that network that you're doing, and it was wonderful to talk with you. And please tell anyone in your network that it would be great to hear what they are doing on the other side of the pond, if you will. I am actually —

NR: I will.

SC: — at York University in Canada. And we have a — there's a room in one of our 1960s buildings that was created and dedicated by the University of York. So we have some —

NR: In England?

SC: — [inaudible 0:16:48.3] connections.

NR: You do? Such a coincidence.

SC: Yeah. So —

NR: [inaudible 0:16:57.5*But, yeah, you have a whole new host of British fans too.]

SC: Okay. Well, great. Well, British fans, come and let's do another little interview. I hope Nicole [inaudible 0:17:06.2] like, very easy and not intimidating because I think I'm so interested in what you're doing in England, and I really love this idea that you already have this network that are thinking about diverse histories. And yeah, I would love to hear more about that work. So thank you so much, Nicole.

NR: No worries. Thank you.

SC: Okay. Well, see you later. Bye.

NR: Bye.

SC: You don't have to hang up. Sorry, I meant to tell you that before. It's a fake —

NR: I was already about to click.

SC: I know. It's a fake goodbye.

In conversation with Ian Duncan

IAN DUNCAN AND SAMANTHA CUTRARA

Pandemic Pedagogy Conversation #20

Ian Duncan

Ian Duncan is a high school teacher in Ontario. You can connect with him on Twitter at @Mister_Duncan.

We spoke May 8, 2020.

Video posted May 19, 2020.

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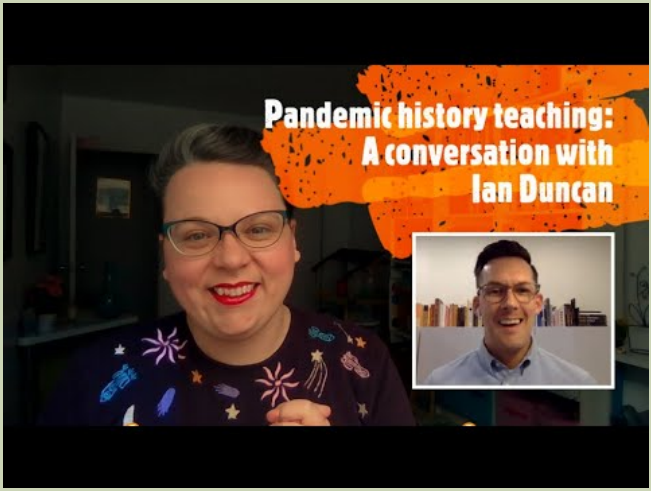

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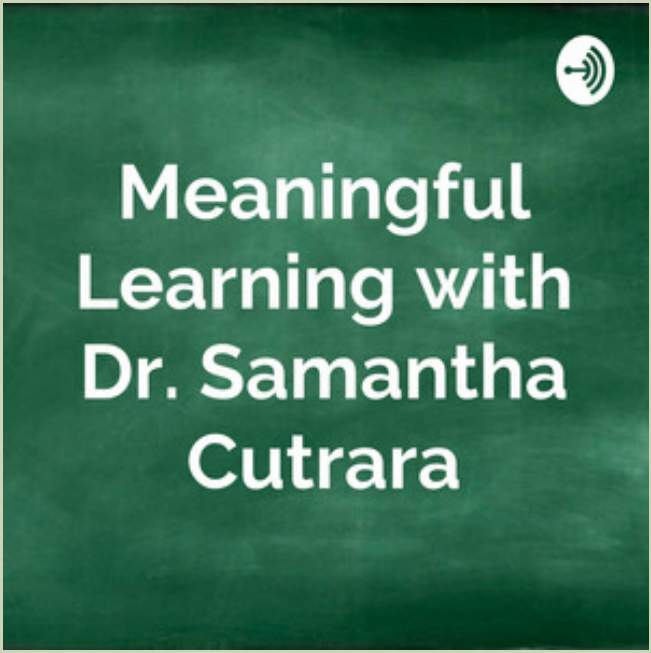

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TRANSCRIPT

- Question 1: Have you thought of history any different *because* of this moment?
- Question 2: Do you think we would teach history *after* this moment?
- Question 3: Do you think we can "imagine a new 'we'" during/after this moment?

Dr. Samantha Cutrara: Ian, thank you so much for speaking with me. It was so wonderful to connect with you on Twitter. And I'm really excited to talk with you about teaching history during the pandemic and thought after. Before we get started, do you wanna introduce yourself?

Ian Duncan: Sure. Hi, Samantha. My name is Ian Duncan, and I'm a classroom history teacher in the suburbs of Toronto. And I live in Toronto. I've taught lots of different courses, all in the [inaudible 0:00:39.6*Canada world] studies sort of disciplines and documents from grade 10, 11, and 12.

SC: So I always start with the first question about whether or not you've thought of history any different because of this moment. Because when this happened, I kind of did. Like, "Oh, yeah. Like, where does history fit in our world right now if everything is going crazy?" **So have you thought of history any different because of this moment?** And no pressure if no. Some people were like, "I don't have time to think of that." How about you?

ID: I always think that current events inspire my curiosity for his-

tory. So when we're going into quarantine and physical and social distancing and we're learning about COVID-19 as a disease and we're looking at ramifications in so many different ways in our society and in our civilization and around the world, I start going backwards and I start looking at similar moments in history because as a curious student of history, I want to know how the world responded then. So that's been, I think, how I'm thinking about it a little differently because suddenly it's inspired me to learn more.

Like, I have never really demonstrated a terrible curiosity in Spanish Flu. And I know you've discussed this before on your podcast and on YouTube series, I just wasn't curious about it at all and all of a sudden, I am more curious. So I had questions and my students had questions as well. We decided to go backwards into ancient history to look at examples that were relevant in the time periods that we're studying an ancient world history and bring forward sort of the experiences, and impacts, and responses to the now. So that was really — even just having conversation around those things and to say, "Hey, what's happening now has happened before. We have seen disease and pandemic shaped history in the world in history, so we should think about how this might shape us now." And this is going back. Now, we're at, like, seven weeks ago that we started that conversation, but I think that's really interesting and like I said, it made me more curious about disease and history and certainly engages some of our very scientific minds in that sort of historical learning as well, which is sort of cool.

I also think that the history hasn't necessarily changed, but our view and our perspective of it has. I think a lot of people are re-evaluating their lives and starting to think about what's important to me. And the result is that we're going to do the same with history. Like we can approach history from a new lens and it's a real opportunity to approach history from a new lens and to correct some of our historical oversights or exclusions to correct the kinds of omissions from the narratives that are traditionally taught in our classrooms or even just sort of profiled through mass media. All of that kind of stuff can be happen-

ing, and it has me thinking about, well, I didn't even think about these folks' experience in the COVID-19 pandemic. So now, I should go and look for that in history and keep my kids looking at those groups as well because their experience is not just defined by COVID-19. It was defined by all the things that happened to that group of people or those individuals before and afterwards.

So part of their story will be how did they respond? How were they inspired? Or what did they do in response to those things? I've noticed that we have sort of a continuity of fear and our responses to fear in history. And this is like a whole new theme in history that has sort of been my own thinking about our response to COVID.

Yeah, so the idea that fear is a motivator for our actions. And sometimes those actions are good and sometimes those actions are bad. In a lot of cases, I think we're seeing communities forge together and support one another in new and wonderful ways, but we also see the influence of socio-economic disparity, we've seen examples of racism from day one of us talking about COVID. And this was in my classroom before we stopped attending physical school classrooms and we had to sort of unpack those things in my classroom when we started talking about COVID in the world and people — we had great conversations around racism.

So I think that is sort of an interesting theme in history that's, for me, that I'm thinking a lot about is fear and motivation of fear and how we respond to it. We just finished talking of the Red Scare and the Lavender Purge of the Cold War era. And isn't that interesting to think that these were periods of fear that we saw these negative interactions and then positive interactions that come out of that sort of thing? So there are new ideas forming about history because of my experience and because of my students' shared experiences in this sort of COVID-19 context.

SC: Thank you for that. I'll tell you why I don't like that answer, and it's because you said so many good things. I have so many follow-up, like comments and questions.

ID: Yeah, ask them. Ask away.

SC: So the first thing, when you had said like, — well, so one of the things that I talk about a lot in the video is that I feel like sometimes in history classrooms, we can focus on, like, the method of history so much that we miss the [inaudible 0:07:52.5*affect.] We miss the emotion. We miss the, like, human experiences. And Aaron Stout's video also talks about that.

And so when you said, like, this continuity of fear, I love that. That was so smart because that is an emotion that can really be traced through through history in so many really interesting ways. So I want to thank you for that because I think that's a real great thing to be able to pull out because sometimes I'm a little worried that we might pressure students too much to be able to, like, self-confess right now what they are going through.

SC: But we do know that there is anxiety around. So whether or not, or however they are feeling it, they can at least connect because I say that meaningful learning is connection, complexity, and care and we know that they can connect with the feeling of fear in this moment, but also in their own lives separate from this moment. And the complexities of that that I'm hearing from you, I think, is a really interesting way of bringing that out.

Yeah, so thank you for that. Were students able to make the connections between the Red Scare and the Lavender Purge from this or were those connections that you drew together?

ID: Yes, we were having a Google Meet at the end of last week and some of my grade 10s were attending, which is amazing. We're working asynchronously, so that's a challenge. But we were trying to debrief, and I'm always trying through conversation at least to make it relevant and I said, we're talking about fear. I mean, what does that remind you of? And that's just my natural kind of what does this remind you of? That's a literacy prompt in my grade one student at homework, what does this remind you of?

So what does this remind you of is like my really easy and approach-

able bridge question and some of them said, "Yeah, people are afraid right now." And I said, "And what are the reactions? What do they do with that fear?" I mean, how interesting to be able to help students digest really intense emotions. And they're still young. 15, 16. I'm talking about grade 10 history students. How do they use history to help them inform and digest and understand that this is not the first time anyone has experienced anything like this, or the first time that fear has guided this kind of massive civic response.

I did follow up with a student later who was very interested in sort of the fear of Naziism in World War II as being a motivator for enlistment for civic duty and responsibility in a World War II context. And because over March break, the extended March break, I had drawn some parallels between the prime minister's press conferences early on and he's referencing to the second World War and Canada's new civic duty sort of echoing some of that.

So there were connections to be made. And certainly, when they started to connect with just the, "I understand what fear looks like and I see that I'm not the only or first person to try to digest that as a society at this massive societal level," I think that's sort of interesting and it makes the history approachable. It's an entry point for them to actually learn the history of other people who have responded to and experienced fear in this sort of way.

SC: Yeah. You know, when you're saying, like, grade one literacy, I actually think that history instruction can be really enriched by literacy practices because history is a story. We can focus on the discipline, but history is a story and these literacy practices can help bring out those connections. And also, I talk a lot in the series that I say that history should transform, but it should be the basis of activist's action. And for me, when you're saying that it helps a 15-year-old unpack their feelings about something going on, to me, that is activism, right?

That a student can connect in a healthier way with what they are feeling can be this really amazing source of activism. So thanks for making those connections too.

Before we move on to the second question, I also just wanted to say something about earlier part of your answer when you said it's causing you to think about history differently? I was going for a walk the other day and thinking about what it would be like once things get back to normal and how, like, there won't be a normal? And then I was like the Roaring Twenties.

You know, like we always — we associate the Roaring Twenties with World War I, and yes. But as someone that also is not curious about the Spanish flu, like that's an interesting connection and I'm so interested to see how once things kind of settle. How people will start thinking about that. Has that come up in your class at all?

ID: Not yet. And I think it's because we are still very much in the midst of our impacts and reactions too to the context of COVID-19 and to quarantine and staying at home, and I think we're still trying to digest it. The reality is that because it's evolving and we never really know, "Oh, am I going back to school? What is next week look like?" And I think we've helped the students find flexibility as they approach the new environment rather than routine, and that flexible approach has meant that they're just not, I think, thinking yet that far ahead. I think the closest we've come is to sort of try to digest what are you going to do afterwards? But I think a lot of it sounds like celebration, which I think is often sort of become synonymous with that Roaring Twenties kind of history as well, right? It's a time of celebration, but also, sadly, of ignorance, of disparity, right?

So their concern is that the celebration will override our ability to understand, digest, recognize disparity in people after a period of challenge, right? So I know that's a lot along the lines of your last question, but certainly, I think we're in this space where the students are not yet willing to forecast what it might be like because they're so accustomed to growth. I think as adults, we are normal, feels a lot more entrenched maybe than theirs does.

SC: Yeah, that's a great answer. Of course, a 15-year-old isn't like, "Oh, remember the Roaring Twenties?" But I'm really excited. Actually, I

think this is more of like a five-year long question to see how our interpretation and our teaching of the Roaring Twenty as well take place because we have this experience in a way that we forgot, right? Neil Orford in his video on the Spanish flu says this cultural amnesia about the period, and we won't be able to forget it.

Do you think teaching history will change after this moment? So that's the second question I've been asking to everyone. Do you think it should change? Like, people are like, "Well, of course you know the technology, but do you think it should change? Do you think there are things that we should be doing differently that has been revealed because of this moment?

ID: I think, personally, history should change all the time and the way we teach it certainly. I mean, I don't know who our students will be when they return to the classroom. And I always try to base my teaching and the ways in which I teach on the students that are in front of me. And that could be different from day-to-day or class-to-class. I think the context of this is yet to be determined.

So I think my advice to my colleagues will be to be flexible and to be open-minded and creative in let's say the fall when we return to "normal teaching" in a classroom setting will, sure, imbed some new technology and explore any kind of acquired technological fluency that has come about through the experience of learning in more virtual and digital ways. But I don't know who's going to be in front of me. I can't yet tell if my students will be feeling more removed, and more isolated, and happier in that sort of introverted bubble or whether they are going to clamor for interaction in community and talk and debate in conversation and storytelling. I don't know.

I feel like those are two sort of swings of a pendulum and I'm hoping that they'll land back in between, but I think I wonder at first what they'll crave. Whether they'll say, "I need to talk to people. I want to group work everything. I don't want to be online. Don't give me a computer and another Google Doc or something to work through." I want to divorce myself of it whether they will swing away from it or whether

they will have grown so comfortable within sort of social distancing and learning on their own and learning digitally that they will want more of that.

So I think the way in which we teach history may evolve depending on who's in front of us. I also think that it's going to give us an opportunity to break some of the chains of our instructional patterns. I've already done that. It has been liberating to throw out three quarters of my course and start to reinvent it in a way that students can achieve expectations, and find success, and find engagement from a distance in less than three hours a week, which was we pulled students at the beginning, we said, "Okay, about six hours in the classroom a week, how much homework do you find you're getting in this course?" They want one to two hours depending on the week or what we were up to. And I said, "Well, we are going from eight to three. What does that look like?" But that has been really liberating because it's meant that we can really assess for ourselves as teachers what our students want to learn and how they want to learn it and how they will learn it efficiently and effectively, but also deeply and hopefully with connection.

All of those things of my teaching in my classroom, I don't want them to go away. I want them to be connected to me and to each other. I want them to be learning in heartfelt ways to history. I always say, "If you make a heart connection that you will understand and know the history after you leave my classroom, not just while you're in it." So I think it's going to break some of those patterns, and it's a little bit liberating to sort of be able to say, "Oh, maybe I don't need to teach every one of these topics. Maybe I don't need to do this always so chronologically. Maybe we could dig a little deeper on fewer things."

And I think for some people — like I've been teaching for 17 years and my practices evolved and evolved and evolved. But I think too, there are courses where we get into a pattern of what we think is interesting or what we think students think is interesting and we just go there because we're busy, and it's easy, and the lesson is ready to pick up and deliver maybe with some tweaks and changes. And instead, I

think it's like, I do have capacity to change it and to take a step back and to work on building community even more in my classroom and to build relationships with students even more in my classroom and then the history. So I think about those things as well.

SC: Yeah. Like that student-centric learning approach resonates so much with what I try to advocate on this channel. And for anyone watching that teaches at university level, I also point you — although, I mean, anyone can watch it obviously. I point you to Mary Chaktsiris' video because she was saying, as a history professor, she's just like there's this idea to keep adding and that this allows her to just be like, "No, we're going to start deleting," and that, "Yes, there's some liberation in that."

The teachers that I work with in my research, they talked about the binder a lot. And they were always critical of the binder. I felt like it was still lingered as a thing, especially for history teachers. And I argued, because I work with teachers at alternative schools as well as mainstream schools, that the teachers need time, space, and place for reflection and research. And maybe, I mean, like for me, the connection is that maybe being away from the standard space of the school and separated from some colleagues, that might be a little toxic perhaps. That might not be so supportive of these things. And just knowing that you need to connect with students provide some of that space, place, and time to re-evaluate what, like you said, you have capacity to do.

That's a really exciting perspective to kind of move forward with teaching history. So thank you for putting that out there, especially as a "regular teacher" and as a husband and a father, like, because you are bouncing many things right now, right? It's not just, like, just like you, by yourself that's like, "Okay, let's just do it for everyone," you know.

ID: You know, opportunity is knocking to make changes. And you said, "I don't think there's going to be a new normal or back to normal. They'll be a new normal and we have to build that normal, so why not use it as a chance to sort of springboard into some changes that you want to see?"

I'm very lucky, my colleagues, we had a meeting this morning virtually. And my colleagues who also teach history with me are equally excited about making change, which is amazing. Like I'm very, very lucky. I'm very fortunate. Yeah, but there's so pumped they're like, "Yeah, let's change the themes. Let's do this. Let's re-organize things." And I'm like, "Yes," because they're feeling that same context of I have an opportunity. I'm learning a lot. Like the kinds of learning that I typically reserved for July and August, I'm able to also engage in now. What am I reading? What am I picking up? What am I looking at online? And like I said, COVID-19 has inspired me to look at new history that I haven't necessarily focused on before.

So all of that comes into how I teach it, and what I will be teaching, and what I'm able to offer students when we come back in a traditional classrooms in some form in the future.

SC: Well, and the stuff that you do in July and August, now you can be in dialogue with your students about it, you know.

And I know too, like, if you're doing something in July and you're like, "Oh, that reminds me of that student from last year, but it seems weird to just send them an email and be like, "Oh, I saw this inside of you," right? Like, you can make those connections as more like human beings and less as teacher and student. I talked about that too, this notion of curricular roles. We can get into these roles and just forget these are people in a room with us that have fears, and have anxieties, and have questions as well.

So this —

ID: Some of our students are — sorry. Some of our students are interacting a lot more via email than they would in a classroom. They might be quiet in class. They were one of 30 or more students in a room. They're great students, and they're engaged, and they like what they're learning, and they like history. They have a passion for the discipline, but we don't often get to sort of connect with additions. And I'm emailing with students who are very excited about, "Oh, I bought a copy of Plato's Republic. I can't wait to read it." And I'm like, "Holy

wow. Okay, that's like –" Yeah, I don't think they would have gone there.

We talk about my summer research, but they're also getting an opportunity, some of them. The real passionate senior students in the discipline of history are using the time to explore that interest and passion with their own research beyond the confines of what I can hand out. And I've been trying to encourage some of that too.

SC: Well, this too reminds me of a video that I did with Joe McGill from The Slave Dwelling Project. So he's a public historian. He's a preservationist. He goes to different sites, mainly in the United States, and he — well, exclusively in the United States, mainly in the south, and he sleeps in slave dwellings, and he does learning activities with that. And he was saying that this moment is a real possibility and his words were, "For museums to do the right thing to be able to broaden the type of narratives that they are bringing to their audiences." Because he said, "If you want to keep your audiences engaged, you have to start telling the stories that you weren't telling before." And that's something I'm hearing from you as well, right? That we are able to have a different kind of conversation because we can use this as an opportunity to be like, all right, it's already kind of screwed over. So let's make the best of this. That's really exciting.

I think of my third question too. So my upcoming book "Transforming the Canadian History Classroom: Imagining a New 'We'" is about thinking of history classrooms as a lot of the things that you're talking about. Full of people with questions about the world that a teacher can focus on their learning rather than thinking of just like, the students that need to know what's in the binder. And a way to do this is to bring in more connection, complexity, and care to be able to think of more inclusion and that we have to start by doing that by imagining it. By thinking of it.

Do you think that we are going to be able to imagine a new 'we' in our classrooms after this in ways that we may not have been able to before?

ID: Oh, gosh, I hope so. I actually —

SC: I feel like that a lot of our conversation is already kind of led to like a yes, we should answer. And so I'm just interested to hear more of your thoughts about it.

ID: I hope that we will again and again and again critically assess what 'we' means, right? Not just once, but all the time. I think that when we hit this sort of national crisis, international crisis moment, we do have an opportunity to think about 'we' very differently and to start to evolve that. And so I think the context for — again, we don't know who our students. How our students will respond. We don't know. Maybe we're going to teach history differently. We're going to dig in. We're going to reorganize, we're going to reassess what we do, but then let's encourage students to define that, what that 'we' looks like.

I teach in a diverse classroom. I know many people across the country do and it's not just those diversities that are so visible and really pushing into those other spaces. I think that the context of quarantine, of social distancing, of COVID-19 that's highlighted, the different experiences of various socioeconomic groups, I think it has highlighted and really emphasized the importance of our essential workers. And we've redefined really what essential worker looks like, which is so great.

And I think what's happening in that, we are finding a common context with all of those different people in their context, but different experiences within it. I don't remember where it was. It was Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, somewhere, but it was we are not all in the same boat. We're in the same storm and we're all in different boats. And some of our boats are lavish and some of them are much simpler. And I like that that is even just a nice way in for students to connect with one of the most challenging elements of 'we', for me, is looking at people who, for whatever reason in their identities, experience socioeconomic struggle.

And also, the intersection of socioeconomic status in our society with so many other elements of a person's identity. The 'we' is not just one type of person with one element to their identity that we crossed different barriers and boundaries and we look at one person as a whole per-

son, not just as like an example of someone who is LGBTQ2+, or someone who happens to be a woman at that time period, or who happens to be a person of color in the 1970s. You know what I mean? Like, I don't think it's that one type anymore. I think that COVID has given us an opportunity to see that there are so many intersections of identity that are really relevant to the conversation that will allow us to challenge what 'we' looks like and start to hopefully undo some of the consistent othering that I see in the system, in our curriculum, in resources that are made available. Even in hiring practices of educators, there is examples of 'the other'.

And in our classroom, I think our students often do that to one another. They other each other. They label externally rather than understanding the whole person. So I sort of hope that maybe some empathy and some compassion, because we've seen a lot of those examples in our communities and in our lives will transcend into the classroom from there.

SC: And, I mean, I also think that the othering can happen in our practice, right?

SC: I think even just the divisions of saying like the students, the students, the students, the students. And like, again, just thinking of them as students rather than human beings can miss the nuances and the complexities of who these young human beings are in our classrooms. And yes, they are students in our classrooms, but the othering of just student can wash away a lot of those diversities as well.

And students now up here, and I just did. Young people today, because of the ways that they interact on a lot of online communities, they already see a lot of diversities of ways to be a human being. And one thing I thought of with your answer is that they can now think too about not just the interaction or the performative nature of those different identities, but also the inequities of some of those identities in the ways that something like this will impact. And it will be really interesting how young people will think through this. What the next 10 years

will look like with these 15-year-olds going into their adulthoods with these experiences, for example.

And I think of Sarah Glassford's interview too because she also used that boat metaphor. That we have to remember about how this has been experienced so differently for everyone and not by choice, right? And the difficulties of that.

Another connection. I also think of Nicole Ridley's interview that I did when she said, "We have to be careful that we're not also prioritizing those experiences." Like, "Oh, you had internet connection? Obviously, you may now be in the advanced class," right?

SC: Like, because what's that — we all know what that's going to do. It's going to exacerbate, like you said, the othering already within the system.

ID: You know, I hope that the experience of COVID-19 will slow us down so that we can listen a little bit more. Listen to students and learn their identities. I mean, it's certainly always the effort doesn't mean that every student always wants to share that with you. It can take — we're talking of building relationships as defining success during sort of distance learning.

And I said, "I only had less than 20 days in the classroom with my students. That is not enough time for me to build relationships with 90 plus students this semester." I think that the new 'we', it is always dependent on what we can know of our students and understand that our students are multifaceted individuals who have potential and capacities beyond what they have shown us in a given day or time that all of these things maybe will slow us to listen to their story, to listen to them telling us what they think is important or who they think we should listen to, maybe even offering opportunities for choice to explore different experiences other than themselves and like their own in a time period and place. That there are so many stories out there. And I think everyone will have their COVID-19 story.

And just like our parents' generation, maybe we're talking, "Oh, I have my moon landing story, right? For me, my big history awakening

was when I was in grade 10 and we were leading up to experiencing the 95 referendum in Quebec. I mean, these were the moments that catalyzed my interest and started to illustrate diversity and inequity because I learned about the diversity of Canadian culture and language even if it was just sort of the French-English divide at the time and started to empathize and understand some of those things.

So I wonder and I hope that this will catalyze people into an interest in history, and politics, and civic duty and action, but also into sort of understanding others. And I hope that we're able to teach and tell many more stories as a process about learning. Not just about COVID, but in all the things that we do.

SC: Yeah. Like, that's the thing too about being in people's homes. We're seeing different sides and to be able to listen to what that interaction tells us, I think, is really powerful. And that's a really wonderful way to end. Thank you so much. This has been great.

ID: Oh, thank you very much for speaking with me today, Samantha. You're awesome.

SC: Thank you. You're awesome.

In conversation with Dr. Marie-Hélène Brunet

Pandemic Pedagogy Conversation #21

Dr. Marie-Hélène Brunet

Dr. Marie-Hélène Brunet an assistant professor at the University of Ottawa since 2018. Her research focuses on the understanding of women's history and gender history. You can connect with her on Twitter at @didact_marie.

We spoke May 9, 2020.

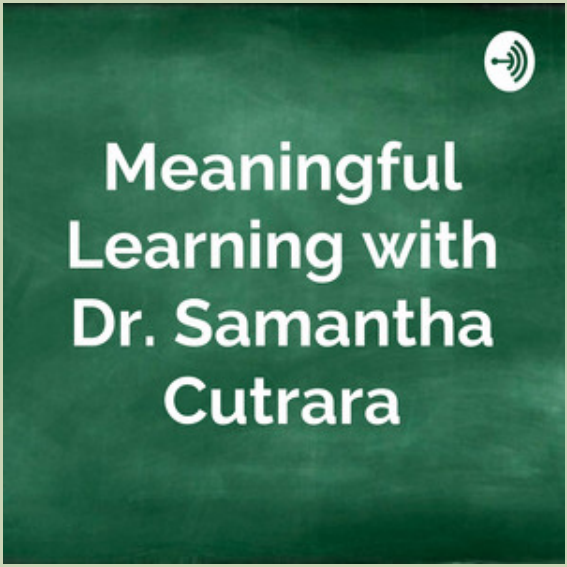
Video posted May 20, 2020.

QUICK LINKS

Video:

A YouTube element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: https://press-books.library.yorku.ca/pandemicpedagogy/?p=224

Audio:



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TRANSCRIPT

All the Pandemic Pedagogy conversations revolved around three questions:

- Question 1: Have you thought of history any different *because* of this moment?
- Question 2: Do you think we would teach history *after* this moment?
- Question 3: Do you think we can "imagine a new 'we'" during/after this moment?

Dr. Samantha Cutrara: Marie-Hélène, thank you so much for speaking with me today. I'm just really excited for us to connect and talk about these ideas, especially from your perspective of being a francophone educator, scholar, as well as someone interested in the histories of teaching and learning of women. So thank you so much.

Dr. Marie-Hélène Brunet: Thank you for the invitation. This is a great series, so I'm really happy to be here and —

SC: Well, great. I'm happy that you're here. Before we start, can you just do a little — do you wanna do a little introduction for yourself?

MB: Sure. So I'm an assistant professor at uOttawa. So University of Ottawa in the French side of the Faculty of Education. That's been since 2018, so it's quite recent. My research focuses on the understanding of women's history, gender history, and I'm also looking at other very interesting topics like gender representations, in teacher education. I'm interested in media literacy. I'm interested in how the curriculums make a place or not for the Franco-Ontarian minorities. So yeah, I

think I've managed to put a little bit of what I do here. I don't know if that's enough.

SC: Yeah, that's enough. I think we have so many, like, intersections of interest that I'm especially interested to be able to bring some of those up today. So let's just get started with our first question. So, **have you thought of history any different because of the COVID pandemic?** Because when this first started, I certainly had.

In particular, I was thinking of all these experiences and all these feelings that are happening in our homes that, like, are they ever going to come out in a textbook as a way that we are going to think and learn about this historical moment. So I know some people haven't had a chance to do that kind of thinking. Have you thought of history any different because of this moment?

MB: It's a good question. I think a lot of the questions this pandemic forces us to look at or already somehow on my radar, right? But let's say that the present situation gives us collectively the occasion to look at history with a different lens.

Might not come as a surprise to people who know my research, but I think we have here an occasion to analyze, for example, some gendered aspects of the pandemic, which obviously will lead us to look through history to try to understand better the present, right?

Thinking this morning Le Devoir, so the Quebec francophone newspaper published a statistic investigation to show how women were disproportionally on the front line of the pandemic. This was interesting, but as more of a specialist of qualitative data, I was more interested in another article that was also published this morning. It was a collective of women in France who signed an opinion letter in Libération. And I could give you the link for that. It's quite interesting. So for the people who are able to read French.

So they signed this opinion letter in Libération on May 8. So that's today. And I read that this morning and it kind of summarized a lot of things that I want to focus on during this little interview that we have.

So maybe I can translate just a part of it. Do you feel that's a good idea?

SC: Yeah, that would be great. Do you want us to — do you want to share your screen with some of it?

MB: I can just translate it and then I can send you the link or you'd rather have the —

SC: Yeah, please.

MB: So it's just a short quote of it just like where they summarize different — very important aspects of how this pandemic is gendered in so many ways. So they say this crisis exposes a fracture of gender, precarious jobs generally related to caring and that are occupied mostly by women. We realize those are now indispensable. They always have been, right? But now we can see that they are much more indispensable than more 'prestigious' jobs.

There is also the pressure for single-parents family or even other families that is visible right now. There's also an increase in domestic violence. And even in these times of isolation, there's an increase in street harassment. And they also in their [iaudible 0:06:39.4], they say that there's also more difficulty to access with production rights because they're not considered a priority in the hospitals. So abortion, for example.

So mainly, like all of these were, like, kind of issues that are there in normal times, but the fact that we're going through this pandemic, it makes it even more visible if we take a look at it, right? So it has to be brought up and showed to people so that they can actually see this.

So this is only some of the things that relate to gender in this crisis. So the quote that I just gave you. Of course, if we were to take an intersectionality, analysis and inequalities are much more complex than the simple man-women [inaudible 0:07:32.8*binary.] But I think there's still a place to focus on gender there. There's quite a lot to say right now.

I'm thinking of something else about the language that is used and I will give you some examples. This language is used in Quebec and elsewhere in France, and you can tell me if it has been used in the news

in English, which I haven't been following. But the language is interesting. It brings us to look through the historically constructive gender attribute, gendered attributes for a better understanding.

So a first word that comes to mind that is used so much in Quebec here is the guardian angel. So has this the news in the media in English? Calling the nurses, the essential workers are guardian angels. Has it?

SC: I don't think so. I don't think so too perhaps the same extent. Like that isn't an evocative image, but I may have missed it. I will be doing some little research about that after this.

MB: So it's been used by prime minister of Quebec [inaudible 0:09:01.3] ago a lot and his team, right? So it's meant as a compliment, of course, but it has implications including gender implication. An angel is benevolent, it refers to something — it refers to a vocation. It does not refer to professionalism, even if nurses, for example, are trained professionals.

So while it is meant as a compliment, it should also remind us that these jobs are related to care and how these have historically been feminine and paid badly. And in these times we're going through, the term guardian angel is also a way to not question the inequalities in a context where even more than usual is asked from care workers extra hours, working on weekends, and of course, being in the front line putting their own health and security at risk.

So I think a few people have reacted to this language demonstrating all what I've been saying. So this is not coming out of my mind, but I think history here can be a great tool to better understand where it comes from. So that's one of the things in the language. Maybe the war, the war narratives that we've been hearing — have you seen this in the Anglophone Media? Like we're —

SC: Well, I mean, of course there's always the, like, fight against. And I think I've heard it more in American context than Anglophone Media Canadian context, but I don't think it's a stretch by any means. I think people would resonate with that.

MB: Yeah, I think you said it people resonate with that, but it's kind of important to kind of question this language again. You know, war soldiers, the fight, [inaudible 0:11:10.9*the vile,] it kind of, you know, it calls for notions of virility — virility, is that how I would say virility?

MB: Okay. Violence. But it also calls for being a soldier without questioning and wondering is that what we are doing? Is that a language that we need at this moment? And why is that war language so easy to use? I think looking at the way we teach history, we might find some answers, right? Fighting a war and winning it through a vaccine. Vac-sine?

SC: Vaccine. Yeah.

MB: Vaccine. I knew I wasn't pronouncing that well.

SC: [inaudible 0:11:56.4]

MB: It would make like a wonderful progress narrative, wouldn't it? But then it would lack the complexity of what is happening, right? But we love those war narratives.

So the war language also brings me to the question of agency. So, do we have any form of agency in this? And then it brings another question. Are we really all equal in this? Who are the soldiers working towards this war to be 'won'? Whose war is it? What exactly will the victory look like? Who is gonna benefit from it? Who still holds the power to make changes now and after this?

So when I think of the agency, it brings me back to that letter of opinion from Libération I was telling you about this morning because all the women authors in this, they point out the gender language and they say at the end, "No, we won't accept going back to normal. You will have to express your respect in more concrete forms than calling us angels or good little soldiers."

So all about this, we socially have to realize that what is feminine is constantly under valued and the perpetuation of this has permitted our differentials to continue. I think if men are not — if men do not choose care as career options; teaching, nursing, it's not because women are better at care or that men are not good at care, it's because care asso-

ciated to so-called feminine values is not socially valued, and therefore, this feels for a lot of men like losing it would feel, like losing prestige, losing power, and of course, the salary doesn't help, but that's all related.

So I think all of this calls for history. Not history as [inaudible 0:14:16.8] from the past do not repeat mistakes. That's a common cliche. The complexity of societies, the novelty of the present crisis make this thought pointless. But that doesn't mean history is not important. I think if we are to use it, we do have to rethink the way we teach it and the lessons we take from it. And I've seen a lot of great interventions from historians, even some questions I hadn't brought about. I have to admit though that my time to read through all these has been quite limited, but it's fabulous the response from the historians. So I might give you one example that I think I might be talking a lot.

SC: Give me one second. I wanna see if I can pull a book off my bookshelf because I wanted to make comments about what you said. And I wanna see if I have that book through here. No, it's not in that one. My bookshelf is such a mess.

MB: These are the best bookshelves.

SC: I know. Okay, what I'm gonna do is I'm gonna say something then I will be — I'm not gonna stop the video, but when I edit it, I'll put the book covering just so you know.

That brings up so many important things. Just like my head is like percolating with connections right now. One thing that I, like, really wanted to draw on is this book about commemoration, and I'm gonna put up the cover right now. This book, like the cover is a statue of an angel with a soldier at its feet because that is such a typical kind of war commemorative moment. And what I love to what you had said was I love that you're drawing the parallels to these progress narratives. The ways that we are invoking these same narratives over and over and over again and we can say, "Oh, no, there are context specific and it just happens that these metaphors work and –"

MB: No, they need to be disrupted. They need to be disrupted.

SC: Yes. And how is something like an angel and how is something like war essentially gendered, right? Like, and when — and there are commemorative practices that bring those together just like this moment is bringing things together.

I also thought of — and I want to direct people to the video I did with Neil Orford, and this is not a critique of him or his project, but he said, "One of the things we can learn about the Spanish Flu is how many women worked as nurses." And often it was on their porches or in their church basements. And to me — and again, this is not a critique of Neil or the work, but to me, I was like, "No, women have always been doing this work." Women has always been doing care work. It's just that now you're calling them nurses and you were formalizing their work, but that care work was always, always, always there. And that was the thing that's so frustrating for me as a historian and a feminist to think about, like, these care work narratives are — like, how are we thinking about these care work narratives when every single woman with children right now is doing care work at a different rate probably as a male partner. I mean, those are broad strokes, but you know, because that is especially care work.

I saw this tweet that the CBC like reposted with these laughing emojis that said, "The hardest thing about a Mother's day from a man –" that said, "The hardest thing about creating a Mother's Day card during the pandemic is asking the mother where the craft supplies are." And I was like, "That's not funny."

MB: There's a concept used by feminist in France mostly. It's (French language 0:18:39.8). I don't know if there's a translation for this, but it's the mental charge and that's, you know —

SC: Yes, yes.

MB: — thinking about who's the one thinking about the lunch, thinking about taking the rendezvous for the dentist, for the doctor, thinking about the next birthday, thinking of organizing the space in the house so that the kids can — so this is often put on the shoulders of

women, and it's historically and socially constructed so that a lot of men will react in saying, "Well, you know, I would have done it. Just ask me." "But I shouldn't have to ask you," right?

SC: Yes. Just ask if you need help.

MB: Why? I'm not asking myself, right? I just do it. So that's, I don't know. The term probably exists in English and I don't know. So I'm sorry, but I know that [French language 0:19:43.4] and I could share a great comic about this made from Emma. She's a French feminist, and it's just great. And it shows kind of someone inviting over, friends, which it's not related to the present context, but in how she's trying to manage. Having them over, making their homeworks for the kids, cooking the — and she's taking care of all this. And then the — I don't want to say everything. So I'll leave it up to — look at that comic and that's just great. And I'm sure the book you wanted to share is also pretty great. So I don't know if you have it. If you have it in your —

SC: Well, the book is like commemoration and it's the cover that is really evocative that brings so many things. And I'm not a mother, but I did care work — I did health care work for a family member who's similar in my age. It was an elder care, and some people were like, "Well, you're home with them. Like, I'm sure that's fine." It's like there's so many things.

And even though I'm not doing it now, and I live by myself, I am thinking about what it would be like to be engaged in that care work now and I — well, I don't know if we want to talk about that. I'm just like, whoa! But it will be really interesting about how and in what ways that this will shift and change how we approach so many things because you're drawing on history, but you're not just talking about history teaching.

But I want to talk about history teaching now. **Do you think the ways that we are going to teach history are going to shift after this?** Do you think that their — I already feel like the — anyway. Do you think that this greater acknowledgment of care work — I don't even know [inaudible 0:21:50.5] these questions. Do you think about a greater per-

haps recognition of care work is going to shift to be brought into the classroom more? Or do you think, and I won't be laughing about this so much. Do you think that the ideas about like the angel and about like the mom that does it all will actually start being solidified in our teaching when we get back to the classroom?

MB: Hm. Will we as a — a good question for which I don't have an answer. Should we?

SC: No you didn't?

MB: Should we? Should we for sure, you know?

SC: Yeah.

MB: I think we should have already been teaching history differently. Some teachers are doing, you know, — I'm not saying that all teachers are the same. Far from that. A lot of teachers are doing some amazing work at teaching history in meaningful ways. But where I want to go with this, and I think that you've explained it quite well. The present situation shows us the complexity of societies, the complexity of the past in a lot of ways. This might mean we have to take a different look on the past. And I'm thinking, again, we talked about this a bit earlier, the progress narrative.

From my research and from my teaching, I know how much the progress narrative is attractive. It's comfortable. It's reassuring, and therefore, it's not a threat, right? For example, it's so reassuring to think that women have achieved the quality with men following multiple victories and all this has led to a wonderful society where both gender enjoy the same rights. In reality, we know that this is false on so many levels. But it's still somehow reassuring so much that when reminded of ongoing inequalities, a lot of students, student teachers, students from, like, different research, they will respond, "Okay, yeah, it's still unequal, but we've gone so far," right?

So I think we see this right now too. a lot of people are saying, "Focus on the positive. see forward. stop complaining. We're all in this together," right? In Quebec, and I keep repeating myself on this, I don't go out, I think. There's a good reason for it, but I don't go out a lot. But

from what I see in the streets around here, there's rainbows everywhere in the windows. I don't know if that's a trend that has been going on —

MB: — in Ontario. So it's linked with the word (French language 0:24:57.1). So, all will go well, right? And these images, sure, are reassuring and helpful in some ways, but we should be questioning what it means (French language 0:25:10.7). And that means we shouldn't stop highlighting historical power differentials. We have to look at this. We have to see how it can explain some aspect of this crisis. And surely, we should never forget to think about our own privilege and how these are salient when considering like the isolation jammed in a small apartment or surrounded by a villa, right? The isolation is not the same. So I'm drifting away. But if we're going back to history teaching, I think we have an opportunity to disrupt the progress narrative.

So this brings me to underlining again agency. So, how do we teach about a lot of events including events we typically associate with women? The right to vote. So the focus is the government that allowed women to vote instead on focusing on the struggle —

SC: They allowed.

MB: — of women — sorry?

SC: They allowed. Yeah.

MB: Yeah. So instead of focusing on the struggle of women for decades demanding to have that right, right? We lack what I call in French [French language 0:26:36.2]. So, and I struggle to translate that. Let's say a concern for duration. So we focus on a date, on a fixed event on the end while we should be focusing on the means and analyzing how the reality is much more complex. So we're still going back to that progress narrative and how it's important to disrupt that.

The present events can be the way to expose this to our students. We could be asking them, when historians will be looking back on these events in the future, what will they focus on? Who's at the center of this crisis? How are women care workers? What are their role in this? Should historians focus only on government decisions or on the scien-

tist who discovered a vaccine? I think I didn't pronounce that well again.

SC: No, you did exactly. Yeah, you did.

MB: Or the historians should be looking at this in a broader way? So just asking those questions to students can start an important discussion, so it can help afterwards leading discussion on forgotten narratives and help our students realize how much, for example, women's voice, but any marginalized group voice in history have been invisibilized by the curriculum.

And I was watching the video you sent me. So you have looked at these questions in how we can integrate, for example, women in lessons. I think you should share those two videos. Those were great. And one thing you are saying in your March 8 video is super important. I think that might wrap, help us wrap up this question so it can help us conclude. The important thing you're saying is if you want to have a gender, if you want to look at gender, if you want to have women even, you have to challenge the structure. Gender will only become visible if you challenge the curriculums, if you challenge the structures. So, yeah.

SC: Yeah. I have no problem when people [inaudible 0:29:04.2]. But like, you know, I have been looking in a lot of curriculum lately and I've seen a lot of questions, like, what was the changing status of women during this time? And you know what question I haven't seen? What was the changing status of men during this time?

SC: And you had said like, "I wonder how this will get brought up in the future." Like, historians will frame it. And if it's framed as like, and then women stepped up in where these guardian angels, women were really able to take center stage because of that. Like, there aren't —

MB: [inaudible 0:29:42.6]. It will become the same as every war narrative again because men couldn't do work, then women came in and replaced them till the war was over when they went back home. And when you look at the gender of history in the work that women historians have been doing, it's completely false. It's so much more com-

plex than that, but it's kind of the easy way out and, "See, I told you about women. We covered this already."

SC: And I think it's also worth really questioning for people, like how — if I'm teaching this, how is this familiar to me? Because if it's familiar to me, there is probably an element of this that could be challenged. And one of the videos I did early in May, I posted videos that I actually filmed in February that said, "What's your purpose for teaching history?" Because my purpose is transformation. I think that if you aren't teaching history to make a change, then I don't know what you're doing.

And so, if your purpose is to make change, then yes, you need to challenge that narrative about, well, women now got the right to vote. No, if your idea is that history will help us make change, then you need to be able to focus on the resistance, the resilience, the actions, the agency of people that made those actions happened. So I really appreciate you bringing that into this pandemic moment.

MB: I love the agency because that was the center of many pieces, right?

SC: There you go.

MB: But generally, it makes it really easy using agency to disrupt narratives. Because what I did in the thesis and I did again with teacher candidates, and every time it really brings a big reaction is to have different narratives from different textbooks. And there are like — sometimes there are only two or three sentences talking about women in a, like, 50-page range, right? But then you have those and you have them comparing the sentences.

And some of those textbooks actually give some agency to women, some ignore it. And you have students reflect on the different ways, the different formulation and what it means about history. And there's a great deal of debate going on, and they start talking, and they start realizing. And so, that's just I love doing that. And it's a very easy way. Very simple. It doesn't take a lot of time, and just this brings the question to mind, oh, I thought my textbook was always giving me the right

version. And that every textbook approved, it will all give the same version because it's all the same curriculum and it's all approved. But no, when we start looking at it, they all showed different agency. And what does that mean is a fun exercise too to have students you're working on.

SC: One exercise that I also do when I do the historic space work is to use multiple textbooks to show how similar the narratives are as well, right?

MB: Yeah, it is.

SC: And how we can get so, like, ingrained in a certain set of stories. And actually, I think that's very similar to the progress narrative that you talked about.

SC: So, like, big pictures can look very similar and there can be some different ways that certain histories are positioned, but why is there so much similarity? And why are the differences important at certain moments too, right?

MB: Yeah. I think it's — like, if you're looking at a metal?

SC: Yeah.

MB: — on a bigger scale, then yes, they all have quite the same narrative. And I think it's very subtle. When you want to look at agency, you have to look through [French language 0:34:04.5]. So subtleties?

SC: The subliminal?

MB: Yeah. Well, you know, who's the actor. Who —

SC: Subtle. The subtlety, yes.

MB: Who's positioned as doing the change? As being an actor or an actress of actual social historical change? And is it the government? Is it women? Is it the event in itself, right? I remember one of the excerpt I was using said, the pill, the concentrative pill have this huge effect on families. And I thought, where's the human in this? It's not the pill. It's actually women deciding and making decisions over their body. So we're even giving agency to an event and not to humans.

SC: The pills just like came in to the household and was like, no more children, everyone!

So this might be a good time to switch to the third question. So my work generally is on imagining a new 'we'. That we have to break down a lot of these silos that we create between just like even teacher and student as well as a variety of different multicultures, but like not necessarily ethnic or racial, but like the variety of different cultures; gendered cultures, culture to sexuality and that we have to really challenge that in order to transform our world to be one that is more equitable.

Do you see — what kind of potential do you see in this moment to imagine a new 'we'? And maybe that's in the imagination, maybe that's in the 'we', maybe you don't see potential in this moment or after. Do you have any thoughts on that?

MB: Sure. We've thought about the rainbow earlier, right?

SC: Yeah.

MB: Kind of having a rainbow overdose, right? I've criticized those rainbows. I think I'm having kind of an overdose, but I have to admit that at first, I love them. I love how my kids love them. They wanted to draw them. They still want to expose their arts in the windows. And I love how they sent a hope message. And surely, I hope everything will go well like the [French language 0:36:35.2]. But I sure hope that we just don't go back to the normal we had before.

So what I'm hoping is that we end up building something better or like you say, I'm kind of hoping we can imagine a new 'we'. There's still this cynical part of me that fears that we might go back to old habits that we know, that we know they work. And while I'm saying this, I realize how much my own privileges might have me going back easily to the way it was. But I don't want to. I think it means putting effort thinking and how much some of us, some of this, some of what we're going through makes us realize things in a very concrete way. Being at home with the kids reminds me of the essential and that this essential is quite the opposite of productivity as the neo-liberal university defines it.

But for a while at the beginning, I thought, well, how unuseful do I feel? The kids surely didn't feel that way. They were happy. They found this time — with their time, they still find this time with their parents

joyful being with us. That felt so important to them. And I'm saying all this and I know my situation is ideal considering what we're going through that family is not a safe place for a lot of kids right now. Isolation makes this even worse.

For example, I know some LGBTQ+ students for whom closing the university residence meant going back to a family that doesn't accept them. So, maybe I'm drifting away again, but all of this brings me back to vulnerabilities. And you had a great talk with Dr. Geoffrey Reaume on this?

SC: Yeah, Reaume feasibility studies.

MB: Yeah. So I didn't watch all of the talks, but this one, I saw. So vulnerabilities, that brings us back to how were differentials that have been exposed by this crisis. And so after this, we can go in a lot of ways. There's a threat though to make this even worse instead of making it better, so we have to be careful.

I will reach to — well, we'll talk about maybe another thing that's of interest of me as an example and I will talk about another power differential. So the French language right now, especially for minorities outside Quebec getting access to services, and French has been made even harder with the pandemic. So the present crisis has made it easy to say, for reasons of crisis, the service is only available in English.

Prime Minister Trudeau has had to give explanations of it few weeks ago on how some equipment, some essential equipment might come with no French on it. Like explanation, information. And of course, some of this can be explained because of the emergency. But I'm sure that, like, in other times in history, francophones in Canada will have to fight to make sure that we don't lose the rights. That this is only temporary. And even this, it means that in particularly vulnerable time, some people can't access information, fundamental information in their own language in a bilingual country.

So this is another example of how we're differentials. There are so many. We need to keep having protection for minorities, but even that, that's not enough. We need, as a society, to reflect on our contradic-

tions, on our privileges, on how our choices perpetuate power dynamics that are not good, and then we have to make changes.

I'm thinking of something else. I'm thinking of class. Not like class tune, but socioeconomic classes. In my university after the 'in-between period' following the first few days of the crisis, staff. And I'm not talking about professors here. Staff with kids or with conditions making it harder for them to do their job, for example, care for an elderly were told that they have to continue full-time distance working even with the particular conditions or take a leave and lose their salary. No in-between. And I thought, "Wow. How absurd it is that the people who right now need the most of these salaries are the one who have to make those tough choices. And it's a reflection that we need to have as a society, as a new we, this crisis has showed us more than ever that care is fundamental. It's the basis. And now we have to fight because teachers, nurses, essential workers, they deserve better.

And this is for me and I will conclude with this, I think we need — it means that we have to reflect on gender. On how much it's a historical concern. And also, we need to reveal those power dynamics in our society. And so maybe those are avenues to tackle the challenges ahead of us.

SC: Well, and I'm going to draw back to what you said earlier as a way to conclude too. I think that if we are going to have a better world, a more equitable world after this, that we have to use our agency. We have to remember we have agency.

SC: And I think of Mary Chaktsiris' video, one of the first ones in this series who said that I'm trying to remind my students that they are historical actors as well. And that things they — it's not acted upon. They can act in this moment too. And I'm really hoping that we can shift the narratives, and I think that this conversation has brought up so many important points for teachers and other educators to be able to think about. So thank you so much for taking time to have this wonderful conversation.

MB: Thank you.

SC: That was so great.

MB: Take care, everyone. Take care of your loved ones. And yourself.

SC: But also, take care of yourself.

MB: And take care of society and have agency, and let's have a better week.

SC: Yeah. Thank you so much and have a great rest of the day.

MB: Thank you.

SC: Okay, bye.

In conversation with The Tattooed Historian

Pandemic Pedagogy Conversation #22

John Heckman

John Heckman is also known as The Tattooed Historian. He's across many different social media platforms as a way to share and talk and connect with people across the digital world about history. You can connect with him on Twitter at @Inked-Historian.

We spoke May 9, 2020.

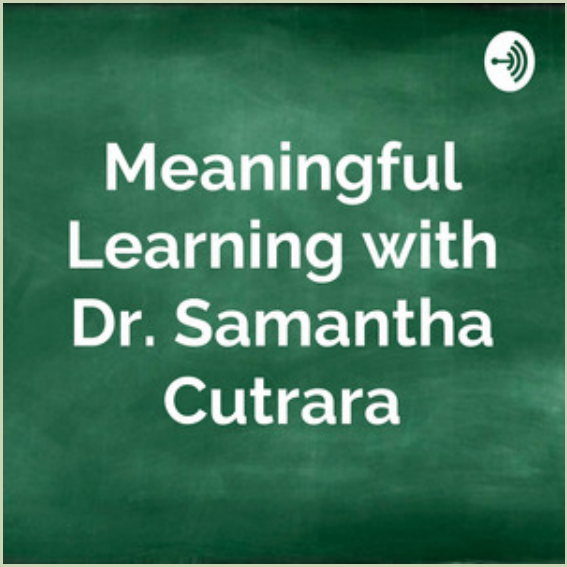
Video posted May 21, 2020.

QUICK LINKS

Video:

A YouTube element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: https://press-books.library.yorku.ca/pandemicpedagogy/?p=81

Audio:



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TRANSCRIPT

All the Pandemic Pedagogy conversations revolved around three questions:

- Question 1: Have you thought of history any different *because* of this moment?
- Question 2: Do you think we would teach history *after* this moment?
- Question 3: Do you think we can "imagine a new 'we'" during/after this moment?

Dr. Samantha Cutrara: Okay, let's get started. So today, we have a real treat. We are going to talk with John Heckman. John, thank you so much, "The Tattooed Historian", for coming to talk on the "Imagining a New 'We'" video series. It's so exciting to make this connection that we did on Twitter. So thank you so much.

John Heckman: Yes, thank you for having me, Samantha. It's awesome to see when two Twitter historians come together. And I think it helps.

SC: Mm-hmm, yes. I was especially drawn to a lot of the ideas that you're having because of this digital history conference that you started and that's going to take place in June, correct?

JH: Yes. 20th of June, it's a Saturday.

SC: Okay. And hopefully, we can talk about that a lot more in the questions, but let's — do you want to actually just introduce yourself before we dive into the questions?

JH: Sure. Well, as you said, Samantha, my name is John Heckman,

and I have a graduate degree in history. And I used to work for the US Army Corps of Engineer alongside them as a historian archivist. And I realize the cubicle life wasn't for me, so I broke out of that and started a brand.

I actually started the brand as I was working for the Corps of Engineers called The Tattoed Historian and it was a way for me to try to get my next job. And because LinkedIn wasn't the sexiest of things going on at the time, so I figured out let's make it a Facebook page. And I was showcasing my work and then it kind of got legs of its own. It took off. And I left my job to pursue this passion of mine full-time. And the brand has worked out pretty well for me. And basically, I built it up as a brand to help other historians basically get on the map and to bring history to the masses in a friction freeway. No pay for play or anything like that. So I wanted to be very open and welcoming.

SC: And I think that because of the COVID pandemic, a lot of people are thinking about a lot of stuff differently. I mean, that's a redundant statement, but thinking about historical narratives differently and even thinking about their interactions with them differently in their potential career or hobby kind of interactions with them, so it's specially great to connect now because I think that the work that you're doing is so much more relevant and salient for us to talk about today.

So let's just go to my first question. You know, I have the same questions for everyone. **Have your ideas about history changed at all during this time?** And if so, in what ways? And if not, because some people have been like, no because I'm already doing really critical work. If not, why not?

JH: My personal belief is my ideas of history and doing history haven't really changed that much. It's just been put on an accelerated pace.

For example, I was conducting live stream interviews two, three years ago and maybe doing two a month, now I'm doing four or five per week. I'm reaching out on new platforms, but I'm seeing a lot of new faces coming online and doing a lot of new things. So I would say,

for me personally, the crisis that we're going through now, the pandemic that we're going through now hasn't really changed my outlook on what I believe the history field can become or should become no matter what you do in the history field.

I think that I've actually been in training for this moment because I've been just so accustomed to being like this for the last couple years. It's like, "All right, finally, I get to showcase much up here." But it's just been an accelerated process now for me where I've built up something and now I'm just building it higher and higher as we go. But it's been very [inaudible 0:03:59.2] people who have never done this before and you get to watch them create right before your eyes in front of a lot of people.

So yeah, for me, it hasn't really changed a lot, but I know for others, it's been a drastic change.

SC: Well, could you comment on that about others? Like, how are others reacting to this moment that now that you're like, yes, please, I've been doing this. Like, come, let's talk about it? Have found others have their ideas shifting about history that you've interacted with?

JH: The interesting part, Samantha, is that in the early March this year, I was at a conference in Waterloo, Ontario, and I was a speaker at the conference. And I spoke about social media outreach for historical entities. And we talked about nonprofit reach, outrage museums, reenactors, how they can do outreach and everything else. And people were taking notes and jotting things down, and they were actually involved in the conversation. Little did they know that two or three weeks later, they might had to put some of that into work and make it something else.

But when I first started the brand, I would try to mentor or assist other organizations with their social media outreach and there's a brick wall pulled up many times, where like our people weren't on that platform, or our future isn't with Facebook, or future isn't with Instagram or whatever it may be. But now, I'm starting see some of the same entities coming around and having their own live stream presentations, and

making an Instagram page, and putting things up on Twitter for the first time. And I think that this is going to make the process move along even faster because people are going to get comfortable with it.

And I've seen a lot of entities coming up online who I never would have thought of [inaudible 0:05:46.5] in five years, but because of what we're going through now, it's really changed the pattern for how they're doing history. And I think that's a fascinating look at it, and I hope that the people I talked to in Waterloo put some of it — even more of it into pattern because they would ask me, "How can you do so many posts per week?" And I would tell them, "Well, I'm always working on this stuff and I'm always trying to create and think of new things. And it's been more about documenting a journey than creating content for me. So that makes a little bit easier."

It's been a really neat thing though to see more people coming online and doing some great things. And I watched a lot of them do it because I want to support them and help them through the whole thing because I know it can be an uncountable process for a few people.

SC: What conference was it?

JH: I was at a reenactor style conference. It was put on by 1812 reactors, and it was at the Waterloo Region Museum and it's called The History Mix 2020 Conference. And it was a CD thing on the sign that had history mix on it. So like, yeah, we're '90s people here.

SC: [inaudible 0:06:55.9]

JH: But we're back in the day here. But it was fascinating because I believe there are four speakers total. I was one of them and I was obviously — like, I usually am a wild card speaker. You don't know what he's going to come up with or what he's going to say or how he's going to present it. And the other speakers are pretty much traditional style speakers, but I was the one talking about how do we reach a new audience? And how do we provide accessibility to a new audience? And we went over everything from starting a podcast to getting on TikTok, which was fun. So [inaudible 0:07:32.6]

SC: I don't really understand TikTok. You don't need to explain it

to me. I feel like I'm just going to stick with my CDs and like, answer my [inaudible 0:07:41.0].

JH: Yeah, that's fine. I don't dance on air. Don't worry, [inaudible 0:07:45.5].

SC: Well, okay — no, I am not going to ask you to explain TikTok to me. I'll just ask an eight-year-old instead.

JH: Yeah. Maybe [inaudible 0:07:56.6]

SC: Yeah, maybe. It's interesting because, you know, I have been seeing a lot of things about like the future of museums and historical sites, and heritage preservation centers, and worried about fans, and worried about audience.

And then I talk with Joe McGill from The Slave Dwelling Project too. He's an American. And he was like, "This is an opportunity for us to shift the narratives." To shift the narratives of what we are talking about at historical sites in particular. Because if you want to keep reaching those audiences, you need to tell the stories that they already know. Like they're coming to a historical site because they already kind of know the stories. But if you want to keep these new audiences, you are going to need to challenge those stories to tell more complex stories. And it's been really exciting. That really shifted my ideas about what this moment could do.

And so it's kind of cool about what you're saying that you're already talking about this like that first week of March because I am sure that a lot of those people are thinking about or trying those things because you probably made it very accessible for them.

JH: Right. I've seen a couple of them pop up. They'll send me invites and I'll be like, I made a page or I put a YouTube channel up or something. And I know one of the reenactors who was there started a — I believe he started a Facebook page or YouTube page for all he's doing. He's playing the fife. So he's showing people what the music sounded like and how to play it and stuff like that and I just applaud him.

He is one of the people who was taking notes very intently during

the conversation and would talk to me afterwards. Though it's really awesome to see people who are experimenting with social media, and with blogging, and with creating videos and you slowly start to see the insecurity start to go away. You're nervous originally. How is this going to be judged? How is it going to look? Is the lighting right? Things like that. But when you start to realize that all you need to do is just put the stuff out there to an audience who's possibly already into it, into the subject you're talking about, you can grow a new audience out of that and create something really different.

And with my audience, it's been really awesome because a lot of them were under the age of 40, which is different for the history field in many ways because when you go to public talks, they're usually older. And also, I've drawn in people who are tattoo artists or who ride Harleys on the weekend and stuff like that because of the brand name. The name kind of became a welcoming thing of its own because I have been admittedly turned down for a job in the history field because I have tattoos below my elbows. So I was turned down for the position.

So I wanted to make a brand that was also welcoming from the name and it's been cool to see other people making either brands or just doing new things in the museum they work with or the archives they work for due to the fact of we're going through this time where we're all separated and we have to do outreach in some way to get our mission across.

SC: And I think a lot of big part of that is to — and I think about this other, the video I posted early in May about to understand your purpose in teaching history. Now, like, I do obviously recommend that people go and watch those videos, but it seems like it's just for K-12 teachers and to be open to learning from it even though if it doesn't seem like it fits you because what is your purpose of doing that engagement? Because those things like the analytics of social media, the numbers, the numbers, the views can seem really intimidating and it might seem like too much. But if you're like, my purpose for teaching history is — my purpose of playing the fife as a reenactor is to keep this particu-

lar practice alive. Then the numbers can come, but you're still fulfilling your purpose, and I think that that is a good way to think about how are you going to engage in some of these new practices.

So think about what is the purpose that you want to achieve here, not just to drive numbers. Although I'm not saying that that isn't — it isn't something people are interested in, but to share parts of history.

JH: Right. I've never been worried about numbers as far as this is how many followers I have. As long as I was doing what I felt was my story or my way of telling a story and doing it authentically, that's all I was worried about. And I was more worried about bringing value to an audience. Whether it was 200 people or 2,000 people, it didn't matter to me. And I think because my brand has always been authentically me, that that helped propel it. Because people knew when they met me on the street or when they saw me in an event, they knew it was the same person. They could always come up and I would say hello and all that stuff.

So I think if you're doing it authentically, you're being yourself, you're not trying to fake it till you make it and you're not worried about, "Oh, I need to get this May followers by Saturday or I'm going to lose sleep." That's when you're secure with what's going on. But yeah, having that purpose and finding out why do I want to do this or what's my goal in doing this is a very important thing to be thinking about. And I just remember what it was like not — and I still many times can't, I can't afford to go to many conferences when we have them because they priced me out. So I wanted to bring people into the history field or at least have that curious group of people be able to get that fulfillment.

So that's why I wanted to also make it friction-free. I didn't want to have it where you have to pay money to see people. We're going to do live events for free and you just show up. So we did events in pubs and other places like that and it would be free. We would have bartenders and food service and we would do a history night. And there are times where we cram people in there and it was just crazy because people

wanted it. And that's when I knew that we were onto something really and now it's all gone digital because of our current situation.

SC: Yeah, I really appreciate that thinking about the value, right? Like, as long as your content is valuable and you're being authentic to the type of histories that you want to do and aligned with your purpose of engaging in these histories, you're going to have quality content even if you're new to the media itself.

This makes me think of the second question. So I ask everyone, **do you think the way we teach history will change after this?** And we've already kind of talked about this in the last question. Like, I think the answer that you would probably say is yes. And of course, when I say teach history, I mean mobilize the past. I don't mean necessarily in traditional settings. Can you maybe talk about what you think that might look like from your perspective in particular thinking about the conference on June the 20th and why that is such an important thing for thinking of the ways that we're going to mobilize the past to teach history, to share history during and after those moment?

JH: I really think history is going to be mobilized more than it has been in generations because of the fact that we have so much ability to do free outreach now. I'm on 10 platforms and I don't pay for any of them. It's free outreach. So when you can do it within your budget, within your means, the sky is the limit. And I really think that a lot of historians, historical entities, nonprofits as we would have down here or wherever they may be are going to embrace more of this. And what I'm hoping is that they keep it up.

When we go back to work, so to speak, and everyone goes back to normalcy, whenever that may be, I don't want this to stop and I don't want it to people lose interest in it because there's going to be so many opportunities for outreach on here and it's going to level the playing field. And I've talked about that a lot, where I have my master's degree in history, but I've brought on people who have written 20, 30 books. And 10 years ago, that wouldn't have been possible because we wouldn't have had these kind of things.

So if we look at it as a source where we can really get our mission out there and cause a creativity boom, I think we can really, really embrace this more than ever in the history field. Whatever way you do history or conduct teaching, whatever fashion you do, there's always room for that on here. And it doesn't matter what platform it is, and it doesn't matter where you are, it's a universal thing luckily.

As far as the digital history conference is concerned, I was up at 12:30 in the morning. And as I usually am, I'm still up thinking about projects and ideas and my brain doesn't stop seemingly until about 1 o'clock in the morning. And I was thinking, I have a lot of friends who had some conferences that were cancelled and these people have done wonderful work with papers for their panels, and they're sitting on the sidelines now.

So I decided that I'd take an old idea I had, which was I wanted to have The Tattooed Historian brand have a conference. A one-time a year conference where it was kind of like a knockoff of a TED Talk basically where we'd have 20 minutes of someone giving a presentation. You'd allow 10 minutes of Q&A then we take a break and we do it again.

So I was going to have people come out from all walks of life who had done historical research on something. They get to pick their theme music when they walk out on stage, and we have fun time doing that. But obviously, we can't do that now, but I don't have to worry about logistics and cost because now we can do it digitally. So I came up with the idea, well, let's do all day Facebook live through Zoom and we would have six presenters. And these people would be people who have prepared for conferences no matter where they are and no matter what the subject matter as well, as long as it's history, and we would present history to the mass.

So we're doing it on the 28th of June between the hours of 10:00 and 5:00 Eastern. And it's going to be a great time because we have so many people from all walks of life who are coming on and talking about all kinds of stuff. We have people from England to the United

States. I'm trying to get a Canadian, so I need to get my Canadian [inaudible 0:19:08.3] with this one. But I'm working on that.

SC: Well, now that I know that you aren't Canadian, because we were saying that before we started recording, I thought you were a Canadian. Now that I know you're not Canadian, I will make sure my Canadian colleagues know about this.

JH: Awesome, awesome. Yeah, I'll be hopefully Canadian in a few years with my dual citizenship, but I'm looking forward to it because it's going to be a great time and it's going to be an awesome networking opportunity as well. Who knows? People could get a call to do a program somewhere else on some other platform. I'm really just the person who likes to open doors for people and connect people with people in the field because I know how hard it can be.

So it's going to be an interesting ride andI'm already getting people who are asking, "Are you going to do another one? Because I'm not available on the 20th of June. Can we do another one?" And I actually received in our message asking if I was going to do a multi-day one? So it's something that I think is going to resonate with a lot of people. And we're going to try it out. We're going to see how it goes. And for the six positions, are already filled up. And I thank all four of those people, and we're going to have a good time with it.

So, who knows? Sky is the limit with it. But I'm hoping that that also creates new opportunities for more people to do history in new ways. So we'll see. We'll see on the 20th of June.

SC: Well, I can't wait. I think it's going to be really exciting. And I always am thinking about how to mobilize the amazing work that historians do to a K-12 audience. And so I'll be thinking about that. That's where all my notes will be as part of my learning. And yeah, I can't wait to hear how it goes and develops. Because when you said, like, this is a moment that we could have a creative boom, my hope is that people will really see the opportunity to use these platforms to do something different. Not to do the same thing, but just this way.

And because I am focused on teaching and learning, and also in

higher ed, I'm thinking about this a lot with history professors. Like, "Oh, you're just planning on, like, lecturing to your screen for three hours because that's what you did in class. Like, how can we really use this to mobilize history in these creative ways? So I can't wait to watch the conference and to hear more from your perspective about how this works.

My last question is about imagining a new 'we'. So I have a book coming out in the summer called "Transforming the Canadian History Classroom: Imagining a New 'We'." And I was saying with another person, like, it says Canadian classroom, but I think Americans should read it too. It's really just about teaching national history in high schools and elementary schools.

Because I argue — the Imagining a New 'We'" is that I argue that there are so many silos. Like, how can we increase circles of inclusion in how we understand the nation, how we understand our past, and how we understand our teaching practices? Do you have any thoughts? The final question is thinking about this idea, **do you have any thoughts about whether or not we are going to imagine a new 'we' with history differently after this moment or during this moment?** Sometimes people talk about the creativity that can come from imagining. Do you think that is going to be a thing that happens after this moment?

JH: I think we're going to have, as I said earlier, like we're going to have a boom of creativity, I hope that causes us to have a different talk about the historical narrative. I hope that allows those new voices that I talked about to resonate louder than ever. I'm hoping that it creates more diversity, more inclusion, and more understanding of historical narrative. I don't know so much from an American perspective what it's going to be like after this is all over. I'm hoping that it's a boom and not a bubble. That's my main thing. I don't want the bubble to burst here, I want a boom where it lasts and it keeps going and we start to see more and more creativity, which may help us develop a new sense of 'we'.

I just think that this is a crossroads in my opinion of the arts and

humanities, in this case, the history field, more so than I've ever seen. And I'm really interested to see where this leads us because this defining moment in our lives is going to be that crossroads I think we need to go through as far as historians or history curious people, history lovers, history nerds, whatever you want to call us, I really think that the new 'we' may be we who work in the field are going to see it totally differently. See our potential totally differently because now we've shaken off the rust and this, the chains of insecurity and said, "Well, I was standing in front of the camera for five minutes and talk about whatever and then handed it off to this person and do it."

I really hope that it is a boom of that. Because if we keep creating and we keep documenting the journey, we're going to create a new narrative and it's going to be a more inclusive and a more enjoyable narrative than just doing things as we've done it for the last 20 years. I think if we go through this and we don't change or we revert back to the way we were doing things, we've lost the unique opportunity.

I know, for me personally, I'm going to keep pushing very hard to keep going and to allow this to be a boom and not a bubble. And I keep asking people to please, just document your journey. I understand a lot of people are making journals, which one day could be their autobiography of their time going through this era.

So I think that it's going to create a new way and different ways for different subsets of people, but I think if we bring that all together in a historical narrative in 10 or 20 years, we're going to see that this was a defying time for us in more ways than one.

SC: Yeah, thank you for that. I think there's a lot of really interesting elements. And one of the things I want to pull out is that when we're saying we, there's a lot of different wes. And so we can think of the 'we' of people teaching and learning history, historians, history educators, public historians and to think of how we can imagine ourselves differently. And I just really appreciate you pulling that out as particular 'we' we can imagine. So thank you.

JH: Oh. I think we need to focus on how we are as historians or

teachers or educators so we can get the narrative out in an even better way. Or it's almost like, you can't love someone unless you love yourself. It's like that with the history feel to me. You can't do it well if you don't feel well doing it. So I think that we have to look inward and create, and document and that will help create our own new 'we' in my opinion.

SC: Well, and also, to also bring in another like therapy thing that you have to work through who came before. Like the parents and grandparents before and those legacies, because I think in the field, we can really — this is the way we've always done it. And even when you're young and fresh in the field, you can be like, "Okay, well, I want to change it," but then it's very easy to get to those roots.

So to be able to think about no, like, what does it look like if we don't have these traditions that we are building on? That we don't have the, you know. A 75-year-old volunteer that like, "No, we literally have always done it this way. We've done it this way for 55 years, so let's just keep doing it this way." Like, there are more spaces to interact in that creativity separate from those relationships. And I was talking to a teacher about that. That sometimes stockrooms can be a little toxic. And so if you can do some creative work without the naysayers, then there's a lot of potential to transform what happens whenever we get back whatever that looks like. Yeah.

JH: Mm-hmm. Yes always appears better than no.

SC: Great.

JH: So I've received emails from people who I never knew. And they asked, "Would you like to collaborate on this?" And I say, "Yes, let's see what happens. Let's try it." What's the worst that could happen? We get back to the same place we were.

JH: You know, there's no laws. There's just an experimentation process. So a lot of people have come on to my brand who I didn't know ahead of time, and I've said, "Hey, let's try it. Let's give it a shot and see what happens." And if it works, it works. That's fine.

And I think we need to have like exactly like you say. We got to get

rid of that boardroom mentality of, you know, where it's little intimidating or little stuffy. For me personally, I always like to have discussions where like we're sitting in a coffee shop or a pub and we're just hanging out and we're just talking about history. Because usually when we're in a coffee shop or pub, we're talking history anyway if we're around these people, so why not film it and just have a good time with it.

So I think that we're going to see that in the future. I really hope we do. And I'm looking forward to starting in a full-term at western in London, Ontario and bringing this all to Ontario with me and seeing how it goes. There's a lot of places I want to go to in Ontario.

SC: Well, I'll tell you, Ontario won't know what hit them with these ideas, but I think it will be a really exciting thing for Ontario to have you, speaking from an Ontarian, but I'm also excited to hear about the potentials that you see and the possibilities in these sites that I know a lot more than a lot of the sites that you talk about in the United States. And thank you for saying yes to me. Thanks for participating in this. This was really great and it provides so many different dimensions than the other conversations that we've had.

And one of the things I love about all of these conversations, and I've done about 20 now since the end of March, is how they build and develop on each other and I think that this fits so well. So thank you so much. Can you say the time and date of the digital conference again?

JH: Yes. It'll be on the 20th of June, which is a Saturday. It will be on my Facebook page. Facebook.com/thetattooedhistorian. It will be right on the main page. We're going to live stream all day long. We're going to start at 10 a.m. Eastern. Our final presentation is at 4:00, so we should be done around 4:35 o'clock that Saturday.

And we'll, hopefully, have six presenters. And as I said, you can go to my Facebook page and check it out and watch along.

SC: And all of the links that you talked about will be below this video so people can check it out right from there. So thank you so much, John. This was really great.

JH: Thank you so much. It's been awesome. Really appreciate it.

SC: And, yeah, I can't wait to see you in Ontario.

JH: I need some Tim Hortons right now.

SC: Well, I mean, I think we all need a little bit of that, yeah.

JH: Yeah, I think everyone deserves it whole year round . Yes, yes. Thank you so much.

SC: Okay, thank you so much. Bye.

JH: Bye now.

In conversation with Dr. Sean Kheraj

Pandemic Pedagogy Conversation #23

Dr. Sean Kheraj

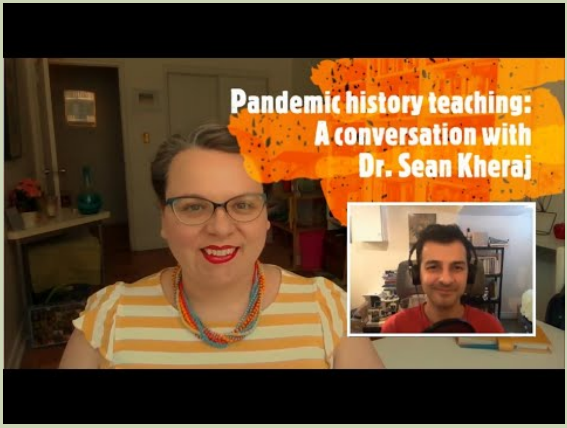
Dr. Sean Kheraj is a Canadian historian in the Department of History at York University. He also teach environmental history and digital history. You can connect with him on Twitter at @seankheraj.

We spoke May 14, 2020.

Video posted May 26, 2020.

QUICK LINKS

Video:



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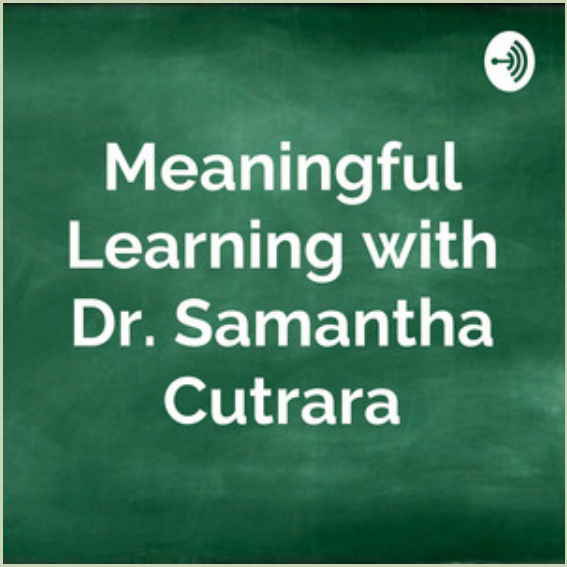

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TRANSCRIPT

All the Pandemic Pedagogy conversations revolved around three questions:

- Question 1: Have you thought of history any different *because* of this moment?
- Question 2: Do you think we would teach history *after* this moment?
- Question 3: Do you think we can "imagine a new 'we'" during/after this moment?

Dr. Samantha Cutrara: Hey, Sean. Thank you so much for agreeing to talk with me. It seemed like forever though that we connected about this and it's so great that we're able to connect now. Thank you so much. I know how busy you are.

Sean Kheraj: Thanks for the invitation to speak to your audience, Samantha. It's a real pleasure. And just to introduce myself to everyone, my name Sean Kheraj, and I'm a Canadian historian in the Department of History at York University. I also teach environmental history and I teach digital history.

SC: Yeah, I was saying in my little introduction before we came together that a lot of people are talking more about the environment and wanting to connect with nature, but also being consumed by digital technologies in ways that we weren't anticipating. So I'm looking forward to you coming to this conversation as a historian and educator of both of those fields.

SK: Yeah, me too. Looking forward to getting to think a little bit about what this moment is doing to history and teaching.

SC: I am too. I think about that all the time. It will be really interesting how — really interesting what happens after this. And that's why I find these conversations so great because they're a little bit of a time capsule. So let's get right into it.

The first question is **have you thought about history any difference because of this moment?** And as I've said in other interviews, my ideas about history have shaped — have been shaped by my own perspectives as being a critical educator, but at this moment I've been really re-evaluating the things I hold dear in history. It hasn't changed at all for you.

SK: Yes. I mean, I think at a kind of base level, my thinking about the relevance of history as a discipline for addressing contemporary crisis or issues is still the same as it was before the COVID-19 pandemic, but where it's changed is how we can apply it in the moment during a pretty unprecedented crisis.

So for me, as an academic, I've never lived through a global crisis like that. And the closest moment like this would have been maybe the great recession about a decade ago or the start of it, but that wasn't quite as singular a moment. It was a long and prolonged experience that only in retrospect I think we can look back on and identify as a distinct period of time. Whereas this is really the first that I've lived through probably in my lifetime outside of September 11th in fall of the Berlin Wall I guess when I was a kid, where there is a kind of global crisis.

And so I still think I have the confidence that the context that history education provides to thinking about crises and problems is still relevant. It's just I'm a little bit shaky on how you deploy that in a moment like this. So I think teaching about past pandemics, teaching about past experience of national crises can be useful and can be instructive. And in my own work as an administrator at the university, it's been somewhat useful. Maybe I can give a little example of this.

SC: Sure. Of course.

SK: So I also work as an associate dean for academic programs at York in the Faculty of Liberal Arts & Professional Studies, and so I'm involved in some of the contingency planning and emergency planning around COVID-19 for a faculty. And in March, we had been having conversations about how this might affect the university, how this might affect our enrolments, how this might affect our classes. And one of the issues that I had brought up early on was the fear that students and their parents will have about returning to classroom spaces. And the case that I relied upon was the 1918 pandemic, because I knew as a Canadian historian, when I teach the First World War and the pandemic, one of the points that emerges is how long it took people to feel comfortable being in public spaces again after the pandemic? And it was well into the 1920s, there were still people who continued to wear masks in public years after the Spanish influenza pandemic and there were still people who had these kind of lingering psychological scars of that just as survivors of the Great Depression, had continued psychological scars that led them to hoard canned goods in their basement and stuff like that.

And so we are now starting to confront that as we look toward the future and ask when we return to the classroom, how comfortable are students going to be sitting in a 500-student lecture? I know for myself when I think about getting on the subway here in Toronto or I think about going to a movie theater, I think about going to a restaurant, definitely right now, May 2020, I don't feel comfortable with that at all and I don't know what month I'll feel comfortable with that.

SC: Yeah. I mean, I know you didn't put in your bio that you're an associate dean, but of course, I knew that. So I'm glad that you —

SK: My secret job.

SC: Yeah, it's your secret job, but I'm glad that you brought that up because, I mean, that was one of the things I too was thinking of when I was thinking of how — like, about history as a discipline after this because I'm also working in administration and I'm like, "Well,

what's going to happen to histories and humanities when there was already this idea that they were like navel-gazing.

Like at this moment, are people going to think of them more as like these leisure non-career ready topics? Or are people going to recognize the importance of having these historical perspectives, having the critical thinking, having the skills to be able to tie together these different ideas? And that's one of the reasons why I was like, what does history look like during this moment?"

SK: Yeah. Well, I mean on my hopeful side, I think that it may be that a traditional liberal arts, humanities, or social science education might be more relevant than ever in this moment. Because I think before this, it was clear from surveys of students who are in traditional liberal arts programs that there's a versatility to that education that students get in terms of career outcome.

So we know for history graduates, when they graduate, there isn't a single career path that they follow. Many go into teaching, but many go into business management, many go into journalism, many go into law and that's kind of been the story about liberal arts education for a long time is the versatility. A kind of training in critical thinking that educates rather than trains for a particular job outcome. And I do wonder, and this is 100% speculation, right? But as we start to look into the future past this moment of economic uncertainty, it may not be clear that programs that are more singularly focused on career outcomes may be the places where students are going. It may be programs that offer students more adaptability because of how unpredictable job markets might be when they come out.

So my hopeful side as a historian is that history as a traditional liberal arts discipline may be a place that a lot of students end up going in this time of uncertainty.

SC: Well, it's interesting that you say that, and of course, I agree with you. And because I've been seeing teachers on Twitter, for example, talk about how their students are asking them these questions that seem like a 'wild goose chase', but are not. They are questions that

young people have about the world and that this moment has facilitated this opportunity for them to ask those questions and engage in different ways because there isn't this kind of monolithic curriculum dictating how those interactions are supposed to go. And so I do hope that this demonstrates the importance of liberal arts and history education.

Do you think the teaching of history will change after this moment?

SK: Yeah, I think there's a possibility. So in addition to the possibility that we might see some degree of an increase of interest in history as a discipline because it can maybe start to answer some questions that students have about the current moment of crisis and uncertainty. I think the modes of the delivery of teaching may have some changes. So right now we are very rapidly turning into an online university.

I think I tweeted at some point, at the end of the winter term, that we were the largest online arts faculty in the country, which is a bit of a joke because like we're the largest arts faculty in the country so we're now offering online courses. So largest online arts faculty.

SC: Congratulations.

SK: Yes, yes. So, I don't want people to mistake the moment right now with online teaching as being a strategy to move towards E-learning. Like online teaching right now at universities is a response to a public health emergency for the health and safety of students, staff, and faculty. But it is introducing history educators to a range of tools for teaching that have been available, but that we haven't really used all that much or all that well.

One of my own I guess frustrations or disappointments is that I think that we were initially unprepared for this moment. That at least in the academy among humanities and social science disciplines, skepticism about the use of technology in teaching in a kind of technophobia is priced as a kind of virtue signal among academic communities. And one of the consequences of that has been a deficit in our skills in using technology for teaching. And so we very quickly had to learn how to

use video conferencing software like Zoom, a tool that has existed for five years, and that at our university, we had access to three years ago.

And so we had a long period of time where we could have been learning this tool and we didn't. And I think in terms of kind of retrospect on this moment, it's worth asking why that was. And I do think that an academic culture that issues technology is part of the reason that we were left unprepared. And I think we see this at multiple levels all the way from K to post-secondary that skepticism and panic about technology left us unprepared for the moment when we needed it the most.

The other consequence for this is that it's kind of harm to the potential market for the development of better technology, so we're unsatisfied with some of the teaching technologies that are available to us. Skype is really bad and the audio isn't great, but if educators kept turning their backs towards technology expressing more fear about the effects of screentime, then why would there ever be a market to develop better technologies? And so there's this kind of two-fold problem that we entered into the crisis with one, was a deficit of skills among educators that we've had very rapidly try to close as we're now in emergency, and two is a kind of deficit of tools available because there wasn't a sufficient market to support those tools in part because they were being rejected by educators.

This is a blanket statement that's not fair to educators who did embrace those tools, but it is pretty clear that when we switched to online teaching, we had to create websites, more than 300 websites for our courses because they had absolutely no learning management system set up for them before we went into the crisis, which is astonishing. It's a huge effort that our E-services office had to engage with, but had we been engaging with learning technologies before the crisis? We would have been better prepared.

So I'm a little bit hopeful that afterward, I don't think that we're talking about moving to 100% E-learning afterward, but I'm hoping that we'll maybe be able to see some of the benefits of this. One example

at the university level is video office hours. Our university is a commuter campus where many students have to commute more than an hour. Some of them commute for two hours to get to campus.

So if the only option was to meet your professor face-to-face during a one-hour block during the week and you don't have classes and you don't need to be on campus that day, you are not going to get onto a Go Bus and travel to York University and meet face-to-face with your professor. You might pick up the phone and call them at their office, which I suppose you could have done before, but now we're doing video office hours that don't require the student or the professor to have to do that long commute. Maybe they'll have a little bit more FaceTime. It might be over something like Zoom or FaceTime I guess, but I think I would take more face-to-face hours virtually over fewer face-to-face hours in person with students. So these are some of the things that could potentially change as we go forward.

Another might be the type of resources that we use as history educators. So we're trying to find more E-books, more open educational resources to be able to use in online courses during the present crisis. Many of those resources are great resources to use at any time. So more colleagues are making use of scan documents that are available in digital archives, on archive.org, the world's largest digital archive. And maybe and I'm hopeful that we're maybe discovering that there's actually a lot more out there than we imagine.

So one of the concerns that we have right now is access to our physical collections of our library, but the digital collection of our library and the digital collection of the Internet's library is thousands of times larger than our physical collection. And so if you're just looking at it by volume of books, there's a larger digital library available to our students than there is a physical library, but we're currently concerned about access to the physical library. And I'm hoping we're starting to take a peek into what's actually out there in the digital archive, in the digital library that we can use in our teaching.

SC: Well, there's a few follow-up points I want to make to that,

but I want to pick up on what you said about the digital office hours in particular because I think that for many educators and students, that this has brought about this equalization of humanity in a way that's like, "Okay, fine, let's just see in each other's like rooms and just have these conversations and like recognize that we're all anxious and we're all figuring this out." Because I think that like destigmatization of like professor and student or teacher and student can allow for greater humanity to have more learning back and forth.

And so when you said that, we haven't talked about that a lot on this series, but I think that brings up a really important point about how we are seeing that we have to connect with our students in different ways and that we can see the ways our students appreciate them or need that or what other things that they need. So thanks for bringing that up.

SK: Yeah, I think that I've heard sort of anecdotally from some colleagues that this is one of the side benefits that they're seeing to this. That even though you're using a digital medium to interact with students that it ends up feeling more personal. I know for myself when I first did an online lecture, a video lecture when I teach the Canadian history survey course, there's like 120, 130 students in this class and it's in a lecture theatre most of the students I don't have like a close face-to-face interaction with in that course.

When I started doing online sessions for that class, even just through a chat room, I was engaging with many more students than when I was speaking to the group in person in the classroom. And then on Zoom, we've had colleagues doing these big grid meetings on Zoom and they're even closer to their students face-to-face on Zoom than they were with the student —

SK: — who sits in the back of the lecture theatre. So there is some hope there. And then in terms of kind of demystifying the professor, humanizing the relationship between the professor and the student through these kind of virtual engagements I think is one potential plus or one potential benefit that we get out of this. And again, like I recog-

nize that we're losing a lot right now. The face-to-face experience is hugely valuable, and I don't think there are many educators who would say that we want to get rid of that altogether. But I do like to remember that there are some benefits that were getting from this transition to online learning that might be worth holding on to.

SC: Well, and two, that we can make an inventory of things that we want to see happen when we get back to our classrooms and an inventory of things that we want to change because we have been forced to these new methods and these new media, and so we can now say, "These are the things I wanted to keep."

And before we move on to the last question though, I want to ask you is because you have done a digital history work, you already were aware of a lot of digital resources and a lot of digital technologies. Anecdotally, is it frustrating that people are discovering some of these for the first time when you were like, yes, digital archives have been a thing for a long time, so have digital humanities?

SK: I mean, I think this is great. Like, I'm excited that more history teachers are discovering some of these resources and will be using these resources now. They've been sitting out there for years and they are astonishing. Like, I think — I sometimes like to think like what do I have access to now as a history educator, that if I could travel back in time 15 years and show to myself what's now, it would blow my mind?

So again, in my Canadian history course, a colleague here on College at Western, Tom Peace and I put together an online textbook in Canadian history, and we used almost entirely scanned primary source documents that are available in archive.org. So it's 24 chapters. Almost all of them are archived data or documents. All of those have been there for over a decade for some of them for free for students to download and use for assignments. And it's the kind of stuff that we used to send students to I guess look up on microfilm or to maybe get a physical copy of a reprint in the library that they can access from home. And so there is this kind of like magic to be accessing these sources that if I had access to these 15 years ago, I wouldn't even know what to say,

right? I wouldn't believe you that the stuff is available. So it's a little bit more exciting to see more history educators using this because I think that there will be a lot of stuff that will stick.

I don't think that the majority of the courses will continue to be taught online, though maybe more will. But I think certainly in terms of access to digitized primary sources, why would you stop using that after you started?

SC: You know, also like the people involved with this community are very friendly open people too, right? Like there's this idea about you start engaging in a new community like digital humanities, community — it might seem intimidating, but from my experience, like the people that have been working on these different websites, the OER that you and Tom created, like these are people that are doing this stuff because of a desire for collaboration and community and access, and that to draw on those expertise as well as the resources and technology. So I'll put a link to that textbook below for people who are interested, as well as any other archives that you want to share with people.

So I'm going to segue to my last question, which is about imagining a new 'we'. So when I developed the education and exhibition program at the Archives of Ontario and I started working more with archival material and bringing those to Ontario teachers, one of the things I talked about over and over and over again is that when we were using primary sources, you can narrate a history that is way more diverse than a secondary source often can be because it can show you that they were there or that we were there and that we can recognize a much more fulsome understanding of history. Which is why I think that we should move towards "Imagining a New 'we'", which is the name of the video series and my book in how we teach and learn Canadian history. **Do you have any ideas after this moment about how we could imagine a new 'we' differently during and after this moment?** Do a lot of people have said like the 'we' needs to be challenged, which it certainly does, but also the possibilities for imagining, which is really exciting? Any thoughts about that?

SK: Yeah. So I think I fall into the camp of the deconstructing the 'we', which, you know —

SC: Let's do it!

SK: — doesn't make me unique I suppose. But from my own research field in environmental history, this is an issue that we are confronting when we teach about the Anthropocene. So the idea that we're living in a new geological or even biosphere epoch that's predominantly influenced by people.

And so environmental historians are trying, I think, to deconstruct what we mean by the Anthropocene. Who are the humans who are responsible for the changes? And once we start to think about that, we can see the ways in which social class, race, ethnicity, et cetera start to break down what we mean by 'we' and the Anthropocene. So if we're thinking about historical changes that humans have brought to the earth over time that have changed it in such a way that we can now describe the planet as being influenced profoundly by human activity, who are the humans? Who were the humans?

So if we take global warming as an example, we know that the contribution of CO2 gases in the last century into the atmosphere of the earth wasn't equivalently distributed across the planet, but that Western industrialized countries are the predominant emitters of CO2s. And that is one of the ways we kind of break this down.

If you think about it in the current context of COVID-19 pandemic, I think you can start to ask similar questions around that question of who is 'we'? And you could use — I guess as a history educator, if you're reflecting on this moment later, you might take some of those signs that you maybe see neighborhoods that say, "We're all in this together," and then kind of take a part that 'we', well who's the 'we' that's in this, right?

So we know that exposure to the disease isn't equivalent among social classes in Canadian society as an example. We're seeing data in the United States that the infections in mortality is affecting African-American communities at a disproportionate rate. And we can start to

think about who are the people who actually work on the front line? So we're all in this together, but the people who work at the grocery store in my neighborhood are far more in this than I am as they're taking many more risks than I do.

And so I think that kind of deconstructing the 'we' is a useful pedagogical exercise. One that historians pre and post-COVID can use to think about how history proceeds, which is at a level that is not necessarily individualized, but specific. So I think the strengths of history is the discipline and the skills it provides are about thinking about contingency and context.

And so it's difficult — as a historian, I try to dissuade my students from making any broad statements because a broad statement could be dismantled very easily. And it's also not true to the experiences of an individual, of a lived experience. And so I try to encourage my students to reflect upon their own lives and how complicated they understand — how much they understand the complexities of their own lives.

And so one of the exercises we do is ask them to say whether or not they're a good person or a bad person, right? And I don't think anybody — first of all, I think very few people would describe themselves as a bad person. But I don't think anybody would say, "I've never done a bad thing." And so if we can extrapolate from what we understand about our own lives and how complicated they are and what leads us to make bad decisions, maybe immoral decisions, and what leads us to make good decisions and moral decisions? If we can extrapolate that to be thinking about people in the past, then I think that leads to more complex thinking, right? So why would we be less generous to someone who lived in the 1930s and had to make a range of decisions about policy related to unemployment insurance or something like that then we would see the way we understand our own lives and the complexity about the decisions that we make?

And so I think that's important to really think about that 'we'. Who are all the people within that 'we'? And to remember that just as people

in the present try to make the best decisions for themselves, their families and their communities, people in the past did this as well. And there are very few people in the past, I think, that we can find who made a decision for the purposes of doing something harmful or that they thought was a decision that was stupid. That most decisions that people make in the past, they make because they think it's the best decision to make.

SC: So thank you for that. I really appreciate you bringing up the the idea of complexities and to get students to reflect on their own complexities, because one of the things I talk about in the series is we have to strive for more meaningful learning, which is a combination of connection, complexity, and care. And often, like, teachers can do connection really well. Teachers normally say that they care for their students, but the complexity piece is so important for challenging our ideas about society, ideas about individuality or ideas about the structures that guide our lives and I think that foregrounding that complexity.

And I think the way that you're doing it is in a way that is really like a table for an average teacher and an average student to be able to think through, to be able to foreground that complexity so that we are thinking — it's dangerous to say something about we in this answer because [inaudible 0:29:14.3*you just want to play in circles.]

SK: Sure.

SC: — that we can really foreground what that complexity looks like in deconstructing what a 'we' looks like right now and how it can be really problematic for a lot of different reasons. And the ways that it will be complex and difficult and make us really challenge a lot of things that we know about ourselves and the structures around us that we can often take for granted to build a better world. And so, thank you for that. That was really great. It was a really wonderful weekend.

SK: Yeah, I think the last question is really good too though, because I think inviting people to imagine new wes kind of invites them to try to be empathetic and thinking about other people and where

they fit within communities. And so when we think about the past, I think that kind of empathy is really important for interpreting the past.

And I just did an interview with a historian who published a book about American and Inuit interactions in the 19th century, and the book is largely driven about empathetic thinking both on the part of the scholar who wrote the book, who did everything in her capacity to try to understand the actions of these people in the past on the terms that those people would have come to those decisions. And at the same time, one of the problems she identifies is that these two groups of Americans and Inuit in the 19th century, especially for the American whalers that she looks at didn't exercise empathy.

And so when they went into Arctic environments, they ask questions like how could anybody live here? And this can't be a home because you would die, so why would you ever live here? Without ever thinking — without ever trying to think through the eyes of the Inuit who live in those environments, who have lived there for generations and for whom these are homes.

And so I think reimagining what a 'we' is reimagining a community might [inaudible 0:31:17*have gendered] that kind of empathetic thinking in our historical thinking.

SC: Well, and also for me, that empathy can lead to action. And I think that's really important. Dr. Funke Aladejebi was saying that like hope or imagination or that action is nothing. And Dr. Kristina Llewellyn was saying in our conversation about oral histories that the more that you're listening and the more you have empathy towards different stories, it can lay the foundation for your political commitments and hopefully your activism.

So anyway, that's a great way to end. Thank you so much.

SK: Thank you, Samantha.

SC: This was really great. And all the links that you talked about will be below. And I was saying to a few people, like it'll be really interesting to follow up once we get back to something normal, whenever

that will be, to see how and in what ways these ideas have manifested or not. So anyway, stay tuned.

SK: Yeah. I will.

SC: Okay, thanks. Bye.

SK: Thanks, Samantha.

In conversation with Edmund Sosu

Pandemic Pedagogy Conversation #24

Edmund Sosu

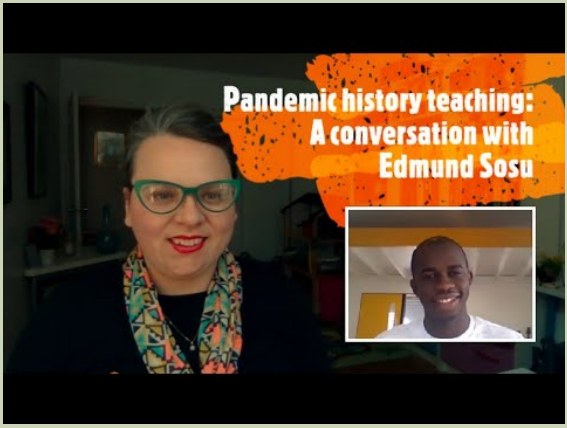
Edmund Sosu is a high school teacher and he is also into the Pedagogian curriculum and currently a Ph.D. student at the University of Newcastle looking into the systemic and ideological issues that are shaping history gibralters in this current world. You can connect with him on Twitter at @sedmund235.

We spoke May 9, 2020.

Video posted May 27, 2020.

QUICK LINKS

Video:



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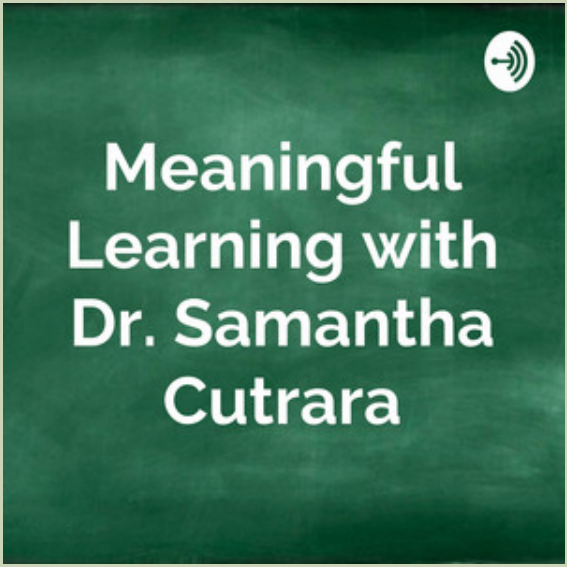
Audio:



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TRANSCRIPT

All the Pandemic Pedagogy conversations revolved around three questions:

- Question 1: Have you thought of history any different *because* of this moment?
- Question 2: Do you think we would teach history *after* this moment?
- Question 3: Do you think we can "imagine a new 'we'" during/after this moment?

Dr. Samantha Cutrara: Edmund, thank you so much for agreeing to speak with me for this series. Umm, you are the first person that I am speaking to from Australia so I am very excited to have a perspective from a totally different part of the world. Do you want to introduce yourself before we get started?

Edmund Sosu: Yeah. You just mentioned my name. I am a high school teacher and I am also into Pedagogian curriculum and currently a PhD student at the University of Newcastle looking into the systemic and ideological issues that are shaping history gibralters in this current world. So my focus has always been what is the purpose that drives teachers' classroom and the very context where they find themselves and how they are able to maneuver themselves faced with those complexities and challenges and what best they do in those circumstances and what informed those decisions they are doing in the classroom.

SC: Yeah that's such important research. I did a couple of videos on people's purposes but I think what you are saying about like what

informs the decisions especially when they get to moments—teachers get to moments where they are…you know, that it feels a little uncomfortable to them, so and hopefully we can pick up some of that research in our questions today. Let's just start with our first question, **have you thought of—like when this happened–when COVID happened, it made me think about history differently.** How we think about it? What we define is history? Has this changed for you at all? Have thought of history any different because of this moment? And it's–okay if you haven't, some people were like "I am too busy." [laughs 00:02:04] to think of that but have you thought of history any different because of this moment?

ES: Uhh, one of the things that I've—that's so fascinating is the issue is, 'is this real at all? Is this really happening or what kind of thing is happening because things have always been in a smooth way?' Any human problem that has put a major hurt on the economy. For instance we could talk about, what was the name? The…the Wall street bombing and that was way back 200, is a time 9/11 issues…is a time of 9/11 issue and you find yourself in 2020 looking at what is happening you ask yourself, "Is this really happening?" And especially when by you are like, you hear different narratives, a whole lot of conspiracy happening and you ask yourself am I part of history? Am I part of what is going to happen and what kind of narrative am I going to project to come to the next generation of my children, come to my grandchildren especially when the whole lot of conspiracy theory is going on the co-concept of blame theory, who are we blaming for this COVID?

And countries are coming out saying that you don't have to attach my name—the whole concept of—Excuse me if I could mention a country here like Trump coming in here and saying that 'the Chinese virus' and [laughs 00:03:41]. The Chinese are also saying that you don't have to attach Chinese to the virus. So you've heard that [inaudible 00:03:48] are people one way or the other are very careful in terms of pointing hands to the origin of the virus because they know the consequence and how long it could go in terms of its impact and its transmit-

ting to a whole new generation who have a different perspective about the whole origin of this virus and in my case, I'm kind of wondering what kind of story am I going to talk? Am I going to be objective or am I going to say it's from my perspective in terms of my children, my grandchildren because we least expect some of these things to come in [inaudible 00:04:26].

The baseline is am I going to be objective? Am I going to point hands at China? Or am I going to point hands saying that the origin of the virus just came from Wuhan but the Chinese have nothing to do with it or am I going to point it from the conspiracy [inaudible 00:04:46] I find myself in. In terms of history, how to pass on this information as it lingers in my memory and people are also having different thought about it. So that's the fascinating aspect of it.

SC: Do you think though that...um, that we can never be objective? Do you think we should be objective?

ES: To an extent we have to be objective about—objectivity we can never have an absolute 100% objectivity but there is a bit of subjectivity in what we do and one or the other, bringing my own interpretation and this interpretation may be informed by my own experiences, and experiences differ and we see things in the world from a personal perspective or personal framework and so in as much that we want to achieve these objectivity, or in as much as we want to bring in our subjective experience, we just have to make sure that there is a level of objectivity in the kind of narratives we put out there because currently the internet is another means whereby fire or—it's another means whereby information is spread like fire and it can archive for a very long time and a whole new generation can chance upon it and those are the libraries, historians or public records so on and so forth. We use this information in terms of reconstructing the past. So the likes of me the individual in this time that a—whatever thing that I'm doing although my experiences, my subjective experiences will shape what are you trying to do? I should try as much as possible to be a bit of objective in

what kind of narrative and everything that I do should be proven by fact.

But the problem here is any comment everybody is trying to put up as is based on a particular documentary. They use a particular evidence to support their conspiracy theory and so are—it leaves the individual better than going forward if you want to make any claim or you want to make any argument, you should be so much objective proven by facts but as what is fact is also a different thing altogether because people can put bits and pieces together and it makes a whole lot of false narratives and especially in an era whereby we have picture—audio of our pictures whereby the narrator or the person making the documentary can tune in the documentary to a particular way based on a particular question and the background audio he/she is worth putting up to explain a particular incident going on. So it's a challenge but we'll try our best to mitigate it.

SC: Yeah, it's an interesting perspective because I don't think that we are ever going to be objective or should strive for objectivity but what I'm hearing from you is like where am—like I am connecting a couple different things and I am thinking that, what you are really saying is like we really need to recognize our politics and the certain things that we are doing because we can say "Oh the virus came from China," in a way that is just a fact and we can say in a way that's like loaded with politics and judgment. And I think it's kind of interesting to think about the ways that we need to be aware of like the politics and what we are thinking about.

SC: Yeah. So this leads me to my second question about, **do you think the ways that we are going to teach history will shift and change after this moment?**

ES: Obviously, it is going to shift. And some teachers are shifting the way they look at things. You know the whole idea about teaching the whole historical thinking concepts has been lingering on for a couple of years now and this much more going beyond that in terms of looking up dedication of the soul, mind and heart and kind of teaching

to transform the individual, transform the child and looking at what is happening in our society, teachers will want to use a classroom as—let me use it as a transforming and whereby they feel like you want to mould up this child, you want to mould up this student to become more robust citizens come tomorrow.

So you realize that going forward–but we won't be thinking about thinking questions but we realize that beyond thinking questions we can't afford any education of morality, education of social change, a whole lot of stuff fitting the child into the society will mean a good citizen or being a good member of economy and working towards this and so, it's a whole responsibility and teachers–and that's when you realize that teachers end up to become – you see a whole lot of criticism in teaching in terms of using the past and what is happening to try to advice students. Teachers will end up being like more of evangelists, more of preachers, advisers, counselors to students because they fell like a greater majority of the child upbringing lies with them especially when by the child spent about 8 hours in the school and spent few hours home and they feel as sort of they dare not they were the power parents to a child so they want to advise these students to become good models.

So we will go back a bit towards what has been the traditional way in terms of—although we are going more first time more of constructive way, by right at now we still have to do more before any transforming a child and sometimes that's when you have to do the direct detail advisors to continue first time in some sort of morale consciousness in them because things are worst today because of–if I am to go by a whole lot of conspiracy theory, we assume that was somebody one way or the other have planted these same things assuming that we had a moral society that things are about each other and more conscious of whatever they do then that sort of community of belonging, a community of looking out for each other start from the classroom and teachers have a role to play in seeing to that this works.

SC: Yeah, I love that. I think that's so interesting because I have

been called the harshest critic of historical thinking in Canada. [laughs 00:11:58], which is a badge I will wear with honor because I do think the history, education should give out transformation and I really love that you are saying that you think that this might be the moment that helps teachers think more about the transformative possibilities for history education because I think it is so important that we are thinking of the stories we are telling and we are thinking of the ways that we want to make change in the world and we aren't just like looking through evidence in a very procedural way for example and that's really kind of exciting that, that is–from your perspective that's kind of what you are—what you think or predict might happen after this moment.

ES: Yeah, obviously. This is how things are—because you realize that anytime a major incident happen in a country, a particular incident happened in a country one way or the other that informs especially when it becomes a major problem that affected a whole society. We can't do away with such a discussion, you can't—teachers live in a society, they're living in a context and context one way or the other, had a greater impact on whatever thing that they are doing in classroom. Nobody can be neglected, the war of such a great atrocity, we are talking about hundreds of thousands of people who have died out of this virus and we can't act as if that we are being blind of the whole sort of conspiracy theory going on even if this negligence even if it's a plot towards an aim to eradicate part of the human race, there are a whole lot of things that are informing our understanding about life.

Look at life from a different perspective altogether that the challenges is so much, especially when by people are living with a fleet of property so a fleet of cars have been asked to stay at home and you can't have no access to enjoy your whole luxury that you used to enjoy that at all you have to reconsider life from a different perspective rather, there is a greater part of life that we can't control but the little we could do is how best we can use our classrooms as a point whereby we can teach these students to be more of look out for each other and think more about their decisions because they are the next generation

of leaders and we have to transform them to think about each other. You've been hearing about this whole concept about atomic bombs, and you've been hearing about after—this whole concept of atomic weapons that they assumed that was if it is being launched it may have an impact on human race and in turn, eradicate the entire [inaudible 00:15:05] and people are looking at different.

Could it be a different world altogether or a different testing of atomic bomb or biological weapon whereby the human race would want to be wiped out and teachers, anybody who is more moral conscious or society conscious and thinks more about the needs of the society would want to avoid such a thing so we end up using our classroom, try to advise our students to be more of like evangelists, preachers of practice, preachers of good using history and we're aware that history poses a lot of past issues that we can track on and use to advice our classroom. So no matter what you want to do in terms of teaching to be more—teaching students to be more of applying thinking schools and interpretive schools using evidence so on and so forth. The other aspect of dedication will be dedication of changing, dedication of the heart whereby we want student towards an [inaudible 00:16:09] transform life and by being responsible citizen you know. This comes by—what was the name, the teacher acting as a said on stage trying towards the name advising the student what is best and teachers cannot be independent, they cannot be excluded from bringing their own experiences in their classroom. That is inevitable, it can never happen.

SC: Yeah, I think that's so interesting but we really need to reconsider what and who we are after this and we can use history for that. This really makes me thinking of the last question which is, **do you think that we are going to be able to imagine a new we after this?** So a lot of my work is about this transformative version of history and that we need to imagine greater spaces of inclusion for the people in our rooms so that they can recreate and create places that include them. Do you think that we will able to imagine a new we after this moment and what do you think that might look like?

ES: It's when the processes of imaging a new we because this event has really had an impact on how we look at things. How we commit to ourselves, how we take decisions in what we want to do in a classroom and the transformative aspect of it is we cannot really consider what is worthwhile in terms of education and all this the most important thing. And I saw a post recently that tried to see that technology has taken place, technology has taken families on each other. Everybody seems busy, everybody seems to be occupied by their work, everybody wakes up and goes to work. Now with a lockdown, everybody is making time for each other.

Families they then pass issues whereby prior to the invention of technology families used to have time for each other, commune at the dining dining table, it's been really installed and so we cannot look at what is worthwhile in this moment whereby we are considering this major hit on the world, would you want to go back? Do we still want to make time for each other? Do we want to look at things from a transformative end, making time for each other and we are looking times from a transformative end by fostering more of social values, things that are worthwhile being–things that are worthwhile will drive. I think looking at the future, things that are worthwhile and going back to the basis, how things used to be in the good way prior to the invention of technology and how best we could include that in our families. Now child—children have the maximum time from their parents and fathers are staying home, some fathers are staying home and technology—the rules are being old and made less easy. Nature is reinventing itself. Nature is really procreating itself again and that is how we are going to see things looking at things what is worthwhile going back to the basis and in the future what is worth to be included so that we can become very good citizens and people who are informed by things that are happening.

SC: You know, one of the things that makes me think about like what we make time for during this time like what are we considering when we're reconsidering, is I live in a very expansive ravine system

and this time—this COVID time, I have seen the most people out in those spaces and using them. And I think that for a lot of people it's not just getting out of the house but it's actually reconnecting with nature and it's staying away from digital technologies and um, whenever I am there and I am doing hiking, I am thinking 'Is this going to translate to more climate change activism? Is this going to translate for people to be greater stewards because they are connecting in these phases and I think that's—those are really interesting questions and I am really glad that you brought them up. This has been a really great little talk, thank you so much Edmund.

ES: Okay, you are welcome.

SC: Yeah, this has been really great, and I am—it's really interesting from a place across the world, Australia, how there are such similarities in how we are thinking through these ideas. So, yeah it was really great to connect. Thank you so much.

ES: The good news is people are making documentaries showing how things used to be when humans were occupying those natural environments and now that humans are no longer in, using their activities, the less fumes in the skies just kind of take our nature as people great to nature and bring them back if so if things are looking in very good shape. And like you said, this whole sort of climate change activist could also had a voice in new year and kind of look at things from a different perspective. Another issue is the politics of control, the politics of memory you put out here is what we just have to guard. So that at all, we're just being objective at least. We are bringing our objective to subjective excludes to.

SC: Yeah, that's a lot of food for thought. Thank you so much and lets stay connected.

ES: Okay you are welcome.

SC: Okay, thank you so much.

ES: Okay, you are welcome.

SC: Bye.

ES: Bye...bye.

In conversation with Reshma Konstantinova

Pandemic Pedagogy Conversation #25

Reshma Konstantinova

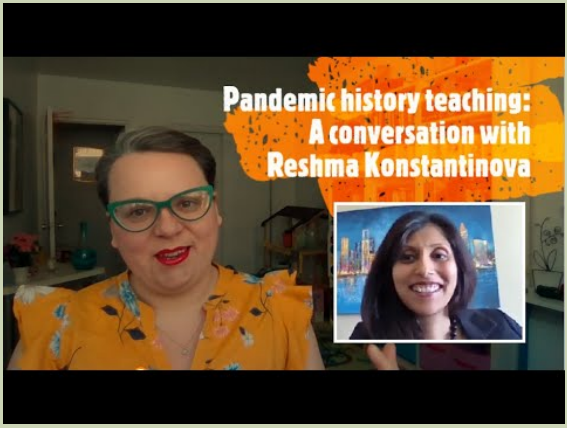
Reshma Konstantinova is an elementary school teacher with York Region District School Board. She also works at a school called Discovery Public School which is in Maple, the school has a diverse student body and have around 20 or even more different languages being spoken at our school. You can connect with her on Twitter at @ReshmaKonstant2.

We spoke March 27, 2020.

Video posted March 30, 2020.

QUICK LINKS

Video:



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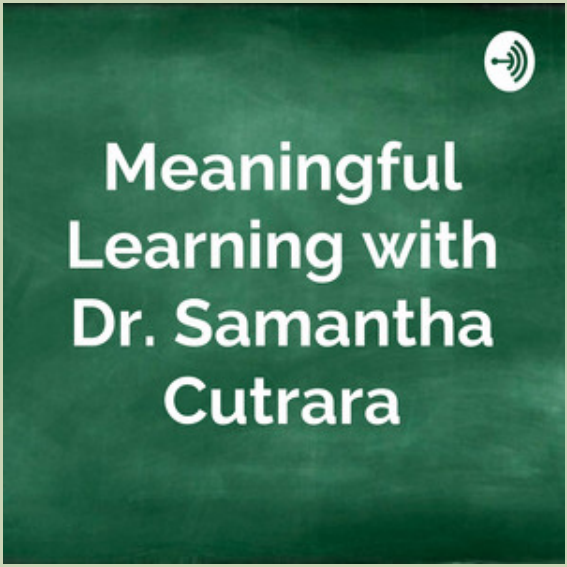

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TRANSCRIPT

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- Question 1: Have you thought of history any different *because* of this moment?
- Question 2: Do you think we would teach history *after* this moment?
- Question 3: Do you think we can "imagine a new 'we'" during/after this moment?

Dr. Samantha Cutrara: Reshma, thank you so much for agreeing to talk with me. It was so wonderful to connect on Twitter, and I'm really excited to talk about your choices board for Asian Heritage Month. Thank you so much.

Reshma Konstantinova: Thank you. Hello.

SC: Hi.

RK: I'm an elementary school teacher with York Region District School Board. And I work at a school called Discovery Public School which is in Maple. And the school has a diverse student body. We have around I want to say 20 or even more different languages being spoken at our school. Discovery Public School has always excelled in delivering lessons that are inclusive and welcoming environment.

When I talk about my school, it makes me very emotional because it truly is a school that's — it's a home away from home for me. I have been a teacher for 17 years, and over those years I've built — it's been a privilege actually to build my teaching skills and I strongly believe in

continuously growing as an individual. I've taken on leadership roles such as being the primary lead and my teaching assignments happen in the homeroom as a home teacher and I'm also trained as a certified Reading Recovery teacher.

Reading Recovery holds a very special place in my heart because I can see the impact that it makes on my students, on my students' families, and ultimately me. It's an incredibly special opportunity to see my little learners seeing themselves as readers and writers. I'm currently teaching grade two homeroom and my focus is literacy and social studies. I'm also the reading recovery teacher for grade one students and an English language learner teacher as well this year.

During this pandemic, I've had to adapt my ways of teaching and reestablish and build on connections with my students all online, using technology. Assignments that I post now, I find have to be impactful even more and meaningful because it needs to sustain the interest that I would have had in the classroom, you know. For a while, I would have built on it, but now it's all through technology. So it needs to make an impact on the other end.

I wanted to share this quote by Marie Clay. Now, Marie Clay is known for her work in global education literacy and she's the one who developed the Reading Recovery intervention program. She said, "If children are unable to learn, we should assume that we have not as yet found the right way to teach them." I thought this was just beautiful. I have it everywhere.

RK: I truly believe this. So I'm always on the hunt to find resources to make my assignment engaging, fun, and purposeful. My partnerships with my colleagues during these times have truly been a blessing. And another tool or you could say friend is Twitter, that I found has sparked my curiosity to learn new ways of engaging my students. And that's when I came across Ms. Lilly Vijayasekar's Twitter post about choice boards for Asian Heritage Month. And my motivation to make a choice board that would fit my children's needs, where my students are, was realized.

Being of Asian descent, I take this task seriously. I'm very proud of my heritage. And I truly believe that if we want our children to appreciate and respect the diversity that we have here in Canada, we need to educate them.

SC: And I think, like for me, to be able to tie couple things to that statement together, and thank you so much for such an eloquent introduction of yourself in your pedagogy that thinking about the diversity of Canada and combining that with literacy practices is so important because as Paulo Freire says, "You're not just reading the words, you're reading the world." And that is so powerful for young people trying to understand themselves in the world.

RK: Very true, yes. The connections that they're making, yes.

SC: And speaking of connections, I actually went to grade two in Maple.

RK: Oh! Which school?

SC: Our Lady of Peace?

RK: Oh, yeah. Okay.

SC: Yeah, it was actually just right behind my house, and so — I have a soft spot for Maple, but Maple I think is very different now. Like it was all Italy. We had like Italian courses. And right by now, I see the Canada that I'm more familiar with as being in Toronto too.

RK: Right. Yeah, it's a growing, changing world. Maple is beautiful.

SC: Yeah, yeah. Maple is beautiful. Okay, so I have three questions. I ask everyone these three questions. And I know that rather than think about history, it might be easier for us to talk about social studies, so you can just use those words if you want.

But the first question I've asked people is about the present. **Have you thought about history or social studies any different because of the COVID pandemic?** And I know that I have some people said, "I'm already kind of doing this work." What do you think? Have you thought of history any different because of this moment?

RK: I thought this question, it really boggled my mind when you first asked me this —

SC: In a good way?

RK: — and I saw it in a very good way.

SC: Okay, good.

RK: Really interesting question. And it forced me to be introspective. I believe that every day we're making history, meaning we all have stories to tell. We need to realize that we are making history and actually slow down and acknowledge that. I'd like to speak within the context of the work that I do with my young children to answer this question. If I thought about history differently because it's actually a two-part answer. It's a yes and a no. So no, I have not thought about history differently because I believe it is still relevant regardless of COVID-19, but the way I am currently teaching it is definitely different.

So as teachers, I feel we have a responsibility to acknowledge this moment and time because our young learners are facing a new way of learning. They have had to adapt very quickly to these changing times. So definitely the status quo is not an option with the current limitations that have been brought about by OVID-19. The pandemic has pushed this moment that we're in into uncertain times. It's surreal. Its impact is being felt globally. My students are living in these times that one day will be a significant part maybe of the history curriculum.

Speaking of the past being relevant, every year in the month of May, we have always celebrated Asian heritage to appreciate the contributions made by people of Asian descent and to celebrate the diversity we have in Canada. Pre-COVID-19 we've had assemblies, read alouds, and artistic interactions with different organization, which has led to knowledge building for our students so they can make those connections. But this year, I have had to adapt. My students have had to adapt. I kept thinking about how can I engage them. How can I be purposeful with my little learners so they can appreciate Asian Heritage Month and celebrate the diversity we have in Canada.

So again, as I mentioned before, when I came across Lily's Twitter

post, it kind of motivated me to design this choice board. Why a choice board? For me, it represents a collection of — a collection actually that you explore on your own terms. And it's a journey of discovery for my students. I chose a variety of resources that include read alouds, virtual museum tours, music appreciation, and art appreciation. To my choice board, I wanted to showcase these wonderful artists so that my students can appreciate that rich diversity.

The book by Rukhsana Khan, a Big Red Lollipop, is — okay, so she's down there, a Big Red Lollipop. Yeah, at the bottom. So a Big Red Lollipop is an opportunity for my learners to appreciate the rich art of storytelling and to make connections to her lived experiences. She's an amazing artist. There she is.

I chose the book Blue Hijab by Ibtihaj Muhammad, which builds on a central theme of being true to oneself. That was very important for me.

SC: Is this one?

RK: Yes.

SC: Can we just pause for one second?

RK: Sure.

SC: I want to — I just don't like the way that this is showing up, so I just want to — we might just —

RK: Maybe we don't need to. We could just show the choice board.

SC: Okay.

RK: You did not click on the links if it's — yeah.

SC: Okay. So maybe could you —

RK: Back it up?

SC: Pardon?

RK: Do you want me to back up?

SC: Yeah, a little bit.

RK: Okay. So should I talk about why the choice board was designed again from there?

SC: Yeah, let's do that. Yes.

RK: Okay.

SC: Okay.

RK: Okay. So why design a choice board? For me, it represents a collection that you explore on your own terms. It's a journey of discovery for my students and I choose a variety of resources for that reason. I included read aloud, I've included visual museum tours, art appreciation, and music appreciation. To my choice board, I wanted to showcase wonderful artists so that my students can appreciate the rich diversity.

The book by Rukhsana Khan Big Red Lollipop is an opportunity for my learners to appreciate the art of rich storytelling and make connections to her lived experiences. I choose the book Blue Hijab by Ibtihaj Muhammad, which builds on a central theme of being true to oneself. A Big Mooncake for Little Star by Grace Lin is a beautiful book with beautiful illustrations which describes the moon cycle and has the underlying theme of love for your family and traditions being passed onto the next generation. I also added a reflection piece, which I think is critical because it will — and my hope is to force my students to critically think about the experiences that they're having and enhancing that learning experience.

So in the context of teaching history to young audience or social studies to a young audience, it was also very important for me that my students see themselves represented in these stories. I never saw myself as a curator or an archivist of history, but the pandemic actually has provided me with this opportunity.

SC: I love that. And I would love — there are so many things I want to say to that. So first, I love your choices board. I'm going to put it back up. I love the reflection piece because I think that is so important. I love that you can see the mixed media that you're up here so that students can still feel that connection and that you ask them about their feelings related to that because —

RK: Mm. I left that open-ended for them to express their feelings because that's what this is all about. It evokes a feeling. The choice, what it should. So for now, I've observed that they do love me dancing,

so I think there's going to be more animation. And if you do click on that, it takes you to dance tutorial. So some of my students have tried it out and they felt rejuvenated apparently. So it's fun with a purpose.

SC: Let's see if we can — oh, no, we're just going to have ads.

RK: Oh, no!

SC: Yeah, I was going to be sponsored by Quaker Oats and Burt's Bees. But I guess there could be worse things.

SC: And I mean, like we know that our students, like even the little learners like you said, are going on YouTube. So to be able to direct them to some heritage-rich videos I think is really excellent. And I love the way you said that like you've never thought of yourself as a curator or an archivist, but this moment is allowing you to do that because, of course, you are curating things in your classroom, but like, you wouldn't use that language —

RK: Yeah.

SC: Thank you for bringing that into this conversation. I think it's really powerful for elementary teachers like yourself to be able to think of themselves so actively in thinking about history and social studies like that.

RK: Thank you.

SC: Yeah. So the second question —

RK: You're freezing a little bit, Samantha. I'm not sure if is it — it's not continuous.

SC: Don't worry about me freezing.

RK: Okay.

SC: As long as your sound is consistent, that's all I'm happy about. So your sound has been great. Yeah.

RK: Okay, okay.

SC: So why don't we move to the second question which is about teaching history in the future. So **do you think some of these things that you're thinking about and others like you is going to transform history and social studies teaching after this moment?** Do you think it should? What do you think?

RK: I thought about this for a long time as well. And I thought, wow, it's really hard actually to even think about how we will teach after this moment because we're still in the moment and it's kind of hard to understand the impact it will have because of the situation we're in. I can only speculate.

I do believe that as educators, we are on this continuous learning journey. So the present moment, if anything it has taught me is that we're all interconnected and we need to work together. So it's an exciting time for collaboration, and I hope this momentum doesn't stop. Collaboration within my school, I found school community now has extended beyond boards and even countries, and maybe even continent. So this will have a lasting effect and will likely continue in the future. The way we'll be teaching history and any subject for that matter will probably change after this moment passes.

The truth is technology is essential to these changes. In order to keep the learning tasks engaging and meaningful, my colleagues and I have had to learn to be flexible and update our technical skills as well. I see this change in a positive light because it has forced me to be creative and it has accelerated this learning process for me, you know? And I feel at the end of the day, who is it going to benefit? My students. So I do feel like this is all in a positive light. My hope is that we will continue to teach history through collaboration, inquiry, exploration leading to new discoveries perhaps.

SC: Yeah, thank you for identifying that. Though it is all speculation, but coming in with an optimism or like with a central principle that like, this is for students so let's figure out what's going to work for them I think is a really great way to propel us into these uncertain times.

RK: Smile.

SC: Yeah.

RK: Very important.

SC: Yeah. Yeah, it is.

So my last question is the larger theme of this video series, which is imagining a new 'we'. Because I argue that it's important that we

engage in practices in our pedagogies, the ideas behind our practices that are more meaningful, transformative, and inclusive for their students so that we don't create this othering kind of ideas that students feel like they aren't part of the classroom or they aren't part of the nation, where they aren't part of history. **Do you have any ideas about whether or not we can imagine a new 'we' more or perhaps in different ways during and after this moment?**

RK: I love this question. I may get a little emotional. So I imagine a new 'we' actually as a chance to build on relationships and connections. It's a chance to explore our lived experiences. I could be naive, but I really hope humanity will look at this moment as an opportunity to make positive changes and future generations will see that this was the time that the world worked collaboratively to fight this virus. Decisions that we all make, but especially our leaders will have lasting consequences that will shape the new 'we'.

As an educator, I have the responsibility to instill that the future is brighter and that the best is yet to come. It's really important. That has been my goal throughout my teaching career and has taken precedence in the last few weeks. Through the pandemic, I have realized further how important it is for our children to build resilience, flexibility, and adaptability. After all, this generation, which I think they're called the alpha generation, I had to look that up, will — I know. I didn't know that. Will one day be the new 'we' in the not so distant future. It's my own daughter actually.

So it brings me back to this theme of Asian Heritage Month, and it's a beautiful theme. It's united in diversity, which sums up how I hope the new 'we' will be. It will lead to unity and create an inclusive and compassionate society. That's the goal.

SC: Yeah, that's so wonderful. And I think coming into our classrooms with that as a goal helps develop our practices that align with what students are going to need because it isn't that far from the future, right?

SC: Yeah. So thank you so much for sharing so much of this wis-

dom, your choices board. I really, really enjoyed this. I think that like elementary teachers can teach so much to secondary teachers when it comes to like creativity and disciplinarity. And I hope that secondary teachers have really enjoyed this as much as I have.

SC: But I also hope that secondary teachers can see ways that they can help develop conversations with elementary teachers for other kind of collaboration. So thank you so much.

RK: Mm-hmm. Oh, thank you. It's just — this was a really great project for me because as I said, it forces me to be introspective and actually try and understand and clarify my own thought. So how I want the new we to be or, you know, how I think history will be or should be.

RK: Yeah. So this was a wonderful conversation.

SC: Oh, that's so wonderful. I'm so happy. Because something I've talked about in another video about like getting teachers to think more about their purpose now that [inaudible 0:22:58.9*they're in classroom.] Like it's so easy doing a teacher education program to do all that reflection, but then school just gets so busy and you don't get a chance to do that introspective work as much as I think a lot of teachers want to. So that's why it's really great to engage in this series and to have teachers like you. And if other teachers want to talk with me for this series, just send me an email or direct message me in Twitter because this has been just such a pleasure. Thank you so much.

RK: Thank you.

SC: Okay, we'll say goodbye. Bye.

RK: Bye.

In conversation with Natasha Henry

Pandemic Pedagogy Conversation #26

Natasha Henry

Natasha Henry is the president of the Ontario Black History Society. She is a historian, education consultant and the foremost expert in Black Canadian history education in Ontario. You can connect with her on Twitter at @NHenryFundi.

We spoke May 28, 2020.

Video posted June 9, 2020.

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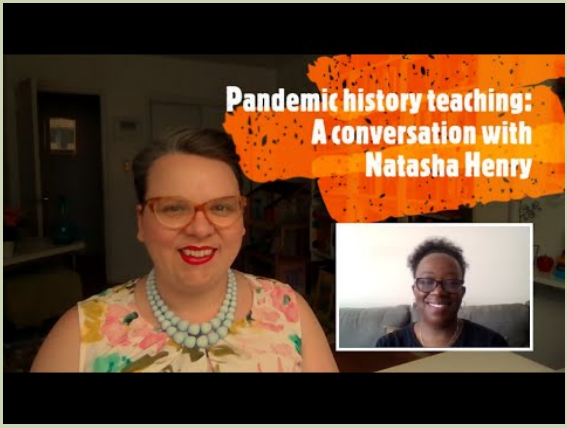

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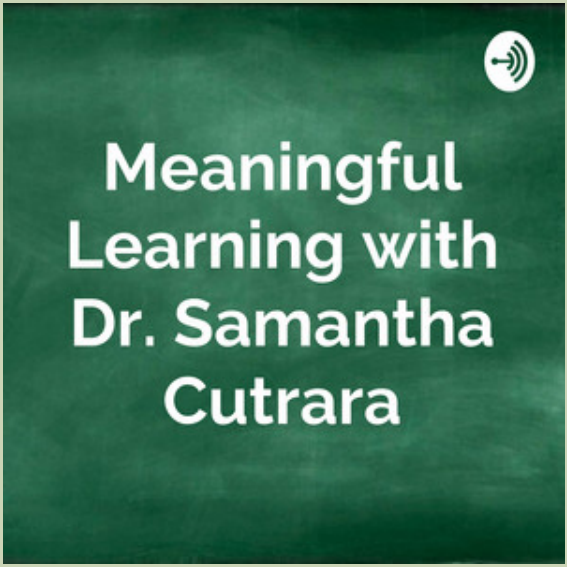

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TRANSCRIPT

All the Pandemic Pedagogy conversations revolved around three questions:

- Question 1: Have you thought of history any different *because* of this moment?
- Question 2: Do you think we would teach history *after* this moment?
- Question 3: Do you think we can "imagine a new 'we'" during/after this moment?

Dr. Samantha Cutrara: Natasha, thank you so much for agreeing to speak with me today. I know that you are so busy, but I am so excited that you are here to share your decades of experience in this field. So thank you so much.

Natasha Henry: You're welcome, and I'm so happy to join you in this conversation, Samantha.

SC: Like, I just think that your perspectives of being a historian, and author, and educator, and president of the Ontario Black History Society will just be a really rich addition to this. So thank you. Although I just listed a whole bunch of stuff, do you want to do your own introduction before we get started?

NH: Sure. Yeah, as you had mentioned, I have quite a bit of experience as an educator. This year marks 21 years as an educator mainly at the elementary level, and I'm also currently the president of the Ontario Black History Society. And around my work in education, I

melded to my roles as a historian, as an educator, and my work as a curriculum consultant.

And so I focus on developing resources specific to teaching about Black Canadian and African diasporic experiences for K-12, and I am currently completing my Ph.D. in history looking specifically at the enslavement of Africans in early Ontario. So my roles, the work that I do overlaps in many respects, but it's something that based on my passion and I really enjoy doing in whichever capacity.

SC: I said in my introduction before we gone onto Zoom that soon I'll be saying like, Dr. Natasha Henry. So that'll be good.

NH: Working on it.

SC: Yeah. And I've been using your work and familiar with your work since I've been in the field, so 10, 15 years. So again, it's just wonderful to connect.

SC: So with this "Pandemic Pedagogy" series, I've been asking everyone the same three questions. And the first one is **have you thought history any difference because of this moment?** Do you want to share your thoughts on that?

NH: Sure. Absolutely. For me, I would say not so much. My views haven't changed. There are some longstanding feelings that remain, but they have been heightened by the realities of the COVID pandemic. For me, in the work that I've done, whether it's related to preserving and recovering narratives and experiences of people of African descent or with the curriculum, that for me, there's always been a sense of urgency around the work because of the longstanding historic absences and exclusions. And so, for me, there's always been this sense of priority and that has been magnified for me by the pandemic.

It's also, for me, thinking about the very real fair of permanent loss. And again, that's a feeling that's been with me for quite some time as it relates to African-Canadian heritage, as well as there's always this passion and this burning to document and to recover Black and African-Canadian experiences.

So for me, the COVID pandemic — the conditions of the pandemic,

for me, parallel some of the very longstanding conditions as it relates to Black and African-Canadian experiences in the curriculum. And so these parallel conditions, as it relates to retrieving and preserving Black stories, it brought to mind as well the realities around Black heritage sites and what's happening there. And so these sites connected to Black presence, but what is happening, right? There's been this ongoing perpetual threat of some heritage site as it relates to Black history. And when you think about how much is compounded now and in the near future because of the conditions of the COVID pandemic, I also see as it relates to the teaching of Black experiences in K-12 curriculum. There has been this, again, this pattern of this erasure and this exclusion.

And so we do see that as the pandemic continues to impact the lives of people, we do see those parallel experiences of exclusion and adverse threat for particular groups including people of African descent. And so when I think about — and I've been thinking a lot in preparation for our conversation around those parallels of the conditions of the pandemic for present-day realities along with Black heritage and Black experiences in the curriculum.

And so just going back to some of the heritage sites that I talked about, there are sites that more recently have been under threat because of the similar conditions of the COVID pandemic such as scarcity of resources, right? So we'd look at, for example, the Oro African Church in Oro-Medonte in Simcoe County. And just recently, they did actually restore the church and there were some efforts there based on community activism working with different stakeholders, local and regional, right? And provincial stakeholders. So there is that, but then there's still this ongoing threat of how long will this relic of a Black presence remain with us?

I also think about the Salem Chapel in Niagara Falls, the BME Church, and that's the church where everyone knows Harriet Tubman attended while she lives in St. Catherine's for 10 years. And over the past couple of years, there's been a real urgent need for restoration efforts for this

church which has been claimed as a national heritage site by a lot of people, right? Including our governments and other agencies. But then if we're claiming this heritage and we understand the threat that this site is facing, how much support does it get? And again, we want to maintain that heritage and make sure that another of this particular artifact is available for people to visit, and to see, and to experience that history. But then when it comes to the conversation around that support, particularly financial support, is it included in those factors equally?

So there is that. And then one last very real and very pressing example is the Fugitive Slave Chapel in London, Ontario. A couple of years ago, it was under threat of being demolished to make way for a parking lot by the owner. And through a lot of efforts, the church was moved and it's now sitting beside the Bethel Emmanuel BME Church, which is its future iteration of the Fugitive Slave Chapel.

But it's been there. It hasn't been restored. There's a lot of issues around this restoration. And so as these conflicts continue to percolate, this site continues to be under threat. And so there's a lot of things that play in terms of that. And to me, I saw that in terms of, again, the scarcity of resources how much access do Black heritage sites and organizations have to some of these resources to put them in a better situation moving forward?

And so I very much see how that plays out for the pandemic — in relation to the pandemic. And also, for me, it makes a connection to the idea of social death. And I've been thinking of, again, a lot about the impact that Black people are facing in COVID which we see in the United States and we see that here as well because of anti-Black racism and the racially disproportionate effects that are playing out in Black lives.

And so with COVID, I see that that parallels again as it relates to are there heritage sites, but also, again, the curriculum. I've been thinking about as well when we think of the racial disproportionality that's ongoing because of COVID, I've been thinking about some of the front-

line workers and how a lot of these people, the personal support workers, are Black women, right? And so what have their experiences been like? And what is the historic trajectory that led these women to be overly represented in these kinds of occupations?

And so I think I've been thinking about that as well. And when we think about the emergency distance learning that's happening, right? In elementary school, in secondary school responding to the COVID regulations and the shutdown, and what has been the curricular response from teachers and school boards as it relates to culturally relevant resources for teachers and for students to represent Black and African-Canadian experiences, what has that been like?

And so, there's a lot of parallels that I see. It's not in a sense where I'm not saying that the death that I'm referring to equates to the loss of an individual, of a family member, but that the conditions that make that happen disproportionately. So for some segments of the population, has been playing out for some time and has been exacerbated by the COVID conditions.

And so we do see lastly in terms of another parallel that I see is going back to what I talked about that permanent loss, that sense of loss, that possible permanent loss that will happen after things kind of settle into a new norm. What will that loss look like? And then in particular, when we talk about Black heritage sites, where will we be after COVID? Right after things kind of settled down? What position will these organizations and these heritage sites be in? So that's something that I've been thinking about, and then I also think about how with the curriculum and in this emergency distance learning situation, I've seen where a lot of the resources that have been shared and are being used, they intentionally or unintentionally kind of bring us back to the idea of a very strongly Euro-centric focus in the curriculum, in the history curriculum whether in other subject areas. And so what does that mean for Black youth, for Black children?

There is, again, it's a contributing factor to the sense of loss of sense of self or the sense of identity forging that racial pride around those

experiences. So if you don't have — if we're already struggling for that inclusion and that integration in the curriculum and in classrooms in a regular conditions, how is that playing out now within the emergency distance learning situation? And so those are some things that I've been thinking about in terms of the very strong parallels to the situation exacerbated by the pandemic.

SC: Thank you for that. It's so multi-layered, but it also really highlights the importance of recognizing those multiple layers of things. So one of the things I'm hearing from you is that it's exacerbating issues that were already apparent when it came to recognizing, acknowledging, preserving Black Canadian history. It's exacerbating that, but also it's even more important to recognize that in this particular context because of the ways inequities and marginalization works. So it's like, if all those rainbows in the window saying, "We're all in this together," one of the ways to also recognize that is to preserve histories that demonstrate that legacy of why there is a disproportionate amount of Black and racialized women in a lot of these frontline essential positions.

I think that's a really powerful way too, because a lot of people are like, oh, I hope things are different, but what is that action? And that can be a really important source of action to ensure that these sites, for example, are preserved and ensure that we are bringing in the histories of these sites into our classrooms as well.

NH: Right. Yes, and I should actually just — just hearing you talk about that as well, I did want to just mention a couple of other things that it kind of connects with [inaudible 0:15:14.9] relate to the first question here. When we're talking about the racial disproportionality, I also have been looking at the impact of state policies on Black people in the province of Ontario and dealing with COVID and the documentation of data brought to mind the government of Ontario and their reticence to collect race-based data.

NH: Right? Around the who's impacted by COVID. And to me, that also parallels the Black experiences in histories that become hidden

because of the stance that the state, right? The government often takes as it relates to not wanting to deal with race. Not wanting to deal with anti-Black racism [inaudible 0:16:13.0*wanting to have] this aggregated information. And I see that linked to the state curriculum. So the curriculum of the province where you still don't have any learning expectations as it relates to Black Canadian experiences that all students in Ontario have to learn about.

And so what the result is in this refusal to pay attention to the very specificities of race in the province, whether it's in the health data or in the curriculum is that it becomes institutionalized erasure, right? And so how do we think about addressing that during this pandemic in terms of, again, looking at how we can pay attention to that looking at the historical continuity of some of these gaps and be mindful of hopefully addressing these things so that on the other side of the pandemic, that we do begin to see things differently.

And I also was brought to mind around the resilience and the continuity of activism of Black people, because getting back to the collection of race-based data because of COVID, because a lot of people have been so vocal in different ways and different platforms, we have the province responding that they will be collecting race-based data as one example. And so I think about how Black people have been and always have been creative in adjusting to the conditions and to the climate, and how their activism has been ongoing even through this particular time of COVID.

People have been using a lot of social media to act to mobilize voices and to press for concerns and to seek responses, right? From the government and from other agencies. And so we continue to see that collective action from Black communities throughout this particular time, and I will talk a bit about that after in terms of the documentation of that. And I also see that in this collective, you know, this community that we're seeing a community reconstitute itself in different ways, particularly in a virtual form.

And so whether it's through the activism or whether it's through

some of the events that have come about as a result of the COVID condition, it's been really interesting to see as a person, as an individual, and as a historian. And so I have been thinking about how people have been able to, with the social distancing measures, create some kind of sense of connection and community in spite of these conditions. And so these are some of the ideas that I would love to see how we will record this and document this as part of our history later on after the pandemic.

SC: I think that that is a really amazing example. Thank you so much for making that link between the people advocating for race-based data related to COVID and without having that data, the erasure of those experiences in history because that has been ongoing throughout the histories of Canada on this land that we call Canada. And I think it's a really powerful example to think about in our history classes, for example, about the evidence that we're using sometimes have been crafted by the states to be purposefully exclusive to one set of experiences and to link that too to the ongoing activism.

Dr. Funke Aladejebi's talk when she was saying that like, a lot of Black activists have been talking about these things that we can just see differently, see in a more mainstream way right now, but like these are the same issues that have been ongoing. I think those are really powerful examples to pull up. So thank you for that.

NH: Mm-hmm. Yes. I mean, I think with — you know, there's been a lot of calls for documentation of histories and experiences during COVID with people have been participating in the documentation whether or not they know it. On social media, for example, I've been seeing activities where students are encouraged to keep a journal, a COVID journal to document what they and their families have been going through during this time. And so it's important for us to do that.

For us at the Ontario Black History Society, we've been having this conversation about what can we do, right? As a historical society to document to some of these experiences. So we're thinking about how can we document again some of these experiences of Black frontline

workers, again, paying attention to that historical context of why they're in these particular roles? Thinking about some of the less savory experiences during COVID such as the racial profiling that Black youth, for example, have been experiencing in some places here in Canada because of the orders around public space, the use of public space.

But I also have been seeing as well how can we document — thinking about how can we document Black creativity during this time of COVID? And there's been a lot of examples that have been wonderful looking at how young people have been using TikTok, right? Around to communicate and to capture stories thinking again about some of the events and how, for myself, even participating in some of those online events.

Just this past Saturday, there was a Versuz Sound Clash with — base is a reggae dancehall sound clash. So Beenie Man versus Bounty Killer. And just the community of people that were involved in this event, over 500,000 people worldwide. People, right? Such as myself were watching and tuned in looking at how the atmosphere and the feeling, the vibe was adapted to this online platform is really something to think about to document and to look at how this was done. And so there's a lot of things to talk about and to record and to document as a heritage and historical society that we would want to pass on to people of future generations as well.

And then I also connect that to my work for my dissertation where it seems quite eerie that for my study, I want to create a database of African people who were enslaved in early Ontario recognizing the importance of the virtual platform, and here we are at a time of COVID when I'm starting my database and really seeing how important and how useful it could be to have these stories documented online for posterity to carry on these stories and to engage with it in a different way.

And so when we think of how we've been continuing history, recording history, document history through this time, there are some things that will definitely change and we need to be part of that and we need

to make sure that the experiences and the stories of Black Canadians are carried forward.

SC: One of the things that I am really interested to watch the evolution of is how the virtual communities that are being developed now because of COVID help shift and change those narratives as well, right? Like, if you have never been to a dancehall event, but you can do it from the comfort of your own home and like explore what that looks like, you might be able to build different types of community. And so I'm very interested to see how that will develop, and I think that's a really good example of like this transnational community from around the world can all participate in this event and like enjoy this event. And I think that will be really interesting, but like you said, we also need to record it and document it for what it is and what it's doing.

SC: So this makes me think of my second question because we covered a lot of ground, but I'm interested in if you think that we are going to take some of this learning and translate it into our classrooms after this, **do you think after this, the ways that we teach history will shift or should shift?** I think the answer to that is yes, but do you think it will shift after this?

NH: Well, I think it should. I agree with you. Absolutely, this will shift. I have two responses. I have a no and I have a yes in terms of —

SC: Okay, bring it.

NH: Yeah. I have to give you both. So I don't think — for me personally, I don't think that it will change much, especially as it relates to the more formal classroom, the official instruction in the classroom setting because the structures remain intact, right? So unless and until the ongoing push for change happens, I think that things will continue somewhat in the same measure. However, and still — right. So there is this activism that's happening and I should say this activism happening at the same time when we're dealing with COVID as it relates to the experiences of Black youth around the curriculum and around their learning in public schools.

And so I hope that with this ongoing push and agitation, that there

will be some change if the structural change can happen, right? And so whether it's the inclusion of curriculum expectations. So that is not just left up to individual teachers to be inclusive of Black histories and Black experiences, or whether other kinds of institutional changes that would allow for a more reimagining of that kind of formal instruction. So in that sense, it's contingent upon what will happen in the long run.

I do also see a response to this lack of change by Black families during this emergency distance learning, and that I've noticed that a lot of Black families are choosing to kind of opt out of the official formal instruction that teachers are wanting to engage in in this new environment because it's not responsive to their child's, right? Cultural means.

NH: And so families are opting to I guess homeschool in a sense, right? Given the conditions, and are deliberately choosing to use Afrocentric approaches to teaching their children, being more inclusive of African experiences whether it's early African civilizations or being more intentional in teaching their children about Black experiences going along with maybe some of the expectations of the classroom. And that is a response because of that failure of change in the formal structure of things. And so Black families are deciding, well, this is an opportunity to do some unlearning and some new learning as a family together to better ground our children in their sense of self, in their sense of their racial identity because they have not been getting that in the classroom. And so this is the opportunity to do that.

As it relates to more community-based education, I am more hopeful in terms of seeing some changes. And I think about the work that the Ontario Black History Society that we have been doing, and we have to shift. We absolutely have to in our shifting in order to be more relevant and more accessible during this particular time.

Our programming, strong focus of our programming is to educate whether it's the general public, whether it's young people, or whether it's to serve as a resource for educators. And so for us, not being able to have our events or in-person events right now has caused us to

rethink and to reimagine our work so that we can continue our commitment to education on Black history's past and present.

And so in that sense, I see that — and you did mention this earlier as well, that individuals and organizations who have always been pushing for change and always sought creative ways and new ways and different ways to engage and to be accessible. And so that's what we will continue to do, as I said, in order to be accessible. And so we have to use the online platforms as one sense. Whether it's through new online exhibits, digitizing some of our resources and our artifacts, hosting online events, these are things that are crucial in terms of thinking about and engaging in learning on Black histories in new ways.

SC: Yes. And I think that, like I said, like there could be an element where there is a bit of a revitalization of certain engagement with community histories because of this in really powerful ways. And it's been — like, I think the Ontario Black History Society has had, especially for the last five years or so, a really robust online presence. But even more so now, I see posts, I see things to think about and engage with, especially because I am home and it's a lot easier to read three articles about something rather than just say, okay, I'll read this one article in the weekend, and it could be really exciting. But it's interesting what you're saying about the structures of history curriculum. Just one second because I have like cat here sticking on my lipstick, and it's — sorry. I'm just going to edit that out.

It's interesting that you're talking about the structures of curriculum because I speak to a lot of teachers for this series that are saying it's been a lot easier to cut things out and really focus on like student-centric learning. And I'm a little worried that for some teachers that are engaging in that now will go back to very didactic types of teaching and learning practices once they get back in the classroom as a way to grasp for normality, but often that grasp from normality is a grasp for like White supremacist narratives. And I am worried that there could be a push for greater tradition in the classroom after this.

And other than people that I've spoken to talking about their own

experience as parents, people I haven't on this series talked about parents yet, and that's a really interesting element that you brought up because it will be interesting if parents really force and push for different types of engagements with learning different content when their student goes 'back', whatever that looks like because they have been engaging and thinking about what they want their child to formally and informally know because of the unschooling/homeschooling that they have been doing.

NH: Mm-hmm. Yeah. And so you've presented another possibility upon return, the idea of returning to normal and what that meaning may hold for some people, right? And this return to — like you said, it would return to a more White dominant narratives. And so it's important for us to think about that because these ideas are not neutral. What will it mean for the acknowledgement and the inclusion of Black stories and Black narratives?

And so it raises for me a couple of other questions as well. I think I've been thinking about as I've been working through and working on my dissertation and looking at the digital humanities approach that I'm taking to the enslavement of Africans here in early Canada, thinking about the importance of the availability and the accessibility of Black data. And so whether that's through, again, that this stream, this thread of conversation around COVID and that experience, but also historically, past and present stories as well that need to be made accessible.

And so if teachers are, hopefully, in the choices that they're giving to students in the emergency distance learning, that some of those choices do include Black stories, Black experiences particular to Canadian history that that's important. And then if it this then return when we return to the classroom, is there going to be more agitation or more recognition of the importance of making sure that these stories are available for all young students, particularly for Black youth, but absolutely necessary for all students? Because if we want to address some of the issues of inequities and racism, all of our young people

need to be educated critically in a way that helps to see things improve, right? As we move on in the future.

I also wonder what the after effect will be as it relates to the teaching of Black histories? Particular, I think about what will happen in the university sense when it's inevitable that there will be some recovery austerity measures that universities, that post-secondary institutions are going to undertake. And so what will that mean for the very recent headway made in Black studies here in Canada?

Just looking at what's been happening in the United States where some academics have been talking about getting laid off in particular fields and disciplines, particularly Black histories and Black studies that the institutions are implementing there, what will that mean? Well, that happened here, right? And again, what will it mean for Black scholars and for Black academics who want to document and recording and retrieve whether it's the experience through COVID or whether it's more just teaching and recovering Black stories and Black experiences, what will it mean in terms of opportunities post-COVID as some of these institutions seek to address a lot of the losses? The financial losses. Who will bear the weight of that?

And often when we look at racial disproportionality, again, for example, it's Black people who will face some of that impact. And so I really do wonder what that will look like post-COVID.

SC: Yeah. I was talking with Sean Sean Kheraj from New York University who is a historian and environmental historian, but he's also the associate dean in liberal arts and professional studies right now at York, and we were talking about how important like a liberal arts education is right now. And we were talking — I think I said in the introduction, I don't know if we said it together, but like the importance of interdisciplinarity and something like Black studies demonstrates that critical liberal arts interdisciplinary historical knowledge and foundation and mobilization that is going to be essential for rebuilding a world after this.

I just want to show you what is happening here. Sorry, just there is this happening [inaudible 0:38:59.8] to asking you a little bit.

NH: They're recording?

SC: And I also just want to pick up on something else you had said about like, you know, we're talking about Black students, but not just Black students because, to me, this is a really good segue into my last question about imagining a new 'we'. And you've used the word imagining a little bit too.

I've worked in classrooms where teachers will say like, we need to do Canadian history first and then we'll get to Black history. And like, that is super problematic, but in particular, it's super problematic if all of the students in your class are Black. And I worked with one teacher who was like, well, we have this one White student. Like, we have to make sure that his history is also being covered. And I'm like, well, this is his history. Because like the histories of White racism is integral to who he is as a White person. And it was really disturbing to have teachers even with articulated commitments to anti-racist teaching articulate history in these ways.

And that's why my upcoming book "Transforming the Canadian History Classroom: Imagining a New 'We'" is really about how foregrounding. Ensuring that we are foregrounding the complexities of being Canadian in our Canadian history classrooms for our students who are Canadian, who might be Black Canadian, who might be Caribbean Canadian, who might be White Canadian, who might just say I'm Canadian regardless of my racial or ethnic or cultural affiliations, I just want to be understood as Canadian first.

And so I wonder if you have any thoughts about this notion of imagining a new 'we'? **Do you think that we can or will be able to imagine a new 'we' differently because of this moment?** More because of this moment? Do you think it will exacerbate? Like you said, divisions that are already there? Or do you think there's promise for understanding the ways that the structures, like you said, are exacerbating racial inequities?

NH: Well, let me just kind of piggyback up what you were saying in your intro to this third question, that there is on the flip side, we also have educators who will say, "Well, we don't have any Black students in our classrooms depending you know the pick. Tpn the geographical location or there may be only one or two Black students. So do we need to focus on including and acknowledging Black history?" So there is that. And that's something that plays out a lot in different areas.

And so it really is about whether or not it shouldn't be incumbent upon the presence of a Black person in the space to dictate whether or not the experiences of Black people in Canada are taught in the classroom. But again, getting back to the whole structure of things, what is guiding the responses of a lot of educators is the exclusion of specific learning expectations in the curriculum. And so that void gap allows for that kind of response to say we're going to teach what's in the curriculum, which is very Euro-centric, very White, right? And so I'm going to teach it that. That is the official expectations that should be taught, and then all of the other stories, the kind of optional topics in the curriculum document or any other kind of stories will be brought in at different times as [inaudible 0:42:53.4*Adoms,] not and part of the Canadian narrative.

And so I do think that if post-pandemic, if the continued decades long advocacy of Black families and communities is realized that we get some expectations in the curriculum, that helps to disrupt that in some sense, right? In terms of official guidance in structure, but you also have to disrupt mindsets and ideologies that are held by, right? By educators in terms of what they view to be important and what they view to be Canadian history and Canadian narratives as well. So then there is that other aspect as well.

And so a part of me I guess is hopeful that we could see something different. And again, it's going to be the continuity of this push and this agitation by Black families and Black communities for recognition of these histories. And thinking about this 'we' that you said, right? Imag-

ining a new 'we', and the conversation of the discourse during the pandemic is we're in this together. But that is not a reality, right?

NH: And so we have to, in our classrooms, be able to teach our students to critically debunk that and deconstruct that. When we say we're all in this together, that is not a reality, however, it can be used as a call to action, right? And in recognizing that that's not the case, how can we change it? How can we make that true? How can we encourage and create spaces for young people to talk about and to learn about belonging or not belonging, about care, collective community care, and thinking about concern for all, right? If we want that to be the true story, we then have to be able to create classrooms where we are recognizing and teaching about differences and inequalities, right? And going from historic through to contemporary. We have to do that or else we're failing our young people.

And if we want them as adults to be in a better position to address some of the things that we're facing now during this pandemic, we have to be intentional in our instruction, right? And in our pedagogical approaches too teaching them. And so how will we force institutions whether as it relates to health, or education, and other institutions to address these differences and these inequalities that have been playing out post (during) and — I mean, sorry, pre (during) and will play out post-COVID.

And the classroom really lends itself again to some really deep meaningful engagement with some of these issues. And as educators, if we can do that in large numbers, not just one-offs and — you know what I mean? If we can really do that in a more intentional, more I guess systemic way through, for example, an anti-racist pedagogical approach, we would really have some young people to reckon with. They are already asking these questions. They are already making these observations of difference and inequality, and we have to create the space for them to learn about that and to engage with that and to be the ones to come up with solutions, because they're very much capable of doing that.

And so, we do have the power to reimagine and to define 'we' in a way that really is inclusive of everyone in all of their differences, not just trying to make everyone the dame, right?

NH: And making things equitable. This 'we' that we are envisioning, this future 'we', this new 'we' has to be one that things are equitable for all, and that means taking different approaches to address different issues so that we all then become in a better position together.

SC: Yeah. Like, I love how you were like, if we do this in our classrooms, the youth are going to be a force to be reckoned with, because what I see with my work with you is that they were just dying for recognition of the complexities and they want to be engaged with these ideas in the classroom because they don't know where to put their lived experiences of inequities and the things that they are seeing about discrimination. They don't know where to put that energy. They want to understand the historical legacy of that, and they're looking for their classrooms as well as their families, their communities, their places of worship to be able to make sense of that. And for me —

NH: Yeah, sorry. Just as you've mentioned there as well, oftentimes these young people experience these things and they think it's an isolation, right? Because they may not, and some people have these conversations at home, but they may not have had the opportunity to really contextualize their experience into a broader context, historical context. And so, like we think about the impact that that will then have on a young person if they go through life not recognizing and not knowing that there are systemic forces at play in that post-experiences that they may think is just happening to them or they may place the blame on themselves.

And so we have a responsibility, right? In order to help them to bring their entire selves to the learning space whether it's a physical classroom or whether it's online in order to engage with these thoughts, and these experiences, and these ideas.

SC: Yeah. There is this one article. I can't think of the reference off

the top of my head, but through the magic of editing, that reference is right below this video now that said like, the Canadian youth in particular are really proud of the cultural diversity that they understand to be Canada, but that they are going to get more dissolution by what that means the more that they have personal experiences of discrimination that they can't link to a systematic element of like you saying, like having curriculum that doesn't have a curriculum expectation related to a very long, rich history of Black Canadians on this land.

And when I preface that question, I don't mean to suggest that just because there's Black students in the room, that's the only reason why you have to teach Black history, but rather like the violence of not teaching Black history is even more apparent when you have Black students in the classroom and you're like, look at what I'm doing. I am not withholding my responsibility to demonstrate the complex legacies that frame all of our lives in this space. So thank you for making that distinction if that wasn't clear.

NH: Yeah, that wasn't how I took it. It's just to demonstrate how it plays out —

SC: No, no, you're right. You're right.

NH: — on both sides. And so there is still a level of violence that is experienced in both scenarios, right?

NH: And so we just be cognizant of how that could play out and then how those narratives are then used to kind of sometimes to silence, right? To silence those stories.

SC: And silence the experiences of young people in the room. Because even if they don't know like their own personal histories, like it's embodied in a lot of ways. Like, I have been in classrooms as a student where I'm just like, this does not feel right. Like this does not make sense with my experiences. And students feel that too, right? Like, young people feel that even if they can't articulate it.

NH: And if we fail to do in what we're talking about, if we fail to do that, then we fail to bring in another generation of young people today in terms of getting them to see how relevant history is to their

lives. And the fact that, as I'd like to say to the young people, that you are history in the making. And so history isn't just 1814, 1834 or 1956, history is today and you are part of history as well. But if we, again, do not provide them with the space to have those skills and to see those connections, we are not going to bring in another generation of people who love history, who understand its complexities, who want to engage with it, who want to revise it, who want to present it in different, creative ways, we will fail to address that.

And I don't know how much out of scope this is, but there's the complications with history departments about how can they remain relevant today, right? In terms of whether it's undergraduate studies or graduate studies, how can they continue to bring in young people into the field? Well, it starts in elementary and in high school, right? And if we don't engage young people with history in very creative ways, in ways that is of interest to them, if we're not meeting them where they are, then we're also failing in that respect in order to grow and enhance the discipline.

SC: Yeah. I was talking to another teacher earlier today and she was saying her grade 10 students would say to her like, "Miss, like why is this important?" And she's like, I realize that really what they are asking is how was this relevant and important to my life today? And I think those of us who are enmeshed in the field of history know that, but we also know, hopefully, that there are a lot of 10-year-olds, 15-year-olds, 5-year-olds who will continuously wonder that if they are not learning histories that demonstrate the complexities of the world that they know.

So thank you so much for this, Natasha. This was amazing.

NH: Wonderful. Yes, thank you, Samantha. That was a great conversation.

SC: Thank you so much, and I will provide the links to the Ontario Black History Society and the rest of the work that you would like to share below this video so people know how to get in touch with you, as well as to support the work of the Ontario Black History Society. So

thank you again, and I look forward to calling you doctor in the future. Not so distant future.

NH: Okay, thank you.

SC: Okay, bye.

NH: Yeah. And let me know whatever you need me to send to you. Links or anything, then just let me know and I'll send them along.

SC: Sure. Do you want to just say goodbye really quickly, and then I want to talk to you about something else like not for the video series?

NH: Okay. And thank you for having me, Samantha. This is a wonderful conversation. I really wanted to thank you for creating this platform for history educators in different spheres to engage in this conversation. It's something that's really important, and we do hope that we continue to engage young people in history, learning about history, and teaching about history. And so I'm looking forward to your ongoing work as well in this area. So thank you again.

SC: Well, thank you, and likewise. I hope we find more points of collaboration in the future whether that is virtually or in person. So thank you again.

NH: Okay.

SC: Okay, bye.

NH: Bye.

SC: Okay, that was great. I'm going to stop recording.

In conversation with Dr. Julian Chambliss

Pandemic Pedagogy Conversation #27

Dr. Julian Chambliss

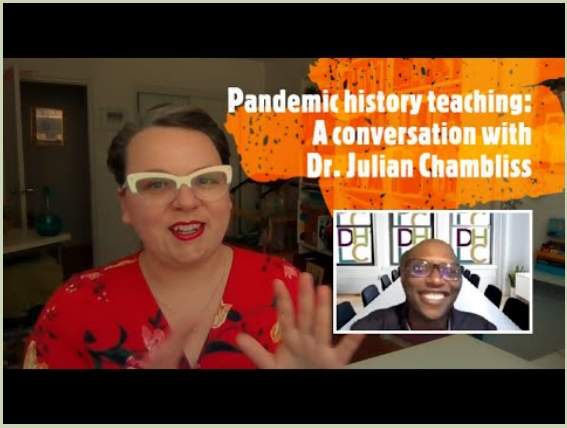
Dr. Julian Chambliss is a professor of English at Michigan State University. He is also the Val Berryman Curator of History at the MSU Museum and core faculty in something called the Consortium for Critical Diversity in a Digital Age Research at MSU, which goes by the acronym CEDAR. He is also the co-director of the Digital Humanities and Literary Cognition Lab here at MSU. You can connect with him on Twitter at @JulianChambliss.

We spoke June 9, 2020.

Video posted June 11, 2020.

QUICK LINKS

Video:



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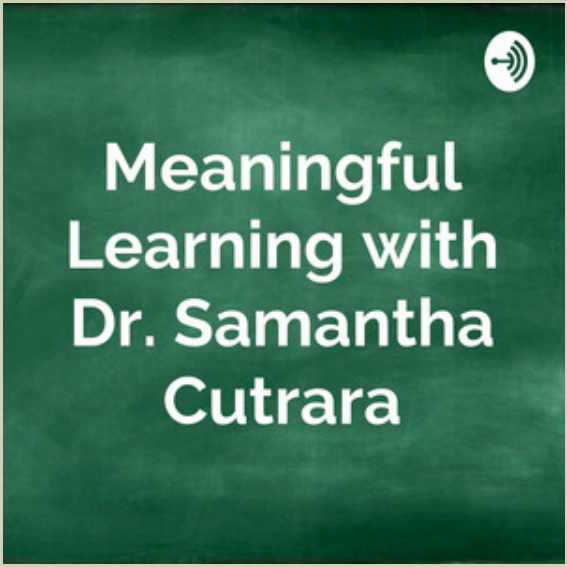

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TRANSCRIPT

All the Pandemic Pedagogy conversations revolved around three questions:

- Question 1: Have you thought of history any different *because* of this moment?
- Question 2: Do you think we would teach history *after* this moment?
- Question 3: Do you think we can "imagine a new 'we'" during/after this moment?

Dr. Samantha Cutrara: Julian, Hello. Thank you so much for responding to my invitation to talk about Juneteenth, especially in relation to the social revolution that is happening right now. I'm really excited to talk with you about these ideas of pandemic pedagogy. But before we begin, do you want to introduce yourself?

Julian Chambliss: Sure. My name is Julian Chambliss. I'm a professor of English at Michigan State University. I'm also the Val Berryman Curator of History at the MSU Museum and I'm a core faculty in something called the Consortium for Critical Diversity in a Digital Age Research here at MSU, which goes by the acronym CEDAR. And I'm also the co-director of the Digital Humanities and Literary Cognition Lab here at MSU.

SC: You know, what's been really cool about this series is to be able to see all these like interdisciplinary ways that we're bringing ideas of history together, and that's one of the reasons why I was really

drawn to your work because of this like interdisciplinary public history, English history everything together. So thank you again.

JC: Oh, no, thank you for asking me. Happy to be here.

SC: So let's start with the first question. I ask everyone in the "Pandemic Pedagogy" series three questions, but the context as we were talking about has shifted and changed so much.

So the first question is **whether or not the ideas of history have changed at all for you during COVID?** For me, there has been some kind of shifting and I'm much more aware of, for example, marking particular moments in history because of the fact that we aren't kind of organized in the classroom or maybe in with community groups. So have your ideas about history changed at all? And again, we got in touch about Juneteenth. I don't know if this is like a good time for you to talk about kind of that history related to these times.

JC: Well, you know, I do think that the importance of history is really central to my thinking right now. I mean, I've thought about that a lot. And when you were sort of like inquiring about Juneteenth, I really thought like, well, that's really a pivotal event that sort of fits into a pattern that in some ways explains the landscape that we're in right now and in terms like this was a systematic failure on the part of people in charge to sort of deliver on the ideologies that they articulate, right? And the consequences for people.

So I think that history becomes very important. In the case of something like Juneteenth, I think about that in part because the idea of this holiday that's articulated by African-Americans that most White people don't know about, most White Americans never heard of Juneteenth, but it's very, very important to African-Americans. Really, it's pivoting on this idea that African-American's celebration of freedom is forestalled, right? Because the actual event, really the sort of like the moment that Black people find out that they're free even though like legally, they already had been three years before. And this idea that the right that you have could be forestalled by forces out in the world and what do you have to do to sort of like become aware of them and sort

of achieve them, and sort of celebrate them and make them, you know, I think is a recurring theme in terms of like the American historical experience and really the western hemisphere's experience and these questions of colonialism and oppression of power that are connected to these moments of like when people try to make real the theories of freedom and the theories of citizenship really do I think matter a great deal because how do they do that, right?

In the case of Juneteenth, one of the things about that holiday is that it's connected to what was for many years for African-Americans public displays of citizenship. Like they would march through the streets. They would have these huge celebrations like emancipation day in Juneteenth. Like these are holidays that celebrated citizenship and a kind of public identity as a citizen in defiance of oppression and systemic erasure in the public sphere, like this effort on the part [inaudible 0:05:42.7] racist institutions and racist individuals [inaudible 0:05:48.3*besides] people to marginalize them. And being in public spaces demonstrating marching through the streets, having parades was an important part of like establishing the parameters of a real citizenship, like a material citizenship [inaudible 0:06:03.2*met when you had to walk the streets.]

And so it's no surprise to me that I see people in a moment where they're trying to articulate a better vision of freedom that they're walking in the streets, right? Like that makes actually perfect [inaudible 0:06:16.8] historical standpoint.

SC: Well, and I think to, you know, people were saying when the protest first started like, "Well, we still have COVID. Like why are you gathering in groups?" But I think the way that you're articulating like this legacy of like identifying the I am a citizen. Like you can't not see me. And as a collective, that's more important. That's more powerful.

JC: Yeah. And I think that the thing about COVID and the danger that it poses, does it pose a greater danger than a systematic erasure of your person, right?

JC: And I think for a lot of people, the idea that they're already

being erased in a slow steady way by a system that's indifferent and uncaring, that allows for systemic deficits to negatively affect their lives every day up to and including you might be randomly killed is more dangerous, right? Like COVID as a virus, it doesn't really want to kill Black people more than White people, it's just able to because of all the other horrible things that have happened in society, right?

So for Black people, COVID is just another example of how the system is systemically trying to hurt them or failing to live up to its obligations to them. And I think that language of failure of the system to live up its obligations resonates not just simply with Black people, but also as you can see, when you look at these crowds, it's not just Black people marching through the streets. There's a lot of people that recognize that in some ways our assumptions about what the system is supposed to deliver, it's failing to do that and it's failing very deliberately. Like it's a choice, right? It's a choice for the system not to provide healthcare to everybody. In our case, [inaudible 0:08:29.7]

SC: Nope.

JC: It's a choice. You know, it's a choice in the context of United States for us not to have a social safety net similar to most industrialized world. And the consequences of that choice are really clear because as bad as COVID has been in other parts of the world, arguably it's worse here because of those choices around not protecting people at a fundamental level, right? And at the very bottom of that heap of like negative choices are people of color, right? So they die more and they suffer more, but other people are also suffering from that kind of indifference.

SC: One of the really strong themes that has come up through the "Pandemic Pedagogy" series is how the pandemic has really demonstrated or allowed us to really like not ignore the way that our systems don't function for everyone and they weren't designed to function for everyone. And like in the series, we've talked a lot about K-12 history education in particular and about like, well, how are students now going to be able to — like how can we even pretend that students are

going to have an equitable learning experience? Like we can't even pretend that. And I see that a lot of the resistance right now is to kind of what you're saying like demanding a system that can better — that can live up to the promise that it keeps saying that it's making.

JC: Right. And I think that that too becomes like a historical question, right? Why is it that the system has failed to deliver on somebody's fundamental things around citizenship? And I often think about this in terms of the sort of fundamental failures because United States is a highly ideological place. I mean, we really sort of built a lot on norms, not rules, right?

JC: And so one of the things about the situation is that why we don't have rules that guarantee X, Y, and Z where in a lot of other countries, they do? Like they have these rules that make it a requirement for the government to operate in such a way, and we [inaudible 0:11:10.8] to sort of shy away from that.

In part of the I think the consequences of that are very much to people in power saying, "Oh, don't worry, this system will lift every boat. You don't have to require it to do so," right? So things like the minimum wage or things like healthcare, there were moments in the past, in the historical past, where people have banded together and really pressed for these systemic changes have often been forestalled by people in power saying, "Well, we don't need this," or as you see the day, people say like, "We'll you're asking the wrong way," right? Like you're too demanding of the system to deliver the people the fruits of citizenship.

But that's almost never really true and those moments where we sort of embrace these changes, some of those norms, like some of those practices, Americans don't really question, right? We don't question Social Security, but from a historical standpoint, that was really controversial what was introduced, that it was only introduced because we're in the midst of the worst at the time, the world's global economic downturn [inaudible 0:12:29.5*emperor.]

And so to respond to the danger posed by people losing faith in the system, I think of the new deal is that, right? Like the first and second

deal in American history context, our reaction to the sense that this system is failing and when we need the government to do more. And now we are in a moment where people are pretty sure this system is failing, and so the question is is the government going to do more? And like those past moments, I think people being in the street and there being confrontations with authorities, those are all normal things, right? What's the real question for me is to think about what's the scope of the political imagination of leaders now? Is it as great as it has been in past?

[inaudible 0:13:30.1] in my head about that issue. About the scope of the political imagination. I think for African-Americans, there's always a great sort of like liberatory vision that drives Black politics, but the coalitions of actors that I think about in the context of past historical transformation in terms of systems and politics, I worry about that in a sort of contemporary landscape in part because of things like the digital, the nature of the digital world.

So it's more complicated to me personally, but I tend to believe in people in sort of like collective nature of humanity even when I get down on what I see is sometimes like inhumane policy from people and power.

SC: You know, I — one second. We're not there though. You know, I wrote this blog post last week. Just a lot of historians and history educators, like I don't know how to navigate this moment, and I'm like one of the superpowers of historians is like we know stuff and we know how to read and we know how to research because like you're saying all these nuances in history that lead up to this particular moment that could help provide us like context and nuance. I think it's so much more integral that we are thinking of our work as people involved with teaching and learning history mobilizing the past as it's a responsibility to highlight change and highlight resistance and highlight resilience in order to think about a transformation of society in moving forward.

And maybe that's a good segue to the next question. Oh, no, I feel like you have something to say.

JC: Yeah, I do think that is really important, and I am really interested in — I've had a colleague and we've been having these conversations about things like information fluency, which I know sounds weird, but like you often, I often talk to students about the sort of between good information and bad information.

JC: And like the idea of like how do you get good information, right? And how do you recognize good information? And usually, I do this in the context of like Twitter is not the world, right? Like Twitter is not exactly the world. It's like a funhouse mirror version of the world. But now, especially the different digital spheres that people find themselves in versus the physical spheres and bridging the kinds of knowledge that these different spheres have into a coherent whole becomes really important. And I agree with you, like I was posting about that Kerner report, the Kerner Commission from 1968.

JC: Because I was like, people have written about this years ago, right? Like there was an urban riots in the United States in the late 1960 and the government wrote a report. In the first like summary, they said you need to stop because you're creating a [inaudible 0:17:03.8*world web Black and White] and you're going to have to change that or horrible things are going to happen. It's going to take political will, right? Like that's like in the first couple of paragraphs and then this go on from there like, you need to stop all of this, right? So it's not that we don't know what happened. Like it's not that we haven't been born. It's just like people choose to forget. And so, yeah, that historical memory thing is real.

SC: Well, I think of like couple things that have come up on the series are things about like cultural amnesia, socially amnesia. Natasha Henry who's the president of the Ontario Black History Society and a African-Canadian history education specialist for the past two decades is like, this is about social death when we allow like our history sights to [inaudible 0:17:59.9*disintegrate] and Joe McGill from The Slave

Dwelling Project said the same thing. And it's interesting the histories that can be revered for particular aims that keep things — that maintain a past that actually wasn't, you know? Like that maintains a past that doesn't highlight things like diversity and resilience and struggles for greater power and for like systematic shutting down of some of those conversations.

JC: Well, you know, I think we forget how important historical history has been for the future, right?

JC: And I think one of the things that I'm really interested in is Afrofuturism. And part of the reason that appeals to me, my work, I work on comics as well as digital humanities things in history, and so there's an element here when you think about Afrofuturism that the future, like the speculative is always an important part of a kind of future industry and the future industry in itself relies on projecting the present to the future. So like colonizing the past is important part of that process.

JC: So national character is at some level tied up into the people in charge being able to like celebrate a very particular version of the past because they're in charge right now and [inaudible 0:19:40.4] of the past needs to [inaudible 0:19:42.4] of being in charge now so they can continue to inject themselves into the future being in charge, right?

And so eliminating histories that don't support that narrative become an important part of maintaining control, right? And so erasure is an important part of that process. And it doesn't matter where you are in a western hemisphere, there's an element of like kind of historical contest always at play in the public sphere because the people in charge are in charge and their version of the past which allows them to be in charge at some level needs to be validated and any kind of version of that story is problematic, right? And so whenever we talk about making a more equitable history, it often becomes broadening the narrative of how we got to the place that we are because that in term broadens the possibility of how we might proceed into the future.

SC: There is another cat here. No, I don't necessarily work on

futurisms per se, but I have talked a lot about like creative nonfiction, because I think things like creative nonfiction, which I think there's a lot of parallels with notions of futurism, allow young people in particular to be able to read and write and think into the past in ways that can help them navigate where they are now to give them tools for the future, which is why I talk about imagining a new 'we' because I think that imagination is so important, and I also talk about how we need to do that within historic space, which is hilarious because on your website you have a whole like banner that says imagine space. And I was like, am I reading that right? Because I think we're going to get along. That we need to like imagine — sorry.

SC: That we need to like imagine more within these historical spaces because it is through exploring the past, through imagining through the past that we can help see ourselves in a different present and a different future potentially. And that's so important for students that routinely have encountered history in formal spaces that exclude any experiences that align with who they are.

JC: Yeah, I think that's really important. And when people think about the future, part of the reason that I think digital humanities, like digital things are important because they allow for us to sort of like make these more inclusive futures more available and more accessible. And part of the reason I have that imagine space [inaudible 0:22:53.8] is because yeah, in those imaginary spaces, you see people in dialogue with all these potential futures a lot of times. I mean, whether it's comic books or speculative fiction, that's often them trying to reach beyond the constraints offered by the system that they're in or being offered by the expectations that have been given and it's often very transformative, right?

And right now, I'm working on a project, a summer project with this video archive called The HistoryMakers Digital Archive. One of the things that we've been looking at is how Black people have used comics in their past lives to inspire a different worldview, and it's interesting because you follow the examples stretching back into like the

1940s and '50s where young African-Americans were reading comics and it made them think about like rocket ships and then they became a rocket scientist because they're like, "Well, I read the book of Rogers then I saw [inaudible 0:24:03.1] in an article, and I was like, This is a real thing. I could do this." And they did, right?

So there's this potentiality around imagining is really important for the past and for teachers, especially I think digital will offer a chance to connect their students with resources that they can use themselves to help imagine more complicated futures, because there's always more happening than that's in the record that you were given, right? Even when you go — right now, here in the United States, they just recently announced they were taking down the monuments to the Confederate generals in rich Richmond, Virginia, which is a Monument Avenue. And those spaces have been part and parcel of very elaborate narrative of white supremacy and on the one hand, getting rid of those physical spaces, those physical statues and taking them away as these symbols of white supremacy is what they are is very good, but there's a part of me that wants them to think this is much about what are the new statues and the new marker that will sort of create a more equitable future that could be in those spaces, right?

So you remove these things that were distortive false histories, can you put something into that place, in our place that will be sort of affirmative, more inclusive figures of history? And I think that they can, it's just a question of will they, right? And so there's always this sort of interesting tension around having access to a more complicated story, which I think we increasingly do because of digital pains. We just have to find the time and the means to integrate them into the stories that we're sort of required to tell, right? Like everybody has like their learning outcomes [inaudible 0:26:04.7*in lesson plans] that they're supposed to do, but it could be done for sure.

SC: So that seems — I have a cat here. That seems like a good segue to the second question of the three question, like discussion we're having, about whether or not you think that history education will

change after this moment. And when I've asked this question before, this moment was just the pandemic and this moment has become so much more significant. And what I often hear people say is like I hope, but there isn't a very clear way about I will or it will or that this is the way it needs to happen. **Do you have any thoughts? Do you think it will change after this?** Like what will you imagine that would look like? Although the next question is about imagining, so if you want to say that, that's okay too.

JC: I think that there's a lot of pressure on educators right now to sort of deliver on the most basic elements of education, right? And I think about this as a real challenge. And so we ask will education change? Like the answer is yes. I think the answer is yes, education is going to change. But the problem is that it might change for the worse, right?

SC: Yeah.

JC: Because I think one way that education is going to change is there is going to be I think a greater sort of like engagement with technology and that will create a number of different new chasms within the educational experience of students, right? So, as we all know, we're all working from home right now and you're at the mercy of your internet connection, right?

There were a number of stories in the spring semester as we were forced to start teaching online about people in the K-12 who did not have internet at home, and even if you do have internet at home, is the nature of your internet, the quality of your internet any good? I mean, in United States, we used to talk very deliberately about the digital divide, but I often point out to students, even though they don't talk about that anymore, it still exists, but it's a quality, right? It's a quality divide.

And the reason I say that is because the reason they don't talk about the digital divide as much as they used to is because a lot of people now have access to the internet, but they have it through mobile devices and that's not the same as they have access through the internet through a desktop device. It's just not.

I know students, I know some of my students did their work when they left through their phones, right? Even though I was like, that's not the best way to write an essay, they did it through their phones. We will have to wrestle with the reality of an uneven access to the online environment. And again, it becomes a question of how was the state going to address that? Is it going to address it as some school districts in the United States by giving kids like iPads or laptops or something? Which is an answer, but that doesn't mean that they have the greatest internet service provider. It just mean they had an iPad, right? Who's going to pay for that? There are wildly different levels of funding for educational institutions, educational districts in the United States and some of them have stuff that are like cutting edge and some of them do not. And so that's one element.

I think like we're going to have a kind of weird new set of chasms that develop between educational institutions and we're also going to have sort of private sector sort of growth, right? Because I get an email every day about a new tool I can use in class and I know some stuff about digital things and can say, "No, I don't want to do this," or I can say, "I can find an open-source version of that thing that you just want to sell me, so I'm not going to do this." But how many people know that, right? Like how many people know that there's like a sort of like OER, open electronic resource, environment that they can use to supplement their work? Like that is [inaudible 0:31:20.9] is an education that teachers have to do while at the same time they have to also do the normal thing they have to do when they're teaching, right?

And so supporting all those sort of like growth areas in terms of the resources, that [inaudible 0:31:36.9*minimum] resources that teachers need, give them access to things, helping students with like questions around accessibility, like all those are real challenges. So at the end of the day, yeah, I think education is going to change because like the pressure on institutions right now coming out of the pandemic and with protest are going to be magnified across the next several years and there will be changes just because some institutions in the United

States context, I don't mean this as a hyperbole, some institutions will not survive.

JC: They won't get enough students, their funding will decline, there are going to be institutions of a certain size that are not going to be able to handle this or they're going to come out the other side erratically different institution. And so that's a real concern I think we all should have because every decision that they make that were around trying to stay alive may in fact involve something like seeking funding or making partnerships with for-profit entities that will require X, Y, and Z, right?

JC: So I think that's a discussion that we're not really having now, but will probably going to have more and more.

SC: You know, one of the things I was thinking of when you were saying like I know some students wrote their essays on phones. Like I've done a little bit of digital humanities work, not definitely to the extent that you have. And like even though in like the OER guide that I put together, I said to the professors like, "You don't need to use fancy technologies, like just use Word to do like an annotation of a digital image." But like even that, you can't do on the phone, you know?

So like on one hand, there are these educators that are like coming up with amazing, amazing ideas about how to bridge and develop learning opportunities in these online digital spaces, but they might not translate to a phone. So if writing is something that we can do on our phones, we might not be able to do anything else. And so like that's a really interesting kind of element too, right?

Like the digital, if we are imagining the digital on a laptop or on a desktop, that is not effective as if we are like, okay, create a digital story through TikTok, which please don't explain it to me. I don't get it and I don't really want to know. Or like an Instagram story, right? Like think of these other ways that can be done on a phone as a way to create greater opportunities for students to engage, but through the technologies they have available if at all.

JC: Yeah, I do think that's true. I mean, some websites that we

have access to, of course, there's a mobile view, right? But you lose something on the mobile view, right?

JC: So they can look at things on their phones, but it doesn't look exactly like it looks on their laptop. Nine times out of 10, they may not. Probably 75%. I mean, that matters [inaudible 0:35:15.1] going to get to 80%. But for some people, that environment won't work, like accessibility which is a [inaudible 0:35:27.9], right? Visual accessibility, you lose things when something is odd on a smaller screen, right? And the adjustments that could be made for something on the laptop [inaudible 0:35:40.6] like some of the accessibility tools, I don't know that all of those pour over to the cell phone. Like sometimes they do, sometimes they don't for what I can tell, but I haven't done a systematic view and that will be something that people have to keep in mind.

I mean, I do think that there are things that people could do that are really interesting. There are a lot, right? Like I, of course, think about assignments that sort of flip the idea of what kind of work the students can do that they can do much more work that's like critical and creative working in an online environment because they could take the raw materials, so the primary sources in my case, and use them in a story mode. For instance, like making a visual essay.

And a lot of people have access to Google Slide, and so you can talk to them about using Google Slide to do a photo essay. I did that a year before last as a final assignment and things like that. And so like that, if they do have access to the mobile version of that, it doesn't look exactly the same, but they can sort of figure it out. But you kind of have to think creatively I think and you have to think about what do they have access to? And that's why like talking to them about some of the open sources on the web becomes really important in terms of like quality of the information that they access to.

But yeah, there are opportunities, so that I don't want to say like when talking about is education going to change, [inaudible 0:37:34.3*not all going to be bad,] but there's definitely going to be like these weird challenges associated with it. And I wonder about the dis-

cussions that we're having about that. And to me, as someone who's thinking about teaching in the fall, right now I'm thinking about what's an online class look like? Because the reality is I'm probably going to be teaching online to some significant [inaudible 0:38:01.8] is different than thinking about a face-to-face class without question, so.

SC: It is. And I mean, I see more potential for this remote emergency online teaching to be more student-centric, right? To not be like, let's just have this like huge array of content that we need to ensure that students like know and revere, but rather to find spaces for co-creation because like with some of the digital technologies, like the students know better than us. Like maybe not you, but students would know better than me not knowing Tiktok, and like maybe we can get them to help co-create these assignments and assessments. Like for me, that's a real key exciting possibility, but I know that like just the idea of that can be really daunting to educators. Which is why I think it's good [crosstalk 0:39:06.2]. Yeah.

JC: Yeah. You know, I do think that's really interesting. I mean, TikTok is a really — almost for every pay thing that's out there, there's a free thing that you can substitute for, but the problem is that the free thing is way more clunky, right?

SC: Right.

JC: So you were right. Like making the TikTok video, which I've never made a TikTok video. I know what TikTok is, but I don't feeling, you know, do anything with it.

SC: Okay, thank you.

JC: But making Instagram story, like I had a colleague who had students, they created a class Instagram and one of the final assignments was like students taking over the class Instagram and telling a story using the class Instagram as a sort of final essay. And they all had access to that class Instagram account and they made the story and she sort of evaluated that Instagram story using a criteria. And things like that are totally doable. But Instagram owns that now.

JC: Which I'm like, mm, yeah. That's a question.

SC: I mean, it's like how many battles can you fight at once? Fine Instagram, take it.

Okay, let's move to the last question about imagining a new 'we'. So this a concept that I came up with when I saw teachers, mainly white teachers, in classrooms mainly full of racialized students really like making this clear divide between like our history and like their history. And like let's just make sure they know Canadian history, some of the Canadian context, and then, then, then. It's important, so we'll get to Black history too. And I'm like, you know, Black history isn't for Black students. Black history is part of my history because it's white supremacy and I'm a white person and I need to understand that, and she's like, "Yes. No, definitely." But also, let's just teach the main story first.

And so it's like we need to imagine greater circles of inclusion in the narratives that we tell that allow us to recognize these diverse histories, and not in ways that are just like add and stir because that's not the thing. But I mean, obviously, you know that, but in ways that allow us to shape a different future of what we might look like and to shape to allow us to really shift and change what community and connection might look like as we move into the 21st century. So with all that being said, **do you have any ideas about whether or not we can imagine a new we during or after this moment in different ways?**

And some people are just like, "No, I think the concept of we is problematic," and that is fair too. I still think though that this notion — I really appreciate you laughing, right? Because —

JC: I just don't know that like I would throw away we as a concept. Like that seems a little extreme. I get it, but.

SC: I mean, like there are wes that are problematic, fair. But anyway, I'm just like allowing you to disagree with me if you would like.

JC: Yeah, I think that — yeah, I want to state that I'm in favor of we. I know that seems simplistic, but as I say, I do tend to like think about a collective humanity that tends to move forward, right? Historians know that the past was worse than the present. Like I'm never like

really — I'm never unclear about that. I am doing better than my great-great-grandparents, period, right? So I know that. But at the same time, I do understand what you mean about the place of the "other" in the dominant [inaudible 0:43:36.4*manner.] And I sometimes think about this in terms of history is like a great action-adventure story. Like it's a great whatever story you wanted to be, right? But I like action-adventure story. So to me, it's a great action-adventure story. It can be a great romance story. It can be like romance stories, but to me, it's great action-adventure stories.

SC: Well, from your background before you switched to this one, like I knew that was a great comic. Good comic books.

JC: Yeah, it was [inaudible 0:44:06.6*comic background.] So as a great action-adventure story, there's always like heroes and villains, right? And so by default, in the action-adventure stories of the past, the villains were always the people who weren't White, right? Like, you know, it's Black people, Brown people, Yellow people. Whatever color you want, they were the bad guy. And then they had like a loyal —

SC: But also people don't see color. White, black, green, purple, right? It just so happens.

SC: It just so happens all the villains weren't White.

JC: Yeah, it just so happened that they're — but because it's like a story that has like these sort of [inaudible 0:44:52.3] or action-adventure context, like there is like a central action figure like that's giving point of view — like there's a point of view character in a story. And I think like when I think about telling them their histories, I'm like, "Well, you can switch the point of view character," and a couple of things happened. One, you can still tell the same story, right? Like you can do a point of view shift in the American Revolution and still tell the same story like America becoming free. It's just that the nature of why and how and who did what, when. It's just a little bit, right?

JC: But there's a lot of historical fiction that does this, right? They'll take a character and it'll be there. And then it'll be in a room and George Washington is on the other side, the villain is the other thing

that's really important. But there are real people who are like that, right? And so I do think like that [inaudible 0:45:55.3] to shift the point of view, define the point of view characters that bring people of color and women into the center of the action because they were there and they're just being ignored, right? They were there, but they're just being ignored.

What does that mean for all the stories? Like sometimes those people are "the villain", but like every action-adventure stories, the truly great villains aren't villains. They think they're doing the right thing.

JC: Like they have a really clear vision of why they're doing what they're doing, they're just on the wrong side of the story, right? So in history, the people who are on the "wrong side" of story, they're really great villains because they have a good reason why they did it. If you get into it, you can see why they're doing what they're doing. [inaudible 0:46:52.4] change the story of the villain — you know, they're competent villains. We all enjoy a competent villain in an action-adventure story. Like they're making more variety. A competent villain makes things more excited. Let's just be honest, right?

And so those are things that people can do. They can shift the point of view characters, make the story a little less about those people that everyone knows is still the same story, and they can give the villains their due, right? Don't ignore what they said or why they said it, instead like bury down. Be like, yeah, they had a good point of view, and what does it mean for us to think about our "heroes" through the lens of that person who was in opposition. They're antagonists, right? Protagonist and antagonist. Not heroes and villains, but protagonist and antagonist, right?

JC: Because many of these people who are "villains", they're now your neighbors, right? Like their descendants are right around the corner. You eat their food. So they're not villains, they were at one point on the opposite side of a conflict. That conflict ended and there was a peace, and they had to come to terms with that peace because they didn't have the power to impose their peace and so they become a part

of the whole. And what does it mean — what was the consequences of that [inaudible 0:48:37.9]?

In the American context, one of the things that's really a historical moment is how the south won the peace, right? Like they told a different history. They told a different version of history that justify their continued white supremacy. Even though the system, they gave birth to white supremacy, slavery was overturned. So they created a whole story, a mythology that justified their supremacy, that white supremacy. And allows them to be violent still, it allows them to do all these things, and that's an example in the American context of like how important telling a story can be.

And so when you're a teacher and you gather the narrative, like when you, you know, in my version, the action-adventure story. When you put in together the like point of view characters, you don't have to ignore how it's going to end. It's always going to end the same way, but you can get there lots of different ways.

JC: And the way you make your decision really matter to students.

SC: Well, ends like get students to do choose your own adventure, right? Like I don't —

JC: Yeah, right, your own adventure.

SC: Yeah. Like I don't know why we — I mean, the students that I worked with, like I kept thinking I'd have to like convince them of how important history is and they're like, "No, we know. Do it better." Like they weren't saying that to like me, but they were saying that in the interviews, like we know this. And some students were saying like, the most interesting history I've ever learned was in elementary school because we got to do [inaudible 0:50:28.1] around it. Like it wasn't just sit here and tell me the story.

Because I think of like it's not action-adventure. I think you mentioned romance. It's not that either. It's a musical. But I think — like I think of Hamilton. Like I think of the musical Hamilton in so much of what you're saying that like Burn Hamilton or both these characters that we see their complexities and the casting and the ways of the

story is able to kind of present itself forces you to think new ways about the present, right?

SC: And I just think that's just so powerful. So thank you so much for just bringing that to this conversation. This has been so wonderful.

JC: Oh, no problem. Thanks for asking me. It's always nice to think about teaching and every teacher knows you're always wondering am I doing a good job with this? Look, like I think that all the time. Like I'd sometimes tell the students like, this was not a good one, but I'll do better next time, right? Like I've said that at the end of the class like, yeah, this wasn't great.

SC: Sorry.

JC: [inaudible 0:51:44.0]

SC: Well, I mean, —

JC: [inaudible 0:51:45.8] you know, like that was awesome. You guys should be really pleased [inaudible 0:51:51.1]

SC: I'm sorry I wasn't new for this one because — but I mean, like one of the things that I've written in the past is like to work with your students. Like think of it as a learning community and like you as an educator, I don't mean you, but like maybe you, don't need to be the expert. You can just help guide them through the like exploration of these topics. And so if the class is bad, it's their fault, not yours.

JC: That's good.

SC: Yeah.

JC: [inaudible 0:52:25.1]

SC: [inaudible 0:52:29.8] because of you today. So take that on. But it's different because in an online learning environment, I was like I don't have the same tricks. Like it's not like I have a lot of tricks, but if I'm staring at like all these black boxes because students don't have like a webcam or they don't want to turn it on, it's like hard to know if things are landing, you know? So, yeah.

JC: Yeah.

SC: It is really going to be a challenge to educators moving forward, but especially in this new milieu.

JC: I hear you. Yeah, I totally get that.

SC: Yeah. Well, Julian, thank you so much, and hopefully we stay connected.

JC: Oh, yeah, yeah. I'm looking forward to checking out the series and thanks again for asking me to participate.

SC: Thank you so much, and I'll provide all the links to your work and any other resources that you think might be useful for people or comic books that you want them to read below the video as well.

JC: Okay.

SC: Okay. All right, see you later. Bye. That was great.

In conversation with Dr. Kristen Duncan

Pandemic Pedagogy Conversation #28

Dr. Kristen Duncan

Dr. Kristen Duncan is an assistant professor at Clemson University. His research focuses on Black teachers and the ways they talk about race as well as their experiences, and also study the way race plays out in social studies texts. You can connect with her on Twitter at @DrKristenDuncan.

We spoke June 11, 2020.

Video posted June 16, 2020.

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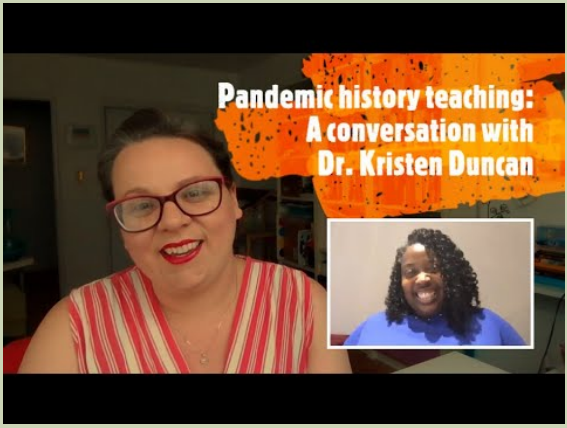

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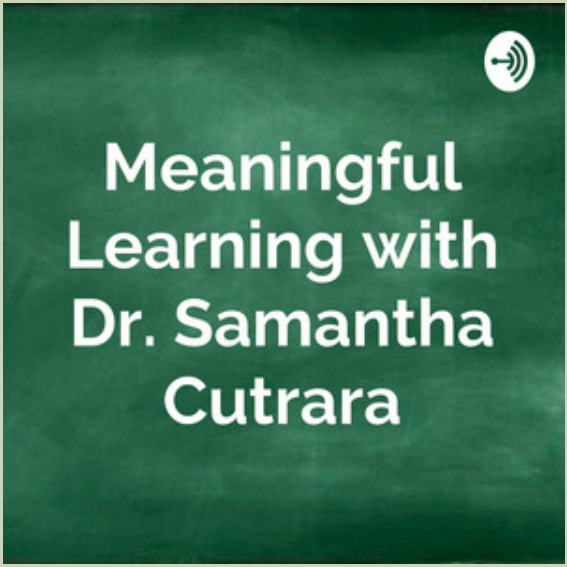

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TRANSCRIPT

All the Pandemic Pedagogy conversations revolved around three questions:

- Question 1: Have you thought of history any different *because* of this moment?
- Question 2: Do you think we would teach history *after* this moment?
- Question 3: Do you think we can "imagine a new 'we'" during/after this moment?

Dr. Samantha Cutrara: Kristen, thank you so much for agreeing to talk with me this week. It is amazing how much has changed since we first connected on Twitter, and I'm just extra excited for us to have this conversation. So thank you.

Kristen Duncan: Thank you for having me.

SC: There is a fly around, which is why there are cats. So very excited because — let everyone know what kind of conversation this is going to be. Before we get started, do you want to introduce yourself?

KD: Sure. I am an assistant professor at Clemson University, so I prepare pre-service teachers who are going to teach high school social studies. My research focuses on Black teachers and the ways they talk about race as well as their experiences, and I also study the way race plays out in social studies texts. Now, when I say text, that is like a large umbrella term that could mean actual, like literary text with words like textbooks, or it could be like historical sites that students might go on field trips to visit.

I got my Ph.D. at the University of Georgia. Go Dawgs! And I'm a former middle school teacher. I'm really grateful to the students I taught because I learned more in those years about life probably than in the decades leading up to that time. So, yeah.

SC: It's funny you said, "Go Dawgs!" because in my introduction to you, I was like, in her bio she sent me, she said, "Do Dawgs!" I don't know what that means, but like sure. So it's funny you said that. I'm glad I put it in the introduction. Your middle school teaching, was that in Georgia?

KD: It was.

KD: So I taught in the Metro Atlanta area, and then I also taught in Athens, Georgia.

SC: And it's like middle school seven, eight, which are already difficult years to teach.

KD: Yes. Middle school students are full of energy and questions and are trying to figure out how to cope with the changes that are happening in their lives, but they are fun and they're interesting, so it was a good time.

SC: If you're like with middle school, it's either they're still very young and that's surprising or they are very mature and that is surprising. And that it takes a lot of trust to be able to develop a good community. But when it happens, like that middle ground between being really matured, being really immature allows for some really positive things to happen. So thank you for bringing your experience as a middle school teacher, but also as a social studies teacher educator to this conversation.

KD: Thank you.

SC: So we'll get started. I asked everyone the same three questions, but the context has changed quite a lot since when we first started talking about pandemic pedagogy. So the first question that I asked people is whether or not the pandemic — just one second because there's a truck. Good times. At least there's no lawnmowers. Okay.

So the first question is about **whether or not your ideas about history have changed during COVID?** And what I find interesting was I had talked to some historians that were like, you know, after things like the Spanish Flu, there were pushes for greater rights and greater equity. And what's so interesting is this revolution is happening. Like that's a word that you used right in the middle of it, which demonstrates how like the importance, but also like how it was so close to being there to begin with. So do you have any thoughts about how your ideas about history have shift and changed if it all during this time?

KD: So until about two weeks ago, I would have said no.

KD: But the last two weeks have really led me to ask a lot of questions about how change happens, right? So what we've seen in the last two weeks, I feel like it's something that I haven't seen in my lifetime. And so I'm wondering what are the conditions that allow this kind of rebellion, this kind of uprising to happen because George Floyd was not even the first Black person to die at the hands of police during this pandemic, right?

KD: So what happened now, it took me back to 2012 when Trayvon Martin was murder to 2013 when George Zimmerman was acquitted, to Michael Brown's death in Ferguson, to Eric Garner, and it just made me wonder what has happened in those last few years for us to get to this point. And the reason I ask that question is because I went to a protest in 2013 after George Zimmerman was acquitted, and nearly everyone in the crowd was Black. But if you look at the protests today, they are in actual multiracial coalition out there protesting. So I've been wondering what has happened? How do the stars align for this moment to be happening where corporate entities are putting out statements saying that Black lives matter when just a few years ago, there was like a serious — pause on this while I get my word right.

But just a few — so just three years ago, Colin Kaepernick was essentially blackballed by the NFL for protesting police brutality towards Black Americans, right? And there was a whole lot of hubbub that involved the president of the United States, but what happened since

then? Like how did we get to this moment? So is it because 40 million people are unemployed and they don't have sports or work or kid's activities and those other things to distract them? Is it because of the continuous new cycle of this, right? So I don't watch the videos when they come out because it's traumatic and I don't need to watch the video to know what happened essentially, right?

KD: But the video of George Floyd in particular, that image was everywhere. I don't watch — I'm not a consistent cable news watcher. I usually watch like the morning news and the evening news and that's it, but that image was everywhere so you couldn't get away from it. Was it people watching that long video and watching the life like leave his body? I really am really interested in what happened to create this kind of energy around the need to address different forms of racism. So, yeah, it has really garnered a lot of questions for me more so than like changing the way I think about history.

SC: Yeah. Well, it's interesting because Angela Davis said on — well I saw it on Twitter, but she did a video that said she also has never seen anything like this, right? And it's like — I mean, Angela Davis has been such a foundational person from Black Power onwards for her to say that. I saw someone in Twitter saying like, "Thank you for just validating that because I'm so confused right now about like how this is placed in in history?" Kind of like the questions that you're having. And so to say that, it's like, yes. Like what is happening at this moment? And it's interesting you say distraction because like there aren't distractions like sports and childcare because that's not something I've heard a lot. I've heard a lot more of like in more of this like kind of like charitable discourse like, oh, the pandemic has really highlighted the structural inequities, and so this has provided a space for people to talk through. And so it's kind of — I mean, both of those things can be true, but it's kind of interesting how they come together. And to me, it really highlights like how multilayered mystery is? Like what are those elements that are going to be remembered when historians are writing about this?

KD: Right. That's really interesting. I posed this question on Facebook maybe on Sunday just because I have been thinking about it for a while and I checked a little earlier, so far there are 62 comments.

SC: [inaudible 0:11:43.1]

KD: They have lots of thoughts about this, but people also mentioned like there's a growing distrust because we've been given different kind of information around the Coronavirus and what works, what doesn't work, lots of untruths have been told or mistruths, but yeah, there are —

SC: Do you mean alternative facts?

KD: Indeed. Indeed.

SC: Because there's no facts, there are just alternative.

KD: Right. But, yeah. So before George Floyd's murder, we were already given all of these things to create a what I would call a pretty unstable environment, right?

KD: So it's kind of like the powder keg was loading and being ready to be ignited. And before George Floyd was murdered, there was the murder of Ahmaud Arbery in Georgia and the video of that murder ran the course of social media and the news networks. And Breonna Taylor was murdered in her sleep at her home. So a lot is leading up to this moment. And as a Black woman, I'm excited. I hope that substantive change comes. The symbolic gestures are cute, but I would love to see substantive policy changes come from this. The history teacher in me is really interested in what creates this moment, but as an activist and a person who realizes that there is much more change that needs to be made, wants to know what happens to create change, right?

So if we can figure out how that happens, then we can get necessary change created. Hopefully, it doesn't require a pandemic every time. You're muted.

SC: Yeah, I said here's hoping.

SC: [crosstalk 0:14:09.1] every time. But I mean, right the day before he was murdered, there was also the video of Amy Cooper, right? Threatening, like weaponizing African-American, like that is

clearly a weapon. And so I think also, like people that maybe didn't really understand how and why that was so problematic could see it literally the next day.

SC: And maybe that's why more people have wanted to become involved than they did for Black Lives Matter a couple years ago. I mean, of course, there's all these different things at once, but hopefully, it doesn't take a pandemic.

And I had spoke to Natasha Henry, who's the president of the Ontario Black History Society here in — well, obviously in Canada like two days before all of this happened. And one thing we were talking about was with remote online teaching, she was saying that like there is even more of a focus on kind of a "traditional curriculum". So less room for culturally relevant teaching practices and resources, and so there's a lot more White focus, Eurocentric focus.

And we were both kind of talking about like when we get back to our classrooms, what will that feel like for people? Will there be such a desire for things to feel normal that it will go back to the same in ways that are even more problematic than they were before? Like exacerbating the inequities of education was such a big theme across all the different videos and like this, this moment is highlighting that in such strong ways.

KD: Yeah. I honestly feel like if we go back to teaching history the way we did six months ago, we have wasted this moment. There are lots of teachers who want to do better, right? So like you were just saying about history in layers, there's lots of layers to teaching history, right?

KD: Because one, people can't teach what they don't know, right?

KD: So one, we have to help teachers, history teachers in particular, become more knowledgeable of Black history and the histories of other people of color. We have to — and I know this is a question, so I don't know how you're going to frame this in the video. Sorry.

KD: But we also need to make our history more inclusive, right? So in the US, Black Americans usually show up at enslavement, recon-

struction, and civil rights movement. Like no Black people lived through the Great Depression or something like that. Like that's how it plays out. Asian-Americans usually only show up at the Chinese Exclusion Act and Japanese incarceration. So that's really problematic for a number of reasons. But if we can galvanize this moment, teachers can really take advantage of resources and professional development, and go back into classrooms in August or online. I have no idea what's actually going to happen, but be prepared to teach a diverse group of students the history of a diverse group of people.

SC: One of the things that I try to advocate in my work is like, it's okay for you as a teacher to be like, "I don't know this stuff. Let's explore together." Because when you hold yourself so tightly to being an expert, you are setting yourself up to only teaching what you know. And if you have never been exposed to these histories, you don't know them. And so it is extra scary, and you might — like that combine for White teachers. That combined with like a fear of desettling their only privilege means it just gets replicated.

Like for me, a lot of things that I've been hearing in the series is people really wanting to prioritize like student care and emotional wellbeing and building relationships with students. So we can like bring that to our classrooms. We can explore these histories together and be like, yeah, I didn't know this. Let's learn together.

KD: Right. Absolutely.

SC: Oh, sorry.

KD: No, I was agreeing with you. So do I.

SC: Okay. So, well, this brings me to my second question, although we kind of already like talked about it. But **do you think history teaching will change after this moment?** Like a lot of people say should, right? You're saying should. Everyone is saying should. Do you think it will change? What would that look like? What would that work look like?

People can't see right now, but you do not look — you do not look up your mistake.

KD: The difference between will and should is a big one, right?

SC: Mm-hmm.

KD: So it involves helping teachers learn new material and involve the actual structural changes right from the state level because in a lot of cases, teachers are held accountable for teaching like state standards. And so they stick to that for that reason. So if we could get state standards that are more inclusive or actually allow more room. Like the state of South Carolina actually just moved to a new set of history standards that are all inquiry-based, and so they allow a lot more room for teachers to bring in different kinds of content because the standards aren't content-based. They're actually based on students engaging and inquiry.

So lots of stakeholders would need to be involved for those structural changes to happen, and those structural changes take a long time. So I think that history teaching will look different in some places where the teachers might be more equipped to do so, but I am concerned about whether or not it will actually happen at large. But I would love for teachers to even take advantage of like oral histories or having their students interview people to talk about like their engagement. So if they know someone who marched or who protested in some other form or fashion to talk to them about that and what that was like and why they engaged in it, I think we don't take advantage of that kind of stuff nearly enough.

KD: Yeah. Schools have looked the same for a very, very long time. So I am cautiously optimistic that some change — well, I feel like I said like a politician. Cautiously optimistic —

SC: I was actually gonna say you sound like Sam Cooke, A Change is Gonna Come.

KD: Yes, but it takes time, and my concern is about the momentum slowing down in that process. But another one of the changes that should happen would be this moment didn't happen because of like one leader, right? That's what I love about the Black Lives Matter movement, it's really grassroots, right?

So my colleague Ashley Woodson talks about Messianic Master Narratives. And let's take Martin Luther King, for example. So this is going to be an oversimplification, but it's pretty realistic.

Students essentially learn that like Martin Luther King marched and gave speech, and then Black people got their rights. What that does is actually way more harmful than a lot of teachers realize. So it makes kids feel like if they can't be Martin Luther King, they can't contribute. When in reality, the movement was lots and lots and lots of people, right? So there are even lots of other leaders.

Women in particular, I'm still a little upset that I didn't learn about some of the women involved in the movement until I was in graduate school, but like the Ella Bakers, the Diane Nashes, and the Fannie Lou Hamers of the world also were pivotal to the civil rights movement. The students don't learn about that. They learned about White guy who marched and gave a speech. Maybe you learned that he went to jail and wrote a letter there, but that's about it. So hopefully, we can at least start there with reforming or revolutionizing the way that we teach social movement in schools.

SC: There's a couple things there that I wanna pick up on, and I'll just immediately start with the last thing you said. Like that you are upset that you didn't learn about women that were involved with the movements. So the John Lewis Trilogy, graphic novel trilogy, and also Selma directed by —

KD: Ava DuVernay.

SC: Yes, thank you. Both of those texts really highlight women's presence in a way that I have read other graphic novels, like one by the same artist that did the John Lewis book that have women like totally absent. And you can watch whole documentaries about Martin Luther King and never see women, and both of those sets of text show that women are there and they are involved. And, yes, it's a different type of patriarchy during that time, so women weren't involved in the same way that like you and I could be now, but like that contribution of like

cooking and housing, some of these leaders, it was as essential to the leadership of that work.

And I think that — one of the things I — one of the concerns that I have and I know that a lot of people share this is that people are going to bring these narratives in their classroom in harmful ways and in very simplistic ways. And I think that being thoughtful about text, which I know what your research is on, being thoughtful about text and just like thinking about deconstructing what am I looking at, what am I hearing, what am I seeing can help work through those histories, but in ways that aren't like, hey, guys, racism, right? You know? Because that is going to be more harmful.

KD: Right. So one of my favorite activities to do with my pre-service history teachers is to talk about narratives and the way they're constructed, right?

KD: So we watch this video about Thomas Jefferson that is very typical of the narrative we all learned in school. And then I teach them about Sally Hemings, and usually most of them had never heard of her or her children. So Thomas Jefferson is usually glorified in history classes, he wrote the Declaration of Independence, he's one of the founding fathers of this nation. He did a lot for — sorry, it just started like monsooning outside.

SC: I could hear.

KD: Oh, okay. He did a lot for the foundation of our nation, but he also was a slave owner who repeatedly raped one of his slaves, right? And she bore his children. People need to learn more complete histories [inaudible 0:27:28.0].

So in that same day, I have them read a page of the textbook from the first year I taught, and the section that they read is about Rosa Parks. So Rosa Parks is usually the one woman that students learn about in the civil rights movement. So the textbook section about Rosa Parks describes or it says, Rosa Parks, a tired middle-aged seamstress blah, blah, blah. And then I teach them what actually happened and how the Women's Political Council of Montgomery had actually

planned the entire Montgomery bus boycott before she got on the bus, how she was actually a freedom fighter and had been working for years if not decades. With the NIICP, she had attended the Highlander Folk School. Like Rosa Parks has done all this activist work and she's reduced to a tired middle-aged seamstress in this textbook that thousands of children are reading every year.

It's pretty infuriating. So giving teachers access to that kind of information is really important.

SC: I think one of the things that infuriates me about that Rosa Parks' narrative is that her work with the NIICP was based on like gendered and racial violence, right? Because she was a sexual assault investigator.

SC: And like to take that away from the narrative is such a different form of violence on top of the work that she was already doing. As someone that's interested in women's history, to be able to take that very gendered nature out is just, yeah, it's extra infuriating.

So this could lead to the third question about whether or not this moment will allow us to imagine a new we after this? So imagining a new we is something that I started to articulate when I was watching how teachers, particularly White teachers, would really other their students of color. And even though they're like, oh, no, you know, it's all Canadian history, it's all American history, but we will get to those histories for those students and those other things later. Let's just focus on our national history first, and that we really need to have these greater circles of inclusion to force ourselves to understand that we are nations, that we are transnational countries that are made up of different things in the stories we tell ourselves. So do you see this moment as allowing us to be able to imagine a new 'we' in different ways or in better ways? Or maybe you don't think that's a useful concept at all? Any thoughts?

KD: I think we have to imagine we as the most inclusive we possible, right? So if Black Lives Matter, that means Black women's lives matter, that means black LGBTQ+ lives matter, that means Black kids'

lives matter, that means Black trans lives matter. So when we're talking the histories of Black people or Black Americans at least, we need to be teaching all of those. So as far as women, that includes women of all stripes of life, right? We have to bring the margins to the middle essentially.

SC: Oh, I love that. Is that yours?

KD: Kinda sort of.

SC: Just kidding.

KD: So a friend of mine has a paper called From Margin to Center, and I just traded middle for center.

SC: Because the alliteration works better.

KD: It does. It does.

SC: Yup, trademark.

KD: But yeah, I think we have to — one of the things I think happens is people in the center forget about people at the margins. And they'll bring a few more in and leave most people at the margins. But the people at the margins right now are fed up, right?

KD: So if the people whose lives have been centered in everything actually want some kind of structural change, which seems to be the case right now, right? Like I was talking about that like multiracial coalition that seems to be happening right now. I do think that we can leave this moment with a more inclusive we than we have right now. At the same time, I'm sure that there are people that are being left out and we who have more privilege than they have to make the effort to bring them towards the middle.

SC: Yeah, I love that. And I think that like we should be imagining different wes as well, because when those margins come to the middle, it shouldn't just be the same thing replicated, but just looking slightly different. Like those margins should really shift what the we looks like, you know? So thank you for that. That was great.

KD: Thank you. And I did want to say something about you mentioning earlier teachers who would like say, "Oh, we'll teach about the

histories of people for color for those students." Then White kids need to know the histories of the people of color too, right?

KD: So White students also need to know that people of color have made incredible contributions to the history of their countries. So histories of people of color are not only for students of color. So I think it's really imperative that teachers understand that.

SC: Yeah. I mean, an example I often use with White teachers as a White person myself, obviously, I feel like I'm like glowing right now with this particular light and fact I'm so hot in the middle of summer that like I see Black history as fine history too because the changes and the resistance and the resilience inform the world that I live in, but also the white supremacy that informs so much of that activism is part of who I am as a White person and understanding that. It's a lot easier to understand that this is not separate history from me. This is something that I have to think about and grapple with and learn from in order to teach better and think better and do better.

This separation, for me, has never felt — I never understood it. And I went to elementary school for a couple years in Florida. Actually, in the southern United States. And the most like isolated from histories I felt was during the — was in 1992 during the 500th anniversary of Columbus coming to America and I was just like, this is so confusing. Like as a young Canadian student, I didn't understand this patriotism. I felt so isolated. But, to me, it demonstrated a type of nationalism that did not like fit with how I understood the world. And I think that if those types of narratives are comfortable, then those are good invitations to push. Like it's okay to be uncomfortable to change things. Like that's how change happens.

KD: Absolutely. Absolutely. Yeah, I was in elementary school in '92 and I don't remember any of that. I don't remember [crosstalk 0:36:05.6]

SC: I think you're a little younger than me. I was 10 in 1992.

KD: Oh, I was eight.

SC: Oh. I mean, it was a pretty traumatic year. Like I went from

Canada to Florida, [inaudible 0:36:17.9] and everyone was like singing these songs and I was like, I don't get it. I have no idea what's happening.

KD: I can imagine. Yeah.

SC: Kristen, thank you so much. This has been fantastic. Thank you for agreeing to speak with me this week. It's been a real pleasure, and I hope we stay connected.

KD: Thank you. I hope so as well.

SC: Well, and you know I was saying to people too like it will be interesting to touch base when things settle, although that feels so different to say that now to see how things have changed. So I will definitely be in touch. So hopefully, we can continue.

KD: Thank you.

SC: Okay, bye.

KD: Bye.

In conversation with Mark Currie

Pandemic Pedagogy Conversation #29

Mark Currie

Mark Currie is a PhD Candidate and Educator in the Faculty of Education, University of Ottawa. His research focuses around public pedagogies, sociohistorical spaces, and enacting antiracisms. More specifically, his dissertation examines how the Ontario Black History Society's walking tour in downtown Toronto acts as an educational tool for engaging and (re)shaping sociohistorical spaces as antiracist geographies.

We spoke May 21, 2020.

Video posted June 23, 2020.

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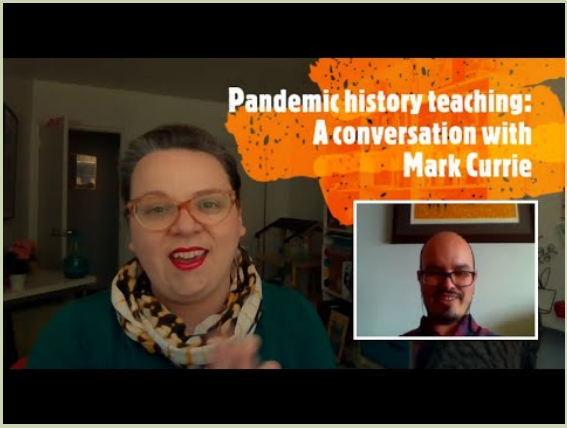

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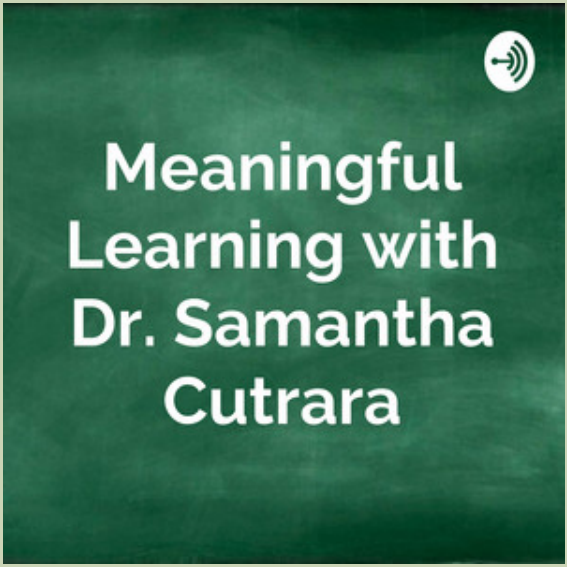

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TRANSCRIPT

All the Pandemic Pedagogy conversations revolved around three questions:

- Question 1: Have you thought of history any different *because* of this moment?
- Question 2: Do you think we would teach history *after* this moment?
- Question 3: Do you think we can "imagine a new 'we'" during/after this moment?

"As an educator, I have taught in the Teacher Education Program at the University of Ottawa, teaching courses on History education methods at the Intermediate and Senior levels. Between my undergraduate studies in History, obtaining my own secondary school teaching qualifications, conducting research on postcolonial education on the Caribbean island of Dominica, and now engaging in work on antiracism through informal forms of education, I learned to see history as something that people create through their own knowledges and lived experiences, and I now understand History education to generally be that of teaching and learning about relationships between people, time, place, and space. While this approach might be seen as an interdisciplinary one, branching away from more traditional forms of teaching historical inquiry, I believe it provides students with a stronger sense of why learning about the past matters for understanding themselves in relation to the contexts of the world in which they live. These are the ideas I

discuss and try to expand upon in my conversation below." –**Mark Currie**

Dr. Samantha Cutrara: Mark, thank you so much for agreeing to speak with me today. It's really exciting to blend both your interest in anti-racist history, which is how I know you, as well as your doctoral work on anti-racist geographies, which I'm really excited to talk about. Before we get started, do you want to do a little introduction to your own work before we just jump into the questions?

Mark Currie: Sure! Thank you so much for having me on. It's been just an exciting lead up to being your guest here. I've seen so many great people speak on your show. And I just think it's such a privilege to be put in with that list of names. So thank you very much for having me.

SC: Thank you.

MC: It's a great opportunity to talk about some of the work I've been doing and some of the thinking that I've been working with. As you say, I've been working with the idea of anti-racist geographies and anti-racist historical consciousness. I think in a nutshell, what I've been looking at is the relationships between the geographies—the spaces that we occupy—the ways that we've become positioned in those spaces as racialized beings, and the way that we create those spaces through our understanding of histories and in relationship to the present. So I think there's a strong role to be played in terms of developing anti-racist historical consciousness, which I can talk a little bit more about later in terms of understanding who we are in the spaces that we occupy on an everyday basis.

SC: You know, one of the things that has been really awesome about this show that I'm doing is to see all of these different ways that people come to history. I came from a Women's Studies background, so very interdisciplinary, which really helps me think about both theory as well as subjects. And if I remember correctly, you were also from an interdisciplinary bachelor background, right?

MC: Not so much the bachelor background. My bachelor background was History and English, but where the interdisciplinary stuff

really comes in was perhaps more in my Island Studies work where I focused on post-colonial education in a Caribbean setting. It became a strong working of the relationships between the island setting itself, the education, the history behind the education, and the history behind the colonization of the island. And so a lot of different disciplines at play there, all coming together in the Caribbean doing an ethnography.

SC: Yeah, it's so interesting how we come to these different ideas. So I'll jump into the first question which is about, **have you thought of history any differently?** And we can expand this to talk about social studies more broadly. But have your ideas about history changed because of this moment at all?

MC: Well, I think in a lot of ways, yes. First of all, I'll say that I find it difficult to separate the history and what we'll call the geography of the spatial elements, because the histories that we learn are always positioned in a context in the space. They take place in a space; they shape that space.

In terms of the context that we're in now, looking at history in terms of how it relates to our everyday experiences, it's just interesting to see how the way that we've always understood our spaces—the way that we've been taught to understand them from the past—is shifting, and we're seeing that shift with the way that we use spaces and are perhaps recognizing that more. What we're experiencing now becomes like a history of tomorrow, and that's just really interesting to think about in terms of historicizing ourselves, I think, and recognizing that yeah, what we're doing, the way that we're experiencing this pandemic, for example, is very much going to shape the world of tomorrow. So it's definitely something where history has to be considered.

I think in another way though, it's also interesting to think about the histories that we are taught, that we do learn. When we think of, say, secondary school history, for example, I think about learning about World War I, the Depression, World War II that type of thing, and little do we hear about the idea that right around the tail end of World War I was a pandemic; the Spanish flu there. And that's interesting to think

about which history has become prominent, which history becomes prioritized in different times. Since this pandemic started, I've heard more about Spanish flu than I have in my entire life before this.

SC: Me too.

MC: So I thought, well, why am I just hearing about it now? Well, I think its history becomes important in relation to the context that we're in perhaps. Yeah, so it's a changing perspective, I think.

SC: Well, I think too about what you said, you can't just separate history and geography, history and space, because I think about the Spanish flu and I think of Neil Orford's talk that he did, the very first "Pandemic Pedagogy" talk, when he said, "A lot of women were turning their porches and their church basement into these makeshift hospitals." And those types of use of spaces also get lost in our cultural amnesia of particular histories.

So when you're saying we learn to use spaces because of how they've been used in the past, it's not often conscious as much as in the historical legacy. I think that's a really powerful way to put those things together.

MC: Absolutely. What I try to bring into this conversation with that idea of historicizing the ways that we come to understand the way we use spaces, is also the added idea of who gets to use those spaces. Who gets to claim belonging to those spaces or ownership of those spaces? And in a lot of cases, what we find is if we look at the history and even the present, what we find is that the spaces are often marked in ways that are in racialized terms. Whether intentionally or not, they become marked in ways that we understand them as certain official spaces, and when we say official, that means it's who gets to claim that as their official past, as their official present.

MC: And in doing so, it excludes a lot of people, particularly racialized people and Indigenous people. So that's the kind of work that I'm trying to understand, how in shaping those spaces we enact exclusions and inclusions along various lines. Whether we intentionally

do so or not, the effects are exclusions. So that's something to consider, I think.

SC: Yeah, I think of a really big example is when Trump was trying to demonize Nancy Pelosi, saying, "Oh, Nancy Pelosi wants us dancing in the streets of Chinatown." And like that is such an evocation of racialized discourse that you point to that and use that as an example of racializing a particular phenomenon in very explicitly racist ways.

Do you have any examples that teachers might be able to think about or use that aren't quite as explicit? I know I'm putting you on the spot with that, but I wonder if —

MC: That's okay, because I think what teachers might be able to emphasize more is the local; is the looking at where they and their students are, just looking around the spaces that they occupy on an everyday basis. Not anything that we determine as particularly historically significant. You know, yes, you need to look around. I'm in Ottawa right now and I could go to Parliament Hill and there are statues of former prime ministers and statues dedicated to the War of 1812 and all these types of monuments and such, and we can analyze those, and I do, I do think those warrant some analysis, but it doesn't even need to go to just those specific historical markers in that way; rather, just the everyday. Look at the street signs that we have on our streets. Look at the structures that we live in.

If teachers ask their students to look at the spaces that they occupy on an everyday basis, considering ideas of which languages are being represented, considering the ideas of just even the design of their town, of their street, what is their function and who gets to decide how that function is perpetuated or not, I think in a lot of cases, you'll find that cultural representation, for example, you can point to—say you're talking about the Chinatown. For people in Toronto or Ottawa or in a lot of major cities, they will have a Chinatown and you can say, "Well, there's representation." But at the same time, you have to ask, "Why is it there? Why is there only representation—why is it the main represen-

tation of Chinese culture and history and anything like that, why is it isolated to that spot? And who got to decide that?"

Because if you look at the surrounding, the dominant area surrounding that becomes, well, it's not Chinese. Typically it's taken over by the same signs and designs and such that were put in place by British colonial bodies and then continued on as Canada became its own country, but hanging on to those colonial roots, those colonial structures, that kind of thing.

So I know I'm kind of going on a roundabout way of what can teachers do, but I think coming back to that, it's the idea of looking at the history of the space that you're in and seeing who gets represented and who doesn't get represented and why. And has it always been the case? I think in a lot of cases, you'll find that there's maybe those—now, I don't want to say token necessarily, but usually token examples of racialized representations, but for the most part, the dominant representation is still that underlying structure of colonialism that is maintained.

SC: Well, I mean, like I think of street signs just like you said, right? Are we naming these particular streets after key people in the settling of a city or a town? And that settlement is settler colonialism. And often we can incorporate gender into these conversations. Are we renaming women? No, probably not. And often in houses, they'll be like "so and so lived here with his wife and his children." And I think that's a really powerful way to be able to think about the incorporation of history and geography, especially as we're moving into the summer and teachers might be thinking of the ways that their classrooms are going to be shifting in September, and thinking of ways to do some outreach to community, but also in a way that's—what's the word I'm looking for? That's very tangible, right?—

MC: Sure.

SC: —for students and teachers, if it does go back to remote teaching, and I think looking at your local neighborhood I think is a great suggestion, as well as like the larger municipalities around you.

I think of Casey Burkholder's talk that I did where she was saying she was getting her teacher candidates to also just map their own quarantine spaces.

MC: Yeah.

SC: That can also highlight things that you don't even necessarily think are racialized or gendered or classed and then they become this, or you see them becoming this, because they were always there, but you hadn't really seen it that way. So yeah, those are some really powerful connections. Thank you.

MC: I'm happy to talk about it because this is something I think about basically on a daily basis right now.

SC: Yeah, I live in a very Greek neighborhood, and it's interesting that a lot of people will speak Greek to me and I am not Greek. And I'm just like, "Oh, no." And then I recognize the ways that my neighborhood excludes me from a lot of things because it was designed to be this kind of Greek community. It's been a really interesting element to be living in this community to think about, well, "why did this Greek neighborhood have to pop up in a way that there are just all these businesses that only speak Greek?" And I'm going to be more thoughtful about it because of the suggestion. So thank you.

MC: My pleasure. I think that's what I've learned so much through my own research, but also in talking to people about my research: it's always interesting and wonderful to see that click of beginning to think about the simple things that we take for granted every day in terms of how we do and don't 'fit' with the space that we're in.

So what my work does a lot of is looking at the spaces of Toronto and historicizing those. And for the city that is said to be—I think it is said to be the most multicultural place on the Earth, perhaps.

SC: One of them. I think it's like one of them. Yeah.

MC: One of them. Okay, thank you. I think my stats are dated, perhaps. But yeah, one of the most multicultural places, it's always interesting to see how the English language, for example, becomes the constant, where, well, yes, you see the restaurants and the shops and

such that speak other languages other than English, and they have the signs that are other than English, but if you look at the majority of them, and I don't know about your experience of where you are, but the majority of them that I've looked at, they can be in a variety of different languages, but there's always an English representation.

MC: There's always that English as the constant and that these representations other than English become added on, as opposed to being there just in their own right.

SC: Mm-hmm. This came up in Marie-Hélène's talk as well, that we have to—if we want to leave the pandemic fighting for greater equity or engaging in activism for a greater equity, we have to recognize the ways that a lot of minorities get marginalized, which include like Franco linguistic minorities in—

MC: Sure.

SC: —in Canada, which is a bilingual country. So yeah, those are interesting elements to bring up.

I want to switch to our second question right now, which is about teaching history after this. **Do you think that because people are in their homes right now, they feel like they aren't able to utilize the spaces that they normally use, so they might be thinking about them differently?** Do you think any of that is going to change the way we teach history after this moment?

MC: Well, I'll start by saying, I hope so.

SC: Okay.

MC: Because I think now we're seeing an opportunity. Whether we take it or not, we're seeing that opportunity to go back to that idea of thinking about history in the place that we're in. And I think that if we take that opportunity to promote that, to emphasize that history that we are in, and see things not as just some story in a textbook that is taken for granted and taken as it is, but as something that we have, we come out with our own experiences and with our own knowledges and we shape it ourselves and we create histories ourselves. So I hope that there's an opportunity taken to make use of this changed environment

of learning that we have here and bring about this idea of it's not just a story in a book of the past; it's something that we're living.

And so when we think back to that Spanish Flu idea, and thinking, "how did that shape and reshape the ways that we engage with our society?" and then to bring that to our present and say, "okay, now, let's look at our own lives and how is the pandemic shaping and reshaping the way that we take for granted every day the way that we operate in our spaces and which spaces we take for granted as having access to." A major place in this pandemic is grocery stores. Prior to this, we're very used to—so long as the store is open—we're very used to having the ability to walk in and out of those places, and that's not the case anymore. There are rules, and regulations, and lineups and this is also changing the way that we operate with our spaces around.

So moving forward in terms of teaching history, I think there's an opportunity to kind of put history in relation to the present in a much different way. In a much more personal and connected way than perhaps it has been in previous educational efforts.

SC: You know, one of the things that I'm a little worried about in going back, whatever that looks like, is the desire for teachers to want to connect with student's experiences. So well, really, foreground student's reflections of this moment. And I talked about this with Kristina Llewellyn, that students might not be ready to do that. They might not be comfortable doing that. Their quarantine experience might have felt really unsafe or uncomfortable, or maybe it would just feel fine, like, "fine, let me just play my video games by myself."

But what I'm hearing from something that you're saying is that this could be a really interesting way for students to connect to the pandemic, but in a way that doesn't self-divulge in the same way; to get teachers to invite students to think about the spaces around them as a form of reflection about their own personal experience, but more about the society around them.

So what I heard from what you were saying about teaching history is that we can use space as a way to get into students connecting with

this experience in historical ways, but, and again—this draws on my fear—without them having to self-divulge in ways that they might not be familiar with. So I think that's a really powerful element to going back to really connect with the geography, to connect with spaces as a way for students to think through this moment and then, therefore, think through other moments in history.

MC: Yeah, I think that element of how comfortable and safe students might feel to divulge, I think that's something that we perhaps can put it into context of the pandemic, but it has been the case even before the pandemic, of course. And so I think because we can use this as a more connected and personal way of engaging with the experiences, but without divulging, we come to see perhaps what we were overlooking before. What we were taking for granted as something to just assume, "Well, students are all in this classroom together. They're all in the same boat. They should all be able to talk about it the same way," and that was never the case.

MC: So now I think, leaning on what you're talking about there in the comfort and safety of being able to divulge, that's something where we might, ourselves as educators, reflect back and say, "What was I doing before? What was I asking students to do before and was that a comfortable and safe thing for me to do?" Because now we have much more—I think you used the word tangible before—a tangible context that we say, "Oh, this is not being experienced the same way by every student, and so I need to be more conscious of that," in the same way that with or without pandemic, life is not being experienced the same way by every student. So we need to be conscious of that, cognizant of that, and promote ways of investigation, ways of thinking perhaps that allow students to make those connections personally, but don't require them to say, "Here's me", if they're not comfortable to do so.

SC: Right. And also the student might not feel—the student might feel comfortable doing so, but they might not be comfortable in that space doing so, right? Again, this is where the space dynamics come in. Like maybe a classroom setting is really a comfortable space.

Maybe it's the teacher. Maybe it's the other students in the classroom.

So to ensure that there is that space metaphorically for students to explore different elements and bring what they want to or need to into the classroom when they can. And this idea of allowing student's multifaceted experiences and multifaceted elements of their lives and their histories into the classroom is a key element of my own work, as you know, about imagining a new 'we'; that it's, you know, it's really easy to think, okay, the students as this monolith, but these students are these young humans with all these experiences, and how can we ensure that they are seen, they are heard, they're able to speak, and in a way that allows them to bring those full selves without this compromise or a 'subtractive' sense of self?

And I think of—there is this theorist that talks about the ethics of care, Nel Noddings, and one of the critiques that she's had from a lot of critical race theorists is that she puts too much of a pressure on the student to show up the way the teacher envisions. And instead, critical race theorists say that education should not be 'subtractive' to students' sense of selves, and that's a key-key element of imagining a new 'we'.

Do you have thoughts about the ways that we can imagine a new 'we' during this time after this time? Do you think that's possible? Do you think that is a worthwhile thing to think about? Do you have thoughts?

MC: Yeah. That's obviously a big question, hence, something that warrants some great conversation. I don't know that there is a set new 'we' in the same way that as much as some people would like to believe it, we didn't necessarily have a set 'we' before this. Who represents 'we'? Who can say that we are included in a space changes in context, in time and space and so, I think it's not so much that there is a new 'we', but perhaps that there will be new 'we's, plural, to consider in terms of how we've experienced this whole pandemic and how we've made it to the other side, so to speak.

SC: Once we get to the other side.

MC: Yes, exactly. And that's something to be seen, what 'we' will look like once this is, so to speak, all over.

So I think when you talk about the imagining a new 'we', I think a 'we' is always an element—there's always an element of imagining a 'we,' with or without pandemic, because 'we' insinuates the idea of the categories, the lines to say I am part of 'we', and therefore, somebody else is not. We've always done this. And I use the 'we' in general terms there.

It's just a matter of what are the parameters, what will the new parameters be for who's included and not included in the 'we'? I think there'll be new lines set, I think, in different ways. Some will be just reconstructed as they've been on national lines and racialized lines and gendered lines. But there's also a matter of the 'we' in terms of shared experience and certain different collective memories that I think that's where we'll see new categories being created.

SC: Well, to pick up on an element to that in kind of an active way, I think that it allows us, too, to recognize how we have the agency to define and push and set those parameters ourselves and to really challenge ourselves to look at who the 'we's are that we are surrounded by and to recognize the absences and to recognize what it would look like to re-engage with a community of 'we'.

One of my favorite answers to "do you think we're going to teach history different after this" was the teacher Ian Duncan, because he said, "I don't know because I don't know who my students are going to be when they're back in the classroom." And I love that answer because to me, it actually brings in all three of the questions. It demonstrates the shifting subjectivities because of history with historical actors, but it also—and this is why I'm saying it—because it picks up on what you said: there are these different 'we's and the 'we' for young people has yet to be created because we don't have an endpoint; we don't even know if we're in the middle of it.

So to me, your answer helps bring up the fact that we can't just

assume that any sort of 'we' is going to be the same after this moment. And we have to continuously challenge ourselves to recognize that.

MC: And I think—just playing off something you just said there with the idea of agency—I think the idea of putting together with how we teach history and how we see ourselves as agents of history and helping students to understand themselves as not only products of history, but also producers of history, in terms of the products of history as far as the way that history has positioned them in particular ways, but also the possibility for reimagining various histories in ways that reshape the way that people become positioned in the future.

MC: And I think that's an opportunity just to—I guess I'm trying to put things altogether here into one nice little package, but this—

SC: It'll be a messy package, right? So don't—

MC: Yeah, it's always a messy package. But this idea of the agency to produce histories is the agency to produce what 'we's are created. And who has the ability to do that? Well, everyone has the ability, but whose productions of history become dominant and not dominant is something that might—I mean, I think it's something to be recognized, but it's also something that we can perhaps see changing as we look at history differently through our current context and the spaces that we are now learning history in.

SC: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm. I think that's something that Sean Carlton said and he said it really great. And I know I'm going to not say it as well as he did, but he said something like, "We are historical agents with—we have agency, but not in conditions of our own choosing." And that to me is saying we have space to maneuver in this pandemic world that we're trying to figure out, and we have space to maneuver what it will look like when we move forward into the future, but we also have to be active in prompting that. And both history and geography is a really good way to start thinking about that. So thanks so much for bringing all those perspectives to this conversation.

MC: Oh, it's been a pleasure. And I hope that it helps to carry on more conversations and people—between all those other episodes

that you've mentioned there—putting pieces together and try to move forward in different ways and new ways that maybe creates not necessarily a singular 'we', but 'we's that are better.

SC: Well, you know, one of the things that I'm really picking up from in having all of these conversations—because you're like number 30 of the conversations I've had—

SC: One of the things is that people recognize and are hopeful for different things. And they also recognize the inequities. And what I'm looking to hear right now and thinking about so much in relationship to these conversations are the ways for us to mobilize this: How to make action; how to use our classrooms to do that; how to use ourselves; how to demonstrate to students how they can make change. And that's why drawing on history is such a powerful way because—I'll just use the example of how often women's suffrage is talked about as, okay, women fought for the right to vote. They were allowed to vote or they got the right to vote, but there isn't really that larger context of activism and looking at what that activism looked like.

And I think if we engage more of those types of narratives in our classrooms, as well as to recognize the ways that our spaces do shape a lot of these ideas—like I think about Christie Pits in Toronto that had the Nazi—what's the word I'm looking for? Do you know what I'm talking about?

MC: The riot. I think, if I'm correct, the Christie Pits riots?

SC: Yes, thank you. So if I think about the Christie Pits riots and we can really recognize the ways that these spaces have been used in the past and, therefore, the ways that we can use our own spaces I think is really powerful. So yeah, I love the way the conversations are coming together.

MC: Well, I think just to touch on your example of the women's right to vote and how we hear about the fact that it came about, the date that it came about, but that we don't hear a lot about the activism that led up to it. I think on top of that is, we also don't hear a lot about how the activism continued beyond that—

MC: —because the initial right to vote came in, but it was the right to vote if you fit into a very particular box as a woman, and the fact that that right to vote came in is fantastic, but the work had to continue on. There was no once-and-done thing. The work had to continue on to allow for women, Black women and Indigenous women, to get the right to vote much later.

SC: Quebecois women.

MC: Quebecois women. Yes, thank you. Yeah. And omitting these perpetuates this idea of history being a single moment and being done—it changed, it's done, moving on—that's where I think we need to perhaps revamp the ways that we understand the histories, because I think if we talk about actions of breaking down sexism, breaking down racism, it's never going to be a once-and-done thing. It's never going to be a one-size-fits-all. It's a matter of, it has to be active, as you say. It has to be ongoing and it has to be continued over and over. Because as we've seen in history, racism, sexism, homophobia: all these discriminations become recreated if they're allowed to grow.

And I think that's something that we have the agency, too, to carry forward, to carry on over and over if we are aware of how it's working. And that takes an understanding of where it came from. The understanding of the history behind it. And that's where I think perhaps an element of history education could come into play.

SC: Yes, definitely. And I'm hoping that this series can spark some ideas in people's classrooms, whether it's K-12, whether it's university, whether it's college, whether it's in continuing ed, whether it's a public history project, about how that can be done both during and after this time in ways that also really address the connections and complexities of this time.

So thanks so much for bringing all this to the table. This was a really great talk. Thank you.

MC: Well, thank you very much for having me.

SC: And we'll stay connected. We'll see what comes of this series

because, you know, why stop with one thing when you could do like a half a dozen?

MC: Of course. Well, as you say, it's a conversation that needs to be ongoing.

SC: Yeah, it does though. Okay, we'll see you later. Bye.

MC: Take care. Thanks.

In conversation with Dr. Casey Burkholder

Pandemic Pedagogy Conversation #30

Dr. Casey Burkholder

Dr. Casey Burkholder is an assistant professor in the Faculty of Education at the University of New Brunswick. She teaches pre-service teachers and masters of education students primarily. You can connect with her on Twitter at @CM_Burkholder.

We spoke May 20, 2020 and June 16, 2020.

Video posted June 23, 2020.

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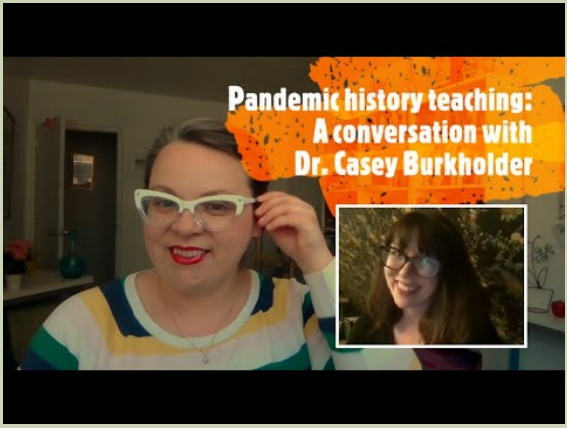

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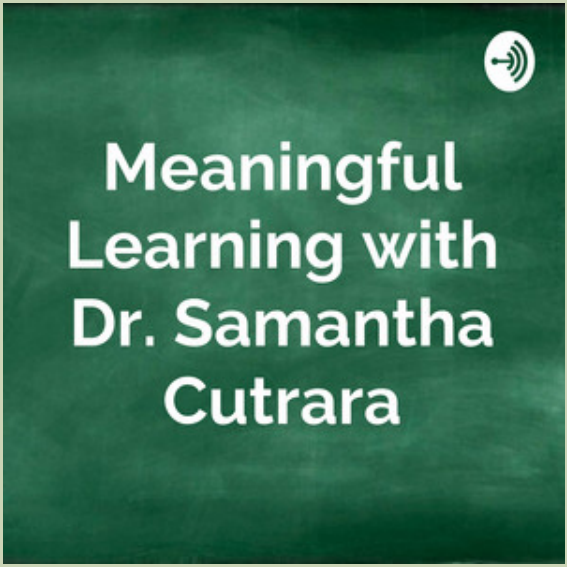

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TRANSCRIPT

All the Pandemic Pedagogy conversations revolved around three questions:

- Question 1: Have you thought of history any different *because* of this moment?
- Question 2: Do you think we would teach history *after* this moment?
- Question 3: Do you think we can "imagine a new 'we'" during/after this moment?

June 15, 2020 Reflection

Dr. Samantha Cutrara: Casey, it is so nice to see you again. I feel like it has been an age since we did our original video. So we talked on May 19th. It is now — I mean, your video was actually going up around June 19th, but on May 25th, George Floyd was murdered by the police and it has sparked, as you know, the revolution. The Black Lives Matter revolution. And I'm so glad that you wanted to touch base really quickly to kind of put some context to our first video.

Casey Burkholder: I think one of the things I want to say is, and I think we talked about anti-Black racism a bit in the video, is that is deeply horrific that the police killed George Floyd, but this is business as usual for the police. This is not a special case. The special case I think is that a lot of white folks have taken notice and are joining in solidarity with Black Lives Matter, at least in the context of Fredericton where I'm living.

So Black Lives Matter Fredericton has just been incorporated, but it's

really a Black youth-led movement here, and a lot of the young people were saying that in 2016, when they tried to make a March, they just couldn't get interest. And so this time when they had a march, there were three different events over the course of a week in solidarity with what's happening in the US and also acknowledging the anti-Black racism in Wolastoqiyik [New Brunswick]. And there were tons of folks there, which I find very exciting, including some of my B. Ed. students who I haven't seen in person, of course, since March when the Pandemic began. So, it's kind of nice to see them in the world.

But in New Brunswick, we also have the murder, the police murder of Chantel Moore in Edmundston, New Brunswick that just happened on June 4th. And then just the other day, we had the death of Rodney Levi also at the hands of the police. So police violence, of course, is all about anti-Black racism, but in the context of New Brunswick, yes, it's anti-Black racism and it's also about anti-Indigenous racism too.

Clearly, the police are not doing what they're — I mean, what do they meant to do, right? They're doing exactly what they're meant to do. What I'm saying is like the police are a broken system. This is not a new conversation either, right? Like, how long has Angela Davis been writing—decades?

SC: Exactly. And I mean, even before that, like she also stood on the shoulders of giants, right?

CB: Yeah. I know.

SC: And it's not just New Brunswick. Like it's Canada completely that police systems have been charged with keeping down particular racialized minorities in particular ways to support white property, white people, and it isn't new. And there is, you know, I'm sure you are also seeing all the different readings and things that are going out there, but when I'm interested in this, how is that manifesting in your class right now? Because when we talked before, you were just about to teach. Like you haven't even started the course.

CB: Yeah, that's right. So I'm co-teaching the course with Katie Hamill, who's a Ph.D. student at the University of New Brunswick, and

originally, we planned this course about geography teaching in March. We were both really thinking about geographies in sort of almost a personal way. Like how are you experiencing the feeling of "I want to be trusting of the government" and on the other hand, "I don't trust the government." Simultaneously trusting of their neighbors and yet not trusting of their neighbors.

So we wanted to get students to think about psychogeography, their experiences of space and place, and how that shifts in a pandemic time. But of course, as we've been teaching, we had planned for example, readings on digital activism and many of these readings were about environmentalism because in the beginning of March, there was a couple of pieces about climate protests and how that would be moving online. And then we started thinking about the anti-Black racism within the readings that we chose, even though we were trying to be really thoughtful about race and place and space. The readings we chose really didn't work in the Pandemic in June. We were recording a video lecture on June 10th about digital activism and obviously we were talking about Black Lives Matter. We were talking about solidarity actions across North America and the world, and we sort of threw away our original readings. We said, okay those are the readings that we originally suggested, but here are so many better readings.

CB: Then we've been talking a lot about digital space and performativity, like performative activism. For example, those like black squares that primarily white folks were posting on Instagram, especially white folks in solidarity, but it was like optical allyship (Ibrahim, 2020). I think in terms of protest spaces, I've really seen a shift here too. Since March, I have attended two political public gatherings: a healing walk and a protest and solidarity march. The healing walk was to honour the life of Chantel Moore and the other was a Black Lives Matter protest. Protest spaces are so different amidst the Pandemic Like masking up, making sure that you're distant from folks, but also taking to the streets and still being that sort of mass of people despite the risk to

your personal health, I think it's really interesting to see how solidarity shifts. In a performative way, but also in a solidarity way.

SC: Well, Julian Chambliss who I interviewed at the beginning of March, beginning of June after the protests have started, we were talking about that. About like COVID is still happening, and yet thousands of people are out on the streets. And he's like, yeah, like COVID isn't going after Black people. Police are going after Black people. And so like this is a moment where people are saying my personal safety or my personal health is going to be mitigated, the risk is going to be mitigated because it is more important to be together as a group to demonstrate the ways that we want to make change in the world.

CB: I think the only other thing I wanted to say was that one of the things I've been thinking about in the course is that racism is a pandemic (Newman-Bremang, 2020). COVID, is a new pandemic on the scene, but structural racism has been around ever since colonialism in this country.

SC: And it has been really interesting to look back on the Pandemic Pedagogy videos because it's like, as a historian as it were, all of the videos, we talked about structural change and that's showing the difficulties and structures, and how the structures aren't working, and the inequities it's highlighting, and how are we going to do things differently, imagining a new we differently after this moment. And then this happens, and it's like, right, we've been seeing that for months, and we had been isolated for months, and we had, for some of us, have been without services or recognizing how we are privileged.

And so, yes, highlighting that racism as a pandemic highlights that it was in the air. Like in a way that it doesn't seem quite now that we're a couple weeks into more like the second wave of these Black Lives Matter activism, it doesn't feel quite as like a surprise that's happening during COVID the way it may have that first weekend flash week.

CB: I think the other thing we have to think about too is like, yeah, obviously, the justice system is broken. That's an easy conversation for educators to have, but like look at the violence that we enact in our

work as educators. And like education, the erasures of history education, the erasures that we continue to perpetuate through curriculum through the kinds of people who do history education, I think we're really implicated in this too, and I don't know what it looks like to reform.

And like we talked about a month ago — I don't think I'm the one to say, but I'm really interested in how that might look, those actual structural reforms. What that would look like?

SC: Yeah, yeah. I think that there's a lot here that we can think through and do, and like listen, and like resist in good ways. Like resist structures that we recognize don't serve all of us equally. And I hope people like our talk from a month ago, even though we aren't talking about this. But I think this little introduction is a really good way to articulate a lot of the ideas that we had in that first talk in this particular moment. Thanks so much for like coming back to do this extra little video.

CB: My pleasure. Thank you for having me.

May 20, 2020

Dr. Samantha Cutrara: Casey, thank you so much for agreeing to speak with me today. I know that you are extra busy right now because you are a full-time parent, and so many full-time parents are trying to figure out how to balance their full-time jobs and being a full-time parent. So thank you so much for finding the time to speak with me today.

Casey Burkholder: Happy to do so.

SC: Do you want to introduce yourself before we get started?

CB: Sure. My name is Casey Burkholder. I'm an assistant professor in the Faculty of Education at the University of New Brunswick. I teach pre-service teachers and master's of education students primarily, and my area of teaching focus includes social studies education, visual art education, and then at the master's level, my teaching focuses on research methodologies, particularly participatory visual

methodologies which I always sneak into my pre-service social studies teaching.

SC: You know, I was talking with someone today who's a history teacher in Ontario and she also has a drama in English background. And I was saying like, those intersections with like social studies, history and art, to me, are some of the most powerful intersections. So that's why I'm extra happy to talk with you today.

CB: Excellent.

SC: So, I start with this first question, which I ask everyone which is, **have you thought of history any different because of this moment?** And some people were like, "I just haven't had time to think about the subject." And other people have been saying things like, "You know, I recognize the perspective that I was in, now challenges the interpretations that I've had." So, have you thought of history any different because of this moment?

CB: I think I've been thinking about how I teach history a little bit differently, and also how I teach geography a little bit differently. I'm gearing up to teach a course next week, which of course was supposed to be face-to-face and it's now being reimagined in the digital realm. And this course really focuses on the ways in which we teach and think about space, place, and time in school and society.

And so I taught the course last year. I really enjoyed it. I used the Katherine McKittrick and Clyde Woods edited collection, "Black Geographies and Politics of Place," which I think is really important in terms of getting pre-service teachers to think more politically about race and bodies in the classroom. In this year's iteration of the course, I have been using their text in connection with more journalistic articles to really dive into notions of protest, privilege, and space amidst the pandemic. So questions like, what's the cost of progress is something we would have talked about last year. Now we can look at it through the key study of what's going on right now including in New Brunswick, the murders of Chantal Moore and Rodney Levi by the RCMP during wellness check. We are also thinking about psychogeographies within the

course, more or less thinking about the ways in which we act within particular spaces, how certain bodies are policed in particular ways, or how we police ourselves in particular spaces. We are looking at spaces like schools and spaces within the wider society, and then thinking about how we move similarly and differnetly through space amidst the Pandemic.

One of the assignments I have designed is for students to map their quarantine spaces for psychogeographies. Like how do these spaces make you think and feel? And then as an exemplar text, I examined the same prompt with my three-year-old kid about how spaces within our quarantine space make her think and feel. So within this work, I have been thinking about how I could bring my parent life into my teaching life and then put all of these policized and critical race theory-informed ideas that I want pre-service teachers to think about like time, and space, and bodies, and whose stories are told, whose stories are not told, who gets to retell these different stories. All of that is sort of coming into focus, specifically in the pandemic. These questions feel much more alive to me now. The ideas are less static as thinking about them before. To me, these ideas feel very present now.

I think one of the research projects that I was imagining before the pandemic is like really amazing to think about in the current context. It's a project with Dr. Funké Aladejebi, and Dr. Jennifer Thompson. Last year, we started thinking about exploring notions of dystopia with youth not just as a future topic, but also as a present situation and a past situation.

So looking at dystopia in the context of New Brunswick, how do we understand dystopic conditions if we think about contact and settler colonialism as dystopic conditions for Mi'kmaq and Wolastokiyik peoples? If we think about the ways in which people and communities have been physically moved for "progress," like for example, Africville in Nova Scotia. So dystopia has always been around especially for Black and Indigenous communities, and now of course, like everyone is talking about dystopia because we're all like either shut in our homes or

being forced to work in these not safe conditions or protesting the ongoing violence against and policing of Black and Indigenous peoples and communities.

Anyway, the pandemic has maybe not changed the questions we are asking so much as made them feel more urgent.

SC: More like forced percolation maybe too?

CB: Yeah. Or maybe like a rethinking or an added urgency to the work. Many of the pre-service teachers I teach in the University of New Brunswick are primary middle-class, white folk. And so I think the pandemic conditions have been maybe some of their opportunities for the first time to feel deeply destabilized and thinking differently about the state, and their relationship to their communities, to other folks, to other communities. I think this might be a politicizing moment. Or anyway, I hope it's a politicizing moment. Maybe everyone is just going to retreat and do more of the same, but I hope not.

SC: Yeah. I mean, it will be interesting. One of the things that came up really in a lot of the early conversations, but hasn't come up in the same way in the latter ones. And I think that's because people are in it a little bit more than this moment, although I should just preface that nobody else use this language but me. So I just brought this language to things people were saying, but then it like reveals this deconstruction. That it reveals the ways that the system doesn't work the way that the system is always broken. And I think of Andrea Hawkman and Sarah Shear's interview when they're saying, "Well, actually, no. This system was designed for this inequity and now we're just seeing it reveals that."

And so when you're saying like to get people to think about the geographies of their own quarantine space, for example, to me that forces you to think about your spaces in political ways that you might not have before.

SC: And I was talking with Mark Currie, who's a doctoral candidate, that was also talking about geographies and how our like public spaces, we can really question how and in what ways these spaces

were created and how they function. So interesting. I'm so excited to hear how these ideas will keep growing. And I also think it's really interesting and cool about bringing in some of the parenting to the teaching as well because — rather than have them fight each other, which I'm sure it feels like all the time that I think —

CB: Like they also fight each other?

SC: [inaudible 0:08:28.0]

CB: Let's be clear about that.

SC: Yeah. That it's kind of an acknowledgment of humanness too, right? Like, "Oh, I also have this three-year-old at home and we're figuring things out too."

CB: Oh, totally. It's a mess. Like really it's a mess, but it's fine. You know what I mean?

SC: Yeah, yeah.

CB: Sometimes I think myself and some of my friends who are also employed in university positions and, we have a tendency to lament the time before in relation to our work conditions. Like, "Oh, I just wish I had time to write right now," and, "Oh, I just wish I could be alone in my office." But also, that's so deeply privileged. And if anything — I think the pandemic has also reminded me of this privilege big flashing lights. Like, holy moly, look at your privilege and how are you using it in your working life, in your personal life, in your community life?

I think that a pandemic can encourage people to turn inward, but it can also hopefully give you the opportunity to look outward and to see what's going on in your community and hopefully not police other people in your community. Because I also see l so much community and behavior policing in a really depressing way. Like for example, online forums. Like there was a group that was created in my local context that was about 'care mongering', but then it ended up it felt like being more about policing neighborhood behavior. For example, "did you see person X do this thing in Neighbourhood Spot". It didn't feel caring. It felt oppressive to me.

I'm really nervous about that kind of like watching. And I feel that there's something — that the way in which maybe people or individuals or communities are policing other communities, it reminds me a lot of the policing of young people in schools. You know what I mean?

CB: Like the ways in which young people are watched these like very particular ways. For example, "I know the way that you're supposed to be acting in the space and I see that you're acting in a different way." I think that's super problematic, but again, it's making me think about school and what is the function of school. I mean, it's so custodial. Isn't that what I miss about childcare? I miss the custodial piece. I don't really care for the educative piece at all. I feel like we're dealing with the educative piece at home very well, but boy, I miss the custodial piece.

SC: I mean, there's a few things I want to tease out there. One, I want to point viewers to Funke Aladejebi's talk because she identified that a lot of things that people are talking about now as inequities are things that Black activists in particular and racialized activists in particular have been like fighting against forever. And one of those things is policing, right? Hyper policing. And as a white person with white privilege, it wasn't something that I thought of to connect those two pieces.

Another thing she had said was like, "The hope is important, but action is more important." And so to me, those were such powerful connections that she made to be like, right, we don't need to start new movements. We need to work with the activists that are already there to figure out how to be allies, to figure out how to fight against things that people have been identifying. And I think policing is a really good piece of that.

So yeah, like, thanks for making that connection. I mean, it's not a great topic to make these connections, but I think the more we're thinking about those things, the more important. Because again, like I think about teachers saying, like, "I feel a lot more freedom because I'm not doing curriculum stuff so much as I'm just ensuring the care and relationship building of my students." And so then, what function does cur-

riculum and the schoolings do other than keep students in line and doing this type of discipline?

So I'm hoping that it will also shake up the ways that we're thinking about our content, we're thinking about our teaching practices to make it less disciplinary and more relationship-based. Because I've talked to teachers too that are like, "Oh, the curriculum is really open," until there's something I don't really want to do. And then all of a sudden, that curriculum could really shutdown. And I think that's where that disciplining comes in.

CB: Yeah. In the context of New Brunswick, our curriculum is not, especially the social studies, history curriculum, K-12 is not particularly open. Like, elementary is more open, but secondary hasn't been updated in so long. I did this research project with these wonderful Ph.D. student, Amelia Thorpe, and we looked at curriculum documents and policies, exploring through a discourse analysis the ways in which the terms queer, trans, nonbinary, gay and cis women were represented or not represented in the curriculum. The only time that gay people came up at all was in grade 12, there was like an assignment suggestion that said, "You know, write a letter to the editor for or against gay marriage." So I think curriculum does a lot more harm than good a lot of times, especially when curriculum writers with good intentions sort of try to do some kind of social justice work, but don't deeply think about, negotiate with, or talk to community members about the kinds of histories they'd like to have represented. I think we will see a lot of problematic "anti-racist" curriculum writing by primarily white folk in my context (New Brunswick) in the coming years. And it's a kind of violence too. A kind of erasure. Who gets a seat at the table to write curriculum for Social Studies? Who doesn't? In our context in New Brunswick, there are Black and Indigenous historians like Mary McCarthy and Elders Dave and Imelda Perley who have so much knowledge about the histories of Black and Indigenous peoples in this place, but again, the curriculum is often written and reviewed by white folks. It's a problem.

SC: Well, I think of Ian Duncan who's a teacher who is really interested in teaching more LGBTQ to spirit histories. And he's like, the LGBTQ issues are not mentioned in the curriculum, but it's in the glossary? So like, how do you then reconcile that? Like, why are we defining it if we aren't interested in exploring these histories?

And of course, like in Ontario, there is a lot of options. But you need to know and be comfortable with those histories in order to be like, I'm going to use this as an example of whatever, right?

CB: Yeah, for sure. And I think that is the activist component of history education, is figuring out the ways in which you can sneak in and create opportunities for people to learn about stories and communities that they wouldn't learn about because it's not like Vimy Ridge blah, blah, blah, World War I. Do you know what I mean?

I think that that's the space for people like me who teach social studies education where you can see the teaching and research coming together. Part of this work is in creating kind of opportunities for preservice teachers, but then also in-service teachers to learn about histories from this place. Because there's this assumption, when you teach history in New Brunswick for example, that queer people didn't exist here. And Wolastokiyik and Mi'kmaq communities and Black communities don't exist here. And of course, that's not the case at all.

SC: Oh, really? It was just like a whole province of straight people.

CB: And white people.

SC: Right.

CB: If you look at the way we teach history here, it's about many men who were White and propertied.

SC: Right. Yeah. And one of the things that I like to talk about in the series, but also like the video series, the bigger not "Pandemic Pedagogy" more generally is for teachers really to understand their purpose of teaching history. Because research has shown that teachers teach with the purpose they define before coming into a teacher education program.

So, if people start articulating that and being clear with that, then they might be able to have a better understanding of where the things that they don't know lie, right? Like for me, I understand the purpose of teaching history as to make change in the world. And in that being my purpose, I recognize that perhaps some people might see things that I'm doing as less practical than what's needed in the classroom. And I try to balance that, but like being explicit about my perspective allows me to understand implicit parts. And I think that this allows for a moment for people to kind of think about their purpose and hopefully to maybe recognize how it could shift and change their teaching once they get back to the classroom. Because if we're just doing the same thing that we did six months ago, six months from now, that would feel really weird.

So that kind of segues to my second question about **do you think we will teach history any different because of this moment?** A lot of people say we should, but do you think we actually will?

CB: I don't know about 'we', but I think I will. Like, I can't speak for all history educators. Yeah, I think that the pandemic for me, it's going to provide a way to go back. To get people to empathize maybe more explicitly with other histories and communities that they haven't learned about in their own formal schooling maybe. As you're speaking about here, like things that they didn't learn about before, they're not going to be comfortable teaching, but we can always bring it back to the experiences they had during the pandemic experiences of isolation and confusion and like on one hand, deeply trusting the state and then also like should I trust the state? I feel like those experiences that people are having on an individual and community level are very useful in thinking about the experiences that other folks, other communities—particularly Black and Indigenous communities—have had in the territory that we are calling Canada.

I think that there's a lot of opportunities in terms of rethinking assessment. The kinds of things we want students to do and learn. I'm speaking from the perspective of someone who teaches pre-service

teachers about teaching history. I think about how I assess the work that they do. And more and more, I want them to make things. To make art, to make critique, to learn about something that happened before, and then make something new out of it. To make a film, to make — I don't know. To make lots of different things.

Like I'm so inspired by the Graphic History Collective and their Remember/Resist/Redraw poster project. I like to get my pre-service teacher elementary students to do a similar practice from the context of New Brunswick. So, a person, a place, an event that you didn't know about, but you think is worth talking about in the context of social studies or history education. Those kinds of assessments, to me, are deeply interesting and important.

And then I think about the Wolastoqiyik musician Jeremy Dutcher who's from Tobique First Nation and his Polaris-prize winning CD which is really a history project. I'm so interested in people following that kind of methodology. Jeremy Dutcher went to The Archives at the Canadian Museum of History and he found this anthropologist collection on wax cylinders of songs from his community from like 100 years ago, and then he used that , listened to it, l reproduced it and then added more of his own voice, like his own reinterpretation of what he had heard. He is literally singing alongside his past relations. So it's like activism, it's creation, it's looking back and looking forward and creating something new, and that's the way I want to teach people to do history in New Brunswick.

SC: Well, that's the way I would like people to teach history around the world. So [inaudible 0:21:09.6*used to start] with New Brunswick. And as we will together, we will make it bigger.

But like I spoke to a student that I did research with when she was in high school, but I spoke to her now as an adult, and she said that the most powerful lessons, history lessons that she ever learned were the ones in elementary school because they were creating, they were doing. They were engaging in arts, they were doing interdisciplinary work. Whereas I think once you get to high school, it's so much like,

they need to know this because they're about to go out in the world. And it's like, well, no, let them create, let them do, let them activate, let them understand themselves, let them understand the world because this is where history is going to have that lasting resonance with them.

CB: Yeah, I think so.

SC: Yeah. And that's why in my work, in my research, I say that we need to imagine a new 'we' in order to make change in the world and while 'we' is not mono — well, I mean, I guess 'we' by definition is monolithic. It's not the 'we' that we're using now, but a 'we' that is challenged by all of these different experiences. But the imagining part is as important for me because it has to be based in some sort of vision of something different and that vision often comes from the arts. So do you have any — as a way to kind of wrap up our conversation, which we could probably keep going all night, **do you have any thoughts about this notion of imagining a new 'we' during this time or after this time?**

CB: I mean, I hope for a new more community-minded collective way of thinking, but I'm a little bit skeptical. I'm a little bit maybe pessimistic about a coming together. I don't know. Like in my teaching, when I do this kind of work where I push people to think maybe uncomfortably about the careful friendship between white supremacy and history, or to think about the deep friendship between patriarchy and history. I find there's so much pushback to these very easy to prove critiques, and that's even within a room of history-minded folk who are interested in thinking and teaching differently about history, and they want to make change in some way.

Even within that microcosm of the classroom, I don't know if I'm making change. And if that, if I can't imagine change within that group of keen 25 students, I don't know. I guess I'm concerned about who this imagined we would be. I worry that a reimagined 'we' might be a more palatable version of what we've got already. A more watered down version of white supremacy in history curriculum and teaching Do you know what I mean?

SC: Mm-hmm. Yeah, I think that's a valid pessimism. No, I think that's a very valid concern. I think that's a very valid concern. With any sort of 'we', especially when the conversation comes from an understanding that the way that we often think about a 'we' in Canada is through a multicultural lens which uses whiteness as center. One —

CB: And a neutral center.

SC: That's right. Whiteness as a neutral unmarked, don't need to say it. Just the Canadian center.

CB: The notion that "I have no culture, just whiteness" is so problematic, but also so pervasive—especially in teacher education in New Brunswick.

SC: No culture, that's right. One of the things I found in my research which I talk about in my upcoming book is how easy it was, and I know that you have experienced this as well. Although we haven't talked about it, so that's an assumption. How easy it is to be like — to look at students who are racialized and be like those students need to learn my history as a white person. And like once that happens, we can just move along and then maybe we can do those other histories as well. And that was such a problematic stance to witness and to see reproduced over and over and over again.

My hope drawing on things that you were saying earlier is that people seeing different perspectives of experiences might allow them to come into classroom spaces with an openness to recognize that things that they might have seen or expected were different because of the pandemic.

So, I mean, that draws from your second answer. I don't know if — I don't know. What do you think about that?

CB: I don't know. Like, if you think about something like the erasure of settler colonialism in the context of history teaching here, I wonder like what would it mean for people to think about settler colonialism in a move toward action? Like what does that actually — what does that mean in this territory? In New Brunswick? In unceded and unsurrendered Wolastoqiyik and Mi'kmaq territory?

And I think that if we're imagining a 'we' and we're talking about things like settler colonialism, I can't be the one to redesign or re imagine what this looks like. -Even though I'm the white face teaching history with my Ph.D. or whatever, I can't be the one talking about what that 'we' looks like. I think that's my reticence or my fear about this notion of 'we' is like who gets to define who "we" are or what "we" looks like. Settler colonialism is one example. I mean, anti-racism in the context of the Maritimes is another example. In my teaching, I talk about how anti-Black racism is bad in society and in history teaching. Like, of course, that's true, but in order to take action against anti-black racism as communities, I think that one thing I have to do is take a deep step back and listen to community members. For example, in Fredericton, primarily Black students have stared a Black Lives Matter- New Brunswick chapter. One of the things that they are calling for is donations and access to space to meet. These are things that I can listen to, and act upon. So, I think imagining a 'we' could be imagining how to step back as a person who benefits from white supremacy, I guess. That would be my version of what a reimagined 'we' in the context of history teaching might look like. It should be a stepping back white supremacy, stepping back patriarchy and transphobia and homophobia and what that might look like. But I don't know that I should be the one who's going to be able to drive that 'we' if that makes any sense.

SC: Yeah, I think that's a really powerful way to end, and that's certainly come up in some other conversations too. Like if the 'we' just looks like an expanded version of what you have, then that's nothing. That we have to 'we' — whoever that 'we' is in that particular sentence, we have to really have a keen ear and eye and heart to be able to recognize the ways that we perhaps as white people can step back to be able to understand that it will look different than what we've had before. And that is scary, but also kind of an exciting possibility after this time. I mean, it's a big leap, but I think that again, if we want to hope, then we have to do. And so, what would that look like?

And I guess I put that out to the people that are watching, like what

would that look like? What does it look like for people who are white, for example, to take a step back to be able to think about settler colonialism and open up a new version of 'we'.

So thank you so much, Casey, for bringing those complex ideas to this conversation. I think it's a really powerful element to a conversation. We've had like 30 people now in the series, and this just adds to the complexity. So thank you again. It was so wonderful to talk with you.

CB: Thank you so much for having me.

In conversation with Adam Bunch

Pandemic Pedagogy Conversation #31

Adam Bunch

Adam Bunch is the public historian that is responsible for the Toronto dreams project as well as the host of the online documentary series Canadiana. He also wrote a book called The Toronto Book of the Dead, and have a new one coming out called The Toronto Book of Love. You can connect with him on Twitter at @TODreamsProject.

We spoke June 19, 2020.

Video posted June 24, 2020.

QUICK LINKS

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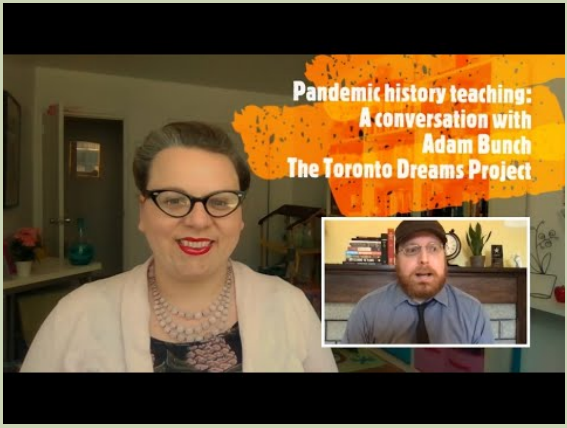

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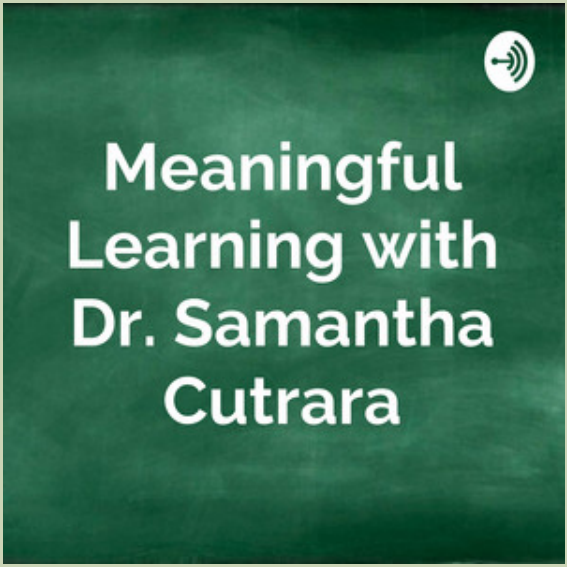

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TRANSCRIPT

All the Pandemic Pedagogy conversations revolved around three questions:

- Question 1: Have you thought of history any different *because* of this moment?
- Question 2: Do you think we would teach history *after* this moment?
- Question 3: Do you think we can "imagine a new 'we'" during/after this moment?

Dr. Samantha Cutrara: Adam, thank you so much for getting in touch with me. I know that this COVID period, you already would have been in quarantine because you are working on the last part of your manuscript, and so I'm really excited that we are talking really as we're moving into the summer. Before we begin, do you want to introduce yourself?

Adam Bunch: Sure. I'm Adam Bunch. I've been working sort of on a variety of different public history-related projects over the last decade or so. I started with creation of a project called The Toronto Dreams Project, which does interventions in public space with little fictional dreams I write about figures from Toronto's history that I then print on little cards and leave in public places that are somehow related to that person's true history.

Each one has a URL so people who find the cards can then look up

the card and find more true information about that historical figure. And that's led to a lot of other things. So I've written a lot for Spacing magazine. I wrote a book called The Toronto Book of the Dead, and have a new one coming out called The Toronto Book of Love. And also host a little ambitious Canadian history YouTube series called Canadiana, where we travel across the country sort of looking for interesting stories and generally just try to engage with as many people as we can to teach more about their history and get them interested and excited and more knowledgeable about the place they live.

And this year too, I've been teaching a little bit at George Brown about the history of Toronto. Just in time for the pandemic to hit and everything to change drastically just as I was finally starting to get a handle on it.

SC: Well, I think even veteran educators also were just was like, "Oh, I'm 20 years into it. I was just getting a handle on it," and then [inaudible 0:03:46.3]. So I wouldn't feel too bad about that. I want to say a couple things after that introduction. One, there is drilling outside your apartment. So anyone watching, that extra sound is just like an extra sound of the city. So that's fine.

The second thing, I want to link to Julian Chambliss' video that I did in early June about Afrofuturisms and how like thinking about other ways to engage in the past can really help us think through these narratives for the future. And that's why I've always really liked The Toronto Dreams Project because I think that bringing in imagination and bringing in creative nonfiction can really help us think through the histories we want, the futures we want, and those meld together. Although we didn't really plan on talking about this, can you talk about how that started?

AB: Yeah. So my background was in screenwriting coming out of

school. So I've always been writing fictions since I was a kid, and I was working downtown in Toronto in what is the oldest neighborhood of the city down by the St. Lawrence market and St. James Cathedral and sort of just being more immersed in the history every day. Sort of being surrounded by plaques and older buildings than a lot of Toronto has.

And it was actually, yeah, 10 summers ago now when Banksy visited Toronto and was doing stenciled art around the city, which there was one on an old historic building on the Esplanade that I went to go see at lunch one day from my dreary nine to five job. And it was neat. Banksy is cool. He doesn't need stuff. But it struck me that it looked so much like the same stuff he'd done in Melbourne like the month before. That there was no reason it needed to be in Toronto at all or on this particular historic building. And at the same time, I've been writing these absurdist little short stories that were sort of dreamlike.

It struck me that making them about historical figures would be a way to give them more meaning. And I always liked the idea of engaging with public places, but I am far too much of a coward to go paint on the side of a building. So making those dreams about historical figures in Toronto making them something with sort of placed-based meaning and being able to leave them somewhere so that somebody could engage with them in that place and sort of maybe interrupt their day a little bit and remind them that there's this history happening.

And in a way, that's hopefully interesting and engaging, and a little different, and sort of breaks that myth everyone always talks about about history being boring and being lists of dates and events. That by doing these sort of dreamlike short stories sort of highlight the fact that historical figures were human beings with passions and dreams quite literally, and nightmares just like us is hopefully, yeah, a way to hook people and interrupt their days and get them thinking more about the history of place in a city, in a country where so frequently people sort of

forget that it has a history just like everywhere else. And yeah, hopefully, doing it in sort of a strange engaging way to then draw them in, follow those URLS, hopefully get interested in that person and their...

SC: Oh, you paused. Could you say again get interested in that person and then whatever you said after that?

AB: So hopefully, by finding the dreams, get interested in that historical figure and be more interested in learning the true stories sort of behind the dream and learn more about the place where they live.

Yeah, sorry. And I've also sort of taken it around the world. Gone across Europe and the UK and other cities in Canada sort of helping to hopefully sort of bridge the geographical divide too. It's easy to just focus on what happened in Toronto when you're talking about Toronto history or in Canada when talking about Canadian history. And I think a lot of stories that happened somewhere else, but that had deep meaning to this place, especially this city and this country which is so much a collection of people from around the world that hopefully kind of uses new digital media to, yeah, be able to bring that history to people where they are and that history to people in Toronto realize that we're connected to the history around the world.

SC: Yeah. One of the things I like to talk about is the how important it is in Canada that we think of our histories as transnational histories? Like the more we just think of it as like the stories of this place, we are losing all of the connections across many nations like nations within this land in Canada, but also the many different places that so many people came from.

And it's always been really cool because I know that you've done some traveling to be able to see those linkages. And, of course, I'll put your website down below and links to all the stuff that you do so peo-

ple can explore that. And it's interesting because a few of the videos that I did like in the last week, we talked about geographies related to history. So it's kind of a nice — I'm glad you're here now. It's like a nice kind of intersection between some of the conversations we're having.

So let's get started with the first question, which is **have you thought about history any different because of this moment?** And people's responses to this have kind of shifted, but I think of those early days of lockdown and I had to leave my house and I'm walking in my neighborhood and I'm looking around at these buildings and thinking our histories never kind of pick up on these multi-layered emotions and anxieties that everyone is feeling. And so, how do we capture that in our teaching and learning? So it made me rethink or kind of solidify things I was already thinking about history. Have you thought of history any different because of this moment? Have there been any moments like that during this time that have caused you to think well differently?

AB: Yeah, I think you're right that it adds a lot of depth and opens up reminders. Like intellectually, of course, I've always known. And anybody who spends a lot of time thinking about history knows that it's an ongoing process and something that's always happening and that we're living through it no matter what's happening. Even the most privileged people in the world are part of historical processes and events, but usually, it's not so viscerally obvious as it is right now. So that's something that has strongly been striking me that like you cannot ignore the fact that we're all part of a major historical event, or two, with the pandemic and the Black Lives Matter protests. And, you know, we'll see what happens over the next year or two that sort of reminds you a lot of things. It makes you viscerally and emotionally realize things that you might know intellectually and I think provides sort of a nearly universal touchdown in a way we haven't had much of during our lifetimes.

That this is something that definitely the pandemic changes people in different ways depending on their circumstances and their privileges, but it's certainly an event that we'll all remember for the rest of our lives and can also provide a connection because of that to people who are maybe realizing that history is more relevant than they had been given to think up until this point. That so much of what I spent my time thinking about is how to reach people who aren't history students, who aren't history nerds like us who have grown up maybe not without the best history teachers who do think of it as something irrelevant to their daily lives. That dusty old books and lists of events and names, and maybe are new Canadians or thinking a lot of my students at George Brown or international students who don't feel the same kind of ownership of Toronto history as people who have been here longer might, but this is an event that makes it clear that history is relevant and is an ongoing process.

So telling people a story about the Spanish Flu right now gets some a lot more engaged than it did a year ago because people can see that what we're going through is something similar to past events, and that there are no relevant lessons to be learned. That don't always translate exactly, but are clearly something that we can be learning from, and something that the Black Lives Matter protests drives home as well. That at the end of my course at George Brown, I sort of tried to — in fact, the whole way through the course showed that history was an ongoing process and that definitions are always changing. That [inaudible 0:13:47.2*thrown away] from being a place that was very specifically founded to be just the British and white and Protestant. But that over the last 200 years, people have broadened that definition of what it means to be Torontonian, what it means to be Canadian, and that that's been a struggle that people in power haven't just handed over more rights and more of an inclusive identity without having struggling. People in the streets, and rebellions, and protests.

And that's something too that this particular moment in history makes viscerally more obvious when people can see what's happening in the streets, and with police forces, and people in power, and debates that are happening at City Council. That it's something that has been struggled for in a way that you can still see happening. That it becomes more obvious than ever within our lifetimes anyway. And at least within my own privileged position, that it is an ongoing process and that history is a communal undertaking that we're all building all the time. And I think this moment sort of gives us an opportunity to connect with people who might not always have realized that themselves. That history is something that's deeply important and happening all the time.

SC: Yeah, thanks for that. There's a couple things there that I really just want to like highlight. And one is what you said kind of early on about like we may have intellectually known something, but like this moment of crisis or these crises have allowed us to kind of think through these more viscerally? And I think that's just like a really nice thing to pull up about like the different ways we come to know things and then like the different ways we come to know history.

Like I remember talking to one of the teachers, and I was like, sometimes you're just sitting in a classroom as a student, and you're like, this doesn't feel right. You might not have like the words for it because you don't know the history, but you know the feeling. And so when you know it intellectually, but are coming to know the feeling, I think that's kind of like an interesting kind of articulation and articulating it in relation to the work that you do about these like these dreams and this creative nonfiction related to history kind of tapped into why engage in with stories of the past are important on these different levels because it does help you get to know on different levels.

AB: Yeah. I think once you realize sort of viscerally and emotionally, that you're a historical figure —

SC: Mm.

AB: — and like in 100 years, people are going to be talking about this moment the way that we talk about things that happened 100 years ago where the Spanish Flu and things like that. And they help highlight the fact that people in the past might not have lived in the same world as us or been identical to the way we think, but that they were rounded real human beings who had feelings, and passions, and emotions which is something I've been thinking a lot about the last few months as I finish up The Toronto Book of Love, which talks about romance, and marriage, and scandal through Toronto's history as a way, hopefully, of highlighting that exact thing. That people are and always have been these passionate, loving, hating emotional beings.

And that one way to get people more interested and more engaged with history is by highlighting that back and reminding them that people from the past weren't entirely different than us. It wasn't just a bunch of stodgy old white dudes who just passed legislation or went off to war and fought. Well laid out diagrammed battles. It's all messy and in a similar way to this moment. They didn't know what was going to happen next just like we don't. They had feelings and emotions about everything that was happening, more passionately invested in those historical events.

And then if you can sort of tease up some of that emotion, whether it's by telling love stories or talking about what kind of dreams they might have had, then hopefully, you're able to, yeah, hook people who might not otherwise get hooked.

SC: Yeah. Julian Chambliss, as I mentioned before who was talking about Afrofuturisms, he was like, when we bring in narratives, he's like, "I like comic books, but like maybe you like romance. Like you can

do that with that type of narrative too." And so I think that's like an interesting way. I'm excited for your next book because I think it is nice to be able to bring in those very affective, those very emotional narratives.

The other thing I want to say about your first answer is when you're like, when you said it's always been a struggle to define Toronto and define who and what Toronto is, and that struggle never ended, right? It's an ongoing struggle. And I think that was just kind of a nice way to articulate something that a lot of people have talked about in the series that it will help young people in particular understand themselves as historical actors, but also within historical continuum. And I really like the way you articulated that, so I just wanted to like highlight that. Thank you.

AB: Great.

SC: Great.

AB: [inaudible 0:19:31.6*I bet it would.]

SC: So first, I just want to say that there's like a half-naked man across my balcony, so I'd look up and I was like, oh, that's — all right, just city living. I will edit this part out obviously.

So this makes me think then about my second question about **do you think we will teach history differently after this moment?** Do you think maybe becoming more aware of different layers of history or different histories that we might find kind of relevant or educators who already helped people think about their sense of being in a historical moment, of being historical actor? Do you think those will translate into the ways we teach and learn history? And I mean that in both formal like classrooms, but also informal settings like the public history work that you

do, the Dreams Project, the documentary series. Any sort of way to 'mobilize' the past? Do you think we're going to do that any different after this moment?

AB: Sorry, you are breaking.

SC: Which part?

AB: Sorry, you are breaking up so I didn't get most of that.

SC: Oh, you didn't get most of that. Okay. I mean, the question is —

AB: [inaudible 0:20:50.0] you may want to repeat the whole.

SC: Okay, repeat the whole thing.

AB: Not only the second half.

SC: It might be just easier for editing if I repeat the whole first half too. So do you think the ways that we might teach history might change after this moment? Do you think being maybe more aware of how we are historical actors or the ways that we are more attuned to wanting to hear certain histories like the Spanish Flu, do you think the ways that we're going to teach history might change after this moment? And I do mean that in a very like broad way. It's like it could be formal like a K-12 history classroom or university classroom, but it could also mean informal like the documentary series that you work on, or the Dreams Project. Anyways that we 'mobilize' the past, do you think we're going to do that differently after this moment? Do you think we should?

AB: I think it has highlighted, hopefully, that idea of history as a process and something that continues all along. And so I've been think-

ing a lot more about that and what that will mean to people who are alive right now. That it's sort of more obvious to more people that that's what happens. And I have seen some great examples.

I can't remember who it was, but someone on Twitter was talking about having their students sort of talk about what historical artifacts would sum up this time for people in the future like beyond masks or placards sort of what things in the world right now would tell that story for the future and thinking through things like that. Like how is this moment being made into history? Whose stories are going to get told about this moment into the future? All those kind of processes are laid bare right now that you can sort of see the inner workings of history and how like that's made in a way that isn't as obvious to everyone all the time that hopefully opens up some new possibilities for sort of teaching people about historiography and getting them engaged even if they're not hardcore history people or history students.

And I think, two, it creates that visceral connection that is an opportunity to reach people who might not have been reached before in ways they might not have been reached. It makes it kind of obvious which examples. Like the story of the Spanish Flu is so much more relevant to people now, and use that as a way into telling other stories and use it as an example of certain processes and that kind of thing.

And on a practical level, we're all being forced to reach our students or audiences in different ways since we can't physically be with them. So certainly, I think there are a lot of drawbacks of that and a lot of negatives to being forced online against our wills, but hopefully gives us a chance to learn some things that once we've returned to being able to reach people directly, we'll have more tools in our toolbox than we might have had otherwise once we return to something closer to normal.

I think about one of my students, after we moved online at the very end of term, just mentioned that she found online discussion for her to — since a lot of my students are new Canadians or international students, speaking out loud in front of the group is something that was harder for her than being able to type on an online discussion board, which was a reminder both to do a better job always of making people feel more comfortable in person, but also the idea of opening up as many different avenues for people to engage with history. That some methods will reach some people and engage them better than other methods.

So that, hopefully, online is something that can engage some people rather than just a focus on in-person. That would be able to sort of give people more ways of choosing how they're going to engage with material. And that's really something that with the Dreams Project, and the Canadiana, the documentary series that I've been doing for a while trying to leverage new media to talk about old stories that even now, I'm going to have to rethink now the books and I'm finally going to get to go back to telling current stories and working on Twitter and Facebook and trying to reach people that way in new ways.

So I think this moment is just going to kind of force us to teach in different ways and develop some new skills and methods. And hopefully, we have to probably be careful that that becomes a positive thing and something that adds to the ways of teaching instead of moving everything online and seeing it as a cheaper, faster, more explorative way of doing things, but that there are real opportunities there to reach people in new ways now that we're sort of being forced to learn them.

SC: John Heckman, the Tattooed Historian, I did a talk with him and he was like — it's hard to kind of explain like who he is. He's like a brand. Like a history brand, but he wouldn't call himself a public historian, although I would. And he said that like this could be a real creative

boom during this time for public history in particular and like he really hopes it's not a bubble that it will burst after this.

And when I talked to Kat Akerfeldt from the Toronto's First Post Office, when I talked to Joe McGill from the Slave Dwelling Project, they both were like, like this is a moment that can change the narratives of a lot of like public history spaces. And Joe McGill from the from the Slave Dwelling Project, he was saying too that like — so he goes to different slave dwellings and he sleeps there, and he does interpretation about the lives of those who are enslaved in those spaces, and he said that some African-Americans, some Black audience members would not go to those events because they didn't want to be in those spaces, but the online interpretation can allow them to learn from and do some healing with the interpretation of those spaces they'll having to go.

And like it's kind of interesting the possibilities, like the things coming up in the cracks of these things. Like, sure, we're rushing and we're doing it and it doesn't seem comfortable and it seems like, sure, let's just do it faster, cheaper, but like there's some really kind of interesting possibilities that are coming from this moment, these creative possibilities, which is pretty exciting.

AB: And it's something a lot of my work is centered around physical locations and geography, and psychogeography, and going to the place and sort of trying to function as [inaudible 0:28:32.2] a portal for people online who can't necessarily get to that place now and people are stuck at home so much, but like I'd go live a dream. One of my cards in a physical location. Mostly around Toronto, but as I said, I've gone across the UK and Europe last summer. Going to those physical locations and then using the moment I drop the dream as a way of reaching an audience that isn't in that physical location with the story of that location.

So when I leave a dream somewhere, the person who finds it in that place hopefully engages with the story and goes and follows the URL. But in some ways, even more important than that is the fact that I'm posting it on Facebook, and Twitter, and Instagram and, therefore, able to reach thousands of people. One person might find the dream, but thousands of people who follow on social media get connected to that place whether it's a dream I leave at Fork York in Toronto, which is an obvious historical site or an obscure like a graveyard in Rome where Toronto historical figures, talents are buried. And you can tell the story of how their time in Rome ended up influencing their work in Toronto and how Lauren Harris's house built by a woman who is a modernist architect who basically only ever got to build one building and it's Lauren Harris's house.

Because she was a woman and a modernist before her time, learned data architectural study in Rome and being able to tie people to that location and that place in a way they might not get to do themselves and sort of unite the digital world and physical locations, which is something that's exciting about this moment, which is so unexciting in so many ways is that it does sort of open that up and make that more important and more something everybody's sort of dealing with and figuring out ways to do like something where you might have only done it in person for a small audience because its location-based may be forced to stream online, reach a wider audience that might dig up some lessons and some ways of reaching broader audiences and finding new ways of telling stories that will hopefully be useful tools in the future.

SC: I said this earlier that a theme that's been becoming up in these later talks is a focus on like geographies and space. And I'm here, I'm talking about history not so much geography, but like it's really that was just going to like do another series for the next month. I would want to like think about place related to this moment. Like how can we — like connection to spaces, and places are important. And I think your

work really demonstrates that. So when we can't do that, when we are located in this space someplace, how can we still revere another space and place? And like those are historical questions. And so, like thank you for contributing to that kind of meta-conversation that some of the series have had.

AB: Yeah, it is a particularly challenging moment for that. To be able to connect with our histories so frequently involves being in the place where something happened or seeing the artifact with our own eyes. But I think you can sort of create that kind of connection online if you do it well, and it's something I think we're all sort of being forced to learn right now.

SC: Well, and sometimes there is a real argument for still engaging in spaces and places during this time. Like I talked to — I mean, again, I'm going to mention Julian Chambliss' talk because I feel like there are some really nice connections. We were talking about Juneteenth, which is a holiday in the States, and about how like people going out right now to protest for Black Lives Matter really echoes a lot of the celebrations for Juneteenth throughout the last 150 or so years because it is a way of marking your presence in public places and spaces. And so it's kind of interesting the way space and geography are working in this moment related to history in ways that, like I said, didn't really come up at the beginning part of the series.

I also just want to highlight that you're the first person to say the word historiography on this series. But like, when we think about teaching history, you're right. This is a moment to teach historiography. And I think that's a really kind of interesting point. So thanks for being the first.

AB: Yeah, it does sort of lay bare the workings of historiography. It makes it sort of clearer to everyone. They might not be seeing it

themselves, but it's an opportunity for people who are already thinking of it all the time to point it out and how these things are made. And you're right too. Like this moment highlights maybe even more how much place is important, and that we can use the digital world to highlight those places and point out how important it is for us to be out and about and taking to the streets and physically being somewhere demanding change and engaging with those places, which is something it's really easy to forget in Toronto in particular, which is a city that's earned its reputation for not really valuing its history where so much of our built heritage and archeological heritage has been destroyed and can feel like a blank canvas so often.

But by sort of engaging with it digitally by digging up archival images and highlighting the fact that these are, even if the house has been destroyed, it's still a place, that corner, still holds that history. That our street names still bear our colonial past in a lot of cases. And that by talking about those physical locations online, you can sort of highlight how important that physical built and archaeological heritage is and sort of engage with people, teach them about it so that when they're returning to those places around their pandemic walks, they can be more aware of it than they might otherwise be.

SC: I feel like this is a good moment to go to my third question, which isn't a smooth segue, but I think this is a good moment to kind of shift because my last question is about imagining a new 'we'. **Do you think that this moment will allow us to imagine a new we?** And the reason why I think this is kind of a good moment to like shift to that is because wes are imagined in a lot of different ways, but also into our proximity to spaces and places.

So do you think that we will get a chance to kind of have greater circles of inclusion of who we understand to be part of a we and that we can shift our notion of we and inclusion to be more inclusive?

AB: Yeah, and especially in just the question right now because I think that answer is maybe shifted over the last few weeks. That it's not just about the pandemic now. This moment in history is more than just that with the Black Lives Matter protest and the fact that everyone is having to confront sort of the past in ways they might not have had to before and very specifically in terms of that we end up becoming a more inclusive we.

That when you talk about the history of Toronto particular, in Canada in general, that process of that widening of we speak so directly to the history of this place over the last few 100 years through colonialism and that this place in this city especially was built to be a very, very narrow we that only British white protestants were going to be part of that we and that people have fought to expand that definition. And in Toronto, it's broader than it is in a lot of places and across Canada too. And this moment made it clear that it's not nearly wide enough and that we need to keep fighting to expand that definition. And that I think already is broader than it was last week or two weeks ago that people are having to confront that and having to redefine it. And even people who felt like their we was all-encompassing or realizing they still have work to do and that the way we tell our stories needs to keep evolving. That you don't get to a point where you're just like, oh, yeah. Now my stories that I'm telling are broad enough and inclusive enough —

SC: We did it!

AB: Yeah. No matter how far you've gone, you need to keep going and keep learning, listening and keep talking, and keep doing your best and ever-evolving best. And that, yeah, there haven't been many moments in our lifetimes where that's been more obvious than it is right now and that needs to keep changing. And that history is a way of highlighting that. That a lot of people I think, like people who are not

history people, old high school friends and other friends have been talking about this dawning on them now how important history is.

And if we want to understand what's happening now, how things have ended up this way, and how we can change them most importantly, then it's really important to be telling stories of how it all got to be this way and those stories of the past. And that people are realizing things about Canada and Toronto that they haven't necessarily realized before, that this is a place that was built in part on slave labor. Hopefully, giving opportunities to talk about that, talk about how that definition of we has changed over time so that people understand better how to keep changing it and hopefully accelerate that change, and hopefully bring up our colonial past, and genocide, and nation-to-nation relationships, and all those things that people might not have felt in their day-to-day lives was as viscerally important to them in their privileged space as it feels now. Now that we've got a moment where it's in the news all the time and feeling Twitter feeds. And that people, when they're not running around after their kids and trying to work and childrear all at the same time, aren't just spending their time in bars or in theaters or wherever else they are. That this is a moment where more people maybe are having a chance to reflect on that and learn more about the place where they live and how it's come to be the way it is.

And once you start seeing those repeating historical patterns, that this isn't, oh, just something that once Canada abolished slavery, everything was good. That you can see that these struggles have been going on and are continuing that hopefully wakes people up to the reality of what it means to be Canadian in ways that aren't just patting yourself on the back for peacekeeping and multicultural policies and realizing that it is a struggle that we all need to be a part of.

SC: Well, and as I'm sure you know, Canada didn't abolish slav-

ery, right? Like the British Empire abolished slavery, and Canada was just like part of [inaudible 0:41:22.8]. Like we need to be aware of like how our country was designed to be a country for White Protestants as a way to help rebuild a narrative that makes sense of the white supremacy and the racism built into so much of the politics and structures of the world that we live in. And that some people, people like myself and like you who identify as white aren't as aware of as other people who are racialized, right?

AB: Yeah. And it's a past — especially in public discourse and with people who aren't paying not much attention to history is just ridiculously white-washed. That story of the underground railroad gets told. People mention on Simcoe Day in Toronto and parts of Ontario that he abolished slavery, which is not the story at all because he filled his parliament with people who enslaved other people and who forced compromise and had it gradually phased out over time instead of abolished. And, yeah, that it didn't get abolished till 40 years later when the British Empire abolished it. That Johnny MacDonald got reparations for his father-in-law's slavery being taken away from him and given freedom to people who have been enslaved is not something that gets talked about. And a lot of the stories of how that continued.

I'm working on a Twitter thread right now about how Toronto and other cities in Canada became [inaudible 0:43:13.6] of support for the Confederacy during the American Civil War, which is 30 years after slavery was ended here. But [inaudible 0:43:20.6] who supported it. Still, people who fought for the south and who upheld the idea of slavery even decades after it ended here and those people were leading figures in the city. Most Canadian newspapers were on the side of the south. There are still streets and schools named after them to this day, which is something I think most Canadians haven't realized and is hopefully beginning to change a little bit.

And so this is a moment where we can reach wider audiences with those stories and hopefully, help change people's perspectives of Canada because I think a lot of people think of it as a finished product that we're more much cultural than other places. So great for us and well done. And if anybody has any complaints about that, then they're just dredging up old stories that aren't relevant till today and is just viscerally and obviously untrue. And hopefully people are realizing that more through those stories of how it continued. And that, yeah, it was tweeted last week about the fact that Canada had slavery for like 29 years less than the United States did, which is not something most Canadians understand at all, and that's just one example among many of obviously our disturbing past that people who have been engaging with the material know, of course, and people in the wider world don't seem to understand nearly enough.

SC: Well, and of course, I'll make sure that there's a link to your Twitter account below the video, and that perhaps that thread will have been published by the time this video goes up and so people can read that. That's so interesting. I'm looking forward to reading that thread myself.

Thank you so much, Adam, for this really great talk. I just want to like pull together a couple things that you said, especially because this is kind of the end of this series for the summer and I think these are kind of nice ideas to kind of pull together to think about like teaching history after this moment as a historiography of the ways a struggle for we, a 'we' has become — like the ways that there has constantly been a struggle for we I think can be a really interesting way to kind of explore a lot of these ideas because a lot of educators don't know these histories and what I've always said is like, that's okay. Just be like, let's learn it together, right?

And so thinking of your classroom or your other like history spaces as

learning with your students, the historiography, like how stories get constructed, and therefore, what gets left out thinking about how a 'we' gets imagined through various discourses I think is really powerful. So thank you so much for bringing all of that to this conversation.

AB: Yeah. I think they're fascinating, interesting stories and that has been a central thread in the history of Toronto in Canada. Something I've been learning a lot about with Toronto Book of Love. Stories I didn't necessarily know about. The first bill ever introduced in upper Canadian history was to expand the definition of marriage because it was such a narrow protestant institution in the beginning. You can follow that fed for 200 years of people fighting for the right to love and marry who they wanted and that those are ongoing processes in so many different parts of our lives and everyone's lives.

SC: And remind us when The Book of Love will be out.

AB: It'll be out in January, pandemic allowing. Just in time for Valentine's Day next year.

SC: And, of course, as The Book of the Dead is already out and that people can get that.

AB: Yup, it's out to all the bookstores and the online shops too.

SC: All right. Well, thank you so much, Adam. This was really great and, well, I'll make sure to connect with all your projects for everyone that is interested, and hopefully, we stay connected.

AB: Great. Thanks so much for having me.

SC: All right, see you later.

AB: Bye.

SC: Bye. That was great.

In conversation with Dr. Bonnie Laughlin-Schultz

Pandemic Pedagogy Conversation #32

Dr. Bonnie Laughlin-Schultz

Dr. Bonnie Laughlin-Schultz a history professor and also run social studies education program at Eastern Illinois University in Charleston, Illinois. You can connect with her on Twitter at @eiuhistl.

We spoke May 28, 2020.

Video posted June 25, 2020.

QUICK LINKS

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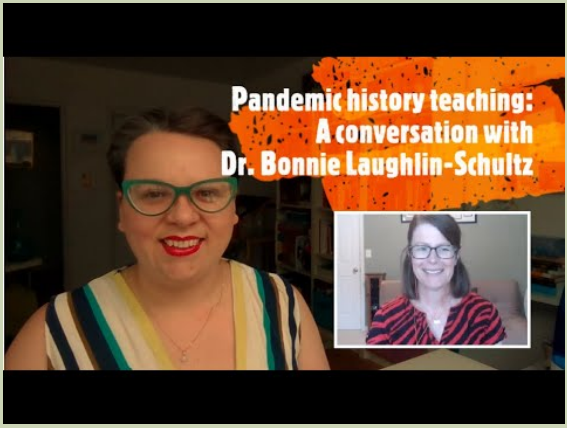

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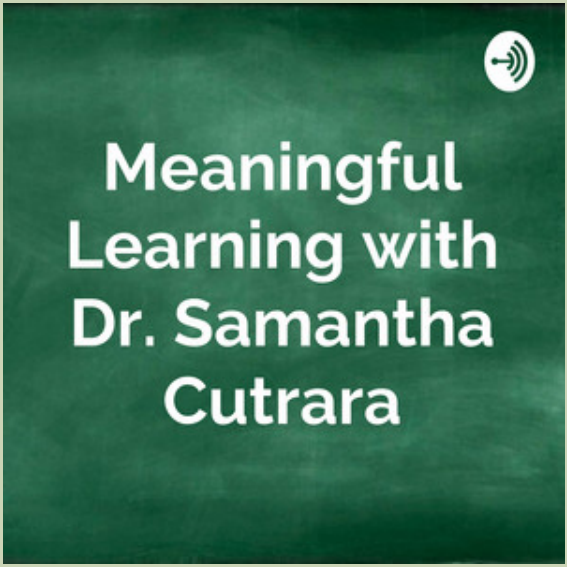

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TRANSCRIPT

All the Pandemic Pedagogy conversations revolved around three questions:

- Question 1: Have you thought of history any different *because* of this moment?
- Question 2: Do you think we would teach history *after* this moment?
- Question 3: Do you think we can "imagine a new 'we'" during/after this moment?

Dr. Samantha Cutrara: Bonnie, thank you so much for agreeing to speak for the "Pandemic Pedagogy" series. I know that coming off your sabbatical, you're probably kind of overwhelmed with this type of work again. And so I just really appreciate you speaking with me today. Thank you.

Dr. Bonnie Laughlin-Schultz: Oh, thank you.

SC: Do you want to introduce yourself?

BS: So I am Bonnie Laughlin-Schultz. I'm a history professor at Eastern Illinois University in Charleston, Illinois. A small town down-state in rural Illinois. I wear two hats in the history department. I'm sort of a 'normal' history professor and then I also run our social studies education program. So I work on helping students who want to be high school social studies teachers or history or civics or some combo of that.

SC: And you were a high school history social studies teacher before. So it was like, if I remember correctly, you said that you did like

you're a teacher in high school, then you became historian and you are also the coordinator of the program?

BS: Exactly. Yes. And it seems like I planned this all out, but I did not. So I taught high school for a number of years and then I got a Ph.D. in history, and then I realized there were actually jobs for people like me who had teaching experience, but who were also historians. And I think that's actually been a cool thing and different than when I trained to be a teacher where you sort of did education and you did history and those two worlds [inaudible 0:02:18.8] didn't talk. So I'm sort of the meeting ground for my students of those two schools that they're in.

SC: And I think that meeting ground is so exciting and it is hard often for people to come to that meeting ground, but also to like hear each other? Because what I find is like academic historians don't necessarily know how to say things in ways that teachers can hear that they can bring into their classrooms. And teachers don't really know how to tell academic historians enough, they're like, that doesn't help me. I need something else. And so I think it's really powerful that you can bring — that your career brings both together, but I think that translation is such an integral part of history teaching conversations.

BS: No, I think it's really interesting, particularly because what we all do is teach and students do not undergo some dramatic metamorphosis from finishing high school to beginning college, right? That the best work that I've done on my own teaching is because I teach a class to my students about how to teach high school social studies and that has made me I think so much of a better college teacher. So it's not different world. We just, like you said, I think exactly, we speak different languages sometimes even though it doesn't really make sense that we do so.

SC: Well, no. I mean, I think it does make a little sense because like you train in a different tradition. It's the same kind of too with like elementary school and secondary school teachers. Like it's interesting because — and anyone that's seen any of the "Pandemic Pedagogy" conversations know that we haven't even got into the questions yet,

but it's interesting because I was talking to some people on Twitter that do higher education. So like teach history at universities, and they were talking about, "Oh, how can we curate a better class for fall?"

And I spoke to a grade two teacher who have this like bitmoji choices board for Asian Heritage Month and she had said, "I've never thought of myself as a curator, but look at me, I'm doing some curation." And it was just like, yeah, the more we can figure out how to talk with each other, the stronger and more diverse our practices will be I think.

BS: Yeah, absolutely. Yeah.

SC: Yeah. Okay, first, how is the Internet for you?

BS: It seems to be better.

SC: Okay, good. We'll just keep going then. It's fine for me too, so.

BS: You know, [inaudible 0:05:03.6] headlight, I look that way frequently, so.

SC: No, no, you look great. You look great. We're having a heatwave in Toronto right now, and so all day long I just watch my face getting shinier and shinier. But you look great. You look very matte.

BS: I think I jinxed us. Okay, now you're back maybe.

SC: I think [crosstalk 0:05:22.6]. Yup. Okay, we'll just give it a second. All right.

Okay, so why don't we get started with the first question because it might be a good way to, again, translate or bridge those worlds. So my first question is **have you thought of history any different because of COVID?** So this question is really about the present. Like, have you thought about history in the present? Anyway, so have you thought of history any different in the present? Any thoughts?

BS: Yeah. I mean, I think I've been sort of moving back and forth, past and present as I think about history right now in part because I just can't stop thinking about evidence. What is the evidence that we're finding in this moment?

So I am a historian of American women's history, particularly 19th-century American women's history, and so I think a lot about missing

evidence. What we missed about women's experience in the past because we don't have documentation. And so I think I've been sort of overwhelmed right now with seeing evidence of this moment everywhere. Everything is historical evidence and documents, but it has made me really reflect on how small our body of evidence is for the past. When I'm thinking my son having a Zoom call with his teacher, that's a historical document of this moment.

No, there wasn't Zoom in the 19th century, but there were these daily experiences for the sort of 'great events' that we talk about in textbooks that were missing the texture for. And I think that that has been really sobering to me, but I would also like to think that it has been humbling in that way and will make me more thoughtful as I seek out evidence in the past, I hope.

SC: Well, I love what you said about texture because I think that is such a key element. Because I say that it has — this moment has helped me think about history differently, but in some ways, it's provided evidence to things I already think about history. In that, we will not have evidence for the emotional experiences and emotional landscapes in all of these homes related to this. And so how will that affect how this history becomes written, but then we still are recording a lot?

So in other eras where that is not the case, we are both missing the emotional landscapes as well as the evidentiary record. And I think that you're — because I did a video about, like why aren't we teaching more women? Because the structure of history doesn't allow it necessarily. When you're focused on like a very grand tradition of history, that how can we make space to think of not only different evidence, but like to allow space for even creative nonfiction with a little bit of evidence that we have. Have these ideas come into play at all for you at all?

BS: No, I think that's really interesting and I think one of the sort of hallmarks for me as a historian. So I wrote a book about women who were sort of ordinary in the 19th century, but they were related to a really famous guy, John Brown. And there were moments when I was recreating their life and there's lots of evidence because they knew a

famous guy. They were part of his family so their staff could say it. But also that interior experience that you're talking about a little bit, there's not a lot of evidence for that. And you sort of hit this moment of 'do I speculate?' 'When do I become comfortable saying I think someone felt something?'

So I think that there's that going on with some of the emotional landscape here that it sort of gets against this place where we start to be like, no, I'm a social scientist, not a humanities person.

SC: Just one second. Wait, wait, wait. You're buffering.

BS: — to wonder about this bit of nonfiction. Can we collect more of these materials and then those become windows into the emotional experience of Americans now. And obviously, I should stop talking about Americans. You know what I mean.

SC: No, no, no, that's okay. But also, most of that answer was cut off.

BS: Okay.

SC: Okay. Could you start again when you had said like, I'm a social scientist, not a humanities person? And then whatever from there.

BS: Yes. I am going to turn off — I'm trying to turn off any device that I have even forgotten is still on that is sucking the Internet. Okay, and I missed — so you were talking about nonfiction and sort of some of the getting at people's emotional experiences and the kinds of things that textbooks don't normally get at, and that maybe we want to think about sort of new genres as a window into that. Is that right?

SC: Yeah. I mean, I think the way your answer was going met my kind of speculation really well. So it just got cut off. Yeah.

BS: Okay. So, I mean, I think that there is — I thought a lot about this question of sort of is history art or science? And where do we fall? Are we a social science? Are we humanities? I think the pandemic has made me double down on we are humanities because we cannot completely understand the past, and part of it is that we want to understand what people thought and experienced and felt. And that

becomes difficult to grasp because we tell our students, right? Even if we have a diary from someone and the person is writing, I felt X. We can't trust that source, right? We have to ask about bias and is this person performing for themselves, right?

But I think that there are ways to get at people's emotional lives and responses to the loss that is going on, and that we historians doing that about past events. And so maybe we can look to that, particularly the thing that I think about its works about the American Civil War and sort of shifts in American thought as they grappled with death changing, right? People dying so far from home without the ability to have what a historian Drew Faust calls "the good death" that really involved sort of this deathbed moment with your family around you. We're seeing the same thing happen now in hospitals where families are barred from witnessing that moment, providing comfort.

And I think it's maybe our study of the past here that even can help us ask thoughtful questions about the present and think about how we sussed out that experience and write about it.

SC: Mm. I mean, when you're saying like I think about is history a social science or a humanity? That is really powerful. Aaron Stout, who's another person I interviewed for the series said that history is a humanity. We really need to sit with the emotions and to be able to kind of feel through. But to me, a key element of that statement that you're making too is for teachers to understand themselves within that kind of binary. Like, what do they think their purpose is in teaching history? Is it to understand the emotional landscape of a particular moment or is it just to assess criteria and assess evidence?

I mean, my perspective is that it should be about emotional landscapes and experience, but it doesn't need to be — but I think what you're also saying about like this moment in thinking about history as a humanity can help us think through a lot of the societal grief that we are going to be experiencing.

BS: Yeah. And I think categorizing history as a humanity too is saying that we can't know everything about the past, and this makes

many historians kind of squirmy like, "No, of course, I am capturing objective truth about the past," we know that is not true. And I think communicating that to students both at the college level as well as secondary and even down to elementary, that becomes very hard because students still arrive in my classroom thinking history is what happened in the past and we have to sort of unpack that. And I think this moment will be a great moment to help students think through. Okay, well, what's the textbook paragraph going to say about this moment? Is that really — does that match your experience? How does this work? So I think the feelings are there, but also this classification of our entire discipline.

SC: So I wrote a blog post in late May for the COVID Chronicles, which is a blog that has come up in Canada about the experiences of COVID and it's about like my camera roll in my phone from the last two months.

BS: Oh, cool.

SC: And I was like, my camera roll is an archive of grief, and longing, and community, you can't see that unless I narrate it for you, because the pictures of me, like a selfie of me in the woods smiling might seem like, oh, look at this late 30's woman in an urban setting coping really well. And it makes me think about the evidence that has to be narrated like that was an important walk in order to X, Y, or Z. And I think because students are recording so much of their lives right now not just because of COVID, they too can think about those things through their own record collections.

BS: Yeah. No, I think that is great. And really the — I don't even want to talk about a silver lining, but a way for students to really understand the nature of history and evidence. And when we look at photographs from the past, now are we going to think differently about what we know? And also just encouraging people to document this moment and to write stuff down and to explain to us through a camera roll so that when someone looks at it 100 years from now, there are liner notes for it essentially.

SC: A different type of record with liner notes, yeah.

BS: Yeah. Exactly.

SC: But it also is a good moment for young people also to think about like, why are essential workers who in Canada at least are predominantly racialized people? Why don't we have as many records from them? Well, because they are busy. The people that are creating the most amount of record have an element of privilege to be able to do that recording, and like I think that this moment can help bring up that discussion in a classroom about the evidence that we have in the past and how this moment demonstrates to us how some evidence get saved and preserved and recorded, and some don't.

BS: Yeah. No, this makes me really think too about this moment of where, for many students, history feels very traditional. We should talk about politics, we should talk about wars. But then if we want them to sort of claim ownership of documenting this moment and thinking that their experience matters, that challenges them to then look in the past and say, "Okay, well, my experience matter groceries from, his experience matters, what about people in the past who would fit our niches?

So I think that it has the — I mean, I think we as teachers have the power to make this sort of reshape the way students think about history and who counts and how we find voices in the past because we have this living example of whose voices are being recorded and not right now, even in this great age of technology where most of us have smartphones and have the ability to make a record.

SC: I think too that it also can help teachers recognize the diverse lives of their students that they might not have a chance to see in the same way. So for teachers to also think that the records that their students have created during this time are different than the records that they created during this time and to make space for those other lived experiences in how we think through this moment. So rather than just being like, don't forget, these other records are there, but like, let's look

at your own records to be able to identify how they look different despite the moment being the same.

BS: Yeah, absolutely. I think that moment is going to forever change sort of teachers' assumptions that every student has the same experience and access to technology. You know, it's very interesting to sort of see what this disruption in education is laying there I think.

SC: Well, this seemed like a good moment to switch to the other question about the future. **Do you think the ways that we teach history will change in the future from this?** Not just about there might be more integration of technology, but like this thinking about evidence, this thinking about or understanding we're seeing the different lives of students, do you think that will come into play at all in teaching history? So do you think history will change — teaching history will change after this moment?

BS: I think it can. Part of the power I think of a series like yours is that it really pushes us to be reflective and to stop just sort of getting through the hard bits of teaching right now and sort of think about not just our own work and discipline, but what we're doing in the classroom and to be more intentional about it, particularly how can I be a good teacher right now, whether that's online or with students who are having such traumatic experiences? Many of them I think will become, can become a pressing question that then becomes a question that drives a lot of our teaching in the future even when we're not in this moment.

I mean, I think the impact on the teaching of history and talking about evidence. I'll have my students in the fall continue to collect evidence and document this experience and think outside the box in terms of what primary sources are, and do oral histories, and that kind of thing. And I have not been much of a local history person in my career, so that will shift for me. But I think the bigger charge is can we just do a better job of being inclusive in our story of the past because we've had this attention to inequity in this moment? Can we think better about what our students need? That care that you talk about? As well as obvi-

ously historical content, skills, all of that, but that has to be packaged maybe in a new box, I hope.

SC: Yeah. Like normally, I would have a follow-up question to that, but my follow-up question actually makes the most sense with my last question about imagining a new 'we' because I argue that we should think of our history classroom with greater circles of inclusion and not just like allowing more people into our circle, but to really challenging our understanding of what that circle could be? What experiences are? And what I'm hearing from your answer is the importance of doing that both with our evidence, but also in our practices in our relationships with our students. So **do you see greater potential after this moment for educators to imagine a new 'we'?**

BS: I hope so. I think in the classroom, I've thought some about just the power of social studies in particular. Not just history, but also the teaching civics especially creating students who are news literate and thoughtful about the world, who value civic participation. I do open houses sometimes to recruit students to my teacher program and I made a PowerPoint last year that sort of started tongue in cheek, but that I put "Change the world. Teach social studies," and it was sort of meant to just be kind of funny, right? That we get students —

SC: Oh, it's true.

BS: Yeah. But then the more I thought about it, the more I was like, no, this is the way we're going to do this because we can model the community that the world that we want to live in, particularly when I think about a high school classroom, right? We can change the world by changing the experience that our students have a kind of civil discourse, this kind of thing.

So I think there is that potential. I feel in my own country in the United States right now, this real tension, we had a virtual commencement that Barack Obama did the address a week or two ago, and he had this, which is a powerful message. But he talked several times about leaving behind the old way of doing things. We know they're not working, he said.

And I was so struck by that because not everybody thinks the old ways aren't working. And I think some of the fight over is the old way working? Is it not working? What is this new America? Do we want to imagine a new world? That that is a contest right now. And I wish I felt confident that it was going to come out on the side of we can imagine a new world. I don't always feel that way, but I think in our classrooms, we teach towards hope and we teach towards the change we want to see and that that is what we have to do.

SC: One of the other things he said in those speeches is like, you youth, it is your responsibility to activate and make these changes. And like I said earlier, like teachers should think about their purpose for teaching history. My purpose for teaching history is for transformation for students to feel a sense of transformation about what the world could be and then to activate that to action. And so, yes, social studies can certainly change the world, but I think that that is our role and responsibility in our social studies and history classes to give students the tool, the knowledge to be able to do that. And sometimes that work can be scary, but I think it is really essential and I think we're seeing that more now than ever.

BS: Yeah, it's really interesting in the United States, a number of states have changed their curriculums in response to the National Council for the Social Studies put out a framework for social studies that everything ends in what they call "informed action" and that you're supposed to be teaching students to ask smart questions, to engage in research, to answer them, to have civil conversations even of controversial events and then to end in this action.

And I really think that is just such a powerful model that Barack Obama is talking to the youth maybe because we've abandoned hope for the adults, right? That you're going to become informed and then you're going to act. Like that's pretty cool, and to see teachers doing that with their students and to see the empowerment that it gives students to feel like they can be a changemaker, for lack of a better word, I think is really cool. And that was happening before this moment and I

see teachers even in these hardest of times in the spring with remote learning trying to continue to do this work with our students.

SC: And you know, something else about this — about you're saying with the adults that there are some adults that don't think things should be changed and then there are people that want things to be changed. What's interesting is that the people that don't want things to change are often using history as a foundation. Like, let's do this again, for example. Or like the way the things that have been going have been fine.

And what I think is so important is that people that want to push for a better future often also draw on the past as a way to demonstrate resilience, and activism, and resistance. And in some ways drawing on the past is different than drawing on history because that history is already been crafted. And so we can use our classrooms as ways for students to think about that tension too and to think about the narratives that they want to see and, again, draw on the past to be able to do this imagining, to do this action.

BS: Oh, I really like how you're separating sort of the past from history. And we talked about history as art and science, and here we're talking about it almost as a weapon, right?

BS: That it becomes this tool to advocate for change or maybe to imagine and pretend past to stand against change. And one of the things that I had hoped before all of this that my students would take away from my classes is that when someone is presenting them 'in the past we...', I want them to stop and listen carefully and then think is this true? What is this narrative trying to do? That narratives of history or narratives of the past, we use them to do incredible work in the present, and we need to be careful. Like they are extremely effective and they are not always accurate. And that is, in some ways, it is a very weird time to be teaching history.

I started teaching history right around the turn of the century and it didn't feel —

SC: Don't date yourself. Make sure you identify which century

because you [crosstalk 0:29:22.2] to the 19th century. So don't date yourself.

BS: That is true. Yes. So around 2000, and it just did not feel so contested, when you talk about things in the past. And, I think that it is, too bad, but it also gives us this interesting challenge and this sort of clarion call do we have to do this right in the classroom? There is a sort of moral urgency to giving our students skills to figure out what is the truth out there, what do I believe in, how does the past impact our present, what does knowledge of the past call for us to do in the present, how should we interpret the news. And I think that that is the kind of powerful history and social studies that I hope to see, and maybe that's part of this imagining a new 'we', right? That if the youth 'we' is coming up through that kind of social studies, maybe that is what brings on a new world.

SC: Well, I think that's a really powerful way to end. We've already talked for 30 minutes. This was so wonderful. Thank you so much, Bonnie.

BS: Oh, no, thank you. This was fun.

SC: Yeah, and I'm not done with this series or with all of you either. Like I think it would be really great to like touch base after and see if and how things are changing once like the urgency has kind of lessened a bit. And I think we'll feel that in the summer and it will feel different in the fall. So anyway, let's stay in touch.

BS: Sounds good. Thank you.

SC: Okay, bye.

BS: Bye.

In conversation with Melanie Williams

Pandemic Pedagogy Conversation #33

Melanie Williams

Melanie Williams is a history and social studies teacher based in Ontario. She is doing her master's at York University.

We spoke May 28, 2020.

Video posted June 26, 2020.

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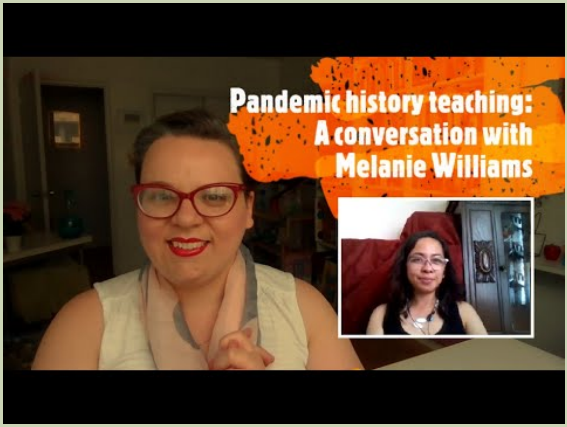

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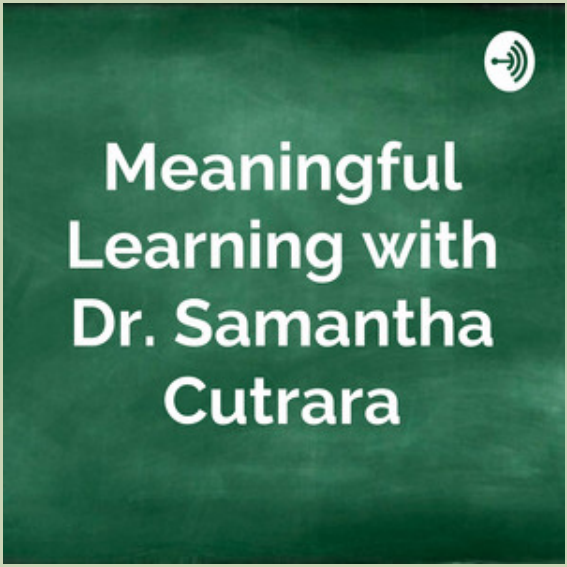

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TRANSCRIPT

All the Pandemic Pedagogy conversations revolved around three questions:

- Question 1: Have you thought of history any different *because* of this moment?
- Question 2: Do you think we would teach history *after* this moment?
- Question 3: Do you think we can "imagine a new 'we'" during/after this moment?

Dr. Samantha Cutrara: Mel, thank you so much agreeing to speak for the "Pandemic Pedagogy" series. I'm really excited to connect with you. Thank you.

Melanie Williams: Thank you for having me. This is very exciting.

SC: Yeah. Do you want to introduce yourself a little bit before we get started?

Mel: Sure, not a problem. Hi, everyone. I'm Melani. I teach high school in Mississauga and I teach history and English, depending on what they feel like giving me for the year, and I'm also doing my master's at York University. And I'm doing interdisciplinary studies as my discipline. Well, that's redundant. And I'm looking at the lives of three Canadian journalists who were [inaudible 0:03:56.9] journalists who lived and worked about 100 years ago, and I'm seeing how their writing and their travels, interest like the femininity that they chose to live as well as how they chose to live that femininity in relation to social expectations at the time. [crosstalk 0:04:16.7]

SC: You know, I said in my little introduction before we came together on Zoom that I think it's really awesome to be able to foreground interdisciplinarity into these conversations. And so the fact that you're also bringing in like journalism history with English, with history, with just like I assume also feminist theory if you're thinking about gender identity —

Mel: Absolutely.

SC: — I'm just really excited to have this conversation. So thank you for bringing all of that disciplinary/interdisciplinary expertise to the conversation.

Mel: It's nice to meet somebody who wants to hear about this because usually people just glaze over right about the journalists part and they don't hear the rest of [inaudible 0:04:58.4]

SC: Not me.

Mel: Great.

SC: SC: Not me. I like to keep this conversation to 30 minutes, but we could talk all day.

Mel: Let me get some more water then.

SC: Yeah, exactly. Hydrate. Hydrate.

Mel: Yeah, sorry.

SC: So why don't we get started on our first question, which is **have you thought of history any different because of this moment?** And I say in all the videos, like I certainly have. I thought a lot more about like the structures that intersect with our lives and the evidence that we used to teach and learn and understand the past, but some people have not been able to like think about that. So have you thought of history any different because of this time?

Mel: I have. Okay, so for two different reasons. One of them is there were several articles in various news outlets, CBC being one of them I think last week or the week before, and the articles were discussing how museums are right now attempting to curate the displays that make sense of the moment that we're in. So I thought that that was interesting that they're working on how do you frame the narrative that

we currently live for the kind of consumption that normally happens well after the fact? I mean, I don't associate museums with contemporaneity, and that's fascinating to me how do we reframe what's happening based on what story we want to tell. So that's one.

And then the other thing that I was thinking of in terms of how do I view history? Just the amount of social media coverage that's coming out of this pandemic, I wonder if any of us survives into the future if people will wonder about our fascination with bread, how it seems to have exploded a reason out of nowhere. Pardon the pun, I can't help it. I haven't been in front of a classroom in so long.

SC: Ooh, a lot of puns and interdisciplinarity. Just like, buckle up everybody. This is going to be a wonderfully long conversation.

Mel: I promise I will try to keep my punning to a minimum, but the kinds of things that people are choosing to record and how they're choosing to record it. I mean in the past, I'm just going to go right to the 1918 pandemic, who was recording their experiences and the kinds of people who were recording those experiences and then which of those experiences were saved in order to be accessed at a later point for study is different from today.

I mean, I don't know that we have the same class barriers to prevent different kinds of people. And I don't know if that's offensive, but we have sources from a variety of different people. So we have sort of a record of how different people experienced this pandemic differently, so I think it's a little bit more wide-ranging the amount of material that there would be later to analyze and to say, well, what happened during this time period?

So certainly this experience, in looking at it and thinking how will we be remembered and how will we do that remembering and what will we choose to do that remembering with? There's a lot more available to us now assuming that there's not some great server destruction that happens in the next 20 years and all of our electronic media history is wiped out and then all of a sudden, future historians 300 years from

now say, "There's this dark period in the early 21st century where there are no records."

SC: I mean, I feel like that's a real like consideration actually. But we don't need to dwell on that during COVID time.

Mel: Well, partially though, right now, I'm in the middle trying to conduct my thesis research and I can't access any of the archives because they're all closed. And in fact, one of them has decided they're not going to open again until next year, which is the same from a researcher's point of view as not having the records at all. I mean, I guess it's a reflection on the type of media on which our records are stored is the kind of thing that I'm thinking about, like is digital, is hard copy, is analog have other advantage as well in this time period? I don't know. Yeah, another consideration.

SC: Yeah. I mean, you are touching upon some things that the archivists that I've spoken to, Chris Sanagan and Adam Birrell, have talked about like people are a lot more conscious of recording things now because we have our phones at hand and debit cards. Our phones at hand at all the times. And often we are recording things like through taking pictures or through our social media posts. And one, does that change the ways that the primary sources that we are creating will be available? Not available, but like are we crafting a narrative that historians in the future are really just going to pick up on, or are the primary sources going to be more available for interpretation? And I think that's a really valid and interesting question to think about the historians of the future and the ways that we are hyper-aware of recording things.

SC: And that with a cellphone, it can be a very democratized type of recording, which is I think what you were saying.

Mel: Yes.

SC: Like in 1918, people of lower classes weren't like, "You know what, let me just sit down and write a lengthy diary entry about my feelings right now," right? Whereas you can do that on Twitter, you can do that on Facebook and it is interesting. And I do think that this moment really does highlight this analog-digital split. So in one hand, if

the resources that you wanted are available digitally on the archive's websites, you are able to access them. But if everything is there, then what about when that technology is not available?

So I think you're bringing up some really key important things that we do need to think about about history and the discipline in history moving forward.

Mel: I'm glad that that last bit made sense, because sometimes you're talking and you think, what am I saying? And somehow being on Zoom makes you really hyper-aware of that stream of consciousness just flowing out of your face and you're thinking, okay. Well, let's hope somebody can pull meeting out of this. Thank you. Thank you for doing that.

SC: Well, what's so great about doing 30 pandemic pedagogy conversations is that I hear different things from different people, but I can also make these strong connections. And although like Chris Sanagan and Adam Birrell, the archivists I spoke to didn't necessarily articulate things in the same way that you're doing, it's the same concern.

Mel: Oh, interesting.

SC: That archivists are [inaudible 0:12:33.1*rejuvenating too.] Yeah.

Mel: Well, that's good. I'm glad that we all seem to have this common thread since we all probably have history as a common denominator among us.

SC: Yeah. I mean, I guess that is the most common denominator that people that — I mean, I say teaching history, but really what I mean is mobilizing the past. Anyone that is able to mobilize the past has an open invitation for the "Pandemic Pedagogy" series. And because I've worked at archives, the archivist I have worked with, like they knew that their work would fit this conversation more than someone that might be like, "Oh, well, that's not really how I conceptualize my work." So it has been really awesome to get so many different perspectives.

Mel: You know, I kind of — while you were talking about how

future historians are going to process this, I kind of feel like maybe that's a thing that I'd like to have my history students do, assuming I get a history class this coming semester. We still don't know. We have no idea what's happening next term. But I think that that might be a useful dear future historians article to let historians know this is what we were thinking when we were creating all of these records and it wasn't necessarily because we wanted future-future generations to look back and know this about us, but certainly these are the things you have to keep in mind about what we were considering when we created these records for immediate consumption. But that sounds like a different task.

SC: Yeah. No, I love that idea. Like, what were we thinking when we created this for immediate consumption? Not for like this diary that we will one day perhaps read or a business record that's really just between two people in an organization, but what do the records mean when we created them to be publicly consumed? That is a brilliant question.

Mel: Oh, thanks. Thank you.

SC: And if you want to just switch your master's thesis, you could do it on that actually.

Mel: I might because like I said, the archives are closed until next year. One of my thesis is due.

SC: Just focus on all the social media posts.

Mel: Oh! Oh, great.

SC: That'll be fun. This makes me think of two things. So one, I published a blog post on a website called The COVID Chronicles, which Andrea Eidinger, someone that I interviewed for this series is one of the coeditors of. And the blog post was about my camera roll on my phone and how the camera roll really demonstrates this archive of grief, but that you don't notice it unless you are me. Like if you were browsing through my camera roll as an archivist in 100 years, you might take a different narrative. And so it was really me highlighting like these are the narratives that I actually see and that I created in my own archive of

this moment. And it would be really interesting to have students think about their own types of records they created during this time and what they meant by it, but then also what other meanings people could take from it.

Mel: And I think that that's the kind of thing — oh, I don't know if I would do that as an online exercise unless I had previously worked with many or most of the students in the class, but something that I might want to do is have them do an individual assessment of look back at a specific — like look back at your April posts. All of your April posts, just that month, and then do the exercise. Think about what you were thinking at the time? What were you trying to capture? Why were you trying to capture it? Who were we trying to communicate with or to? And then have someone else look at it and do the same thing. What do you think this person was...(video trails off 0:16:42.3)

Mel: — at the very beginning of the course to teach the idea that the historical thinking concepts, that this is a creation act looking at primary sources that might be a really good hook.

SC: That is a great idea. I hope everyone steals it from you. Is that okay?

Mel: You know, that one is free. That one, I'm not going to claim copyright, I'm not — yeah, absolutely. Do that if you think that's a good idea.

SC: But you can certainly cite the video. I mean, I think that's really great. And I also just really want to flag something you said at the beginning. That like, I don't know if I would do this online unless I met the students because Ian Duncan in his talk, he was like, "We don't know who the students are going to be in our classrooms virtually or not in the fall." And that is something that we need to ensure that the students feel trust in the classroom, right? So, yeah.

Mel: Absolutely. And the only reason I thought of it is because I'm guaranteed at least one class of students who I've taught for the last three years, just because of the structure of one of our courses, I think I'm the only person qualified to teach it at my school. So I have one

class where I'm going to be able to start in September virtually or in real life in a place where we're very comfortable with one another and this is a project that I could rule out immediately. Whereas if we were online in September, I don't know that I would necessarily trust the students and myself and my own liability to do a project like that, but we'll see, right? We'll see what happens in September.

SC: Yeah, and we'll see too I think like what students have an appetite for. Like are they going to want to spend a lot of time processing this or do they just need to like not actively process it in order to process it, you know?

Mel: That is true as well. That is true as well. So yeah, I don't even want to speculate on that because I feel like, if people watch this down the road, they're going to look back and judge us with the post-COVID eyes and think, oh, my Lord, what are those people thinking?

SC: It's a no-judgment space. It's a no-judgment space. I mean, but it's also interesting. Like this is a bit of a time capsule in and of itself, right?

Mel: Yes.

SC: Yeah. The other thing I want to say is I don't know if you have anything else in your head when you say what future historians will think because all I want to do is start singing this song Burn from Hamilton. Do you know Hamilton?

Mel: No. I was going to try and go see it over the March break because I was headed to New York over the March break until Porter canceled their flights. So you know, I didn't get that.

SC: That is so sad on so many levels.

Mel: Yeah. But you know what, that's okay because — oh, am I allowed to [crosstalk 0:19:43.2] drop companies?

SC: Yeah, I can edit it. No problem.

Mel: Fantastic. Okay, so there is an online streaming service that is about to release Hamilton online obviously for streaming in a few weeks, in a few months?

SC: Yes.

Mel: And so it's the Lin-Manuel Miranda version, so I will watch it then.

Mel: But what's the song about?

SC: So for those of you watching that know Hamilton — I mean, I guess it's a historical record so it's not much spoilers, but if it is spoilers, cover your ears. So Alexander Hamilton, he does a lot of writing and he gets caught in a bit of a sex scandal and he writes about the sex scandal very, very publicly. And there is this song that Lin-Manuel Miranda wrote that isn't necessarily based in a historical record, where Alexander Hamilton's wife, Eliza, is articulating her anger at the fact that he's speaking publicly about an affair and having an affair. And the song Burn is about her saying that I'm going to burn all of the records that I wrote to you. So let future historians wonder what Eliza reacted when he broke her heart. And it's this beautiful song because it highlights such anger, and the actress brings a candle onto the stage and she literally burned something on the stage.

And I've written about this and I've done a presentation about this particular song about how it demonstrates emotion in history. Emotions without records, but allowing us to imagine a particular response. Allows us to humanize history to some extent for our students and for ourselves, but also to remember that we also don't have records for everything and we don't know what the meaning is behind the lack of records, but we can also responsibly use historical empathy to highlight some of those narratives that we as people in today's world want to process.

So anyway, just to flag Hamilton there, but yes, it is coming to streaming very soon if you haven't seen it. But it's also a really wonderful soundtrack to just listen to. Some musicals, you can't like do that. You need to see the performances, but it's a really beautiful thing to listen to as well. So flag for Hamilton because I know they need this flag.

Mel: Oh, I can't wait till they come back —

SC: Yeah, yeah.

Mel: — to see them live, hopefully.

SC: So why don't we move to the second question, which is about history teaching in the future. **Do you think history teaching will change in the future?** Now, some people say that they hope that it will change, but I wonder kind of in a broader way, do you think it should change? Do you think not just the delivery, but the types of ways we engage in thinking about the past, do you think that that should change when we get back into our classrooms in September in whatever way that looks like?

Mel: I'm going to keep my responses to the kinds of history teaching that I'm familiar with. So anybody who's listening, if you don't teach in secondary and you think that the things that I'm saying seem far fetched or grounded in some mystery swamp, that's where I'm coming from.

SC: Don't worry. Don't worry.

Mel: So I'm also going to I think restrict myself to grade 10 history or yeah, grade 10 history just because it's cleaner for me, right? Like I think that way, my answers will make more sense in terms of less general, less platitudy something.

SC: Yeah. For anyone watching that doesn't know why grade 10 history is because that is the mandatory 20th-century Canadian history course taught in Ontario and that's the only history course that students have to take in secondary school. So grade 10 history, adapt.

Mel: Thank you. Thank you for the clarification. [inaudible 0:24:12.9*Sort of mention that.] So in terms of how it's taught now, I mean, you have a real variety with obviously whichever teacher you get, and so you still have some history teachers who are — I hesitate to say old school because I don't want to sound ages. I just mean of the mentality that there is set number of facts and dates and names that are important to know and that that collection of facts and names, when you put them all together in the right order and you assign the right deeds to the right humans and the right groups, then all of a sudden, you have the essential knowledge of history about a group of people or nation or culture or what have you. And then you have newer schools of

historians. History teachers, excuse me. Not historians, history teachers in high school who are a little bit more willing to perhaps have their students question.

So they'll present the same facts as the more classical history teachers, but then they'll perhaps challenge their students with, well, what do you think of how — how do you interpret this piece of evidence and what has been done with it? But I feel like very rarely do we get the kind of history that focuses on not the big names.

Mel: So I feel that if history education, the way that history is taught is going to change, I'm sure it will, but only if the people teaching it want to make a change and I think that that change should be driven towards learning about a broader set of lived experiences because I think that will also show students — I think it gives students an access point into Canadian history. Because if we're just learning about these dead British men for the most part with a couple of tokenistic inclusions thrown in, it makes it seem as though history doesn't exist outside of these exemplary lives. And I don't think that that is a complete picture of what happened.

I don't think it's possible to ever get a complete picture, but I think that our purpose should be as history educators is to try and get students interested in learning what happened, how things changed, what does that mean for us? Because ideally, they want to learn about history, but it's because they want to learn something from it that they can use today or tomorrow. I don't think it should be a closed circuit.

And so I guess if I were to summarize everything I just said and bring it back into some kind of order, it would be, yes, absolutely, the teaching of history should change to include more stories about or viewpoints from other groups that have been traditionally excluded. There should definitely be more choice on the parts of students in order to find connections that they can establish between themselves and the history that was happening in the country, because those connections exist and it's not fair to ask teachers to do all the work, and it's not realistic. But what is doable is for the history teacher to say to the class,

"Why don't we work together? I'm going to teach you the skills of finding these sources, of taking textbooks, putting them together and examining what they say to each other and how they contradict each other, and seeing what kind of history can we make together?"

SC: I love that for a lot of different reasons. I just want to highlight. One of the things that I heard from you is that like this actually, the 'should' in the change of history education, you are articulating that it isn't just a COVID thing, and I agree. And what I think is that COVID can actually highlight, what I'm hoping personally is that it highlights for students and teachers the way lived experience manifested in historical moment and like that can be the hook to get both teachers and students to be able to do this more lived experience human-centric rather than kind of big names and big dates history.

I did a video about on March the 8th for International Women's Day and saying, "Well, why is it so hard to bring in women to the narrative?" It's often because we are focused on big names and big dates. And I think that that really broadens in a lot. And even though you connected old school with age, I don't think it's an age thing. I've seen a lot of teachers who are really interested in bringing in diverse histories, but like often go back to that narrative because that's what's familiar, that's what they know and they might think that like that a base needs to be laid before anything else happens. But I talk so much in this series about connection, complexity, and care. And that complexity stories, I think students are just dying to hear. Like they really want to understand the complexities that connect with their own lived experiences. So thank you so, Mel, for bringing that up is kind of, for me, I feel like it's a bit of a call to action about the ways that we want to frame our practice. So thank you.

Mel: Of course. And it's not to say that I wanted to go play with the big names, big dates, all of that and if somebody were to ask me, well, how do you intend to do this? It's kind of a matter of finding a balance because I don't think you can talk about say the history of okay, let's go with the 1920s and let's go with the advance for women, right?

Starting with some of them getting the vote during the war years all the way up to the declaration of women as Persons. Yeah? I don't think you can teach that without also teaching why do some of them were given the vote. I don't think that you can teach that without going back a little bit and teaching them about women's place in Canada during its formative years.

So yes, of course, and you have to teach about what the prime ministers were trying to do and, you know, big events about trying to get conscription to happen. Of course, yes. I know that some of the objections are, well then, you only have five months to teach. You can't possibly do all this. That's way too much content. And I think again that goes back to you have to pick and choose. And I don't think you as the history teacher should look at all of the content and think how am I going to teach all of this? I think that there has to be — and I think we put a lot of pressure on ourselves to try and teach it all, and I think that we have to say, okay, well, if they get this, then I'm okay. And if they can do this, then that's fine. And so we just kind of have to say find a balance for ourselves.

SC: And you know, both history, element — excuse me. High school, elementary, and university professors have all said on this series that COVID has given them a lot more freedom to just cut things from the curriculum because they know they're not going to get a chance to cover it. And I think — well, the people I spoke to at least, it really highlights for them that not everything needs to be covered. Like we really don't need to focus that much on these things.

This makes me think about this concept of teaching history called historic space that I've talked about before. And for anyone watching that hasn't heard me talked about it, a whole set of videos is going to go up at the end of June about it. But historic space is a way to frame history so that you get those big names and dates, but you spend the most time challenging it. So the beginning of a unit, you get students to just like go through the textbook, put out all the names, all the dates that are important, create a concept map of that, that takes a day or two,

then spend just two lessons, two lectures or whatever just talking about some big kind of concepts, but then the majority of the unit can on complicating that through stories that students bring in, through questions that students have, through a piece of history that you just want to complicate like, well, why only white women got the vote and not other women that were in Canada? And it is a way to do that balance about foregrounds, the complexities. And I think if we are interested in foreground and complexities for our students, there is a lot we would recognize. There's a lot more we can do in that space really.

Mel: Mm-hmm, yeah. And also First Nations history. And not just history, but current affairs, right? There's a lot of that. I think that's a huge gap that many history teachers, I'm throwing myself in there too, we have to address that. And I don't know how many of my colleagues share this particular sentiment, but I want so much to do right by of making sure that that portion of Canadian history is included in my syllabus, and at the same time, I wonder how much am I allowed to — how do I tell my students that I am not the expert while still teaching them, because I want them to know that. And yeah, that's just a — is that a pedagogical piece? Is that a teacher piece? As a reflective piece as an educator?

SC: Yeah. I mean, I think it's all of those pieces. I think that like when you start a class by being like, let's all build these histories together, it's easier when there is stuff that you as an educator don't know. It is easier for you to identify like, I'm not an expert in this, because you've already like laid that groundwork for this is a conversation.

SC: And so often that indigenous histories have been taught as like acted upon. And I think bringing in histories that demonstrate resistance and resilience is such a strong way to acknowledge first nations people on this land in a way that helps build upon contemporary issues of allyship, contemporary issues of settler colonialism that I think many of us, especially there have been many of us who have thought about these things differently because the Truth and Reconciliation Commis-

sion report really want to highlight our classroom. So yeah, thank you for bringing that up as well.

For me, this actually goes into my third question so well, which is about imagining a new 'we'. So this notion of imagining a new 'we' is like the theme of like my whole video blog, but it's also the name of my upcoming book "Transforming the Canadian History Classroom: Imagining a New 'We'" because I argue something that you are saying, which is that we need to highlight more lived experiences in our classrooms, we need to acknowledge the lived experiences of our students in the classrooms, and we need to recognize that these are all Canadian experiences even if they don't fit our 'old school' definition of Canadian history. **Do you have any thoughts about ways that we might imagine a new 'we' differently or in a way that's more complex during or after this period?**

Mel: I think that my answer will not necessarily relate to COVID, but —

SC: Okay.

Mel: And this is what I mean. I mean that it's something that I've been working on for some time just because the struggle that I've always had to answer with my students, you know, they'll say, "Miss, why are we learning this? Why does this matter?"

Mel: And you know, in the past, I remember answering, I don't know, maybe 10 years ago now. I remember telling the students, well, you know, it's important that we know these things about Canada because we share this space and the space comes with a history and we should know that history. You know, my answer is like that. But then over time, I started thinking, well, maybe what they're asking me isn't why do they need to know, but maybe they're also asking me like, did I bother learning in the first place? Because certainly, part of their question has to do with what does this have to do with us being — you know, I'm a first-generation Canadian and a lot of my students are first-gen Canadian as well, and they're asking a question that I used to ask too, which is how does this relate to me on a personal level?

And so I know that, for example, members of my community have been in Canada for — there was a large wave of immigration in the 60s I believe, so there's been a huge community for almost, what? 60 years now? I don't know anything about them. Nothing. I don't know. Why? It's never been covered and I've never done the work myself. And I was thinking when they're asking me, well, what does the stuff that we're learning in history have to do with us? I thought, well, you know what? Why don't we find out by having them do the work?

Mel: Let's identify the parts of yourself that are important to you. Like don't let me tell you which parts of your identity are important to you. I'll let you self-identify and then I'll let you find that, a reflection of that in Canada, and it doesn't — I can help point them towards places where they can explore and find those connections, but that way, I think they can establish those connections themselves.

For example, I know I'm speaking in generalities, so let's try and [crosstalk 0:39:34.2*nail this down a little bit.]

SC: It's okay, it's okay.

Mel: No, I hate doing it in class, I'm certainly not going to do it here.

SC: But you are.

Mel: I know, that's why I'm going to backtrack. So I had students who when we got into the first World War units, they would say [inaudible 0:39:52.9], was it actually a world war though? Because like, you know, France and English and Germans was like, negative, negative. Hang on a second. Why don't we have a look at all of these other participants? And I went and found a couple of photographs of British Empire soldiers from other parts of the world, and all of a sudden, I had students like, "Oh! Oh, my gosh. What?" And they were excited because they were seeing reflections of themselves and their own culture in here. And all of a sudden, they were into it and they wanted to know more about that. And that's the kind of thing I'm talking about, that it's possible to find connections to make connections help them see them

and then help them dig more deeply that way and establish that link with Canadian history.

I don't know if I answered your question. I think I've gone way off-topic. Can you like refresh?

SC: No, you totally answered the question because like when you're showing soldiers from other parts of the British Empire, Canada was a part of the British Empire. Like, why aren't we teaching World War I, for example, that Canada is within this empire, this transnational empire that there are similarities and differences across the empire because then that highlights the complexities of Canada's involvement, but also the like 'world part' of World War? And the students in my research said the same thing. I love how you were like — I think they're asking a different question. Because what I found was that students understand their Canadian identities in very complex ways, and they want their Canadian history to reflect those same complexities. Like, how can I be a Canadian, but never recognized, never seen in Canadian history, right?

SC: And to me, that really highlights some central-central things that it is integral those of us teaching national histories really consider. So I thought you answered the question. I loved it.

Mel: Oh, okay. Great. It's just, yeah, I wasn't sure if I got too off-topic there. But in terms of imagining a new 'we', I think another way of forming a 'we' — so I guess my first rambling answer was how do we get our students to buy in to the idea that, yes, they are as Canadian as the next Canadian and that we all have access points into Canada, right? Like, we can all find some way to connect with Canada's history and thereby, attach ourselves to that longer tradition of Canada. But I think another way that you can forge a 'we' is by putting everybody in the same uncomfortable place, and that way, it's not like you're privileging some into like an originary category and then some into a newcomer category, but you kind of put everybody into the same, 'oh, gosh, what do we do with this category in a story?' Not story, difficult history I

think is one of those really rich, rewarding, awkward, dangerous places where you can do that.

So I would never do it at the beginning of term certainly and I would never do it at the end of term, but certainly somewhere past the midterm, somewhere past the first report card is I think it's a really good place to bring up aspects of the curriculum that are really uncomfortable to learn about Canada and Canadians, and the way that they behave and the actions that they took because I think in that way, you can connect that to today and the uncomfortable things that are happening today and how we are trying to deal with that, us right now, and how we are trying to stay together and forge connections at a time when we're being torn apart.

SC: Yeah, thank you for that. I mean, you know, a really key element of what I heard was like the triad of connection, complexity, and care that I was saying before, like when you're like not the beginning, not the end, not where the first report card is, but like at a place where students are comfortable demonstrate to care for students so that they are in a bit of like a safer, but also like they're just maybe more primed for it as well. And I think that's a really good way for teachers that this might be new for them as a way for them to explore when to do this work. It doesn't have to be all the time always put yourself in these positions, but maybe pick a time, and like that's a good time for you to share the spotlight with your students and not just talking at them about Canadian history, but exploring difficult complex histories together.

So thank you for bringing that up. And I really enjoy this talk, and I hope we stay connected.

Mel: Me too.

SC: So like I said, I hope we stay connected because I've been saying to a few people we should get back together in the fall to be able to think about what this might look like, and it will be interesting how future historians will wonder about this moment. And let me know if you wind up doing that assignment with any of your students.

Mel: Absolutely. I will. Yeah.

SC: Okay. Well, have a wonderful afternoon and we will talk later. Bye.

Mel: Okay. Thanks again for having me.

SC: That was wonderful.

Mel: Yay!

In conversation with Leanne Young

Pandemic Pedagogy Conversation #34

Leanne Young

Leanne Young a teacher in Simcoe County District School Board. She is the chair of the Canada World Studies Department at Orillia Secondary School. You can connect with her on Twitter at @lyoungteach.

We spoke May 25, 2020.

Video posted June 29, 2020.

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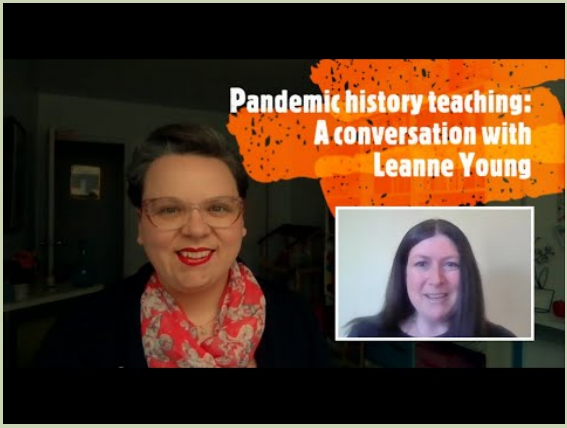

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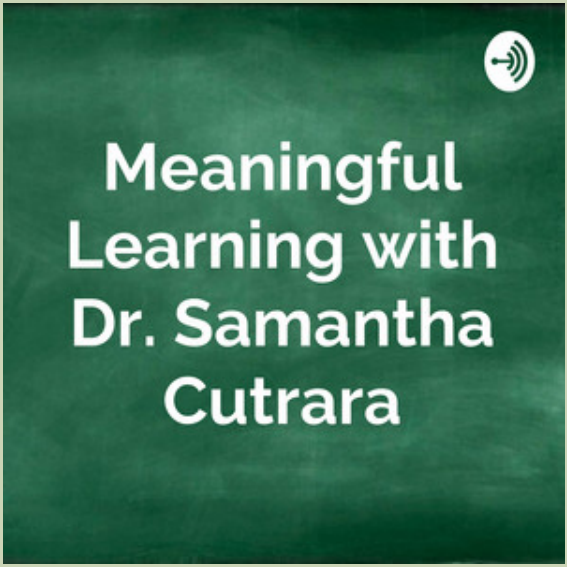

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TRANSCRIPT

All the Pandemic Pedagogy conversations revolved around three questions:

- Question 1: Have you thought of history any different *because* of this moment?
- Question 2: Do you think we would teach history *after* this moment?
- Question 3: Do you think we can "imagine a new 'we'" during/after this moment?

Dr. Samantha Cutrara: All right, let's get started. Leanne, thank you so much for agreeing to speak with me today. I know how busy you are, and I just really appreciate you making the time. Thank you so much.

Leanne Young: Thanks, Samantha, for having me here.

SC: Do you want to introduce yourself? I gave a little bit of an introduction before we came on the call, but do you want to introduce yourself a little bit more?

LY: For sure. My name is Leanne Young. I am a teacher in Simcoe County District School Board. I am the chair of the Canada World Studies Department at Orillia Secondary School. And I've been teaching for 21 years mainly teaching history, drama, dance, English, and some social sciences throughout my career. So I love being in the classroom and have really sort of taken this time to sort of re-evaluate my own teaching practices.

SC: One of the things that I loved about like the information that you sent me, because I knew a little bit about your work, but not a lot

apparently, once you sent me your biography is your connection with drama and English and I think those are such powerful subjects to like learn with history. And so, well hopefully, that will come up in this conversation, but no pressure if it doesn't.

LY: No problem. That's —

SC: So the first question — sorry. Please.

LY: Yup. No, go ahead.

SC: So the first question that I'd like to start with is about whether or not your thoughts of **history have changed during this period?** Because I certainly felt like it was this — we heard these — I certainly felt that it was like this weird reconsideration of so many different things when the pandemic started and history was one of them. Has history, the idea of history changed for you at all during this period?

LY: From more so for the point of teaching history. I have been teaching a number of years, have changed sort of my pedagogy on how I introduce concepts to our students in the classroom by definitely taking it from a storytelling point of view, and that's where the drama and English come in.

LY: We look at history from people's perspective and playing upon those for historical thinking concepts that are underwritten within the curriculums at the high school level. I really pay close attention to historical perspective. So when this pandemic began, we really started to explore the idea of a living history. That we are in a moment in time that is constantly evolving, our reactions are constantly evolving, and what is our role that we play in that living history.

And so students in my class is primarily the grade 10 history class. I have three sections of that this semester. We have been documenting week-to-week what our living history is like and connecting it with things that we were studying. So we had just finished our World War I unit, so it was almost perfect timing especially with the comparison to the Spanish flu in 1918.

SC: It's like you planned it.

LY: It was like I planned it.

SC: You didn't though. Let's just be clear.

LY: No, no. So it was really interesting the kids were, "Hey, I found this document from 1918. Look at it from what was in our newspaper, The OrilliaMatters online, it's almost the same." And so really looking about change in continuity concept. Really started to enrich some of the conversations that were happening. And so students are — as they're documenting their experiences, we have been using those experiences to mirror the events in history. So we've looked at the Great Depression, we've looked at some of the economic challenges of the Great Depression. Well, what are some economic challenges that are going to come out of this experience? What are some that are affecting individual families, communities, businesses, corporations as a whole, countries as a whole?

We're just finishing up World War II so the conversation has led to, well, what sacrifices had to be made within the home front? Can you find similarities and differences between your own experiences? So it brings the conversation instead of looking how I think I have taught history the last let's say five years or so with that emphasis of historical perspective, its bringing it back to the student's experience. And we haven't had, for our generation of students, haven't had that.

I know for me, as a teacher, that moment was 9/11. It was my third year teaching when 9/11 hit and that changed everything for me in terms of how I wanted the classroom to run, in terms of how I delivered historical content, how I looked at historical significance of every event and the stories that came out of that. And so that's where I changed my pedagogy from teaching a regurgitation of information from a textbook to the personal stories are the best lens for teaching history.

SC: Yeah, I love that. Because when I was hearing from what you're saying is how you're using this moment to say, all right, we'll continue to teach history, but really we're just going to help you make sense of your experiences at this moment through history. And I think that is so powerful at this moment, but also just as practice separate

from this moment. And it's interesting that you link it with 9/11 because that has come up in the series before as a key thing that we are — that we kind of link this to.

I was in university at the time and I don't remember things changing too much in our classrooms other than perhaps more critical awareness, but I knew as a student, I wanted it to come up in the classroom more. And so it's interesting, that link.

LY: Yup, yup. And I think 9/11 definitely created sort of more of an ideological change —

LY: — to where I think this experience is going to affect — the community of a school is going to affect a classroom layout. So just see the logistics of how to teach in a classroom, what is going to be allowed. I worry for things like extracurricular sports, drama performances. Are our schools going to revert back to sort of the industrial age where you have to do A, B, and C and there's no movement for creativity or inquiry. And get up in the classroom and talk with your peers and create in the classroom. Like that is my biggest worry coming out of this that we will be limited due to health concerns, due to fear of how interactive our classrooms can be.

SC: Well, that was part of my fear too. And the questions that I had that kind of spark to this series, but it wasn't around the physicality part of. It was more like, is history just going to be understood as this leisure activity? Because now people have these health concerns, these economic concerns that history might just seem like this bonus, fun navel gazing thing when like you're saying and everyone in the series has said, it was such a foundational element for understanding ourselves and the world at this moment.

LY: I think it gives us the tools to break down what is happening. And for an adolescent, they're struggling to make sense of it all. What is their role? Sometimes they're watching their parents trying to make ends meet. They can't see their friends. And they look around and we're seeing this in the south of the border, this protest to open the economy

and open everything and everything go back to normal, well, it can't go back to normal.

And so if we can sort of give students a tool of how to break it down and unpack it through sort of comparative elements through our own curriculum, they've got at least a tool to start. It's almost like that life preserver that they can grab on to a little bit and then start to formulate and ask those questions. How can we move forward into our next journey in the next five, 10 years or so?

SC: It's interesting that you said life preserver because right as you said that, I'm imagining a student like reaching out and being like, let me just feel like I'm not alone. And so I think that's a really great metaphor. Thank you for bringing it to the conversation. Although people have talked about boats and ships, I think you're the first to have said life preserver.

LY: Well, and I think what I'm hoping that I will get across to my students too is that element of hope that we looked at the Great Depression. Canada came out of the Great Depression. We got through two world wars. We got out of those two world wars, and we learnt something.

And so history to me is we are always learning from our mistakes. Nothing is perfect, but how can we make the world a better place from an event that has happened? And I think that will be the next generation's job is to, do we become a more compassionate society? Do we take care of our elderly population? Do we support our governments even though we might not agree with every one of their policies to work collectively for the greater good? These are all questions that our student's generation will need to tackle.

SC: And I think of Ian Duncan's video when he said, "I don't know who the students are going to be when we get back to the classrooms." And I think that's such a powerful statement. Like what the students want and need from their schools. And that's an element of what I'm hearing from you as well, that element of hope. Do they want to go out and make change or are they going to feel just kind of so traumatized

by this moment they're like, let's just do the status quo? Do you think that these conversations will be part of teaching when we go back in whenever the way that looks like? **Do you think teaching history will change, the underlying elements of teaching will change after this moment?**

LY: I think definitely they will. And I think it's pulling upon that personal experience. They have something now to relate to what we're talking about. So personal experiences in growth and resiliency, these are all themes in history even dating back to the early Romans and Greeks that look for stories that we can tell about successes, about conquering for good, about societies that have been sort of on the brink of disaster and have made it out the other side. And I think we can control the narrative a little bit into looking at history not just from such a sort of negative perspective or such a hardship perspective, but to really pull out the good of the stories. And I think this leads really nicely into a celebration of more equity and diversity within our teaching of history. The celebration of community, the celebration of supporting one another, we can bring that into the classroom. And not only just work on that curriculum content, but definitely those 21st century skills as well.

SC: And to recognize the variety of different experiences from the same moment, right? I that is coming out really clearly — as a really clear theme in a lot of the things that we've been talking about both in this series, but also just kind of in society in general the inequities of how the pandemic is impacting people. And I think that it's something that young people are going to be thinking about when they get back into the classrooms. Do you have any thoughts on that?

LY: Well, just even within my own classes, we were having a discussion and some feedback from students where the fact that it's not fair how this has been handled in terms of kids not all having access to the same amount of internet, different quality of devices. We have

some kids that are sharing one device between six family members. So just that logistical piece again of distance learning activity, it doesn't work within our society. There is — we have even among staff that staff have gone through all of their bandwidth and Internet access for a month and are paying hundreds and hundreds of dollars out of pocket to provide services for students. So there is that logistical equity thing.

In teaching history, I think definitely, it will change in terms of the stories that we tell, as I said before, looking at sort of different socioeconomic perspectives of events, looking at different racial and diverse and cultural perspectives really will enhance the story of what our own experiences were and to be consciously aware in the classroom that these voices need to be adhered to.

SC: So this seems like a really great segue to my final question about imagining a new 'we', which is the idea of the video series generally separate from "Pandemic Pedagogy" and a lot of my work about how do we provide more space for experiences both in the past and in the present in our classrooms in a way that challenges who and what we imagine to be part of a 'we'. And this imagination can be from a creative perspective. It can also just be from the philosophical perspective. **Do you think that we are going to have more opportunities to imagine a new 'we' in our classrooms, but also in our practices after this moment or even during this moment?**

LY: I think we definitely will have to imagine a new 'we' in the classroom. I think that's given. I think the way we have been presenting material, running a classroom is going to change just from logistical point of views. But from a philosophical point of view, students have a new experience. They need to be able to feel that that experience is validated. They need to be able to come and find a safe space. They need to be able to be listened to.

So I'm predicting that once we get back into the classroom, I'm not worrying about hitting every timeline. I'm worrying about the mental health of my students. I'm worrying about them finding a voice that might have not been honored within their home as much. And finding those connections again. A lot of students might have been alone. Only children, you know, and very isolated. And so we have to almost recondition students in how to interact face-to-face, and I think that's going to be a learning process within itself.

In terms of looking at it from a school community, I think it is very, very important that we do have those caring adults in the buildings for the students, that we do provide opportunities for student voice and student-led recovery whether that'd be assemblies, whether that'd be small groups that feel like they need to meet. New extracurricular clubs can come out of this.

I hope our school community becomes a more inclusive community in which the students direct how they want their community to be. I also feel that I think we might have that community bubble out into our greater community through helping things like food banks, veteran's associations and legions. Just being aware of our seniors in our community. I think that's kind of a message home for a lot of our young people is what can we do to help? And I hope that carries through in years to come within our schools.

SC: That's so powerful. One of the things that for me, history is about activating change, right? Using that to make a change. And what I'm hearing from you is how important those changes will be for the world and how not only our history classes, but our whole communities in our schools, in our classrooms can be a part of that.

One of the things I talk about a lot both in my book, but also the series is that students need connection, but they also need complexity

and they need care. And another thing I'm hearing from you is all three of those things rolled into one. That those connections are complex, and therefore, the care also needs to be complex. So thank you so much for bringing that dimension to this conversation. It's so powerful. Thank you.

LY: One thing that I've been sort of unpacking a little bit too is the idea of we've gone from this society of 'me'. Everything has been so almost self-absorbed, and how does this affect me? And what can I do? It's my cellphone, it's my right. It's this, that and the other thing. I think we're going to go away from that and move towards what you were saying is the new 'we'. And I hope we can move from this sort of internal feeling of obligation to widening that to a little bit more of open arms for others and the empathy for the people around us.

SC: And also, for me, part of that too is to be aware of how you can change in positive ways by being open to the needs of 'other'. So it's not just that you're now saying, "Okay, others, you can come into my space." But like that 'others' can broaden who you understand yourself to be, and therefore, your own understanding of your cellphone or your learning or that kind of individuality, that to me is such a potential for this moment.

LY: Well, yeah. We tend to be reflective of how others see us. And I think that's an important thing that we're losing right now is being so isolated and not having that constant contact with other people, and so we do have to get that back I think at some point.

SC: Yeah, it will be really interesting. Thank you so much for this talk. It was so amazing. You've provided so much food for thought, but it's kind of the perfect thing, a perfect video to come out in June because we're not in our classrooms in the same way. I mean, like our virtual classrooms in the same way, but we're also decompressing a lit-

tle for the summer and knowing that we are going to need to prepare for something. We have no idea what it's like in the fall. And I think this is such a great thoughtful way to help people think about their own pedagogy and practices for whatever September will bring. So thank you so much, Leanne.

LY: Thank you very much, Samantha.

SC: This was great. We'll talk later. Bye.

LY: Bye.

In conversation with Dr. Tim Stanley

Pandemic Pedagogy Conversation #35

Dr. Tim Stanley

Dr. Tim Stanley is a professor emeritus at the University of Ottawa and he is a noted historian and anti-racist education specialist focusing mainly on Chinese Canadians and the Chinese people in Canada.

We spoke June 16, 2020.

Video posted June 30, 2020.

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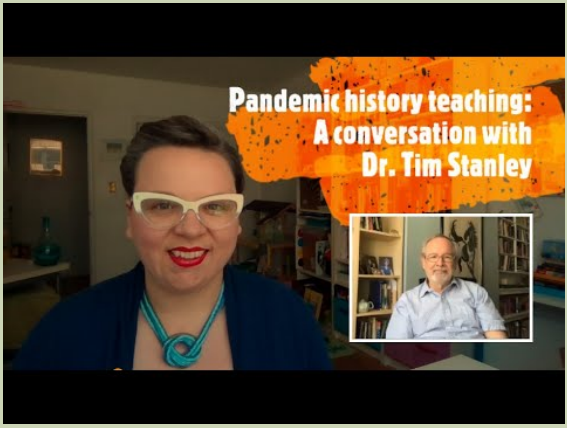

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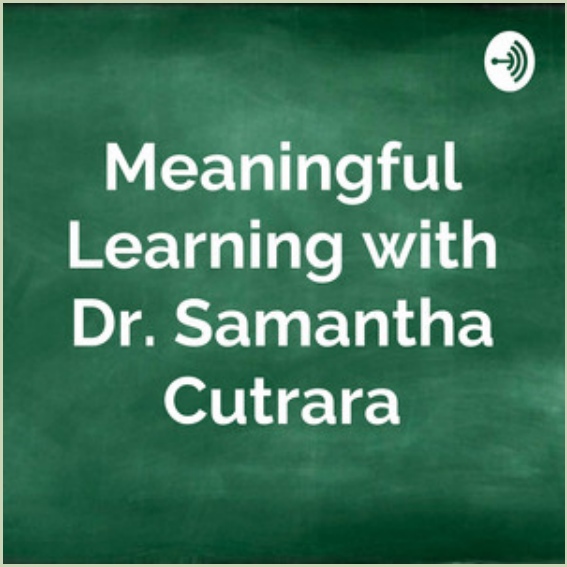

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TRANSCRIPT

All the Pandemic Pedagogy conversations revolved around three questions:

- Question 1: Have you thought of history any different *because* of this moment?
- Question 2: Do you think we would teach history *after* this moment?
- Question 3: Do you think we can "imagine a new 'we'" during/after this moment?

Dr. Samantha Cutrara: Tim, thank you so much for carving some time out of your retirement to talk with me for the "Pandemic Pedagogy" series. It is so wonderful to end this series by talking to you about ideas about anti-racist history and anti-racist history education. Before we begin, do you want to introduce yourself?

Dr. Tim Stanley: Well, my name is Tim Stanley. I am professor emeritus in the Faculty of Education and at the Institute of Indigenous Research and Studies at the University of Ottawa. And my main work has been on the histories of racisms in Canada, particularly [inaudible 0:00:48*the effect of] Chinese-Canadians, but also imagining different approaches to teaching anti-racism. And we see that's about the most important stuff. I spent too much of my life in university governance and administration, but that's a whole other story.

SC: That can be a story for a totally different series.

TS: Indeed.

SC: There is — I talked to Sean Kheraj, and he was like, "Yeah, I'm

a professor, a history professor." And then as he's answering, he's like, "I'm also right now an associate dean." So that brings all these new stories. So a different series.

TS: Yes, indeed.

SC: Yeah. So I ask everyone the same three questions for the "Pandemic Pedagogy" series, and the context has changed so much in the three months since we've started. So the first question is **have your ideas about history changed at all during COVID?** And especially now that COVID has — the ways that we're talking about COVID has morphed into so much around a social revolution related to anti-racism. Have your ideas about history changed at all because of that?

TS: Not really, because my ideas around history for a while have been questioning the received processes and forms of historical knowledge that are [inaudible 0:02:16.9]. So like, just the arrival of COVID sort of nothing else, it proves the way that come hell or high water, we are actually part of a globally connected world. And that what happens on the far side of the world can have very quickly an effect on what happens here. And people often see this as a product of recent forms of globalization, but in fact, this has always been the case. And if we look at the history of previous pandemics, you know, we hear about the Black Death in Europe during the medieval period, people knew it was coming. They knew it was coming. They had news from distant places and traveled around the world. So that sort of, to me, confirms an important point that, in fact, we are connected in very material ways to people about whom we know nothing. And here, the problem is the ways in which we talk and teach about history tends to be histories of nation-states in which it's pretended that somehow the history of people when they immigrate to Canada, for example, suddenly they no longer have ties to the people back home and in the old country. It's as if the history of one nation is just magically distinct from another. And in fact, there's an awful lot of going back and forth and a lot of other things going on in this sort of fetishization of national history.

So, to me, this in a way confirms my point. And it also confirms

another issue that I've been thinking about because one of the things I think that's happened in a massive ways that anti-racism education has failed insofar as we see a resurgence of forms of racism that we thought had been long gone, and suddenly what's euphemistically called White nationalists, but it's really organized white supremacist and often violent organized [inaudible 0:04:37.4*ashes] white supremacy thought is becoming respectable in mainstream in a way that it was not in — not only in Canada and the United States, but generally in the western world even 20, 30 years ago.

And it's come back to be in full force and was full of that. And so, to me, one of the solutions to this is that we need to actually teach people in a very radical way to understand the complex connections they have across difference to other people in the world, and it starts I think with material understandings of our material linkages and relationships, but also then how in particular spaces, they get marked by particularly dominant forms of cultural expression that tend to exclude other people. Classic example is the fact that we're giving this interview in English, even though we are both on territories where indigenous languages were spoken for millennia longer than this one.

I know for myself, I know about three words of Algonquin, and that's about it. And all the signs, all the books in my bookshelf at the back are in English or French or in Chinese, which [inaudible 0:06:07.1] which I look at, but not in the indigenous languages which are excluded. So how we mark our territories tends to eliminate the ways in which we're actually material connected. And then this becomes embodied in the ways in which certain kinds of bodies feel just naturally they belong because they can see themselves being reflected back through these markings, and other people are excluded and seem to be interlopers.

I think this is the kind of thing that underlies a lot of police violence against the Black people both in Canada and in the United States, and also against indigenous people in both countries as well. The assumption that somehow these are people who don't belong in the spaces, that somehow they're newcomers or outsiders or not legitimately pre-

sent is in part a product of this sort of material construction of knowledge that surrounds us.

And so then finally to me, part of the solution here is to really teach people to think historically in the sense of understanding how the world they live in is a historical product, but it's the product of all human beings who have come before and not just the ones that we put up statues to. So that's my short answer.

SC: That was a great short answer. I mean, I'm thinking of a couple things, and one is another piece of evidence to support that point, which is like how quickly certain discourses can manifest again during moments like this. Like the anti-Asian sentiment related to the virus, right? Like there are so many parallels to past historical moments that it does, like you're saying, indicate a failure for us to really tease through that, or indicates a failure of having not been able to teach through that in previous generations or like incarnations of teaching history in classrooms.

TS: Yeah, very much so. So like in part, behind all this is also I guess what could be thought of as a massive failure of teaching history despite the valiant efforts that many teachers and other scholars are making because people don't actually know the pitfalls, don't know some of the things that they're playing with and what it can lead to, which we as historians generally have a much better sense. But if you look at the history of anti-Asian racism in Canada, for example, or any of the other racisms, but when I can talk about most of the early of the anti-Asian one, there's a long history of assuming that Chinese or Japanese or people from Asias are diseased and somehow threatening to those of us here.

And sort of what's interesting is we can also see in that how it actually disarms people from the actual things they need to do to protect themselves. So if you think the solution is to keep people who you see as Chinese out, you're going to die of COVID because it's not that they are the ones who are carrying it more or less than anyone else. And it's not actually stuff that's based on race, it's based on being human.

In the 19th century, it was noticed that Chinese often had a lower incidence of cholera than other people, so was assumed that they were somehow immune to and carriers of cholera. Well, in fact, what most Chinese people did in the world is they only drank boiled water and it's a Chinese cultural — this is what they call [inaudible 0:10:08.4]. It's a cultural practice that is widespread in China still. But if you drink boiled water, it's less likely to be carrying the stuff that causes cholera. So there's very much that's going on today that is disturbingly familiar.

SC: It's interesting that you're saying like the failure of history education. There's a few things I want to say to that because on one hand, I think it shows the success of history education to keep dominant narratives eurocentric white colonialist, right? Like as much as there are valiant efforts of individual teachers, the structure of history education is such that it could perpetrate and replicate these inaccuracies and these racists, and sexists, and classes inaccuracies on purpose.

And I was doing a curriculum review not too long ago and it's amazing how many curricula in Canada are very passive. Like talk about confederation without bringing people into it. And as soon as you start doing that, then you can't talk about challenges now. It's just about this event or this piece of legislation. Do you have any comments on that? Like it's not the failure of history education, it is the success of history education which is why we need to deconstruct it more.

TS: Well, there is a failure of history education in the sense that — and maybe also, I hate to say it, but we saw failed historians too to some extent because we end up talking about informal forces as the actors rather than people as the actors. So I know exactly what you're talking about. This is the idea the railroad was built across Canada and finished in 1885. It's just like, okay, who did it? How? Why?

SC: [inaudible 0:12:12.0*It was good, yeah]

TS: Were the people whose land were literally paid over by the railroad thinking about it? You know, there's all sorts of stuff that you can get there, but as long as it's passive, there is no actor. It's some-

thing that just happened. Canada was founded in 1867. Well, except unless you're in New Finland, but that's a whole other story.

TS: So there's ways of talking and habits of thinking associated with them that are very common in history education in public schools. I think they are less common, but also present in like scholarly historical research, and there often are sort of lazy ways of ignoring actually who's doing what to who and what are the longer-term consequences of that.

There is a marvelous book that came out recently called The Death of Democracy, which is on the rise of the Nazis in Germany. And what it shows is basically how [inaudible 0:13:24.7*the NotANazis] just magically came to power. It was the right-wing parties that actually allowed them to come to power thinking that they could control them. And, of course, the leaders of all those parties, [inaudible 0:13:37.1*and as soon as two, three years,] the Nazi is coming to power or all dead as were many other people.

But it's something that really focuses on the idea that actually work. In any given moment, what individuals are doing actually has effects. It's something that we don't often see, but it has effects. And those effects can be good or ill, and part of the thing is that we never know what the outcome is going to be when we make our choices. But I think the more that we can understand the complexities of human action and understanding that those human actions are not just individual things, but they're parts of sort of webs of association, and relationships, and effects, the better our understanding will be of the complexities of things like our current moment. And the better we'll be able to react to.

SC: Yeah. Because one of the reasons why I like to really advocate for thinking about humans and people is to be able to keep — in our history teaching is to keep demonstrate to students resistance and resilience, right?

TS: Yup.

SC: That we aren't just thinking about these forces that nobody had a control over, but that there were always pushes against these

things. And sometimes they were allowed, sometimes they were quiet, sometimes they didn't have the agency to make a big splash, but that we have to ensure that we know that people can make change so that we too can make change.

TS: Yes. Absolutely.

SC: Yeah. And when you're talking about the webs, like one of the themes that came up a lot, especially in the early conversations I had when we were all trying to sort this out because this series started at the end of March was how we are really witnessing — well, I'm bringing these words into it, but I found this as a theme. We're really witnessing the deconstruction of a system that was never meant for everyone, and so we can see the inequities of COVID response, COVID treatment. And we talked in this series about whether or not we can bring that into our history classes in a more explicit way because we have this example.

So perhaps this is a good way to segue to the second question, which is do you think that witnessing what is happening right now with COVID, with the social revolutions, with a lot of people recognizing anti-Asian racism related to disease transmission? **Do you think that's going to change the way people teach history after this moment? Do you think it will lead to changes?**

TS: I'm always leery as a historian about predicting the future, because when historians start talking about the future, [inaudible 0:16:41.3] are wrong.

SC: I won't tell. I won't tell.

TS: That's been 20 years, so I'll give you an answer.

SC: Okay.

TS: I hope so, but I'm actually not optimistic. I think the real challenge is to improving the quality of history education and the main challenge is improving what's available to the people who teach history. So in Canada, most people who teach history have no training in history. It's only usually the specialists and steer in senior secondary school who teach history that have any history background. Most his-

tory teaching is done by people in primary and junior high schools and so forth who may not be able to sort of articulate some of those sophisticated things.

The other problem is you have a continual challenge with young people, and we've seen this in places around the world that have tried to sort of reinvent historical knowledge and understanding. So I'm thinking of in South Africa, for example. So at the end of the apartheid regime in South Africa, for the first few years, the curriculum, they just added in sort of few great Black men to the great White men who had founded the nation. So they talk about Nelson Mandela and stuff.

And it's in part because both White and Black teachers, that's what they knew how to do, right? So when they started looking around 20 years later looking on redoing their curriculum, one of the problems is that young people were not interested in the struggle against apartheid because that was their parents' and grandparents' world, right? So something we often forget, we sort of think, okay, well this is a moment that's going to last forever and we can draw on it to sort of illustrate all these things that are injustices. So as the Great Depression was like that. So there were previous movements in the past. A whole sort of 20th-century socialist in its very different varieties of movements were based on very highly developed concrete critiques of inequality.

So I'm less certain that it's actually just using this moment to sort of illustrate how inequality is real, which is I think a very teachable moment in this case at this point. I'm not sure that that long-term is going to enable a real remaking of things because the things I was talking about at first, that sort of mass of sort of representation that surrounds us against which these histories are being read works to actually efface that and to actually make it less visible. So it becomes a continual teaching against the grain, and that's always hard and it's always difficult to continue and to sustain.

I think instead, if we can actually use this to not sort of simply teach that there is this inequality, but to actually use the technologies that we have to, for example, to reach out to communities where they are suf-

fering from the virus more directly to find out what their stories are to actually bring alive the human consequences of these inequalities, that that is the stuff that begins to have transformative potential. When we get people to engage with people who are in vastly different circumstances and they realize that, you know, there, but for the grace of whatever you prefer, go [inaudible 0:20:35.5] and you create this notion of solidarity with other human beings across all those differences and you actually begin to see that many of those differences become things that actually make those other people more interesting in yourself, that that is the thing that has transform potential.

And the reason is is because when people have that sense of connection to others, why do Donald Trumps of the world come along and say we're going to build a wall to keep them out? Our reaction will be probably just to laugh them out of the room because it's like this is such a stupid idea, right? And it would have the potential to really remake things. And this includes, if we take a more indigenous perspective as many indigenous people, we're not just talking about the human world here. We're talking about the whole material world. The animal world and the entire environment that sustains us all needs to be also part of that sense of connection.

So I don't know, that's my answer. I haven't figured out how you teach people to do this yet, but working on it.

SC: Well, I mean, for me, one of the things I like to advocate related to history education is to like lessen control. For teachers to think that they can lessen control in the classroom because when they open up more space, like I have found students are dying to learn history. We're just not teaching the histories they want to learn because they don't connect with it. They're like, this is not the world I live in, right? And so I think that lessening control and thinking about the classroom as a community exploring and developing solidarities like you're saying can provide a lot of that. Which is why like in my book, I talk about imagining a new we because I think that the more teachers are thinking of history education as just telling a story to young people,

which I know that the structure of history education right now doesn't lend itself to that. But I think a lot of practices still kind of do.

There can be increasing circles of inclusion. And to be able to include more about the land, more about the water, and more about a greater kind of spiritual connection amongst people rather than separating people.

So I guess it's a good segue to my last question, which is based on this notion of imagining a new we. Do you think that we are going to have — use this moment of social unrest and COVID and things being turned upside down in ways that we hadn't expected, **do you think this will allow us to imagine a new we differently or in stronger more active ways than perhaps we could have before?**

TS: Of course. The danger in the current context is that other forces are going to also reimagine that we in much more limited and narrow terms.

TS: And I think those movements and ideas and individuals are actually the greatest threat to the continued existence of our species that we have ever faced. But I think on —

SC: [crosstalk 0:24:15.9] hyperbole.

TS: Well, if you look at the Bulletin of Atomic Scientists that has the Doomsday Clock, the Doomsday Clock is closer to midnight at any point in history.

SC: Yeah.

TS: And they talk about the ending of all those arms limitation treaties, but also the rise of global warming, you know. And it's going to take existing tensions and make them worse as you get a mass migrations of hundreds of millions of people dealing with global warming. And then also what they call disruptive technologies and their effects. But —

SC: Sorry to interrupt, but like things like that sounded really outlandish, even like two years ago, but now I think we're feeling it more. Like a friend of mine had said, just when I feel like I'm able to handle what is happening right now, then I'm like, climate change hasn't

stopped, right? Like I think that this increased anxiety and the increased fear that the world is coming to an end will increase as we move further into the 21st century if we can at all. Oh, this is going to end really negative.

TS: Well, one of the disturbing gallows humor jokes, right, is I always thought the end of the world would be a little bit quicker and more interesting. But —

SC: Nope.

TS: But I think there's a sign for hope here. And believe it or not, it's the same technologies that are be used to divide us. And I'm thinking here particularly of social media. So as this social media algorithms feedback on us a reflection of ourselves, and so we never —

SC: Sorry. Can you hold on one second?

TS: Yeah.

TS: Sorry, that was a very aggressive knock on my door, but it was just to say I'm leaving you something. Not that there's a fire, which is what it sounded like. So you were saying social medias that can divide us can also bring us together?

TS: Yeah. So the problem in social media is that the [inaudible 0:26:47.3*algorithms feed us back on ourselves] and you get closed in more and more in a kind of close circle of people who reflect back on you, which you already believe in is not challenged. But the same technology, if you think about it, a cell phone can directly connect you to something like 4.5 billion people in the world, which has never ever before happened. Now, it's only half the people in the world, but still — so this is I'm going to go, but this is a huge number of people across all sorts of difference.

And through things like Google Translate, you can actually talk to them, believe it or not. And suddenly it's possible to actually not just discover the teacher stories or the stories that's in the curriculum or the ones that the governments through their official curricula want you to teach, or they get reproduced in the popular cultures and mass cultures that surround us. It's possible to actually listen to discover other sto-

ries. Other stories about other people across those differences in ways that are direct, immediate, and engaged and build connection with people.

So this can range from all sorts of things. Many of which things are kind of things that teachers do already. Like if you're a grade four teacher in Canada, get in contact with a grade four teacher in China and set up a virtual get-togethers with your students and they become pen-pals, or with an indigenous community in Canada. Or even, heaven forbid, the school that's on the other side of town in your own place, and start talking about things that actually affect all of your lives and differences.

So this is about inventing or reinventing a different we. And it is about moving beyond the taken for granted we that is that of the nation and the nation-state. And to part, ask ourselves when we say we, who do we mean? Do we mean you and I? Do we mean the people like me? Do we mean those of us over here on this side of the room? Do we mean the we of the nation-state? Often in history curricula, the we that's encountered is that we they imagine community of the nation-state, and it's an exclusive we that doesn't include the we that is actually the whole species.

So this process of building this larger we, building an ongoing connections across difference and of time as well, because as historians, we can also go — we historians can also build connections to people who were, in radical ways, like us, but who lived in very distant passes and in different contexts. So there's this recognition of a shared humanity of a shared humanness in the best historical research, in the best history education even across difference of time and place.

So actually, this becomes like an ongoing curriculum. Becomes a curriculum for life. And actually, becomes a process of education in [inaudible *Medulin] sense. It's education that opens people up to further experience. And the way you do that is by entering into association with people who are different from you, and this have to be mutually agreed on processes of association. But it's this continual process of

entering into association with others that produces growth. That produces growth in sort of intellectual, moral, and every other term, which is the essence of the educational engagement.

SC: And it's like an element of that of getting to know people that are unlike you is to not bring them into your we to be like, these are the things we have in common, and so these are the things we're going to highlight together, but rather reimagining spaces where our uniqueness and our differences can challenge who we can become. And like you said, like grow.

TS: Yeah.

SC: Yeah. You know, one of the —

TS: If we're all completely alike, the world would be pretty boring, you know?

TS: And it's to recognize community, right? And we talk about communities often this sort of idea of this natural place that has no conflict. Well, communities are also structured by contest, right? But it is about creating communities across differences that don't actually alight those differences, but recognize, accept them, and at times, engage with them. At the same time, we sort of — we also have to have kind of build a radical recognition that this is a human being like me, even though they speak another language and have different worldviews and vote for Donald Trump.

SC: Okay. Well, thanks for bringing that in as that last example.

TS: [inaudible 0:32:36.1]

SC: One of the things that — you know, like the pandemic is horrible, but it has been really interesting to be able to broaden a conversation about history education because — and through these technologies. And like the people that I've spoken to for this series, like they're from England, and from the United States, and from Australia, from different parts of Canada, and it's been really wonderful to be able to bring those conversations together. And to me, it does highlight like what you're saying, that we can all develop and challenge these ideas together even though we're coming from different places, and

the different places can help support that type of imagining that we would like to do because everyone I spoke to recognizes that the world needs to shift and change after this. I mean, it was before this too, but — so thank you so much for ending on that. I think it's a really powerful way to end. So thank you.

TS: My pleasure.

SC: This has been great. I made you follow up because I like to do that. It will be interesting like in the fall or even six months, like you said, or 20 years. Maybe we can do this again in 20 years if we're still around, the world hasn't blown up by then, to be able to see if and in what ways it has changed. So thank you again, Tim.

TS: My pleasure. And I wish everybody well in reimagining new ways of doing history and rebuilding — [inaudible 0:34:12.8*broaden] understandings of who we are.

SC: I second that well wishes. So we'll see. We'll talk soon, bye.

TS: Take care.

SC: Thank you.

This is where you can add appendices or other back matter.