National Educators Consultation
April 4-5, 2003
Gatineau Preservation Centre

REPORT

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INTRODUCTION

On April 4 and 5, 2003, Library and Archives Canada (LAC) invited a large group of educators to a national consultation on the use of primary resources in the teaching of history and in their proposed educational program. The consultation took place at the Gatineau Preservation Centre.

The mandate of Library and Archives Canada is to build "a unique, dynamic culture and knowledge institution which will have as its goal to make knowledge about Canada, the experience of Canadian people, and diverse Canadian stories available to all." Students are a key audience for the new institution, and teachers are the best way to reach them. The main issue enunciated by Marianne McLean was "How to enable students across Canada, regardless of where they are located geographically, to have access to the documentary heritage of Canada for the purposes of learning, reflection and growing in understanding about what Canada has been, is and what Canada can be."

The Internet is the best, possibly the only, tool which LAC could use to make its resources available across Canada. The key project for LAC will be the building of a virtual learning Centre, developed along two axis: first, a virtual repository that will hold digitized copies of selected primary sources for the education world and, second, a database of educational resources that might include thematic sites written for student audiences, lesson and unit plans, comprehensive teaching strategies, assessment tools, classroom ideas and student handouts. Because not everyone has access to the Internet, LAC has identified three ways to supplement its virtual resources: a marketing and promotional campaign, an expansion of its traditional program for schools outside Ottawa and collaboration with libraries and archives across Canada.

During the afternoon of April 4, the participants took a guided tour of the LAC building in Ottawa and of the Preservation Centre in Gatineau. They saw first hand how archivists, librarians and conservators collect and preserve documents, photos, books, maps and audio and visual recordings, and were able to see, touch and manipulate some primary sources. On Saturday, April 5, the participants held open-ended discussions on three themes: the use of primary sources in teaching, the development of teaching resources around primary sources, and the characteristics of the proposed Virtual Learning website. The following pages present the questions the participants were asked and a summary of the answers of the four discussion groups. The most important issues of the consultation are summarized in the conclusion.

FIRST SESSION
DISCUSSION SUMMARY

Discussion of primary sources

- *What interested or surprised you about the primary sources you saw?*

    - Participants were very impressed with the variety, interest and condition of primary-source materials. They were also impressed with the role of technology in giving access to primary sources and its capacity to restore and preserve archival material.

    - They were amazed at being able to handle real objects of the past -- to "touch history" -- and they wished all of their students could have the same opportunity.

    - Participants reported that, thanks to this experience, they could no longer consider archives as old, boring or stuffy things. It was clear to them that people needed to understand that primary sources include not just textual or visual documents but also videos, music and other recording media.

    - The participants supported the proposal to integrate the resources of the National Library and the National Archives and to serve as a single point of access to other sources across Canada. They agreed that all educators should be made aware of these resources.

- *Could these primary sources be used in a classroom setting?*

    - Participants agreed that primary sources would be very useful in a classroom setting. Some felt that many of these sources are ready to be used as they are without any other manipulation. Most participants believe that the sources should be selected according to the target audience -- that is, to the age of the students.

    - Although it is not always necessary to have the original objects (sometimes a copy is enough), students should have the opportunity to feel, touch and look at primary sources in person -- "to feel history". Participants were aware, however, that manageability put constraints on such activities.

    - The documents could be used as triggers or starting points for discussion and enquiry. They also offer a potential for inquiry learning and critical thinking that could -- and should -- be exploited. For students, primary sources are most interesting for the stories they tell.

    - Finally, the use of primary sources should not be limited to the teaching of history. They could also be used in teaching art, math, language arts, sciences, etc.

    Which types of primary sources would be useful in your current curriculum? At what level(s)?

    - Teachers need a wide variety of primary sources, including letters, videos, images and maps.

    - Some primary sources would need little or no context, while others would require a lot.

    - The most important role of documents would be to support teachers in bringing students to apply the historical method: problem, research, interpreting, etc.

- *What other kinds of primary sources could you use in a classroom setting?*

- LAC primary sources should supplement material found in current history textbooks. There should be a bank of primary sources from which one could choose items appropriate to a region, time period etc..

- Documents that could help students to establish comparisons on the same subject or topic: rural versus urban, Western Canada versus Eastern Canada, women versus men, etc.

- Local and provincial archives could certainly be used. Students could also use the archives of their families.

- One difficulty emerged: the language of the original documents could prevent some teachers and students from using many of the primary sources. This is particularly true for those who teach or study in French while the majority of the documents are written in English, though the opposite situation could also occur. The solution could be to provide a translation and put it beside the original document in order to permit teachers and students to compare both versions. This in turn causes a dilemma because the authenticity of the original would be lost with any translation. The problem would be of lesser importance for bilingual students, yet few teachers and students are bilingual enough to deal with original primary sources. No answer emerged to this issue.

- *For which curriculum topics is there a greater need for primary sources?*

  - Participants proposed a cross-curriculum approach; this approach could also be interdisciplinary (e.g.: history-language, history-arts, etc.).

  - Primary sources are needed that present various perspectives on and interpretations of key events such as the Winnipeg general strike, Canadian duality, Canadian symbols and the role of the family/women.

  - It would be important to be able to make comparisons: region by region, of works, events, individuals, etc. (see paragraph on the types of documents)

  - To the question: "How should we approach debatable subjects like Riel, conscription or the October crisis of 1970?", the answer would be to give access to the primary sources, refrain from proposing a personal opinion and give students the opportunity to use critical thinking.

- *How do you want to search for primary sources: by subject, chronology, geography, type of content or other? Is there a priority?*

  - All possible ways, answered the participants: by date (events), subjects, geography, etc. There could be 4 ways: categories (levels), broad types, types of material (diaries, photos, etc.), medium (audio, visual, etc.). One group proposed that if a hierarchy was needed, it could be: subjects, types (written visual, etc.), individuals, events.

  - One group of participants argued against a chronological approach, since the ability to locate events in time is a skill that is developed through the learning of history.

- Participants argued against over-packaging and promoted flexibility, adaptability and cross referencing. Access should avoid subject labels and subject boxes.

- It would be interesting to have two portals (one for teachers and one for students) on the same theme.

Discussion of teaching resources

- *What types of teaching resources do you think should be made available to enable teachers to use primary sources? (e.g.: lesson plans, interactive module -- Internet, hard copy)*

  - The site should adopt a multi-media approach.

  - There were different opinions concerning lesson plans. Some would like to find lesson plans with evaluation tracks, but others believed that well-structured lesson plans often limit creativity. These participants suggested the development of teaching strategies on how to use the sources.

  - Other suggestions included models of learning rather than specific lesson plans, and the use of a broader approach (subjects versus topics).

  - Participants also urged that the site propose decision-making activities, new models using high-order thinking skills, comparison, problem solving and looking at points of view etc.

  - Activities to teach students how to collect and organize personal archives could be very useful.

  - A "tool kit" designed to help students develop the above skills needs to be created collaboratively by teachers and groups like LAC.

  - There should be resources for beginning teachers and for more experienced teachers. Provide expandable ideas that new teachers can use (i.e. *exploitation trails*).

  - There should be research tools, considered as a way to bridge the different curricula across Canada, which should be aimed at the outcomes rather than the topics.

  - Timelines would be very useful.

  - Not all teacher and students have easy access to computers, and not everyone is at ease with computers. There is therefore a need for both online and printed material. A booklet that could help teachers deal with the site would be useful.

  - A virtual tour of the LAC buildings and collections (on videotape, CD-ROM, DVD or online) could be made available.

- *Would online material interpreting primary sources be useful to teachers?*

- Yes. The site should provide teachers with activities that could help them teach "How to …", with examples.

- Some participants suggested software to help students use the site could be made available to teachers. This software could also help students learn how to produce a graph or a chart, further developing their skills in this area.

- One online feature could be a service like "Ask an archivist", where teachers and students could get in touch with a specialist.

- The responses to the previous question also answered this question.

• *Should teaching resources include the learning outcomes for each province and territory?*

- Participants believe that the curricula are too different across Canada to try to work on specific learning outcomes for each province and territory.

- The teaching resources should use a broad approach, working on common themes. A look at a Canadian issue could be complemented with links that would give the possibility of adding local flavor.

• *Do people outside LAC (e.g.: ministries of education, individual teachers, boards) have a role in contributing teaching resources to the site?*

- There should be agreements between LAC and the various provincial or territorial departments of education in order to introduce these resources in their respective provinces or territories. Provinces and territories could find out also how teachers are using the archives and submit the results of their survey to LAC. Results could be made available on the LAC website.

- LAC, Parks Canada, Historica and related organizations should talk to each other. LAC should partner with organizations like heritage fairs and Historica and have links with them.

- Linkages are fundamental. Many kinds of linkages are possible: between provincial/territorial and federal partners, between teachers and students, between school and homes. Resources from various sources should be linked together.

- LAC could host lesson plans, activities and projects from various teachers. If so, there would be a need for standardized templates and screens (see further on, the limits of sharing lesson plans).

• *What factors would be important in encouraging and managing external contributions?*

- The possibility of having access to peer-reviewed educational resources in a standardized format.

- Have a database on FAQs (frequently asked questions).

- *What subjects/topics lack resources? Note most important.*

    - Aboriginal people are often seen from a European point of view.

    - Difficulties in getting French resources.

Discussion on the proposed Virtual Learning Centre

- *What services would educators need or expect to find on our Virtual Learning Centre (LAC educational website)?*

    - Linkages with other organizations (Historica, National History Society, Heritage Canada, etc.) so that each can supplement and support the others.

    - Data banks.

    - Place to put students' stuff.

    - Resources done at the provincial/territorial level that could be shared at the national level.

    - Information on how to teach students about maintaining their own personal archives and how to preserve their own important documents, as well as how to use primary sources.

    - A "a travelling archivist" or "travelling lab" -- someone with "kits" (objects, various documents, artifacts, etc.), based on various themes, could visit schools to give students the opportunity to manipulate these objects (or facsimiles thereof). This service could not be provided online, but was discussed at length by several groups of participants.

- *Would it be useful to build a virtual community where educators could exchange information with experts and colleagues about their use of primary sources?*

    - All groups underlined the importance of a discussion forum. The example of the forum that can be found on Historica's site was given. Some suggested the use of webcams.

    - The possibility of sharing lesson plans and other items was discussed in every group. One group however pointed out that there must be a control mechanism in place to ensure that only high-quality lesson plans are placed on the site. The idea is worth looking at.

    - There must be safety measures on the site to ensure that users' personal information is not passed on to others (especially that e-mail addresses not be given to "spammers").

SECOND SESSION
DISCUSSION SUMMARY

In this section, results are organized by discussion groups, as the questions were specific to each group.

MINISTRIES

• *Where do you perceive gaps in current resources which primary sources might help to fill?*

  - It would be important to *pay attention to perspectives that are not typically represented in our textbooks*: societal perspectives, regional perspectives, regional perspectives of marginalized groups, changes that occur over time in a topic.

  - There is a need for *a database of resources*. To augment a resource-based learning approach that many jurisdictions are taking and to identify some of the links that may be available in regional archives or in other places.

  - There is a need for *an authoritative source for the recognized link to other websites*. Ministries of education can point teachers to LAC as the authoritative site, because we have reviewed and vetted the sites we link to.

  - There is a need fo*r authentic resources.* Developing kits and models, virtual jackdaws and labs that could show students how to do research, analyze documents and approach media literacy would be useful.

  - There would be a need to *provide some instructional background for teachers.* Dealing with archival material means moving beyond a content focus and helping develop a skill-based focus that looks at meta-cognition and conceptual pieces.

• *How should Library and Archives Canada develop its program to be of maximum use to teachers in your province or territory?*

  - Create a background and a basic foundation of information that teachers can begin to work from; provide ideas to teachers about how to use these specific resources to engage students (many teachers are non-subject-specialist teachers).

  - Provide instructions to teachers on how to find their way around an archive and on how to link the information about what an archive is and what an archivist does to other areas of the curriculum. Promote the idea of students becoming archivists of their own family or in their own classroom (practicing and developing skills in those areas starting from the early grades and continuing through to the higher grades).

  - Provide expertise to teachers. Ministries of education need the information that LAC staff has in order to improve the quality of their resources and to show teachers how to access and use the resources in more effective ways with students.

  - Don't provide a lot of lesson plans, but some overarching, broader pieces that can help teachers develop their own lesson plans.

  - Build a partnership to identify how resources can be selected and used. This identification process must be flexible and open in order to maximize the use of the resources and to avoid over-packaging them.

- *Where are there possibilities for mutual cooperation?*

  - Create approach to collaboration on resource development.

  - One or two big themes could perhaps be developed around broad matrixes, using an approach that could help make resources accessible across jurisdictions. Develop a common focus on providing missing information on Canadian history and Canadian identity.

  - Provide access to the voices of the people, the voices of the participating groups (e.g.: the Alberta Métis). This should not be aimed so much at giving information about a group but on providing information from members of that group.

  - Focus on what is engaging and dramatic, and on stories that will entice students into finding out about their history.

  - Look at the three levels where cooperation can take place: the ministry level, broader regional partnerships like WNCP or the Atlantic partnership and the potential of working through CMEC.

  - Engage national specialist councils (they are already organized and involved and would be good sources to tap into).

  - The question of copyright should be included as a topic of enquiry for students. Teachers need to understand copyright issues when using resources.

- *How can we stay in touch with ministries of education?*

  - A suggestion: Invite CMEC to hold their next meeting at the Gatineau Preservation Centre, to open their eyes to the possibilities that a national approach to resource sharing could provide. (CMEC is already discussing ideas around a portal repository, so…).

ELEMENTARY-LEVEL TEACHERS

- *What type of primary sources should LAC provide that would be useful to you?*

  - Photos; any photos.

  - Printed newspapers, journals.

  - Videos and audio.

  - The material must be relevant.

  - Primary sources produced by kids (like a child's diary). Something that will hook their attention: cartoons from the past, miniatures.

- Maps -- students could compare today's maps and maps from the past.

- Canadian documents: the Constitution, flags, symbols, heroes…, that help increase students' pride in being Canadian.

• *What sorts of topics should we attempt to cover?*

- Themes: multiculturalism, diversity, ethnicity, gender, social role models, flags, national anthem.

- Changes in role models, schools, transportation, recreation and leisure and technology.

• *What types of teaching resources would be most useful to you?*

- Kits : Kits (jackdaw type) coming through the schools so the kids can have some hands-on information.

- Archivists that could travel to schools or be accessible online to answer students' questions.

- Virtual tours of the LAC and the Gatineau Preservation Centre on CD-Rom or the Internet. The use of live webcam video would be a good idea (if the technology were available).

- Lesson plans for new teachers and broad stroke resources to give some idea of use when teaching history.

- Appropriate and reliable links to other resources.

• *Are interpretations of the primary sources important to you? (e.g. : background information on the signing of the 1982 Constitution, guidelines for reading certain photos or the story behind a photo's creation)*

- Teachers need context and interpretation in order to use primary sources.

- Teachers would like a toolbox explaining what primary sources are, and showing how to interpret a photo, a journal or other documents. The toolbox should explain what archivists are and how they work.

- How can students learn from the primary sources they have in front of them? Students could learn what archives are, how to collect and preserve them. They would develop a different perception of archives if they could create their own archives.

- Teachers require interpretation of primary sources. Students need questions that will encourage them to think critically and learn to interpret.

- *What are the best ways to communicate with elementary teachers? (e.g.: e-mail, newsletters, professional development day, conferences)*

  - PD days or PA days.

  - The most efficient way would be through the provincial councils.

  - Conferences, heritage fairs, promotional items, summer institutes.

  - Motivate teachers to use these resources will encourage word-of-mouth communication.

FACULTIES/BOARDS OF EDUCATION

This group did not really answer the questions. We can nevertheless try to interpret the result of the discussion in order to put it in the proposed frame.

We will group the first two questions:

- *What are the learning issues associated with primary sources that Library and Archives Canada should be aware of?*

- *What do you see as key issues in the development of the Virtual Learning Centre (LAC educational website)?*

  - The group identified a main challenge: How can we help facilitate a pedagogical shift from learning about history to doing history? This main question brings in four other questions.

    How do we:
      a) help teachers to use primary sources?

      b) teach teachers how to assist students to create a story through reading and viewing primary documents?

      c) ensure that primary documents are not seen as a distraction but as an integral part of learning history?

      d) move beyond history as a retelling of the past to a means of creating critical thinkers who understand the role of interpretation and construction of history and how to use primary documents to do it?

  - Participants provided a possible answer to these questions : *Work toward a systemic orientation of teachers to a problem-based approach to teaching and learning.*

Ways that could be used to achieve this are listed below as answers to the two following questions.

- *Could the Virtual Learning Centre be used as a teaching tool for teacher candidates or as a teaching resource for new teachers?*

- A model of critical thinking should be infused through the teachers' training program. If it is built into the program, new teachers starting their career will be using the critical thinking model because it has become natural to them.

- *Should teaching on the use of primary sources be part of continuing education?*

  - We must recognize that one-hour workshops don't bring about real changes. We need more than that.

  - Certain teachers who have been teaching for a while will find this an uncomfortable shift. Many will need assistance and training to accept this change.

- *How can we improve our communication with faculties of education and boards of education?*

  - By offering more than workshops -- perhaps a teachers' institute on the use of primary sources. Also, by creating or increasing dialogue with subject specialists on the use of primary sources before developing educational material for educators.

SECONDARY-LEVEL TEACHERS

- *Where are the current gaps in resources for history or social studies?*

  - The group has identified four points where material is lacking:

    a) Certain time periods (e.g.: the 20s and the 30s)
    b) The Canadian constitutional battles pre-Confederation
    c) Political versus social history
    d) Curriculum between provinces.

- *What types of primary sources or teaching resources would meet your needs?*

  - Access to photographs, movies, examples of art, letters, diaries from WW1 (for example).

  - Ideally, in the language they were written in (in order to give to the students a true point of view and not a perspective of someone who translated them).

  - General templates on, for example, how to read a picture. We should start with some ready-made ideas for beginners, moving on to a multi-level interpretation, with links, for the not-so-young.

- *How much depth should we provide in making primary sources available on a subject or unit? (e.g.: number of documents and interpretation)*

  - It is a question of quantity and certainly not quality. Teachers are looking for an overview and a variety of sources covering political and social issues.

- One should be careful of the language being used and the interest level.

- A glossary would help.

- *What subjects or topics should we cover first? List specific topics of importance to you.*

  - The group proposed Canada through time and culture, gender roles through time and culture, immigration, economy/resources, territorial change, political evolution etc.

  - All the links on the site should be consistent, so that people would be able to use them all the time. They should also be highly interactive.

- *How can we communicate with secondary teachers? (e.g. : e-mail, newsletters, professional development day, conference)*

  - "All ways are good and the more you do the better it is."

CONCLUSION

We have tried here to identify the most important issues of the discussions and to list here ten key ideas that emerged.

1. People are obviously amazed and enthusiastic over the idea of using primary sources to teach.

2. Participants would use any kind of documents providing that they were adapted to the age and the capabilities of the students.

3. Participants would like the sources to be easily available and classified by broad themes rather than by topics. They also mentioned that there should be links between many other depositories of primary sources.

4. Primary sources to support a theme should be selected to reflect different points of view so that the students can approach subjects from different angles.

5. Teachers have not been prepared to teach using primary sources. They would like to learn how to do so and how to help students learn using primary sources. They would expect to be supported by the LAC's Virtual Learning Centre.

6. The first thing the participants would like to find on the site would be tools such as kits that could help them -- beginners and not-so-beginners -- to answer many "how to" questions: how to read a document; how to look at a picture or cartoon; how to use the information extracted from a bank of sources; etc.

7. Teachers would appreciate having lesson plans but also they would like to have broadly designed teaching strategies.

8. Teachers expect to find decision-making activities, models using higher-order thinking skills, comparison, problem-solving activities and teaching situations that would lead students to acquire and use critical thinking.

9. Participants underlined the importance of establishing linkages between the many organizations that are involved in the teaching of history. This would help to develop complementary items and to profit by the experience of others.

10. All groups underlined the importance of a discussion forum.