Nothing Will Be the Same After This:
Four conversations that can help (re)craft history pedagogy to respond to an unknown future

Part One of Four

By Samantha Cutrara

I mean … even if you thought, you wished, you prayed (in whatever way that meant to you. As R. Eric Thomas says, maybe your church is "blasting showtunes and going to brunch") that fall would be kinda of normal. Or, if not fall, definitely winter. By winter we'll be back to normal.

I mean, even if you thought that there will be an element of normalcy or familiarity in the 2020/2021 school year, I'm sure you see by now that nothing will be the same after this.

Even if the "space" of the "classroom" (and by "space" and "classroom" I mean both the literal and figurative understandings of those concepts) is what we know and expect them to be (my memories immediately transport me to sitting in a 1960s retrofitted classroom at University College at UofT gazing out the window at the quad listening to my professor in a bulky sweater lecture about political theory in the abstract) nothing will be the same after this.

What will it be, we do not know.

But this moment has put an imprint on our generation, and the generations to come, in ways we will forever be changed by.

The confusion of it all, but also its sorrow, its grief. The confusion of sitting in/with the confusion.

Thus, even if classes, classrooms, or course outlines seem to be the same in fall or winter…

They won't be

We won't be.

We'll be forever changed by this moment: the #ShutDownCanada movement, COVID-19, worldwide Black Lives Matter protests, the literal tearing down of political statues, the commemorative remembering of the Siege of Kanehsatà:ke, and the fear of the increased erosion of democracy and due process in Canada and around the world There is so much change that it is hard to keep up, let along process. We will be, we have been, changed.

And so even if *we* tried to pretend things would be the same in our classrooms this academic year (who hasn't found performative solace at the front of the room when things in our "real lives" are going wrong?), the world outside the classroom won't be the same.

Our students won't be the same.

Their(/our) futures won't be.

Their opportunities and needs won't be.

Nothing will be the same after this.

You shouldn't expect that and you shouldn't want that either.

A central theme that has come from the Pandemic Pedagogy video series I've been hosting since March (on June 30th I posted the 35th -- and final -- video in the spring series!) is how the pandemic has revealed the brokenness of our social, economic, and political structures – or perhaps another way to put this is that the pandemic has laid bare how our social, economic, and political structures were designed in broken ways; how they were designed to create, exacerbate, and maintain inequities along lines of class, race, and gender.

Many of us already knew this, but the pandemic made us *see* this in ways we may have ignored before.

To move into our unknown future, we could use this knowledge the pandemic forced us to look at and actively *make change* for the better. We can (and many of us certainly have) fight against inequities, demand changes to our systems, and learn and grow in ways that perhaps makes us uncomfortable. To help influence the changes we want to see in the world, we cannot leave unquestioned the ways we operate in inequitable systems and, in this series of posts, I argue that this involves our teaching and learning practices too.

More specifically, in our work of "mobilizing the past=" in our classrooms, we have to act upon, not just hope for, a new, more equitable and this will involve going beyond what we know in our pedagogies and practices.

Because we don't know what that future will be or who our students will be within it,[1] our response to this moment in our classrooms needs to revolve around navigating the unknown in ways that don't long for what was but that believes in the promise of what could be. As we move into fall, we (and I put myself in this category) need to stop thinking that our "regular" practices are "on hold" until this moment is "over" and things will go back to "normal" and we'll feel "comfortable" again.

Nothing will be the same after this. There won't be a "normal" to go back to. Or at least there shouldn't be.

Instead, think of this moment as razing and rebuilding teaching, for yourselves, but also the future of the profession. Think of it as sowing the seeds for the practices that will be considered "normal" in 20 years – practices, that will again need to be redeveloped. Because that is how change works.

This isn't an easy, one term thing. It is a long-term commitment that starts by imagining and testing practices that could inform what this looks like, and feels like, to you.

So, where do you begin?

A good way to start is looking for and drawing on conversations that go beyond the reactive reflection of this moment. These ideas are important, don't get me wrong, but to start laying the foundation of new practices and pedagogies, we can start by humbly listening to, and gradually participating in, conversations that were already happening before the pandemic.

---

[1] One of my favourite ideas from the Pandemic Pedagogy series came from teacher Ian Duncan, who said that he was sure that teaching history will change after this, but he doesn't know how, because he *doesn't know who his students will be when they get back into the classroom*.

These conversations have already planted seeds as to new ways of teaching and learning. What fruit can you reap (I don't know if this metaphor is working) to put in your new pedagogical jam (I mean, it kinda works…)?

Four conversations topics that I have found myself being drawn (back) into include Digital Humanities, Learning Outcomes, K-12 education and public history practices, and public history. For me, these conversations help us move away from academically traditional knowledge and knowledge practices in higher ed classrooms and, by engaging with in them, they can help us rethink what we might consider taken for granted practices for undergraduate history education.

This is not to suggest that these conversations and practices are not implicated in systems of inequity – far from it! These conversations have their own histories of embedded inequities that shouldn't be ignored. Instead, I present these imperfect conversations as ones that can help us think beyond traditional and familiar higher education practices and in doing so, suggest that critically engaging in them can be helpful for (re)forming teaching and learning practices that align with politics for making change. In other words, I'm suggesting a few more bookshelves to peruse, but recognize that there are more books on those shelves (and other bookshelves too!). In the comments below, feel free to continue expanding these conversations with suggestions, resources, and questions that can support practice to make change.

In this week's post, I begin with the Digital Humanities.

Digital Humanities

Curious about how to blend teaching/researching/presenting history in a digital space? Curious as to how this can lift up analysis because of the digital space? So have people for at least three decades. Use this work!

Digital Humanities and Social Sciences (DHSS) is an umbrella of convergent practices that enhance and expand the work of the Humanities and/or Social Sciences through the intersection of digital tools and technologies with Humanities and/or Social Science practices and pedagogies.

When one talks about the "digital humanities" (DH), one could be talking about developing software or databases *or* they could be talking about extending the possibilities of critical interpretation because of that software – in other words, *meaning making*.

Many people think DH is just about computing, but it is not. It is also about meaning making.

Digital technologies have developed to such an extent that our participation in using digital technologies to enhance or complement meaning making is no longer contingent on us understanding computing or programming. Rather, our use and interest in digital technologies can centre on enhancing meaning making by using already developed technologies to develop what we can do with, and in, research and teaching.

Many of us already do this in our classrooms without calling it "DH." When we ask our students to search for a website or an article, to map something on Google, to collaborate on an online document, or to participate in a discussion on Facebook, we are inviting our students to find, collect, organize, and/or analyse using digital technologies. What makes these practices explicitly DHSS practices is when

we thoughtfully and explicitly use these technologies to develop students' skills of critical thinking, doing, and communicating.

DH assignments and activities that are explicitly planned, developed, and taught with the aim of engaging with, and enhancing, critical and active opportunities for meaning making in and with the digital world are able to explore new modalities and invitations for accessing and developing knowledge. DH can then help students (and researchers) come to know in ways that traditional research and learning may not be able achieve. Dr. Julian Chambliss, core faculty in the Consortium for Critical Diversity in a Digital Age Research (CEDAR) at Michigan State University, says that DH allows us to engage with the past and the future together because the digital can offer educators "a chance to connect their students with resources that they can use to help imagine more complicated futures." By explicitly engaging in the digital world with digital tools and materials, students can think about and develop their own online archive or exhibit or digital story in ways that complicates a standard historical narrative with literal or figurative language often not available (or appreciated!) in a standard history essay. This moment of being forced into engaging in history in the digital world can result in a what John Heckman, The Tattooed Historian, calls a "creative boom" in historical interpretation and connection. How can we be purposeful in inviting students to think about these ideas? DH provides greater opportunities for accessing knowledge and engaging with communities across and beyond our digital world, creatively imagining new worlds, and for reflective problem-posing critical literacy that Paulo Freire writes about.

When we are using digital tools and materials in our classrooms now, we (and I'm including myself in this 'we') are often doing it for accessibility and/or necessity. DH invites us to raise up these practices in order to help students think about product and process of history How can we do this more explicitly in our classrooms? Especially, our remote classrooms that are new to many of us?

Want to know more? This description of DH comes directly from an OER I wrote about engaging in Digital Humanities for people (like me) who are new to DH and/or are not interested in computing. I recommend you check it out along with other fantastic resources and discussions about DH in our classrooms.

What other Digital Humanities practices, people, and ideas do you think Canadian historians should know about?

Next week I'll discuss Learning Outcomes.

Dr. Samantha Cutrara is a History Education Strategist based in Toronto and is currently working in the Office of the Vice Provost Academic at York University as a Curriculum Specialist. Her first book *Transforming the Canadian History Classroom: Imagining a new 'we'* will be published by UBC Press in September 2020. Find more information about her work on her website: www.SamanthaCutrara.com. Contact her directly if you're interested in participating in either her Pandemic Pedagogy or Source Saturday video series launching in the fall.

Note

The author would like to acknowledge that this work was created on land that is the traditional territory of the Haudenosaunee, the Métis, and most recently, the territory of the Mississaugas of the Credit River. The territory was the subject of the Dish With One Spoon Wampum Belt Covenant, an agreement between the Iroquois Confederacy and the Ojibwe and allied nations to peaceably share and care for the resources around the Great Lakes. This territory is also covered by the Upper Canada Treaties. Today, the meeting place of Toronto (from the Haudenosaunee word Tkaronto) is still the home to many Indigenous people from across Turtle Island and the author is grateful to have the opportunity to write, study, teach, and learn in the community, on this territory.