

By Samantha Cutrara

I went into self-isolation about a week before many others. Because I had come into contact with family traveling abroad, I worked from home while the university and college I work for continued to prepare for what felt like an inevitability after the [WHO's declaration](#). Being by myself that first week exacerbated the sense of shock that schools would be closing and learning moved online. I thought of the release of my [upcoming book](#) and my [new video series](#) talking to K-12 teachers about ways to expand their pedagogies and practice related to history. Would these conversations even matter any more? Would history be understood as an indulgent and frivolous subject of study when there was an urgent need for health care, economic stimulus, a reorganization of work and home? **How would we teach history after this, I asked on my video series.** I didn't know. I didn't even know where to start. But, as with most things, when you explore topics within a community you lessen your sense of isolation and broaden your capacity to understand perspective and approaches far beyond yourself. So came the "[Pandemic Pedagogy](#)" video series where I've been talking with historians, history teachers, and people in the heritage community about how we can think about history and teaching history during and after this moment.

When I posted [my initial video](#) questioning how we might teach history after this, I ended by saying that I wasn't sure if I was going to post videos during this time. I had been posting once a week on topics such as [meaningful learning](#), [historical empathy](#), [teaching about women](#), and [teaching about labour issues](#) in elementary school. I even did a [video](#) – and corresponding [webpage](#) – on resources to teach about the Spanish Flu the night of the WHO's declaration. While I had already planned a schedule of videos through spring and summer, these explorations of theory and suggestions of practice seemed trite when schools were closed and parents, teachers, and administrators were worried about getting students enough information to meet curriculum expectations to end the school year.

But when I posted this first (admittedly maudlin, but honest) [video](#), it sparked a conversation among some friends who said that they too had these questions and they too were without answers. Knowing I wasn't alone, I reached out to colleagues to see if they wanted to have these conversations more publicly. These conversations have turned into the "[Pandemic Pedagogy](#)" series. (Now available as a [podcast](#)).

At time of publication, I have interviewed twenty scholars in the history and heritage fields – 12 videos are currently available – and [each conversation has focused on](#) whether our current understandings of history have changed because of this moment, whether teaching history will change after this moment, and the ways that notions of community and creativity – the "[imagining a new we](#)" that is the focus of my [larger video series](#) – may shift, change, or develop because of this moment.

Because I have the privilege of conducting all the interviews, I also have the privilege of drawing together all their connections. Here are a few key learnings I've drawn from the conversations I have had to date:

1. This moment allows us to explore the structures that frame our lives – to witness their deconstruction, drawing on Derrida – and see how they work or, more often, do not work. History allows us to trace, track, and understand the development of these structures and the ways they have become naturalized as “normal.” It is with this historical knowledge that we can then push and develop for the necessary changes we see are needed during and after this moment.
2. This moment is shifting how we teach history and, in doing so, will (should?) also shift the histories we are teaching. The medium is the message, referencing McLuhan, so how does online and remote instruction shift the narratives we share and the ways in which we share them?
3. This moment can help us understand ourselves living within history. This moment can make us be aware of how we are historical actors who can record and make our mark on this moment, but that these records are not being created, shared, or accessed equally. Whose experiences are going to be marked during this time? How will this shape how people in the future will come to understand this moment? How does thinking about these questions change our perspectives on the histories we've already learned?
4. This moment can help us understand the important balance between hard evidence and emotional response in our study of history. There shouldn't be a “democratization of knowledge” when dealing with health issues, but there should still be space for the ways humans are feeling, reacting, and responding to the knowledge being circulated. Future historians will have evidence of the political and public response(s) to this moment, but how will they explore, and then teach, the *feelings* and the anxieties of this moment? How can we use our heightened feelings during this moment in history to think about how we've been missing the *feelings* of historical moments in how we teach them?
5. This moment is not a moment at all but a continuum of what was and what will be. We feel this as a moment or an event because of the uniqueness of this time but even when it is over, it won't be over. How can we use the fragility of this moment to ensure that we are bringing the lessons of compassion, care, and vulnerability into our classrooms and our practices when we return to them in ways we recognize as “normal”? How can we allow space for our students to process what they have went through/are going through without pushing them to determine its significance before they are ready? How can we allow space for ourselves to process what we have gone through/are going through without adding additional pressures to ensure our teaching, learning, and research practices return to a “normal” that may have not been sustainable anyhow?

As you can see, our explorations of answers have resulted in more questions; but important questions that strike at the heart of teaching and learning history in the

21st century. I invite you to [watch the videos](#) or [listen to a podcast](#) to make your own meaning about teaching and learning history after this moment. I'll be continuing the series through June – please [contact me](#) if you'd like [to have a conversation for the series](#).

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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.