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AKADÉMIAI KIADÓ

Goodbye Colston, goodbye Columbus: Why we need to learn history in times of memorial controversies?

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THEMATIC ARTICLE

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ABSTRACT

Around the western world various activist groups confront controversial monuments and other mnemonic infrastructures of historical culture representing contested histories and equally contested visions of the future. This article presents an original model for analyzing controversial issues of commemoration in the context of history education. Relying on the theory of historical consciousness, it first presents monuments as a distinctive type of mnemonic infrastructures of historical culture. It then delineates a conceptual model for making sense of various "types" or ways of engaging with these infrastructures: preservational, analytical, hypercritical, and reflexive. These ways of engaging are then analyzed in reference to four competencies of historical consciousness in relation to Jörn Rüsen's recognized typology (inquiry, historical thinking, orientation, and narrative). The article explains how this new model can be transposed to the context of education so as to help students analyze past and current memorial controversies and ultimately develop more complex ways of engaging with mnemonic infrastructure in society.

KEYWORDS

history education, historical consciousness, historical thinking, commemoration

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INTRODUCTION

Let me start with a quote from French historian Pierre Nora, reflecting on the current intensified interests in uses of the past:

> We are witnessing a world-wide upsurge in memory. Over the last twenty or twenty-five years, every country, every social, ethnic or family group, has undergone a profound change in the relationship it traditionally enjoyed with the past. This change has taken a variety of forms: criticism of official versions of history and recovery of areas of history previously repressed; demands for signs of a past that had been confiscated or suppressed; growing interest in "roots" and genealogical research; all kinds of commemorative events and new museums; renewed sensitivity to the holding and opening of archives for public consultation; and growing attachment to what in the English-speaking world is called "heritage"… These trends together make up a kind of tidal wave of memorial concerns that has broken over the world, everywhere establishing close ties between respect for the past – whether real or imaginary – and the sense of belonging, collective consciousness and individual self-awareness, memory and identity. (Nora, 2002, p. 1)

While Nora made his observation at the turn of the millennium, his observation is still valid and highlights a personal as much as a worldwide phenomenon: the fundamental human need for a cultural history frameworks to orient personal and collective life in the course of time by remembering the past. This sense-creating process of historical consciousness, as Jörn Rüsen (2005) reminds us, "has a practical function: it bestows upon actuality a temporal direction, an orientation which can guide action intentionally by the agency of historical memory" (p. 25). By means of this historical memory, individuals create a sense of identity beyond the limits of birth and death, inscribing their personal existence into a larger temporal and cultural narrative framework. History, for Rüsen, "is a response to this challenge" (Rüsen, 2005, p. 10).

In our 21st century world, characterize by rapid and sweeping changes destabilizing our identities and our temporal references, reference to and uses of the past appear to be both attractive and highly relevant. All over the world, there are signs of engagement with historical memory. Studies conducted in Europe, the United States (U.S.), Canada, and Australia all confirm the extraordinary extent of citizen engagement with public history (Angvik & von Borries, 1997; Ashton & Hamilton, 2010; Conrad et al., 2013; Rosenzweig & Thelen, 1998). Whether it is visiting historical sites and local museums, collecting photographs and artifacts, participating in historical re-enactments or battlefield tours, watching historical movies, or playing computer history games, citizens all over the world show high interests in doing some form of history.

But history is also a contested field. People not only have different relationships with the past, they may also have radically different *visions* of the past, and by extension the present and the future. Indeed, people frequently call upon it for validation, for lessons, for analogies. Politicians sometimes abuse it to fabricate misinformation or "alternative facts" so as to muster support for their political projects. Former U.S. president Donald Trump is most likely the one who best took "fake news" to the mainstream (Field, 2021).

But, for those not in power or who have historically been excluded, history can also be a means to revisit the past, protest their state of marginalization, and seek recognition and redress from long-established colonial practices and injustices. The recent heated debates over controversial monuments ranging from South Africa to Argentina, from Australia to Canada offer prime examples. Christopher Columbus, James Cook, Cecil Rhodes, Robert E. Lee and John A. Macdonald lived in

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very different times and places, but they all share something in common: they now symbolize what might be call a "new history war" – a frontal public attack on powerful historical figures who represent contested narratives of colonial past (Lévesque, 2018). Monuments and memorial sites have been erected for various reasons – to remind people of who they are or perhaps who they want to be. It appears to be increasingly obvious for a growing number of vocal citizens that some of these are no longer fit for purpose (Evans, 2020). In the U.S., monuments for Confederate leaders such as Robert E. Lee and those connected with segregation and slavery have fallen, one after another, and become a "flash point" for many – a defining moment for public protests because of the pain, the suffering or the violent oppression these statues represented to African Americans (Carrega & Allen, 2018). Fifteenth-century European explorer Christopher Columbus has not been spared. All over the U.S., dozens of statues of him have been taken down or in the process of being removed since the renewed Black Lives Matter (BLM) protests began (Brito, 2020). In England, various calls have been made to remove the statues of major historical figures, including Robert Clive, Francis Drake, and Cecil Rhodes, as part of a reappraisal of the United Kingdom's colonial history. A five-metre bronze statue of merchant and slave trader Edward Colston was even thrown into the Bristol harbour by a group of young activists who claimed that "people who benefited from the enslavement of individuals do not deserve the honour of a statue" (in Siddique & Skopeliti, 2020). In Belgium, a statue of King Leopold II was taken down in Antwerp; the toppling led to a massive petition with over 80,000 people supporting the removal of all statues of Leopold as the country grapples with a leading figure of its own colonial past. In Hungary, the German occupation memorial represents yet another controversial commemorative monument erected on the 70th anniversary of the events of 1944, when the Nazi army entered Hungary. Here in Canada, statues and memorials of controversial figures such as prime minister John A. Macdonald, French Canadian minister Hector Langevin, and Methodist minister and superintendent of education Egerton Ryerson were recently vandalized or taken down because of their associated role in the design and implementation of the residential school system in the 19th century, which forced the assimilation of Indigenous peoples.

Public manifestations and toppling of statues are not new – one only has to think about the countless relics of the monarchy destroyed during the French Revolution because deemed to be anti-democratic (Rhodes, 2017). But the current situation is noteworthy precisely because the monuments in question elicit strong emotional, contradictory reactions from diverse groups of people within and across societies thus contributing to increased societal tensions, violence, and confusion. For instance, in the wake of the Bristol incident, Culture Minister Matt Warman told publicly that U.K.'s heritage sites should not be removed from view "however contentious" (BBC, 2020). Four protestors involved in taking down Colston's statue were later charged with criminal damage. "Each of these defendants," claimed Liam Walker, who represented one of the protesters, "were on the right side of history, and I submit, they were also on the right side of the law. Colston's deeds may be historical, but the continued veneration of him in this city was not" (Gayle, 2022). Following a nine-day-trial, the jury finally found the so-called "Colston four" not guilty of charges. The acquittal, which was broadcasted worldwide, was met with both satisfaction and anger. "This verdict is a milestone in the journey that Bristol and Britain are on to come to terms with the totality of our history," said David Olusoga, a broadcaster and historian of the slave trade (BBC, 2022). But Nile Gardiner, director of the Margaret Thatcher Centre for Freedom at the Heritage Foundation, had another opinion: "The result of this ruling will be that mobs will seek to tear down statues across the country – it gives a green light for mobs" (BBC, 2022). Clearly, the end-result did not solve the issue. What should we do?

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A MATRIX OF HISTORICAL CONSCIOUSNESS

As the previous cases show, dealing with controversial monuments is not a mere matter of taking them down. As Thomas Cauvin (2017) contends, it is a serious, complex question due to the impassionate public opinions and the multiple contexts in which these debates take place. For example, the Canadian memorial issue over the fate of Sir John A. Macdonald, first prime minister of Canada and architect of the residential school system, is different from the ones dealing with Confederate commander Robert E. Lee or British merchant Edward Colston. But as a history educator, I believe that we could all benefit from competencies of historical consciousness as opposed to general politicization.

In order to analyze the role of historical consciousness in making sense of contested monuments, it is useful to begin with a conceptual way of thinking about monuments as mnemonic infrastructures of historical culture. Both Peter (Seixas, 2015) and myself (Lévesque, 2016) have recently offered complementary frameworks on the relationship between history and memory in society, which can serve as a basis for discussion. My own matrix (see Fig. 1) has been transposed as follows for this analysis.

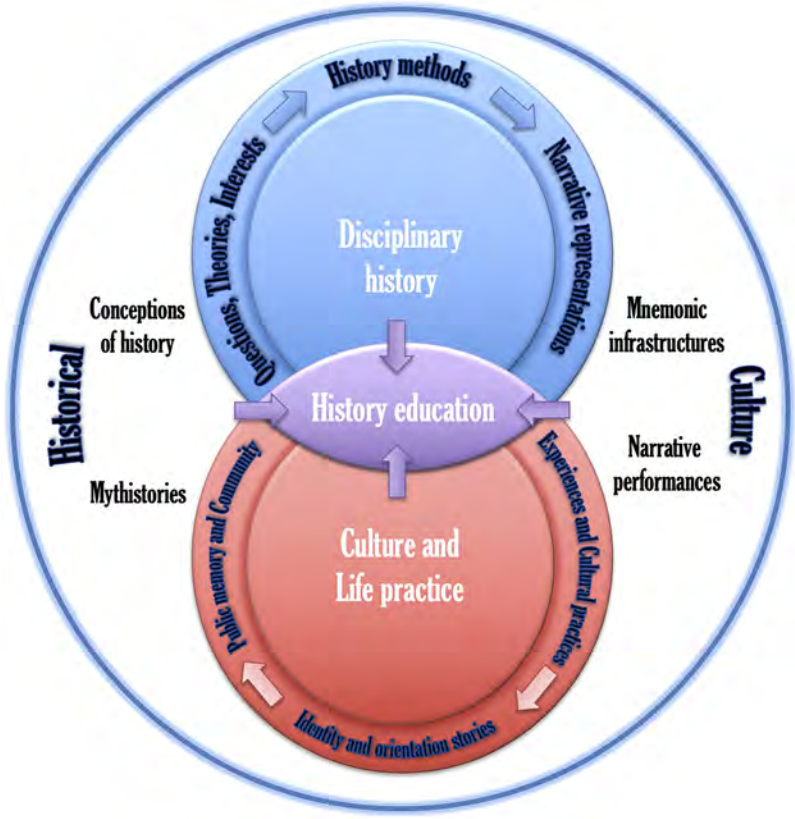

Fig. 1. Matrix of historical consciousness

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This matrix allows us to see how diverse communities are related in society and how they can potentially inform one another without being conflated into a one-dimensional wheel, as defined by Rüsen and later updated by (Seixas, 2015). Disciplinary history, cultural and daily life practice, and history education subscribe to distinctive approaches to generate narrative representations of the past (see Ahonen, 2017; Van Boxtel & Van Drie, 2018). Much has been said about this disciplinary process in the context of education (Chapman, 2021; Lee & Ashby, 2000; Lévesque & Clark, 2018; Seixas & Morton, 2012; Wineburg, 2001, 2018).

But history, as Rüsen reminds us, is much more than a matter of historical studies. It is an essential cultural factor in people's lives. One function of this cultural, public use of the past is to establish meaningful connections between the past and the present so as to shape people's sense of historical orientation, identity, and community-building over time. Disciplinary history is a scholarly way of performing this function through established norms and principles. While a distinction between these two sets of practices serves useful conceptual purposes, it is important to remember that the two often overlap and coexist in the lives of citizens, including historians, as indicated in the matrix. Indeed, these various historical practices do not operate in a vacuum; they take place in the larger context of "historical culture," that is, within the totality of discourses whereby a society understands itself and its future by interpreting and narrating the past (Carr, 2006). According to Maria Grever and Robbert-Jan Adriaansen (Grever & Adriaansen, 2017), the notion of historical culture (*Geschichtskultur*) was coined by German didactics scholars as a way to challenge the sharp delineation between "memory/heritage" and "history/discipline" as disseminated by influential thinkers such as Pierre Nora and David Lowenthal. Historical culture was thus conceptualized in a way that made it possible to overcome this rift and better account for the full range of activities of historical consciousness. Below I briefly present each concept.

- **Historical culture**: Monuments are embedded into distinctive historical cultures which encompass the totality of discourses and mythistories with which a society understands itself and its future by narrating the past. Mnemonic infrastructures such as monuments, memorials, and heritage sites are topoi with a life history, documenting not only aspects of past historical cultures but our own memory reactions in the present as members of given cultures.
- **Culture and life practice**: Monuments play important functions in society. People rely on these objects and infrastructures to generate narratives for life orientation and identity formation, which, in turn, inform public memories, community-building, and social behaviours . As monuments exist in context with an inherent ambiguity about the past and their purpose, multiple stories can be generated over time (Parkes, 2018). Practical approaches to the past (everyday mental heuristics) tend to govern thinking process of everyday life practice (Körber & Meyer-Hamme, 2015).
- **Disciplinary history**: The roles and functions of monuments and other mnemonic infrastructures are studied through scholarly historical research and discourse. Societal issues (e.g., Who controls the creation of monuments? Should we remove certain monuments but not others?) generate research questions which are investigated through a rigorous evidence-based analytical process. Historical thinking tools are used to arrive "independently at reasonable, informed opinions" open to further discussion and criticism (Seixas, 2000). Historians' narrative arguments are reintroduced into historical culture and generate additional questions and potential demands for life practice.

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- **History education**: This represents the educational environment within which learners acquire, develop, and internalize the mental and cognitive procedures of historical consciousness. This context goes beyond schooling to include the multiple forces with which a culture transmits and understands itself over time.

Monuments are distinctive mnemonic infrastructures with inherent messages; they are, so to speak, proto-narratives. Rüsen (2012) calls them "narrative abbreviations" because they convey visual and memorial representations that connect the past, the present, and the future. Learning to engage with a monument is thus a complex act of narrative understanding and competence. As Andreas Körber (2018) argues:

> It therefore is paramount to read monuments as narratives, and not only in the de-constructive sense of "what did those erectors make of that past back then", but also in the re-constructive sense of "in how far or how does this narrative fit into my/our relation to that past". In other words: Standing before a monument and thinking about monuments, we all need to (and in fact do) think in a combination of understanding the others and deliberating our own narrative meaning-making.

Following Körber, I believe that we, as scholars in education, have an important responsibility to help young people make sense of controversial mnemonic infrastructures – such as the statues of Columbus, Lee or Colston – because they serve to anchor culture in time and place and offer members of a community ways of relating to the past for orienting their practical life. Too often, school history educators ignore or shy away from contentious histories and prefer to stick to the prescribed, state-mandated curriculum (Fischer-Dárdai & Kaposi, 2021). But in doing so, they (un)consciously "keep at bay the myriad forces that act to historicize today's youths (Wineburg, Mosborg, & Porat, 2007, p. 176). Indeed, various studies have revealed that the so-called "cultural curriculum" may be more powerful in shaping students' historical consciousness than approved textbooks and formal history lessons (Barton & McCully, 2012; Lantheaume & Létourneau, 2016; Lévesque & Croteau, 2020).

COMPETENCIES OF HISTORICAL CONSCIOUSNESS

In the circumstances, I think we can infer some pedagogical ways of dealing with mnemonic infrastructures of historical culture. To do so, I have recently offered Canadian educators a set of competencies that educators could use to engage their students ((Lévesque, 2018)). These are not specific to Canada and could be used for various contexts of education. They include:

- Inquiry competence: Ability to devise historical questions and engage in evidence-based investigation (Why does a country/nation have monuments? Who created them? What should we do with contested monuments? What sources can tell me about the issue? How can I evaluate the value/credibility of these sources? Why are monuments important to me/society?)
- Historical thinking competence: Ability to think historically about memory issues using key historical thinking concepts (What makes this person significant to remember? For whom? Why were monuments created for him/her? What has changed/remained the same since their creation? What was the context in which this person lived? How did people at the time react to his/her ideas? Under what standards should we judge his/her actions? How are these standards universal or culturally-bound? Should this person still be memorialized?)

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- Orientation competence: Ability to relate information and narratives about the past into one's own practical life (What can I/we learn from his/her life? What obligation do I/we have to him/her and his/her legacy? How do monuments affect my views about the past/future? How are my views shaped by the language and culture in which I live?)
- Narrative competence: Ability to read, create, and understand the structure of historical narratives (How are historical narrative constructed? What functions do they play in culture? What narratives about this person can we create? How plausible are these narratives? What value judgments do they hold? How can we adjudicate between competing narratives? On what empirical/normative ground?)

Of course, these competencies and related questions are far from complete as there is a variety of ways of addressing monuments from different standpoints. As a result, Rüsen's typology of historical consciousness offers a useful delineation model for understanding structural change in our dealing with these four dimensions (Körber, 2015). This typology is structured around four types of consciousness ranging from "traditional" through to "exemplary," "critical," and "genetic" (Rüsen, 2005, p. 29). While Rüsen meant to offer a typology that encompasses the entire field of empirical manifestations of historical thinking, the articulation of distinctive dimensions into competencies can provide useful abilities to carry out the procedures for thinking historically about monuments and their narrative meaning for us (see Fig. 2). For the purpose of this articulation and to avoid confusion with Rüsen's inital typology I have renamed these types as preservational, analytical, hypercritical, and reflexive.

If we refer to Fig. 2, we can appreciate different ways of making sense of monuments which, in turn, can help explain how "types" of individuals in society are most likely to engage in issues of commemoration, knowing that persons in real-life situations do not necessarily fit neatly into these categories and may draw from more than one.[1] That being said, the model recognizes that some form of critical historical thinking is possible within these types so that individuals can possibly criticize aspects of commemoration or the validity of certain rules with regard to monuments.

For example, the "preservational" type represents the individual who is most concerned with how to maintain and preserve monuments as a way to uphold a certain memory tradition seen as necessary for orienting life in the present (e.g., statues of Columbus help North Americans memorialize a European Catholic explorer who first visited the "new world" and led the way to colonization and North American civilization). Such a person will engage in inquiry, historical thinking, and narration acts as way to generate a useable story that will provide guidance in establishing a traditional vision for stabilizing the future of America in the face of radical views and uncertainty (e.g., Columbus serves to remind us the origins of our society).

The "analytical" type represents the individual who analyzes the past in terms of experiences of temporal changes and valuable lessons. Monuments are explained in terms of their development and their differences. They serve as examples for certain types of commemoration (revering, condemning, appealing to action, etc.). As such, they offer useful examples for orienting life in

[1]As an example, it is possible for a preservational type person in real-life situation to advocate for the preservation of a monument (e.g., Robert E. Lee) representing a "hero" of the Confederate states but in a more inclusive form, asking that monuments on both sides (that is, including African American leaders) be represented so as to exhibit the country's historical groups and racial division. In the same way, an analytical type person could maintain and explain a monument because of its significance in exemplifying a certain character or skill (e.g., Robert E. Lee's military leadership) but also agree to relocate it to a distinctive place more appropriate for this purpose (e.g., heritage park, battlefield site).

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Types and competencies	Preservational	Analytical	Hypercritical	Reflexive
Inquiry	History is fixed and known by authority. Questions are designed to provide straightforward, definitive answers through common sense, real-life practice. *Individuals ask for the origin of upholding a certain memory tradition and are interested in the reasons to "carry it further."*	History has its methodology. Questions serve to investigate comparative cases for present-day consideration and useful lessons. *Individuals ask for cases of commemoration, with interest in identifying those forms of memorials which best signify individual/ collective heroism and dignity, or which best express regret/mourning.*	History has methodologies to study the past. Multiple questions can generate different forms of inquiry and representations of the same past. Individuals have different questions and sets of concerns highlighting cultural relativity. *Individuals ask for commemorations and memorials which "fit our time" in the same way older monuments fitted theirs.*	History has methodologies to study the past. Questions are contextually situated and generate forms of inquiry and representations that are open to criticism and revisions. The future generates additional questions about the past. *Individuals consider their perspective and ask for fundamental ways to change or improve commemoration in contemporary society.*
Historical thinking	Abilities to think historically are reduced to obligations to pre-given moral stances. No distance between past and present. Traditions provide stability over change, so no need to question their value and significance. *Study of monuments to consider their important social functions (e.g., to help citizens memorialize past heroes and hold on to their cause).*	Abilities to think historically favour the application of a time-honoured analytical process that provides definitive rules and principles for actions. Experiences from the past represent temporal changes, valuable lessons. *Search for rule about how best to commemorate past leaders informs the questions the person asks (inquiry), the methods (historical thinking), orientation, and their narrative.*	Abilities to think historically reveal the contextual nature of our own self (positionality). Historical significance, morality and continuity/ change are delimited by one's own interpretative framework. *Examination of the development of memorials under the question of how each "spirit of the times" has shaped the monument, guided by historical thinking methods orientation, and narrative representations of the time.*	Abilities to think historically are based on self- awareness, concepts, rules and criteria. Context varies across time, place and experience which limits the capacity to generalize from the past and impose moral frameworks. *Study of monuments, probing what initiatives moved commemoration forward (e.g., how and when marginalized groups were included/excluded), and paying attention to multi-perspectivity*
Orientation	Internalization of a pre-given sense of life shaped by the permanence of the group to which one belongs. Past, present, and future are bound in a sense of eternity. *These monuments are represented as essential to define their own roots, traditions, and sense of self.*	Specific concepts and cases offer general rules and principles for orienting our present-day life. The dimensions of time are recognized and connected through general rules for guiding our actions. *Monuments are explained in terms of their development and their differences. They serve as examples for a certain type of commemoration.*	Individuals feel no obligation to predecessors but establish value-laden principles to define their own course of actions. Past, present, and future are distinct and only connected through a negative sense of rupture. *Monuments of another era are in rupture with today's moral values. There is a need to generate new ways of commemorating for orienting our own present-day life.*	Continuity and change are relational and essential to life orientation. They give history its sense and purpose. Temporalisation is a decisive instrument for the validity of historical claims and moral values. Dimensions of time are connected as a path for future possibilities. *Commemoration is explained in terms of developments in a directed change, campaigning for forms of commemoration beyond monuments that promote (self) insight and perspective-taking.*
Narrative	Narratives are windows to the past, tell true stories which serve to confirm present-day personal relationship with the past and to stabilize identity. *Monuments tell stories which ascertain the permanence of the group.*	Narratives are constructed representations which offer useful lessons by providing historical generalizations or points of reference. *Narratives provide useful examples for orienting life in time and instructing citizens through lessons they can learn from.*	Narratives provide counter-arguments to grand narratives and serve to formulate one's own established narrative standpoint. *Findings serve to generate new contextually situated narratives that are more appropriate for present-day purposes and individuals' positionalities.*	Narratives offer plausible representations of the past to orient life in time that are open to revision and scrutiny. Different stand-points can be assessed for their plausibility and be integrated into a vision of temporal change. *Forms of commemoration beyond monuments generate multiple-perspective narratives that integrate memorial change over time.*

Fig. 2. Types of historical consciousness in reference to competencies

time and instructing citizens through lessons they can learn from them (e.g., Columbus monuments should be preserved to explain culture and epoch such as the 19th century anti-Catholic and anti-Italian violent movements).

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The "hypercritical" type, on the contrary, represents the individual who sees such historical monuments as anachronistic representations of another era that poorly fit our own modern times (e.g., statues and celebrations of Columbus were established in past times to promote colonization, racism, and white supremacy). Taking them down and replacing them is seen as necessary to design more contextually-situated representations of today's society through counter-narratives (e.g., narratives of decolonization and Indigenous peoples) that serve to justify present-day standpoints and moral values (e.g., anti-racism, human rights, and social justice).

The "reflexive" type holds a broader, more comprehensive vision of temporality and monuments as forms of commemoration over time. For him/her, the study of monuments serves to reveal the historicity of mnemonic infrastructures as well as his/her own relations to them. History helps explain how individuals were commemorated in historical times and what brought about change to acts of commemoration over time (e.g., why were earlier monuments representing only white male figures? What led to change/addition of other significant figures?). The abilities to think historically are based on the construction and deconstruction of monuments with manifold perspectives and significances, making it possible to realize that context and meaning varies across time, culture and audiences, which limit our own capacity to generalize or impose morally-situated framework. Monuments are a distinctive form of commemoration that generate multiple-perspective narratives (we can look at Columbus from a plurality of standpoints) that integrate how memorials have changed over time and draws attention to how they might be improved or integrated into other forms of commemoration – now and in the future (e.g., statues of Columbus should be kept with additive and relational counter-narratives representing the complexity and contradictions embedded in collective representation of the national past).

TEACHING ABOUT CONTESTED MONUMENTS AS NARRATIVE REPRESENTATIONS

A key challenge for young and adult citizens is to learn how to reflect on and engage with mnemonic infrastructures in general, and monuments in particular. As these are typically part of historical culture, people often presuppose a given, implicit meaning associated to them (e.g., the way members of a dominant group have traditionally interpreted them). Yet, monuments' messages are neither fixed nor unique. It is possible to generate multiple narrative representations based on types of questions and purposes. Certain messages can call on revering while others on condemning or appealing to action. As Körber (2018) contends, "in culturally diverse societies, the specific linguistic and artistic modes of expression may not be clear to all students, possibly leading to misunderstandings, but possibly also to identifying alternative readings which are worth considering" (p. 3).

As such, I believe that the role of history education should not be to enhance students' cultural and life practices (see Fig. 1) but to advance their historical understanding through an educational engagement in acts of *de*construction and *re*construction of mnemonic infrastructures of historical culture. Schools are unique places where learners from different backgrounds and experiences come together for the purpose of advanced learning, to move beyond commonsense ideas and narrowly sectarian perspectives defined along cultural, linguistic, or religious lines. This is most particularly important in societies with long, contested memories thus leading

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to antagonistic political relations which, in the end, undermine the possibility of a shared future. Recently, we have seen that these contested memories can quickly degenerate into acts of vandalism and violence.

Part of the problem is that people in general, and youth in particular, are unaware of the different types of perspectives and set of competencies to deal with commemoration. They simply apply prescriptive models supplied to them by family, Church, or culture, and use narrative representations according to their own unconsciousness sense of self. This basic level is often found in school when learners naively apply a model or theory for scholastic activities without thinking about the process or the theory itself. With regard to commemoration, this level (re)presents individuals who intuitively adopt a position on monument controversies without the ability to understand how they think (metacognition) and how others might think and position themselves.

Through the act of deconstruction, history educators can engage students in activities meant to analyze the constructedness of monuments – how they were created and what stories they tell. Using the competencies presented above (see Fig. 2), it becomes possible to appreciate that mnemonic infrastructures are cultural and artistic creations not limited to one "true" meaning or official narrative. For example, students could be presented with a practical case (e.g., statue of Columbus) and encouraged to analyze the monument in question, as well as the associated reactions of different persons, using a set of relevant sources of information on the monument, its creator(s)/sponsor(s), and the people who have expression opinions or taken a position (past and present).[2]

- **Inquiry competence**: Who was Columbus? Why was a monument to Columbus created? By whom? For what purposes (inform, commemorate, mourn, engage, remind, etc.)?
- **Historical thinking competence**: Is Columbus significant to remember? For whom? Under what standards can we judge him and his actions?
- **Orientation competence**: What can I/we learn from this person? Do I/we have an obligation to him and his legacy? How does this monument affect my/our views about the past/future?
- **Narrative competence**: What narratives about Columbus have been told? How have these narratives changed over time? What value judgments do they hold? How can I/we adjudicate between competing narratives of Columbus? On what ground?

Once students have tackled these questions, they can then be invited to take position with regard to the future of the monument: what should we do with the statue of Columbus? (keep it, remove it, explain it, change/enrich it).[3] The reconstruction engages students more directly with

[2]The New York City Mayoral Advisory Commission on City Art, Monuments and Markers was recently confronted with the memorial of Christopher Columbus located at Columbia Circle (NY). After heated public consultations and much deliberation, the Advisory Commission recommended to *keep the monument in place*, with additive measures undertaken to continue the public discourse over the legacy and future of Columbus. The Advisory Commission felt that Columbus represents the complexity and contradictions embedded in American representations of history as a nation.

[3]A comparable activity was undertaking as part of the Begbie Canadian history contest of 2001. Students who volunteered for the contest were presented with a real-life political situation that took place in British Columbia in 2001–2002 and which involved four controversial murals (representing four qualities "necessary for the establishment of a civilization") displayed in the parliament building since the 1930s. Students were presented with the task to write a paragraph supporting either the retention or the removal of the paintings, or suggesting some way to resolve the problem (see Seixas & Clark, 2004).

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the concept of historical agency and with the process of decision-making. This act does so on three related grounds. First, it compels students to understand the original context in which the memorialized person (Columbus) operated so as to better judge his intentions and actions. For Kent den Heyer (2018), this requires students to develop a sense of historical empathy, an understanding of the individual conditions and social situations in which he lived his life in the 1400s (How was it back then? Under what belief system did he operate?). Through historical empathy students are in a better position to adopt a historical perspective so as to explain "past forms of life that were different from ours, and a disposition to recognise the possibility and importance of making them intelligible" (Lee & Shemilt, 2011, p. 48). Second, students need to look at the period and context when the monument was created so as to understand the motives and goals for erecting the memorial. This context is also historical but different from the original one as monuments are often created decades or centuries after the death of the person, and for reasons that are to be understood and justified in perspective (that is, in relation to what was going on at the time of the memorialization). For instance, in the case of Columbus, various statues were erected in North America during the 19th century as a way to combat virulent anti-Catholic and anti-Italian discrimination. But history is always a process of looking at the past retrospectively, from our own times. So, it is not enough for students to understand Columbus in his own sociohistorical context, they also have to make sense of the consequences of his actions and legacy in light of the knowledge, assumptions, and values that shape students' personal judgments about the past. In other words, students are placed in the situation to make a decision about the actual presence of Columbus, as memorialized in the community, knowing about the past and the present, and with an outlook unto the future.

This empowering position should make students realize that our interpretation of the past is not teleologically closed (a sort of "Manifest Destiny") but open to revisions. They can thus decide how Columbus should be remembered. Keith Barton and Linda Levstik (2004) make an interesting distinction between "caring about" and "caring to" (p. 237) that is particularly *à propos*. When students look at the past and find aspects of it useful or significant, it means they care about them. History is never a disinterested encounter with past realities; we study certain people because we care about their lives. But "caring to" is different. For them, the ultimate purpose of school history should be to enable students to "take action in the present" (p. 237). This means that students should learn to *care to do something*, to be willing to make changes in their own ways of thinking (in what ways my ideas have changed as a result of this activity?) and possibly changes in their own community as well (how can I contribute to the debate over Columbus?).

As I have argued elsewhere, any sound and viable solutions to deal with controversial monuments are most likely to emerge from education and democratic dialogue as opposed to political confrontations. A precondition for this dialogue is the realization of one's own sense of positionality. As long as people are unable to understand their standpoint and the intentions of others, they are unlikely to engage in an informed dialogue (Barber, 1994). Self-awareness and structural change in people's thinking are not intuitive; they are to be found in education. Monuments are mnemonic infrastructures of historical culture. They play important history, commemorative, identity, and artistic functions. They belong to the people and should serve the people in an inclusive way. Thus, it is important to use education to develop an approach that is open to inclusive understandings of the past. Körber (2018) refers to this as "mutuality," that is, the ability to learn from the past as well as from other members of society and their relations to

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the past (p. 3). In practical terms, this approach could mean for Körber a re-evaluation of current controversial monuments in non-exclusive, binary positions (retain vs. remove). Starting from the premise that a monument is complex and can tell multiple stories, students could envision projects that do not express "heroic" readings but explicitly mark a distance from it through a multi-layered approach to Columbus – by adding perspectives or counter-memorial narratives to it. "Genetic thinking, as Körber (2018) argues, "would not be content to just remove the heroism (especially that of the wrong side) with the effect to have no memory at all, but would call for a memorialization which specifically marks the change between that time and ours today." In support of this view, he offers an interesting case of a restructured World War I memorial in Hamburg-Altona as an example of counter-memorial. A similar approach was recently proposed by the *Commission permanente de l'art public* in Montréal (Montreal public art commission) in light of a public forum on commemoration held in 2019 (Culture Montréal, 2020).

But it could well be that an approach as described above is not feasible for the specific situation under investigation. As with the case of Confederate leader Stonewall Jackson, in Richmond (Virginia), the dominant statue representing Jackson standing on a horse leading the Confederate troops was deemed too offensive in the community for any successful peacebuilding. "When the legacy of the cause of the Confederacy remains in the United States to this day and is evidenced by the social and economic disparities between African Americans and Americans of European descent," claims Thomas Szayna (2020), "retaining of monuments of figures who fought to keep African Americans subjugated is divisive and impedes progress in race relations."

So in the end, students must be in a position to consider all the available options through a robust historical analysis and make an informed decision as to which one would better respond to the distinctive needs of the community. As Seixas and Clark (2004) rightly conclude:

> Teachers can lead young people to engage knowledgeably in debates about continuities and critical breaks in moral sensibilities over time (perhaps even more knowledgeably than some of the politicians who initiate them). And it is participation in these ongoing public debates—not inheritance of mythic, foundational narratives—that nurtures the "postconventional identities" that can sort through the moral dilemmas of our time. (p. 168)

CONCLUSION

The challenges that we face in our 21st century pluralistic societies, characterized by rapid and sweeping changes destabilizing our identities and our temporal references, give rise to intensified interest in uses of the past all around the world. They make people look for ways of making sense of complexity by generating straightforward solutions and associated stories to orient their practical life. Public debates over monuments representing contested collective histories highlight the importance of the past in people's lives. They play a significant role for many citizens, young and adult, in providing symbols and meaning in their fast-changing world. For some, monuments offer useful examples of courage and leadership. For others, they represent outdated relics of the past, in rupture with today's moral values.

Current debates have serious educational and policy implications. On the one hand, this article suggests that educators should pay far more attention to the historical culture that engulfs students' historical experiences. Stories and debates over mnemonic infrastructures offer prime

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examples of the contested memories that circulate in public sphere and contribute – often unconsciously – to our engagement with the past. As Sam Wineburg (2000) has argued, historical consciousness does not "emanate like neat concentric circles from the individual to the family to the nation to the world" (p. 310). Stories learned at home do not necessarily support the ones expressed in school or in the wider community. If we want, as educators, to understand and expand students' historical ideas, we need to (re)examine how young citizens become historical in today's societies. Engaging them in debates over mnemonic infrastructures can help them construct more "powerful knowledge" valuable to orient their practical life (Chapman, 2021). Powerful knowledge may be a contested concept, but I think we become more powerful persons when we are able to engage critically different forms of knowledge (disciplinary, practical, and cultural) with the goal of expanding our historical consciousness (see Fig. 1).[4]

On the other hand, I believe this article offers useful guidance for policy-makers. All around the world, groups of active citizens have demonstrated – sometimes violently – their support for or their rejection of certain controversial memorials erected in various public spaces (parks, heritage sites, city halls, legislative assemblies, etc). In many cases, politicians and public administrations have been taken by surprise and have reacted with unsatisfactory answers which have only reinforced sectarian, partisan confrontations. As many nations continue to grapple with the legacy of racism, colonialism, prejudice, and inequality, I believe that appropriate public policies around commemoration need to be considered more seriously by cities, provinces, and states. Public policies would take these societal issues back to the social spheres, not the court, and offer societal guidelines for action as opposed to court rulings perceived as a "green light for mobs." As the recent New York City Mayoral Advisory Commission on City Art, Monuments and Markers (2018) stated in its report, "now is a time… to take bold action, to identify and contend with racial and other intersectional forms of injustice in its monuments, and to make strides toward truth-telling toward the eventual goal of reconciliation" (p. 9). Assuming their leadership role, politicians and public administrations should not only deal with controversial

[4]The notion of "powerful knowledge" presented here relates to but is somewhat different from that of Chapman (2020) who claims that such knowledge is (1) specialized (produced in distinctive disciplinary epistemic communities) and (2) objective and reliable (its objectivity arising from peer review and other procedural controls). Powerful knowledge, in his view, is supposed to offer "better claims to truth" and replace earlier forms of common sense knowledge. Based on my earlier matrix of historical consciousness, I conceptualize powerful knowledge as the ability to *engage* different forms of knowledge (practical, cultural, disciplinary) so as to (1) understand the powers and limits of each form and (2) change our personal structural form of knowledge by which we deal and utilize different forms of knowledge in life. The difference is that I do not presuppose that disciplinary knowledge is inherently more powerful in generating satisfactory answers that will enable students "to act in and on the world with confidence" (Chapman, 2020, p. 10). Studies conducted in various cultural contexts have revealed that learners, young and adult, do not necessarily replace earlier forms of knowledge with disciplinary knowledge when exposed to, and that disciplinary history knowledge has been rather limited in its capacity to successfully answer and offer "powerful" alternatives to contested historical memories of the past, including mnemonic infrastructures of historical culture. As Barton and McCully (2012) rightly conclude from their empirical work with students in Northern Ireland, "although teachers are comfortable with an analytic approach to history that encourages detachment from thoughts and feelings that might engender passionate responses, students may relegate this kind of history solely to the context of school-based academic study. It may do little, that is, to challenge their affective attachment to particular interpretations of the past—particularly when links to contemporary community identifications go unexamined. As a result, students may be either trapped into polarized ways of thinking or forced to abandon community attachments in pursuit of other ways of making sense of the past" (p. 400).

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monuments but also be proactive in enriching the current memorial representations of marginalized groups and overlooked histories. They should finally create community initiatives and public spaces for ongoing, participatory education, inclusive of multiple collective narratives and identities that make up our nations.

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