LEARN HISTORICAL WRITING WHILE DISCOVERING THE LIFE OF ONE OF ITS GRANDPARENTS: A CASE STUDY IN A QUEBEC PRIMARY SCHOOL

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(Abstract)

This article focuses on the analysis of narratives written by elementary school students in one Quebec school. After conducting an interview with one of their grandparents, students were asked to write a narrative about the person's life. These narratives were analyzed to highlight the traces of students' historical writing skills. In this article, we present the theoretical framework that guides our research, with attention to the contributions of oral history and the distinctions between historical writing and argumentative writing. We then describe the process of the project and the results, and address the potential benefits of this approach for history learning and motivation.

Keywords: *multi-age class in Quebec; historical writing; oral testimony; historical time; motivation*;

ÎNVĂȚAREA SCRIERII ISTORICE DE CĂTRE ELEVI ÎN TIMP CE DECOPERĂ VIAȚA UNUIA DINTRE BUNICII LOR: UN STUDIU DE CAZ ÎNTR-O ȘCOALĂ PRIMARĂ DIN QUEBEC
(Rezumat)

Acest articol are ca subiet analiza textelor scrise de către elevii claselor a IV-a, a V-a și a VI-a dintr-o școală generală din Quebec. După ce au realizat un interviu cu unul dintre bunicii lor, aceştia au fost îndrumaţi să scrie povestea vieţii lui. Aceste

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texte au fost analizate pentru a evidenţia competenţele lor în ceea ce priveşte scrierea istorică. În prima parte prezentăm cadrul teoretic care ne ghidează cercetarea şi care precizează contribuţia istoriei orale precum şi distincţiile dintre scrierea istorică şi scrierea argumentativă. În cea de-a doua parte, descriem desfăşurarea proiectului şi principalele rezultate, în ceea ce priveşte însuţirea de cunoştiinţe istorice, dar şi motivaţia elevilor pe parcursul proiectului.

Cuvinte cheie: *şcoala primară în Quebec; scriere istorică; mărturie orală; timp istoric; motivaţie;*

Introduction

From a young age, children are exposed to dominant historical narratives that shape their perception(s) of the past. These narrative constructions are communicated in various ways within the community, including in schools, museums, films, and books[1]. These narratives influence children's historical consciousness, which can be understood as a way in which young individuals envision the future in light of the past[2]. If children do not see themselves reflected in the historical narrative, they may learn from it but not 'believe' in it, thereby developing resistance to the dominant narrative.[3] Alternatively, they may struggle to perceive themselves as part of a larger community beyond their social group[4], which can lead to self-exclusion from the 'collective we.' That is why it is important in schools to expose students to a plurality of narratives – the stories of the victors *and* the defeated, the narratives of colonizers *and* the colonized, tales of minorities *and* immigrants, and so on – while incorporating as much nuance as possible within these categories.

Among this set of narratives, it sometimes happens that a new narrative – one that was initially situated peripheral to a dominant narrative – comes to assert itself in the public space and, in turn, becomes a dominant narrative[5]. This new narrative may overshadow other aspects of the past or silence other historical actors[6]. These new narratives, such as the narrative(s) of First Nations residential schools in Canada, have the power to shape collective memory through mechanisms such as memory and imposed forgetting.[7] This reconfiguration of memory, sometimes substituting one narrative of the past for another,[8] often leads to claims and tensions among different social groups[9].

Faced with the complexity of competing narratives[10] that make more or less sense depending on the audience they address, we created a project called *Let's Share*

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[1] Wallace-Casey, 2016: 19.
[2] See Koselleck, 1990.
[3] See Wertsch, 2000 and 2002.
[4] See Seixas, 1997.
[5] See Habermas, 1988.
[6] See Stan, 2010: 304.
[7] See Ricœur, 2000.
[8] See Jewsiewicki & Létourneau, 1996.
[9] See Todorov, 1995.
[10] See Létourneau, 1996.

History for use with fourth, fifth, and sixth-grade students. We aimed to start from the students, to bring out their narratives, give them a voice, and present aspects of a 'history from below'[11] through the eyes of those who lived it or heard it from their relatives, thereby shedding light on a precious family treasure. This project guided students to practice oral history and subsequently construct narratives based on the information they collected. Our objectives were to document the implementation of this didactic device, along with certain learning outcomes for the students, their motivations in the project, and their interest in history as explored through their family stories. In the following article, we present the theoretical framework guiding our research and describe the experiences of participating students.

1. Oral History and Its Contributions in History Class

Before presenting the content of the Let's Share History project and the results of our analysis, we begin by defining the concepts of oral history and historical writing.

Oral history is based on the memories and experiences of eyewitnesses or individuals who were contemporary to the events[12]. It is defined by the fact that the investigator, whether it be a historian or a student, generates an oral testimony, which is then processed-analyzed and compared to other sources. From a historiographical perspective, oral history offers many contributions. Firstly, it allows historians to address a scarcity of documents while waiting for archives to become accessible, following existing accessibility policies. Furthermore, oral testimonies often provide access to information not available in other sources or give a voice to historical actors neglected by traditional sources[13]. They are particularly useful in understanding the less documented aspects of social or cultural history.

In schools, the practice of oral history serves as a "cognitive lever"[14]. It helps develop students' intellectual skills, particularly in the critical analysis of testimonies[15] and the understanding of historical time[16]. On a critical level, using oral sources prompts questions regarding the relationship between testimonies and the historical events they recount, as well as between the witness and the historian[17]. Indeed, the testimony has the particularity "of being situated both in the past (the time of the lived experience) and in the present (the time of the recounted experience) and it blends facts and representations"[18]. To assess the testimonial value of oral sources, as with any other source, students must consider the author's identity and intentions, the audience of the testimony, and the accuracy of the testimony, and then compare it with their knowledge and other documents[19]. Once this critical assessment has been

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[11] See Thompson, 1966.
[12] Capiţă, Capiţă & Stămătescu, 2006: 30.
[13] See Fink, 2014a and Heimberg, 2004.
[14] Fink, 2014b:198
[15] See Fink, 2014c and Jadoulle, 2015.
[16] See Jadoulle, 2015.
[17] See Moisan, 2014.
[18] Fink, 2014b:199.
[19] See Jadoulle,2015.

completed, students can then proceed to "narrate the past"[20] and, in doing so, become aware of "the subjective, constructed, and incomplete nature of all knowledge of the past."[21]

2. Writing Like a Historian: Argumentative and/or Narrative Writing

Historical writing is highly valued by many educators because it is considered a form of argumentative writing that engages a substantial part of historical thinking[22]. The definition of historical writing takes the form of a series of dimensions and we present a list based on syntheses proposed by several scholars[23]. The dimensions described by these scholars include situating in time, placing in a historical context (contextualization), assessing the credibility of sources (sourcing), highlighting diachronies and synchronies, measuring duration, periodizing, comparing statements, evidence (corroboration), identifying causes and consequences and weighing them, establishing historical relevance, identifying changes and continuities, considering the perspectives of actors (historical empathy), contemplating counter-evidence, refutations, and filling the 'gaps' in knowledge through 'imagining.'

These dimensions form a profile for historical writing that is argumentative as it is developed from a multiplicity of sources, often contradictory, and aims to support a reasoned response to a research question. The narratives produced by students in the Let's Share History project only partially aligned with this definition of historical writing. Indeed, each student's narrative was based on a single testimony and its purpose was not to answer a research question but rather to develop a narrative – the story of their grandparent's life.

When narration aligns poorly with the definition of historical writing, as described in the various works on historical writing, it still corresponds to one of the school (text) historical genres highlighted by British linguist Caroline Coffin. Coffin's study focused on a large corpus of school texts produced by students and collected in the United Kingdom, the United States and Australia, allowed her to identify the existence of three types of school historical genres that differed based on their nature and the learners' ages (see Table 1). She found various argumentative genres that aligned with those valued in studies on historical writing. These genres are typically practiced at the end of secondary education (16-18 years old), corresponding to college level in Quebec, and to the end of high school in Romania. However, at the primary school level, students are usually taught to write texts in narrative genres. Thus, between the ages of 11 and 13, students write historical narratives centered on a character, which is a biographical genre similar to what the students involved in the Let's Share History project were encouraged to explore.

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[20] Fink, 2014b:199
[21] Fink, 2014b:199
[22] See Seixas, 1996 and 2000; Seixas & Morton, 2012; Seixas & Peck, 2004; Wineburg, 2001.
[23] De La Paz, 2012; Jadoulle, 2015; Capita & Capita, 2011; Monte-Sano & De La Paz, 2012.

Table no. 1: Typologies of School Historical Genres

NARRATIVE GENRES: 11-13 YEARS	EXPLANATORY GENRES: 16 YEARS	ARGUMENTATIVE GENRES: 16-18 YEARS
Autobiographical narrative	Explanation by causes	Presentation of a point of view
Biographical narrative	Explanation by consequences	Discussion of multiple points of view
Historical narrative		Argumentation against a point of view
Historical report		

(Coffin, 2006)

When comparing the main characteristics of these types of narrative texts with the dimensions of historical writing, it is evident that some of the dimensions of argumentative texts are already at play in the narrative writing produced by primary school students. This includes what Coffin referred to as temporal and causal categories[24]. There are four temporal categories: situating in time, highlighting diachronies and synchronies, measuring duration, and periodizing. As for causal categories, these involve identifying causes and consequences, distinguishing between cause and condition, weighing the importance of causes, and establishing historical relevance.

Figure no. 1: Comparative Analysis of Narrative Historical Writings of the 'Historical Narrative' Type and Argumentative Historical Writings

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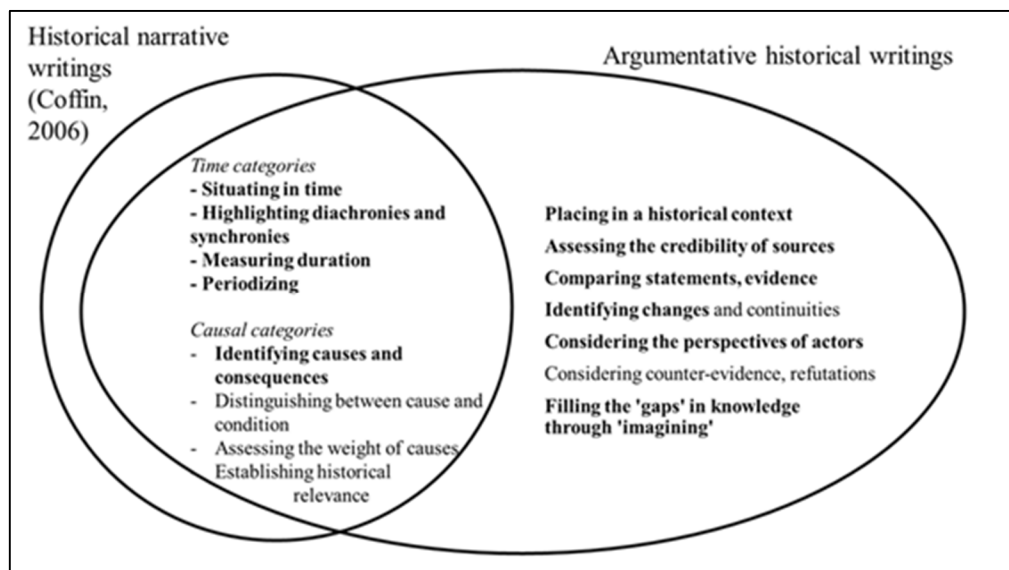
[24] See Coffin, 2006.

3. The Let's Share History Project

The goal of the Let's Share History project was to encourage students to share stories between generations, and thus to connect children with their grandparents. Between September 2020 and June 2021, students in a multi-age classroom at a Montessori School in Quebec researched and wrote the life story of one of their grandparents. Twenty-six students participated in the project, including 12 fourth-grade students (seven girls and five boys), six fifth-grade students (five girls and one boy), and eight sixth-grade students (four girls and four boys). The teacher was 51 years old and had 29 years of teaching experience.

3.1. The Pedagogical Approach

The students' preparation involved an impressive didactic plan conducted by a research assistant, consisting of 21 sessions that lasted 60 minutes each. The preparation included guiding the students to conduct interviews (10 hours), conducting the interviews with a grandparent (outside the classroom, with an average duration of 15 minutes each), preparing for narrative writing (5 hours), writing the narrative (5 hours), and presenting the collective production (1 hour).

After preparing their questions, each student had a phone or online conversation[25] with one of their grandparents and recorded the dialogue. Here are some examples of the questions developed by the students: "Did you have a good childhood? Why?" (Student 4); "What is your fondest memory from your youth?" (Student 8); "How many times did you move? Why?" (Student 23); "Did you have a pet? Do you have one now?" (Student 11); "What did you like most about your childhood home?" (Student 2); "How many children did you have? What do they do now?" (Student 13); "What were the games of your childhood? And the holiday traditions?" (Student 25); "What was your parents' occupation?" (Student 26); and "What was your favorite job and why?" (Student 22).

Two university students from our research team produced verbatim transcriptions of the recorded conversations, which were then provided to the Grades 4-6 students. The students used the transcripts to place any events they deemed significant on a timeline and to structure their narratives accordingly (Image 1). To develop a better grasp of the narrative, the students divided their grandparent's life into three phases: childhood, adulthood, and retirement. Subsequently, some students wrote a third-person historical narrative, while others placed themselves in their grandparent's shoes and wrote from a first-person point of view. The students shared these narratives with their classmates, which allowed the class to identify recurring elements across different stories and thus reconstruct the context in which their grandparents lived. Assisted by their teacher, the students compiled a book titled *Fragments of Life* that contained all of their narratives. The online launch of this book brought together children, parents, and grandparents, and the student authors spoke about their experiences.

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[25] This method was implemented due to the confinement context associated with the COVID-19 pandemic.

Image no. 1: A timeline constructed by a student
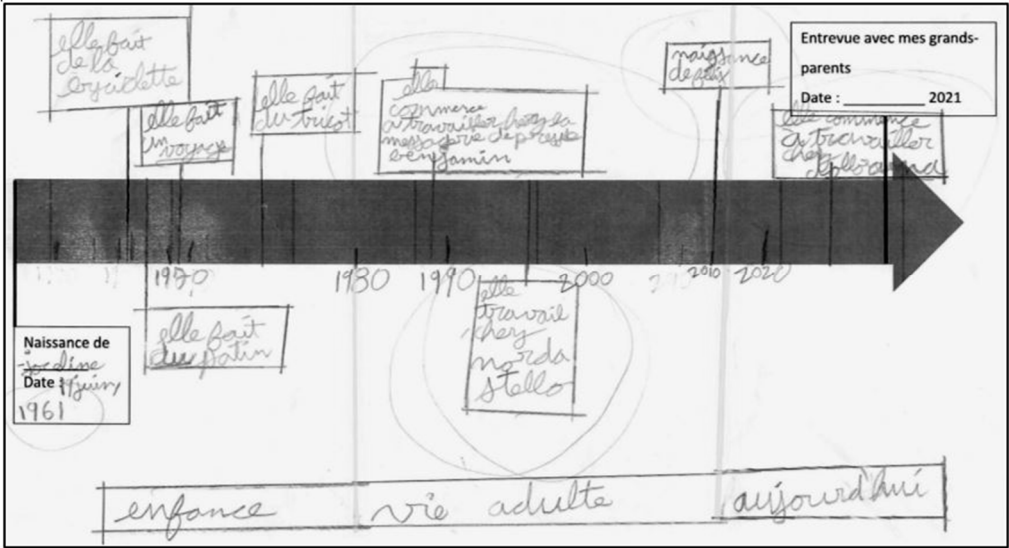
3.2. Data Collection

After the interview, a whole class discussion took place to gather information regarding the students' motivations and the interview process. Subsequently, during the writing phase, a second discussion with the students occurred to learn about the strategies they employed when writing the life narrative. These discussions were audio recorded by the researchers. At the end of the project, the research team conducted an interview with each student in the project as well as the teacher, which helped us to interpret the data we had collected. Drawing on these insights, we present the main learnings achieved by the students in the following section.

4. Results

The analysis of the 26 narratives produced by the students was conducted using N-Vivo software. Our analysis relied on the temporal categories highlighted by Coffin.[26] We also checked for traces of the first causal category and explored whether it would be possible to detect traces of certain categories (highlighted in bold in Figure 1) related to historical writing, which is typically taught and mastered towards the end of secondary school.

4.1 Analysis of Life Narratives: Writing Like a Historian

Table 1 compiles the number of narratives that exhibited occurrences of various skills involved in the writing of narrative or argumentative historical texts.

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[26] Coffin, 2006.

Table 1. Number of narratives and occurrences of skills involved in the writing of narrative or argumentative historical texts

Narrative Writing			Argumentative Writing		
Skills	Number of narratives	Number of occurrences	Skills	Number of narratives	Number of occurrences
Situating in time	26	110	Providing historical context	7	14
Highlighting diachronies	26	136	Evaluating Source credibility	0	0
Highlighting synchronies	8	8	Confronting evidence	0	0
Measuring duration	18	52	Identifying changes	26	115
Periodizing	16	34	Considering actor perspectives	0	0
Identifying causes and consequences	18	30	Imagining	0	0

Not surprisingly, given that the instruction provided to the students involved narrative and not argumentative writing, we found no traces of four of the central skills included in argumentative historical writing – that is, weighing source credibility, confronting evidence, considering actor perspectives, and imagining. However, in seven different narratives, we found 14 occurrences of the skill of providing historical context. For example, one student wrote, "At the time, meaning the 1940s-1950s, women often had a child the year following their marriage. Birth control was prohibited[27]" (Student 14).

Further, across the 26 narratives, we found 115 occurrences of the skill associated with identifying changes. For example, using the first-person point of view to place themselves in the shoes of the person whose life narrative they were writing, a student wrote, "June 1968 was a very important date for me. I left the brotherhood community at the age of 32" (Student 12).

As for the typical categories of narrative genres, traces of these skills were often found in our analysis of the students' narratives. The skills of situating in time and highlighting diachronies were very present, with 110 and 136 occurrences respectively distributed across the 26 narratives. For instance, a student who put themselves in their grandfather's shoes situated a key date in his life, namely his election to the National Assembly: "So I was elected deputy for the Bloc Québécois in 1993" (Student 12). Another student highlighted a diachrony by mentioning that their grandmother "Mary Claire was a cashier in a grocery store. Then she changed to become a teacher for 3rd and 4th grade" (Student 13). The third skill selected for

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[27] Participants' quotes have been translated from French to English.

narrative historical writing (highlighting synchronies) was the least present in the students' writing, with only 8 occurrences in 8 narratives. In one instance of highlighting synchronies, a student specified that "Daniel was born the year Léonid and Louise got married" (Student 6).

When analysing the ability to measure duration, we found 52 occurrences distributed across 18 of the 26 narratives. For example, one student specified that their grandmother "started school at four. She finished Catholic school at the age of fourteen. So, she went to this school for ten years" (Student 11). Finally, the skills of periodizing and identifying causes and consequences were identified with 34 and 30 occurrences respectively, in 16 and 18 narratives. For instance, a student who noted that "during her childhood, Catherine always wanted to become a teacher" (Student 14) used the periodization of childhood to adulthood to retirement that was taught to students through the creation of timelines. Another student demonstrated their mastery of the ability to articulate causes and consequences in writing: "One day, her house was bombed by the Americans because they thought there was a tank behind the house, so they bombed it. Everyone was injured except her. They had to change houses" (Student 11).

4.2. Other History Learning Outcomes

Many students reported that writing was the highlight of the project. Whether to preserve a memory of their grandparent, to share their story with others, or to pay tribute to them, each student had their own writing intention. Some students felt "honored" to write their grandparent's story, while others felt guided in the writing process. One student observed, "I felt like she [my grandmother] was beside me, telling me everything that needed to be done, all the details. ... I was writing everything she had told me" (Student 21). Some students even claimed that they put in more effort to please their grandparent, which inspired them to take the time to reread and correct their work more often than they might otherwise.

Although the students were not motivated by a research question focusing on a specific historical fact or period defined before the interview, according to the teacher who observed them, the students developed learning directly related to history. The children's narratives indicated that they perceived changes related to women's voting rights, labor movements and the consolidation of unions, family planning, and so on.

To better understand their grandparents' stories, some students conducted one or more additional research activities, including consulting the history books available in the classroom library. Our interview with the teacher highlighted the following stories:

> "I've seen several students look into what happened in the last 30-40 years. For example, a student whose father was a deputy for the Bloc Québécois went to find out what the Bloc Québécois was." (Teacher)
>
> "There was a strike on the North Shore, not a major strike, but [a student] went to do some research to find details in the history books." (Teacher)
>
> "We have a student whose grandmother is German. So in her interview, the grandmother said she went to see the remaining part of the Berlin Wall before it was completely eliminated. Well, the student wondered, what was the Berlin Wall

and why was there a wall there? So, we looked in the history books to learn more about the collapse [of regimes politically affiliated with the USSR]." (Teacher)

For one student, the stories uncovered in ir grandparent interview helped connect family history with general history: "I didn't know that when she was little, there was a war.... The Americans came to liberate the French city where she lived" (Student 11).

Beyond these learnings related to specific historical knowledge, the students in the Let's Share History project also developed strategies for collecting and structuring information.[28] These strategies were part of developing cross-cutting skills but also aligned with the practice of history as a mode of thought. Indeed, not only were these collection strategies developed on objects of a historical nature – testimonies about the past – but the predominant use of the timeline made historical temporality a tool for intelligibility in data processing.

Indeed, as described earlier, students had to create a timeline and select the information to be included based on the verbatim transcriptions of the interviews conducted with their grandparent. They had to decide when their grandparent's childhood ended, when their adult life began, and when to talk about 'retirement' or 'today,' to use the terms some students applied to name this last part of the timeline. This series of decisions pertained to situating in time and periodization, thus reflecting the work historians do through the intellectual category of time.[29] This category was, therefore, used by the students as a tool for organizing data. Seven out of 26 students explicitly testified to this:

"I went by date and different moments" (Student 11);

"When I learned the method of how to make the timeline, it was easy to place [the facts] in relation to others" (Student 19);

"I did calculations to put dates before and after other dates" (Student 3);

"I calculated the dates according to her date of birth" (student 12);

"I wrote dates on top of the text and underlined [them] to locate myself" (Student 17);

"I always used the verbatim [transcripts], and for the dates, I had them on the timeline" (Student 19); and

"I knew that she [grandma] separated when mom was 12; I was able to calculate, with the date of birth [of my mother] when her separation occurred" (Student 21).

The development of skills related to time was also evident through some parts of the verbatim transcripts, which indicated some students' attempts to get as close as possible to their witness, to adopt their perspective, and thus to demonstrate historical empathy:

"Conducting the interview and writing the story was like being with her throughout her life when I was writing" (Student 2);

"I felt close to my grandmother" (Student 6);

"It's like you take the place of your grandparents and experience everything they experienced" (Student 12).

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[28] See Martineau, 2010.
[29] See Heimberg, 2002 and Jadoulle, 2015.

Even more fundamentally, this experience provided students with the opportunity to develop their historical consciousness, defined as the awareness of being an active subject in history and situated on a past-present-future continuum[30]. According to the teacher, "for some, there was the realization that grandpa has already been young and has experienced things that I am experiencing now;" "they are making the connection between the past and the present;" and "they have developed a better representation of time: there was the past, the now, the future, and an end". The teacher observed that this realization of 'an end' sometimes elicited an emotional response: "it was emotional during the writing process;" "for three students, there was the realization that life is fragile and that grandpa or grandma will not be here for much longer." In organizing the structure of their narrative, the students also realized that the verbatim transcripts were not always sufficient to present certain aspects of their grandparents' lives: "The further it went back in time, the less information I had" (Student 13); "I started three times, I [had to] gather more information, and I didn't have enough details" (Student 26).

Some students then took the initiative to contact their grandparent again ("at first, I didn't have enough information, not even in the transcript, so I called my grandmother" [Student 15]). Sometimes students attempted to make hypotheses themselves, for example, regarding missing dates: "I calculated the dates based on her marriage date" (Student 23). This iterative process of documentation and writing resembles the work of a historian and its constant back-and-forth between heuristic exploration and writing. The analysis of the transcriptions also provided an opportunity for students to develop their critical thinking skills. Some students described their awareness that their grandparents did not fully answer their questions: "I think she kept the relationship with my grandfather to herself" (Student 16).

Regarding these findings, it appears that students shared a conception of their budding historian work as requiring great chronological accuracy, aiming to assign a date or a specific moment in the course of time, to each event or anecdote recounted. On the other hand, their grandparent did not always attach great importance to the temporal context during the interview but rather to the feelings and emotions associated with their experiences.

When we examined the students' writings, we noticed that some students were concerned with providing context for their statements or defining certain words. These elements of contextualization or definition may reflect prior knowledge or additional research they conducted, although we cannot definitively state which. Such information appeared in a few of the narratives:

> "At the time, they used to hit themselves with rulers or teachers made them sit in corners of the class for punishment" (Student 4).
> "They met at a youth funeral, which is when there's a wedding" (Student 6).
> "My father was illiterate, meaning he couldn't read" (Student 12).
> "The referendum is a vote by the population for Quebec to become a country" (Student 13).

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[30] See Levstik et Barton, 2011.

"Catherine still had studies and didn't want to stop them. Birth control was forbidden. In the years of Catherine's marriage, that is, in the 1960s, that's when family planning started. Women had the right to wait before having children" (Student 14).

Overall, according to the teacher, this experience "made the grandparents' history more concrete" and led the students to write a text "that they knew would be read by their family". It is possible that the longevity of their text, the fact that it was not just a school exercise but might become a reference for their family loaded with meaning, motivated the students to put intense effort into researching, writing, and rewriting aspects of their grandparents' lives.

4.3 Conducting an Interview and Writing a Grandparent's Story: Sources of Motivation

Throughout the project, which involved about ten activities both before and after the interview, almost all the students commented that what they liked the most was conducting the interview and writing their grandparent's story. While some students appreciated the relational and human aspect of the interview ("I could ask her questions, one-on-one with grandma;" "it was a moment to see her again" [student 23]), for others, the interview sparked their interest because it allowed them to discover more details about their family history. One student observed, "it made me want to interview every person in my family and write their story in the same book" (Student 15). The interview even became, in the eyes of at least one student, a tool for understanding the world: "I want to interview parents, friends, and teachers". Another student agreed and expressed their goal of gaining knowledge: "I wanted to see what childhood was like at that time" (Student 9).

For some students, motivation was extrinsically driven.[31] For example, one student noted their desire to please the person being interviewed: "I care about her, and I wanted her to know" (Student 24). Regarding writing, extrinsic motivation is more frequently emphasized:

"[I wrote] for my family" (Student 8);
"[I wanted] to bring it [my story] as a gift to her" (Student 18);
"For my grandmother, I was happy to make a surprise for her, for her birthday, by giving her a book with her story" (Student 20);
"For my grandfather" (Student 22);
"I wrote especially for my grandmother, she has cancer, she started radiotherapy, [to give her] a little surprise; I wrote for myself too, when she leaves us, I will still have a memory" (Student 24);
"For her memory, for my memory, for my pleasure of writing" (Student 26).

Other students invested their writing with intrinsic value. One student expressed her desire to give a voice to social groups who are rarely heard from in the public space: "I wrote it for everyone. Because I want everyone to know that there are people, old people, who are more discreet, but who have lived a beautiful life"

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[31] See Vallerand & Grouzet, 2001.

(Student 10). Some students expressed the pleasure they derived from writing ("I felt free, I could write what I want" [Student 5]), especially in a context in which the terms of writing were not very restrictive: "We didn't have to be everyone at the same, it made it more interesting [to write]" (Student 6).

Overall, students highlighted the project's contribution to understanding others and themselves: "A student from Montreal who participates in this project, and then his book arrives here, and we read the story of his grandfather, he could transport us into his universe, discover the reality of someone we don't know" (Student 2); "[during the project], we discover ourselves" (Student 14). One student emphasized that the project made him deeply aware of realities different from his own: "I know these other stories so well, I feel like I know these grandparents, even though I've never seen them, as if they were my own grandparents or close friends" (Student 7).

These students' statements are supported by the data obtained through the written questionnaire. Three students (out of a total of 23 responses, or 14%) mentioned that the "strength" of their interview rested in the fact that they were "interested," and seven students said they were "attentive" (30%). In response to the question, "What did you like most about your interview?" for which 26 responses were collected, 14 students (54%) indicated that they most enjoyed hearing their grandparents' responses and learning more about them. Some mentioned learnings without specifically identifying them (five responses, or 19%: "the fact that I learned new things"), while others chose a specific moment in their grandparents' lives that left an impression on them (three responses, or 11.5%):

> "I liked it more when he told me how he met grandma" (Student 6);
> "I liked knowing how things went at the seminary" (Student 11);
> "I liked the time when she went in a cart during the war with hot potatoes in her pockets" (Student 16).

Finally, a few students appreciated the relational aspect of the interviews (three responses, or 11.5%): "being able to see my grandmother during COVID;" "rebuilding ties with my grandmother;" "talking to her." Only one student (4%) mentioned the personal enjoyment it brought: "it was new and fun." These findings aligned with several of our observations as researchers about the students' writings, particularly regarding the potential of oral sources to develop critical thinking and a sense of historical time,[32] as well as the opportunity they provided for students to empathetically engage with history and connect the present with the past.[33] Finally, just as oral history allows the voices of the voiceless to be heard, its practice in the classroom linked the broader historical narrative with the personal stories of students' grandparents. One limitation of our sample is that we do not know the extent to which students' motivation might be different had they not had a familial grandparent to interview for the project (e.g., if they then had to interview a family friend instead).

The data we collected also indicated that, in terms of motivation or interest in history, the experience of gathering stories through interviews holds significant

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[32] See Fink, 2014b and 2014c; Heimberg, 2004; Jadoulle, 2015 and Moisan, 2014.
[33] See Fink, 2014b.

potential, especially in connection with the emotional dimension[34] that strongly characterizes the students' interactions with their grandparents.

Conclusion

The implementation of the didactic approach in the Let's Share History project successfully introduced primary school students to the practices of oral and written history. Using tools such as interviews with grandparents, timelines, and text plans, this approach not only strengthened the relationships between children and grandparents but also served as a motivational lever for learning history and narrative composition.

This case study provides evidence of the historical writing skills that students can develop when given the opportunity to narrate the past in their own words, rather than relying solely on teachers or textbooks. While acknowledging the potential influence of parental involvement in the writing process and the limited generalizability of the findings due to the specific context of a Montessori multi-aged classroom in Quebec, this study highlights the students' mastery of various narrative and argumentative historical writing skills. One limitation of our sample is that we do not know the extent to which students' motivation might be different had they not had a familial grandparent to interview for the project (e.g., if they then had to interview a family friend instead).

To further validate these results, future research should employ a more controlled methodology in classrooms to better represent the sociocultural diversity of primary education in Quebec. Additionally, a refined version of the approach could be implemented over a shorter timeframe, aligning with the study of specific historical periods outlined in the Quebec history curriculum, such as Quebec society around 1980. This period remains accessible within the oral testimonies of the students' grandparents.

We believe that a project such as Let's Share History values the potential of oral history as an effective and engaging method for teaching history in schools. By integrating personal narratives into the study of history, educators can enhance students' understanding of the past while fostering valuable skills and a deeper appreciation for the stories that shape their families and communities.

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[34] See Heimberg, 2004 and Moisan, 2014.

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