Introduction to Educational Units Developed for the STONES Project[[1]](#footnote-0)

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The educational material developed for the STONES project, in many respects, aims to provide instructional models for social studies and history teachers interested in cultivating in their students dispositions empowering them to examine their social world critically and conscientiously. The notion of models is crucial, as these units will inevitably be modified by each instructor to the particular needs of the classroom context. These educational materials stress active engagement with social history research and exploration of primary sources in order to provide students with opportunities to concentrate more on developing habits of mind held by historians than on rote memorization of facts or figures from the past.

There are six historical habits of mind treated in the units. These correspond to the Historical Thinking Benchmarks identified and developed by Centre for the Study of Historical Consciousness, the Historica Foundation, and supported by the Canadian Council on Learning. Together, they form a framework for thinking about social studies and history representing a conceptual orientation to the subjects that regards critical thinking about the past as a more important aim than the memorization of historical content. Students can be introduced to each benchmark sequentially, or concurrently, but what these units emphasize is the necessity of scaffolding student understanding through a variety of activities ranging in development from guided activity to independent practice.

The STONES project provides an as yet unexplored avenue for students to focus their newly acquired skills. When students are comfortable with the concepts of historical significance, primary sources, cause and consequences, continuity and change, historical perspectives and moral dimensions of history they can utilize all of them to understand and analyze information about our past and present. Each benchmark is explored in each unit of lessons provided in this project.

Each Community provided in STONES is based on the city of Kingston circa 1870-1990) and is matched up to a specific Benchmark. These can be alternated by choice.

1. Black Community – Historical Significance
2. Chinese Community – Primary Sources
3. Prisoner Population – Cause and Consequence
4. Francophone Community – Continuity and Change
5. Jewish Community – Historical Perspectives
6. GLBTQ – Moral Dimensions

The lessons are acquired and adapted from various sources but mainly from the Archives of Ontario website as well as the Benchmarks of History website.[[2]](#footnote-1) Each unit of study demonstrates links to the public school curriculum of the province of Ontario. There is the potential for many more links to the formal curriculum to be forged by teachers if the social studies and history lessons are integrated with other subjects, including language arts, French, and Geography, and adapted to suit the culture of particular classrooms and schools.

The culminating task identified in these educational units is primarily concerned with engaging students actively in historical research of their own communities. Further, it aims at relating classroom study to the realities of contemporary and past social life in the students’ communities. School life can thus be integrated with life outside the classroom through conference, discussion, debate, and ongoing research on social history. The historical habits of mind cultivated and practiced through the engagement with the benchmarks for historical thinking identified in these educational units will be applied to life in Canada, making explicit the connections between the study of history and such concepts as heritage, collective memory, citizenship, ethnicity, nationhood, and community.

This last emphasis takes up the call issued by Rosa Bruno-Jofré and Karen Steiner for the establishment of historical mindedness as an educational aim.[[3]](#footnote-2) Ken Osborne, had defined historical mindedness as related to historical thinking and historical consciousness, but necessarily “something bigger” than a technical ability to consider the past critically because it involved “a way of looking, not so much at history, but at the world at large, that derives from a familiarity with the past and with trying to understand and interpret it.”[[4]](#footnote-3) Osborne regarded historical mindedness as “a way of looking at the world derived from a way of looking at the past. As such, it is a valuable, indeed indispensable, attribute of democratic citizenship.”[[5]](#footnote-4) The study of history can, liberated both from an overly technical list of skills applicable only to the study of past events and from the practice of committing dates, names, and figures to memory, affect students’ “view of the world in which they live and of what it means to be human.”[[6]](#footnote-5) Following Bruno-Jofré and Steiner, the educational materials developed for the STONES project hold as eminently valuable the statement that historical mindedness should be “the keystone educational aim in relation to history education because, we believe, developing historical understanding provides a promising avenue for building a literate and critical citizenry.” [[7]](#footnote-6)

1. This introduction constitutes part of a larger argument for the importance of social history research and the need for a paradigmatic shift in history teaching and curriculum design, which is to be published shortly in the OHASSTA publication *Rapport* under the title “Using Social History Research for the Cultivation of Historical Thinking and Historical Mindedness” [↑](#footnote-ref-0)
2. See www.histori.ca/benchmarks/ and http://www.archives.gov.on.ca/english /educational-resources/components.aspx [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
3. Bruno-Jofré, Rosa and Karen Steiner (2007). “Fostering Educative Experiences in Virtual High School History,” *Encounters on Education* 8, 69-82. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
4. Osborne, Ken (2001). Review of the books “Knowing, teaching and learning history. Edited by P. Stearns, P. Seixas, and S. Weinburg (2000) New York University Press and “L’histoire à l’ école: Matière à penser. Robert Martineau (1999) Paris/Montreal: L’ Harmattan. In The Canadian Historical Review, 82(3), 552. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
5. Ibid., 553. Osborne also notes that the concern for developing historical mindedness is not a new one. He discusses a report issued the by American Historical Association’s Committee of Seven (1899), which defined historical mindedness in terms of dispositions and outlooks rather than skills. These dispositions were vital to critical and effective citizenship in a democratic community, including a detachment from immediate pressures, a willingness to search for comparisons and analogies, a readiness to subject emotions to reason, consideration of multiple perspectives in issues, and weighing the forces of continuity or change. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
6. Ibid., 553. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
7. Bruno-Jofré, Rosa and Karen Steiner (2007). “Fostering Educative Experiences in Virtual High School History,” 79. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)