***Historical Thinking Concepts***

Six *historical thinking concepts* have been identified. These six historical thinking concepts are designed to help students think more deeply and critically about the past as well as their own relationship to the past, including how it can be linked to the present. The six historical thinking concepts are:

1. ***Historical Significance*** – looks at why an event, person, or development from the past is important. (E.g., what is the significance of a particular event in history? What would have happened if this person [historical figure] had not existed?)
2. ***Evidence*** – looks at primary and secondary sources of information. (E.g., what can we learn from soldier’s letters home about life in the trenches?) To learn from a piece of evidence we must learn to ask appropriate questions. Different questions would be asked about a diary entry than would be asked about an artillery shell fragment.
3. ***Continuity and change*** – considers what has changed with time and what has remained the same (E.g., what cultural traditions have remained the same and what traditions have been lost over time?) Includes chronology and periodization, which are two different ways to organize time and which help students to understand that “things happen” between the marks on a timeline.
4. ***Cause and Consequence*** – examines why an event unfolded the way it did and asks if there is more than one reason for this (there always is). Explains that causes are not always obvious and can be multiple and layered. Actions can also have unintended consequences (E.g., This type of analysis leads students to understand, for example, that there were many causes of the First World War; versus only the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand). This concept includes the question of “agency”, that is, who (what individual or groups) caused things to happen the way they did?
5. ***Historical Perspective*** –any historical event involves people who may have held very different perspectives on the event. (E.g. how can a place be found or “discovered” if people already live there?) Perspective taking is about trying to understand a person’s mindset at the time of an event, but not about trying to imagine oneself as that person. The later is impossible as we can never truly separate ourselves from our 21st century mindset and context.
6. ***Moral Dimension*** – assists in making ethical judgments about past events after objective study. We learn from the past in order to face the issues of today (E.g., the Canadian government issuing reparations and an apology concerning Residential Schools. The formal apology issued in 2006 by the Canadian government to the Chinese Canadian community for the use of a head tax and the exclusion of Chinese immigrants to Canada: “we fully accept the moral responsibility to acknowledge these shameful policies of our past.” – Prime Minister Stephen Harper) Perspective taking and moral judgement are difficult concepts because both require suspending our present day understandings/context.