The Role of Interpretative Communities in Remembering and Learning

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Author's Note

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Abstract

Students' memories and learning strategies are situated in their social relationships, political orientations, cultural meanings, worldviews, and historical experiences. This study uses qualitative research methods to investigate how Canadian students remember and learn about the War on Terror. It deals with the narratives of ninety-nine students studying in an urban university of Ontario. I find that apart from textual resources, remembering and learning involve a collectivity of significant 'others' or what I call interpretative communities. These communities play an influential role in the consumption and negotiation of knowledge inside and outside the classrooms thus an understanding of their role may help teachers to enhance their instructional strategies.

Key words: Canada; remembering; interpretative communities; narratives; learning.

Résumé

Les souvenirs des étudiants et leurs stratégies d'apprentissage se situent dans leurs relations sociales, leurs orientations politiques, leurs significations culturelles, leur vision du monde, et leurs expériences antérieures. Cette étude utilise des méthodes de recherche qualitatives pour étudier comment les élèves canadiens se souviennent et apprennent à propos de la guerre contre le terrorisme. Elle traite les récits de 99 étudiants qui étudient dans une université urbaine de l'Ontario. Je trouve qu'en dehors des ressources textuelles, se souvenir et apprendre impliquent un ensemble d'«autres» significatifs, ou ce que j'appelle des communautés interprétatives. Ces communautés jouent un rôle influent dans

l'utilisation et la négociation des connaissances à l'intérieur et l'extérieur de la salle de classe ; ainsi, une compréhension de leur rôle peut aider les enseignants à améliorer leurs stratégies d'enseignement.

Mots clés : Canada, se souvenir, communautés interprétatives, récits, apprentissage.

The Role of Interpretative Communities in Remembering and Learning

Dealing with the biases of media, it has become hard to inform my own paradigm on the issue of the War on Terror. However, with the help of class discussions in my high school, I was able to form an educated opinion that through the process of invasion the United States has achieved ulterior motives. The great need of oil is the underlying issue in this War on Terror and I firmly believe that the U.S government under George Bush has been a greedy association. Therefore, the knowledge I gained through television and peer-to-peer classroom discussion has impacted on my opinion.

This statement is taken from a narrative written by a first year university student, which is a part of a research project that investigates how Canadian students remember and learn about the War on Terror. This participant's memories are not ready-made reflections of the events of the war, but eclectic and selective reconstructions based on subsequent actions and perceptions (Lowenthal, 1985), or what he calls "my own paradigm on the issue of the War on Terror." He symbolizes and classifies the world around him through a complicated process of negotiation, and selectively reconstructs a narrative of the war based on his perception. This perception is the result of an intersection between his agency, information available through digital sources and an influential community inside his classroom "peers". In several respects, this quote represents other 98 narratives included in the study and provides evidence that the processes of remembering and learning appear to be distributed among the participants as active agents, technologies of memory and a collectivity of significant 'others' or what I call "interpretative communities."

These communities play an influential role in shaping these students' narratives of the war in particular ways. This article focuses on the role of different interpretative communities whose worldviews, historical experiences, and frameworks of interpretation influence students' memories and learning strategies and implications of their role for both teaching and learning.

Theoretical framework

An isolated attempt to measure forgetting by Ebbinghaus in 1885 has spawned an entire industry of research into the nature of remembering (Casey, 1987). In the 1880s, Renan also discussed the role of forgetting and remembering but only in the context of the construction of national identities (Renan, 1990). Since then many researchers have focused on the process of remembering as a way of emphasizing the active process of meaning making (Bartlett, 1995; Halbwachs, 1080; Middleton & Edward, 1990; Nora, 1989). Nonetheless, the theoretical framework I use in this study is situated in Wertsch's (2002) theory of collective remembering. According to him, collective remembering is "(1) an active process, (2) inherently social and mediated by textual resources and their

affiliated voices, and (3) inherently dynamic" (p.178). His main focus is on textual resources that, "shape the speaking and thinking of individuals to such a degree that they can be viewed as serving as 'co-authors' when reflecting on the past" (Wertsch, 2008, p. 139). From his perspective, speaking, thinking, remembering, and learning involve a process of mediation between two main forces. The following model illustrates Wertsch's (2002) theory:

Figure 1.
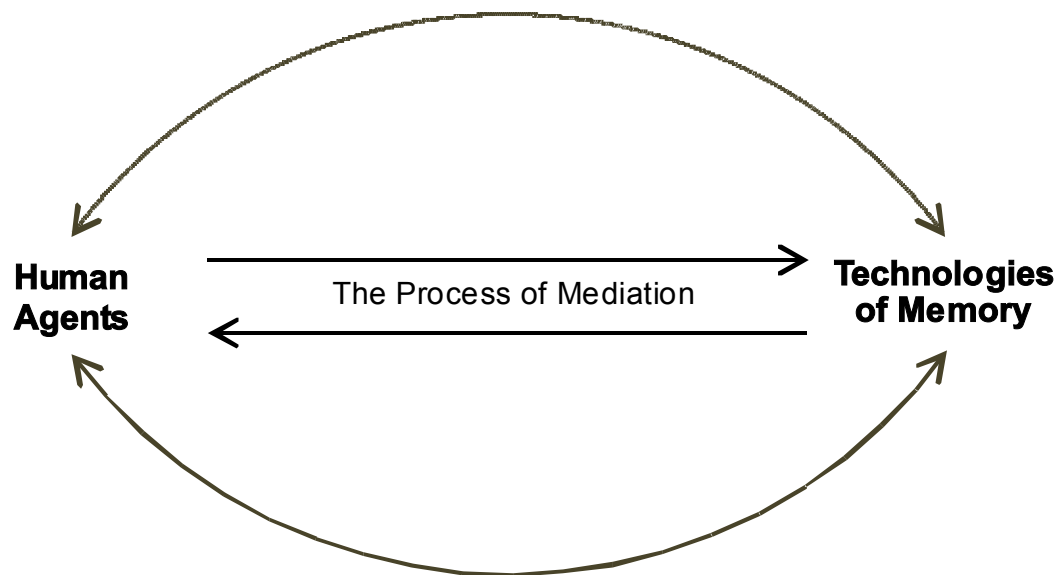
According to this model, collective remembering is a process of textual mediation between human agents and different cultural tools or technologies of memory available in a particular socio-cultural setting. Sturken (2008) also asserts, "Cultural and individual memory are constantly produced through, and mediated by, the technologies of memory" (p. 75). Human beings interpret, relate, select, record, share, and tell their memories with the help of a variety of technologies of memory such as media, textbooks, documents, the Internet, museums, monuments, or landscapes. For example, an important technology of memory is history textbooks. Teachers often rely on textbooks in schools for the content and students tend to consume this textual resource throughout their school careers to remember and learn through the relations between the past and the future. These relations are not given but depend on human agency as well as on mnemonic tools, technologies, and databases (Middleton & Brown, 2005). When students use mnemonic tools, technologies, and databases to remember, they involve themselves in a kind of data searching, data collection, and data analysis strategies. Students use them as thinking devices (Wertsch, 2002) to produce and disseminate vital mnemonic imaginaries and multiple forms of knowledge.

The processes of remembering and learning are altering swiftly because what is remembered individually and collectively depends in part on emerging technologies of

memory and the associated socio-technical practices, which are changing radically (Van House & Churchill, 2008). New technologies of memory such as the Internet, e-mails, YouTube, and text messages have modified and in some cases, altered the ways through which individuals consume and negotiate knowledge. Naim (2007) gives one example:

> YouTube includes videos posted by terrorists, human rights groups, and U.S. soldiers in Iraq. Some are clips of incidents that have political consequences or document important trends, such as global warming, illegal immigration, and corruption. Some videos reveal truths. Others spread disinformation, propaganda, and outright lies. All are part of the YouTube effect. (p. 103*)*

These recent technologies of memory do grant new means of mnemonic representations and communication, but in addition may grant revolutionary transformations to the mnemonic practices, remembering, and learning.

This tendency is reinforced by the fact that a human agent uses these technologies within cultural, historical, and institutional settings provided by certain social groups or communities. Many scholars have discussed in detail that membership, influence, integration, and shared emotional connections are the features that define a community (Bransford, Vye & Bateman, 2002; Hillery, 1955; McMillan & Chavis, 1986; Poplin, 1979). The technologies are not equally distributed, nor accessible for every member of a community but the community's experiences and interpretative frameworks are part of the multi-layered landscape of meanings associated with an event or an object by its members.

Wertsch (2002) has given short shrift to the importance of group context in collective remembering. Collective remembering requires group context: these groups or communities may include families, friends, politicians, organizations, and/or nation-states. Individuals organize and understand events and concepts within a social context and then remember them in a way that orders and organizes them through social constructions (Halbwachs, 1980). In other words, another important feature of the landscape of remembering is a community that has a history of remembering together "where group members have set roles and relationships. These prior relationships may be important in determining the process and product of recalling together, particularly when considering the functions of collective remembering" (Harris, Paterson & Kemp, 2008, p. 222). Communities affect collective remembering and learning as they provide its members with multiple sources of knowledge (Bransford, Vye & Bateman, 2002), and multiple opportunities for active participation (Brown & Campione, 1994; Vygotsky, 1978). Additionally, a community can provide multilayered data and a framework of interpretations to its members with a certain authoritative discourse fused in it. In Bakhtin's (1984) view, authoritative discourse is based on the assumption that utterances and their meanings are fixed, not modifiable as they come into contact with new voices. As examples of authoritative discourses, Bakhtin cites religious, political, and moral texts as well as the word of a father, of adults, of teachers, etc. The words of parents, peers, teachers, or politicians provide frames for the interpretation when a human agent mediates with data provide by textbooks or media representations of an event. For example, the war experiences of parents may have a different and, above all, emotional sound, in contrast to data on the war that are mediated through history textbooks or museums. Whilst "the latter mainly deal with historical facts and their normative

contextualization, communication communities mainly transfer the emotional frames for the interpretation of narratives and images of the past" (Welzer, 2010). In the section that follows, I present the methodology used to provide empirical evidence to situate and substantiate my argument about the role of interpretative communities in remembering and learning.

Methodology

       The following three methods were used to collect data in this qualitative study: interviews; written narratives; and demographic questionnaires. I contacted the professors who were teaching introductory courses, and took their permission to collect the data from their classes. I used "maximum variation sampling" (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, p. 178) method to recruit 99 participants from large first year undergraduate compulsory courses offered in a large urban university in Ontario (students' age ranged from 18-27). The site was chosen purposefully because these classes generally represent the greatest possible variations in the context of religion, gender, ethnicity, culture, and national backgrounds. In order to get to know my participants' personal contexts, I asked them to fill out a demographic questionnaire providing me with information about their religions, ethnic backgrounds, location of their high schools, age, gender, and the language(s) spoken at their homes. The questionnaire was an effective instrument of data collection that helped me to develop a better analytical focus.

Table 1.

Demographic Details of the Participants

Male Participants	Female Participants	First-Generation Immigrant Participants	Second Generation Immigrant Participants	English Speaking Participants	French Speaking Participants	Muslim Participants	Non-Muslim Participants	Aboriginal Participants
29	70	8	19	62	9	9	90	1 (First Nation)

I asked my participants to write the narrative of the war according to the questions given in the questionnaire. I used the following sub-questions to stimulate their memories and generate narratives about the war:

1. Please write a short essay on: What has been the course of the War on Terror from its beginning until today, the way you see it, you remember it and you experience it?
2. How has war affected you?
3. From where did you get your information about the war?
4. Which sources are the most important one for your understanding of the war?

Briefly explain how you used them and why.

My aim was to understand how Canadian students remember and learn about an ongoing war. Their narratives work well to explain their remembering and learning experiences. Carr (2008) gives an account of why narratives normally satisfy and how, or in what sense, they actually explain human experiences with their complexities. He argues that:

> The satisfaction we normally feel with a narrative explanation should not be taken at face value, nor should it close off further inquiry. But there is no reason why we should not take it for what it is, a valuable and useful implement for understanding human action. (p. 30)

In addition, narratives seem to structure narrators' understanding of issues, their interpretations, and the role of social actors in their cognitive and social lives. In the second phase of my project, I conducted four follow-up interviews to collect additional information and to further expand the themes that emerged in my participants' narratives. The interviews were conducted on the same university campus after a month of narrative collection. One participant was a male, Muslim, first-generation immigrant from Palestine; the second was a male, non-Muslim, second-generation immigrant form Sri-Lanka; the third was a male, atheist Anglophone; and fourth was a female, Protestant Anglophone whose grandfather was from Turkey. To some extent, these four interviewees represent the whole group of participants, as it was a highly diversified group. However, in order for the interviews to be representative of the themes that emerged in the narratives, and to deepen/clarify the participants' conceptual maps, I asked the same questions, rather than posing new questions that could elicit only generalizations or abstract opinions (Weiss, 1994). I focused on the content of the narratives and used textual analysis to relate the events to each other in a way that created a holistic view of how cultural settings, physical surroundings, cognitive, and social structures in the participant's life are incorporated in the narrative.

Interpretative communities

Human beings do not consume knowledge linearly from different technologies of memories such as textbooks and museums. Certain communities also play their role as interpreters when a human agent gives meanings to historical facts and their normative contextualization. A human agent gives meanings to facts in the light of how these communities represent them, the words they use, the stories they tell, the images they produce, the emotions they associate with them, and the way they classify and conceptualize them. My participants are relying on certain communities to decode the meanings attached to the messages available through different technologies of memory such as media. The process of remembering/ learning as appeared in the narratives of 99 university students is represented through the following Figure:

Figure 2.

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                    Technologies          Human          Interpretative
                    of Memory             Agent          Communities
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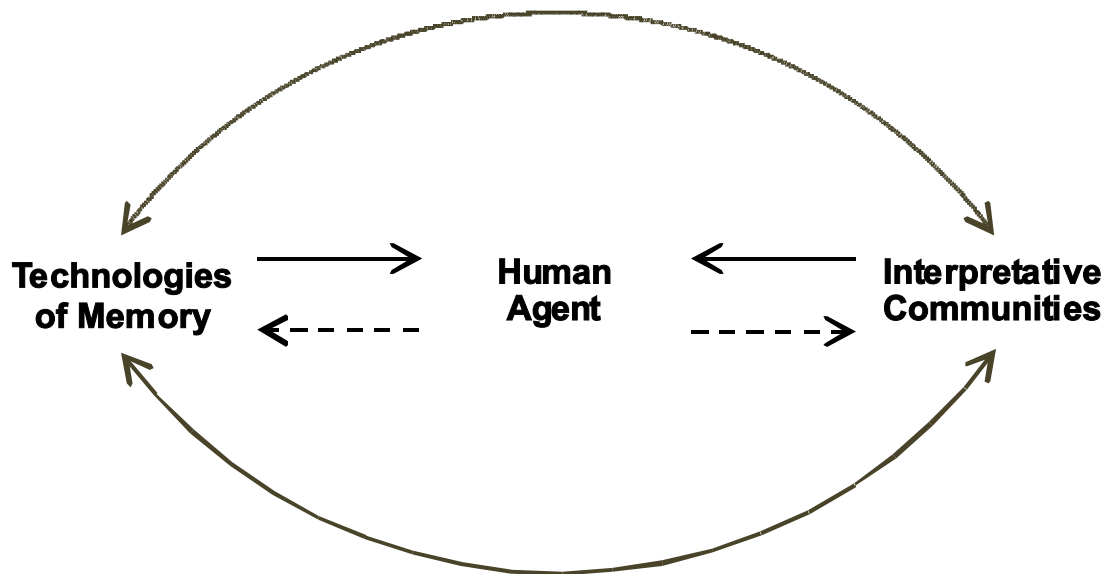
Wertsch (2002) considers collective remembering to be a materially mediated process between human agents and material technologies of memory. My findings extend his theory by providing evidence that remembering and learning also depend on the process of negotiation with interpretative communities. I have borrowed the term from Stanley Fish, who coined it in his essay "Interpreting the Variorum," first published in 1976. Fish's theory states that a text does not have meaning outside of a set of cultural assumptions regarding both what the characters mean and how they should be interpreted. This cultural context often includes authorial intent, though it is not limited to it. We interpret texts because we are part of an interpretive community that gives us a particular way of reading a text. These communities shape the coloring of my participants' readings of different textual resources, and even sometimes play an important role in the selection of a source. The following excerpt taken from the narrative of a 21-year-old female and first-generation immigrant from China illustrates this point:

> *Most of the information, I have in relation to this war mainly comes from my father and grandfather's discussions. My family usually watch television after dinner. My grandfather likes to watch Chinese channels but my father likes CBC channel. I am not very much interested in this war but my father sometimes explains to me what's happening on the name of this perpetual war.*

The presence of "family" as an influential interpretative community can be seen here. This community plays an active role in the selection of the sources of information and then interpretation of the information. This young girl endows the words of her "father" and "grandfather" with an authority already fused in them. This type of engagement does not involve the give and take of a dialogue with information (Wertsch, 2002). For her, an authoritative discourse is situated in the words of her father and grandfather. Families indirectly, or sometimes directly, play an important role in the selection and access to a

certain type of technology of memory as we can see in the following answer given by a 20-year-old male student and first-generation immigrant from Palestine:

> *Well, not any specific [source of information] … I do not have any time to read newspapers. Sometimes I picked up free newspapers from bus stations, watch television … but … not much. My parents watch Arabic channels a lot but I do not have much time to sit and watch television. In the last few days I watched Arabic channels' news on television to know what is happening in Gaza.*

This participant mentions different technologies of memory such as newspapers or different television channels. He claims that he is not very much interested in watching television, however, his access and selection of the media depend indirectly on an interpretative community comprising of his "parents" who "watch Arabic channels a lot". As a result, certain messages and images are being dealt with in the repetitive acts of memory communications and learning occurs without any conscious effort. Social groups such as parents function as mediators by interpreting messages and images that are being dealt with in the repetitive acts of memory communications, as is evident in the excerpt taken from the narrative of a 23-year-old French-speaking female student:

> *In Grade 10, I was taking a social studies class, and my teacher was very enthusiastic about what had happened on the day of 9/11. We talked about what was going on in the world on the name of the War on Terror at that time, as well as what had gone back in the past. One day he came in with a photocopy of a newspaper article from that morning. It said that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction, and that the U.S was going to invade Iraq; well, at that point I did not really know what to think. And my teacher asked us if we thought there were weapons of mass destruction. I just could not help thinking if I was in a corner with no one willing to help me (because who really wants to go up against the U.S when there may be a reason to agree with them?)*

In this statement, the role of teachers as an interpretative community is quite obvious in the consumption and interpretation of knowledge. The teacher is functioning as a generator of meaning or thinking-device, and at the same time playing an important role in the selection and mediation of textual resources such as newspapers. The evidence I review suggests that the processes of remembering and learning are "socially mediated" in the beginning of the plotline of narratives due to the role played by interpretative communities, and gradually technologies of memory are being employed during the process. The direction the process of learning will take is not predictable because these communities are not always capable of forcing the agent to read resources in one way or another. For example, take a look at the following narrative of an English speaking, 19-year-old female student:

> *I remember being at school the day it happened. It was the beginning of my high school journey. I was sitting in my first class when the intercom came on. On 9/11 the principal acknowledged us and informed us that there had been an attack on the twin towers in New York City. He said that an airplane had crashed into the towers and he was unsure of the*

> *conditions of anyone. Naturally the class began to buzz with curiosity and*
> *panic and nervously we absorbed it. Our teacher went on with the lesson*
> *and our class was filled with questions. About half an hour later, the*
> *intercom came back on and the principal informed us of a second plane*
> *crashing into the tower… We discussed [it] in my high school religion*
> *class about whether the Americans bombed the towers. TV helped me to*
> *understand the most of it because it had interviews, pictures, stories,*
> *videos to show what people thought and what Americans think, even video*
> *clips from Osama Bin Laden himself.*

Two interpretative communities in the form of "the principal" and "a religion class" enter into the processes of learning and remembering the war. Gradually, the texts and messages available on TV provide her with multiple messages, information, and interpretations about the war. From the perspective of mediated action, a process of negotiation is occurring here between an active agent, two interpretative communities and multiple textual resources such as "interviews, pictures, stories." Human beings are part of many interpretative communities at the same time, but not necessarily equally influenced by all.

Some of the communities are more influential than others due to the member's level of emotional attachment, and thus play more authoritative role in the processes of remembering and learning. Armed forces are one of those influential communities and their presence is clearly visible as an interpretative agent in the narratives of those seven participants whose friends, boyfriends/girlfriends, or friends' relatives are in the Canadian army. For example, the following statement of an English-speaking, 18-year-old female student reflects the dominating role of this community in the construction of knowledge about the war:

> *Personally, the war has not had a huge impact on my life. The one way in*
> *which it has affected my life is that I have two friends in the military. They*
> *are fighting in Afghanistan as we speak. I worry about them and fear for*
> *their lives every day on their tour. I get my information from newspapers,*
> *radio, TV, peers, and my family. I read the* Ottawa Citizens. *I also watch*
> *CBC news and listen CBC Radio 1. My most importantly, my friends in the*
> *military know a lot more.*

The processes of remembering and learning occur at both textual and social levels in this passage. More than one community ("friends" and "family") are present in this statement, but an interpretative community of "friends in the military" plays the most influential role in the construction of knowledge related to the war. This participant linearly consumes the knowledge provided by a particular community due to the level of emotional attachment and the authority invested in it. The process of learning can easily be seen in the following narrative of an 18-year-old male and second generation immigrant from India:

> *Since then, it's been hard to blindly believe; you cannot ignore the fact*
> *that the War on Terror is a war against a non-tangible enemy. Who is a*
> *terrorist? What is a terrorist? What are the defining differences between a*
> *terrorist and a rebel against exploitation and injustice? I keep thinking*
> *about the case of Ireland. It was a bloody collision between two groups*

separated by religion and a history of violence, or terrorism, and I wonder whether this War on Terrorism is the same thing or somewhat different. How does more killing in the name of War on Terror stop the pain that perpetuates these things? And then I wonder how we can be safe without violence; when someone wants you dead, where does pacifism fit? And I don't know, all I heard is partial and biased stories told by our media and politicians.

Critical thinking and questioning are important learning strategies and this student poses many questions while remembering the war. He critically evaluates the roles of an interpretative community "politicians" and a technology of memory "media." What is represented here is a relation between politicians and the media in relation to the representations of the war. He represents the process of media communication as partial and patterned in a way that does not reflect the social, political, economic, and cultural realities (Hall, 1980) behind the war. An English-speaking, 18-year-old female student also talks about this relationship between politicians and the media in relation to the representations of the war, and on whom she depends more to learn:

I feel misinformed as a Canadian. I believe [that] we are not being informed of [the] exact realities by our media and [the] government. This is sad and outright terrible to see how we are bombarded with television messages and videos every single day, yet have barely any solid basis on which to form an opinion on the war, the people involved in it, or its real implications. My history teacher in Grade 10 helped me a lot to understand this war and many other wars. My father is the most viable source of information for me. We discuss about many issues whenever we watch TV together.

This statement reflects how the process of mediation occurs between an individual, digital media, and multiple interpretative communities. This young student makes specific mention of the dubious role of both media and politicians (another interpretative community). In addition to mentioning this point, the participant does not serve as a passive consumer of media representations of the war, and is not reluctant to let her own voice emerge to question or comment on the war. She also mentions the role of teacher as an important source of knowledge construction and interpretations. The other community is comprised of the "father" playing an influential role in informal learning and remembering. In the following section, I will present the implications of interpretative communities on teaching and learning.

Implications of interpretative communities on teaching and learning

Students learn not only in a school system, but also within a highly diverse network of communities. These communities' memories, world-views, practices, and behaviors can and do have impacts on students' learning experiences and strategies. My findings suggest that students' remembering and learning experiences are also situated in their social relationships, socio-political positions, cultural meanings, world-views and historical experiences due to their membership in more than one interpretative communities. These communities' experiences and interpretative frameworks are part of its members' memories, data collection, and data analysis strategies. Thus, it is important

for teachers to acknowledge and understand the influential role of these communities to enhance their instructional strategies. In his interview, an English-speaking, 18-year-old male student discusses the role of world-views and socio-political orientation in the process of learning:

> *Um, I think people kind of find their own ways to settle their opinion about this war or other issues ... oh... this one kinds of make sense ... if you are conservative then you will believe Fox News or CNN. One that corresponds with their pre-existing thoughts—makes more sense for people. I think, I kind of use to do that by comparing and critically analyzing different stories from different sources about the War on Terror. I just kind of take them all critically and then try to see whatever reality I can find after that. I just try to be critical of everything, even kind of my own type. I am pretty leftist by trend. I want to see how everyone lives. I do not know if that works or not but I always try to be critical of my own trend, yeh.*

This statement shows the role of pre-existing paradigms in the process of knowledge negotiation (i.e., "If you are conservative then you will believe Fox News or CNN. One that corresponds with their pre-existing thoughts—makes more sense for people"). The participant mentions that world-views always play an important role in our selection of textual sources and how we interpret them. Then the participant talks about the importance of his political orientation and its role in the give-and-take of dialogue. Students' socio-political orientations are the result of their membership in different interpretative communities and have certain implications for their learning strategies in the classroom. Canadian teachers particularly deal with a variety of student populations in their classrooms. The success of their instructional strategies also depends on an understanding of students' world-views and the level of communication between them and influential "Others" in their students' lives. Students' membership in religious, cultural, or political communities affects their style and capacity of learning, as is evident in the following quote taken from the interview of a 20-year-old male student who is a first-generation immigrant from Palestine:

> *I know that Western media is so biased about Islam and Muslims. Did you ever watch Fox News or CNN? You know how biased they are. I was watching a program on the Fox television. A woman who wrote a book about Muslim terrorists was telling that the first woman Palestinian suicide bomber exploded [herself] to protect her from honour killing and her boyfriend provided the jacket full of explosives. They are always partial, biased and inaccurate, when representing Muslims. Media has turned into ... what should I say ... some sort of weapon in the hands of white nations. Western media work to promote the politics of labelling Muslims as terrorists. Media has played a prominent role in separating and segregating us from the main society because they always focus on and sometime fabricate bad things about Muslims.*

This statement shows the role played by the religious and political context in the processes of remembering and learning. The participant negotiates with the media on a racialized basis and considers media as "some sort of weapon in the hands of white

nations." He complains that Muslims as a community are represented as dangerous and non-civilized so effectively in the media that the terms "Islam" and "Muslim" have come to inherently invoke suspicion and fear on the part of many (Said, 1985). This statement reflects a strong sense of resentment towards the role of producers involved in the production and promotion of the representations of Islam/Muslims, which has no relation to actual knowledge of Islam (Said, 1985). His resentment towards the role of western media has roots in the canonical and orthodox representations of Islam/Muslims. Personal context or a world-view should not be viewed as a stimulus that simply switches learning 'on' or 'off.' Instead, it should be viewed as supplying a dynamic force of its own that fundamentally shapes interpretations of the knowledge. These are all relevant features of systems of cognitive and social activities in which the processes of remembering, thinking and the transmission of knowledge occur. Teaching cannot be meaningful without acknowledging the relationship of learning and all these features of systems of cognitive and social activities. Teachers need to acknowledge and understand the role interpretative communities play in the construction and interpretations of knowledge because memberships in different communities affect, in one way or another, their students' psychology, understandings, and interpretations of the world around them. The following long quote taken from the interview of a 19-year-old male and second-generation immigrant from Sri-Lanka reflects the influential role of many interpretative communities in the process of learning and meaning-making:

> *Canadian society allows different cultures to live in the same geographical area—um—but there is still a pattern of ghettoization in the society like this area is China Town, there is an area of Sri Lankans, Indians or Pakistanis. We live here in different clusters. We need—um—I don't know how to explain ... it is difficult to amalgamate in this society without sacrificing your own culture. It is our culture. It is their culture. Personally, as a second generation of Sri Lankan community, I did not experience as such any explicit type of racialization but my father did. He told me that when he first came to Canada—well—in 1976 then he experienced racial discrimination, name-calling, bullying, and just different treatment in general. Even my mom was also treated differently when she came to Canada in 1989. People used to ask her what's your Canadian name? She had difficulties in finding a job because you know you can't get a job without Canadian experience. It is ridiculous how you can get Canadian experience without having a Canadian job ... it's a Catch-22. But I found that even my supply teachers when they got to know my name, they would ask, "Where are you from?" Oh my God, why does it matter for them?*

This statement reflects the presence of at least four interpretative communities in this young Canadian's life: Sri Lankan Canadians; parents; a community of second-generation immigrants; and teachers. These communities' historical experiences, knowledge, world-views, cultural values, and socio-political orientations affect, in one way or another, his psychology, understandings and interpretations of the world around him. His parents' personal experiences of racialization are a part of his cognitive and social relationships. Even as a member of second-generation immigrants, he feels being segregated from mainstream Canadian society due a racialization of spaces or what he calls "a pattern of

ghettoization" in Canada. The last part of his statement has a number of implications for teachers: it reflects the importance of teachers' behavior and professional expertise in multicultural classrooms; it shows how much sensitivity is involved in teacher-student relationships, particularly when a teacher's historical and cultural background is different from his/her student; and it shows that as an interpretative community teachers can unconsciously create an uncomfortable environment in which some students may feel disconnected and devalued.

Discussion and Conclusion

Interpretative communities emerge as an important feature of the landscape of remembering and learning in the narratives of my participants. Any change in the historical, social, or cultural characteristics of an interpretative community can affect the communication, inhibition of communication, distortion, remembering/forgetting, and learning strategies of its members. These communities play a vital role in shaping the narratives of the War in Terror in particular ways as these young Canadians negotiate knowledge gained through different technologies with the help of these communities to produce an account of the war. My findings suggest that there is something else going on in the process of remembering and learning rather than just a material mediation between a human agent and textual resources available on different technologies of memory. Where my participants live and with whom they interact also play vital roles in the process of learning and remembering. These communities of interpretation are comprised of mainly parents, teachers, peers, politicians, and friends, and lie somewhere in between human agents and technologies of memory. Some of them are part of classrooms settings; some are not, but their influence in the process of remembering and learning is undeniable. For example, family appears to be the strongest, most cohesive, and most viable social group and has a great impact on the processes of remembering and learning.

Both remembering and learning are fundamental lifelong processes that involve actions and thinking — as well as emotions, perceptions, cultural, historical and social representations — and cannot exist outside students' social networks. In other words, learning is a social experience with various interpretative communities embedded in popular and erudite traditions and is transmitted via long chains of social relationships. This social dimension appears in the narratives of the majority of my participants as a 'constitutive ingredient' of what they learn about the war — in other words, social relationships between different interpretative communities — and these students structure the form of the discourse and its object. These students are keen on understanding not only the war in itself but also the meanings and interpretations of the war that the communities convey to them.

This finding raises many questions for teachers: What are the interpretive communities present in our classrooms? What roles do these communities play in shaping the learning strategies, and in particular for those students who come from different religious, cultural, and historical backgrounds? Do teachers themselves in fact teach children or do they make another interpretative community? If teachers can include alternative voices of interpretative communities in their teaching, beyond the official narratives and schematic narrative templates found in so many social studies and history textbooks, would their students be more successful in interpreting and understanding their

past and present? Would the students of these teachers be more likely to develop and demonstrate deeper historical, political, cultural, and environmental consciousness? How can narratives that teachers have appropriated impact their teaching?

An implication of this finding is that mostly Canadian classrooms are comprised of a highly diversified population of students who often vary in what they already know about the content teachers want to teach and how they interpret the knowledge constructed in their classrooms. It is important to build up a network between teachers and other interpretative communities (in particular, parents and peers) to bridge this gap. This network becomes more vital in the case of students outside the mainstream of our society because interpretative communities outside the classrooms can provide learners with considerable support in obtaining manifold knowledge. These communities can help students in making connections between their prior and current knowledge by providing informal and flexible settings where students are not afraid to ask critical questions, to attempt solving different problems, and to occasionally fail (Bransford, Vye & Bateman, 2002). Many students come to the classroom with deeply entrenched narratives about the past and the present as well. Teachers need to be aware of the narratives that students have already mastered, as well as the narratives that students have appropriated or resisted (Wertsch, 2002) due to the influence of different interpretative communities in their lives. These narratives need to be listened to and examined in order to build a learning community in which everyone is linked, valued, and has something to teach, share, and learn. The importance of such an environment can be traced back to Vygotsky's theory that focuses on the importance of socio-cultural ties in the learning process. Vygotsky (1978) suggested that all learning is culturally mediated, historically developing, and arising from cultural networks and human relationships. If teachers want their students to critically listen, read, and engage in a dialogue with critical issues, then they must learn to acknowledge students' memories, prior knowledge, alternative narratives, and world-views situated in their cognitive and social activities because students' learning strategies also rest on connections to these variables. Teachers themselves as an important interpretative community can help students to understand that all narratives represent someone's interpretation of historical events, and as such, are open to misinterpretations, mistakes, and challenges. They can use a wider range of narratives from various interpretative communities (including those of women, LGTB, and other minority populations) to help students to develop historical consciousness and to learn about equity and social justice.

We need more empirical research to investigate: what are the processes and circumstances in which members of different interpretative communities select and transmit their version of an issue, which may or may not contradict with different versions available through a variety of technologies? How do different interpretative communities legitimize certain types of knowledge and why? On what type of information is their attention focused and which aspects of reality do they try to abstract? Do all students learn in the same way when an interpretative group (parents, teachers, friends, politicians, or professionals, etc.) is inclined to adopt a given representation of a historical issue or a political development? Hopefully, this paper will serve to encourage further research and interpretation of these issues.

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