

Popular program making game of history

Never-before-seen documents and images, up-dateable content and a sleuthing approach to history are making Virtual Historian a 'must-have' for students nationwide

BY BOB KLANAC

Western Education Professor Stéphane Lévesque is making his own history these days.

Lévesque's Virtual Historian web-based learning program has been recently licensed for student use by Western Libraries.

"We're now in the commercialization phase," says Lévesque. "Western Libraries was actually the first licensee to acquire it. Its going to be made available through the library catalogue system so all Western students will have access to the content material."

The Web-based interactive pro-

Video

Check out a promotional video for Virtual Historian at:
www.virtualhistorian.ca/Promotion/VHDemo.html

gram allows students to develop techniques for learning history by having them track down clues, make decisions and develop their own interpretations of historical events.

Primary and secondary sources - including recently declassified documents - within the Virtual Historian provide first-hand accounts of history and provide clues as students attempt to 'solve the case'. Archival film footage and artifacts presented in three-dimensions further bring the stories to life.

"Sir Frederick Banting Secondary School was using it as a pilot project but now the entire Thames Valley School Board will be acquiring it," says Lévesque.

"Various school boards are in the licensing process. We have private schools in Ontario and some public schools in Alberta. I have a meeting out west soon because Saskatchewan is in the process of licensing it for the entire province."

One reason Virtual Historian is so compelling to educators is that the web-based format allows for smooth updating and refinements.



A variety of promotional posters have been developed for Virtual Historian.

"That's the beauty of web-based publishing," says Lévesque. "The cost of revising a textbook is so expensive, you end up working with outdated material in some cases."

"We update the material in the library as more info becomes available."

Although the project was designed as a classroom teaching tool, the acquisition of it by Western Libraries leads to it also being utilized as a virtual library. Cases in the Virtual Historian include the October Crisis, the raid on Dieppe in 1942 and the Halifax Explosion of 1917.

"It's full of never-before-seen

primary source documents and images on the cases in question," says Lévesque. "Depending on the

"We've found that the response is almost always the same: How can we get it?"

Stéphane Lévesque
Faculty of Education

case you select, the library will have declassified cabinet minutes, newsreels, and photos. We also

acquired German newsreels of Dieppe produced by Nazi Germany, so they can see how it was used as a propaganda piece by the Germans."

Currently, Lévesque and his team are busy marketing the Virtual Historian and enjoying the reactions of people who have used the program.

"I think the response has been great," says Lévesque. "It's just going to take some time to reach everyone. Right now we're creating the snowball effect."

"When we've demonstrated it for people, we've found that the response is almost always the same: How can we get it?"

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