Sustaining Canadian Studies in the U.K.: Role Play as an Engaging Pedagogical Tool to Teach Canada Abroad

Luke Flanagan

Luke Flanagan, Teacher of Politics, Bexhill 6th Form College
lukeflanagan@bexhillcollege.ac.uk

Abstract While scholars have been successfully offering courses in Canadian Studies abroad for more than three decades, the recent cancellation of the Government of Canada’s funding program, Understanding Canada, puts such foreign-based teaching programs in a state of flux. Given that there is now little financial support for institutions, courses and conferences, instructors must ensure that courses in Canadian Studies are engaging and accessible in order for the discipline to stay relevant within this new fiscal reality. One solution could be to use innovative teaching techniques to demonstrate the value of Canadian Studies as an academic discipline. My experience at the Centre of Canadian Studies (the Centre), University of Edinburgh provides a case study for the use of this approach. In a first-year undergraduate course at the Centre, offered in 2009-10, I used role play to teach the arguments for and against the establishment of Canada wherein each student took on the guise of a specific delegate at the 1864 Charlottetown Conference and argued the case in an open debate. This exercise simultaneously allowed me to deliver the necessary content while also providing students with the opportunity to immerse themselves in the core arguments and characters. As a result, barriers to learning were reduced as content became more accessible and the interdisciplinary nature of Canadian Studies became more evident because each student approached the exercise from their own subject specialism.

Why study Canada? Why study Canada when you are neither Canadian nor located in Canada? What is the value of Canada as a topic of study? These are questions that are frequently asked when one presents himself as a foreign-based ‘Canadianist’ (a scholar whose primary research interest is the study of Canada). Canada offers a strong basis for interdisciplinary scholarship: it has a rich historical and political context which encompasses aspects like Indigeneity, diaspora studies, nationalism, territoriality, and federalism. This is not an extensive list, but it does give an insight into how Canadian Studies (CS) reaches across the disciplines and can be studied both as a topic in and of itself or in a comparative context.

Julie Thompson Klein and William H. Newell define interdisciplinary studies in the following way: “a process of answering a question, solving a problem, or addressing a topic that is too broad to be dealt with adequately by a single discipline or profession. It draws on disciplinary perspectives with the goal of integrating their insights through a more comprehensive perspective to construct a more comprehensive understanding.” (Klein and Newell 394). Consequently, the study of Canada outside of Canada should not be seen as an anomaly or an anachronism. At a time when disciplinary boundaries are becoming more fluid, the study of Canada can act as a road to navigate contemporary and/or scholarly puzzles. For example, in 2014 many commentators within the U.K. turned to Quebec to understand the implications of the Scottish
independence referendum (see Henley 2014 and Zanetti 2014).

Canadian Studies must, however, be accessible and engaging. The decision by the Government of Canada in 2012 to cancel the Understanding Canada: Canadian Studies (UC) program, a multifaceted grant program designed to promote Canada’s interests and values abroad through CS courses and special academic events, undermined the place of CS in U.K. academia and showed that even the Canadian government did not value CS as a viable scholarly pursuit. What this article will show is that CS can be of value both as a way of teaching aspects of Canadian history and/or politics, and as a pedagogical tool to encourage deeper learning and understanding.

The withdrawal of the UC program has undermined the ability to ‘teach Canada’ by eliminating support for CS within U.K. higher education. Those institutions which continue to offer CS now have a larger role to play in ensuring that CS endures into the future by restating and reinforcing its value as a standalone discipline. Innovative teaching techniques, like role play, can help to achieve this objective. Role play allows students to study Canada in intimate detail and bring out its value as a topic of study. For example, Laure Paquette has utilised role play to study the domestic politics of Canada and advocates the technique for studying the politics of other countries. The core benefits of role play, Paquette argues, are inclusiveness and diversity. These aspects can be seen through the lens of student demographics and differentiation of learning style: “inclusiveness, in terms of race, gender, class, experience, mental health issues and diversity in styles of thinking, because of the broader requirements than a traditional lecture-essay format, and because of the teamwork allowing for division of labour according to preference or ability. Inclusiveness is now regarded as one of the hallmarks of university education” (Ibid).

Moreover, role play must go together with accessible content. As this article will outline, when the content of CS is complicated and/or does not follow a logical pattern, it causes disengagement and confusion. The application of interdisciplinary knowledge to the practical environment of role play can deepen the learning experience through in-depth theoretical and empirical enquiry (DeNardis 2-3). Role play is, therefore, a component of a broader process which can show the inherent value of CS, enhance the learning experience and develop new avenues for academic study.

Canadian Studies in the United Kingdom

Canadian Studies abroad has an established footprint. Since 1981 the International Council for Canadian Studies (ICCS) has served as the umbrella organisation for “twenty-two member associations and six associate members in thirty-nine countries, dedicated to the promotion and support of research, education and publication in all fields of Canadian Studies around the world” (International Council of Canadian Studies 2015). However, the history of CS in the U.K. stretches back even further than the establishment of ICCS.

1970s: The Golden Age of Canadian Studies

The 1970s were the golden age of CS in the U.K. It was in this decade that much of the CS infrastructure within U.K. academia was established. Since the withdrawal of the Understanding Canada (UC) program, the CS landscape in the U.K. is now detached from the Government of Canada. This is both a benefit and a detriment. While now free to pursue conference themes that are not aligned to the priorities of the Canadian government, without the government’s financial support CS is now in a period of flux as it adjusts to the new fiscal context. Nevertheless, CS has proved resilient and much of the CS infrastructure which began in the 1970s still exists to this day. Currently, the CS landscape in the U.K. is populated by a professional membership organization (the
British Association for Canadian Studies, CS centres within established higher education institutions (notably the Universities of Leeds, Nottingham, Birmingham and Edinburgh and Queen’s University Belfast), and, for now at least, a charitable foundation (the Canada-UK Foundation) committed to funding the teaching and research of Canada in the U.K.

**British Association for Canadian Studies**

The British Association for Canadian Studies (BACS) was established at the University of Leeds in September 1975 to promote the study of Canada in the U.K. BACS was a founding member of the International Council for Canadian Studies in 1981 (British Association for Canadian Studies 2015). By 1983, BACS had 195 individual members and 59 institutions who subscribed to its publication the *Bulletin of Canadian Studies* (later replaced by the *British Journal of Canadian Studies* in 1986) (Freshwater et al 11). Early BACS conferences up to 1984 attracted between 50 and 100 participants (Ibid. 12). The continuing financial support of the Government of Canada enabled BACS to grow into the 1990s and 2000s. In 2007, it was estimated that the Canadian government spent CAD $250,000 annually on CS in the U.K. This supported a permanent member of staff at BACS and various CS programs at U.K. universities. By 2007, BACS had 360 individual members and 125 institutional members (Rooth 75).

The annual conference is now BACS’ main strength. Thanks to the support of the Eccles Centre for American Studies at the British Library, who have hosted the conference at a reduced rate since 2014, participation has increased. In 2015, there were 120 papers delivered from a broad range of disciplines and research standpoints—for example, political science, literature, language studies and history. A central London location and complimentary student registration have aided this increase. The *British Journal of Canadian Studies* continues to be published twice yearly, while BACS maintains its role as an information point for CS in the U.K. via its website, monthly e-newsletter and social media (British Association for Canadian Studies 2015).

**Canadian Studies in U.K. Higher Education**

The current footprint of CS exists mainly in five CS centres at Belfast, Birmingham, Edinburgh, Leeds and Nottingham. There are no CS undergraduate programs offered at U.K. universities. However, four of these centres—Belfast, Birmingham, Edinburgh and Nottingham—provide undergraduate teaching programs with significant Canadian content, two of which contain ‘Canadian’ in the title of the degree. Birmingham offers an American and Canadian Studies BA degree, while Nottingham offers an American and Canadian Literature, History and Culture BA. The centre at Leeds is primarily concerned with facilitating exchange programs to Canada. As will be outlined in more detail in the next section, Edinburgh offers CS as an elective alongside core degree modules.
CS has a presence within combined institutes like the Institute of the Americas at University College London (UCL) and the Institute of Commonwealth Studies. The study of Quebec has gained prominence in recent years with the opening of the Centre for Quebec and French-Canadian Studies at the Institute of Modern Language Research at the School of Advanced Study, University of London in November 2012. The Eccles Centre for North American Studies at the British Library maintains a strong interest in the development of CS; for example, from November 2014 to March 2015 it hosted a very successful Canadian themed exhibition entitled Lines in the Ice: Seeking the Northwest Passage (British Library 2014). Queen’s University Canada maintains a permanent U.K. campus—the Bader International Study Centre (BISC)—at Herstmonceux Castle in East Sussex. Although established in 1994, bequeathed by a wealthy alumnus, the BISC has recently started hosting conferences related to Canada. In 2013, the BISC held a conference entitled ‘Canada Abroad’ to explore questions related to Canada’s historic and current roles in higher education, business, culture, sport, international relations and as a global leader (Bader International Study Centre 2014).

While the broader infrastructure of CS in the UK, like BACS, has endured in the face of significant upheaval, CS in established institutions has not fared as well. Moves to establish CS at Cambridge University and Canterbury Christ Church University have seemingly stalled, with the website of the former long out-of-date (see http://www.canadian-studies.group.cam.ac.uk) and the latter losing its core CS champion, Dr. Tony McCulloch, to University College London in 2012. A key problem with CS in U.K. higher education is institutional embeddedness. The ongoing viability of CS frequently rests on the interests of individuals or small groups who pursue the subject within their institutional setting. However, when that individual (or group) moves on, CS within that institution tends to decline. As Freshwater et al noted, “by 1975 anything done to promote Canada within British higher education would have to be by a commitment of enthusiasts already within the system and the backing of the Government of Canada and those provinces which became involved” (Freshwater et al 10).

Following the end of the UC program, CS in the U.K. finds itself back to its pre-1975 context, and recent changes within another vital source of funding have only served to exacerbate this fact.

The Foundation for Canadian Studies in the United Kingdom

The Foundation for Canadian Studies in the United Kingdom (the Foundation) was established in 1975 to support teaching, research and publishing on the topic of Canada in the U.K., and to promote academic links and student exchanges between Canadian and British universities. Like the Government of Canada, the Foundation provided approximately CAD $250,000 annually in 2007 (Freshwater et al. 1). The Foundation awards grants and scholarships to individuals, organizations, such as BACS and British universities, academic partnerships and joint research projects. The funding provided by the Foundation is sourced from a mix of Canadian and U.K. companies and individuals (see http://www.canadian-studies-uk.org/donors/). Although financially independent from the Government of Canada, the Foundation works closely with the Academic Relations Unit at the Canadian High Commission (HC) in London. The Government of Quebec also has representation in London and supports Canadian activities related to that province; for example, since 1977, the Government of Quebec has awarded the Prix du Québec to scholars whose work has “contributed to the influence of Québec around the world and to the evolution of Québec society in their respective fields” (Gouvernement du Québec 2014).

In early 2015 the Foundation made international headlines following the resignation of four mainly academic members of its board. The dispute centred on the intention of the HC to exercise its right to appoint four new board members and remove a distinguished academic from her position. This move caused considerable consternation within the academic community (see Canadian Historical Association 2015). While the treatment of the specific individual provided the impetus for the action, the broader issue was the intention of the HC to align the priorities of the
Foundation more closely with its own objectives (Bronskill 2015). The concern was that, having cut its own funding, the HC was now seeking to utilise the Foundation to promote its own priorities at the expense of highly specialised CS projects in the social sciences, humanities and literature. Such concerns were heightened when the Foundation was renamed the Canada-UK Foundation. All mention of CS was removed and a new mission statement adopted: “We exist to encourage and promote education concerning Canada in the U.K. That means supporting the study of Canada, in all its forms, here in the U.K. and showcasing Canadian talent and uniqueness on the world stage” (Canada-UK Foundation 2016).

While the Foundation continues to offer academic awards, such as travel grants, the commitment to the study of Canada in ‘all its forms’ indicates a move away from a solely academic focus; for example, the Foundation’s support for BACS, currently around £10,000 annually, will be tapered away by £2,500 each year. For its part, the HC argued that the Foundation was at risk of losing its charitable status by taking such a narrow approach to the study of Canada in the U.K. (Times Higher Education 2015).

Centre of Canadian Studies, University of Edinburgh

The preceding sections have outlined the CS context in the U.K. from both a historical and contemporary standpoint. They showed that the 1970s were pivotal in establishing the CS infrastructure in the U.K. which, despite major upheavals, is still intact. In 1974, what is perhaps the most prestigious CS centre in the U.K. was established: the Centre of Canadian Studies at the University of Edinburgh (the Centre). Edinburgh has always been seen as the ‘strong point’ for CS in the UK, which is why BACS was based there until the mid-2000s (Freshwater et al 27). At present, one senior academic is employed to manage the activities of the Centre, with over thirty affiliated academics from across the university who contribute to the teaching program (Centre of Canadian Studies 2014). While this position used to be a standalone Directorship, an academic with an existing position has recently been appointed Director of the Centre in addition to his current post.

The Centre prides itself on being a multidisciplinary hub for the teaching and research of Canada. Administratively, the Centre is a constituent of the School of Social and Political Science (SSPS), itself part of the College of Humanities and Social Science (CHSS). The Centre’s reach in terms of teaching and research extends beyond this disciplinary label. The Centre can accommodate joint supervision in: politics and international relations, social anthropology, social policy, sociology, law, African studies, history, human geography, literature, cultural studies, Scottish studies, and South Asian studies (see www.cst.ed.ac.uk). A key crossover with the teaching program is the Visiting Scholar (VS) program where academics from across Canada spend between one semester and an academic year at the Centre in a teaching and research capacity. As will be outlined, the VS program was hugely enriching for the Centre, but proved to be problematic as a teaching tool.

Teaching Program at the Centre of Canadian Studies

Now that the background of CS in the U.K. and the Centre at Edinburgh have been detailed, it is pertinent to address the teaching of Canada at the latter. This section will relate specifically to the period from fall 2008 to spring 2010. It is from this period that the empirical analysis will be drawn. At this time, the teaching program at the Centre consisted of two semester-long courses: Canadian Studies 1A: The Dynamics of a Multicultural State (CS1A) and Canadian Studies 1B: The Politics of Identity in Contemporary Canada (CS1B). CS1A ran in the fall semester and provided the historical context for the establishment of Canada and its multicultural origins. In 2009-2010, CS1A focused on Canada’s Aboriginal, French and British foundations, Scotland’s historic links with Canada, the Métis in Western Canada and Inuit communities in Canada’s Arctic and sub-Arctic regions (Centre of Canadian Studies 2009a). CS1B in that year addressed nationalism, language politics,
Indigeneity, migration, globalization, ecological politics, Arctic sovereignty and circumpolar relations (Centre of Canadian Studies 2009b). Each of these courses were electives worth twenty credits; some students have flexibility in their degree course and can choose course options to achieve the required sixty credits per semester. Undergraduate students at the University of Edinburgh are expected to achieve a full course load of 120 credits in an academic year, sixty per semester. Most CHSS courses are worth twenty credits, with some worth ten (University of Edinburgh 2014a). The implication of this context is that there was no default CS student body; the Centre had to persuade students to take its courses.

Recruiting Students: Why Would I Study Canada? I’m Not Going There!

Prior to the beginning of classes, in what the university calls its ‘Welcome Week,’ an Academic Fair is held to present to students with ‘outside course options,’ a course offered by a different School/subject area to the student’s main subject area/degree program (University of Edinburgh 2014b). Without its own degree program, CS was considered an outside course option. The Academic Fair was the stage that the Centre had to use to showcase the value of Canada as a topic of study. The importance of having a visible Centre presence at the Academic Fair cannot be underestimated. At the Academic Fair each subject area is assigned its own table, which is used to meet students and answer questions related to the available course. As part of the SSPS, the Centre was sandwiched between major subjects like Politics and International Relations and Social Anthropology. This placement ensured that there was always a steady stream of students passing the table.

It would be fair to say that many students did not even realise that CS existed and met the suggestion of taking a CS course with a degree of flippancy. A frequent comment would be: “Why would I study Canada when I’m not going there?” This showed the narrow way in which CS, and Area Studies as a whole, is viewed. Canadian Studies professor Terry McDonald has argued that “Canada has a reputation for being a worthy but dull country, living permanently in the shadow of the United States and with little to offer of its own other than a few iconic symbols such as Mounties and beavers” (McDonald 2008). Whether this is a fair characterization is moot, and McDonald himself states that it is manifestly false. It does, however, give a fairly accurate sense of how students at Edinburgh responded to CS: it did not have value as an academic subject but was a place of interest and intrigue. Given the place of CS in U.K. higher education, as something that has ebbed and flowed in various locations since the 1970s, this was hardly surprising.

The Academic Fair was an opportunity to change perceptions and demonstrate that, while CS could be valuable as a good in itself, as an elective course it would be of most value as a case study to complement the propositions of their main discipline—for example, to social anthropology students it was pointed out that there was much to be learned from Canada’s Indigenous peoples. Similarly, for politics students, it was explained that CS offered federalism, nationalism and territorial politics. This approach was very successful and in the years 2008-09 and 2009-10, the CS1A course achieved an uptake of 40+ students—three seminar classes. In terms of demographics, the majority of students were from the UK, with a smaller proportion from Europe, Canada, and the United States.

Once students were enrolled on the course, the challenge for the teaching staff was to demonstrate the relevance and value of Canada as a topic of academic study. As many of the students had little to no knowledge of Canada, its history and/or its politics, this is where the rationale for a role play exercise came to the fore.

Role Play as a Method of Teaching Canada

The Center for Learning Enhancement, Assessment, and Redesign defines role play in the following way: “Activities where students simulate a scenario by assuming specific roles. In the classroom, students can work through a situation and practice behaviour for the real
world. Alternatively, the role-playing activities may be used to shed light on any complicated topic. To be effective, students must take on the roles that they are assigned and assume the vantage point of a specific character. Some students may play themselves while others are given roles that require them to behave in a way that they would not normally conduct themselves” (Center for Learning Enhancement, Assessment, and Redesign, 2013).

When approaching the teaching of CS at the Centre, the following question is pertinent: how do you teach Canada in an accessible and engaging way? At the Centre this was applied to a seminal moment in the formation of Canada: the 1864 Charlottetown Conference which ultimately led to Confederation in 1867. A role play exercise was deployed to give the students the required knowledge of the reasons for Canada’s formation. Having students assume the guise of specific characters in a semi-structured debate would allow for a more nuanced understanding of the particular arguments for Confederation. Looking at some of the available literature on role play as a pedagogical tool, its value as a way to navigate complex or unfamiliar topics features prominently (see Blatner, 2009; Komoto, 2009, 126; Morse et al 2009, 186; Shapiro and Leopold, 2012; Center for Learning Enhancement, Assessment, and Redesign, 2013; Nygaard et al 2013, 139-151; Aldrete, 2014). Gregory Aldrete’s observation that role play “encourage[s] student[s] to draw connections and offer insight into historical processes – how and why things happen, or why people made the choices they did, rather than simply memorizing what happened” is extremely relevant for the Confederation role play exercise (Aldrete, 2014).

Structure of Confederation Role Play

The Confederation role play was structured to replicate the negotiations of the Charlottetown Conference. Students were placed in small groups of between two and four and assigned a colony from one of six: Canada East, Canada West, Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island. They were advised to assume the guise of a delegate from that colony and argue the case for or against Confederation based on the known perspective of that delegate at the conference; for example, the students assigned to Canada East and Canada West needed to be aware that they were there to ‘sell’ the idea of Confederation to the hostile Maritime provinces. Delegates from PEI were particularly adverse to the proposal. The role play was to take the form of an in-class debate. As well as researching their own role, the students were expected to research the perspectives of other delegates so that they could anticipate the arguments that may be made by the other colonies.

The students were also encouraged to authenticate the debate by dressing up and phrasing their arguments as they might have been presented at the time (Centre of Canadian Studies, 2009). Students were encouraged to investigate famous quotes such as that from Sir John A. Macdonald: “There may be obstructions, local differences may intervene, but it matters not—the wheel is now revolving, and we are only the fly on the wheel. We cannot delay it. The union of the colonies of British North America under one sovereign is a fixed fact” (Canadian Museum of History, 2016). From the outlined structure, the objectives of the exercise are clear: to teach the fundamentals of Canadian Confederation in a way that allows the students to immerse themselves in the key arguments but, above all, is fun and engaging.

The Importance of Timing and Course Structure

The scheduling of the role play was a key variable in the success of the exercise. In 2009-10, the role play was held in week seven. The core structure of the CS teaching program was two fifty-minute lectures per week and one fifty-minute seminar. Student-led discussion was the main objective of the seminars. Each week three students gave a presentation on one of the assigned readings, which would serve as a foundation for group and class discussions. This structure served the role play well: by the time of the exercise, the students were comfortable with one another and, most importantly, with speaking aloud in front of
their peers. Moreover, there was plenty of time to prepare for the exercise. It could be fully explained in terms of structure and expectations and there was time to answer any questions.

There was an underlying ‘carrot and stick’ approach to the exercise. It formed the main component of the ‘tutorial participation’ assessment element, worth 20% of the overall course grade. The extent of participation and evidence of research and comprehension of the topic were factors measured in the determination of a participation grade for the role play. Grades were given in the form of a percentage. In the year 2009-10, the role play undoubtedly achieved its objectives: the students had undertaken the necessary research and were willing to engage with spirit of the exercise—many dressed up and used authentic language as advised. The timing of the role play was central to making the role play work. By week seven, the students had discussed Atlantic Canada, Western Canada, Aboriginal politics, Scottish migration and Quebec; they therefore had a good understanding of the different components which shaped early Canadian identity.

The breadth of focus underlines the interdisciplinary nature of the courses and the Centre more broadly. Moreover, given that the students were from diverse disciplinary backgrounds, the scope for interdisciplinary research and application was high. For example, a student who was assigned to PEI and was studying for a politics degree focused on the threat posed by federalism and external domination, while a student in Scottish studies looked at how Confederation would affect identity and the sense of belonging. Similarly, students of linguistics were more adept at conceptualizing and operationalizing the nineteenth-century language. Such an eclectic disciplinary mix helps to facilitate practical pedagogy because it brings such diverse knowledge to the table. However, such knowledge does not in itself make for a successful role play. The dynamics amongst the students must be right and the exercise must be appropriately scheduled within the broader teaching program.

Perhaps one of the main problems with the role play being scheduled in week seven was the late teaching of Confederation within the teaching program. The use of Visiting Scholars and their specific expertise introduced more complex themes into the syllabus which delayed the teaching of Confederation. This was problematic because the students were learning about subjects like the Canadian wilderness before Confederation. The role play, however, introduced a creative aspect to the learning of Confederation and allowed the students to get a more nuanced perspective for Canada’s formation. Rather than following the broad prescription that Canada came about because of threat of invasion, the need for railways and political deadlock, the students could gain a real appreciation of why those aspects were important and how they were articulated. However, although the scheduling of the role play in week seven presented some problems in terms of content, if the role play is placed too early in the academic timetable the value of the exercise can be lost because the students do not have the necessary knowledge to sustain the debate. In 2008-09, the role play was held in week two and this was overwhelmingly detrimental to the value of the exercise (Centre of Canadian Studies 2008, 4). Given the students’ lack of knowledge, the exercise was disjointed and devoid of any natural flow. Moreover, they were still unfamiliar with each other and apprehensive of speaking aloud. This led to certain students dominating the debate.

As well as timing, it is also important that the exercise keeps true to real events. For scholars familiar with Canada, it is well-known that the colony of Newfoundland did not attend the Charlottetown Conference. It was, however, included in the role play exercise. As will be outlined, this proved to be a mistake. The students assigned to this colony essentially had more of a creative role in the exercise as they had to envisage how Newfoundland would have behaved and argued had it been at the conference. To this end, the students were advised to research the later Quebec Conference which Newfoundland did attend to gain an insight into its position and arguments. With such aspects to consider, the assigning of students to particular groups was important for the success of the exercise. It was important that each group included the right mix of people; for example, the more animated students were dispersed so that no one group dominated. It was tricky to find the right balance, however, to
ensure that every student had the opportunity to participate, particularly as it was part of the participation assessment. This is where the role of the moderator is most important.

**The Role of the Moderator**

The moderator, a role performed by the class teacher, is crucial for beginning and/or maintaining the flow of the debate and creating ways for inactive students to participate. In keeping with the known structure of the Charlottetown Conference, the debate began with the moderator inviting the Canada East and Canada West to present their proposal for Confederation. It is vital that the moderator has a good grasp of the historical detail in order to maintain some degree of accuracy; for example, details like knowing that the Charlottetown Conference was called initially to discuss the union of the three Maritime provinces can be used to steer the debate and give the students a more comprehensive understanding of how Canada was formed.

The moderator must be attentive to the minutia of the debate and pay close attention to what is not happening as well as what is. This means ensuring that all students are participating and taking steps to involve them where necessary; for example, when a student was disengaged from the debate it was pertinent to intervene in proceedings and invite them to pass comment or submit a perspective. This was particularly true in the case of Newfoundland. In both 2008-09 and 2009-10, the Newfoundland group found it difficult to enter the debate. This was not to suggest that they were ill-prepared or unwilling to participate but they needed additional help from the moderator to find the right opportunity to contribute. Another role of the moderator is to introduce topics or key points which may have been missed; for example, students often needed to be reminded that the conference was actually called to discuss Maritime Union and the Province of Canada had to present its case for Confederation. A small prompt or reminder would usually suffice for someone to pick up the thread. Essentially, the role of the moderator is to maintain the flow of the debate, ensure breadth of participation and content, and uphold the spirit of the exercise. The literature also discusses potential conflict in role play exercises (Center for Learning Enhancement, Assessment, and Redesign 2013). This did not occur at the Centre but the moderator must be aware of any unexpected occurrences.

For the Centre, the biggest unexpected challenge was absence. With two to four students making up a colony, one or two absences can have a destabilising effect on the exercise. The fact that it is linked to the participation grade should discourage absence but the moderator must anticipate absence and take steps to mitigate it—for example, by moving students between groups and giving them time before the start to go over the arguments, and/or postponing the exercise altogether. In a couple of instances it was necessary for some students to participate individually; this is not ideal, but was preferable to postponement.

Finally, the moderator should plan time at the end of the exercise for a de-briefing. This allows for an instant snapshot on how students felt the role play went and for any comments, compliments and/or criticisms to be aired. At the Centre, this was found to be helpful as a way to improve the exercise in future years. A de-brief was also held between colleagues. The sharing of experiences was helpful for reflection on personal performance and any aspects that could be amended and/or improved in future years. Most importantly, it provided an opportunity to think about how the role play exercise impacted the teaching processes in the CS at the Centre. From a teaching perspective, the role play and the course as a whole were successful in changing perspectives on the study of Canada. At least half the students in a given year were so engaged with the content of the CS1A course that they went on to consolidate their knowledge by studying the contemporary CS1B in the following semester. There was no Academic Fair to recruit students to CS1B, so the goodwill and referrals of previous students was crucial.

**Conclusion**

This article has performed two functions: first, it outlined the evolving context of CS in the U.K. The withdrawal of the *Understanding Canada* program has tightened the fiscal context of CS but there exists a clear
desire for CS to continue in some guise within U.K. higher education. The ongoing problem, however, is the individualist nature of CS and its tenuous position within established institutions. The withdrawal of the *Understanding Canada* program and the broadening of the Foundation for Canadian Studies’ remit will only exacerbate this context. However, as the evidence from Edinburgh has shown, there are teaching practices within CS in the U.K. which can demonstrate the value of Canada as a bridge for interdisciplinary collaboration.

From the experience gained at Edinburgh, role play can be seen as a positive teaching tool. However, there are a number of aspects which must be satisfied to ensure that students get the best out of the exercise: timing, preparation and execution are the crucial variables. From the standpoint of ‘teaching Canada,’ role play can only be seen as a positive. There is more scope to ‘Understand Canada’ through such teaching techniques; the Confederation role play allowed the students to delve deeper into the arguments for and against Confederation and contextualise them in a way that they may have been expressed at the Charlottetown Conference. Most importantly, the role play helped to change perceptions of Canada and showed its value as a topic of academic study. That said, the use of role play in CS does not have to be limited to Confederation or Canada for that matter; it could be extended to simulate an intergovernmental conference or election debate (for more on this approach see Paquette 2013). The biggest concern, however, is whether CS in the U.K. remains in existence long enough for such ideas to be put into practice.

11 Birmingham and Nottingham are American and Canadian centres.
2 A fuller history of CS in the U.K. can be found at the following link: https://www.llas.ac.uk/resources/gpg/2424. However, this source should not be used in a contemporary context; it is long out of date.

3 A visible and active presence at the CS table was crucial to persuading a sufficient number of students to take the Centre’s courses. Without this presence, the established perspective outlined by McDonald prevailed and student uptake was much lower. In 2011-12, for example, with no presence at the CS table, only information leaflets, thirteen students signed up for CS1A – a one-seminar class.
WORKS CITED


