

“Whose Canada?” The Assumptions of Canadian Studies

T. R. Morrison, K. W. Osborne, and N. G. McDonald
university of manitoba

Comme c'est le cas pour toute innovation pédagogique, l'adoption générale des études canadiennes dépendra largement de l'élaboration d'une stratégie concertée de changement. Présumer que de “bons programmes” contenant de bonnes doses de canadianisme seront automatiquement adoptés et diffusés serait oublier le fait que les systèmes pédagogiques contiennent de nombreux mécanismes permettant de dévier ou de bloquer systématiquement toute tentative de réforme.

Une stratégie d'innovation pédagogique devrait tenir compte de cinq facteurs: les enseignants, les étudiants, la sélection du contenu, le processus et le contexte. Jusqu'ici les études canadiennes ont la plupart du temps été abordées dans une perspective consistant à modifier les bases de la sélection du contenu, à minimiser ou à éviter toute tentative systématique de modification de la conduite des enseignants, des processus d'interaction ou toute considération du niveau de développement des élèves ou des contraintes imposées par le contexte scolaire. Même lorsqu'ils sont reconnus, ces facteurs sont le plus souvent considérés comme des hypothèses visant à promouvoir ce qu'on a appelé une “conscience nationale”.

Le présent mémoire tente de dégager certaines de ces hypothèses et de les soumettre à une analyse critique politique et sociale. Ce faisant, nous espérons souligner la nécessité d'envisager le développement et l'application des programmes d'études canadiennes dans le contexte des réalités politiques et pédagogiques d'aujourd'hui.

The current attempt to have schools emphasize Canadian studies in their programs is not accepted as legitimate by everyone, and thus must be seen as an effort at educational change. As with all educational innovations, the likelihood of Canadian studies being widely adopted will depend largely on the development of a deliberate strategy for change. To assume that “good programs” with heavy doses of Canadiana will be automatically adopted or diffused and implemented ignores the fact that educational systems contain numerous mechanisms for the diversion, cooling out, deflection, and outright blocking of reform efforts.

A strategy for educational innovation, regardless of the specific changes at issue, must pay attention to at least five factors: teachers, students, content selection, process, and context. To date, most approaches to Canadian studies have focussed on altering the basis of content selection, downplaying or avoiding any systematic attempt to change teaching behavior and interaction processes, or to account for students' level of development or the constraints imposed by the school context. Even when they are considered, these factors appear as unexamined assumptions re-

garding the fostering of what has been called a “national consciousness.” (1)

As a starting point for a serious reconsideration of the current state of Canadian studies in public schools, this paper attempts to unearth several of these assumptions and expose them to a critical social and political analysis. In so doing, we hope to underscore the necessity of seeing the development and implementation of Canadian studies programs in the context of the political and educational realities of Canada today.

STUDENTS

1. There is an assumption that the developmental level of students is not a particularly important consideration.

Jerome Bruner has written: “the task of teaching a subject to a child at any particular age is one of respecting the structure of that subject in terms of the child’s way of viewing things. The task can be thought of as one of translation” (2, p. 33). However, apart from some general considerations about the appropriateness of materials — considerations which usually centre on reading level — the business of “translation” is not often seriously examined. We are gradually accumulating a body of knowledge about how students think in the social studies. Hallam, Coltham, Peel, Osborne, and other researchers have investigated students’ historical thinking (3).

Joseph Adelson and other have examined students’ political awareness (4). Most of this research has been done within a Piagetian framework and has suggested that the age proposed by Piaget as marking the beginning of formal operational thought (approximately 11–12 years) may be too early.

In addition to this, Kohlberg has done interesting work on the development of moral reasoning (5). Indeed, the field of moral education has been well worked over in recent years. In view of the growing popularity of value issues in social studies education, it is reasonable to suggest that this work should be taken into account.

What we know about students’ cognitive, moral, and political development must be an important factor in any attempt to design curricula and materials for them. To date, there is little evidence that this has been the case in Canadian studies.

2. There is an assumption that students’ language patterns can be taken for granted.

As noted above, teachers are understandably concerned with the question of students’ reading level. The point here, however, is different. Basil Bernstein’s analysis of language use in terms of elaborated and restricted codes has important implications for teaching (6). Bernstein connects these codes with variations in social class, family structure, and the nature and demands of different kinds of jobs. He further argues that the linguistic environment of the school is that of the elaborated code. Most of the material in Canadian studies seems also to be in this voice, thus putting working-class students at a disadvantage. Even if one accepts the critiques

of Bernstein advanced by Labov and Holly (7), the fact still remains that language is a crucial intermediary between teachers and students or between students and materials. It is a question which cannot be ignored by Canadian studies curriculum developers.

3. *There is an assumption that a new curriculum will, of itself, make students more effective citizens.*

There was an obvious concern for citizenship in Hodgetts' *What Culture? What Heritage?* Indeed, citizenship is an essential ingredient in the rationale for Canadian studies. In effect, what is being advocated is a more effective form of civic education. The Canada Studies Foundation, for example, has stated that "the schools of Canada must contribute to the preparation of students for adult civic life in Canada," and that "effective civic education for life in Canada must be rooted in respect for the values of the diversity of people in Canada and should be directed to informed, responsible participation in the life of Canada" (8, p. 1). It seems, however, that most people involved in Canadian studies see civic education as consisting simply of a different kind of content. To quote the CSF again, "Improvements in courses of study, in learning/teaching materials and in methods of teaching are necessary to bring about significant improvement of civic education in Canada's schools. (8)

Certainly, there are people who seem to think that studying the Earl of Selkirk or Louis Riel is inherently more interesting and worthwhile than, say, Henry VIII or Otto Von Bismarck. All this flies in the face of what we are learning from research into political socialization. Even if he is describing the USA, Kenneth Langton's words are apposite: "Within school systems where self-conscious indoctrination does not take a massive form . . . there is little evidence that curriculum will have a significant effect on the political values of students." (Langton, p. 119) (9)

In Canadian studies we have to become much clearer as to what it is we want from civic education. Much of the current discussion is couched in terms of knowledge and understanding. Where are such qualities as efficacy and participation? For example, Newmann's notion of environmental competence as a worthwhile objective is clearly appropriate in a Canadian context (10, p. 119). It has the added advantage of getting us to think of what and how students can learn outside the classroom and how they can act upon this learning. These concerns appear to be rarely addressed in Canadian Studies curricula. In fact there is a danger of perpetuating what Hodgetts called the tradition of "desk-bound listeners."

CONTENT

4. *There is an assumption that the inequalities in Canadian society and the relationship of the school to them is not a significant issue.*

Underlying this assumption is the belief that the established order is inherently and fundamentally just and, perhaps, inevitable. Students are

presented with a consensus model for the study of Canadian society (11, p. 3). We would argue that this approach to Canadian studies legitimates the existing social, political, and economic order. Attention must be given to the serious inequalities and imbalances in our society (12). A view of Canadian society which ignores these fundamental realities is a distortion.

5. There is an assumption that conventional explanations of the development of Canadian society are sufficient.

The development of Canadian society has been traditionally explained through such themes as nation building, French–English relations, regionalism, and continentalism. For the most part, these themes have continued to dominate the approach to Canadian studies.¹ The result has been that only certain “approved” interpretations of the Canadian experience are accepted as legitimate. Often, the student is denied the opportunity to examine a range of available or possible interpretations. For example, such themes as class conflict, social reform, education, sex, and violence (13) and work on such explanatory modes as Marxism, fragmentation, modernization, psycho-history, and demographic analysis (14) rarely appear in Canadian studies programs.

6. There is an assumption that Canadian studies need not give much attention to questions of economics.

A high degree of industrialization and a complex economy do not permit simplistic overviews and gross generalizations on national concerns. We would argue that effective civic education must pay substantial attention to such economic issues as labour–management relations, the wage structure, the nature of work, industrial organization, and unemployment. On a national level, moreover, a substantial amount of literature exists dealing with the role of the state and competing private interests in economic decision-making. The questions raised in this writing are fundamental to understanding Canada’s economic development. Another important question is Canada’s role in the Third World. The image of an altruistic Canada helping to solve Third World economic problems must be critically examined.

7. There is an assumption that cultural pluralism is of unquestioned value.

Cultural pluralism has been accepted in Canadian studies without critical consideration of its implications. A latent consequence of this position can be a view that all cultural patterns are valid and ought to be fostered simply because they exist. In other words this precludes the possibility of judging other cultures. (15)

The consequences of accepting a policy of multiculturalism, for example, must be critically examined. If this policy is intended to encourage individuals to maintain a strong identification with their own ethnic groups, it may mean that social mobility for those groups is impaired (16).

If this is the case, active pursuit of a policy of cultural pluralism is an instrument to entrench further social inequality.

TEACHERS

8. *There is an assumption that teachers are anxious and willing and know how to innovate.*

The implicit and explicit models currently guiding the development of Canadian studies programs assume that teachers, if provided with the opportunity, are ready and willing to play the roles of creators, adopters, diffusers, or implementers of new curricula. This assumption is unwarranted for several reasons.

First, the teacher's informational field is quite restricted (17). Occupying a lower position in the educational hierarchy than administrators, consultants, and faculty of education professors, the teacher maintains few external contacts with professionals in his own or related fields. Even within schools, time constraints and the control ethos of bureaucracy stand in the way of a teacher forging regular contacts with a range of different educators. This is not a situation which lends itself to obtaining and reflecting upon new ideas. Moreover, if a teacher hears of a new program or project, release time poses a substantial problem.

Second, there are few incentives for a teacher to participate in innovation. Usually salary, tenure, and advancement are tied to seniority and compliance rather than innovation. There are personal risks in trying something new. They range from being labelled as a threat by other teachers to the anxiety of being faced with the obsolescence of one's skills and knowledge. As Ernest House has aptly put it:

The teacher finds himself faced with learning a new mode of behavior at high personal costs with no expectation of tangible reward and with no assurance that the innovation will work any better than what he has been doing. No wonder teachers regard many new programs with cynicism: too many such programs are not worth the personal investment. Few corporations would invest under similar circumstances. (18, p. 339)

Some may see the foregoing picture as an inaccurate portrayal of teachers and school life. On the contrary, we would argue that it is realistic, and until it is accepted as such, and dealt with, no amount of financial investment, materials development, prodding, or professional development will make any impact in the classroom (19).

In this regard, several alternatives to the conventional change strategy in Canadian studies of "content alteration with ripple-out effect" exist and should be given serious consideration in program development. To what extent, for example, have developers of Canadian studies programs explored or used such innovation strategies as the formation of advocacy groups in schools, pairing and exchanging of roles between faculty of education instructors and teachers, decreasing the administrative control of innovation, differentiating rank and pay structures to reward innovation,

and building community consultative and policy committees at the school level?

9. There is an assumption that the teacher is a neutral transmitter of content.

It is difficult, if not impossible, to design curriculum in such a way that the objectives are not changed or modified by the teacher, knowingly or otherwise. In fact, to do so may be undesirable since it would be an attempt to produce a teacher-proof curriculum. Nonetheless, one cannot but be struck by the lack of attention to this problem. Given what we know about such things as the hidden curriculum, and about the relationship between teachers' expectations and students' performance, it is obvious that the teachers' role is crucial. Lightfoot's research suggests a less obvious but equally interesting dimension (20). She found that a teacher's world-view (and we all have one) influences his/her political ideology and that these, in turn, have a direct connection with behavior in the classroom. Lightfoot found that such things as the degree of openness, the attitude taken by the teacher to the students, even the seating arrangement of the room, were reflections of the teacher's political stance. The conclusion surely is that, even though Canadian studies may operate with one view of civic education, teachers have the power to counter it with their own. If one accepts the analysis of teaching proposed by Morrison and Osborne, then one can say that Canadian studies has concentrated on logical and strategic processes but has said very little about cultural processes (21). In short, we have been too simplistic in our view of educational change.

Contrary to the assumption underlying many change strategies . . . we found that implementation did not merely involve the direct or straight-forward application of an education technology or plan. Implementation was a dynamic organizational process that was shaped over time by interactions between project goals and methods and the institutional setting. (22)

PROCESS

10. There is an assumption that the prime concern in Canadian studies is the selection of content, to the exclusion of other pedagogical concerns.

By process we mean the implementation of teaching strategies and the nature of the interaction that occurs within the classroom. The Canada Studies Foundation has repeatedly said that teaching method is one of its prime concerns. However, much of the Canadian studies teaching that we have seen has been expository. We ought to know by now, however, that for students it "ain't what you do, it's the way that you do it." The medium is the message.

If, for example, we use Bruce Joyce's models of teaching, much of the activity in Canadian studies belongs to what he describes as information-processing (23). Joyce's other models, behavior modification, socialization, and individual person, are rarely encountered. In other words, Canadian

studies has not given enough attention to the range of teaching strategies that are available, nor to the introduction of teachers to them. This omission can only vitiate any possible impact of new curricula.

11. There is an assumption that students learn in essentially the same way. Canadian studies curricula have not often taken into account the fact that students learn in different ways or that there are different learning styles which we ought to try to foster in each student. The corollary to this is that we have not thought very much about matching students' learning styles with an appropriate environment. In this regard, it is sufficient to refer to David Hunt's work on matching models in education. (24)

12. There is an assumption that classroom interaction is a neutral process which will not unduly affect teaching or learning. There has been very little work in Canadian studies in the area of classroom interaction, be it teacher–student or student–student. It is obvious that this interaction affects the message which a teacher is trying to convey. In the language of the communications theorists, it is the noise around the signal. The work of Bellack, Flanders, Keddie, and others has pointed to the predominant forms of classroom interaction (25). Bernstein's work is also relevant. However, rather than being seen as problematic, classroom interaction seems to be taken for granted in Canadian studies.

CONTEXT

13. There is an assumption that the formal curriculum is the most potent force affecting the values, attitudes, and understanding of students. Canadian studies is an effort to use the school as an instrument for the political socialization of the young. This objective will be achieved, it follows, to the degree to which one can identify those mechanisms within the school which actually affect the values, attitudes, behavior, and world view of students. The answer to this question lies mainly in the distinctive nature of the school as a social organization containing within it a particular institutional culture, something which has little to do with the formal curriculum as such. (26)

The school is not only a place for teaching, but also a context for enculturation, labelling, assimilation, socialization, tracking, and typification (27). It affects the personality, perception of social reality, and level of cognitive functioning (28) of students through such mechanisms as reward and punishment, generalization, modelling and exemplification (29, pp. 133–144). The impact on students and teachers alike of this “taken for granted” world of the school is amply supported by a growing body of ethnographic and observational research. Among other things, these studies document how schools direct the consciousness of students toward passivity, obedience to authority, powerlessness, and feelings of inefficacy. (30)

Current attempts through Canadian studies to use the formal curriculum

as the main mechanism through which to form or alter young people's understanding of Canada, it seems to us, deny the powerful effect of the context of schooling on students — an effect which we believe works directly against many of the cardinal objectives set for such programs.² A necessary step in developing Canadian studies, as we define it, must include a strategy for the critical examination and alteration of the context of schools. This strategy, like education itself, must be political in nature and face such issues as power, influence, access, participation, inequity, and social control.

14. There is an assumption that the "expert" ought to control the selection process underpinning the development of Canadian studies programs. Most approaches to the design and development of Canadian studies programs, particularly those linked to funded projects, establish teachers, academics, and other educational experts as gatekeepers who monitor, direct, and otherwise control decisions regarding what should be developed, taught, and learned. In other words, the "experts'" view of Canada provides the core content for Canadian studies programs. Needless to say, this selective perception has produced a distorted view of Canada, particularly as it is experienced by various people in society (31). Barry Broadfoot's portrayal of the meaning of World War II to those Canadians who experienced it illustrates well the trap of accepting conventional wisdom as a generalizable view of social reality. (32)

The development of Canadian studies programs is a process of defining social reality for oneself and others (33). The process used to establish that definition is far too restrictive and closed. Thus there is a need to broaden substantially the decision-making and selection process in Canadian studies from an in-house control by expert toward a more open, community-based forum in which such constituencies as labor, ethnic groups, the under- and unemployed, the aged, and the young can play significant roles. To do as we suggest will, of course, generate conflict and tension; and, to that extent at least, a missing element in Canadian studies will have surfaced.

NOTES

1. For example, see *Contact* (8). There, to help identify the major questions and issues arising from the distinctive character of Canada, the Canada Studies Foundation urged that particular emphasis be placed on the following:

- (1) Canada is culturally diverse — a bilingual country with many languages, native populations, two founding cultures, and people from a wide variety of origins.
- (2) The people of Canada have viewpoints substantially influenced by regional factors and characteristics.
- (3) Canada is exposed to strong external influences.
- (4) Canada is vast, and has a unique northern location.
- (5) Canada is an industrialized, technological, and urbanized society.
- (6) Canada is a democratic, federally organized, political community.

See also Carl Berger, *The writing of Canadian history* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1976).

2. Among other things, the Canada Studies Foundation argues that students should "learn to read, to collect and organize data, to synthesize, to develop and test hypotheses

and to acquire other skills. To do so, and in doing so, students should begin to develop personal values." (8, p. 2)

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