

# DEMOCRATIC SOCIAL COHESION (ASSIMILATION)? REPRESENTATIONS OF SOCIAL CONFLICT IN CANADIAN PUBLIC SCHOOL CURRICULUM

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This article examines the representation of conflict, diversity, peace, and justice issues in selected mandated curriculum guidelines, grades 1-10, for three Canadian provinces. These curricula, grounded in prevailing assumptions, reflect political will and influence resource availability for teaching. Prominent among them is a neutral discourse invoking Canadian ideals of multiculturalism that emphasizes harmony, marginalizes conflict and critical viewpoints, and presents injustices as past or virtually resolved. Because relatively little attention is given to actual instances of social conflict, violence, or marginalization, these curricula limit students' opportunities to practice with constructive democratic conflict and peacebuilding.

Key words: citizenship education, conflict resolution, social studies, English language arts, health education

Cet article analyse la représentation du conflit, de la diversité, de la paix et des questions de justice dans des programmes-cadres s'adressant aux élèves de la 1<sup>ère</sup> à la 10<sup>e</sup> année dans trois provinces canadiennes. Ces programmes, qui reposent sur des théories implicites courantes, reflètent une volonté politique et orientent les ressources disponibles pour l'enseignement. L'un des principaux postulats est un discours neutre qui invoque les idéaux canadiens du multiculturalisme. Privilégiant l'harmonie, ce discours marginalise les conflits et les points de vue critiques et présente les injustices comme des réalités du passé ou comme étant en voie de règlement. Comme les conflits sociaux, la violence et la marginalisation se voient accorder très peu d'attention dans ces programmes, les élèves ont peu l'occasion de se confronter à des conflits démocratiques constructifs et à la consolidation de la paix.

Mots clés : éducation à la citoyenneté, résolution de conflits, sciences humaines, anglais langue maternelle, éducation à la santé.

Public schooling contributes to young people's preparation for roles in society's inevitable conflicts, including redress of injustice. In this article, I examine how conflict, social diversity, violence/peace, and (in)justice are expressed in official curriculum expectations in English Language Arts, Health, and Social Sciences curricula, grade 1-10, in three Canadian provinces: Nova Scotia, Manitoba, and Ontario. Curriculum discourse reinforces certain ways of thinking and de-legitimizes others—for example, encouraging or inhibiting diverse students' development of agency for democratic engagement in handling social conflict. Formal guidelines by no means determine classroom practice: teachers, too, have agency! However, official curricula do reflect public understanding and political will, and help to shape the resources available for implemented curriculum.

In the complex environments of pluralistic societies, social conflict is a constant, but it can be handled constructively and nonviolently (Bickmore, 2004b). Citizens negotiate, through governments, the rules by which rights and differences are regulated (Kymlicka, 2003). Thus peace is built upon imperfectly democratic management of social conflict. Susan Bickford (1996) describes political communication as creating a path toward understanding another's experience: "not to erase the distance, but to be able to speak, listen, and act together across it," in the interests of democracy (p. 171). Similarly, citizenship education could equip members of diverse social groups to build paths toward understanding and democratic decision making — embracing and handling conflict, rather than erasing differences. Schooling is one social institution that simultaneously facilitates, shapes, and impedes such conflict management.

Public schooling, a project of the state, has a built-in mandate to legitimate the existing (inequitable) social order (Curle, Freire, & Galtung, 1974). At the same time, social and political institutions are made up of human beings, whose passive consent and active agency continually ebb, flow, and reshape them. Competing discourses and goals coexist (often embedded in the same curriculum documents), and are brought to bear on every aspect of schooling (Carnoy & Levin, 1985). Dominant cultural norms and narratives about justice, identity, conflict, violence, and enmity are both perpetuated and challenged by

individuals and groups, through school policy as well as implemented curriculum practices.

It is natural for the state to attempt to foster social cohesion through school curriculum. However, that cohesive impulse can be primarily democratic, based on diversity and pluralism, or primarily assimilational (Bear Nicholas, 1996; Mátrai, 2002; Tawil & Harley, 2004). Democratic social cohesion implies encouragement of both significant diversity of identities and viewpoints, and significant citizen agency.

Developing young people's agency through schooling is more problematic than it sounds. Citizens' choices are somewhat autonomous, but also constituted and constrained by what they experience and understand as known. For example, teaching Canadian identity as if equity and mutual tolerance have been already accomplished could silence students' inevitably more checkered lived experience and deemphasize their capacity to do something about continuing injustice. In societies that see themselves as harmonious, dissenters and dissent may be unjustly marginalized (Merelman, 1990). Notions of agency also tend to embody individualism, rather than highlighting collective/cumulative capacity to influence social structures. The underside is an unfounded assumption of unconstrained individual freedom and responsibility that can easily slip into blaming and devaluing both dissenters and those with low status.

However, ignoring diverse students' agency is as dangerous as taking individual autonomy for granted. Where curriculum reinforces student passivity and disengagement by marginalizing conflicting viewpoints, it denies those students opportunities to develop skills and understandings of themselves as social actors (citizens). This marginalization is especially undemocratic for lower-status students, whose agency in relation to school knowledge is most rigidly curtailed (Anyon, 1981). Agency for democratic social cohesion requires citizens to understand how particular actions may contribute to, and impede, social (in)justice.

Typically, Canadian public educational practice has not emphasized critical democratic engagement (Sears, Clarke, & Hughes, 1999). Yet the contradictions and dynamic negotiation of priorities within the system create cracks in the edifice that can become opportunities for critical

transformative work (Ellsworth, 1997; Freire, 1998). Public education often reinforces structural/cultural violence, but it can also strengthen teachers' and students' agency to promote democratic social cohesion (Bush & Saltarelli, 2000; Davies, 2004). Thus I probe the citizenship implications of the implicit and explicit education about conflict that is embedded in the official curriculum.

#### METHOD

In this article, I have examined a sample of official provincial curriculum documents from Manitoba (within the Western Canadian Protocol), Nova Scotia (within the Atlantic Canada framework), and Ontario (Canada's most populous province). Grades 1 to 10 encompass the majority of compulsory courses offered before the minimum legal school-leaving age. I chose three subject areas — English Language Arts, Health, and Social Studies — because a pilot study revealed that these curricula hold the majority of explicit conflict-related content. Clearly other subjects (and the co-curriculum) also have important implications for citizenship in/for social conflict, but those implications are less explicitly visible.

Data collection began with an inclusive search for conflict-related words and phrases in the content and skill learning expectations and teaching guidelines in the selected curriculum documents. With student assistants, I extracted all identifiable expectations in these curricula related to three broad approaches to conflict derived from conflict theory: peacekeeping (words such as violence, aggression, safety, security), peacemaking (words such as communication, critical reasoning, understanding and handling conflict, viewpoint, negotiation), and peacebuilding (words such as equity, justice, bias, and attention to social differences such as culture and gender). I added a fourth category, other citizenship concerns, to keep the analysis open to other explicit citizenship-related content such as governance or rights and responsibilities, not clearly captured by one of the preceding three categories. Our goal was to investigate all identifiable elements of citizenship education that were potentially relevant to understanding and participating in social conflict. I examined these extracts in their

discursive contexts, coded, and re-coded thematic categories to best reflect the actual themes that became visible (see below).

I arranged the coded collections of curriculum excerpts to reflect the approximate frequency of attention to each theme relative to the others, across subject areas and provinces. However, this analysis did not carefully measure the quantity of each provincial curriculum's emphasis on particular themes. Instead, the goal was to uncover the qualities and implications of particular inclusions and exclusions in these curricula. I analyze the themes presented more rarely in these official curricula in the most detail here, to focus this analysis on the range of meanings and possibilities embedded in these curricula. In contrast, the most typical elements of these curricula are presented with the least detail, assuming they will be most familiar to readers. Last, I selected a few curriculum excerpts from each province and each subject area to represent the thematic character of the range of curricular expectations (see Tables 1-5). The goal was to present sufficient detail to allow readers to question my interpretations, while reducing to a manageable size the data extracted from several hundred pages of curriculum documents.

Much of the rhetoric about active participation, citizen engagement, social justice, and critical thinking is found in the general introductory sections of these documents, more than in the specific substantive content expectations. Critical thinking goals in particular were often found in separate lists of skills, disconnected from the content to which they might be applied. Because teachers, tests, and textbooks generally attend to specific subject matter more than to such general and marginal guidelines, this analysis emphasizes the substantive content expectations.

The English Language Arts curriculum takes on special significance for citizenship education because in many school systems, pushed by high-stakes literacy tests, substantial time is allocated to it. For example, Nova Scotia's "Time to Learn Strategy" recommends that in grades 4-6 teachers spend over 30 per cent of classroom time on English language arts and over 20 per cent on mathematics. In consequence, only about 4 per cent of time remains for health education, another nearly 9 per cent for physical education, and less than 8 per cent (110 minutes per week) for each of science and social studies (Nova Scotia Department of

Education and Human Services, 2005). Classroom time is often limited for social studies, the traditional home for explicit political citizenship education and nationalism, and for the life skills strands of health curricula, where most conflict resolution learning expectations are found. Within as well as among subjects, officially mandated tests often direct attention away from the most citizenship-relevant aspects of curricula (Harber, 2002). This time scarcity clearly limits teachers' capacity to implement critical democratic citizenship curriculum.

Teachers, curriculum leaders, and resource-developers have substantial agency to reinterpret and shape official expectations in implemented curriculum. Yet the discourse in curriculum documents generally reflects considerable assumed consensus among educators who have had input in their design, and may also reflect ways of thinking common among many teachers.

#### CONFLICT-RELATED CITIZENSHIP DISCOURSE IN OFFICIAL CURRICULA

Below, I introduce the conflict- and citizenship-related themes that emerged as prominent in the selected Canadian provincial curricula (listed from most commonly emphasized to least prominent). I discuss excerpts according to these thematic categories: harmony-building elements, individual skill-building elements, and explicitly political, international, and/or conflictual-issue elements. Because the harmony-building elements are prominent among all three sets of curricula, I present them together. Next, I compare the three provinces' approaches to the latter set of themes (individual skill building and political/international/ conflictual issues).

##### *Harmony building:*

1. Self: Individual contribution, responsibility, communication and cooperation
2. Others: Appreciation of diverse heritages and viewpoints, multiculturalism, national unity

##### *Individual skill-building:*

3. Conflict resolution: managing disputes and avoiding violence
4. Critical reasoning and problem-solving processes

*Political, international, and social conflict:*

5. Citizen participation, governance and Canadian ideals
6. Global interdependence: peace, human rights, and ecology
7. Social conflict issues: past or present conflicts and public controversies.

The most prominent themes in these curricula were individual communication and cooperation, appreciation for diversity, and conflict management/avoidance (themes 1-3). Although pure assimilation was not explicitly advocated, the over-all message was often about not making waves and getting along. The conflict resolution content (theme 3) nearly always focused on interpersonal disputes, and emphasized dominant-culture ways of avoiding disruption and restoring harmony. The relatively infrequent attention to international interdependence and global diversity (theme 6) also emphasized non-confrontation and harmony. Thus many elements of these curricula could marginalize conflict and dissenters. This containment of disruption would tend to protect the status quo, and thus be anti-democratic in its citizenship implications.

Citizen participation and governance, critical reasoning, global interdependence, and social conflict issues (themes 4-7) were considerably less visible in these curricula than the harmony themes. Such conflict-avoidant curricula tend to be generally uninteresting and ineffective for most students. Attention in classrooms to investigation and open discussion of controversial social issues, in contrast, engages teachers and students in applying democratic ideals to the complexities of real conflicts, thereby generating more knowledge and interests (Hahn, 1998; Torney-Purta, Lehmann, Oswald, & Schultz, 2001). All the curricula reviewed, primarily in social studies, did create some limited and cautious space for such conflictual content — thereby offering some encouragement and protection for teachers who do address conflicts and controversies in their implemented curricula (Bickmore, 2002). Thus teachers are not prohibited by these curricular requirements, but not pervasively encouraged, to confront the kinds of social and political conflicts that would engage democratic citizens.

### *Curriculum for Harmony Building*

The curricula reviewed in all three subject areas placed clear emphasis on students' development of skills and inclinations for civil interpersonal communication and cooperation (see Table 1). Pedagogical guidelines continually exhorted teachers to use student-centred and experiential teaching methods such as discussion and group work, perhaps because such pedagogies remain anything but pervasive in practice (Sears, Clarke, & Hughes, 1999). These themes were emphasized in similar ways in all the provinces' curricula in the three subject areas.

*Table 1: Curriculum for Harmony-Building: Appreciating Self and Others*

MANITOBA	NOVA SCOTIA	ONTARIO
<p>ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS grade 8 (1996): "engage in dialogue to understand the feelings and viewpoints of others and contribute to group harmony." Grade 4: "identify similarities and differences between personal experiences and the experiences of people from various cultures portrayed in oral, literary, and media texts." Grade 3: "show consideration for those whose ideas, abilities, and language use differ from our own."</p> <p>PHYSICAL &amp; HEALTH Edn Framework grade 1-12 (2000) strands include self-awareness/self-esteem/respect for others and social development/appreciation of diversity. Grade 9: "examine the effects of stereotyping</p>	<p>PHYSICAL &amp; HEALTH Edn grade 7-9 (1999): practice fair play, including "willingly choosing a variety of partners using a variety of criteria" and "valuing the participation of both male and female students." Demonstrate "acceptance of and appreciation for their own and others' sexual orientation", and "awareness of social influences that contribute to gender stereotyping."</p> <p>SOCIAL STUDIES grade 9 course, Atlantic Canada in the Global Community (1998): "demonstrate an understanding of the nature of culture, ethnic, and linguistic groups in Atlantic Canada," mentioning especially francophones, aboriginals, and Afro-Canadians.</p>	<p>SOCIAL STUDIES grade 5: "demonstrate an understanding that for every right ... there is a responsibility." Grade 2: "demonstrate an understanding that Canada is a country of many cultures [and] identify the significant features of various family cultures (e.g. food, dress, celebrations)." In grade 6: "identify the contributions of Aboriginal peoples to the political and social life of Canada (e.g. in music, art, politics, literature and science)."</p>

MANITOBA	NOVA SCOTIA	ONTARIO
based on a variety of factors (e.g. gender, age, race, roles, media influences, body type, sexual orientation, source of income...) and ways... to promote acceptance of self and others."		

Respect for self and others and avoiding stereotypes were emphasized in all three sets of curricula across all reviewed subject areas. In Social Studies, this rhetorical affirmation of diverse identities also included invocations of national unity, recognition of the contributions of (essentialized) ethnocultural groups to Canada, and the Canadian-ness of our rights and freedoms. Except indirectly in the discourse about avoiding stereotypes, most of the curricular attention to social difference, especially in Ontario and Nova Scotia, did not mention (in)equity. Ethno-cultural differences were far more consistently mentioned than any other social difference, although especially in Manitoba, a few curricular passages included additional kinds of diversity such as gender, ability, and economic status, but without much concerted attention to any particular axis of (in)equity.

All three provinces emphasized Canadian identity, represented as ethnoculturally plural. Manitoba and especially Nova Scotia also emphasized regional identity. Ontario's relative inattention to regional identity presumably reflects its assumed dominance in central Canada. Ethnocultural diversity is represented somewhat differently in each province. For example, Nova Scotia emphasized Afro-Canadian identities, Manitoba attended more to Aboriginal concerns, and Ontario emphasized the polyglot community of immigrants. Manitoba's curriculum attended to discrimination and social exclusion in relation to a wider range of social differences, including sexual orientation and social class. Thus with notable exceptions, this prevailing contributions approach to social diversity appears to be aimed more at harmony and conflict avoidance than at restructuring conflictual social relationships.

Although social conflict is the assumed threat that seems to motivate this curricular attention to diversity, it rarely breaks the surface into explicit text. This kind of indirect, conflict-avoidant, awareness-level attention to diversity is unlikely to facilitate any movement toward equity (Banks, 1988; McCauley, 2002). To be effective, such curriculum would require open dialogue and sustained, equitable, cooperative, inter-group interaction (Tal-Or, Boninger, & Gleicher, 2002).

#### *Curriculum for Individual Skill-Building*

I have grouped the remaining two thematic sets of curriculum excerpts by subject area as well as by province to highlight emerging differences among jurisdictions (Health and English Language Arts appear in Table 2, Social Studies in Table 3). For example, compared to Nova Scotia, Manitoba and Ontario gave more explicit attention to conflict resolution in multiple subject areas. Manitoba's main attention to conflict resolution was in Health and Social Studies curricula. In comparison to the other provinces' curricula, the Manitoba curricula more explicitly linked critical reasoning to specific learning outcomes in all three subject areas. As in Manitoba, Ontario curriculum called for specific conflict resolution and critical reasoning outcomes, notably including social and political conflicts in addition to the interpersonal. At the same time, similarities among the three provinces' curricula (especially in English Language Arts) outweighed differences. What distinguishes these curricular themes is an individualistic, skill-building approach.

Table 2: Curriculum for Individual Skill-building: Physical & Health Education and English Language Arts

MANITOBA	NOVA SCOTIA	ONTARIO
PHYSICAL/HEALTH EDUCATION		
<p><b><u>Conflict resolution/ avoiding violence</u></b> MB Framework K-S4 (2000) General Learning Outcomes include safety (including violence/ abuse prevention) and personal/ social management</p>	<p><b><u>Conflict resolution/ avoiding violence</u></b> Grades 7-9 (1999): a student "listens attentively, encourages others, disagrees in an agreeable way, criticizes ideas instead of the person..." Grade 6: "identify and practice conflict</p>	<p><b><u>Conflict resolution/ avoiding violence</u></b> The grade 1-8 (1998) strand on "Personal Safety and Injury Prevention" attends to various types of verbal and physical violence, for example</p>

MANITOBA	NOVA SCOTIA	ONTARIO
<p>(including conflict resolution). Grade 3: "identify <i>strategies</i> (e.g. say no assertively, seek adult help... conflict resolution <i>skills...</i>) to avoid being <i>bullied</i> in different case scenarios." Senior 1 (grade 9): "apply conflict resolution strategies (i.e. mediation and negotiation) in different case scenarios for understanding different perspectives and points of view."</p> <p><b>Critical reasoning</b> This framework includes a decision-making/problem-solving strand, e.g. grade 3: "explore the steps in the decision-making/ problem-solving process (e.g. define topic or issue, explore alternatives, check and consider health knowledge and values, identify possible solutions, decide, evaluate...)." </p>	<p>resolution strategies."</p> <p><b>Critical reasoning</b> Grade 7-9 guidelines: students should have opportunities to "examine critically ways in which language and images are able to create, reinforce and perpetuate gender, ability, culture, and other forms of biases," and apply "critical, analytical and creative thinking to identify and solve problems, making decisions collaboratively." The foundation for all grades (1998) frames communication, problem solving, and the capacity to critically interpret information and different points of view as "essential graduation learnings."</p>	<p>grade 7: "identify people and resources that can support someone experiencing harassment." HEALTH grade 9-10 includes a main section on conflict resolution, such as "understanding the triggers of conflict."</p>
ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS		
<p><b>Critical reasoning</b> Senior 1-3 curriculum overview (1996): "Texts provide opportunities for thinking and talking about a wide range of topics and ideas, including those relating to society, ethics, and the meaning and significance of experiences... [Students should] become more <i>conscious, discerning, critical, and appreciative</i></p>	<p><b>Critical reasoning</b> Grade 4-6 curriculum overview (1998) emphasizes "critical literacy," including helping students to recognize "<i>how text constructs one's understanding and worldview of race, gender, social class, age, ethnicity, and ability</i>" and giving students "the <i>means to bring about the kind of social justice that a democracy seeks to create.</i>"</p>	<p><b>Critical reasoning</b> Grade 1-8 guidelines (1997) advocate "brainstorming, discussing strategies for problem solving, debating issues..." and "identifying values and issues, detecting bias, detecting implied as well as explicit meanings." Grade 9 includes units on Media</p>

MANITOBA	NOVA SCOTIA	ONTARIO
<i>readers of visual media and more effective creators of visual products. Students need to recognize that what a camera captures is a construction of reality, not reality itself."</i>		Studies and Literature Studies and Reading: <i>"explain how readers' different backgrounds might influence the way they understand and interpret a text."</i>

Table 3: Curriculum for Individual Skill-building: Social Studies/ Social Sciences

MANITOBA	NOVA SCOTIA	ONTARIO
<p><b><u>Conflict resolution/ avoiding violence</u></b> A Framework General Learning Outcome, "Power and authority," includes "...justice, rules and laws, conflict and conflict resolution, and war and peace." "Skills for active democratic citizenship" are to pervade the curriculum, including "cooperation, conflict resolution, accepting differences, taking responsibility, negotiation, building consensus, collaborative decision-making, and learning to deal with dissent and disagreement." Grade 5-8: "use a variety of strategies to resolve conflicts peacefully and fairly [such as] clarification, negotiation, compromise..." Grade 1: "give examples of causes of interpersonal conflict and solutions to interpersonal conflict in the school and community."</p>	<p><b><u>Conflict resolution/ avoiding violence</u></b> Foundation (1997) identifies communication (including debating, negotiating, establishing consensus, clarifying and mediating conflict) as essential skill outcomes, and suggests that students be required to take positions on past and current issues.</p> <p><b><u>Critical reasoning</u></b> Foundation guidelines: teachers should "encourage and enable students to question their own assumptions and to imagine, understand, and appreciate realities other than their own." One of six conceptual strands, Time and Continuity, advocates "critical analysis of the events of the past, their effects on today and their ties with the future... values clarification, and an examination of perspective..."</p>	<p><b><u>Conflict resolution/ avoiding violence</u></b> Grade 1-6 (1998) "Canada and World Connections" strand identifies examples of divergent viewpoints and conflict resolution. HISTORY grade 7 (1998) unit, "Conflict and Change:" "demonstrate an understanding of the rivalries between the French and English in North America and Europe (e.g. between the Hudson's Bay Company and the North West Company, [and] between Aboriginal allies...)" and "demonstrate an understanding of the nature of change and conflict, identify types of conflict (e.g. war, rebellion, strike, protest) and present strategies for conflict resolution." CIVICS grade 10 (1998): "demonstrate an ability to anticipate conflicting civic purposes, overcome personal bias, and suspend judgment in dealing with issues of civic</p>

MANITOBA	NOVA SCOTIA	ONTARIO
<p><b>Critical reasoning</b> “Skills for managing ideas and information” and “Critical and creative thinking skills” also are to pervade this curriculum. Grade 5-6: “compare diverse perspectives in a variety of information sources.” Grade 7, “compare differing viewpoints regarding global issues ... [and] analyze prejudice, racism, stereotyping, or other forms of bias in the media and other information sources.”</p>		<p><i>concern</i>” and “analyze approaches to decision-making and conflict resolution that affect their own lives.”</p> <p><b>Critical reasoning</b> Grade 9 Geography of Canada course: “analyse the factors that cause change, and forecast the effects of change in the relationships between the earth’s natural and human systems ... [to carry out] problem solving and planning.”</p>

All the curricula reviewed presented reasoning skills as essential such as information processing, decision making, interpreting multiple sources, and recognizing bias. Interpersonal conflict resolution skill-building was nearly as common. However, these expectations were usually listed separately from what many teachers understand as the real curriculum: subject matter content. The curricula mentioned abstract concepts of social justice and bias, but usually not attached to particular instances, causes, or ramifications. These curricula presented both critical thinking and conflict resolution primarily as technical skills and even as attitudes, disconnected from any particular substantive topic, and from dissent, diverse approaches to conflict, or engagement in probing the causes or effects of social conflict. Yet conflict and critique are not generic: each instance acquires distinct meanings in cultural, historical, and social context (Lederach, 1995; Ross, 1993). Although individual skills and willingness to confront conflict constructively are necessary for the dialogic and decision-making aspects of democratic citizenship in pluralistic contexts, they are likely not sufficient until applied to practice in relation to specific instances (Avery, Sullivan, & Wood, 1997; Case & Wright, 1997). Clearly teachers with the capacity and inclination to do so could plan lessons to achieve the above curricular expectations by delving into multiple perspectives on

contested questions and issues, but most of these curricula would not require them to do so.

None of the English Language Arts curricula explicitly taught peacemaking, although they emphasized critical reasoning skills that underlie conflict management. This lack of direct attention to conflict and resolution in language arts curricula represents a missed opportunity because both non-fiction and fiction often present characters' points of view about conflicts. Reading and writing curriculum could provide examples for thoughtful discussion, perspective taking, and other conflict learning. Nothing in these curricular expectations would prevent teachers from facilitating such learning opportunities, but there is little to directly encourage them to do so.

The reviewed Health and Social Studies curricula directed teachers to teach interpersonal skills and processes for handling conflict such as listening, negotiation, and peer mediation. Especially in Health, the curricula emphasized avoidance, settlement, and individual responsibility for preventing violence. All three life skills curricula emphasized individual strategies for avoidance and dispute settlement, rather than comprehension or critique of the sources of destructive conflict and violence in schools, communities, and the world. The implication, especially visible in the Manitoba curriculum, that students should use interpersonal skills to avoid bullying and abusive situations, places heavy responsibility on the individual victim. This diverts attention from the sources of social power for bullying, such as inter-group and gender-based prejudice, and the factors exacerbating destructive status competition in schools, such as competitive testing or privileging student in-groups such as sports elites (Aronson, 2000).

The Social Studies curricula called for a mix of individual conflict management skills similar to those in Health, and offered variable attention to concepts for understanding social-level conflicts including injustice. The main implication seems to be that conflict is a negative: This confuses the underlying causes with the symptoms of aggressive behaviour. Nova Scotia's Social Studies curriculum emphasized safely abstract constructs of worldview and multiple perspectives, in contrast to Ontario's and Manitoba's more explicit attention to intentional,

constructive confrontation of conflict (such as strikes, rebellions, protests) that could result in positive social change. At least in Ontario, the expectation to teach conflict resolution skills and processes in Health is a relatively recent change in the official curriculum. The Health curricula reviewed, more than Social Studies, emphasized quick settlement or avoidance of disruption and disconnected conflict from its cultural and social meanings, social structural causes, and potential positive outcomes. At worst, they seemed implicitly to legitimate use of force by the powerful, while de-legitimizing disruption by the less powerful.

Interpersonal conflict-resolution and critical-thinking learning expectations have been adopted rapidly and widely in many mainstream academic curricula, including those reviewed here. However, some of these goals and materials, as currently articulated, seem to build on and reinforce much older, dominant cultural assumptions that implicitly locate problems in certain uncivilized individuals rather than in the struggles for democratic social relations. This may contribute to a kind of social cohesion, but not to democratic cohesion. Clearly the solution is not to remove the important opportunity to develop critical thinking and conflict resolution capacities in school, but to reattach these skills to the concepts, instances, and social challenges that give them meaning in pluralistic democratic life.

*Curriculum for Understanding Political, International, and Social Conflict*

The curriculum excerpts reviewed below (Health and English Language Arts in Table 4, Social Studies in Table 5) did address directly some political, international, and social problems such as bias, stereotyping, war, and human rights violations. At the same time, even these few expectations rarely required teachers or students to address either specific instances or the underlying foundations of such problems. Because most citizens' (including most teachers') explicit intercultural, international, and political knowledge is minimal, a lack of specific content examples in the curriculum could virtually guarantee that these specific instances of social conflict, and their causes, often would not be addressed.

In the curricula reviewed, only Social Studies taught explicit citizenship, and especially civics (how the government works). Where the curricula did interrogate and problematize intersections among governance or national identity and social diversity, injustice, and social conflict, this interrogation created opportunities for teachers and students to practise constructive confrontation of the conflicts inherent to democracy. Classrooms, compared to the adult political world reflected in the news, are usually relatively safe contexts in which guidance and feedback could facilitate effective learning from such practice.

These curricula seemed to advocate social cohesion more through grand intentions than through close encounters with uncomfortable knowledge. To be fair, some of this abstraction results from this study's level of analysis. Broad provincial-level curriculum guidelines, designed to remain in place for a number of years, cannot feasibly address too many specifics (however, one wonders from what sources such specifics would ever emerge in practice). There is no reason to assume that exhorting students to respect abstract human and environmental diversity and interdependence would have an appreciable effect, in relation to the specific identities, uncertainties, and traumas inherent in deep social conflict. Thus it is a hopeful sign that these curricula did include a few potentially interesting opportunities to actually engage in discomforting dialogue about difficult democratic questions.

*Table 4: Curriculum for Political, International, and Social Conflict: Physical & Health Education and English Language Arts*

MANITOBA	NOVA SCOTIA	ONTARIO
PHYSICAL/HEALTH EDUCATION		
	<p><b><u>Global interdependence</u></b>            Foundation grade 1-12 (1998) overview includes as key principles citizenship and "self-reflection and consciousness that preserve human rights and the development of supportive and sustainable environments for all citizens." Curriculum expectations (1999): "to assess cultural, economic, and</p>	

MANITOBA	NOVA SCOTIA	ONTARIO
	<p>environmental interdependence in local and global contexts.” Grade 6: “identify ways in which communities and countries cooperate to protect and maintain environmental health.”</p> <p><b><u>Social conflict</u></b> Introduction encourages use of potentially-controversial resources, and provides strategies for teachers to defend their use of such resources if community members raise objections: “given the diverse nature and maturity of students, it is important to confront important issues and bring them into the open for discussion.”</p>	
ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS		
		<p><b><u>Global interdependence</u></b> Grade 1-8 (1997) guiding principle: to equip students with the “knowledge and skill that will help them <i>compete in a global economy</i> and allow them to lead lives of integrity and satisfaction, both as citizens and individuals.”</p>

Table 5: Curriculum for Political, International, and Social Conflict: Social Studies/ Social Sciences

MANITOBA	NOVA SCOTIA	ONTARIO
<p><b><u>Canadian citizenship/ideals</u></b> The Framework of Outcomes grade K-8 (2003) describes “citizenship as a core concept,” including ways individuals and groups</p>	<p><b><u>Canadian citizenship/ideals</u></b> Foundations (1998) grade 1-12 emphasizes democratic values such as equality, dignity, justice, freedom, civil rights and</p>	<p><b><u>Canadian citizenship/ideals</u></b> “Canada and World Connections” (1998), grade 5: <i>how federal and provincial governments ensure unity through governance</i></p>

MANITOBA	NOVA SCOTIA	ONTARIO
<p>influence the making of laws, redress past and present injustices (e.g. resource extraction from Aboriginal communities), and handle conflicts (e.g. global disparities in wealth &amp; human rights). This "active democratic citizenship in Canada" approach recognizes Canada's "bilingual and multicultural nature... respect for human rights and democratic ideals and principles, ability to work through conflicts and contradictions that can arise among citizens, commitment to freedom, equality, and social justice..." For the "Power and authority" general learning outcome, grade 5: examine "the authorization of some individual or group within a society to make binding decisions... [which may] vary from one society to another." Grade 9 CANADIAN STUDIES: "conflict between increasing needs and wants and limited resources is a fundamental economic problem which necessitates a decision-making system. In Canada, the political system is... marked by federal-provincial tensions."</p>	<p>responsibilities, and universal human rights. Curriculum outcomes emphasize that students should "take age-appropriate actions to demonstrate their responsibilities as citizens." Two of 6 'key-stage curriculum outcomes' are 'citizenship' and 'power and governance:' identify, analyze, and compare relations of power and authority, understand how the Canadian legal system "establishes order and manages conflict," and "how groups, institutions, and media influence people and society." Grade 9 course, Atlantic Canada in the Global Community: "explain how Atlantic Canadians shape political culture by exercising power and influencing political decisions."</p> <p><b>Global interdependence</b> Introduction encourages student-centred teaching: "stimulating ideas, social issues, and themes... to examine issues, respond critically and creatively, and make informed decisions as individuals and as citizens of Canada and of an increasingly interdependent world." Key-stage outcomes include 'culture and</p>	<p><i>mechanisms</i>. CIVICS grade 10 (1998): "demonstrate an understanding of the reasons for democratic decision making [and] <i>compare contrasting views of what it means to be a citizen.</i>" A main course strand is "Active Citizenship:" show "understanding of a citizen's role in responding to non-democratic organizations (e.g. supremacist and racist organizations) [and to] <i>compare and evaluate the impact of various non-violent citizen participation.</i>"</p> <p><b>Global interdependence</b> "Heritage and Citizenship" (1998) grade 6: "identify some of the consequences of Aboriginal and European interactions (e.g. economic impact of the fur trade on Aboriginal peoples, transmission of European diseases to Aboriginal peoples)." GEOGRAPHY 7-8 (1998): interdependent relationships of trade, and protecting the environment as a responsibility of citizenship. CANADIAN/WORLD STUDIES grade 10 has students "explain the significance of Canada's contribution to the forces of globalization and the United Nations (e.g. Universal Declaration of Human Rights, treaty on land mines,</p>

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<p><b><u>Global interdependence</u></b>            Framework General Learning Outcomes include "Identity, culture, and community" and "Global interdependence." Grade 7 "Spaceship Earth" course specific outcomes: "give examples of global cooperation to solve conflicts or disasters, "identify various international organizations and describe their role in protecting or enhancing global quality of life," and "identify universal human rights and explain their importance." Grade 8, "People through the Ages": "how the First World, Second World, and Third World developed and how life compares and contrasts in these 'worlds' ... and how may the Third World be affected by the First World." Grade 6, "Life in Canada's Past": "what impact did the arrival of [various waves of British] settlers have on the lives of French and Native people already living in the area." Grade 9 CANADIAN STUDIES: "what role does Canada play in keeping peace in the world?"</p> <p><b><u>Social conflict</u></b> Specific skill outcomes in this Framework include (grade 5-8), "recognize bias [and] discrimination and propose solutions." Grade</p>	<p>diversity' and 'interdependence,' including human rights, and planning and evaluating actions for peace and sustainability. Grade 9: "explain the concept of market" at multiple levels, "describe and analyse how ecosystems are created, influenced, and sustained," and "explain and analyse how Atlantic Canadians are members of the global community [and] need to become contributing members of the global community."</p> <p><b><u>Social conflict</u></b> Curriculum outcomes assert that social and cultural groups have different perspectives on social issues, and mention human rights and discrimination. Grade 9: "demonstrate an understanding of the issues and events surrounding cross-cultural understanding in the local, regional, and global levels" including <i>prejudice, discrimination, social injustice, ethnocentrism, racism, multiculturalism, and anti-racism.</i></p>	<p><i>children's rights).</i>" The grade 9 course, Geography of Canada, "Global Connections" strand: "Since the world's economies are becoming increasingly interconnected, and the flow of people, products, money, and ideas around the world is accelerating...."</p> <p><b><u>Social conflict</u></b> "Heritage and Citizenship," grade 6: "identify current concerns of Aboriginal peoples (e.g. self-government, land claims)." HISTORY (1998), grade 7 "Conflict and Change" unit: historical instances of conflict such as the rebellions of 1837 in Upper and Lower Canada. Students are to "analyze and describe conflicting points of view about an historical event (e.g. the expulsion of the Acadians), giving examples of fact and opinion [and to] describe the impact of the Treaty of Paris and the Quebec Act from both the English and the French points of view." Grade 8: show "understanding of the growth and development of the West from the points of view of the Canadian government, Aboriginal peoples, Metis, and new immigrants"; show "understanding of major developments that</p>

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<p>6 unit, Western Canada: "the relocation of Native People onto reserves," and "how is life in a contemporary reserve similar to and different from life on a reserve in the past." Grade 7, "Spaceship Earth": "what different conflicts may arise as a result of interaction of various cultural groups? What could help to prevent or counteract these conflicts?" Core concepts: "Canadian citizenship for the future" including "redressing past and present injustices" and "eliminating inequalities"; "Citizenship in the global context" including "help reduce the disparities and human rights violations that have become a common means of addressing internal and international disputes," and "Environmental citizenship". Grade 9: "define colonialism, imperialism, and nationalism."</p>		<p>affected the <i>working conditions of Canadian workers</i> (e.g. <i>development of unions, Winnipeg General Strike</i>)," and to "identify major developments (e.g. the suffrage movement) and personalities (e.g. Nellie McClung) in the <i>women's rights movement, and demonstrate an understanding of the changing role of women in Canadian society.</i>" Grade 10: "explain how and why social support programs (e.g. <i>old age pensions, unemployment insurance, medicare</i>) were designed, and assess their effectiveness in meeting the needs of various segments of society," and "explain how and why the Canadian government restricted certain rights and freedoms in wartime, and "describe the impact... of these restrictions on the general population and on various groups within the Canadian population."</p>

The above curricula, especially in Ontario and Manitoba, did emphasize the responsibility of citizens to recognize some fundamental sources of social conflict and injustice, and to participate actively in nonviolent citizen action in response to such problems. Interconnection and interdependence were mentioned a great deal in an abstract fashion, but power imbalance, injustice, or specific conflicts were mentioned very little. The language of global perspective and human rights had been adopted, but these provincial expectations would not require teachers to

allocate much time to examine specific international people, places, or problems. There was remarkably little international content mentioned in these curricula (there was more in some grade 11 and 12 social sciences, but generally fewer students participate in such courses). The pitfalls of dependence for marginalized regions were essentially unmentioned. As with the interpersonal appreciation of diversity discussed earlier, these curricula presented international diversity and human rights primarily as uncontested ideals, disconnected from specific instances.

Exceptions to these curricula's general pattern of conflict avoidance provide important illustrations of how attention to conflict could change the citizenship expectations embedded in curriculum. For example, global-level interdependence and citizenship expectations were included not only in Social Studies, but also in Physical and Health Education in Nova Scotia and in English Language Arts in Ontario (see Table 4). The Social Studies curriculum (Table 5), especially in Manitoba, did confront some difficult topics, grounding explicit concern for global and local equity and justice in specific examples. Notable learning expectations required examination of contemporary First World (including mainstream Canadian) patterns of behaviour that impact on injustices and challenges endured currently by Third World and Canadian Aboriginal peoples.

Nova Scotia's mention of citizens' divergent worldviews and students' participation in debating controversial issues was limited primarily to vague introductory statements. However, Nova Scotia required an entire grade-9 course on individual-local-global linkages, which could cover conflictual issues in more detail. Manitoba's and Ontario's Social Sciences curricula included significant attention to critical reflection on questions of global and national injustice. Mixed with unabashedly capitalist and status quo intentions around national unity and competing in the global economy were spaces for applying principles of justice and active citizenship to specific political issues such as land mines, Aboriginal land claims, workers' rights, women's rights, and English-French colonial rivalries in Canada—in historical and contemporary settings.

The English Language Arts curricula made essentially no specific mention of controversy or social conflicts. Health Education similarly avoided virtually all mention of social conflict or controversy, except for the mention in Nova Scotia's introduction that the use of certain curricular resources might be contested, yet worth the risk. Even in Social Studies, to different degrees in the different provinces, discrimination against specific out-groups was framed most frequently as past, as if such problems were largely solved.

Canadian identity was presented in a very positive light in all three sets of curricula: provincial authority over curriculum does not seem to prevent these curricula from reinforcing remarkably similar and unified approaches to national identity. Sometimes past or distant instances of social conflict and injustice were juxtaposed with current Canadian values of equality, rights, and participation. All the reviewed Social Studies curricula appeared to have been influenced by international citizenship education practice, in particular United States guidelines emphasizing study of multiple perspectives organized around key concepts (especially National Council for the Social Studies, 1994). Like national identity, international linkages and global citizenship responsibility were presented in similar ways in all three provinces.

However, some interesting differences occurred among these provincial curricula in how they applied democratic, justice, and interdependence concepts to specific instances of social conflicts and political controversies. Controversy was rarely encouraged in these curricula, but it was not totally ignored, especially in Social Studies. Ontario's Social Sciences curriculum included substantial attention to past inter-group conflicts and injustices. In Manitoba, more remarkably, a number of current social conflicts and justice issues were named, thus more likely to be included in teaching resources and actually covered. Clearly a teacher could present past conflicts in ways that would inform comparison and open discussion of today's conflicts, but there were only very rare explicit requirements here to do so.

## CONCLUSION

This research has pointed out many potential and partial opportunities for democratic social cohesion education in three sets of official

provincial curriculum guidelines. The discursive assumption that diverse students are becoming citizens with agency in relation to unresolved social conflicts was an evident sub-text throughout these curricula. They did provide some rationale, motivation, and safety net for teachers who would choose to offer their students guided opportunities to practise constructively addressing risky topics and perspectives. Despite typical patterns of denial and fear of controversy, a significant minority of teachers do effectively address the challenges of democratic social cohesion and citizen development by engaging diverse students in pluralistic, constructive management of conflict (Hess, 2002; McCully, O'Doherty, & Smyth, 1999; Wilson, Haas, Laughlin, & Sunal 2002; Worthington, 1985). At the same time, these curricula carried a mix of contradictory expectations for citizenship: everything from being good by being compliant to an exhortation that young individuals can and should change the world. There was consequently considerable space for teachers, individually and collectively, to use these curricula in relatively conservative or relatively transformative ways. Teachers' agency to pick up on these spaces of possibility is constrained and shaped by some of the same discursive patterns that have shaped these curriculum guidelines.

Like any official citizenship education, the curricula reviewed here reflect the intersections and contradictions among the voices of the various powerful and less-powerful stakeholders who negotiate in relation to national and regional identity and social cohesion through a federalist state. Examination of curriculum discourse in these three Canadian jurisdictions suggests that, despite the democratic language with which many of the documents are introduced, these governments are by no means unambiguously committed to active, critical, inclusive citizen agency in relation to current conflicts. At the same time, the tendency to avoid conflict and discourage potentially educative disruption was not absolute. Each provincial curriculum reviewed above did present various kinds of subject matter and skill-building expectations that could open important spaces for pluralistic democratic engagement.

There were few instances in the curricula reviewed here of explicit attention to contrasting viewpoints in specific social conflicts, especially

to gendered social relations or transnational social-structural factors. Substantive content about concerns of diverse human communities, or specific equity issues, was quite rare in these curriculum requirements. The assumption embedded in this discourse seemed to be that learning about *us* and how *we* should act is prerequisite to more complicated political engagement — social cohesion before conscientization. Citizenship education that begins by marginalizing conflicting voices is unlikely to provide a solid foundation for more pluralistic democracy.

The conflict-related learning opportunities and expectations embedded in these curriculum discourses offer grounds for optimism as well as concern. There was substantial attention to citizenship education for and about conflict in these curricula. All three sets of curricula in all three subject areas attended to conflict-related skills such as interpersonal communication and getting along with others. At the same time, much of this curriculum discourse embodied unchallenged dominant discursive perspectives, and could leave little space for actually practising engagement in unfinished democratic efforts. To different degrees in the various subject areas and provincial systems, the rhetoric of these curricula emphasized social harmony values and individual skills such as communication, generic critical thinking, cooperation, and appreciation of diversity. Thus all three sets of curricula appeared to emphasize assimilation more than democratic engagement — implicit social control and homogenization through inculcation of unproblematized values, silencing or marginalization of dissenting viewpoints. This emphasis is unlikely to provide a secure foundation for democratic social cohesion because it provides little support for development of creative, autonomous dissenting viewpoints, and little practice with managing actual public issues or social conflict challenges.

Education in and for conflict management is a crucial ingredient of democracy. Democratic processes of open dialogue and deliberation, as well as substantive democratic equity, are defined by their inclusion of conflicting voices and perspectives. It is a paradox of democracy and human rights that a degree of coercion (for example, non-discrimination laws and compulsory education) may contribute to democratic self-determination. Government curriculum requirements can contribute to

democracy and democratization by insisting that every student receive an opportunity to engage in guided experience and practice with constructive deliberation on social and political conflicts to develop skills, agency, and well-informed viewpoints as democratic citizens. To contribute to citizenship education for democratic agency, explicit curriculum can and must delve into the unsafe but real world of social and political conflicts and injustices that defy simple negotiated settlement, including the roots and human costs of current local and global injustices.

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#### NOTES

This paper draws from my larger SSHRC-funded study, *Safe and Inclusive Schools* (Bickmore 2004a), that compares implicit and explicit curricula, policies, and programs in three urban Canadian school districts for peacekeeping (security), peacemaking (conflict resolution), and peacebuilding (redressing social and cultural injustices underlying destructive conflicts).

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