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Social Studies in Three Canadian Provinces: A Comparative Exploration

Les sciences sociales dans trois provinces canadiennes: Une exploration comparative

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Abstract

This paper compares the similarities and differences in Ontario, British Columbia, and Nova Scotia's Social Studies curriculum documents. It finds a number of similarities in the curriculum documents including in structural form, aims, and content. It also finds some differences based on historical contingencies and regional conditions. The paper then analyses possible reasons for the similarities and differences found, with a focus on key individuals involved and contexts, and comments on whether calls for a national Social Studies curriculum should be implemented.

Résumé

Cet article compare les similitudes et les différences entre les documents du programme d'enseignement de sciences sociales de l'Ontario, de la Colombie Britannique et de la Nouvelle Écosse. Il repère un certain nombre de similarités dans les documents du programme d'enseignement, y compris la structure, les objectifs et le contenu. Il trouve également quelques différences fondées sur des contingences historiques et conditions régionales. Le document analyse ensuite les raisons possibles des similitudes et différences constatées, avec un accent sur les individus clés impliqués et les contextes, et commente si les appels pour un curriculum national de sciences sociales devraient être mis en œuvre.

Keywords: Social Studies curriculum documents; national curriculum

Mot clés : documents du programme d'enseignement de sciences sociales ; curriculum national.

Education is a provincial matter in Canada. For over a hundred years, however, individuals have debated whether education should remain a provincial matter, or whether federal involvement should increase (Di Mascio, 2013). Later in the twentieth century, some groups have made increased calls for Federal involvement. They have argued that provincial control leads to divergent and splintered educational programs. For example, the Council of Ministers (1993) argued:

The fact remains, however, that all Canadians also have certain common expectations of education. While our current education systems are already attempting in many ways to meet the challenges of modern society, when faced with common problems, it is clearly in our interest to adopt a national approach in dealing with them.

At their 2004 conference, they stated that they continue to work together and have further support for their joint goals from “the new Council of the Federation [that] offers an additional opportunity to strengthen ties between provinces and territories” as well as “the implementation of national indicators programs such as the Pan-Canadian Assessment Program” (Canadian Intergovernmental Conference Secretariat, 2004). Other groups, such as Historica (www.historica.ca) are also promoting national initiatives.

This paper explores whether calls for more Federal involvement through national initiatives should be heeded through a case study exploration of Social Studies curricula in three Canadian provinces. The aim is to explore whether a common understanding of Social Studies already exists in some parts of Canada by comparing the similarities and differences of British Columbia's (BC),

Ontario's, and Nova Scotia's (NS) curriculum guides. Based on these comparisons, the paper concludes with a discussion of whether or not having a common Social Studies curriculum across Canada through Federal initiatives or national agreements should be supported or not. If commonalities are found in Social Studies curricula, calls for a national curriculum may not be necessary. Reasons may also exist for differences in curricula. Social Studies is a good subject to investigate, as it has traditionally been the subject area through which national policies and initiatives, such as nationalism and multiculturalism, have been pushed. Further, evidence exists that Federal and national bodies have become more involved in curriculum initiatives in Canada (Di Mascio, 2013), and calls for more national policies have been heeded in the United States, which has also traditionally seen education as a state-level endeavour. Thus, this paper discusses whether trends occurring in the United States, which have been subject to much contestation (Evans, 2011), and which are pushed by some organizations and government bodies at Federal and national level in Canada, should be supported in Canada or not, based on a discussion of their necessity.

Methodology

The researcher carried out a qualitative document analysis (Bowen, 2009; Kohlbacher, 2006) of Social Studies curriculum documents in British Columbia, Ontario and Nova Scotia, looking at both general curriculum document overviews and the curriculum materials themselves in their entirety, using an interpretative approach. All curriculum documents are publicly available online. Document analysis is a qualitative method often used by historians and other social scientists. Key questions were: How is Social Studies defined, how are the guides structured, what are the curriculum's objectives or aims, what content is to be taught, and how? What other topics or themes are included in the curriculum? First, the researcher read the documents in order to get an overview of them and identify initial themes (Richards, 2005). The researcher then read all the documents again in order to carry out a detailed coding of them using the initial themes. Any new themes that emerged were added using a grounded theory approach (Glaser, 1992; Strauss & Corbin, 2008). Finally, the researcher returned to detailed sections of the documents in order to confirm codes. Research findings were placed in data tables and analysed. Each province was studied individually and then the three provinces were compared.¹

¹ In British Columbia, the researcher read the Social Studies K to 7 (British Columbia, Ministry of Education, 2006) Social Studies 7 to 10 (British Columbia, Ministry of Education, 1997b: 2005b), Social Studies 11 (British Columbia, Ministry of Education, 1997a; 2005a), Civic Studies 11 (British Columbia, Ministry of Education, 2005c), History 12 (British Columbia, Ministry of Education, 2006a), Geography 12 (British Columbia, Ministry of Education, 2006b), Comparative Civilizations 12 (British Columbia, Ministry of Education, 2006c); Social Justice 12 (British Columbia, Ministry of Education, 2008), and BC First Nations 12 (British Columbia, Ministry of Education, 2006d) curriculum documents. In Nova Scotia, the researcher read the Social Studies foundations document (Nova Scotia, Department of Education, 1999), Social Studies 7 (Nova Scotia, Department of Education, 2005), Social Studies 8 (Nova Scotia, Department of Education, 2006a), Social Studies 9 (Nova Scotia, Department of Education, 2006b), and discipline-specific courses including Geography 10 (Nova Scotia, Department of Education, 1996), Micmac Studies 10 (Nova Scotia, Department of Education, 2006c), Canadian History 11 (Nova Scotia Department of Education, 2002a), Gaelic Studies 11 (Nova Scotia, Department of Education, 2002b) Global History 12 (Nova Scotia Department of Education, 2003a) and Global Geography 12 (Nova Scotia Department of Education, 2003b). In Ontario, the author read Social Studies Grades 1 to 6 History and Geography Grades 7 and 8 (Ontario, Ministry of Education, 2013a), Canadian and World Studies (Geography, History, and Civics) Grade 9 and 10 (Ontario, Ministry of Education, 2013b) and Grade 11 and 12 (Ontario, Ministry of Education, 2005), and the newly released Social Sciences and Humanities Grade 9 to 12 curriculum guides (Ontario, Ministry of Education, 2013c).

These three provinces were chosen as they represent three different conceptions of Social Studies (BC has an interdisciplinary conception; NS has a multi-disciplinary conception and Ontario has a disciplinary conception, as will be described in more detail below). The researcher has also lived and taught in both Nova Scotia and British Columbia. The aim was to deepen our understanding of how three varied provinces, one on the West coast experiencing social and economic growth, another in central Canada with a large population and some economic issues, and the third on the east Coast with economic challenges and issues related to out migration of youth, conceptualize Social Studies in their curriculum in order to deepen our knowledge of similarities and differences in Social Studies curriculum documents across Canada and to begin a discussion about calls for a national Social Studies curriculum. The researcher acknowledges that other provinces have rich Social Studies curricula and plans to carry out further studies with more provinces in the future. This paper is an exploration of Social Studies curricula in three, varied provinces at a time of globalization and when some government officials and organizations are pushing for more standardization across the nation.

Academic Work in Social Studies

A few key areas of work in social Studies across Canada and the United States are Citizenship Education, Multiculturalism, Equity/Social Justice, and History. Since the foundation of Social Studies, citizenship education has been a key, but contested, component of the course (Broom, 2011a; Evans, 2004; Jorgensen, 2012; Nelson, 1994). Debate over the twentieth century has occurred over the meaning, purpose and relationship between citizenship education and Social Studies (Evans, 2004). Due to low rates of youth voting, a resurgence of interest has occurred in citizenship education. Scholars have discussed youth civic behaviours and recommended improved citizenship education (for example, Arthur and Davies, 2008; Beaumont, 2010; Callan, 1997; Campbell-Patton and Quinn Patton, 2010; Crick, 2000; Finlay, Wray-Lake, and Flanagan, 2010; Howe, 2010; Reid, Gill & Sears, 2010; Youniss & Levine, 2009; Zajda, Holger & Saha, 2009). A related area of work is Global Education/Citizenship, where scholars explore whether there are bonds that connect us as humans in general and if there are, what are they and what kind of education they involve (Andreotti, 2006; Appiah 2007, Nussbaum, 1997; Pike, 2008).

Social studies scholars are also writing about topics such as multiculturalism (Banks, 2007, Kymlicka, 2008) and related social issues such as racism and inequalities based on race, class and gender, and how these can be addressed in Social Studies classes using methods such as inquiry and critical thinking (Giroux, 1997; Mendleson, 2012; Ornstein, 2000; Reitz and Banerjee, 2006). A third area of work is a resurgence of interest in the meaning and methods of History education in both the United States (Evans, 2004; 2011) and Canada. A number of scholars have explored what Historical study means and entails. For example, Seixas (2004) and Levesque (2008) have written about what historical thinking (or consciousness) is and how it can be developed in students. Historical research and thinking has been promoted in Canada through the establishment of a website (Then/Hier). Discussion has occurred over whether history in schools should aim to develop a common national consciousness in students (Bliss, 2002; Granatstein, 1998) or to develop historical mindedness and methods (Seixas, 2002).

Commonalities in BC, Ontario, and Nova Scotian Curriculum Guides

Definition

BC (Ministry of Education) and NS (Nova Scotia Department of Education, 1999) define Social Studies as the integrated study of the Social Sciences with the aim of developing good citizens.

These citizens should be aware of their rights and responsibilities; promote equality, inclusion, diversity, pluralism; and respect self and others, the rule of law and our environment. Both provinces include similar elements such as developing critical thinking, problem solving, communication, IT, and inquiry/research skills (Nova Scotia Department of Education, 1999). Ontario (Ministry of Education) guides also aim to develop good citizens and have many of the same features as those of BC and NS, such as a focus on inclusion, but within a disciplinary-based structure. In high school, they label Social Studies “Canadian and World Studies” and define it as including “five subjects: economics, geography, history, law, and politics. In studying these subjects, students learn how people interact with and within their social and physical environments today, and how they did so in the past.” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2005, p. 4).

Like NS and BC, the new Social Sciences and Humanities curriculum (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013c) states that the guides aim to help, “all learners develop the knowledge, skills, and perspectives they need to be informed, productive, caring, responsible, healthy, and active citizens in their own communities and in the world” (p. 4). Ontario guides aim to develop the same skills as BC and NS, with a particular emphasis on student inquiry (all courses include the requirement for students to engage in inquiry projects on questions chosen by the students) and with attention to developing “positive habits of mind, such as curiosity and open-mindedness; a willingness to think, question, challenge, and be challenged” (p. 34). Ontario guides also encourage teachers to develop students’ critical literacy skills. The curriculum guides of all three provinces thus focus their definitions of Social Studies around the concept of the development of Canadian citizens who understand their rights and responsibilities, a progressivist (in the child-centered sense) conception of the subject (Broom, 2012a; Evans, 2004).

Organization

The three provinces present their curriculum guides using “outcomes,” general statements as to the knowledge, skills, or values students are to learn, associated with course aims. They also use “themes” or “strands” into which they divide the outcomes to be studied. Ontario’s guides are structured around general concepts, such as “communities, conflict and cooperation” that are used to frame the program of study. As well, the provinces have “Social Studies” in elementary schools (and junior high school [grades 7 to 9] for BC and NS), and then separate Social Studies into individual discipline studies (History and Geography) at senior levels. They all follow Hanna’s Social Studies expanding horizons framework in which students begin their studies with their immediate communities and then expand out to their schools, local communities, national community, and international study (Evans, 2004). However, Ontario guides jump around a little in elementary school, and the province offers a number of varied courses of studies in local and global history at the senior high school level.

While the objectives in the three provinces include specific content that students are to study (see below), the objectives are also written in such a manner that teachers have some choice as to what details they focus on and how these are presented. For example, in Ontario’s grade 10 Canadian History since World War I course, teachers are told that, “students will be able to describe attitudes towards and significant actions affecting ethnocultural minority groups in Canada during this period” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013b, p. 113). Thus, teachers with varied students and perspectives of social studies do have the ability to shape their courses within varied orientations to the subject (Broom, 2012a). Further research can be conducted in order to see the extent to which teachers personalize their content delivery or follow textbooks, as textbooks often present structured content and perspectives (Broom, 2011b).

In BC, in grade 12, Social Studies is split into elective courses that include History 12 (Twentieth Century History), Geography 12 (Physical Geography), and Social Justice 12 (Contemporary social issues). BC guides have the least World History study of the three provinces (Broom, 2010). BC's History 12 course focuses primarily on Canada in the context of twentieth century world history (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2006a). Both Ontario and NS have senior courses in World History (Nova Scotia Department of Education, 2003a; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2005). Ontario offers the largest assortment of senior level elective courses including History, Geography, Law, Politics/Civics, Economics, Philosophy, Gender/Social Justice, World Religions courses and an Introduction to Anthropology, Psychology and Sociology course.

Content

The three provinces have some similar thematic content. They have physical Geography and Geography skills, First Nations history in Canada, pre and post Confederation history, the World Wars, Ancient and European history, twentieth century history with a focus on Canada, government studies, law, and the study of a number of problems, or issues, in our contemporary world including environmental degradation. All three provinces pay attention to Canada's cultural and social diversity and inclusion and make reference to including the multiple perspectives or experiences of Canadians of varied cultural groups in Canadian history courses. Ontario's new Equity Studies course in its Humanities curriculum (Ontario, Ministry of Education, 2013c) includes courses on gender identity, equity and culture which can be considered to be "social justice"-(or reconstructionist [Evans, 2004])-oriented as they have students explore the complexity of identity, power inequalities, social and historical injustices. Students also prepare an action plan to address a social inequity/issue: "the courses promote an understanding of and respect for diversity, and a critical awareness of the status quo and of continuing challenges to an inclusive, fair, and just society" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013c, p. 44). BC's Social Justice 12 (British Columbia, Ministry of Education, 2008) has the same type of content and aims.

NS guides, in grades 7 and 8, and BC guides, in grades 9, 10, and 11, aim to develop national identities in their students by focusing historical study primarily around the telling of the Canadian "nation building" historical narrative in which historical facts are carefully selected and weaved together to create a narrative that aims to build a positive collective consciousness (Broom, 2012b, Kenny, 1999; Wertsch, 2002). As mentioned above, some scholars argue that this is necessary for developing an attachment to the nation (Bliss, 2002), while others oppose in favour of developing students' historical thinking skills (Seixas, 2002). Ontario's newly revised grade 7, 8 and 10 curriculum focuses more on Canada's social history and the inequities experienced by particular groups in Canada rather than the older nation-building narrative, although the grade 11 History guide does state that, "An essential aspect of history is the appreciation of the legacy of the past, through which students come to understand their connection to their heritage and their role as citizens" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2005, p. 134).

Specialized Courses

All three provinces have optional senior courses. For example, British Columbia has First Nations Studies 11, Civics 11, and a number of optional grade 12 courses such as Social Justice 12, History 12, and Geography 12. Nova Scotia has Micmac Studies 10, Gaelic Studies 11, and African Canadian Studies 11. Some of BC and NS's optional, specialized courses focus on groups previously omitted from programs of study in senior grades. These courses aim to develop positive

feeling for the groups studied such as by celebrating the distinct cultural traditions such as “spirituality.” Ontario offers a variety of senior level courses including options in global history, law, politics, American History and Human, Physical, Environmental, Urban and applied Geography.

While all three provinces state the need for teachers to consider the diverse needs of their students, Ontario has the most differentiated program of study by having courses separated into four streams of study: university, university-college, work, or “open.” This is an element of the Ministry of Education’s general aim of having all students complete their high school educations. However, the university and college course options provide the richest and most intellectually stimulating courses that develop a number of skills including critical thinking. By offering courses at varying levels of ability, Ontario’s curriculum may perpetuate inequalities in society that the Ministry of Education states it aims to end, as students will graduate with varying knowledge of and ability to participate in Canadian society. This is made clear in the varied Law courses (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2005), where the apparently “smarter” university bound students will acquire far more information on Canadian Law. Shouldn’t all Canadians have the same amount of knowledge of Canadian legal concepts and terms? Some scholars such as Adler and Van Doren (1988) argue that all students are capable of studying intellectually-rich material. Questions emerge as to who is “streamed” into which program and why. Previous research in the United States and the United Kingdom has found that streaming students often occurs along race, class, and gender lines (Apple, 2006).

Methods and Assessment

All provinces advocate “active,” student-focused learning that considers varied learning styles, values inclusion and diversity, and connects to students’ experiences or local issues (e.g., British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2005b; Nova Scotia Department of Education, 1999; 2006; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013b). They comment on the need for and importance of assessment in illustrating what students have learned and state that this assessment should be both formative and summative (that is, assessment of, for and as learning) and that students should be allowed to illustrate their learning in varied ways. The three provinces recommend similar and varied activities such as debates, discussions, using information technology, audiovisual resources, worksheets, group work and creating a “community of learners” (Nova Scotia Department of Education, 2006, p 112). All provinces state the need to consider English-as-a-Second-Language learners and students with special learning needs, as well as recommend developing students’ skills such as research and critical thinking skills. Ontario guides emphasize student-focused learning such as problem/issue-based inquiry/research projects by including this as a key, learning outcome in all courses. NS and BC also include outcomes related to developing students’ critical thinking and inquiry skills. The new Ontario guides also reference Seixas’ historical thinking concepts and differentiated instruction and universal design (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013b), both of the latter are popular in curriculum instruction courses in academia.

Perspective

While the guides include historical events that are either of European nations’ history (particularly that of France and Britain) or of Europeans actions in North America, again particularly those of the French and the British, teachers are given opportunities to include other groups’ histories and to take a critical look at Canada’s history. For example, some outcomes in BC curriculum guides have students critically explore the historical actions of the Canadian government (such as the

Komagata Maru, Residential Schools, Immigration policy). Asian Canadians are also included for their contribution to the building of the cross-Canada railroad and for their unfair treatment during the early twentieth century by the Canadian government (the head tax and interment) (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2005b).

The older Ontario guides tended to present an overly positive perspective with the aim of developing national feeling by having students consider “Canada’s contribution” to world events and “Canada as a world leader;” however, the new guides include more content that is critical of Canadians’ behaviours in the past. The new Grade 10 History curriculum, for example, is a social history of Canada in the twentieth century with attention to social group (divided by race, class and gender) interactions and inequities, within a study of key Canadian and world events (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013b).

Ontario’s new Grades 9 to 12 Social Sciences and Humanities curriculum specifically emphasizes studying diverse groups in Canadian society and their contributions to Canada and historical and contemporary power inequalities (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013c). The Ontario guides not only include diverse groups but also state that the lessons should focus on the students’ backgrounds: “It is imperative that students see themselves reflected in the choices of materials, resources” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013a, p. 48). These recommendations reflect the reality of an increasing ethnically mixed population, within a multicultural policy framework. Ontario guides also include specific reference for teachers to include women’s history, such as changes in the status of women over the century. While BC also includes recommendations to include multiple group’s histories, and anti-racism education and belonging are dealt with in both BC and Nova Scotia (Nova Scotia, Department of Education, 2006b), women still appear more as “add ons,” in BC and NS’s curricula, if they appear at all.

Attention to Citizenship Education

As mentioned above, Citizenship Education is a growing area of study. Both British Columbia and Ontario now have Civics courses. In BC, Civics 11 (Ministry of Education, 2005c) is an optional course. It reviews the structures of government in Canada, the rights and responsibilities of citizenship, has students explore the ability of various groups to implement change, the effectiveness of Canada in managing issues, and ways of getting involved. The course ends with students developing an action plan to address an issue of their choice. The Ontario civics course is a half credit, required grade 10 course (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013b). Similarly to the BC course, students learn about government structures, the rights and responsibilities of citizenship, and different points of view on issues. Students develop an action plan for an issue. Citizenship education is also integrated into the general learning outcomes of all three provincial curriculum documents and links into the progressivist aims of the course (Evans, 2004).

Differences in BC, Ontario, and Nova Scotian Curriculum Guides

Interdisciplinarity versus Multidisciplinarity

The provinces have different approaches to the study of Social Studies. British Columbia takes an interdisciplinary view. In other words, the “disciplines” are subsumed under general discipline-like themes such as society, economy, and politics, which are used to organize a primarily history-based program. In Nova Scotia, the disciplines are given a much larger “public” view, with less focus on history. For example, in the grade nine Atlantic Canada course (Nova Scotia, Department of Education, 2006b), the textbook and curriculum are divided into units, according to the

disciplines of Geography, Anthropology, Economics, Law, Political Science, and Sociology. These disciplines are then used as frames through which to study contemporary Atlantic Canada using an issues-based approach. Ontario guides take the most disciplinary approach by dividing Social Studies into separate Geography, History, Economics, Law, and Politics courses in grades 7 to 12. More attention is given to Geography study in all grades in both NS and Ontario than in BC. All three provinces offer some disciplinary social science options (Sociology, Political Science, and Economics for example) in senior courses.

Controlling Language, Standards, and Accountability

Nova Scotia and Ontario have no provincial assessments, or exams, of Social Studies. British Columbia has a standardized, provincial exam for Social Studies 11 worth 20% of students' grade. Further, BC curriculum guides contain the most "controlling" language and neoliberal ideas such as "accountability" and "standards" (Apple, 2006; Ross, 2007; Vibert, 2009). For example, teachers are told that: "Prescribed learning outcomes are the *legally* required content standards for the provincial education system" (italics added, British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2005a, p. 7); and that "When used in a prescribed learning outcome, the word "including" indicates that any ensuring item **must be addressed**" (bold in the original, British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2005b, p. 19). Ontario guides are between NS and BC. They contain less controlling language but do include some neoliberal concepts such as accountability, the aims of developing "financial literacy skills" including being a "wise" consumer and preparing students to develop good work habits and skills (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013c, p. 46). Ontario also includes testing of student literacy and numeracy at points in the school program. Ontario teachers are given responsibility for developing in-course and final course assessments tools for the courses they teach, using their professional judgment. Ontario guides make references to the professional judgement of the teacher more often than BC or NS guides.

A Focus on Inequality and Interconnectedness

Nova Scotian curriculum guides (Nova Scotia Department of Education, 1999; 2005; 2006) give more attention to inequality, interconnectedness, and global citizenship than British Columbian guides. "Inequality" refers to gaps in wealth or justice between different areas of Canada or the world. For example, Nova Scotia is described as less wealthy than the rest of Canada as is the "developing world." Tied to this theme is that of injustice. "Interconnectedness" is positively portrayed as part of globalization, understood as constructive interdependence between different parts of the world. The guides even mention teaching students the concept of a "global village" (Nova Scotia Department of Education, 2003a). British Columbian guides have very little Global History or Geography study. Although the guides mention social inequities in Canada's history, they also present content that focuses on the old, "nation-building" narrative (Bliss, 2002). Some Ontario curriculum guides, particularly those in Geography at senior levels (Ontario, Ministry of Education, 2005), also include the themes of global interconnectedness and inequality.

A "Case Study" or "Depth Study" Approach to Content

NS guides cover more contemporary information across the disciplines and condense historical information into shorter periods of study. For example, a broad sweep of Canadian history, from pre-contact aboriginal life to twentieth century issues with sovereignty, is presented in one grade 11 course (Nova Scotia, Department of Education, 2002a) using six major themes (Globalization, Development, Governance, Independent Study, Sovereignty, and Justice) and the grade nine

course presents a contemporary study of the Atlantic region through disciplinary study (Nova Scotia, Department of Education, 2006b). While Nova Scotian guides take a “case study” or “depth study” approach by presenting a few key events, BC and Ontario guides take a more comprehensive, “over-view” approach. BC reviews Canadian history in grades 9, 10, and 11 and Ancient and European history in grades 8 and 9. Ontario reviews Canadian history in grades 7, 8 and 10. Ontario guides also go into detail in separate courses of study at the senior level.

More “Social Studies”

BC students take “Social Studies” until the end of grade 11. Socials 11 (British Columbia, Ministry of Education, 2005c) reviews more recent Canadian history, the Canadian government, and a little Geography. In grade 12, “Social Studies” is divided into elective courses. In Nova Scotia, Social Studies ends in grade 9. In high school, students can choose a variety of distinct “Social Science” courses including European and Global History, Physical and Human Geography, Gaelic Studies 11, and Sociology 12. Similarly, in Ontario, students take Canadian and World Studies after grade 9. Within these, the grade 9 Geography of Canada course and the grade 10 Canadian History since WWI as well as a Civics 10 class are required. The grade 9 Geography course reviews physical and human interactions in Canada with attention to resources and their management and sustainability, and the grade ten course reviews Canadian social history (Ontario, Ministry of Education, 2013b). Senior courses of study in Ontario are varied and include History, Geography, Politics, Law, and Economics courses, but they are optional (senior courses are optional as long as one course is taken in the Liberal Arts area, according to graduation requirements). Students in Ontario and Nova Scotia study more Geography and World History than BC students, and they have more options of study in various, separate Social Science courses. However, as these are not required courses, some students will study less Social Studies material than BC students.

Varied Content

While much of the content is similar, some thematic differences are apparent. For example, in the Canadian “national” story, Nova Scotia goes into the story of immigration into Canada in more detail than does BC, and aims to build students’ sense of regional pride, and to address the issues of racism and regional economic disparity (Nova Scotia Department of Education, 2006b). BC focuses more on the “development of the West” (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2005b). Ontario includes content on varied cultural groups within the Ontario area and local history and regional issues (such as the auto industry and history of unionization) (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013b; 2005). These different foci make sense based on regional interests and issues.

Discussion: Social Studies across Canada

Table 1 on the next page summarizes the findings of the paper. Similarities in Social Studies documents are found in their structural features, such as their use of objectives, concepts or themes to organize the curricula and their content (all include Canadian history, primarily social history that gives attention to varied social groups’ histories in Canada, including Canada’s First Nations). The guides also share similar general aims and skills, which include citizenship, inquiry, research and critical thinking development. All of the guides also include teaching strategies that are student-centered such as the use of projects, inquiry learning, and activity-based learning, and all the guides encourage teachers to focus their planning on the needs and interests of their students and to be inclusive and consider special learning needs.

Connections to academic work

Earlier, this paper reviewed academic work occurring in Social Studies, which includes attention to theorizing and teaching history, citizenship education, and social justice themes such as addressing gender and racial inequities. Some BC and Ontario guides include some of this work. For example, attention to citizenship education is illustrated in the development of new Civics courses in both provinces: Ontario has added a new compulsory Civics course in grade 10 and BC has added an elective Civics course in grade 11. All three provinces have links to academic work in the areas of multiculturalism and some connections to social justice work, as they include content addressing issues such as racism. Further, they all incorporate recommended Social Studies methods such as inquiry, collaborative learning and critical thinking and varied assessment forms. The new Ontario guides have courses that aim to address social inequities (such as the new Equity Studies course) and also specifically mention some of the concepts associated with academic work relating to history education, quoting Peter Seixas directly.

These similarities are not surprising considering the amount of cross-pollination in resources. For example, the Nova Scotia Department of Education reference list (1999) includes materials from Australia, American, Saskatchewan and Ontario curriculum documents in addition to work by academics on racism, history and geography education.

Differences across the three provinces are found in the framing of Social Studies as multidisciplinary or interdisciplinary, in some areas of focus, and in the amount of Social Studies studied. BC takes an interdisciplinary approach, Nova Scotia takes a multidisciplinary approach, and Ontario has a disciplinary approach to the subject. BC and NS focus on the creation of good citizens in their definitions. While Ontario guides take a more social science/disciplinary approach, its guides also pay attention to citizenship education. Some content also differs, based on regional histories and issues. For example, NS guides aim to develop positive regional identities due to economic and social issues in the area such as out-migration by youth.

The many similarities found in curriculum guides in the three provinces illustrate that curriculum ideas travel across the provinces through the work of scholars and means such as journal articles, books and conferences. At the same time, the guides contain differences as the local environment shapes how curriculum materials are developed. For example, Nova Scotian guides aim to foster regional identity and encourage young people to stay in the region. Ontario's new guides focus attention on the need to include the histories of multiple social groups in Canada and to tailor the materials to the students' backgrounds. Ontario guides also discuss the need to address varied students' needs. This attention to inclusivity is fitting for a province with increasing cultural diversity. Thus the curriculum guides reflect how those with power to reform curriculum guides understand and interact with perceived local needs and interests. However, these processes are complex as these individuals are also affected by global patterns of academic work and ideological discourses of power. Currently, for instance, neoliberalism is popular in many government departments. The BC guides include the most controlling neoliberal language of the three provinces and its features such as preparing workers, teacher accountability and student choice (Ungerleider & Krieger, 2009). Ontario guides also include the aim of preparing students to be workers.

Table 1. Social Studies Curriculum in Three Canadian Provinces

	B.C.	Ontario	Nova Scotia
Definition	“To develop thoughtful responsible citizens.”	“Encompasses five subjects: economics, geography, history, law, and politics...students learn how people interact with and within their social and physical environments today, and how they did so in the past.”	“Will enable and encourage students to examine issues, respond critically and creatively and make informed decisions as individuals and citizens of Canada and of an increasingly interdependent world.”
Organization	5 key themes that repeat at each grade (eg. Society & Culture; Performance)	Organizing concepts (eg. Cause and Consequence)	Outcomes developed from Conceptual Organizers (eg. culture)- at grade & program level
Content	History and Geography of Canada, citizenship education, attention to skills development, such as inquiry and critical thinking		
Methods and Assessment	Student-centered learning, integration of information technology On-going assessment of varied types (as/of/for learning)		
Perspective	Attention to varied social and cultural groups in Canada, past and present, to social inequalities. Women only explicitly focused on in Ontario.		
Differences			
Structure	Interdisciplinary	Disciplinary. Not called “Social Studies” in high school; rather the Canadian and World Studies program.	Multidisciplinary
Neoliberalism	Neoliberal language, focused on accountability	Less explicit neoliberal language	Neoliberal language focused on making good workers
Focus	Old nation-building historical narrative & inequality	Some attention to interconnectedness	Interconnectedness & inequality
Content organization	Overview approach	Overview approach	Depth over breadth
Amount of Social Studies	To Grade 11	To Grade 6, and then History, Geography and Civics to grade 10, with optional senior courses.	To grade 9, and then optional disciplinary courses.
Varying content	B.C. history and more attention to the “Development of the West”	Ontario local regional geography and issues (eg. Auto workers)	Local and regional history and issues

The historical study of curriculum guides helps us to understand why the three provinces have these similarities and differences (Broom, 2008). In varied places and times, individuals, often scholars or graduates of Educational programs influenced by global trends in their disciplines, were able to integrate these ideas into curricula as a result of advocacy and/or government support. Academics or ministry officials (often with similar educational backgrounds) picked these ideas up from their own educations, conferences and journals. Further, they were

influenced by local and global socioeconomic conditions. Considering the guides of BC, Ontario and NS we can argue that Canada's increasing social diversity is influencing the curriculum as the guides pay more attention to citizenship education, varied social groups and inclusion. As mentioned above, attention to social inequities, inclusion, multiculturalism, history and citizenship education are also present in much academic work in Canada and the United States today (including Apple, 2007; Banks, 2007; Giroux, 1997; Kymlicka, 2008; Reid, Gill and Sears, 2010; Rinaldo, 2014)

Returning now to calls for a national curriculum, this research has found that much cross-pollination of curriculum materials is already occurring (and has occurred in the past [Clarke, 2004; Broom, 2008]). Differences often relate to the specific contextual factors and issues of each region. Some differences are historical "accidents" such as the time when the curriculum was implemented and who was involved in its development. Overall, many similarities in the curriculum documents are already found (in their content, attention to skills development, and focus on inclusion and issues of race and gender), and these will continue to occur as popular ideas travel across borders through books, journals and conferences. Differences allow for the inclusion of regionally-relevant content and issues, such as attention to building a positive local identity.

Those calling for national curriculum initiatives argue that there is a need for a national curriculum in order to focus on national problems in Canada today and to ensure that young Canadians learn similar information across the nation. For the latter, there is much similarity in the content that is studied in all three provinces (particularly about the history of Canada, which has been one of the areas where national calls for a curriculum have most focused). For the former, it is clear that those who develop curriculum documents in provinces are familiar with the problems faced both across Canada and in their provinces, such as the need to address racism and inclusion in a multicultural nation. Thus, the author argues that there is no need to develop a national curriculum (or national curriculum standards as has occurred in the United States) as curriculum development at the provincial level is already addressing national problems and issues. Further, this curriculum development is able to specifically address local and provincial issues (such as the problem of youth outmigration in the Maritimes) at the same time. Provincial curriculum development and standards, that is, addresses both national and regional issues and is thus more effective than attempting to push Social Studies curriculum standards at the national level—a process that has been both problematic and contested in the United States (Evans, 2011; Labadie, 2011). However, further research should look into mandated textbooks, teachers' interpretation of these curriculum guides, and students' learning from them, as the mandated curriculum is mostly likely not the same as these other forms of enacted or lived curriculum experiences.

Conclusion

This paper reviewed Social Studies curriculum documents in three varied provinces in Canada. The aim of the review was to explore similarities and differences in curriculum content and suggested teaching strategies and objectives in order to comment on whether calls for a national Social Studies curriculum or standards should be heeded, as has occurred in the United States. The review found many similarities in content, suggested teaching strategies and focus on addressing national issues in Canada today, such as inclusion, multiculturalism, and racism—all areas that have been part of the reasons made for a national curriculum. Differences based on regional needs and issues, such as more attention to union history in Ontario, to the "development of the West in BC, and to building regional pride in the Maritimes address local or regional concerns. Some differences, such as whether Social Studies is understood to be interdisciplinary or cross-

disciplinary relate primarily to who developed the curriculum documents and when, and are not related to calls for national curriculum standards. The many similarities found in curriculum documents is related to the rich sharing of curriculum concepts and ideas across the nation that happens naturally through conferences, books, journal articles and educational graduate study and is a testament to the open and fluid nature of curriculum development and reform across Canada.

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