CANADIAN SOCIAL STUDIES
VOLUME 38 NUMBER 3, SPRING 2004
www.quasar.ualberta.ca/css
Special Issue: Graduate Work in Social Studies Education

Identity and the Forthcoming Alberta Social Studies Curriculum: A Postcolonial Reading

Laura A. Thompson

University of Alberta

Return to Articles

Abstract

Beginning in the early 20th century, the role of citizenship as an organizing concept has been significant in the teaching of social studies. The central aim of the social studies was the production of "good citizens," and the main focus of the Alberta social studies curriculum has ultimately become developing "responsible" citizenship. While citizenship has always been the raison d'être of social studies, identity has also played an important role in the formation of young citizens. The author's aim in this article is to explore how and in what ways multiple perspectives can be read in the context of the Alberta Junior High social studies curriculum. After examining the evolving concepts of citizenship and identity from the 1970s to the 1990s, she undertakes a postcolonial reading of the forthcoming Alberta social studies curriculum.

Introduction

Beginning in the early 20th century, the role of citizenship as an organizing concept has been significant in the teaching of social studies. The central aim of the social studies was the production of "good citizens", and the main focus of the Alberta social studies curriculum has ultimately become developing "responsible" citizenship. While citizenship has always been the raison d'être of social studies, identity has also played an important role in the formation of young citizens. For example, the consultation draft of the Alberta social studies curriculum (2002, p. 1) states that it "will meet the needs and reflect the nature of 21st century learners, and it will have at its heart the concepts of citizenship and identity in the Canadian context." As a teacher and a Francophone, I have learned that identity is not easy to define, not easy to represent, and not easy to even trace. While the social and cultural location of learners and teachers is complex, it is difficult to represent such complexity given Canada's "evolving realities." Nevertheless, if the Alberta Social Studies Program of Studies is to make a valuable contribution to "a Canadian spirit," it will need to explore the complex, cultural construct of

identity. My aim in this article is to explore how and in what ways multiple perspectives can be read in the context of the Alberta Junior High social studies curriculum. Particularly, my interest is to examine the evolving concepts of citizenship and identity from the 1970s to the 1990s. Furthermore, I undertake a postcolonial reading of the revised Alberta social studies curriculum. In doing so, I revisit social studies education within the framework of a plural society. It is my hope to provide social studies educators with a deeper understanding of the complexity of identity in the Alberta social studies curriculum, both past and present.

Creating a sense of national identity

Although the concept of identity is at the core of the new Alberta social studies curriculum, it has also been a central question in citizenship education. Because identity has historically been associated with the nation, national identity has become a problematic concept in the globalized world environment. In the 19th century, the nation became the focus of people's loyalty and the modernist idea of national character created a unique sense of identity critical to the survival of the state (Richardson, 2002). The production of "good citizens", therefore, became the domain of the civic nation. On the one hand, "the nation as political construct and consensual contract between the governed and the governors…remained a fairly abstract concept", while on the other, it romanticized nationalism for its people (Richardson, 2002, p. 53). While both of these constructs created the modernist idea of identity, it was the state itself that developed the national character of its citizens. Therefore, "national curricula were created to perpetuate, and in many cases manufacture national myths for the twin purposes of grounding national consciousness in some kind of legitimizing historical tradition and garnering the allegiance of people to the existing political status quo" (Richardson, 2002, p. 54).

If Canadian schools are currently serving the needs of the global marketplace, then historically they have served the needs of the nation-state. Throughout the 19th century, the expectations of the Enlightenment Project were central to the emergence of a state-constructed national identity. Modernist education of the 19th century was designed to support the development of liberal democracy. Such a function was both political and economic in scope because its aim was to manufacture the modern citizen (Richardson, 2002). The educational system of the time emphasized the age of nationhood where the making of national consciousness was the order of the day. In this way, national identity became a legitimate platform for modernist education. When thinking in terms of identity formation, the state served to mediate the content to be learned and, thus, the meaning of national identity.

Canadian national identity has historically been problematic in citizenship education. The subject of social studies has been used to teach citizenship and the related theme of identity. National citizenship, or national identity, prepared students to contribute to a single vision of Canada (Osborne, 1997). And within the modernist paradigm, national identity tended to be presented in narrowly essentialist terms. The dominant discourse of citizenship was used for creating a consistently 'English' national identity until the 1970s, creating the dichotomy of 'us' versus 'them'. In this regard, citizenship was an exclusionary concept. The decidedly Anglophone and Eurocentric view of Canadian history was an attempt to portray nation building as the common theme and vision of Canada. For example, Canadian identity was inextricably linked with conformity to British culture and Eurocentric history in Canadian history textbooks. In Osborne's words (1997, p. 41), "citizenship has been used to justify attempts to eradicate minority cultural traditions that were seen by dominant groups as inconsistent with their vision of citizenship." Moreover, aboriginal peoples and women were

excluded from Canadian history, while Québec separatism, Americanization, and regionalism posed different threats to Canada's existence. Inasmuch as Canadian education was to create a single vision of Canada by distancing itself from the United States, it also distanced itself from Québec and Canada's Francophone population and, in turn, contributed to the ongoing crises of Canadian citizenship and identity (Osborne, 1997).

The emphasis on Canada's Britishness failed for Canada as a 'manufactured' nation because Canadian national identity retained its modernist form. And attempting to create a single "sense of the nation" was doomed to fail because "it has lost the mythic and emotive power to evoke the passion of students" (Richardson, 2002, p. 56). While the portrayal of the Canadian experience has been British, European, and North American in scope, it is now being placed in global contexts. The fact that Canadian citizenship and identity have evolved in Canadian education and curriculum bears close examination. Increasingly, the teaching of identity and of a sense of Canadian citizenship is becoming problematic in an era of global thinking. The concepts of citizenship and identity are inextricably linked to the social studies. Therefore, the following examination will focus on the constructions of citizenship and identity in the Alberta Program of Studies from the 1970s to the 1990s.

Defining citizenship and identity in the Alberta social studies curricula (1971-1989)

The definition of citizenship within the Alberta social studies curriculum has evolved and, in turn, influenced the curricular definition of identity. It is important to consider the role of citizenship in the making of Canadian identity since the 1970s. By determining the relationship between citizenship and the formation of national identity in curriculum, social studies educators can generate questions about identity *tout court*.

In the 1970s, the new social studies curriculum for Junior High Schools of Alberta kept with the "basic tenets of democracy." For instance, the 1971 Program of Studies for social studies invited "free and open inquiry…by actively confronting value issues" (Alberta Education, 1971, p. 7). In general, it was stated that students would deal not only with the "what is" but also with the "what ought to be" in hope of having "the opportunity to make this world a more desirable place in which to live" (Alberta Education, 1971, p. 7). The fact that Alberta students were expected to create a world that "ought to be" represents the participatory and activist component of citizenship. Furthermore, it reflects the social progressivism of the 1960s and 1970s. For instance, the constructivist approach encouraged student engagement around civic issues and the development of connections with society. What is somewhat surprising during this era of free and open inquiry, however, is that the definition of identity was not subject to such debate. Discussions of identity were limited to the fact of the "assimilation of other minorities in either the English or French linguistic groups" (Alberta Education, 1971). In Grade 3, students learned to compare and contrast community life in for example, a Mennonite or Hutterite community, followed by historical, economic, sociological and/or geographic analysis of Alberta's peoples in Grade 4. Such comparative examples included Australia and Middle East oil producers (Alberta Education, 1971, p. 13). Furthermore, the Grade 5 unit on "People in Canada" provided sample studies to analyze historical and/or contemporary life in Canada's regions, citing for example, "people in an Atlantic fishing port" and "people in a French-Canadian mining town" (Alberta Education, 1971, p. 14). Such economically driven discussions did not move beyond the newly created policies of official bilingualism and official multiculturalism at the time.

The free and open inquiry era of "what ought to be" was directly targeted during the more conservative era of the 1980s. It is not surprising then that "effective" citizenship became the ultimate goal of a much less activist social studies curriculum. The 1981 curriculum was

designed to help students "to explore, and where possible, to resolve, social issues that were of public and personal concern" (Alberta Education, 1981, p. 52). Its objectives were designed to have students develop "more effective involvement" in various aspects of their communities. History, geography, and the social sciences provided the "essential base" for such social inquiry, while skill objectives were required for "effective community, Canadian and world citizenship" (Alberta Education, 1981, p. 52). Therefore, the concept of citizenship was developed in terms of interrelated objectives with a focus on content, both Canadian and historical in scope.

Identity, too, was seen in terms of a national consciousness where history provided the content for social inquiry. In a section on Canadian society, its peoples and their culture, the concept of identity was more fully explored. However, under the same heading of "Canada: A Multicultural Society," reference is made to the examination of "issues pertaining to cultural interaction, preservation and adaptation in Canada" (Alberta Education, 1981, p. 64). Although the 1981 curriculum developed the notion of identity in terms of interrelated concepts of multiculturalism, ethnic diversity, discrimination and assimilation, the competing values in this section involved seeing minority rights from the perspective of the welfare of the majority. In decision-making, for example, students learned to define a position on a social issue in terms of "what appears to be in the best interests of Canadians" (Alberta Education, 1981, p. 64i). On the one hand, national consciousness referred to an effective citizenry from two dominant language groups, and on the other, it represented the preoccupation of Canada with its two 'founding nations', in Grade 8, for example. In Sears' words (1997, p. 28), "mainstream British and French cultural perspectives dominated most curricula, and where other cultures were included at all, they are interpreted in terms of one or both of these dominant groups." The 1980s, then, marked an era of attempts to create a sense of unity in diversity, while identity continued to be developed in terms of a national citizenship.

While the 1980s saw a rise of "effective" citizenship practices, the 1989 Alberta social studies curriculum emphasized the roles, rights and responsibilities of the citizen. Henceforth, "responsible" citizenship became the ultimate goal of social studies. Responsible citizenship was defined by "participating constructively in the democratic process by making rational decisions" (Alberta Education, 1989, p. 2). It also included the development of critical thinking and an understanding of history, in particular. Central to social studies knowledge objectives was that learning be deemed "useful for lifelong learning and responsible citizenship" (Alberta Education, 1989, p. 2). With its strict emphasis on knowing and learning, the 1989 curricular definition of citizenship was the most narrow of the period under examination.

To be a responsible Canadian citizen in a changing world, history along with geography, economics, and other social sciences played a key role. Canadian identity was "shaped by our values, attitudes and cultures as they have emerged from our history and geography" (Alberta Education, 1989). Moreover, the belief was that bilingualism and multiculturalism were fundamental to the Canadian identity. The 1981 curriculum heading "Canada: A Multicultural Society" was modified to reflect the country's bilingual nature, and became "Canada: A Bilingual and Multicultural Country" (Alberta Education, 1989, p. 6). Under the section "People and their Culture," the rationale states that the "study of cultural interaction and adaptation in Canada necessitates an understanding of bilingualism and multiculturalism" (Alberta Education, 1989, p. 6). Therefore, students in Grade 7 were encouraged to develop an understanding of the bilingual and multicultural influence on the Canadian way of life along with an appreciation and a respect for the contributions of cultural groups to Canada

(Alberta Education, 1989, p. 11). By including the policies of bilingualism and multiculturalism with regards to "Canada's basic nature," the Alberta social studies curriculum supported the existence of culturally diverse perspectives. At this time in Canadian curriculum theory, "the inclusion of multiple cultural perspectives is seen as an important organizing idea for the social studies curriculum in all of the educational jurisdictions in Canada, and detailed programs with explicit rationales have been developed" (Sears, 1997, p. 28). Therefore, in the 1990s, students' understanding of history, geography, and identity would contribute to the requirements of responsible citizenship in an ever-changing world.

The Alberta social studies curricula from 1971, 1981, and 1989 — the latter which is still in effect — represent three visions of citizenship education in Alberta that span thirty years. What is common to these social studies documents is that Alberta Education (now Alberta Learning) was confident that its programs of studies engaged in citizenship education for a democratic society. Its approach to the concepts of citizenship and identity might have evolved, but they both remained an integral part of the social studies. They evolved in terms of scope, influencing each program's rationale and philosophy. While the early 1970s represented a promising era of challenge in the "what ought to be," it was quieted by an era of conservatism in the 1980s and 1990s. And although responsible citizenship does not necessarily symbolize a return to effective citizenship, it does encourage students for responsible participation in a changing society where multiple cultural perspectives were now recognized as important and legitimate by the 1990s.

To sum up, a review of the position of citizenship in the Alberta social studies curriculum from 1971 to 1991 indicates that citizenship is a contested concept at many levels. First, the political nature and educational purpose of the teaching of 'national' citizenship is questionable. A clearly articulated definition of Canadian national identity does not currently exist; in fact, it remains unresolved. Second, the teaching of 'national' citizenship is problematic because it does not acknowledge difference, but rather creates a hegemonic vehicle by which national consciousness is disseminated regardless of class, culture, and gender (Osborne, 1997). Third, and finally, identity - as a subtopic of citizenship in the area of the social studies - becomes a problematic concept when defining what constitutes the social studies differs from one educational stakeholder to another. Thus, the complexity of citizenship and identity can mean different things to different groups of people. Nevertheless, in an era of globalization, Durrigan Santora (2001, p. 462) reminds us that the goal of the social studies is to help develop students who "are to become active participants in cross-cultural communities of learners and empowered citizens in a cultural democracy." Houser & Kuzmic (2001, p. 453) also remark on the importance of divergent perspectives: "Rather than independence, isolation, and domination, we must begin to recognize and embrace the interdependence, reciprocity, and contingency of our postmodern world." Furthermore, from a Canadian perspective, Osborne (1997, p. 48) reminds us that "[d]espite its attempt to distance itself from the United States, and despite its acceptance of diversity and limited identities, Canadian citizenship education has never effectively come to terms with the English-French duality of Canada." It is perhaps for historical and constitutional reasons along with the need for social cohesion in an ever-changing world that the 2002 and 2003 drafts of the Alberta social studies curriculum expand the notions of citizenship and identity. A final look at contemporary definitions of citizenship, identity and social studies informed by postcolonialism will help situate the multiple perspectives approach of the new provincial social studies curriculum.

Reframing identity and difference within the new Alberta social studies curriculum

In Canada, much like Sweden, the United Kingdom and the United States (James, 2001; Grosvenor, 1999; Merryfield & Subedi, 1997), recent approaches to citizenship education seek to facilitate a more open framework of the concept of national identity. The 2002 consultation draft and the 2003 validation draft of the Alberta social studies curriculum are examples of how curriculum documents now promote ideals of social cohesion in general and encourage the development of an active and responsible citizenship in particular.

Questions about citizenship and identity formation, in the plural sense, have captured the interest of social studies educators and curriculum developers in Alberta. Central to the 2002 Alberta social studies curriculum is the development of active and responsible citizens. It is defined in broad terms: "Citizenship is the understanding of relationships among needs, rights, roles and responsibilities, governance, and an awareness of one's capacity to effect change" (Alberta Learning, 2002, p. 6). In this regard, students are seen as active learners when they engage in the multifaceted experience of citizenship and civic participation. The vision of the 2002 document states that the program of studies "will ultimately contribute to a Canadian spirit — a spirit that will be fundamental in creating a sense of belonging for every student as he or she engages in active and responsible citizenship locally, nationally and globally" (Alberta Learning, 2002, p. 1). By exploring the various factors and processes that shape their identity, students are encouraged to "develop and value their individual and collective identities and better fulfill their role as active and responsible citizens in society" (Alberta Learning, 2002, p. 6). Therefore, in an era of complex and rapid change in local, national and global contexts, the notion of active and responsible citizenship would appear to be entirely appropriate for the development of positive self-esteem and a strong sense of identity in young citizens.

Moreover, the concepts of citizenship and identity in the Canadian context are at the core of the vision of the Alberta social studies program. They are inextricably linked because individual and collective identities influence citizenship and civic participation, while the latter has an impact on the development of individual and social identities in an increasingly pluralistic world (Alberta Learning, 2002, p. 1). In responding to Canadian diversity, the renewed vision of social studies in Alberta also recognizes "the pluralistic and evolving nature of Canadian society" (Alberta Learning, 2002, p. 2). Central to the multiple perspectives approach is the recognition that "students bring multiple perspectives to citizenship and identity", that "these perspectives are shaped by the diverse experiences and backgrounds that make all individuals unique," and that "they are also grounded in students' collective identities that are formed by their own culture, heritage and history" (Alberta Learning, 2002, p. 2). Therefore, the revised social studies curriculum problematizes the notion of a single Canadian identity.

Modernist notions of national identity that emphasize the existence of common understandings of the nation are inadequate in understanding, valuing and fostering diverse viewpoints and perspectives. Although the Alberta curriculum clearly states its intent of "building a strong and united Canada," it does so in the context of "recognizing and respecting the diversity of Canadians" in hope of fostering a sense of inclusion (Alberta Learning, 2002, p. 2). A sense of national consciousness is developed along with a dynamic concept of Canadian identity. For example, language is generic and open, for example, with the use of such expressions as "Canada's evolving realities," "Canadian spirit," "diverse viewpoints and perspectives," and "sense of belonging." A fluid definition of Canadian citizenship and identity is required to explore the social studies through a multiple perspectives approach. Under a section on Canada, Grade 7 students "will acquire an understanding of the challenges that arise from living in a bilingual, pluralistic and diverse

society, and how citizenship and identity are affected" (Alberta Learning, 2002, p. 75). Recognizing the dynamic nature of Canada and its peoples will encourage students to appreciate the flexibility necessary to fully comprehend a pluralistic society such as Canada. Because students are seen as actors within the expanding space of civic action, it is crucial that they appreciate the discourse of active and responsible citizenship within a rapidly changing Canadian context. Therefore, modernist frameworks of national identity are outmoded, and the proposed Alberta social studies curriculum illustrates that a shift towards a model of multiple perspectives values students' identity and contributions to a pluralistic and evolving Canada. In doing so, the new social studies curriculum supports a postcolonial orientation that necessitates the examination of key historic and contemporary issues through a multiple perspectives approach and the recognition of a "national fabric interwoven with cultural, ethnic and linguistic diversity" (Alberta Learning, 2002, p. 2). Perhaps the greatest outcome this social studies curriculum can offer its 21st century learners is the development of active and responsible citizenship through multiple viewpoints and perspectives for the benefit of "foster[ing] a sense of inclusion and a commitment to building a strong and united Canada" (Alberta Learning, 2002, p. 2).

Reading the Alberta social studies curriculum from a postcolonial perspective

The development of a seemingly totalizing globalization is having a dramatic impact on education, including curriculum. During the past thirty years, educational sites have had a variety of reactions to the questions of citizenship and identity, whether they be at local, national or international levels. In this regard, academics and curriculum developers have proposed theoretical frameworks and pedagogical models to reconsider citizenship and identity in a variety of contexts. Multicultural education, anti-racist education, global education, and peace education have been some of the more popular models embraced in North America. Although these responses affect the question of difference among citizens and among students in a world environment, it is crucial to make visible the postcolonial condition of the world. And because identity, representations of identity and citizenship have become part of the postcolonial world, it is increasingly vital to reflect on different perspectives of curriculum theory and practice.

A postcolonial reading of the forthcoming Alberta social studies curriculum is appropriate on three fronts. First, it is important to consider the current structure of curriculum in terms of postcolonial theory. While mainstream curriculum discourse can provide one frame of reference, it can also seem detached from a personal understanding of curriculum and pedagogy in a world of rapid change and increasing difference. Perhaps this is why the program vision of the proposed Alberta social studies curriculum, which is still undergoing revision, currently emphasizes the students' need to develop a sense of personal and collective belonging and to accept others as they "develop an understanding of who they are, what they want to become and the society in which they want to live" (Alberta Learning, 2003, p. 1). Put another way, what it means to be Canadian is put into question both on personal terms and on provincial, national and global levels.

Second, it is vital to understand the complexity of the colonial and devote attention to how our current worldview has been shaped by colonialism and imperialism. As Willinsky (1998, p. 3) explains, "much of the knowledge achieved through conquest and colonization was understood to legitimate the political and cultural domination of imperialism. The resulting perspective on the world formed an educational legacy that we have now to consider." This might explain why the concept of imperialism is introduced as early as Grade 7 in the new Alberta social studies curriculum. If the overall purpose of social studies is to provide

learning opportunities for young Albertans to "appreciate and respect how multiple perspectives, including Aboriginal and Francophone, shape Canada's political, socio-economic, linguistic and cultural realities" (Alberta Learning, 2003, p. 2), then they must be prepared to reconsider the complexity of historical, constitutional and contemporary issues surrounding notions of identity and citizenship in a pluralistic society like Canada. For example, Grade 7 students will examine how European imperialism impacted the social and economic structures of Aboriginal societies and how it was responsible for the development of Acadia, New France and British settlements (Alberta Learning, 2003, p. 81). Following a study of Confederation, students will explore and reflect upon the consequences of Métis uprisings and the Manitoba School Act, and will be asked to critically assess how such changes have posed challenges and presented opportunities for individuals and communities (Alberta Learning, 2003, p. 83). The concept of imperialism continues to shape issues studied in Grade 8, as general outcomes focus on intercultural contact and historical worldviews. Through an examination of societies with different worldviews, students are provided with more specific outcomes that allow them to "reflect on their own worldviews and assess the influence that the past has on the present" (Alberta Learning, 2003, p. 91). By highlighting the notions of imperialism and worldviews, the new Alberta social studies curriculum offers learning opportunities for junior high students to delve into the complex world of Canada's origins, histories, opportunities, and challenges.

Third, and finally, it is crucial to bridge the work of postcolonial theory and educational theory in hope of transforming curriculum, notably the concepts of identity and citizenship in the 21st century.

> Schools have offered students little help in fathoming why this sense of difference in race, culture, and nation is so closely woven into the fabric of society…. They need to see that such divisions have long been part of the fabric and structure of the state, including the schools, and they need to appreciate that challenging the structuring of those differences requires equally public acts of refusing their original and intended meanings (Willinsky, 1998, p. 5).

Thus, the interplay of race, culture, and nation vis-à-vis identity should be the concern of every student and teacher today. But to what extent is a postcolonial approach appropriate for a provincial context such as Alberta? Creating a curriculum of openness and inclusivity is key when discussing possibilities of enhancing personal and collective identity(ies) of social studies students in Alberta classrooms. The fluid concept of identity becomes critical when studying encounters in race, ethnicity, language, culture, religion, and so on in a colonized and marginalized relationship to the Anglophone majority. The importance of diversity, with particular attention to social cohesion, can be explored in two ways: first, moving towards a program of studies of pluralism and respect for differences in a broad sense, and second, promoting a sense of belonging and acceptance. In both cases, it is vital to reflect upon Aboriginal and Francophone perspectives in order to examine the concepts of citizenship and identity in the Canadian context. For instance, studying the concept of assimilation in Grade 7 will require a deeper understanding of economic, social, cultural, historical and political issues and questions that have influenced ways in which Canada has evolved (Alberta Learning, 2003, p. 79). Overall, the proposed Alberta social studies curriculum reminds educators of the importance of opening students to otherness. By reflecting Canada's Aboriginal heritage, bilingual nature and multicultural realities, the new program of studies

helps students develop a sense of belonging and acceptance in a diverse Canadian context.

Both drafts of the Alberta social studies curriculum (2002, 2003) open up the parameters of citizenship and identity for members of both the majority and the minority. Postcolonialism, too, intends to create educational sites where the possibility of creating a new ethnicity exists because fluidity and hybridity are embraced. Indeed, the field of postcolonial studies is not coherent and uncomplicated, but rather an opening of a field of inquiry and understanding of the social, political, economic, and cultural practices which arise in response and resistance to colonialism. While the postcolonial perspective recognizes the historical terms of colonialism, it also considers 'historical continuity and change.' McLeod (2000, p. 5) thinks about postcolonialism "not just in terms of strict historical periodisation, but as referring to disparate forms of *representations, reading practices and values*." In this way, it is not important to look for clarity, but rather to discuss historically situated experiences that circulate across the past and the present. Postcolonial theory, like the new Alberta social studies curriculum, is fluid and engaging about new ways of seeing the contemporary postcolonial world. The curriculum draws upon the historical and current issues framework to explore the multiplicity of contexts. In this new curriculum document (Alberta Learning, 2002, p. 2), it is stated that the social studies will help all Alberta students "recognize and understand the values and experiences of one's own heritage and history" in order to "develop an understanding of cultural diversity, pluralism, official bilingualism and intercultural understanding." Fundamental to this vision of the social studies is a postcolonial approach to legitimately address these goals in an era of global interconnectedness.

Furthermore, a postcolonial approach embraces the act of "decolonizing the mind" in which new modes of representation are produced. Social studies educators who teach from a global perspective attempt to "decolonize" students' understanding of their world in order to examine the interaction of power, culture, and knowledge from different viewpoints. Merryfield & Subedi (1997, p. 285) support infusing the social studies curriculum with skills in perspective consciousness and knowledge of alternative histories in order to contribute to "decolonizing the mind":

> Once students are able to recognize the limitations of colonialist assumptions in a postcolonial world, they can begin to see the world from other perspectives and learn from people whose voices they may never have had the opportunity to hear.

In Alberta, the forthcoming social studies curriculum provides students with the opportunity to learn from multiple viewpoints and perspectives, including Aboriginal, Francophone, and culturally diverse groups in Canada. It is by recognizing all of Canada's peoples that students will examine and reflect on the concepts of citizenship and identity in a Canadian context within the discourse of diversity. Through the social studies program, students' understanding of Canada's pluralism will be enhanced. On the one hand, the new program of studies is committed to "actively promot[e] and recogniz[e] culturally diverse, culturally relevant, culturally sensitive and culturally responsive content of Aboriginal perspectives" in order to provide insights into ways of knowing that increase knowledge and understanding of the complexities and evolving nature of the First Nations, Inuit and Métis (Alberta Learning, 2002, p. 3). On the other, it will "introduce and instill an appreciation of the multiethnic and intercultural nature of the Canadian Francophonie" (Alberta Learning, 2002, p. 4) because if all Alberta students are to understand the relationships across language, culture, identity, and power, they must experience the different traditions and histories of Canada's diverse Francophone peoples. Like the proposed "multiple perspectives" approach in the new social

studies curriculum, postcolonialism offers a critical framework from which to problematize colonialism and traditionally Western views of colonial ideals. Simply put, it provides a critical framework to understand the world - both past and present — and explore new ways of seeing.

Moreover, postcolonialism, like the field of social studies, is a complex and rapidly changing field lacking consensus and clarity. Intellectual debate lies in the term itself. The 'postcolonial' is problematic because many different theorists take up their own critical position within a conceptual framework that is at once temporal, geopolitical, and sociological (Slemon, 2001). When the prefix 'post' is added to 'colonial,' postcolonialism describes a reformulation of the imperial centre to the colonial periphery and, in the process, a development of "new structures for group identification and collectivity" (Slemon, 2001, p. 102). As Dimitriadis & McCarthy (2001, p. 7) make clear, the 'post' in postcolonialism is not to be understood in temporal terms, but "as a marker of a spatial challenge of the occupying powers of the West by the ethical, political, and aesthetic forms of the marginalized." In both definitions, the centre and the periphery are inseparable. Indeed, postcolonialism goes beyond the centre because its purpose is to rechart complex understandings of the local and the global. Central to the new Alberta social studies curriculum is to move the centre within Canada and the world.

Finally, some of the most contested and complex issues in both social studies and postcolonialism include ethnicity, race, resistance, power, identity, and nationality. The critical texts of Said (1978), Spivak (1995) and Bhabha (1994) remain the monumental ones in postcolonial theory. They bring attention to modes of Otherness, agency and hybridity, which are vital to postcolonialism. The field of postcolonialism is by no means homogeneous or unitary: "there is no single post-colonial theory, and no one critic can possibly represent, or speak for, the post-colonial critical field" (Slemon, 2001, p. 101). By invoking theories of colonial discourses, the umbrella-term 'postcolonialism' perpetuates a sense of difference and ongoing debate. Therefore, a postcolonial approach to the social studies curriculum must involve the reading and re-reading of texts if it is to aspire to the contestation of colonialism and to the development of perspective consciousness and knowledge of alternative histories.

Revisiting social studies education in a plural society

Given the historical roots and evolution of national identity and citizenship in the Alberta social studies curriculum, it is perhaps time to consider postcolonialism as a way of addressing the "absences and amnesia of the past" (Ghandi, 1998). Mainstream educational thinkers "still insist on a project of homogeneity, normalization, and the production of the socially functional citizen" despite curriculum reform such as multicultural education framework (Dimitriadis & McCarthy, 2001, p. 2). Although multiculturalism has sought to bring into the field of social studies education critical discourses of multiplicity and difference, educators have not engaged in postcolonial interpretations of teaching and learning. Therefore, current pedagogical practices are not being problematized, while mainstream curriculum, especially in the area of social studies, attempts to address topics of cultural identity, national and global communities, and multicultural distinctions. It is my hope that this discussion will invite teachers

> to imagine a new transformation of social consciousness which exceeds the reified identities and rigid boundaries invoked by national consciousness... Nativism, as Said writes, "is *not* the only alternative. There is the possibility of a more generous and

pluralistic vision of the world" (Said, 1993 cited in Ghandi, 1998, p. 124).

Fundamental to the vision of the forthcoming Alberta social studies curriculum is a sound postcolonial approach to broaden students' and teachers' representation and understanding of pluralism in a Canadian context. The multiple perspectives approach of the new social studies curriculum is, therefore, an excellent starting point for considering postcolonialism in action.

References

Alberta Education (1971). *Program of Studies for Junior High Schools of Alberta*. Edmonton: Department of Education.

Alberta Education (1975). *Program of Studies for Junior High Schools of Alberta*. Edmonton: Department of Education.

Alberta Education (1981 [1978]). *Program of Studies for Junior High Schools of Alberta*. Edmonton: Department of Education.

Alberta Education (1989). *Social Studies Junior High*. Retrieved April 8, 2003 from http://www.learning.gov.ab.ca/k_12/curriculum/

Alberta Learning (2002). *Social Studies Kindergarten to Grade 9 Program of Studies*, Consultation Draft August 2002. Retrieved March 31, 2003 from http://www.learning.gov.ab.ca/k_12/curriculum

Alberta Learning (2003). *Social Studies Kindergarten to Grade 9 Program of Studies*, Validation Draft September 2003. Retrieved April 30, 2004 from http://www.learning.gov.ab.ca/k_12/curriculum

Bhabha, H. (1994). *The Location of Culture*. New York & London: Routledge.

Dimitriadis, G. & McCarthy, C. (2001). "Introduction" and "Conclusion". From *Reading and Teaching the Postcolonial: From Baldwin to Basquiat and Beyond*. New York & London: Teachers College Press, pp. 1-13 and 117-119.

Durrigan Santora, E. (2001). "Interrogating Privilege, Plurality and Possibilities in a Multicultural Society." From Stanley, William B. (ed.) *Critical Issues in Social Studies Research for the 21st Century*. Greenwich, Connecticut: Information Age Publishing Inc., p. 149-177.

Ghandi, L. (1998). *Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Grosvenor, I. (1999). 'There's no place like home': education and the making of national identity. *History of Education* 28(3): 235-250.

Houser, N.O. & Kuzmic, J.J. (2001). Ethical Citizenship in a Postmodern World: Toward a More Connected Approach to Social Education For the Twenty-First Century. *Theory and Research in Social Education* 29(3):431-461.

James, C.E. (2001). Making Teaching Relevant: toward an understanding of students'

experience in a culturally 'different' Sweden. *Pedagogy, Culture and Society* 9(3): 407-426. Retrieved February 1, 2003 from Pedagogy, Culture and Society Web site: http://www.triangle.co.uk/cus/index.htm

McLeod, J. (2000). *Beginning Postcolonialism*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Merryfield, M. & Subedi, B. (1997). Decolonizing the Mind for World-Centered Global Education. From *The Social Studies Curriculum: Purposes, Problems, and Possibilities*, Ross, E. Wayne (ed.). Revised edition. Albany: State University of New York Press, pp. 277-290.

Osborne, K. (1997). Citizenship Education and Social Studies. From *Trends & Issues in Canadian Social Studies*, Wright, Ian & Sears, Alan (eds.). Vancouver: Pacific Educational Press, pp. 39-67.

Richardson, G. (2002). *The Death of the Good Canadian: Teachers, National Identities, and the Social Studies Curriculum*. New York: Peter Lang.

Said, E.W. (1978). *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage Books.

Sears, A. (1997). Social Studies in Canada. From Wright, Ian & Sears, Alan (eds.) *Trends & Issues in Canadian Social Studies*. Vancouver: Pacific Educational Press, pp. 18-38.

Slemon, S. (2001). Post-colonial Critical Theories. From *Postcolonial Discourses: An Anthology*, Castle, Gregory (ed.). Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, pp. 99-116.

Spivak, G. (1995). Can the Subaltern Speak? From *Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, Ashcroft, Bill, Griffiths, Gareth & Tiffin, Helen (eds.). London & New York: Routledge.

Willinsky, J. (1998). *Learning to Divide the World: Education at Empire's End*. Minneapolis & London: University of Minnesota Press.

Return to Articles