

## **Revisoning Social Studies Curriculum in an Era of Globalization: A Canadian Perspective**

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**Abstract:** How do students become global citizens? Globalization and pluralism are two primary issues of interest to Canadian social studies educators and researchers. The growing interest in globalization is in large measure attributable to Canada's increasing diversity. Rethinking globalization and pluralism within a social-educational framework has also become a priority for Canadian educators because social studies is primarily concerned with citizenship education (Pike, 2000; Richardson, 2002, 2004; Sears, 2004). But what happens when one particular province of Canada links global citizenship with complex notions of national identity? Canadian social studies curriculum has been significantly influenced by the particular ambiguity involved in articulating a singular Canadian national identity (Clark, 2004; Clark & Case, 1999; Hodgetts, 1968; Lévesque, 2004; Richardson, 2002; Sears, 2004). In Canada, addressing issues of citizenship, identity and history is wrought with tensions and contradictions. Canadian researchers and educators have thus turned to notions of pluralism and globalization as a way to recognize Canada's increasing diversity (Shields & Ramsay, 2004; Quell, 1998; Richardson, 2004). Rethinking how to recognize the diversity of citizens, however, challenges educators to approach pluralism in different ways. Curriculum initiatives in one particular province of Canada – Alberta – reflect the need to revise programs in order to represent plural societies and the students who inhabit these increasingly dynamic spaces (Alberta Education, 2005). Program revisions also reflect the current educational priorities of various jurisdictions in an era of globalization (Durrigan Santora, 2001; Varma-Joshi, 2004). In this session, I will explore the tensions between global education and the teaching of globalization in one province of Canada (Alberta), and suggest ways that complex constructs of citizenship and identity in the Canadian context can help educators to better understand the relationship between education and how we come to think of who we are in plural societies such as Canada.

**Keywords:** citizenship, identity, globalization, social studies, Canada

### **Introduction**

How do students become global citizens? Pluralism and globalization are two primary issues of interest to Canadian social studies educators and researchers. The growing interest in globalization is in large measure attributable to Canada's increasing diversity. Rethinking globalization and pluralism within a social-educational framework has also become a priority for Canadian educators because social studies is primarily concerned with citizenship education (Clark, 2004; Richardson, 2002b, 2004; Sears, 2004). But what happens when one particular province of Canada links global citizenship with complex notions of national identity?

In this paper, I will explore the tensions between global education and the teaching of globalization in one province of Canada – Alberta, and suggest ways that complex constructs of citizenship and identity in the Canadian context can help educators to better understand the relationship between social studies education and how we come to think of who we are in plural societies such as Canada. Two focus areas will be treated in this paper: how ideas of (national) identity and (global) citizenship are constructed and, second, how they are prescribed in

Alberta's social studies curriculum (Alberta Education, 2005). It is by examining a conceptual framework of social studies curriculum and, by extension, a Canadian view of global citizenship that the "multiple perspectives" of Canada will reveal an ongoing Canadian preoccupation: social cohesion.

### **Social studies education in Canada**

In Canada, no single, consistent definition of social studies exists. Education falls under provincial jurisdiction in Canada, and not all provinces advocate for social studies, but rather for academic disciplines such as history and geography (Lévesque, 2004; Osborne, 1997; Sears, 2004; Shields & Ramsay, 2004). However, all departments/ministries of education agree that citizenship education is the primary concern of social studies (Clark & Case, 1999). In the province of Alberta, for example, the new social studies curriculum describes the ultimate goal of social studies as "engaged, active, informed and responsible" citizenship which includes "recognition and respect for individual and collective identity...in a pluralistic and democratic society" (Alberta Education, 2005a, p. 1). Citizens are not merely "responsible"; they are encouraged to "affirm their place as citizens" in a society that values inclusion and democracy. In Alberta, social studies means active citizenship and civic engagement in local, societal and global contexts:

Social studies develops the key values and attitudes, knowledge and understanding, and skills and processes necessary for students to become active and responsible citizens, engaged in the democratic process and aware of their capacity to effect change in their communities, society and world (Alberta Education, 2005a, p. 1).

In this regard, students are seen as active learners when they engage in the multifaceted experience of citizenship and civic participation. As the Alberta social studies Program of Studies (2005) illustrates, the concept of "active" citizenship in various contexts has become the educational priority.

I must briefly mention that social studies education in Canada is "in some ways, in a state of crisis" (Shields & Ramsay, 2004, p. 39). The social studies is a particularly ambiguous subject area because it is inextricably linked to values and belief systems and ideas of what makes a 'good' citizen. And what is meant by a 'good' citizen is not only contentious, but highly contested. Citizenship is a word that "is intensely value laden, embodying a set of ideals that represent what citizens ought to be and how they ought to live in order to enjoy the rights of citizenship" (Osborne, 1997, p. 39). To be a citizen, then, is to be a 'good citizen' – one that is defined and constructed by dominant ideologies of the day.<sup>1</sup> While all Canadian provinces agree that the main goal of social studies – and public education – is the preparation for democratic citizenship, differing views abound regarding what should be taught as social studies, how it should be taught, and about the very purpose of schools (Gibson, 2004). Shields & Ramsay

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<sup>1</sup> Egan (1999) makes a good point in rethinking citizenship goals and, more importantly, the ideological implications of the social studies curriculum in a pluralistic society. Understanding that ideological unanimity surely does not exist in plural societies, he concludes by saying that educators should be more concerned with the implicit ideological aims inherent in the social studies curriculum, rather than with approaches for preparing (read producing) 'good citizens.'

(2004) compare characterizing social studies education across (English) Canada “as complex and challenging as trying to capture the essence of what it means to be a Canadian” (p. 38). Furthermore, while social studies has undergone curriculum reform initiatives across Canada (Shields & Ramsay, 2004), reform in the field of citizenship education is not taken seriously and still lags “well behind” work in literacy, mathematics, science, and technology (Sears, 2004, p. 102). Perhaps it is time to rethink the field of citizenship education, particularly in increasingly plural societies such as Canada.

### **Citizenship education and identity in Canada**

A fluid definition of Canadian citizenship and identity is required to explore the social studies in a society of increasing difference and diversity. Central to the 2005 Alberta Program vision for social studies is “the recognition of the diversity of experiences and perspectives and the pluralistic nature of Canadian society” and the recognition “that citizenship and identity are shaped by multiple factors such as culture, language, environment, gender, ideology, religion, spirituality and philosophy” (Alberta Education, 2005a, p. 1). Although the Alberta social studies curriculum clearly emphasizes “the need for social cohesion,” it does so in the context of recognizing “diversity and respect for differences” in hope of fostering a sense of inclusion (p. 1). A sense of global (and national) consciousness is developed along with a dynamic concept of Canadian identity. Language is generic and open, for example, with the use of such expressions as “Canada’s evolving realities,” “diversity of experiences and perspectives,” “accommodation of diversity,” “the unique nature of Canada,” and “sense of belonging.”

Canadian social studies curriculum has been significantly influenced by the particular ambiguity involved in articulating a singular Canadian national identity (Clark, 2004; Clark & Case, 1999; Hodgetts, 1968; Lévesque, 2004; Richardson, 2002b; Sears, 2004). In Canada, addressing issues of citizenship, identity and history is wrought with tensions and contradictions. Canadian researchers and educators have thus turned to notions of pluralism and globalization as a way to recognize Canada’s increasing diversity (Shields & Ramsay, 2004; Quell, 1998; Richardson, 2004). Rethinking how to recognize the diversity of citizens, however, challenges educators to approach globalization in different ways. For this section, I will use the social studies curriculum of the province of Alberta as a case study to explore how pluralism and globalization are defined, described, and developed for secondary and elementary students (Grade 10 and Grade 3). In doing so, I explore how and in what ways citizenship and identity can be read in the Canadian context.

### **Taking a closer look at globalization: The case of social studies in Alberta**

The growing interest in globalization is in large measure attributable to Canada’s increasing diversity and the increased interconnectedness among nations, economies, peoples, and cultures. Rethinking globalization within a social-educational framework has become a priority for social studies educators. On the one hand, global education, the field which has traditionally taught about the world, has changed with the times and, on the other, there are growing concerns about the effects of globalization; as a result, the meanings and roles of both global education and globalization need to be better understood (Richardson, 2004, p. 138). But how is globalization incorporated into the social studies curriculum? How is globalization changing the way social studies educators teach and think about citizenship and identity?

Globalization is a term that is commonly known to describe the increased interconnectedness among the world's nations, economically, politically, technologically, socially and culturally.<sup>2</sup> More recently, globalization is most often discussed in economic terms (e.g. Alberta Education, 2005c; Ghosh & Abdi, 2004; Richardson, 2004; Steger, 2003). It has essentially become an economic process in which a global economy invites citizens to see the world as one (global market). For example, the Grade 10 Alberta social studies curriculum asks 15 and 16 year-old students to investigate economic and contemporary understandings of globalization: "To what extent does globalization contribute to sustainable prosperity for all people?" and "To what extent should globalization shape identity?" – all under the heading of "Key Issue: To what extent should we embrace globalization?" (Alberta Education, 2005c, p. 13). Students are encouraged to explore citizenship in the global context and, although the word 'economic' is not always apparent, the challenge of globalization is seen in its economic disparities and such contributing factors as universalization, Eurocentrism, and natural resources development/degradation. It is important to note that Alberta, an oil-rich province currently undergoing an economic boom, promotes a positive connotation of globalization, an idea that should be "embraced" and a process that should "contribute to sustainable prosperity for all." Alberta students are required to "explore understandings of contemporary economic globalization" in general and to analyze "political and economic challenges and opportunities of globalization" in particular (Alberta Education, 2005c, p. 23). Such challenges and opportunities include: trade liberalization, foreign investment, economic growth, privatization, outsourcing, and the knowledge economy. While students will "analyze multiple perspectives on sustainability and prosperity in a globalizing world," the emphasis is on knowledge transmission, the primary focus of global education (Richardson, 2004, p. 144).

In other words, Alberta focusses primarily on the positive effects of globalization – an idea that is "assess[ed]" or "recogniz[ed]" rather than questioned and discussed more critically, especially with regards to the future of nation-states. The term "sustainability" refers to economic prosperity, rather than to the environment, and the study regarding "the relationship among people, the land and globalization" includes "resource development", for example (Alberta Education, 2005c, p. 23). While impacts of globalization on the environment, as well as women, children and youth are discussed, the emphasis is not on transformative education. As Richardson (2004) argues,

globalization represents a unique challenge that demands a reorientation of global education towards transformative education [because] globalization is a phenomenon that demands that students do more than study its consequences; they also need to formulate an informed response to the impact globalization is having on their lives, the lives of others, and on the planet in general (p. 144).

Although the phenomenon has encompassed drastic changes involving the entire world, "globalization remains an inexact term for the strong, and perhaps irreversible, changes in the economy, labor force, technologies, communication, cultural patterns, and political alliances that it is imposing on every nation" (Stromquist & Monkman, 2000, p. 3). While globalization is

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<sup>2</sup> When considering the term 'globalization' and conflicting definitions, it is important to understand that the concept is neither precise nor endorsed by everyone everywhere.

more often thought of in economic terms, one should strive to understand various dimensions and competing ideologies of globalization and global education.<sup>3</sup>

### **Global education and globalization**

If social studies curriculum is to prepare students for active and responsible citizenship at the global level, then how do they represent different perspectives of global education and citizenship? Globalization, the buzzword of our time, precipitates the need for social studies educators to not only reconceptualize knowledge and instruction, but also global education. Merryfield (2001), while acknowledging the relevance of teaching about globalization and the interconnectedness of peoples, economies and environments, also writes how global educators “need to globalize global education through literature, theories, and diverse perspectives that reflect the complexity of the planet in the early twenty-first century” (p. 181). It does not suffice to teach about inclusion; rather, the challenge lies in having students examine mainstream, Eurocentric assumptions in order to rethink frameworks for understanding peoples, places, and problems – both past and present.

Merryfield (2001) describes this challenge as “moving the center of global education from institutionalized divisions of people and ideas to the complexity of the interaction and syncretism of the global human experience” (pp. 181-182). For example, Grade 10 Alberta students are asked “To what extent should contemporary society respond to the legacies of historical globalization?” (Alberta Education, 2005c, p. 21). In having students (and teachers) attempt to assess the impacts of historical globalization and imperialism on indigenous and nonindigenous peoples, they must also “exhibit a global consciousness with respect to the human condition” (p. 21). Generally speaking, they will study at least two worldviews, those of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples in Canada, including how British and French rule in Canada affected Aboriginals. But will Grade 10 students, in uncovering knowledge about the prevalence of Eurocentrism, develop a perspective consciousness about concepts and contexts of identity, diversity, power, and globalization? While students will “analyze contemporary global issues that have origins in policies and practices of post-colonial governments in Canada”, such as the consequences of residential schools and the loss of indigenous languages, the emphasis remains on knowledge transmission and not on active citizenship. Grade 10 students must learn the perspectives, ideas and experiences of Aboriginal peoples and societies in Canada, but will they feel compelled to “accept social responsibilities associated with global citizenship” (Alberta Education, 2005c, p. 21)? Will they appreciate the various perspectives of these underrepresented Canadians? By moving the centre of global education and, in turn, the centre of the social studies curriculum to include multiple (Aboriginal) perspectives, experiences and worldviews, social studies students will better understand the complexity of globalization (Merryfield, 2001).

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<sup>3</sup> Richardson (2004), while he outlines five different perspectives of global education, also discusses and compares competing ways of viewing the world and globalization. Because globalization encompasses its own worldview (p. 138) and, more recently, global education has taken up neo-liberal constructs of the global marketplace (p. 143), global education is struggling ideologically. As Richardson (2004) writes, “Caught between learning *about* the world and learning to live *in* the world, the specific challenge global education faces is how best to prepare students to act as informed, caring, and active participants in a globalized world” (p. 147).

The challenge of pluralism, like globalization, puts into question the nation, national identity and civic allegiance, and thus growing debates seek where (national) boundaries are as people struggle to find common touchstones. Consequently, other layers of understanding and awareness need to be created, and the diversity of citizens needs to be recognized. The Alberta social studies curriculum (Alberta Education, 2005a) reflects the changing nature of society and of “21<sup>st</sup> century learners”:

The program reflects multiple perspectives, including Aboriginal and Francophone, that contribute to Canada’s evolving realities. It fosters the building of a society that is pluralistic, bilingual, multicultural, inclusive and democratic. The program emphasizes the importance of diversity and respect for differences as well as the need for social cohesion and the functioning of society. It promotes a sense of belonging and acceptance in students as they engage in active and responsible citizenship at the local, community, provincial, national and global level (p. 1).

The “multiple perspectives” approach seeks to foster more inclusive ways to ‘correct’ social studies practices and have students (and teachers) recognize normative interpretations of citizenship, identity and culture by the dominant group(s). For McKay & Gibson (2004), in response to societal developments such as globalization and pluralism, encouraging alternative ways of thinking about teaching and learning in Canadian social studies classrooms is imperative:

Care also needs to be taken to reflect the diverse nature of Canadian society and to hear the previously silenced voices of many of its citizens. [...] Careful consideration needs to be given to the vision(s) of Canada and the Canadian experience that are to be conveyed to students (p. 20).

In this way, the discourse of critical multiculturalism “is blazing a distinct and emancipatory path through the frontiers of democratic pluralism for a more epistemologically sensitive social studies education” (Durrigan Santora, 2001, p. 151). Such an epistemological shift requires the ambiguity, uncertainty, complexity and fluidity of a postmodern world.

It is noteworthy that Alberta Education describes the necessity of a postmodern search for understanding active global citizenship for young Canadian citizens. For example, in Grade 3, under the heading of “Communities in the World,” 7 and 8 year-old students examine how geographic, social, cultural and linguistic factors affect quality of life in India, Tunisia, Ukraine and Peru. These four communities were purposefully chosen in hope of better understanding the diverse nature of world communities, but also in hope of instilling an appreciation of “multiple perspectives” of Canada’s Aboriginal and Francophone peoples. Peru was chosen to provide opportunities for students to understand indigenous worldviews and traditions. Tunisia, a member of the world francophonie, was selected to better understand the “multiethnic and intercultural makeup of Francophones in Canada” (Alberta Education, 2005a, p. 2). Ukraine, the European case study, ties in with historical and contemporary communities of Ukrainian-Canadians in Alberta. Finally, India, the Asian case study, reflects increasing immigration of East Indians to Canada and Alberta. Altogether, these four world communities help Grade 3 students connect with Canada and the world. Recognizing the dynamic nature of Canada and its

peoples can encourage students to appreciate the flexibility necessary to fully comprehend a pluralistic and globalizing world. However, if young students connect with these four world communities by studying their respective traditions, celebrations, stories and practices, then to what extent will they recognize and understand “deep (cultural) diversity” (Taylor, 1994)? The challenge of teaching and learning “multiple perspectives” (both nationally and internationally) lies in the shift towards a practice of “culturally relevant” pedagogy that reconsiders normative conceptions of knowledge and identity, creates space for students’ lived experience, and values students’ identity and contributions in knowing a pluralistic and evolving world (Ladson-Billings, 2001).

As the Alberta social studies curriculum example illustrates, teachers and students need to understand and appreciate the fluid and interdependent concepts of citizenship and identity. If Alberta students are to understand the relationships across language, culture, identity, and power, then they must develop an awareness and understanding of the different histories and stories of Canada’s diverse peoples, including Aboriginals and Francophones. Social studies from “multiple perspectives” can provide a critical framework to understand the world and Canada – both past and present – and explore new ways of understanding and teaching citizenship in an era of globalization.

### **Global or national citizenship?**

But the question remains: how do students become global citizens? The literature suggests that the central aim of social studies was (and continues to be) the production of ‘good citizens,’ the domain of the civic nation. In the 19<sup>th</sup> 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, 2002b). Because the identity of the citizen has historically been associated with the nation, national citizenship has become a problematic concept in a globalized world. Does one’s allegiance lie with the nation or with the world? Does citizenship education need to distinguish between the two or, as is the case of Alberta, continue to reinforce the interests of Canada and Canadian citizens?<sup>4</sup>

The effects of globalization challenge Canadian students to serve the needs of the nation state and the global marketplace. In Canada, “global citizenship is framed as a matter of national self-interest and almost exclusively tied to the civic structures of the nation state” (Richardson, 2004, p. 145). For example, Grade 3 Alberta students are introduced to the concept of global citizenship by reflecting on Canada’s rights, roles and responsibilities in terms of environmental concerns and international organizations (Alberta Education, 2005b, p. 5).<sup>5</sup> Although these 7 and 8 year-old students will be “connecting with the world,” they explore Canada’s involvement in other parts of the world as citizens of Canada rather than as citizens of the world (Richardson, 2004). Their responses will be national in scope instead of international, thus putting into question Alberta Education’s vision of engaging students in active and responsible citizenship at the global level.

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<sup>4</sup> As Alberta Education (2005a) states, the Program of Studies “has at its heart the concepts of citizenship and identity in the *Canadian* context” (p. 1, my emphasis).

<sup>5</sup> International organizations include: UNICEF, Red Cross, Médecins sans frontières, and Development and Peace, the Canadian Catholic international development organization.

But in debating whether or not social studies should promote global or national citizenship, the question teachers face is in the very challenge of globalization and pedagogy (Durrigan Santora, 2001; Ghosh & Abdi, 2004; Merryfield, 2001; Richardson, 2004). For example, international issues such as the Kyoto Accord on climate change need to be addressed at the global level and by numerous nation states (Richardson, 2004), thus promoting the “global consciousness” Alberta Education (2005a) aims to provide its students along with an understanding of how “opportunities and responsibilities change in an increasingly interdependent world” (p. 2). However, despite Alberta Education’s desire to develop active and responsible citizens at the global level, it defines citizenship differently than other provincial jurisdictions in Canada (like its strong stance against the Kyoto Accord). As illustrated above, the terms “sustainability” and “prosperity” can mean different things in different provinces. Even within a jurisdiction, educators and stakeholders differ on the meanings and goals of global education in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century. Thus, a final question of debate concerns how best to prepare students to assume their responsibilities collectively as global citizens. While transformative global citizenship initiatives should be welcomed, it remains to be seen how social studies and global education can “imagine a civic fabric on a global scale” (Richardson, 2004, p. 147).

Irregardless of different curricular definitions and pedagogical difficulties, the literature generally maintains that social studies should promote citizenship aimed at examining and challenging the prevailing economic paradigm of globalization in a democratic society (Ghosh & Abdi, 2004; Richardson, 2004; Ross, 2001). In sum, the issue of globalization should persuade social studies educators to reconsider questions of perspective, namely neoliberal conceptions of the world, and of pedagogy, given the challenge of preparing students to become “engaged, active, informed and responsible citizens” in a globalized world (Alberta Education, 2005a, p. 1). After all, the collective civic sense of students will have national and global ramifications: “The people in the centers of power must begin to take responsibility for the role of their societies and their governments in producing conditions the rest of the world must endure” (Merryfield & Subedi, 2001, p. 286).

## **Conclusion**

Curriculum initiatives in the field of social studies reflect the need to revise programs in order to represent plural societies and the students that inhabit these increasingly dynamic places. Teachers and students are called to recognize the limitations of modernist assumptions and develop deeper understandings of the world and its peoples (Durrigan Santora, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 2001; Parker, 2003). Despite the globalization, pluralism and global education rhetoric, however, there is little evidence to suggest that most social studies teachers have had the theoretical and pedagogical training needed to prepare students to work with people different from themselves (Merryfield, 2001, p. 192).

Program revisions also reflect the current educational priorities of various jurisdictions in an era of globalization (Durrigan Santora, 2001; Varma-Joshi, 2004). The new Alberta social studies program aims to provide learning opportunities for Alberta students to “demonstrate a global consciousness with respect to humanity and world issues” (Alberta Education, 2005a, p. 2). However, when students are ultimately asked: “To what extent should I, as a citizen, respond to globalization?” as national citizens of a particularly privileged province of Canada, they are invited to develop responses to (economic) globalization (Alberta Education, 2005c, p. 13). If

citizenship education is to succeed in a globalizing world, students need to “accept political, social and environmental responsibilities associated with global citizenship” (p. 24), and become fully implicated in the multi-faceted challenges that are characteristic of globalization.

We are reminded that, in an era of globalization and increased diversity, the goal of the social studies is to help students develop a sense of agency, as they examine their own perspectives and individual and group identities, and as they (re)imagine themselves as empowered citizens who can effect change (Alberta Education, 2005a; Durrigan Santora, 2001; Richardson, 2004). While constructs of citizenship and identity remain complex, the Alberta social studies curriculum clearly emphasizes diversity and differences as “assets” and “strengths” because of Canada’s preoccupation with social cohesion. Alberta Education, in true Canadian fashion, views accommodation of diversity as “essential for fostering social cohesion...a process that requires the development of the relationships within and among communities” (Alberta Education, 2005a, p. 5). Although the social studies curriculum of the province of Alberta has recognized the importance of divergent perspectives and active citizenship in a globalized world, the particular problem of developing global citizens in a socially cohesive society is pedagogical: students and teachers alike must challenge the dominant narrative of (neoliberal) globalization, while learning to think, act and live as autonomous global citizens in an interdependent world.

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