

RESEARCH NOTES (NON-REFEREED):

“All of Us”: Searching for Inclusive Representations of Canadians in Social Studies Curricula

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“All of Us” is an ongoing research project that examines representations of ethnic, racial, socio-economic class, and gender diversities in social studies curriculum documents mandated for use in Canadian provinces and territories. These research notes explain the rationale, theoretical perspective, and methodological approach grounding the project. To begin, we share our conceptualization of diversity within the Canadian context. We then elaborate our understanding of critical multiculturalism, the theoretical framework underpinning the project. Finally, we explain the methodological approach used to identify and analyze the perspectives, points of view, and presuppositions of and about diversity in official Canadian social studies knowledge.

Keywords:

Dans leur recherche « All of Us », qui est toujours en cours, les auteures explorent les représentations de la diversité – ethnies, races, classes et sexes – dans les documents de politique ayant trait aux programmes scolaires provinciaux en sciences humaines. En étudiant ces documents d’un point de vue multiculturel à l’aide d’une méthode d’analyse critique, les auteurs cherchent à répondre à la question clé suivante : comment ces documents sur les programmes scolaires provinciaux et territoriaux en sciences humaines, en histoire et en géographie reflètent-ils les points de vue et les présuppositions de divers groupes au Canada ? À l’aide de leurs notes de recherche, les auteures élaborent le cadre conceptuel de leur étude et expliquent l’approche méthodologique qu’elles ont retenue.

Mots clés :

According to federal government policy, Canada is officially a multicultural society that not only tolerates but also encourages the practice and celebration of diversity. Despite this national endorsement, provincially controlled school programs are not specifically required to either embrace or encourage multicultural education. Yet some scholars (e.g., Edwards,

1992; Fleras & Elliott, 1992) have discerned a trend in which schools and curricula do acknowledge diversity through, for example, celebrations of festival and heritage. However, although these attempts tend to superficially acknowledge diversity, they avoid meaningful and significant shifts toward the inclusion of diverse perspectives and knowledges in curricula. We have developed "All of Us" to determine the ways in which officially mandated provincial and territorial social studies curriculum documents acknowledge diversity and the nature of this recognition. Using in-depth critical document analysis, our ongoing research project addresses this main question: In what ways do mandated provincial and territorial social studies, history, and geography (hereafter, social studies) curriculum documents reflect the perspectives, points of view, and presuppositions of diverse groups within Canada? These research notes elaborate the theoretical framework of this research and explain our methodological approach.

Despite current discourses proclaiming increasing plurality, we base our research on the belief that Canada has always been a nation of diverse peoples and cultures. Rhetoric acknowledging Canada as becoming increasingly diverse appears to be linked to rising numbers of immigrants who are identifiable as visible minorities. Although such immigration is certainly a reality, we hold that issues of diversity are not simply reflective of this most recent immigration pattern. Rather, we believe that issues of diversity need to be understood within the context of Canadians becoming increasingly willing to acknowledge and tolerate the diversity that has always existed. This is a significant departure from past approaches in which Canadians either worked to assimilate or eradicate diversity, or simply did not recognize diversity. Multicultural education and perspectives about diversity in Canadian society are not simply demographic questions: they are important issues of social justice, moral equality, and relations of power within our liberal democratic nation. Despite the consistent rhetoric, the best of intentions, and widespread beliefs holding otherwise, we believe that Canada remains a nation of inequality and inequity. We emphasize, however, that Canadian democracy is a work in progress and recognize that Canadians are actively striving to achieve the transformative potential and promise of our nation.

Through social studies curricula, educators deliberately and explicitly teach students who they are as Canadians. Although citizenship education — or Canadian-ness education — is arguably part of the entire school curriculum, it is the explicit focus of social studies. Within social studies curricula, our children learn the discourses of equality, freedom, justice,

and opportunity within the systems of Canadian democracy, rule of law, and capitalism.

Power wielders use social institutions, including schools and school curricula, to win consent to and compliance with their ideologies (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1997). Members of such dominant groups influence the writing of curriculum policy documents; they hold enough power to insinuate their own perspectives, worldviews, and ideologies into official knowledge (Apple, 1993; Cornbleth, 1995). Hence, school curricula are not ideologically neutral documents. Our understanding of these hegemonic processes informs our interrogation of social studies curricula that government ministries of education sanction and prescribe for use in classrooms.

Despite the pervasive myth that classroom teachers ignore curricular expectations in their teaching, it should not be assumed that formal curricula play no part in teaching and learning in the Canadian context. Whether they teach to explicit objectives stipulated in the curriculum or rely on supplemental resources such as authorized textbooks, teachers transmit to students knowledge arising directly from the ideas and perspectives embedded in curriculum documents. Although we acknowledge that the curriculum as written is not necessarily the curriculum as taught or even as learned (Apple, 1993), we believe that the process of education begins with the written curriculum document. We do, however, recognize that students access the knowledge found in curriculum documents in limited ways.

[S]tudents are usually taught school knowledge as a set of facts and concepts to be memorized and later recalled. They are rarely encouraged to examine the assumptions, values, and the nature of the knowledge they are required to memorize or to examine the ways in which knowledge is constructed (Banks, 1992, p. 154).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

We ground our study in critical multiculturalism. Critical multiculturalism is a theoretical approach that focuses on deliberately exposing, acknowledging, and understanding the power relationships between and among groups within society to challenge the status quo and actively work toward the realization of social justice (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1997). According to Kincheloe and Steinberg (1997), the pedagogical dimension of critical multiculturalism works toward the identification of how "racial, class and gender oppressions are implicit in the way knowledge, values and identities are constructed . . ." (p. 29). Critical multiculturalism openly

asks questions about the sources and origins of knowledge, who justifies and validates knowledge, and what political purposes knowledge may serve (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1997). Hence, the critical multicultural approach differs significantly from other multicultural approaches that range from cultural tourism, the ethnic museum, and our "shared" heritage, to those that embrace well-intentioned but ineffectual colour- and gender-blindness, to those that hold the position that only claims made by members of identifiable groups about their groups are authentic claims (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1997; Werner, Connors, Aoki & Dahlie, 1977). We find these approaches untenable because they reinforce, albeit unwittingly, the status quo of inequality based on difference. Because critical multiculturalism pays explicit attention to power relations and their material consequences on the lives of people, we prefer this approach. It also appeals because of its deliberate focus not only on relationships between ethnicity, gender, and class but also on its ability to examine each of these aspects of identity in its own right. Fundamentally, we ground our analysis of representations of gender, ethnicity, and class in critical multicultural theory because it emphasizes the belief that social groups exist in relationship with and not in opposition to each other (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1997, p. 42).

A Note on Terminology

We hold gender, ethnicity, and class to be complex social constructions, which are context-specific both temporally and spatially. They reflect culture, not nature; they are mutable, not absolute. More specifically, we borrow Flax's (1990) conceptualization of gender as a relational process between women and men in which human characteristics are asymmetrically, and oftentimes exclusively, attributed to either men or women. This false dichotomy enables unequal power relationships wherein particular roles, skills, and knowledges are either valued or devalued according to their assignment within the gender system.

We borrow Lee's (1985) definition of ethnicity and use it to "describe groups which share a common language, race, religion or national group" (p. 11). Working within the Canadian milieu, we chose to work with the concept of ethnicity rather than race because we see it as a more encompassing term. Also, as Stasiulis (in Mansfield & Kehoe, 1994) reminds us, expressions of racism throughout Canadian history have been "evoked not only by skin colour, but by ethnic markers as well, based on language, religion, and other components of ethnic culture" (p. 424).

We find Yeskel and Leondar-Wright's (1997) conceptualization of class

useful for our purposes because they define class as "a relative social ranking based on income, wealth, status, and/or power" (p. 233). Class, as a category of analysis, is often overlooked primarily because of the belief that Canada is a classless society (Allahar & Côté, 1998). In addition, critiques of the economic system that produce and reify our classified society are erroneously perceived as challenges to democracy rather than to capitalism (Yeskel & Leondar-Wright, 1997).

We deliberately chose to use the term diversity rather than multiculturalism as the umbrella concept for our analysis of representations of class, gender, and ethnic differences in social studies curricula. Within the Canadian mindset, the term multiculturalism tends to conjure ideas of food and festival, particularly celebrations rooted in cultural expressions of traditional celebratory dress, dance, music, and other art forms, as well as national or regional dishes, recipes, and food items. Multiculturalism is also used as a synonym for visible minority, implicitly erasing white or Euro-Canadians from this categorization. Within the context of schooling, educators often delimit multicultural education to recognizing and managing ethnic and racial diversity (Fleras & Elliott, 1992). Multiculturalism, therefore, is both an overly specific concept for our purpose, and also a term that carries potentially loaded connotations.

Although our use of diversity certainly includes notions of ethnic difference, we move beyond this unidimensional conceptualization toward the recognition that diversity encompasses complex and interrelated processes of identity construction and relation that include, but are not limited to, ethnicity, gender, socio-economic class, ableness, sexuality, religion, and language. Using diversity instead of multiculturalism also facilitates the differentiation between references to our theoretical framework, critical multiculturalism, and references to differences among and between people, that is, diversity. For our current research, we have delimited our study of representations of diversity in social studies curricula to gender, socio-economic class, and ethnicity.

METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

R. G. Collingwood (1939, 1940, 1994), an English philosopher and historian working at the beginning of the twentieth century, suggested a methodological approach for handling and interpreting written, primary source, historical documents. We have adapted his methods to the analysis of social studies curriculum documents.

Collingwood's methodology arose from his resistance to the positivist

approaches that were being taken up by scholars at the turn of the last century. He argued that positivism, with its emphasis on what can be observed, weighed, measured, or calculated, was an inadequate method for understanding historical events. He posited (1939, 1994) that historical events, or past human action, have both an outside and an inside. By the outside of human actions or historical events, Collingwood meant everything that can, or could have been, observed. For Collingwood, the inside of human actions or historical events meant the thoughts of the characters involved in the event, that caused them or motivated them to act as they did before, during, and after the event. For example, a description of the movement of troops during a World War I battle is the outside of an action. The thoughts of the general who ordered particular troop movements or the thoughts of the troops themselves as they followed their orders are examples of the inside of this action.

Collingwood was convinced that uncovering the motivating thoughts of human actors in historical events was as important for understanding and making meaning about those events as was knowing about the events themselves. He therefore devised a method to uncover and reconstruct such thought by examining surviving records. Collingwood's approach requires the interrelated and simultaneous processes of deep interrogation and reconstruction.

Interrogation

The process of interrogation involves cross-examining a written document to uncover implicit meaning. Collingwood (1994) asserted that to understand the deeper, underlying thought that motivated people to action, the researcher must treat the documentary evidence as testimony to be grilled rather than as an authority espousing the truth. He claimed, "It is absolutely necessary, when one comes across any piece of narrative which one is trying to use as historical material, to put the narrator in the witness box and to exert all one's ingenuity in order to shake his [sic] testimony" (Collingwood, 1994, p. 378). When using Collingwood's document analysis approach, an analyst acknowledges that explicit statements in a written document are not necessarily true or accurate reflections of what the document creator meant. To uncover the meaning in a document, an analyst subjects it to probing questions by which he or she is, in effect, involved in a dialogue with the document. An analyst interrogates the text using a set of sub-questions to assist in addressing the overall or general research question, pre-formulating the sub-questions within the context of the theoretical framework guiding the inquiry. However, just as

a lawyer in questioning a witness is never certain about what the interrogation will reveal, and is therefore required to formulate further questions from the emerging testimony, an analyst frames additional interrogative questions as themes, ideas, and underlying suppositions emerge during analysis.

Reconstruction

The process of reconstruction, also guided by asking and answering questions, involves recovering the thought of the document creator and reformulating the internal, and usually implicit, cluster of presuppositions from which the document creator's thinking emerged. Collingwood argued that to understand past human action — i.e., to understand the inside of an historical event — an analyst makes meaning from the written record by reconstructing the thinking of the person involved. According to Collingwood (1939), this understanding involves getting "inside other people's heads, looking at their situation through their eyes, and thinking for yourself whether the way in which they tackled [their problem] was the right way" (p. 58). Collingwood referred to this part of the reconstructive process as re-enactment.

In addition to re-enactment, Collingwood argued that the reconstruction of thought, and making meaning from that reconstruction, must also involve an effort to determine the internal sources or presuppositions from which the document creator derived his or her thinking. Collingwood (1939) claimed, "you cannot find out what a man [sic] means by simply studying his spoken or written statement" (p. 31). To discover this meaning, an analyst must first know the question "to which the thing he has said or written was meant as an answer" (Collingwood, 1939, p. 31). Rethinking another's thoughts, and understanding what they mean, is an active process that involves understanding the underlying assumptions the document creator takes for granted. Three ideas underpin Collingwood's method for determining presuppositions (a) all people take for granted particular beliefs about the natural world, the nature of human beings, and the relationship between the two, i.e., they hold presuppositions; (b) these beliefs cause people to ask particular questions about the world, their work, and other people; and (c) whether these questions are explicitly or implicitly stated, an analyst can consider a document creator's written statements to be responses to the questions that he or she asked (Collingwood, 1940).

Collingwood (1940) posited that document analysts can expose the presuppositions that lie behind the creation of a document by examining

the written statements contained within the document. From these statements, they can determine the implicit questions the document creator asked at the time of writing. In exposing these implicit questions, an analyst can determine the presuppositions held by the document creator that prompted the questions to be asked in the first place. For example, an author might write, "Children learn best by exercising their minds" in one part of a document, and later in the same document write, "Children learn best by doing." It might be concluded that the document contains contradictory statements, if an analyst decides that the question behind the author's statements is "How do children learn best?" However, through further examination of statements in the document, an analyst could determine that the author included apparently contradictory statements because she or he was actually asking two different questions: (a) "How do children of the elite learn best?" and (b) "How do children of the working class learn best?" By determining that the document creator was asking two questions, an analyst understands the document creator's presuppositions about the nature of humanity, and why the creator made seemingly contradictory statements about children and learning. In this case, the analyst could deduce that the author takes for granted that there are different kinds of people in the world, that they have different kinds of abilities, and that the class into which a person is born determines individual abilities. Thus, by determining the questions asked, an analyst gains access to the document creator's presuppositions, the internal sources from which the thinking is derived.

An Example of Reconstruction

An example from our analysis of the Alberta Social Studies (Elementary) Program of Studies (Alberta Education, 1990) document provides further insight into the process of reconstruction. We found, for instance, within some units of this curriculum, statements explicitly indicating that Canada is officially a multicultural and bilingual society:

This study is the first formal orientation to Canada as a multicultural society. (Alberta Education, 1990, p. C. 8)

The intent of the unit is to develop an awareness of Canada as a bilingual country. . . . (Alberta Education, 1990, p. C. 33)

However, in another unit of the document, we found this statement:

The students will demonstrate an understanding of the following: Some people prefer to

live in or belong to a special community so they can keep their customs and traditions. (Alberta Education, 1990, p. C. 23)

This statement appears to directly contradict the previous statements about a multicultural/bilingual Canada because it suggests that the only way to maintain and preserve customs and traditions is to remain within a special community. This contradiction also tacitly hints that people who do not remain within a special community will lose their customs and traditions and be assimilated into the mainstream.

This document contains contradictory statements if we decide that a single question lies behind these statements — a question like “What do we want students to learn about Canadian culture/ethnicity?” However, through further examination of statements in the document, we determined that the curriculum included these apparently contradictory statements because they were responses to two different questions: (a) “What do we want students to learn about ‘us’ — our culture, our ethnicity?” and, (b) “What do we want student to learn about ‘them’ — their cultures, their ethnicities?”

By determining that statements in the curriculum addressed two questions, we uncovered the presuppositions concerning the hierarchy of cultures/ethnicities underpinning the document. Because we discovered that the curriculum presented contradictory statements in response to these two questions, we deduced that it was taken for granted, or presupposed, that a dominant culture/ethnicity in Canada (the “us”) allows “them” (those who are strange, exotic, or other) to retain their culture, although “they” are always in danger of assimilation into the mainstream. Thus, through the process of determining that statements in the curriculum are responses to two questions, we reasoned that one assumption of the Alberta Social Studies Program of Studies (1990) is: Canada is a bilingual and multicultural society, but a dominant culture/ethnicity is the most important and powerful.

Collingwood insisted that the process of reconstruction — which, for him, lay at the heart of making meaning and constructing knowledge — must begin and be continually guided by the act of questioning. Therefore, the unearthing of presuppositions involves an analyst asking and answering questions as she or he examines documents. This list provides examples of such questions:

- What was the author thinking when she/he wrote this?
- What seemed to be her/his main concerns?
- What were her/his intentions when creating the document?
- What might the author be trying to hide from me?

- What notions are embedded within the document that the author assumes her or his readers will also take for granted?
- Do the things the author left out of the account reveal as much as the things that she or he decided to include?

Through the process of reconstruction, which includes re-enacting, questioning, and critiquing, an analyst derives meaning from documents by gaining insight into the thought that underlay their creation.

THE RESEARCH PROJECT

In our ongoing curriculum analysis research, we use two sets of probing questions to uncover and unpack ideas embedded in social studies curriculum documents. These documents provide testimony about the discourses and representations of class, gender, and ethnic diversities that are endorsed in official school knowledge and reveal the presuppositions that lie behind these representations. One set of questions we used, found above, is generic because it assists in the process of reconstruction regardless of the particular inquiry focus. To interrogate documents, analysts need to design a second set of questions specifically for their inquiry. To assist in the interrogation of the curriculum documents in our inquiry, we ask the following questions:

- What key themes, generalizations, and ideas are found implicitly or explicitly about cultures/countries/peoples/ethnic groups/genders/classes?
- Is there a dominant perspective or grand (meta-) narrative?
- Is there an explicit or subtle hierarchy of ethnicities/genders/classes?
- What notions of progress are expressed implicitly or explicitly?
- What notions of civilized/civilization or uncivilized/primitive are expressed implicitly or explicitly?
- What notions of public and private spheres of influence are expressed implicitly or explicitly?
- Whose story is told? How is it told?
- What are the gaps? What else could have been included?

We find that further and more specific questions emerge, depending on the particular testimony of a particular curriculum document.

As we read each social studies curriculum document, we record responses to these questions along with particular statements extracted from the document. From the analysis and interpretation of these responses, we reconstruct assumptions about diversity underpinning a particular curriculum. Working with these data, we are able to understand,

acknowledge, and reveal those representations of ethnicity, gender, and class that the official curriculum provides as appropriate and acceptable knowledge for social studies students.

WORK IN PROGRESS

We continue our exploration, interrogation, and analysis of social studies curricula using a variety of organizational approaches. The analyses may be (a) a general overview of a particular grade from a particular province; (b) a comparison of content and assumptions of two or more graded curricula; or (c) an exploration of a theme (e.g., the family or natural resources) common across grades or provincial curricula.

Social studies curriculum reform and rewriting is an ongoing process across the country. Although some provincial ministries of education are engaging in lengthy processes of consultation, redrafting, and piloting curricula, others have imposed curricula with little or no consultation. Regardless of the curriculum reform approach that particular provinces adopt, we believe that the time is opportune to search for representations of diversity in the official knowledge about Canada and Canadians that ministries of education sanction for consumption in schools across the country; it is an opportune time to determine if it includes all of us.

NOTES

- 1 See as a specific example the Canadian Multiculturalism Act, 1988.
- 2 Collingwood was not thinking in terms of linguistic gender equality. Rather, he was using the style that was common to his historical time and place when referring to "universalized man" as all human beings. We want to acknowledge that academic writers and thinkers no longer conceptualize in terms of a "universal man," without taking Collingwood's writing out of his particular historical context.
- 3 For example, Alberta is engaging in a lengthy process of consultation in revision of the social studies curriculum (see Alberta Learning, 2003). Alberta's process can be compared to the lack of consultation and rapid introduction of a revised elementary curriculum in Ontario in 1998, following the election of the Harris Conservative government.

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