Chapter 4
Citizenship and Social Studies Curricula in British Columbia, Canada: Contemporary Realities and Alternative Possibilities

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ABSTRACT

This chapter begins by reviewing the history of citizenship education in social studies curricula in British Columbia (BC), Canada, as a way of framing how the topic has been understood. It then discusses the latest curriculum revision in the province, which is in the process of being implemented. This new revision has dramatically changed the style of the curriculum in comparison with previous revisions, while also maintaining continuity in some areas, such as its conception of citizenship education. After this review, the author discusses issues related to the new curriculum such as its specific focus on particular concepts or theories which can limit teacher views and practices related to citizenship education. The chapter concludes by discussing alternative curriculum-framing and teaching ideas for citizenship education and social studies in general that connect into contemporary work and contexts.

INTRODUCTION

In Canada, provinces are responsible for administering public schools, including managing teacher regulation and certification, developing school policies, allocating funding, designing curriculum and recommending instructional strategies. Limited Federal (national) involvement in provincial policy and curriculum development occurs through the influence of some Federal policies, such as the policy of Multiculturalism (Di Mascio, 2013). In the province of British Columbia (BC), citizenship education is generally integrated into Social Studies courses, following a nineteenth century pattern. This chapter
reviews major revisions to social studies curricula over the twentieth century in the province, including the latest curriculum revision, which is just in the process of being implemented, focused on how citizenship education is or has been conceptualized. It finds similar threads and trends related to the aim of creating good, national and political citizens over the century, with the addition of some critical citizenship features in more recent guides. The chapter then discusses some of the limitations with this citizenship education program found in government guides due to its primarily political nature and its limited conceptions of how citizenship and social studies can be understood and taught. These may relate to a lack of broad-based involvement in the conceptualization and creation of curricula. The chapter concludes with some alternative ways of thinking about citizenship education and Social Studies, such as expanding views of how the subjects can be understood and taught, which include attention to considering democracy as a lived concept and to present realities, issues and influences, such as social media.

**BACKGROUND**

Public schools were established in a number of Western nations during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Prussia was one of the first nations to develop public schools. This state closely connected public schooling to the development of nationalistic citizens who were supportive of the nation (Broom, 2012; Cordasco, 1976). The United States, England and Canadian provinces such as Ontario followed this pattern. BC, Canada’s most Western province situated along the Pacific Ocean, established public schools in the later nineteenth century following Ontario’s lead. BC joined the Confederation of Canadian provinces in 1871. Shortly after, in 1872, the new province passed a School Act that stated that public schools were to be free and administered by a Board of Education.

BC’s Department of Education (now Ministry of Education), under a Superintendent, was responsible for establishing and managing public schools throughout the province. Government schools were set up around the province with the use of money (grants to schools) and the development of certification requirements for teachers at these schools (Broom, 2016a). That is, the government provided grants to communities that wanted to establish schools. However, the schools had to be accountable to the government, and school inspectors were set up to visit schools and report on them. Inspectors evaluated teachers and schools based on a number of categories including teaching performance, using standardized forms. For example, one teacher’s inspection report of 1928 commented on the “tone” of her room, discipline, and teaching ability-methods (Brough, 1928, p. 1). The government (under the Superintendent of Schools) issued varied types of teaching certificates based on teachers’ achievements on tests. Normal Schools were established to train teachers. The first Normal School in BC opened in 1901.

In the late nineteenth century, the Department of Education developed subject-based curricula, including History and Civics. The History curriculum was closely inter-weaved with the development of citizenship, focusing particularly on developing students’ political citizenship. One textbook, for example, presented a “nation-building narrative” (Anderson, 2006; Wertsch, 2010) that aimed to foster students’ sense of connection to the fledgling Canadian nation, recently founded through the Confederation Act of 1867 (Broom, 2012). While Confederation united provinces, Canada remained part of the British Empire until after World War II. In Civics, students were to learn “traditionalist” citizenship practices, such as following political news, being knowledgeable of government structures and processes, and engaging in civic activities such as voting (Department of Education, 1919, 1927; Jenkins, 1918; Sears & Hughes, 1996).