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Analyzing the Front Matter

# SOCIAL STUDIES CURRICULUM



## WHAT IS SOCIAL STUDIES?

"The study of people in relation to each other and their world"

## DEFINITION:

Issues-focussed drawing from history, geography, ecology, economics, law, philosophy, political science and other social science disciplines.

Social Studies is all about understanding and getting involved in the issues within our communities and facing our world.

It is at the center of students development of who they are, who they want to become, and what kind of society they want to live in.

## WHY TEACH SOCIAL STUDIES?

To foster social cohesion, respect for individual and collective identities.

To understand and appreciate those different from ourselves and their perspectives.

To better understand and examine our own perspectives.

## THE PURPOSE

Encouraging students to find their place as citizens within an inclusive, diverse, and democratic society.



# MOULDING INFORMED, RESPONSIBLE, CRITICAL THINKING CITIZENS



## TEACHING = FACILITATING OPPORTUNITY

Using current events and controversial issues to facilitate historical, creative, critical, geographic thinking as well as problem solving.

Teaching pedagogy encompasses utilitarian teaching to prepare students for the future, as well as continuity for social cohesion, reformation through critical thinking, and self-actualization for understanding themselves.

## LEARNING = INQUIRY- BASED

Students construct meaning through a lens of their own lived experiences. Learning takes place through active inquiry and engagement.

learning is the application of information through: community connections, writing letters, asking questions, sharing ideas, listening and collaborating, empathizing, problem solving, reflection, and metacognition.

### KNOWLEDGE

Time, continuity, change  
The land: places and people  
Power, authority, and decision making  
Economics and resources  
Global connections  
Culture and community



### SKILLS

Participation in democracy  
Research for deliberative inquiry  
Oral, written, visual, and media literacy  
Application of Knowledge



### ATTITUDES

Citizenship and identity  
Aboriginal perspectives and experiences  
Francophone perspectives and experiences  
Pluralism: diversity and cohesion

## DISCIPLINARY APPROACH

Issue-focussed approach  
Empowering students to effect change within democracy  
Informing students of civil rights and responsibilities of active citizenship  
Pluralism, Multiculturalism, Equity, & Diversity in the Canadian Context



In Laura A. Thompson's *Identity and the Forthcoming Alberta Social Studies Curriculum: A Postcolonial Reading*, the Alberta program of studies for social studies is presented as an opportunity to decolonialize the mind, a way to examine pluralism and multiple perspectives, and as an expansion of the definition of citizenship and identity for majority and minority groups. A postcolonial reading of the program of studies is seen by Thompson as 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." Such a view recognizes Canada's past as colonial, assimilationist, and discriminatory, perhaps even recognizing such practices against students of various backgrounds in the classroom, while also acknowledging historical continuity and change opening up 'Canadian identity' as accessible in multiple ways and for multiple perspectives. By putting the curriculum through a lens of postcolonialism, the opportunity to recognize the faults of colonialism, allows students to see the world from new perspectives, and to hear voices that they have not previously had the opportunity to hear. Postcolonialism is portrayed by Thompson as a gateway to create new identities, foster belonging in a pluralistic Canadian context, while also recognizing a challenging and complex history in Canada.

Furthermore, opportunities within the curriculum in regard to postcolonialism also "help develop students who are to become active participants in cross-cultural communities of learners and empowered citizens in a cultural democracy." For instance, a classroom that is listening and open to a variety of perspectives from various ethnic and cultural backgrounds can begin to foster such a 'cross-cultural community of learners'. By practicing democracy in the classroom, students become empowered to take part in democracy as informed citizens and as those that can hear opposing perspectives. The curriculum itself, promotes social cohesion as well as the "development of an active and responsible citizenships" and with the addition of a postcolonial lens can "develop and value their individual and collective identities and better fulfill their role as active and responsible citizens in society". By acknowledging history and a Canadian past, and even present, that is not always inclusive, the social studies classroom can question what it means to be Canadian on multiple levels and to critically examine a student's personal beliefs. Then, postcolonialism can approach diversity by "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". Therefore, according to Thompson, "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."

On the other hand, postcolonialism in light of the program of studies does not come without its challenges. While the program of studies promotes the ideals of citizenship, something which can quickly become apparent in the classroom but it not explicitly dealt with in the front matter is that "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". Such discussions could be highly charged, even painful to some students, and yet the promotion of citizenship persists. Thompson also notes the challenge that without a postcolonial lens, "the teaching of identity and of a sense of Canadian citizenship is becoming problematic in an era of global thinking". Therefore, the program of studies alone teaches an ideal of Canadian citizenship that may not acknowledge differences and diversity, instead hegemonizing a national consciousness that is not strictly true.

Even though the program of studies preaches diversity and multiple perspectives in Canadian citizenship, the historical and present reflections of this do not always align creating problems if not viewed post colonially. “Students need to see that such divisions have long been part of the fabric and structure of the state, including schools, and they need to appreciate that challenging the structuring of those differences requires equally public acts of refusing their original and intended meanings”. Thus, a postcolonial or alternate lens is required to challenge colonial assumptions and Canadian identity pieces that no longer fit the ideal of multiculturalism and diversity that Canadian identity in the curriculum promotes. The final challenge with postcolonialism itself is that it is an emerging field and concept often “lacking consensus and clarity” and therefore difficult to implement in a meaningful way in the classroom without the appropriate training and research.