

# *Border within Borders: Ontario's Canadian and World Studies Curriculum*

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Canada is a country comprised of many people, many identities, many cultures, and thus, many borders. These borders, whether demarcated with provincial, municipal or imaginary lines, play a large role in influencing the current position and efficacy of our education system., Having gone through major changes in the last ten years, the Ontario curriculum is an example of how borders influence both what is taught and what is excluded. By focusing on current theories of border politics in Canada and two courses in the Canadian and World Studies section of the Ontario Curriculum – Canadian History Since World War I, Grade 10, Academic; and Canada: History, Identity, and Culture, Grade 12, University Preparation – I argue that current curriculum and political theories undermine the official Canadian policy of multiculturalism. A discussion on current political border theory as it applies to Canada will outline the main arguments for borders and their place in Canadian policy. A look at current educational thinking will outline the current role of education in society, and an examination of the Ontario Curriculum documents will shed light on the idea that the institution of

education is not quite as multicultural, open and free of oppression as Canadians like to think it is.

Kenneth McRoberts (2001) deals with Canada's unique stance as a nation dealing with multiculturalism, multinationalism and coming to terms with ideas surrounding the traditional nation-state. Consistent with federal policy, he argues that Canada is actually a multinational state with a tripartite of founders, consisting of the French colonisers, the British colonisers and the Aboriginal peoples of Canada. The current political language speaks more towards the ideas of multinationalism and multiculturalism. Looking at Canada in terms of three founding nation does away with the old rhetoric of binationalism and biculturalism that was fostered and prevailed through the late 1960s and early 1970s. What this actually means is that Canada has been continually reshaping and remodelling how it views itself over the last fifty years—from the acceptance of binationalism and biculturalism under Lester Pearson, to the adoption of multiculturalism under Pierre Trudeau, to the current ideas of multinationalism. This shows that Canada is a nation that is malleable in its own interpretations of what defines it as a country.

Ideas of the nation-state, which still exist in many countries around the world, were fostered out of the ideas of Rousseau and Herder in Europe in the wake of the French Revolution and continue to be the foundation of nationalism and patriotism (Wiborg 2000). What makes Canada unique is that its national policies have never ascribed to these notions. It is arguable that some politicians may have governed differently, but as McRoberts (2001) asserts:

Canada was the first political system in which federalism was designed, at least in part, to accommodate and protect cultural and linguistic differences, as opposed to purely territorial ones (695).

Due to the fact that Canada, had two distinct language groups upon uniting in 1867, in order for governing to work, both languages had to be accepted or the union would never have worked. This allows for Canada to be “non-traditional” in its nation-building, because unlike its European predecessors, and even the Americans, Canada never forced assimilation to one language: citizens were recognized for speaking two languages. Of course the ugly blot on this record is the forced assimilation of the Aboriginal peoples in residential schools. It can remain true, however, that, as McRoberts points out, “The dominant form of Canadian nationalism celebrates the minority language” (2001, 700) where the minority language is French.

The policy of multiculturalism comes to fruition under the leadership of Pierre Trudeau. Trudeau’s ideas of a united Canada, with a Charter of Rights and Freedoms, a constitution and a policy on multiculturalism trumped the 1960s policies on biculturalism and binationalism (McRoberts 2001). By the time Trudeau was in power in the 1970s, Canada had undergone considerable change; with the post-war influx of immigration, Quebec’s Quiet Revolution, and petitions of Aboriginal self-governance, Trudeau sought to unite Canada with a new form of nationalism: multiculturalism. Under these circumstances, it would appear that Canada’s multicultural policy, while revolutionary and new, came about due to the necessity to keep the nation united.

Multiculturalism has essentially stayed intact as a Canadian policy, but what the McRoberts article is arguing is the notion that Canada is becoming a multinational nation. Indeed, as I have stated earlier, Canada is founded by a tripartite of peoples – many nations – thereby making its formation one of multinationalism. McRoberts states that the multinationalism is highly problematic in the Canadian sense. Take his example of the “nation” of Quebec; if Quebec is a minority nation, within the larger nation of Canada, its borders are clearly delineated in provincial lines. One of the central identifying factors in belonging to the

Quebec nation is the French language, which does not include Acadians, Franco-Ontarians, or Franco-Manitobans. How does one deal with French speaking peoples outside of this minority nation? And what of the multiple minority groups within Quebec? Do they become minorities within the minority? And what if there are people within the provincial borders, for example, some Anglo-Quebecers, who reject the idea of a Quebec nation? Part of the problem that I believe McRoberts is getting at, is that the idea of minority “nation” sets in place ideas of borders. How can you identify a nation that cannot be isolated? The borders within Canada have become so permeable that there are numerous groups who can find ties to others that may have recognizable “nationalist” traits, but are located in Vancouver, Toronto, Montreal and Yellowknife.

Another problem with the multinational idea, is that nations often have a distinct culture. And while this at first seems to solve the “unsolvable” Canadian problem of identifying Canadian culture, nationalist cultures are often reductive cultures, or a blending of many cultures over space and time. Canada’s many “nations” after immigration would have people who could potentially come from the same country of origin, with different political ideas, different beliefs, and different languages and values. As McRoberts states, “multiculturalism recognizes and even celebrates a wide variety of differences that multinationalism seeks to subsume within the framework of the individual nations” (2001, 703). Rather than recognizing the differences and celebrating them, multinationalism actually partitions them, creating borders between people, rather than helping people to come together within the nation of Canada.

McRoberts’s conclusion, with which I can reasonably agree, states that Canada is conflicted. Canada is a nation attempting the ideas of a nation-state under the guise of multinationalism, but holds firmly within it, an underlying policy of multiculturalism. With this in mind and

keeping with the idea that Canada's identity is distinctly malleable, Patricia Goff (2000) builds on the idea of Canada's invisible borders by arguing that in the wake of globalisation, countries will open the borders of the state while closing the borders of the nation. What is important to note here is her distinction between the state and the nation; the state she defines as the economy and the politics of a particular country, whereas the nation is tied to the culture of the country.

Goff argues that borders still exist, but that they are permeable. Much like the idea of Canada's malleable borders within itself, the idea of permeable boundaries in Canada seem much like a filter. The filter determines what external influences come in and how much of Canada goes out. These Canadian borders allow the "outside" to come in, but can also define the "inside" from the "outside". Goff (2000) states that:

States are responding to globalization by attempting to restore meaning to the national borders, not as barriers to entry, but as boundaries demarcating distinct political communities (533).

In other words, with a high influx of global trade and international influences, many countries are attempting to determine cultural boundaries in order to create a distinction of a sovereign nation-state within a global economy.

For example, Goff describes how Canada refused to allow the free trade of culture to be on the discussion table during the talks negotiating the Canada-United States Free Trade Agreement (CUSFTA) or the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) (2000, 534). Culture in this sense specifically refers to television, radio and film. While this shows an overt resistance to complete global trade, it also shows that Canada is not prepared to take down all of its borders when it feels that the culture or perceived essence of the nation is threatened. Canada maintains its television, radio and film industries to foster growth in Canadian talent and potential, but also for a larger reason: to educate. Canadian

programming educates Canadians about what happens in their own country – the news, the laws and the everyday happenings on sitcoms all play a role in this popular education. These industries show Canadians things they can relate to that no other nation can in the same way, and the government of Canada feels so strongly about these industries, that the threat of the larger American counterpart was enough to create borders around them.

The common thread surrounding both McRoberts's (2001) and Goff's (2000) articles are the value of Canadian culture. Though neither defines Canadian culture, as such, both convey very strongly that Canadian culture is something that is to be protected with borders to keep it inside and defend it from other invasive cultures, and yet also as something that cannot be kept neatly within a border as one single entity. The idea of the complexity of Canadian culture is at heart here, but it is revealed as something ever changing within the borders of the state, and still protected by it.

Graham Pike (2000) examines the idea of global education and how it is influenced by the formation of national identity. Pike believes that a national culture implies a type of cultural dominance and has relationships with the many subcultures interacting with the dominant one. He goes on to say that the nation is the place where people find their sense of belonging; people believe that they are citizens of a particular country and feel that they are a part of this country. He states:

Whatever the political and economic realities of the global system, it is particular nations and cultures that continue to provide people with their primary sense of belonging and, by extension, continue to exert a powerful influence on education systems (Pike 2000, 71).

When people identify with cultures, they feel more secure, and the educational system is faced with the situation of either reinscribing the identity which makes people secure, or threatening it by questioning the

validity of this national identity. In the case of Canada, this can be highly problematic, because as frequently as the country reshapes itself, so too must the curriculum encompass these changes, but do so in a way that does not destabilise the people it is supposed to teach and support.

Waters and Leblanc (2005) argue that schools are actually charged with creating an identity in imagined, legitimate, expressions of “nationalism, patriotism and economic activity” (129). This is consistent with Rousseau’s idea that people are what governments make them and that state institutions, particularly schools, are instruments that create the national character and thus must remain subservient to the building of national citizenship (Wiborg 2000). Rousseau’s ideas of political nationalism can be seen within the Ontario curriculum where one of the overarching expectations for students is that they will “develop the knowledge and values they need to become responsible, active, and informed Canadian citizens in the twenty-first century” (Ontario Ministry of Education 2005a, 3). Waters and Leblanc (2005) argue that this political nationalism identifies the particular “we” in society, that is to say, those who are citizens of the country. In turn, the identification of the “we” also creates the juxtaposition of the “them”, or “the other”, or in this case the “non-citizen”. This creates a certain partition, or border, around those who are included and those who are not. In particular, for Waters and Leblanc, they take issue with those living with refugee status. Refugees are, by definition, a stateless people; they cannot identify with the “we” within the protectorate nation, and at same time, they cannot live within the nation to which they hold citizenship (Waters & Leblanc 2005, 130). This is exceedingly problematic in Canada, where many people hold refugee status and also, where many new immigrants have yet to obtain their citizenship. These people may have more ties in their country of origin than they do in Canada.

Rousseau’s political nationalism also sets the stage for political participation in the future, and this, too, is the stated goal of the Ontario

Curriculum. Leblanc and Waters (2005) argue that not only does it create active citizens, but a political curriculum actually makes statements about the type of desired “we” within the nation. This becomes a complex idea when coupled with the fact that most educational institutions are requiring that their teachers foster critical thinking within their students. It begs the question of whether teachers can foster critical thinking within a politically charged curriculum, or whether they have students think critically within the framework of these politics. It can be a type of conundrum, as Waters and Leblanc would argue that the goal of common schooling is to establish the “modern political community” (2005, 129).

Citizenship borders are not alone in the modern curriculum. Versions of Goff’s (2000) invisible borders reappear when discussing cultural boundaries. Brand and Glasson (2004) examine how cultural borders, as well as borders of race and ethnicity, affect students, teachers and pre-service teachers. Indeed, this is a central and critical idea when discussing Canadian issues since the basis of Canada’s national policy is multiculturalism. Brand and Glasson argue that moving across cultural borders means that each person is constantly negotiating and renegotiating their beliefs and ideas amidst those around them and with the social place or institution in which they find themselves (2004, 120). This constant renegotiation is especially relevant in Canada where pluralism is more the norm than homogeneity. Understanding how these cultures interact is critical for students to know in order to map their way through schooling, but also for them while they are creating and negotiating their own identities (Yon 2000).

As important as negotiating through cultural barriers might be, many scholars would argue that the Canadian system is ill-equipped to deal with such issues. Gordon Pon (2000) takes issue with much of the educational systems and focuses on the fact that Canadians of Asian descent are often overlooked in the curriculum. He is not wrong in this



assertion, as the Ontario Curriculum takes little notice of the Asian influence in Canada. Save for the remarks about Chinese labour while building the railway (see Ontario Ministry of Education 2005a, 184 & 187), Asians are largely left out of the curriculum despite their large waves of immigration and contribution to the economic growth of Canada. Pon also touches on the issue of multiculturalism and states, “multicultural education fails to deal with systemic and structural racism” (2000, 140). This is also true; by embracing and celebrating the many cultures within Canada, it is easy to gloss over the idea that racism still exists. In effect, multiculturalism has not “fixed” racism; it has simply covered it over so that it is not necessary to discuss. Neither the documents for grade 9 and 10 study, nor the documents for grade 11 and 12 study in the Ontario curriculum deal with racism after the adoption of Trudeau’s multicultural policy (Ontario Ministry of Education 2005a, 2005b). Any specific focus on racism in the Ontario programs reviewed is limited to the pre-Trudeau era of Canada. By not dealing with an existing problem as difficult as racism, the policy of breaking down barriers through a blind faith in multiculturalism simply blankets a nation with many borders already in place. This is problematic for Brand and Glasson’s (2004) ideas of negotiation and Yon’s (2000) ideas of identifying the self through culture, race and ethnicity.

McCarthy and Dimitriadis (2000) take issue with the often simplified version of multiculturalism that is presented and focus on Nietzsche’s view of identity formation. Nietzsche believed that identity is formed first by picturing “the enemy” and then creating yourself in the opposite image: to know our enemies before we define ourselves. McCarthy and Dimitriadis take this idea one step further and argue that a person empties and annihilates “the other” in order to find the self, creating an “ethnocentric consolidation” (2000, 174). This idea is not far off from Goff’s (2000) previously mentioned idea that the inside is often defined by what is outside. This form of self-identification, especially within the

context of defining a nation, requires that there are strict borders and delineations between who “we” are, and who “they” are. It means that we cannot have ourselves without “the other”.

Looking at this in another way, if you cannot have yourself without “the other”, one must negotiate understanding “the other” within the multicultural framework, and that McCarthy and Dimitriadis (2000) argue comes in with a simplification of what the “other” groups might be. Racial origin is one such argument, stating that each culture has an ethnic and a racial origin at some point in time and at some place in the world. Of this, McCarthy and Dimitriadis state that:

This discourse of racial origin as it is infused in multiculturalism provides imaginary solutions to groups and individuals who refuse the radical hybridity that is the historically evolved reality of the US and other major Western metropolitan societies (2000, 175).

What is interesting here is that cultures are not easily divided in ways that clearly delineate exclusive racial and ethnic origins; it is not as simple as putting up a wall and declaring groups inside and outside. The idea of hybridity in Canada dates all the way back to the first French fur traders and the creation of the Métis. Cultural hybridity is not talked about within the multicultural framework, and McCarthy and Dimitriadis are right to point it out. Many families in Canada live in hybrid cultures, especially those of immigrant descent. McRoberts (2001) argues that despite an emphasis on multiculturalism, immigrant families are still being integrated into Canadian society and as a consequence, must renegotiate their cultural boundaries and create the type of hybridity that McCarthy and Dimitriadis are arguing is historically the case.

The other large issue that McCarthy and Dimitriadis (2000) touch upon is the idea that multiculturalism actually masks underlying problems. They state, “Much educational policy has become complicit

with this project of normalizing the problems of poverty and inequality as the objects of the management of diversity" (181). I would argue that this is as true in Canada as it is in the United States, but to go one step further, I would argue that the circumstances surrounding the initiation of multiculturalism was to manage the tensions of nationalist interest groups, as discussed earlier. Or, as McCarthy and Dimitriadis put it, "multiculturalism...attempts to manage the extraordinary tensions and contradictions existing in modern life that have invaded social institutions including the school" (175). In effect, multiculturalism's claims and attempts at breaking down barriers are actually being used to cover up the existing borders between people, making Goff's (2000) invisible borders a little more difficult to see.

What is not difficult to see is the absence of multicultural policy within the Ontario curriculum due to the borders created through remnants of Rousseau's political nationalism. I focus this examination on two courses: "Canadian History Since World War I, Grade 10, Academic" (CHC2D) and "Canada: History, Identity, and Culture, Grade 12, University Preparation" (CHI4U). What is important to note here is that only CHC2D is required by the provincial government. CHI4U is an elective course, and so many students will have only taken CHC2D by the time they graduate from high school. As such, I would argue that CHC2D is the most important course in Canadian History at the high school level and should be comprehensive enough to foster a critical understanding of the official multicultural policies in Canada.

Three consecutive expectations in CHC2D require to identify influences on Canadian multiculturalism, how a common Canadian identity has been promoted, and how international events have shaped Canada's evolving identity (Ontario Ministry of Education 2005a). In a sense, we ask our students to identify Canadian pluralism, Canadian nationalism and then Canadian identity based on Goff's (2000) "inside/outside" identity formation idea. All of these expectations are

under the heading “Forging a Canadian Identity” (Ontario Ministry of Education 2005a, 46). There is no inclusion here of McCarthy and Dimitriadis’s (2000) notion of hybridity. The Métis are mentioned, but as a distinct cultural group rather than an example of hybridity. The identity of Canada that students are being asked to form is laden with borders. According to the curriculum document, borders define “regional, linguistic, ethnocultural, and religious communities” (Ontario Ministry of Education 2005a, 46). Students’ ideas of Canadian identity, then, are shaped by the invisible borders within which we ask them to construct Canada as a national “whole”. Referring to Rouseauian principles on education, Wiborg (2000) states, “in order for a curriculum to be patriotic it should emphasize the symbols, language and literature of the nation-state” (238). It would see that this is the view of the nation-state, or at the very least, how the province would like to see the nation-state—as a land divided by language, culture and regions, but brought together by government and shaped by the “outside other”. Not exactly the Canada that people want to be proud of; this is not a Canada united by multiculturalism, this is a Canada contrived by a government.

Blatantly missing from the outline of the curriculum are Canada’s Aboriginal groups. In CHC2D there is an entire subheading for French-English relations, and yet no subheading for Aboriginal-government relations. Aboriginal conflicts are relegated to one outcome which reads: “evaluate the impact of social and demographic change on Aboriginal communities (e.g. relocation, urbanization, pressures to assimilate)” (Ontario Ministry of Education 2005a, 48). While these are all valid instructional pursuits, missing is attention to the huge self-government movements of the twentieth century including issues with the Meech Lake Accord, territorial disputes and government treaties. In a nation that is supposed to recognize three founding groups, one has surely been left “outside” of the curriculum.

The exclusion of Aboriginals continues in CHI4U. Aboriginals are only discussed in two time periods: pre-colonisation and colonisation (Ontario Ministry of Education 2005b, 183). There is no further analysis of the British North America Act with regards to aboriginals, no examination of the Indian Act, and no discussion about the modern issues facing Aboriginal groups. This seems to be more than a simple oversight in a course labelled “Canada: History, Identity, and Culture”. And as in CHC2D, when it comes to “Citizenship and Heritage”, there is no mention of Aboriginal people (186); a very telling sign about borders within the curriculum.

What is also interesting is the CHI4U attention to multiculturalism. One would expect that by grade 12 students would be developing some critical understanding about Canada’s multicultural policy. The expectation, however, is limited insofar as it asks students to “assess the difficulties involved in maintaining a united country while promoting diversity through multiculturalism” (Ontario Ministry of Education 2005b, 186). Curriculum developers are quick to ask students to provide reasons why multiculturalism makes nation-state nationalism difficult but are reluctant to ask them to identify the benefits of multiculturalism. I would argue that, as an aspect of political nationalism within the curriculum, the government wants to evoke sympathy from its future voters for the issues it faces in dealing with a diverse population. The error here is that there is no balance; there is nothing to counteract the governmental ideas on nationalism. Students are given a binary of nationalism and multiculturalism, which is the opposite of what the multicultural document was supposed to be. Trudeau’s initial idea was to *unite* Canada under a policy of multiculturalism, not to build a nation-state in spite of it. Multiculturalism and nationalism within CHI4U constructs them to be mutually exclusive; as such, multiculturalism is seen as a hindrance to uniting the nation.

The borders within the Ontario curriculum for Canadian history are clearly marked by a governmental interest. A government, it would seem, that does not recognize the federal policy of multiculturalism as it was intended. A government set on excluding Aboriginals, despite their place in the tripartite founding of Canada. A government set on delineating Canada, so that its identity can only be formed from those within certain boundaries. A provincial government, it seems, that does not understand the intended meaning behind federal policies and that does not understand the problems of reinscribing or creating ideas of borders, boundaries and partitions in a world that is rapidly throwing borders away. As Goff (2000) argues, the restoration of borders to protect a nation's identity is a reaction to globalization. Leonard Waks (2002) agrees with Goff that the nation-state is gradually being eroded in the twenty-first century, and he aptly outlines the unsettling fact that "no unifying vision has yet emerged to replace that of industrial democracy" (102). In a sense, Ontario's reactionary measures of reinscribing borders around Canada are not alone. According to Goff, it seems that a global reaction is occurring.. But the creation of more borders within Canada is troubling. If borders are created around the nation-state out of a reactionary fear, and the government of Ontario is creating borders and delineations *within* the country: what are we so afraid of from "inside"?

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