

==== 2021 ====

CANADIAN HISTORY
Report Card

Full Report

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INTRODUCTION

Overview

Historica Canada's History Report Card assesses history curricula across Canada. We believe that history education should do more than teach young people about past events and people that shape the present. Strong history education should promote critical thinking, teach students to explore both the past and present and how they relate to their own experiences, empower students to confront difficult issues, provide history and context for the need for Indigenous reconciliation, and show how historical narratives and accounts are constructed.

An analysis of history and social studies curricula across the Canadian provinces and territories demonstrates that national history education can do all these things at once, but not necessarily equally well. In the 2021 Canadian History Report Card, we focus on ways in which provincial and territorial curricula try to balance these educational priorities. What parts of Canada's past are presented to students in the classroom, and how are they presented?

This report card assesses history curricula, which are not wholly reflective of what students learn in classrooms across the country. Teachers can interpret – and in many cases enrich – curricula in a variety of ways that differ from what curriculum writers envisioned. This report does not address how teachers use curricula in their classrooms, only the parameters set out by provincial and territorial curricula for learning, exploration, and inquiry into the Canadian past.

Historica Canada envisions a Canadian history curriculum that includes a balanced intersection of traditional political history and people's lived experiences, and a deep understanding of Indigeneity and land in the past and present. This vision of history education means students learn about the past by asking critical questions, exploring answers with a variety of media and sources – including those in their own communities – and sharing the results and reflections in a variety of ways. Curricula should also meet the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's (TRC) [Calls to Action](#). It is our hope that curricula exceed these guidelines not only by including Indigenous peoples, but by teaching students about responsibility and reconciliation as well.

Curricula outline what is possible in history and social studies education and provide a vision of how a province wants its young citizens to understand the past. With this assessment, we examine what is possible with the curricula that determine the nature of Canadian history education for young people in Canada today and suggest ways to improve the study of the past for a better future.

This is the Full Report. To read the Summary Report, [click here](#).



INTRODUCTION

Changing expectations: A note on previous versions of this report card

With every version of this report card, our expectations have changed. The world has changed, and Canada with it. How we approach history education must change, too.

While certain standards have stayed the same since the last version of the report card, such as an emphasis on Historical Thinking Concepts in the skills sections, other standards have evolved to reflect the times.

At the time of publication of the 2015 Canadian History Report Card, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Actions had not yet been published. This year, we included a new category to grade provinces and territories on how well they adhered to specific Calls to Action regarding education (see the **Methodology** section). In 2020, the call for representation of Black voices — by no means a new request — was amplified, and brought an increased awareness of how stories of Indigenous, Black, and racialized communities are taught, if at all, in classrooms. As a result, this year's report card more closely scrutinizes the inclusion of diverse perspectives and narratives.

The inclusion of diverse narratives is not at the expense of traditional narratives told from a political,

military, or economic point of view. Confederation, for example, should still be taught. But so too should the perspectives of Indigenous peoples on Confederation. The Second World War should be taught. But so too should the experiences of Black, Asian, and Indigenous soldiers and the contributions of women. That is why this version of the Canadian History Report Card includes a category for scoring narrative balance in the content section, along with categories for "traditional" history, diverse history, and Indigenous representation.

In 2015, the skills section evaluated the incorporation of the Historical Thinking Concepts, research and writing, and communication. This year, we expanded our scope by considering the use of primary sources, whether the curricula accounted for differentiated assessment, and if students had opportunities to connect the content to themselves, their family and/or their community, along with critical inquiry and Historical Thinking Concepts. As a result, scores in the 2021 skills section may have changed significantly from 2015 results due to assessments based on a more complete picture.

Our expectations will continue to change. History education is not and should not be static. As our society changes, so will our classrooms.



METHODOLOGY

This report card assesses the mandatory coverage of Canadian history in grades 7 through 12 (Secondary I to V in Québec). Because students in the intermediate grades 7 through 9 have mandatory courses, all relevant courses were assessed. In grades 10 to 12, students often have options for learning Canadian history. In cases where students were mandated to take a history or social studies course but could choose from several options (e.g., a student must take one social studies credit and is given four courses to choose between), the optional courses were assessed individually and then averaged. More than 40 courses were assessed across Canada's 13 provinces and territories. Optional electives, as well as mandatory social studies courses with limited or no Canadian history content, were not assessed.

Because education is the responsibility of provincial and territorial governments, each province and territory was assessed individually. Some provinces and territories collaborate on curriculum development. In 1999, the four Atlantic provinces developed "Foundation for the Atlantic Canada Social

Studies Curriculum" as a framework on which to base provincial social studies programs. New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Labrador, and Prince Edward Island each mandate an "Empowerment" course in the intermediate grades. Nova Scotia also included this "Empowerment" course in its previous curriculum, but the new piloted curriculum, evaluated in this report, does not follow the framework. British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, and the three territories collaborated on the "Western and Northern Canadian Protocol," a guide for each to use while developing their own curricula. These collaborations demonstrate the potential for sharing pedagogical methodologies.

Each course was assessed equally in three areas: content, skills, and whether the course aligns with the TRC's Calls to Action, specifically Calls 62 to 65.¹ Additional points were awarded for each mandatory Canadian history-focused course. For example, a province that requires three mandatory Canadian history courses across grades 7 through 12 had its final score raised by 3 points.

Content

The content section focused on what students are expected to know, with points awarded in four areas:

1. **A traditional narrative** of Canadian history that emphasizes military, political, and economic history(ies).
2. The **lived experiences** of the Canadian past, emphasizing social and cultural histories, including histories of racialized peoples; women, gender, and sexuality; labour; migration; and dis/ability(ies).
3. The integration of **Indigeneity and the land** as key elements for understanding the past. We examined the extent to which resistance and resilience by First Nations, Métis, and Inuit were studied throughout Canadian history, or if they were covered only in pre-colonial and early colonial contexts. We also studied the extent to which land and environment were integrated as part of history – reflecting Indigenous perspectives on the past – or whether there was a disconnect between actions of humans and the land that they live on. This category was developed with an eye toward how we understand the past and our relations in the present.
4. **Balance and integration** of the above topics together. Were histories presented in the curriculum as if politics, experience, and land intersected in the past? Or were these histories presented as independent of one another?

¹ The TRC's [Calls to Action 62–65](#) include the "Education for Reconciliation" calls. These Calls demand K-12 curricula that cover residential schools, but also broader goals such as education that can build students' "capacity for intercultural understanding, empathy, and mutual respect" (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action [2015], p. 7, 63.iii).

METHODOLOGY

In the content section, each of the four categories was given a score out of 10, for a total content score of 40. If there was a grade in which students chose a mandatory course from multiple options (e.g., grade 10 students had to choose one of three social studies courses), all of the Canadian history–focused options were evaluated and those marks were averaged for a grade total.

Skills

The skills category assessed what students are expected to do, with a focus on the instructional possibilities invited by the curriculum. In this category, we looked at four areas:

1. **Critical thinking and inquiry:** asking questions, examining evidence, looking for answers, and presenting conclusions. Many, but not all, provinces use the Historical Thinking Concepts to organize inquiry. The Historical Thinking Concepts include six benchmarks for engaging in this work, including establishing historical significance, using primary source evidence, identifying continuity and change, analyzing cause and consequence, using historical perspective, and recognizing the ethical dimension of history. In this review, we evaluated inquiry based in the Historical Thinking Concepts as well as inquiry not explicitly linked to the concepts. Inquiry was present in all provincial curricula, but it did not always result in critical examination of history.
2. **Primary sources:** opportunity for students to use and learn from primary sources or a range of sources that could provide multiple perspectives on the past.
3. **Differentiated instruction:** opportunity for students to learn from, and show their learning through, a variety of instructional and assessment strategies. This includes differentiated instruction, which allows for tailored teaching based on the needs and learning styles of students (e.g., for language-learner students).
4. **Reflection:** opportunity for students to learn from diverse family, community, or local histories.

As with the content scoring, each course was assessed out of 40 marks across the four skills categories. If a province offered more than one course in a particular grade, those marks were averaged for a grade total. The province's overall score in this area was the combined and averaged grade, per grade level, across the course offerings.

The TRC category was scored out of 10, assessing whether courses covered this content in ways that aligned with the spirit of the Calls to Action. As with the other categories, if a province offered more than one course in a particular grade, those marks were averaged for a grade total.

Under the **TRC Calls to Action category**, specifically Calls 62 to 65, each course was assessed on whether they covered:

1. **History of residential schools**
2. **Legacy of residential schools**
3. **Indigenous peoples' historical contributions to Canada**
4. **Indigenous peoples' contemporary contributions to Canada**
5. **Treaties**
6. **Indigenous knowledge**

To determine the province's overall grade, their scores for content, skills, and TRC Calls to Action were averaged, with additional points awarded for each mandatory course offered in the province.

Each province and territory was assigned one grade where anglophone and francophone curricula are identical or integrated. Provinces with different anglophone and francophone curricula were graded separately.

OVERVIEW OF FINAL GRADES

This report adhered to the following method of letter-grade equivalencies.

Rank	Province	Grade	%
1	Ontario	A	85%
2	Nova Scotia (Anglophone)	B+	77%
3	Northwest Territories	B	76%
T4	British Columbia	B-	72%
T4	Yukon	B-	72%
T4	New Brunswick (Anglophone)	B-	72%
7	Saskatchewan	C+	68%
T8	New Brunswick (Francophone)	C	66%
T8	Nova Scotia (Francophone)	C	66%
T10	Manitoba	C	65%
T10	Prince Edward Island (Anglophone)	C	65%
12	Newfoundland and Labrador	C	64%
13	Prince Edward Island (Francophone)	C-	61%
14	Nunavut	C-	60%
15	Québec	D+	57%
16	Alberta	D-	50%

Letter	Per cent score
A+	90–100
A	85–90
A-	80–84
B+	77–79
B	73–76
B-	70–72
C+	67–69
C	63–66
C-	60–62
D+	57–59
D	53–56
D-	50–52

CROSS-CANADA TRENDS

The Canadian History Report Card provides a grade for each province or territory, and highlights areas of strength and those that need improvement. While grades vary widely, trends are evident across the country.

- **Active emphasis on inquiry.** Curricula across the country emphasize the importance of having students ask and critically explore questions and communicate answers about the past as a way to understand history. Some curricula rely on primary sources more than others do, but all jurisdictions provide space for students and teachers to use a variety of resources in the study of the past.
- **Less emphasis on history and more emphasis on social studies.** Many more required courses fall under the category of interdisciplinary studies (history, geography, economics, and civics) compared with strictly history. This trend may support or undermine history education depending on the structure of the curricula. In some cases, a social studies blend provides greater space for students to explore the nuances of topics, themes, and issues, and how they intersect. In other cases, this integration leaves history behind, making it difficult, if not impossible, to count such courses as Canadian history courses. The best social studies courses across the country thoughtfully explore the relationship between, and integration of, history and social studies and show that they can result in a strong interdisciplinary understanding of the past.

GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Inquiry should inspire critical thinking.**

Even with an emphasis on inquiry, many curricula use language that encourages passive thinking and task completion rather than active and thoughtful exploration of a topic. In other words, not all inquiry is created equal. Inquiry can use leading questions as a way to prompt an established answer, or it can be harnessed to encourage students to organize and analyze conceptions about the Canadian past. Recognizing and reconciling how inquiry does not always result in critical, student-centric education is key to successful reassessment of what inquiry can achieve in history education.

- **Students need more opportunities to engage with local histories.**

The skills assessment asks whether students had opportunities to reflect on and bring their own histories into the study of Canada's past. This concept was the least prevalent among curricula across the board. Having students look at the experiences of their own neighbourhoods and communities is key to encouraging students to understand Canadian history in ways that apply to themselves. When personal connections are included, they are largely reserved for students in the intermediate grades, with high school students rarely given similar opportunities. Curricula should incorporate personal reflection at all grade levels.

- **History curricula need to reflect more diverse perspectives, including those of race, gender, and class.**

This is not a new critique and was noted as an area requiring improvement in the 2015 Canadian History Report Card. Studies of well-known individual women, immigrant groups, or labour movements are included in many provincial curricula, but there is room for improvement in exploring how marginalized and diverse groups shape and are shaped by past events and experiences. Curricula often separate lived experiences from political structures, which can undermine the understanding of how one's lived experiences can shape—or dismantle—political structures. People and their experiences need to be better integrated in our approach to studying the Canadian past so that young people can understand themselves in the Canadian present.

The 2021 Canadian History Report Card was researched and developed by Dr. Samantha Cutrara in close collaboration with the Historica Canada team. Dr. Cutrara, a history education strategist based in Toronto, has helped individuals and institutions mobilize history in ways that are meaningful, transformative, and inclusive for our diverse Canadian students. Under her leadership, the Archives of Ontario's First World War exhibit "Dear Sadie: Love, Lives, and Remembrance from Ontario's First World War" won the Ontario Museum Association's Excellence in Exhibits award in 2015. Dr. Cutrara's first book, *Transforming the Canadian History Classroom: Imagining a New 'We'*, was released by UBC Press in the fall of 2020.

This report was released in June 2021. Curriculum research was conducted between February 2020 and April 2021.

This report is presented by Historica Canada, the country's largest organization dedicated to enhancing awareness of Canada's history and citizenship. We offer programs that you can use to explore, learn, and reflect on our history, and what it means to be Canadian. For more information, visit historicacanada.ca.

This project was made possible by the generous sponsorship of the Wilson Foundation. The Wilson Foundation supports charitable projects and initiatives that strengthen and enrich Canada in education leadership, community, history, and heritage.

Describe

Across grades 7–12, Alberta has only one course focused specifically on Canadian history: the grade 7 course “Canada: Origins, Histories and Movement of Peoples.” Alberta also offers a grade 9 course, “Canada: Opportunities and Challenges,” but it is a social studies course, and the history content cannot be assessed on its own. This does not exclude the possibility that more history is taught in grades 7–12, but it is not offered explicitly as history. The Historical Thinking Concepts are featured in all curricula, which means teachers can, and are even encouraged to, include more historical content in courses that are not explicitly historical.

For this assessment, only the grade 7 curriculum was reviewed.

Quick Assessment

“Canada: Origins, Histories and Movement of Peoples” is a traditional curriculum that focuses on Confederation as the origin of contemporary Canada at the expense of diverse narratives and perspectives. While inquiry is built into the curriculum, the key learning opportunities are based on the traditional political story of Canada and leave little room for students to study history through a personal lens or through their community. This course is the only mandatory Canadian history course in Alberta, exacerbating the absence of social and cultural lived experiences in the past and present and leaving a significant gap in students’ understanding of the past.

Content

The grade 7 course is taught in two sections: *Toward Confederation* and *Following Confederation*, with the goal of having students “understand” and “appreciate” the evolution of Canada leading up to and stemming from Confederation. The course is heavily focused on the 19th century, with some aspects of the 20th century identified for study (e.g., the First World War) as well as larger themes (e.g., technology and the changing nature of work) that could bring the study of the past to modern day. The curriculum also suggests including local and current affairs, time permitting.

Using Confederation as the focal point of the curriculum results in the omission of histories that do not fit this narrative. For example, while First Nations are mentioned, the absence of the history of residential schools is particularly egregious. This approach highlights the clichés that are often attributed to history curricula: politics and economics are presented, with social and cultural

experiences relegated to the sidelines. While studying Confederation, the topic is approached as an event that happened, with little mention of the people who supported or opposed it. When the people are mentioned, they are framed as passive actors. For example, an inquiry question of Outcome 7.2.4 asks: “What were the Métis, First Nations, French, and British perspectives on the events that led to the establishment of Manitoba?” Here, the perspectives of groups of people are generalized, and they are framed as people who witnessed an event rather than as active participants in shaping outcomes.

Chronology and sequencing are prioritized in ways that make each action or event seem like a logical and inevitable result of the action or event that came before. For example, Outcome 7.1.5 asks: “To what extent was the Battle of the Plains of Abraham the key event in achieving British control over North America?” The question, one of many leading questions used throughout the curriculum, does not give students room to critically explore history and come to their own conclusions about whether or not it was a key event.



Skills

While the content of the curriculum is traditional, the methods of teaching and learning are more open-minded. An entire section of the curriculum emphasizes skills and processes related to the dimensions of thinking, social democratic practice, research for inquiry and communication. Some outcomes specifically focus on diversified assessments, asking students to debate, listen, and respond as ways to communicate their research and inquiry findings.

The curriculum is divided into three parts: Toward Confederation, Following Confederation, and Skills and Process, which separates the skills from the content, leaving teachers to determine how to blend skills and processes with values and knowledge. Because the expectations, outcomes, and questions in the content sections of the curriculum are framed as established points in history, the emphasis on inquiry and the use of primary sources serve to develop skills, but still support the presented perspectives, rather than encouraging a critical analysis. The skills and processes serve only as tools to map and reinforce those points, rather than as methods to critically explore and question the past.

Ways to Improve

Alberta would benefit from an overhaul of its history program. While the Historical Thinking Concepts feature in many course curricula, introducing another mandatory history course would provide students with more opportunities to learn about history and develop skills. Making the optional Western Canadian History 20 course (not assessed here) offered in secondary school a mandatory course, with updated content and skill-building exercises, would allow students to conduct a more thorough study of the Canadian past.

Alberta should include an integrative response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action and a greater focus on residential schools. By focusing on Confederation, the lone history course establishes a glaring omission of histories outside this "traditional" narrative, which can be improved by placing people and lived experiences at the centre of the study of Canada's past. Additionally, there needs to be a greater commitment to inquiry for the purpose of critical exploration, not as a way to answer leading questions.



Describe

British Columbia has two required courses across grades 7–12 that include Canadian history. The first is a grade 9 course that covers 1750–1919, although the curriculum is not specifically centred on Canada. In grade 10, students take “Canada and the World: 1914 to the Present,” which is more Canada-focused.

For this assessment, the grades 9 and 10 curricula were reviewed.

Quick Assessment

British Columbia’s curriculum was revised between 2016 and 2018. The grades 9 and 10 courses are both organized with “Big Ideas” and standards that outline what students are expected to do and learn. “Big Ideas” encompass overarching historical and political themes, which shape the competencies and content that follow. The “knowing” (content) element is structured so that students engage in inquiry to explore the themes of the Big Ideas. The content is presented thematically rather than chronologically, making it easier to engage in critical inquiry of the past rather than arriving at pre-determined responses, as is the case in some provincial curricula. The content standards are relatively open and accompanied by suggestions on how teachers can meet the objectives.

These curricula have space for Indigeneity, politics, economics, war, and social and cultural experiences. However, the “Big Ideas” often separate content into themes, making the intersections between them harder to blend as strongly as one might hope.

Content

In the two mandatory British Columbia courses, the history and structure of Canada is presented as part of larger global forces and political structures.

In grade 9, for example, the curriculum covers 1750–1919, with Canada covered within a global exploration of colonialism, revolution, change, and geography. The grade 10 course focuses on 20th-century Canadian history, and Indigenous governance is integrated with Canadian ideologies, balancing both political traditions in the same time period, rather than highlighting one over the other.

While these curricula effectively integrate big themes with the study of the Canadian past, they separate the history of political and ideological structures in Canada from the history of its people. By separating mainstream Canadian history from lived experiences, the curriculum implies that people did not actively shape, contest, resist, or develop the country, but rather that they had these experiences while the country developed independent of their actions. For example, in the grade 10 curriculum, the content is divided into eight strands. One strand has students learning about “government, First Peoples governance, political institutions, and ideologies” and another is “Canadian identities.” This division creates a separation between politics/governance and identity, and there is no modelling of how to blend identity or lived experience with how, why, and in which ways governance develops, manifests, and changes. This is a streamlined and innovative curriculum with only a few prescribed standards for teachers to meet, and with “big ideas” framing their exploration. However, this division is a missed opportunity to draw students into history by having them learn about the experiences of the people who developed, organized, resisted, and experienced the political, economic, and governance structures that shape Canada.



British Columbia

Skills

The British Columbia curriculum is organized around curricular competencies to build skills, not just learn content. There is a strong emphasis on students inquiring, assessing, comparing, explaining, and coming to reasoned judgments. Elements of the Historical Thinking Concepts are used to structure the approach to inquiry: students are asked to assess significance, make reasoned ethical judgments, and infer and explain different perspectives. However, the split between political structures and lived experiences is exacerbated by British Columbia's approach to inquiry. This approach misses explicit opportunities for a more integrated study of the past as diverse primary sources, differentiated assessment, and personal reflections are not prominent in the curriculum's approach to critical thinking. Examples in the curriculum appear to indicate that students are asked to take the experiences of writers, readers, and publishers out of primary source analysis, and to think of sources as a repository of information rather than as an expression.

There are no prompts in the curricula for students to reflect on themselves and their own community histories. Although the content-based learning standards feature identities and discrimination, students are not asked to reflect on these things as they manifest in the present or apply them to their own lives. This absence again illustrates the split between politics and experiences that limits the ways histories can be understood.

Ways to Improve

British Columbia can improve curricula by bridging the gap between politics and lived experiences through curricular elaborations and linguistic revision. It can re-evaluate its definition of "identities," a clear theme in the curriculum, to minimize the separation of actions from actors in history. Highlighting various uses of primary sources, differentiated assessments, and personal reflections in the curricula would provide greater opportunities for critical and diverse inquiries.



Describe

Manitoba requires only one Canadian history-focused class from grades 7–12: the grade 11 “History of Canada” course, launched in 2014. While there is a mandatory grade 9 course, “Canada in the Contemporary World,” it is a social studies course with only one area focused on history and therefore was not reviewed here.

For this assessment, only the grade 11 course was reviewed.

Quick Assessment

Manitoba has put great effort into its grade 11 course. The curriculum is designed in an engaging manner: in full colour, with numerous pictures, and an accompanying poster. This suggests the curriculum can be hung in the classroom, making the learning objectives clear to teachers and students. The Historical Thinking Concepts are explicitly integrated. The course includes examples of museums, archives, articles, and exhibits that teachers and students can, and should, use to study history.

However, with only one explicit history course across the intermediate and secondary grades, that one course is responsible for covering all of Canadian history. With such a burden, the curriculum reads as a traditional exploration of Canada’s past and the content contrasts starkly with the way the curriculum is presented.

Content

The mandatory grade 11 Canadian history course covers the pre-contact era to the present, across five chronological clusters. These clusters are organized traditionally, with the first leading up to the Royal Proclamation of 1763, the second to Confederation, the third from Confederation to the Great Depression, the fourth from the Great Depression to the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, and the final cluster covering 1982 to the present. Each cluster begins with “Essential Questions” that frame the “Learning Experience” for students. Within these “Learning Experiences” are “Enduring Understandings” that align with five Canadian history “themes”: First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Peoples; French-English Relations; Identity, Diversity, and Citizenship; Governance and Economics; and Canada and the World. Each “Essential Question” comes with a list of suggested historical content for inquiry, but the content itself is not mandated.

While organizing courses around big questions can invite critical exploration of history, the “Essential Questions” that frame each cluster tend to be leading questions rather than genuine tools of inquiry. This directs teaching into specific and traditional ways. While the curriculum is presented as innovative and inquiry-focused, its leading questions and the conventional chronology make it more traditional in practice. Politics, economics, and military endeavours are covered thoroughly, but social and cultural experiences are largely overlooked, coming into focus only in the 20th century. The result separates politics/economics from society/culture, prioritizing the structures of Canada over the experiences of being a Canadian, and using “Essential Questions” to get to these conclusions.



Skills

The grade 11 Canadian History curriculum in Manitoba is focused on inquiry through the Historical Thinking Concepts, which are repeated throughout. By beginning with “Essential Questions” and outlining “Enduring Understandings” rather than outcomes, teachers are encouraged to get their students to those understandings through inquiry.

The topics that help teachers explore the essential questions are listed under themes such as “challenges facing British North America,” “seeking political solutions,” and “making Confederation a reality,” which shape inquiries into a traditional narrative of the Canadian past.

A textbook was developed specifically for this curriculum, and each element offers a variety of resources, from museum exhibits to articles to archives, for teachers and students to use. Examples and links to primary sources are included, with accompanying guiding questions, along with worksheet templates to help students analyze different types of primary sources (e.g., artifacts, documents, or photographs). These are useful resources that can benefit teachers all over the country.

However, the curriculum leaves little to no space for student reflection or the study of community history, which lessens the opportunities for inquiring into Canadian history outside the designated content and structure.

Ways to Improve

This grade 11 curriculum could be strengthened by making the “Essential Questions” that frame each cluster less leading and more exploratory. With this revision, students could engage in thematic and topical inquiry rather than inquiry designed to lead to a specific answer. Adding a question that refers to the social and cultural experiences of people during this time, and how they affected and were affected by the politics of the past, would integrate the experiences of people into the history of Canada. This focus would provide an opportunity for students to draw on their own diverse family histories and incorporate different perspectives on the past.

The biggest improvement Manitoba could make is mandating additional Canadian history requirements across grades 7–10. With only one Canadian history course for all intermediate and secondary grades, this course covers too much for the goals of inquiry to be achievable.



Describe

Anglophone: New Brunswick covers Canadian history-focused content in grades 7–9. Along with other Atlantic provinces, New Brunswick uses the Foundation for the Atlantic Canada Social Studies Curriculum framework (1999) as a base for its intermediate social studies courses; in particular, for the grade 7 “Empowerment” course and the grade 8 “Atlantic Canada in the Global Community” course. The grade 9 course “Canadian Identities” was revised in 2020. For this assessment, grade 7, 8, and 9 curricula were reviewed.

Francophone: The only required Canadian history content in the francophone system is the grade 11 *Histoire du Canada* course, assessed here.

Quick Assessment

Anglophone: The mandatory New Brunswick courses teach Canadian history only within a social studies context. In grade 7, Canadian history is covered under the theme of empowerment; in grade 8, the theme is Atlantic Canada in the world; and in grade 9, the theme is identity. While an interdisciplinary approach to learning about the past can result in some interesting ways to explore history and its effects, the Canadian history content gets lost in these courses. This leaves students without a clear historical foundation for understanding contemporary Canada.

Francophone: The content of the grade 11 history course is largely focused on traditional history, although the course does integrate diverse primary sources. However, as it is the only mandatory history course, there is not enough space to explore more nuanced narratives.

Content

Anglophone: As seen with the other Atlantic provinces, the grade 7 curriculum provides a chronological Canadian history from 1820 to 1920 under the theme of empowerment; specifically, political, cultural, societal, and national empowerment. This structure provides a balance between learning about the Canadian past and understanding history as a way to think about future change. The grade 8 course is a broad social studies program that focuses on themes in geography, culture, economics, technology, and interdependence. While history is not a key feature, the thematic focus on culture, economics, and even technology provide space for a historical examination of lived experiences, particularly their change over time. This is similarly the case for grade 9’s “Canadian

Identities,” in which the thematic social studies focus invites a historical perspective on human settlement and migration, although the curriculum does not focus on history alone.

History content incorporated into social studies courses allows for multidimensional ways of examining themes. However, the lack of distinct Canadian history content means that history can get lost, depending on how it is taught. Historical and contemporary inequities can be exacerbated by not being addressed directly when the study of history is built into other disciplines. For example, in the grade 8 curriculum, Learning Outcome 1.5.1 asks students to “research an Aboriginal group that inhabited a part of Atlantic Canada prior to new-world migration and identify their primary settlement sites and migration routes.” While this learning outcome starts off with an Indigenous focus, the rest of the examples and sample learning/teaching strategies do not focus explicitly on Indigenous peoples in the Atlantic region. They are introduced at the beginning, but the particular circumstances of Indigenous peoples in Atlantic Canada in the 20th century are neglected.

In the grade 9 course, Content Outcome 2.3 states that students “will analyse the impact of migration and immigration on identities in Canada.” An example asks students to “investigate the impact of immigration on Indigenous way of life.” While this example refers to the impact of settler migration on Indigenous peoples, it doesn’t specifically call out or explore the history of colonialism, which is a key element of the reconciliatory responsibility among settlers.

Francophone: The francophone Canadian history course focuses on a traditional grand narrative of Canadian history with connections to world history. It addresses larger themes of the growth of the nation in the world, with less attention given to maritime identity. As a result, students have fewer opportunities to connect the content to themselves and their community. Because the only mandated course is a history course, francophone students lose the opportunity to explore the past in the interdisciplinary ways seen in the anglophone intermediate courses.

New Brunswick

Skills

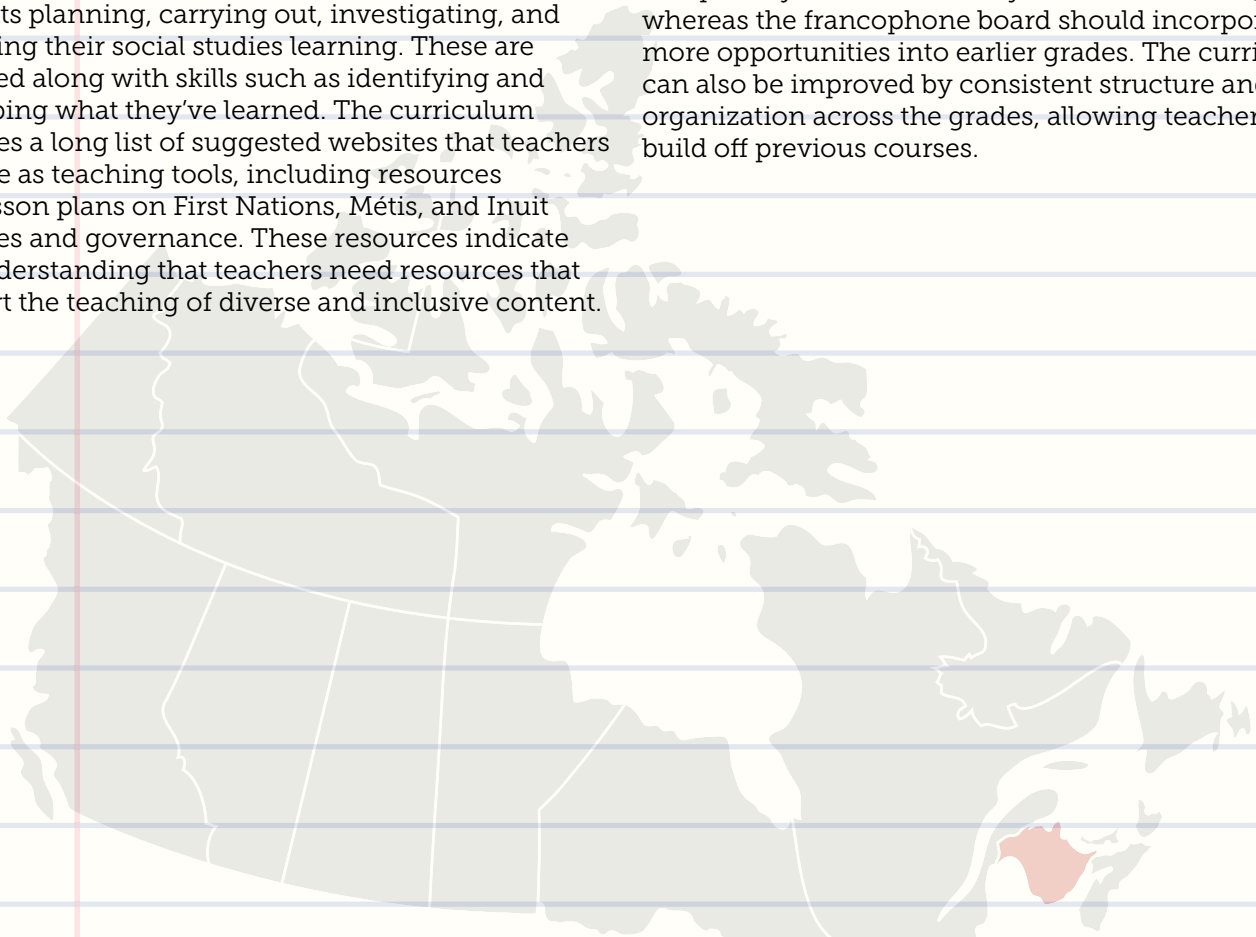
Anglophone: New Brunswick scores high on the skills section of its curriculum. Throughout the three courses, students are invited to make use of interdisciplinary knowledge through various pedagogical activities, and to reflect on their own knowledge and community histories. For example, Learning Outcome 2.5 in the grade 8 curriculum gives students the opportunity to “analyse case studies to show their understanding of racism” by looking at Africville, centralization policies related to the Mi’kmaq, or their local community. This kind of prompt can lead to historical analysis of racism related to self. Activities specifically referring to students’ “local community” are rare in history curricula across Canada and should be used more to connect students to their communities and how they can affect them.

In the newly revised grade 9 curriculum, the use of inquiry to learn about Canadian history is evident. While activities related to inquiry are not specifically mentioned as a curricular theme, the curriculum does provide “I can” examples that explicitly mention students planning, carrying out, investigating, and analyzing their social studies learning. These are included along with skills such as identifying and describing what they’ve learned. The curriculum provides a long list of suggested websites that teachers can use as teaching tools, including resources and lesson plans on First Nations, Métis, and Inuit histories and governance. These resources indicate the understanding that teachers need resources that support the teaching of diverse and inclusive content.

Francophone: In the grade 11 *Histoire du Canada* course, each unit, or “Bloc,” is accompanied by an annotated list of five to 12 aligned relevant primary documents, which represent a range of documentation styles (from poems to declarations) and perspectives. While the content presents a traditional Canadian narrative, these documents establish a primary source–connected discussion as the core for inquiry, a key element of historical learning.

Ways to Improve

Both the anglophone and francophone school systems in New Brunswick can improve by creating more history-focused courses for students to learn Canadian history or by integrating Canadian history into social studies courses in more critical ways. A better balance in narrative and (inter)disciplinary focus is needed across all grades in both systems. The anglophone board would benefit from more compulsory Canadian history at the senior level, whereas the francophone board should incorporate more opportunities into earlier grades. The curricula can also be improved by consistent structure and organization across the grades, allowing teachers to build off previous courses.



Newfoundland & Labrador

FINAL GRADE: 64% | C

Describe

Canadian history content is taught in Newfoundland and Labrador in grades 7, 8, and 9. As do the other Atlantic provinces, the Newfoundland and Labrador curricula draw on the Foundation for the Atlantic Canada Social Studies Curriculum framework (1999) for a grade 7 “Empowerment” course and grade 9 social studies course, which covers 20th-century Canada. The grade 8 course focuses specifically on Newfoundland and Labrador history from the 1800s on. While there are social studies courses in high school, none are devoted to Canadian history.

For this assessment, the grades 7, 8, and 9 curricula were reviewed.

Quick Assessment

Newfoundland and Labrador’s grade 7 curriculum stands above the later grades, with a more balanced approach to content and a stronger use of inquiry and primary sources. The curricula for the grades 8 and 9 courses emphasize traditional narratives related to politics, economics, and military history, with little attention paid to social history or Indigenous experiences. The way that Canada and Newfoundland and Labrador are presented as constants in these curricula leaves little room to challenge the traditional narratives, nor does it weave histories that focus on ethnic diversity or Indigeneity through the curriculum consistently.

Content

Newfoundland and Labrador’s Canadian history focus starts in grade 7, using the tailored Atlantic Canada “Empowerment” course for students. Of the three courses assessed here, the grade 7 course provides the most well-rounded view of Canadian history. Units start with historical context and end with students making content connections to present-day Canada, and often to their own lives. The historical content includes frequent consideration of diverse peoples at the time. For example, in Outcome 7.3.3 of the political empowerment unit, in which students learn about Confederation, teachers are cued to “ask students to explore the extent to which the Aboriginal peoples of Canada had a voice in decisions about Confederation. Have students explore whether or not the views of the Aboriginal peoples were considered.” Units also include suggestions for teachers to invite experts and leaders to speak with their classes about topics relating to course content to strengthen connections to present-day Canada. Examples include “Invite an elder or Aboriginal leader to the class to discuss

land issues and self-government issues today” and “teachers can invite a guest speaker into the class to discuss issues around income tax today.”

The grade 8 and 9 courses are more traditional history courses, organized chronologically. The grade 9 course is a social studies course, with two of the seven units focusing on a chronological history of the past 100 years. Despite the interdisciplinary and thematic nature of these two courses, Canadian history is approached in a traditional fashion. Political, economic, and military history is covered in depth, while social and cultural experiences, including gender, racial and ethnic diversity, and labour history, are hardly seen in these curricula. These histories are either omitted or included with a tokenistic approach.

The traditional approach of the grade 8 and 9 curricula is highlighted by the ways that First Nations peoples are studied. In the grade 9 course, there is a prompt to “Make Value Judgments” that asks: “Over time, there has been a decline in traditional activities of Aboriginal Peoples. In your opinion, who should take responsibility for these changes?” However, the same questions are not asked of the decline of traditional activities of settlers. This framing holds Indigenous life to a standard of static tradition that is not applied to other groups and places in Canada.

While this curriculum attempts to articulate regional, interdisciplinary, and identity-focused frameworks for studying history, in practice the curriculum is a traditional treatment of Canada’s past. It does not provide teachers with the tools needed to explore the unique challenges and perspectives of Newfoundland and Labrador’s history program.

Newfoundland & Labrador

Skills

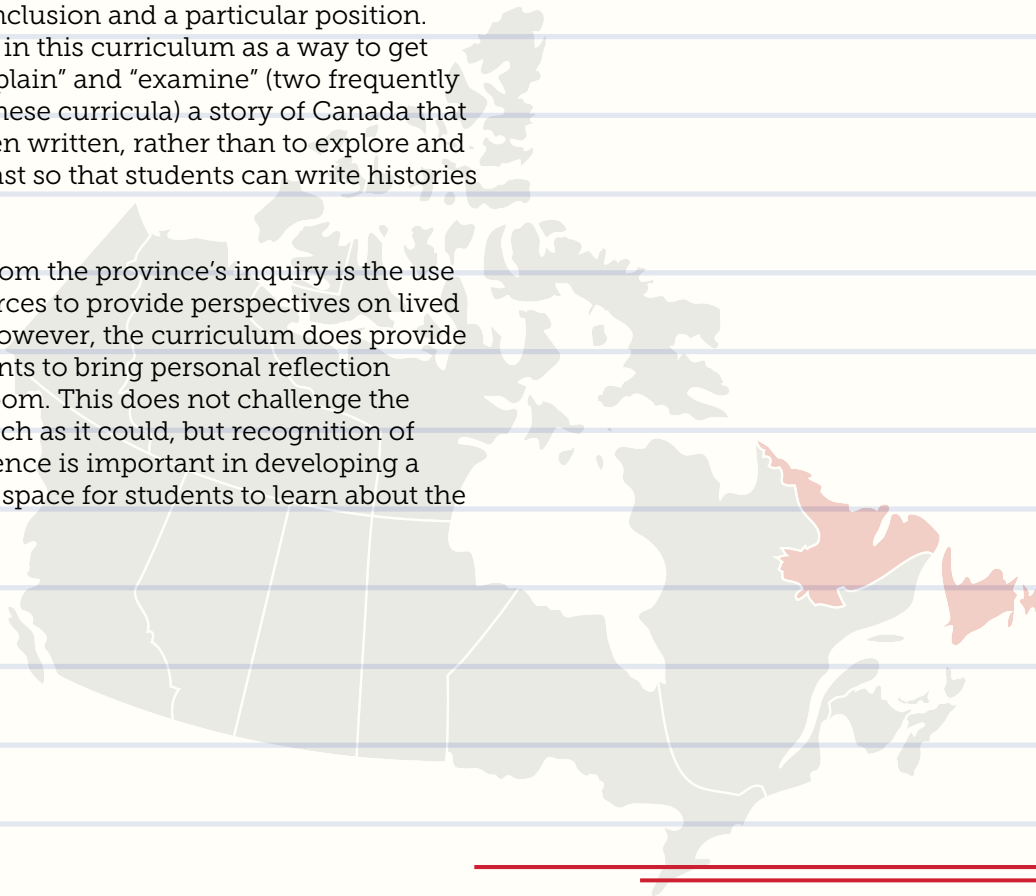
The strongest skills section in the Newfoundland and Labrador curricula is found in the grade 7 course. Connecting the course content to modern-day Canada provides students with opportunities to reflect on and learn from their own communities. The use of primary sources is emphasized in each unit, as formative assessments have students study maps, pictures and paintings, statistics, and songs.

While the Newfoundland and Labrador grade 8 and 9 curricula include inquiry, the focus is more on learning content than skills. When it is referenced, inquiry is used as a means to a predetermined end, rather than as a method of provoking analysis. For example, in the grade 8 curriculum, Specific Curriculum Outcome 3.3 states that “The student will be expected to demonstrate an understanding and appreciation of how Newfoundlanders and Labradorians have had to cope with crises and disasters.” The key verbs used here are “understand” and “appreciate,” and further outcomes use verbs such as “describe” and “assess.” However, these verbs can be at odds with each other. Describing may lead to understanding, but not always. Assessing may lead to appreciating, but not always. The curricular language does not provide space for students to critically engage. Inquiry prompts set students up to reach a particular conclusion and a particular position. Inquiry is used in this curriculum as a way to get students to “explain” and “examine” (two frequently used verbs in these curricula) a story of Canada that has already been written, rather than to explore and question the past so that students can write histories themselves.

Also missing from the province’s inquiry is the use of primary sources to provide perspectives on lived experiences. However, the curriculum does provide room for students to bring personal reflection into the classroom. This does not challenge the histories as much as it could, but recognition of student experience is important in developing a contextualized space for students to learn about the past.

Ways to Improve

These curricula can be improved by narrowing the focus of the history courses to concentrate more on the regional, interdisciplinary, and identity themes. Rather than trying to cover all of Newfoundland and Labrador and Canadian history, these curricula could be tailored to a few key historical themes that focus on historical events and personal and collective responses to them. They would also benefit from an interdisciplinary approach with diversified outcomes and the inclusion of more higher-order thinking concepts at the high school level. The most important improvement would be to work closely with Indigenous peoples to develop curricula that integrate Indigeneity and land into studies of how present-day Newfoundland and Labrador developed.



Describe

The Northwest Territories social studies curriculum is based on the frameworks produced through the Western and Northern Canadian Protocol in the early 1990s for curricula in Alberta, British Columbia, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Yukon Territory, and the Northwest Territories. The grade 9 course “The Growth of Canada” expands on grade 7’s “Circumpolar World” (a mix of geography and current events) and includes Canadian history.

The Northwest Territories’ high school social studies curriculum follows Alberta’s standards. As in Alberta, Historical Thinking Concepts are featured in all the social studies curricula, providing teachers with the opportunity to include more historical content in courses that are not explicitly history.

In 2015, the Northwest Territories introduced a new grade 10 course, “Northern Studies 10: Northern Homeland,” designed outside the collaborative Protocol.

For this assessment, the grade 9 and the grade 10 curricula were reviewed.

Quick Assessment

The required grade 9 history course is an outdated and traditional reading of Canadian history, and a poor reflection of content that Northwest Territories’ students need to understand themselves and their place in the North and in Canada.

However, the new grade 10 course is an integrated and personal exploration of the past and its influence on the present. This course is an exciting and fresh framing of history and reflects a promising new direction for the study of the past in Canada.

Content

The Northwest Territories’ grade 9 Canadian history course “The Growth of Canada” is based on the 1993 Western and Northern Canadian Protocol. The curriculum is heavy on politics and economics, and while it includes social and cultural experiences, it only offers cursory coverage of land and Indigeneity. These threads either remain separate or are brought together in problematic ways. For example, one “major understanding” of the grade 9 course is that “the presence of early Aboriginal peoples, colonial practices, and subsequent immigration politics have made Canada a cultural mosaic.” The concept of a “cultural mosaic” has been heavily critiqued in the 21st century because it frames Indigeneity through the

same lens as immigrant/settler multiculturalism. This language also frames Indigenous peoples as passive residents rather than emphasizing their ongoing resistance, resilience, solidarity, and community. This lack of representation is particularly egregious given that more than 50 per cent of the population of the Northwest Territories is Indigenous.

Conversely, the new 2015 “Northern Studies 10: Northern Homeland” is such an exciting curriculum that it should be the model for how social studies courses evolve in the Northwest Territories—and other provinces and territories. The grade 10 curriculum is organized around five modules, with each module centred on one question for guided inquiry, and on additional questions for student-led inquiry. These questions provide room to explore the past and how it applies to the present (and to the student and the future). Questions such as “How should I respond to the history and legacies of residential schools?” ensure students both understand the history and legacy of residential schools and help students develop a plan and a commitment to ongoing relationships of reconciliation.

Each module includes “Values and Attitudes Learning Outcomes” and “Knowledge and Understanding Learning Outcomes.” The former encourages an understanding of and empathy toward the past and its present-day legacies. The latter embraces integrated and active learning. For example, Outcome 4.12 asks students to “Analyze the history of relationships between Aboriginal people and the Canadian Government (treaties, *Indian Act*, land claims, devolution, self-government).” This outcome requires students to analyze history to better understand the historical legacies for the present.

² In April 2021, media reports indicated that the Northwest Territories government is re-evaluating whether to continue using Alberta’s curricula as the basis for their own, or if they will look elsewhere for source material. They will decide whether to continue using the Alberta curriculum in the summer of 2021. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/north/nwt-curriculum-renewal-territory-weighs-options-1.5988171>

Northwest Territories

The fifth module, “Becoming Capable,” is a new and hands-on approach: a 25-hour practicum during which students develop a skill or talent with supervision and mentorship from a community member, Elder, and/or knowledge-keeper. For example, by “sharing the process of making traditional food” or “retelling a story or song that they have learned” students are asked to reflect on their sense of belonging in the North and the ways their mentor shares wisdom through ways of doing, knowing, and being. This experiential element is designed to develop young people’s understanding of continuity, help them build individual capacity, and create connections with tradition and culture.

While this Northern Studies curriculum doesn’t cover as much economic, political, and military history as most traditional history courses, the integration of political history and social and cultural histories with Indigeneity and knowledge of self and community offsets what some may view as a deficit. Additionally, political, economic, and military histories are prioritized in the grade 8 course, which covers basic knowledge.

Skills

Both the grade 9 and grade 10 curricula emphasize active learning. In the grade 9 course, questions and inquiry prompts are used as key organizers and primary sources are considered as learning tools. Differentiated assessments and instructions include examples of active learning along with traditional writing. However, this curriculum leaves little room for students to reflect on their experiences or local histories. Linking current events and northern issues is not explicitly encouraged.

Grade 10, by comparison, uses active, student-centric teaching and learning strategies with ample room for student inquiry, experiential learning, differentiated learning, and student reflection. Inquiry prompts that frame each module are meant to spark discussion, thought, and application between the past and the present. When students are asked “What current story do you predict will shape the North’s collective identity in the future?” they need to think about stories from the past, how they have shaped the present, what makes a story, what elements from the past and present will be crafted into story, and what this might look like for, and in, the future. Questions like these demonstrate the strength of inquiry in learning history, and the inclusion of experiential sources, differentiated assessment, and student reflection make this a curriculum worth replicating.

Ways to Improve

The Northwest Territories can improve its Canadian history and social studies curriculum by overhauling intermediate courses in the same manner as the new grade 10 Northern Studies course, and incorporate that curriculum’s approach to inquiry, historical thinking, and experiential learning. Incorporating a historical element into earlier courses, such as the grade 7 “Circumpolar World” course that covers geography and current events, would give students context to build a foundation for later grades.



Describe

Nova Scotia is going through a curriculum renewal, with curricula for grades 7 and 8 courses piloted for the 2019–2020 school year.³ The anglophone grade 11 courses were all updated within the last five years and the grade 11 *Histoire du Canada* course was updated in 2020–2021.

Anglophone: Nova Scotia mandates Canadian history-focused social studies courses in grades 7 and 8. In grade 11, students have to take one of five Canadian history courses: African Canadian Studies 11, Canadian History 11, Gaelic Studies 11, *Études acadiennes* 11⁴, or Mi'kmaw Studies 11. For this assessment, the piloted grades 7 and 8 curricula along with all five grade 11 courses were evaluated.

Francophone: Francophone students in Nova Scotia must take one of five grade 11 Canadian history course options.⁵ However, only three of those courses are offered in French; the other two are available but must be taken in English. African Canadian Studies 11, Gaelic Studies 11, *Études acadiennes* 11, and Mi'kmaw Studies 11 are the same courses as those offered to Anglophone students. *Histoire du Canada* 11, the French-language equivalent of Canadian History 11, is similar to the English version, but requires fewer learning outcomes. For this assessment, all five of the grade 11 courses were reviewed.

Quick Assessment

Nova Scotia's curriculum indicates an interest in covering Canadian history in integrated ways. As with other provinces, Nova Scotia focuses heavily on inquiry, and offers suggestions for differentiated assessment tools and student reflection. This allows inquiry results to be unique, challenging, and critical of traditional narratives of Canadian history. Nova Scotia is the only province that has five options for students learning Canadian history in secondary school, with African Canadian, Gaelic, Acadian, and Mi'kmaw courses offered alongside a more general Canadian history course. However, learning opportunities are not equal for francophone students.

Content

Nova Scotia's Canadian history-related curricula are not heavily focused on traditional topics of politics, economics, and the military, but give space for greater explorations of social and cultural lived experiences, Indigeneity, and how they are interwoven in the past and present.

Anglophone: In grade 7, the curriculum covers 1820–1920, and students are invited to explore Confederation and the First World War through different lenses. Instead of structuring the course around a chronological sequence of events and treating them as givens, this curriculum asks students to reflect on the experiences of Mi'kmaw communities and the historical challenges and opportunities of different people living in Atlantic Canada in relation to major events. Politics, economics, and war are studied in ways that ask students to critically consider governance and its impact on people. This structure is used in both grades 7 and 8, embedding injustice and inequity in history, reflecting on them, and presenting the content as something to be learned from, not revered.

Anglophone and francophone secondary courses:

In grade 11, the variety of Canadian history courses that students can choose from — African Canadian Studies, Canadian History, Gaelic Studies, *Études acadiennes* (offered in French only, but available to anglophone students) or Mi'kmaw Studies — acknowledges the diversity of experiences that make up Canada. These courses are designed for students to explore the transnational aspects of cultural identities in Canada and to question the inequities faced by many people throughout these histories.

However, by dividing Canadian history from specialized histories, the curriculum suggests that there is one Canadian history and then a series of “other” experiences. The division also results in the omission of much of Indigenous history, notably the history of residential schools, from the African Canadian Studies, Gaelic Studies, and *Études acadiennes* courses. Because the Canadian history course does not present a diverse or integrated approach to Canadian history, francophone and anglophone students choosing this option will miss out on the diverse content and historical interpretations in the other courses. Francophone students wishing to learn in French cannot take advantage of the opportunity to study a more diverse history, as they do not have the option of taking Gaelic or Mi'kmaw studies in their own language.

³ The grade 7 and 8 curricula in the Nova Scotia anglophone school system, reviewed in this report, are currently being piloted in select schools with plans to implement them province-wide for the 2022–2023 school year.

⁴ Course taught in French but available to English students.

⁵ Students can opt to take one of the two courses offered only in English (Gaelic Studies or Mi'kmaw Studies) or one of the three courses offered in French (*Études afro-canadiennes*, *Études acadiennes* or *Histoire du Canada*).

Nova Scotia

Francophone and anglophone students who choose to take the Canadian history course also miss out as the course lacks diversity. If students choose to take the Canadian history course in grade 11, they miss out on diverse content and historical interpretations found in the other courses, focusing instead on bigger-picture forces such as globalization, development, government, sovereignty, and justice. The course options do not allow for myriad topics to be covered in other courses, creating divides between what students learn about Canadian history in various courses. While the secondary Canadian history options are exciting, they may exacerbate differences in historical understandings.

Skills

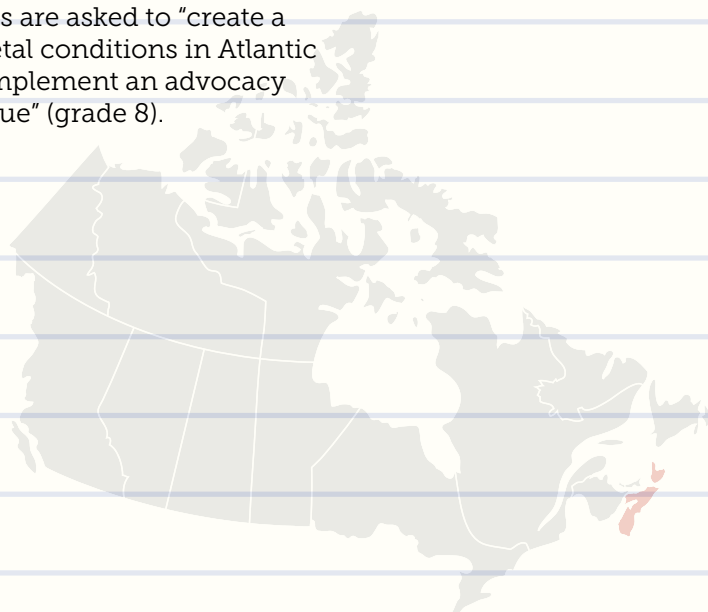
Anglophone: The grade 7 and 8 curricula in Nova Scotia centre on inquiry so that students can explore the past to spark reflection, action, and deeper consideration of inequity and experiences in history. For example, the grade 8 curriculum asks students to “Compare experiences of inequity and resistance from various perspectives.” This exercise establishes that the recognition of resistance is essential in narratives of inequity. Inquiry in the grades 7 and 8 curricula also has students explore history as a way to develop change in the present, with guiding questions such as “What does examining conflict teach us about life in Canada?” and why, in the context of learning about the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, “is it important to be truthful about past events?” Students are not just asked “What were the economic consequences for Canada of World War II?” but also “How was the war a catalyst for human rights?” and “How do we care for our veterans [in the present]?” These examples demonstrate a strong approach to inquiry in which students are asked to “create a response to changing societal conditions in Atlantic Canada” (grade 7) and to “implement an advocacy action in response to an issue” (grade 8).

Anglophone and francophone secondary courses:

The approach to inquiry is not as strong in either the francophone or anglophone grade 11 courses. Inquiry prompts ask students to “investigate,” “demonstrate,” and “examine,” but not in ways that invite reflection and action, as found in the grades 7 and 8 curricula. Each of the five grade 11 options has a unit during which students develop an independent study. In some courses, there are specific outcomes for students’ project management of this work, while others only mandate that this happens. Both approaches suggest didactic and reflective ways to engage in inquiry, where students are asked to “engage in specific research using the historical method and communicate the findings of their research effectively.”

Ways to Improve

Aligning Nova Scotia’s intermediate and secondary curricula will improve the high school curriculum and relieve the high school courses of the burden of trying to cover so much unique content. This is particularly true for the francophone curriculum, which does not mandate any Canadian history-specific courses in the intermediate grades. Indeed, adding a mandatory intermediate history course in the francophone curriculum would serve students far better. An interesting pedagogical approach for the grade 11 courses, for both anglophone and francophone students, would be to bring students together across the different course options to engage in a larger collaborative and interdisciplinary project to give students a more diverse field of knowledge. This integrative approach to independent study could be used to build bridges across histories and experiences.



Describe

Education in Nunavut is organized into four cross-curricular strands. Canadian history is taught under the Nunavusiutit strand of the territory's curriculum, which is interdisciplinary but generally social studies-themed, and includes areas such as entrepreneurship and tourism. In the intermediate grades, Nunavut follows the same social studies courses as the Northwest Territories. Of the three social studies courses at the intermediate level, only the grade 9 "Growth of Canada" course contains a focus on history. While this course is based on outcomes and skills from the Northwest Territories curriculum, the curriculum available on the Nunavut website is less detailed.

At the secondary level, Nunavut mandates Social Studies 10-1 and 10-2, which more closely resemble civics courses with a historical foundation, rather than straight history courses.

For this assessment, the grade 9 and 10 curricula were reviewed.

Quick Assessment

The grade 10 course in Nunavut provides an updated approach to history education, with a more diversified skills section and a strong approach to land and Indigeneity content and incorporating the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action. However, the Nunavut curriculum lacks any specific reference to or specification of Nunavut's unique context and peoples. While supporting resources are available to help educators incorporate best practices and Inuit Qaujimagatuqangit (traditional Inuit knowledge, skills, and technologies) in their classrooms and assessments, the curriculum documents lack details on how to apply this to specific curricular objectives.

Content

The Nunavut curriculum is presented sparsely with a list of knowledge and skills for teachers to cover, but no suggestions for content or activity elaborations, as seen in other curricula.

The grade 9 "Growth of Canada" curriculum lists 16 pieces of "essential knowledge," of which nine focus on Canadian history to the 20th century. This course is based on the same curricular objectives as the Northwest Territories' grade 9 curriculum, which in turn is based on the 1993 Alberta social studies curriculum. The Alberta curriculum emphasizes traditional, unquestioned colonial narratives of Canadian history, and its influence is evident in the Nunavut curriculum. The "essential knowledge" list treats colonialism as inevitable, reveres Canadian nation-building, and ignores the experiences and perspectives of those who contested, resisted, and faced the brunt of colonialism.

Examples of "essential knowledge" include "the names of various British and French colonies and conflicts between them" and "the essence of conflicts between the colonial peoples and the British government." Even the current-events element of this curriculum emphasizes stories involving international relationships, the federal government, and regional economic disparities and political tensions at the expense of a connection to Nunavut. Overall, there is a lack of Nunavut-created or Inuit Qaujimagatuqangit content.

The grade 10 social studies courses 10-1 and 10-2 are more Nunavut-focused. Their curricula include Nunavut-specific justice, governance, and residential school history. While the content in grade 10 has a heavy focus on institutionalized power and government, the content is approached from a Nunavut perspective. The Nunavut focus is evident in the unit on residential schools, which focuses more on exploring and communicating the concept of reconciliation than on defining and detailing what residential schools were. Also included is the "Inuuqatigiitsiarniq Project" (relationality and respecting others) module, in which students choose a Canadian conflict and identify and communicate solutions, including those rooted in Inuit Qaujimagatuqangit. Despite these inclusions, the curriculum is still heavily centred on traditional Canadian organizations of knowledge and history, rather than on Inuit Qaujimagatuqangit and unique Nunavut perspectives.

Nunavut

A separate document, “Nunavut Approved Curriculum and Teaching and Resources,” available on Nunavut’s website, supplies suggested resources for teachers for all the territory’s curricula. The grade 9 course includes suggestions for Nunavut and Inuit-oriented resources, indicating a more thorough coverage of these topics than what is in the curriculum. The grade 10 suggested resources support the curricular objectives of learning about residential schools and reconciliation.

Skills

In the grade 9 and 10 curricula documents, the skills section is longer than the content section. In the grade 9 course, the skills are categorized into processing, communication, and participation. They are focused on rational and evidence-based research and communication, with no space given for reflection, personal and community connections, or creative interpretation.

The grade 10 course has a more contemporary approach with Historical Thinking Concepts and geographic thinking skills incorporated into the learning outcomes. For example, students are asked to “identify aspects of continuity and change in the story of residential schools,” and to “research and analyze a significant Canadian conflict in terms of causes and consequences, continuity and change and historical perspective.” Skills are also listed separately from the content, divided into nine subsets such as “Dimensions of Thinking,” “Social Participation as a Democratic Practice,” and “Research for Deliberative Inquiry.”

The curriculum appears to split content from skills by title, but in practice integrates them. The grade 10 course changes the approach to the skills section from the grade 9 curriculum, with more attention on students’ abilities to think collaboratively and connect to broader issues, such as social participation and democracy.

The skills sections of the grade 9 and 10 courses lack opportunities for students to connect with their personal or diverse family histories and to reflect on history, geography, and governance in their own lives.

Ways to Improve

Nunavut needs to revise the social studies courses under the Nunavusiutit strand. Currently, students learn more about ancient societies and Canadian colonial governments than they do Nunavut and Inuit history in grades 7 – 12. Basing these curricula more explicitly around Inuit Qaujimagajatuqangit would be a better approach. Nunavut also needs to better incorporate current pedagogical trends by providing students with opportunities to reflect on and conduct inquiries related to their community history, as part of a larger historical narrative.



Describe

Ontario covers Canadian history in three mandatory courses across the intermediate and secondary years: grades 7, 8, and 10. In grade 10, students choose between a Canadian history course in either the “academic” or “applied” stream. The content of the two courses is similar, but the academic course covers content in deeper, more analytical ways than the applied curriculum indicates.

For this assessment, the grades 7 and 8 courses and the two grade 10 courses were reviewed.

Quick Assessment

Ontario revised its curricula in 2013 to emphasize inquiry, and again in 2018 to better meet the Calls to Action put forward by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The Ontario curriculum thoroughly covers the experiences of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples. These revisions significantly improved both the content and skills sections of the Ontario curriculum, providing students with a well-rounded history education and placing Ontario in the top spot of this Canadian History Report Card. The grade 10 applied history course description states that it includes more practical applications of history than its academic counterpart, but this is not reflected in the curriculum.

Content

In Ontario, students cover New France to the First World War in grades 7 and 8, and the First World War to the present day in the grade 10 course options. In all four courses, there is a good balance among traditional political history, social and cultural experiences, and Indigeneity. The curricula are organized into chronological “strands” and the elements of politics, society, and Indigeneity are integrated within these strands rather than separated. Each strand has overall and specific expectations, big ideas, and framing questions. Together, this makes for a dense curriculum that requires teachers to decide what to teach and what to omit. The four courses score high in content coverage because of the range of examples and sample questions that are provided, but in practice, all the content is not necessarily covered.

For example, specific expectation D2.1 in the grade 10 academic curriculum asks students to “describe some significant instances of social conflict and/or inequality in Canada during this period, with reference to various groups and communities, including First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities and analyse them from multiple perspectives.” Examples and sample questions include suggestions regarding the Sixties Scoop, Vietnam protests, Coppermine Tent Hostel, Africville, and disagreements between federalists and Québec nationalists. While these suggestions cover a variety of important political, economic, social, and cultural topics, the range is so broad that teachers may find it overwhelming.

When histories are built into specific curricular expectations and not just the examples and sample questions, there is a greater chance these diverse histories will be taught. For example, one of the strengths of the 2018 revisions is the greater integration of histories related to First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities and peoples. Almost every specific expectation references Indigenous communities and lists a range of examples. Because these stories are emphasized in the specific expectations, teachers can prioritize them when choosing how to meet curricular expectations.



Skills

Ontario's history curricula are structured around the concept of inquiry. Students are invited to think critically by asking and answering questions using a variety of sources, which is a key curricular expectation. Primary source analysis is integrated into how students approach content. For example, Expectation B1.1 in the grade 10 academic course asks students to "analyse historical statistics and other primary sources, including oral traditional knowledge, to identify major demographic trends in Canada between 1914 and 1929 and assess the significance of these trends."

The grade 7 curriculum emphasizes personal connections and comparisons with the present. A sample question for grade 7 Expectation A1.2 asks students "What were some environmental challenges facing people in early Canada? What similarities do you see between these challenges and current environmental challenges facing people in Canada today?" These comparisons allow students to think about how their experiences relate to the past, strengthening both their relationship to the past and how they can learn from it in the present. However, while inquiry and primary sources are prominent, the emphasis on comparisons with the present and personal reflection are diminished in higher grades.

The curriculum document indicates that applied history should give students "more opportunities to experience hands-on applications of the concepts and theories they study." However, the grade 10 applied history curriculum does not provide expectations for students to engage in hands-on applications, but expects less of them than its academic history counterpart.

Ways to Improve

While Ontario's curriculum ranks the highest in Canada, there is still room for improvement. Ontario has excelled at including diverse perspectives throughout the curriculum but needs to ensure that it offers resources for teachers to cover these topics. The curriculum includes so much content that the province needs to help teachers navigate the lengthy document and choose what content to teach. Another option would be to divide the grade 10 courses into two courses or grades. The grade 7 course's emphasis on threading past and present comparisons should be continued more in the grade 8 and 10 curricula to strengthen the reflective and transformative possibilities for learning Canadian history for students.



Describe

Anglophone: Prince Edward Island uses the Atlantic Social Studies Framework as a structure for its intermediate social studies curriculum. Grade 7 is an “Empowerment” course, grade 8 is a “Canadian Identity” course, and grade 9 covers “Atlantic Canada in the Global Community.” In high school, students are required to take two social studies courses but as not all of the options contain Canadian history content, they are not evaluated here.

For this assessment, the grades 7, 8, and 9 courses were reviewed.

Francophone: The only mandatory Canadian history content in the PEI francophone system is found in the grade 8 social studies course, which includes a module on New France. The grade 10 *Histoire du Canada* is an optional course offered to francophone students in PEI to fulfill graduation requirements of two social studies courses at the secondary level. While the vast majority of students take this course, it is not evaluated here because it is not mandatory. For this assessment, only the grade 8 course was evaluated.

Quick Assessment

Anglophone: The Prince Edward Island curricula related to Canadian history are interesting but unbalanced. The curricula attempt to focus on social justice while ensuring that students know Canadian history. However, these ideas conflict with each other due to the ways they are presented and framed across the four courses reviewed here. Because of this disconnect, these curricula largely fail to ensure that knowing, learning, and mobilizing Canadian history become part of movements for social justice.

Francophone: The province’s francophone Canadian history program is not robust. Students take only one module of Canadian history content in their grade 8 course, *Sociétés du Passé*, which focuses on New France from 1604 to 1763.

Content

Anglophone: Intermediate social studies education in Prince Edward Island starts with a revision of the Atlantic Social Studies Framework “Empowerment” course. This is an exciting course in which empowerment is an integrated element of a discussion of justice, colonial exploration, media stereotyping, and poverty. The curriculum asks students to critically review global and historic forces

to empower them to advocate for change. History is studied chronologically and thematically, allowing students to focus on empowerment and a diverse exploration of different dimensions of the past. The course features a mix of traditional history, social and cultural experiences, and land and Indigeneity.

The grade 8 course differs greatly from the “Empowerment” course. It is a 20th-century social studies course, with units separated by discipline: geography, history, and political science. The history unit separates political, military, economic history from social and cultural histories. This divides the governing elites from everyone else, creating a narrative in which political history is deemed essential, and social and cultural histories optional.

The grade 9 course on globalization also attempts to use social and political context to entice students to take action in their communities and the world. However, the framing of content is problematic. Units are separated into themes of culture, trade, environment, human rights, and citizenship in the global community. While historical exploration or analysis is not the focus of the course, there are suggestions for how to bring Canadian history into these discussions through examples or further context. But these suggestions are additive, rather than complementary, and they provoke more questions than answers about how we understand globalization and Canada’s historical place in this conversation. This presents a problem for Canadian students trying to understand who they are and what they can do in an increasingly precarious global world.

In the human rights unit students are taught about residential schools and invited to connect the contemporary moment with global perspectives. While residential schools certainly represent an example of human rights abuses in Canada, it is framed as a historical example in a modern discourse about globalization. The history and legacy of residential schools are taught alongside concepts such as “Mass media is a powerful tool” and “There have been, and will continue to be, significant challenges in the advancement of universal human rights.” The concept of “human rights” gained traction during and after the Second World War and carries specific associations within the global community and the United Nations.

Prince Edward Island

This history can be explored alongside the 19th-century development and ongoing legacy of residential schools in Canada, but neither the histories nor the concepts associated with them are synonymous. Placing this learning in an ahistorical and global context discourages Canadian students from examining the ongoing national, regional, local, and personal effects of the residential school system in Canada. Including residential schools and global human rights issues in the same unit is confusing and runs the risk of losing one or both of these important topics within the course.

Francophone: The New France module in the grade 8 course combines both geographical and historical knowledge. Students learn where the French occupied territories in the Atlantic, as well as the social, political, and economic activities during this time. Despite broad outcomes that promise an exploration of a “balanced” social, political, and economic exploration of this period, in reality the content favours politics and economics. Five of the nine outcomes, for example, focus on *le Régime français* (French regime) whereas only three emphasize *la société acadienne* (Acadian society). One of these outcomes does emphasize comparisons between Acadian and Mi’kmaw societies; however, issues of colonization, settler relations, and violence are not an explicit part of the curriculum.

Skills

Anglophone: The Prince Edward Island curricula focus on active learning in history and social studies. Each curriculum across the grades recommends tools for teaching and learning, including graphic organizers, discussions and role-playing prompts, and invitations for community-based or archival research to support teachers’ presentation of concepts. PEI stands out among the other provinces and territories with its invitation to establish personal and community connections and reflections. Its use of active, involved learning is particularly notable in the higher grades, which most other provinces and territories reserve for intermediate grades.

As with many other provinces, the verbs used in specific curriculum outcomes in PEI courses demonstrate an approach to acquiring knowledge that is more rote than exploratory. The grade 8 course on “Canadian Identity” is particularly didactic with its approach to inquiry, with verbs such as “explain,” “identify,” and “determine” used in the majority of curricular outcomes. In this curriculum, suggestions for instruction and assessment often include charts and brief writing assignments, with far less creativity than could be broached with the same outcomes.

Francophone: One strength of this course is the list of accessible resources to support classroom instruction. From Google Earth to Scholastic books and links to museum websites, along with a tool kit of worksheets, this curriculum provides teachers with a variety of resources to help students actively engage in learning about the history and geography of the French Regime.

Ways to Improve

Anglophone: The suggestions provided throughout the curriculum indicate Prince Edward Island’s overall approach is learning about the Canadian past through doing, often collaboratively and thoughtfully, while making connections to community and students’ own personal reflections. Incorporating these elements into the provincial curricula objectives, rather than suggesting them, would strengthen this approach to learning about the past. While PEI provides consistent opportunities to learn a traditional view of Canadian history, it struggles in areas that explore the diversity of Canadian people and experiences. This could be improved by incorporating a sense of reconciliatory relationships and justice.

Francophone: With only one module of the grade 8 social studies course dedicated to Canadian history, the PEI francophone system would benefit from mandating more Canadian content. The optional grade 10 Canadian history course (not evaluated here) is designed with Historical Thinking Concepts in mind and covers the pre-contact era to the present. This could be a useful course to mandate in the francophone system, although dividing it into two, smaller chronological sections would provide greater space for the historical inquiry the curriculum writers intended.

Describe

In Québec, Secondary I, II, III, IV, and V grade levels correspond with grades 7, 8, 9, 10, and 11 in other provinces and territories, and are structured around cycles that include more than one year. While three history-related streams are offered to Québec students in their Secondary years, only “History of Québec and Canada” in Cycle Two (Secondary III-V) has an explicit Canadian history focus. This stream has two parts taught over two years, Secondary III (grade 9) and Secondary IV (grade 10), both of which are evaluated here.

Quick Assessment

The curriculum for the “History of Québec and Canada” has a clear and distinct focus on the Canadian past from a francophone perspective. However, with only one stream related to Canadian history across the Secondary cycles, it covers a vast amount of content. This leaves little room for inquiry and critical thinking that can lead to an exploration of the past, rather than rote learning.

Content

The “History of Québec and Canada” curriculum is split over two years. The Secondary III course covers prehistory to 1840 and Secondary IV covers 1840 to the present.

The curriculum draws on larger curricular competencies related to “interpreting a social phenomenon” with specific concepts identified in each unit. Units are divided by time periods that relate to a specific social phenomenon, such as “Origins to 1608: The experience of the Indigenous peoples and the colonization attempts,” and “1840–1896: The formation of the Canadian federal system.” Each of these units includes a narrative description, a timeline, a list of historical knowledge to be acquired (in the form of key terms), and specific related concepts (e.g., “Adaptation,” “Trade,” and “Environment”). The curriculum provides a history of each period, a timeline of significant dates, historical knowledge to be gained, and a long list of elements of that knowledge to be acquired.

These courses provide more content related to francophone Canadians than any other curricula in Canada. This curriculum also gives the most time to pre-18th century history in comparison with other

provinces’ secondary school courses, highlighting the importance of a critical understanding of early Canadian colonialization and settlement, and not just the themes of the 20th century. The content covered across the two courses is diverse in scope, referencing everything from farms and dairy production to alliances and rivalries among First Nations before 1600.

However, the curriculum is essentially a list of key topics to be covered in chronological order. This organization suggests that the curriculum wants students to understand their importance, but not necessarily critically examine them. In the unit covering 1760 – 1791, for example, the curriculum covers the “sociodemographic situation” through a list of six different elements for study, including British immigration, Acadian refugees, and use of the French language. While the topics are diverse, they come with no instructions or suggestions about how to examine how these topics affected each other. People and institutions are also separated, neglecting students the opportunity to understand how they intersect. A key example is the separation of religion and sociodemographic elements, even though religion cannot exist without people or society.

The formatting of the Québec curriculum is particularly unsuited to Indigenous topics. For example, the unit “1945–1980: The modernization of Québec and the Quiet Revolution” includes subtopics on the residential school system in Canada, socio-institutional organization, and educational activities, but the format does not provide details of the ideology and legacy of the schools. Without context, the material could be framed in positive or neutral ways. This makes understanding the long-term systemic consequences of the schools difficult and fails to open a dialogue about reconciliation.

⁶ The significant grade drop between 2015 (80%) and 2021 (57%) is a result of updated scoring criteria. The 2015 version of this report placed significant emphasis on the Historical Thinking Concepts, at which Québec excelled and continues to excel. However, this year’s version of the report card expanded the scope of the skills category, assessing a broader range of skills that are not as clearly reflected in Québec’s curriculum.

Québec

Skills

There are no specific expectations or competencies related to the curriculum. There is a major emphasis on “knowing” history rather than “doing” history. In the curriculum, the listed verbs deal with explaining rather than investigating or analyzing. While the curriculum ends with an appendix on the critical analysis of primary sources, little guidance is included on how teachers would integrate this work, or even where they can find these sources. The skills align with the curriculum’s overall sense of static, knowable history, rather than students analyzing and exploring the past.

Ways to Improve

Québec’s Canadian history curriculum would be improved by approaching the study of history as something to be explored, rather than something to know. Because the courses in Secondary III and IV are so ambitious, inquiry, student reflection, and lived experiences from the past are overlooked. This curriculum has attracted media attention for being so closely linked to a textbook that it leaves little space for Québec students to learn about diverse experiences in the past. Adding courses in intermediate grades (Cycle One, Secondary I and II) would create room for inquiry, the use of a variety of resources for study, the integration of diverse family and community histories, and the inclusion of more social and cultural lived experiences.



Describe

Saskatchewan has three mandatory courses in grades 7, 8, and 9 that cover a range of global social studies issues. These courses do not have a singular Canadian history focus, but Canadian history supports the exploration of transnational themes.

In grade 10, students must choose between taking a Social Studies, Native Studies, or History course. Of these three options, only the Native Studies course includes significant Canadian history content. As a result, we have not evaluated this optional course here. In grade 12, students must take one of three Canadian studies courses: Social Studies, History, or Native Studies.

For this assessment, the grades 7, 8, and 9 curricula were reviewed, along with the three grade 12 course options.

Quick Assessment

The courses in grades 7 through 9 are unique explorations of topics and issues and, while they include Canada, they have a broader global scope. The topical integration of the Canadian past with global and political issues gives greater weight to the importance of understanding the complexities of Canadian history.

Of all the provinces, Saskatchewan mandates the most Canadian history content for its students. However, the high school curricula are almost 25 years old and do not reflect the innovations of the grade 7, 8, and 9 courses, which were revised in 2009.

Content

The three intermediate courses that students in Saskatchewan take in grades 7, 8, and 9 each take a different approach to the study of Canada and its past. The grade 7 course, "Canada and Our Pacific and Northern Neighbours," is thematic in design, integrating and assessing contemporary, historical, and geographic elements of Canada and circumpolar and Pacific Rim countries. The grade 8 course "The Individual in Canadian Society" weaves history in and out of Canada-focused themes and structures. Students are asked to learn about the historical legacy and contemporary effects of different topics, and to use what they learn to take personal actions. While the course is called "The Individual in Society," it promotes an understanding of working toward the common good rather than an individualistic approach.

In grade 9, students take "The Roots of Society," an exploration of colonialism, global knowledge, and worldviews. Canada is included in this course, but so are other countries with histories of colonialism and imperialism. This curriculum highlights the importance of confronting the processes of colonialism in the present. The biggest drawback to these courses is that the complex and sophisticated concepts that are covered in these intermediate grades may not be fully comprehended by 12- or 13-year-old students.

The three grade 12 Canadian studies courses that students can choose from include some of these sophisticated ideas. However, since the courses date to 1997, a refresh in framework, organization, and presentation is needed to make these connections clear for students and teachers. The three courses were designed together and their unique contributions to a larger Canadian studies conversation are discussed in relation to one another. History 30 is organized chronologically from pre-contact to the present. Social Studies 30 is topic-based, covering change, economic development, culture, governance, and globalization. Native Studies 30 starts with an optional history unit for students needing context because, as the curriculum states, there is no pre-requisite for taking this senior course. It then covers units in Indigenous and treaty rights, governance, land claims and treaty land entitlements, economic development, and social development.

The three grade 12 courses try to do too much. For example, in the History 30 course, the "External Forces and Domestic Realities" unit has a 15-hour allotment, during which teachers need to cover early 20th-century foreign and domestic policy, the First World War, changing government, the Depression, and liberalism. Each of these topics is slated to be covered across one to three hours each, with time available for enrichment and/or review. While the curriculum suggests unique content for these topics, only a single hour is assigned to the study of the First World War, leaving barely enough time for even the basics. This loss of unique content is particularly noteworthy because all six courses include creative examples of how to teach about the past in ways outside the standard narrative, but the timeframe is restrictive.

Saskatchewan

Skills

All three intermediate courses in Saskatchewan emphasize inquiry. Curricula are organized under different goals, each with outcomes and indicators. Inquiry is used to help students engage with the content. This is seen in the diverse verbs used as the indicators: students are not just “describing” and “examining” but “hypothesizing” and “constructing.” This provides a wide range of inquiry-related experiences; students are not just looking for answers but actively investigating and critically engaging with the content.

The grade 12 Canadian studies curricula have interesting elements, but numerous skills, abilities, and value objectives are used as a means to an end, rather than to critically evaluate the history. The language of these activities reflects outdated research, as the curriculum was designed in 1997. This may create problems for teachers who have received more contemporary training. While these generational traditions are not necessarily in conflict with each other, they still require a translator.

Ways to Improve

The best improvement that can be made to the Saskatchewan curriculum is an update of the high school courses. They need to be slimmed down and focused more narrowly. Inquiry methods that reflect current research in history and social studies education can be introduced to enhance the complex histories these courses are intended to explore. If these courses could be treated as an extension of the intermediate courses, students can continue their learning from grades 7–9. It is important that the ideas and discussion points central to the intermediate courses be woven through the more advanced courses so that students’ ideas and plans for action can develop along with their maturity.



Describe

Yukon follows the British Columbia curriculum with, as they have written, “integrated Yukon First Nations language, history, culture and ways of knowing, doing and being into all subject areas and grade levels.” However, documents or specifications of what the “Yukon content and Yukon resources” are, or the ways in which “Yukon First Nations ways of knowing, doing, and being” are integrated into the curriculum have not been made public.

Given that these are the same courses, assessment of the Yukon history curriculum is based on the assessment of BC’s curriculum (see [pages 11-12](#)).

Quick Assessment

On the Yukon government website, the page “How First Nations perspectives are incorporated into schools” outlines the ways that the Yukon is incorporating these perspectives, not just into curricula, but into school culture and programs. The website highlights the importance of learning about the legacy of residential schools and a mandatory “Our Stories of Residential Schools in Yukon and Canada” unit is now included in the grade 10 social studies curriculum. Other initiatives to incorporate Indigenous perspectives in education (not exclusively history or social studies) include experiential learning programs, First Nations languages, and community involvement.

Ways to Improve

The most effective improvement that the Yukon can make is ensuring easy access to Yukon-focused curriculum documents for teachers, guardians, and potential partners. The government of the Yukon’s website includes a prominent link to an application form to bring a “project, presentation, resource or materials” into schools. With more easily accessible curriculum, those interested will have an easier time ensuring their work fits into the curriculum, which will prove more useful for Yukon teachers and for student needs.

