Comparing Recent Canadian and American Social Studies Curriculum and Methods Texts: An Essay Review

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Singer, Alan J. (2009). *Social Studies for Secondary Schools: Teaching to Learn, Learning to Teach.* New York: Routledge. 448 pp. ISBN 978-0-8058-6446-5

Case, Roland & Clark, Penney. (2008). *The Anthology of Social Studies Volume 2: Issues and Strategies for Secondary Teachers*. Vancouver, BC: Pacific Educational Press. 419 pp. ISBN 978-1-895766-47-9

Ross, E. Wayne. (2006). *The Social Studies Curriculum: Purposes, Problems and Possibilities* (Third Edition). Albany: State University of New York Press. 358 pp. ISBN 0-7914-6910-7

Sears, Alan & Wright, Ian. (2004). *Challenges & Prospects for Canadian Social Studies.* Vancouver, BC: Pacific Educational Press. 312 pp. ISBN 1-895766-72-9

Typically one does not come across a book review that examines four books at the same time, especially considering the potential for confusion and expanse. As a high school social studies teacher, doctoral student, and educator of pre-service social studies teachers I am always searching for new social studies texts that are relevant to the diverse areas of social studies education I am involved in. In the last few years I have discovered four of the most recent Canadian and American books that were conceived and written with the intention of being relevant and instructive for a diverse audience of people in the field of secondary social studies education including pre-service and practicing secondary (high school) social studies teachers, social studies teacher educators, and curriculum developers. The four books include Alan J. Singer's *Social Studies for Secondary Schools: Teaching to Learn, Learning to Teach* (2009), Roland Case and Penney Clark's *The Anthology of Social Studies Volume 2: Issues and Strategies for Secondary Teachers* (2008), E. Wayne Ross' *The Social Studies Curriculum: Purposes, Problems and Possibilities* (2006) and Alan Sears and Ian Wright's *Challenges & Prospects for Canadian Social Studies* (2004).

I approach the critical review from three perspectives and lenses: a secondary school social studies teacher, doctoral student, and social studies educator. In order to critically evaluate each book from these perspectives, there are several important questions to ask: Does the book include chapters that attend to the breadth and depth of important and current topics in social studies education? What are the theoretical assumptions, claims to knowledge and underlying ideologies present in each book? Is the book relevant and instructive for a diverse audience of pre-service and practicing social studies teachers, social studies teacher educators, and curriculum developers in both the Canadian and American contexts?

The books I examine can be located in either the American or Canadian context of social studies education (this will be described in more depth later in the review), which to some might seem like an incompatible pairing. Many social studies educators and teachers in Canada and the United States are quick to dismiss each other's social studies curriculum and methods texts as being irrelevant to their country's educational, social, political, economic, historical and cultural realities. There is no doubt that there are some significant differences both historically and presently, however, social studies education in Canada and the United States are more similar than different. Because of these similarities, social studies educators in both countries have much to learn from each other's scholarship about methods, curriculum problems, responses, and future possibilities for social studies education in their respective countries. Learning from each other's work in social studies education has many benefits; social studies education in each country can be improved substantially while reducing the cost in resources and time that major reforms normally require.

While I strongly believe that all social studies educators should be expected to adapt ideas and concepts from a different context into their own, I am also aware that it is necessary to briefly discuss the context in which each book is situated. Singer's *Social Studies FSS* focuses exclusively on the American context and cites examples from American history and social studies curriculum throughout. More than any other book Ross' *The Social Studies Curriculum* is the most balanced between American and Canadian perspectives. Ross refers in a general way to the "North American context" at different points in the book rather than directly mention Canada or the United States, and the book includes academic contributors from both Canadian and American colleges and universities (five Canadian and fifteen American). Despite being more balanced than the other books, the majority of the book analyzes the American educational context and uses curricular examples that are almost exclusively from the United States. Sears and Wright's book focuses entirely on the Canadian context, which is obvious considering the title explicitly denotes "Canadian Social Studies". Both *Challenges & Prospects* and *Anthology* include chapters on Canadian-specific topics like First Nations social studies education, which is more of a focus for Canadian social studies educators than American Indian education is for American educators. Unlike its predecessor (the *Canadian Anthology of Social Studies*, 1997) the 2006 version of the *Anthology* dropped "Canadian" from the title because the "previous edition aroused interest amongst British and American teachers" and they wanted to better attend to the interests and needs of a non-Canadian audience (p. ix). Despite dropping "Canadian" from the title the *Anthology* is still very much set in the Canadian context; every contributor is Canadian and all of the examples cited throughout the book are Canadian-curriculum specific.

American and Canadian Social Studies: A (Brief) Historical and Contemporary Context

> "It is impossible to entirely avoid the American influence on social studies education in Canada. Instead, Canadian social studies educators have chosen to benefit from the dollars and energy put into social studies education in the United States by taking the models and strategies that seem useful, adapting them to the Canadian context, and discarding the rest, while at the same time working to develop and share uniquely Canadian ideas" (Clark, 2004, p. 32).

Penney Clark's quote best sums up the profound influence social studies developments in the United States have had on the development of Canadian social studies education. The similar

pattern of development in social studies education in both countries provides a unique situation for Canadian and American social studies educators to learn from each others' challenges, contexts and possibilities.

Since Canadian provinces began to adopt social studies as a school subject in the 1920's the major curriculum trends, resources and textbooks, pre-service textbooks for training teachers, the speakers invited to Canadian teachers' conferences, and the American references in provincial social studies curriculum guides all reveal the profound influence social studies developments in the United States have had on Canada. Clark (2004) explains that, "American social studies thought has affected Canadian curricula from the progressive education movement of the 1920's through the structure of the discipline and Canada Studies movements, continuing on through the social issues and values education influences, to the citizenship emphasis of the 1980's" (p. 32). It is important to note that American social studies model have not always experienced widespread acceptance across Canada, instead they are often incorporated in a piecemeal fashion that speaks to the fact that education (and curriculum development) in Canada are the domain of the different provincial and territorial governments. It would be disingenuous to suggest that the acceptance of social studies as a school subject in both Canada and the United States has been controversy free. Throughout the past century there has been fervent and widespread debates between advocates of social studies and those who believe that social studies would be better taught as separate courses in history, geography and other social sciences. There are further debates over pedagogical practices, purposes for social studies, and the exact content of what should be included in social studies courses.

Canadian social studies teachers and educators have not always enthusiastically and/or universally accepted developments in American social studies. Despite this reality, it can be argued that even Canadian-specific social studies developments emerged as a result of the powerful influence of the United States. For example, Clark (2004) highlights the fact that in the early 1970's the Canada Studies Foundation materialized in order to strengthen the amount of Canadian content in the curriculum, and it may not have come to light if not for perceived fears and threats of American cultural domination. It is also important to note that up until the 1980's developments and resources from Great Britain also had a profound influence on Canadian social studies developments. For example, the British production of primary and secondary source jackdaw kits for history and geography were widely used in Canada in the 1970's (Clark, 2004).

Clark (2004) believes that only in the 1990's and the first part of the twenty-first century did social studies curricula in Canada become more uniquely Canadian and began to feature more substantive differences from American social studies. In Canada there was renewed interest in strengthening the place of history and citizenship education in the curriculum, major revisions were made to the provincial and territorial social studies curricula, critical thinking was increasingly emphasized in curriculum documents, and social studies resources and pre-service methodology textbooks were developed by Canadian educators who focused more on Canadian-specific curriculum content and important developments in Canadian social studies education (Clark, 2004).

While social studies education in Canada became more uniquely Canadian during the 1990's and 2000's, the American system shifted towards standards-based education reform (SBER). SBER is an effort by a governmental body or professional education organization to create a standardized document or guidelines that define and establish purposes and goals, what content is selected, teaching methodologies and assessment techniques. Believers in SBER assume standards need to be raised because students do not know enough and raising the bar is

the best way to improve student achievement. SBER proponents assume that national and state standards are important for ensuring American competitiveness in foreign markets, and that standardization will promote equal educational opportunity for all students (Ross, 2006).

Different national social studies organizations across the United States representing the seven different disciplines (history, US and World history, geography, social studies, civics and government, economics and psychology) supported SBER and worked to create standards documents that outlined the goals and purposes, pedagogy, content and assessment techniques for their specific discipline. Ross (2006) points out that the creation of the different curriculum standards for each social studies discipline did little except aggravate the long-standing intellectual battles over pedagogy, purpose, and content of what constitutes social studies—the same arguments that have plagued social studies since its beginnings as a school subject.

One of the major controversies regarding the SBER is the use of standardized testing and "high-stakes tests" as the method for determining whether higher standards are being achieved. "High-stakes tests" are any tests that have real consequences for teachers, students and/or schools, whether it means pay increases for teachers, failure to graduate for students, or decreased budgets for schools. Mathison, Ross and Vinson (2006) contend that almost every state that has raised the bar for higher standards have also introduced high-stakes standardized tests to determine if the standards have been met. While Canada has not completely disregarded SBER and high-stakes testing, it has not been embraced as widely and as enthusiastically as it has in the United States. For example, in British Columbia, Social Studies 11 (a required course for graduation) features a mandatory provincial exam that is worth twenty percent of a student's final grade. While the standardized exam for Social Studies 11 can be criticized for a number of different pedagogical and political reasons, this exam is not necessarily a high-stakes exam. It is worth twenty percent of a student's final grade, students can still fail the exam and pass the course, and both teachers' pay and contracts and school budgets are not linked to how well students do. Both Quebec and Ontario do not require mandatory provincial exams in social studies to graduate, and many provinces (including BC), have either cancelled, or made provincial exams optional for graduating students.

Furthermore, unlike the United States there have not been any unified pan-Canadian movements established to define pedagogical purposes, content selection, teaching methodology and assessment for social studies, or the different social studies disciplines. The lack of any national standardization can be accredited to the fact that the there has been little desire amongst the provincial governments that control education and curriculum development to create any national uniformity, and there has been a lack of political will and little enthusiasm generated amongst politicians, public and members of the educational community. When there have been attempts to standardize social studies curricula across Canada, the attempts feature regional rather than national collaboration, such as the Foundation for the Atlantic Canada Social Studies Curriculum, and the purpose is to pool scant resources rather than provide standardized pedagogy, content or assessment practices.

In this section, I have outlined some of the similar historical and contemporary developments in social studies education in Canada and the United States. The context for teaching social studies is more similar than different in both countries, and there is a great deal Canadian and American educators can learn from each other's challenges, contexts and possibilities for improving social studies education in both countries.

Overview of the Four Books

Alan Sears and Ian Wright wrote *Challenges & Prospects for Canadian Social Studies* (2004) (hereafter *Challenges*) with the purpose of updating their first book *Trends & Issues in Canadian Social Studies* (1997). *Challenges* retains important chapters from the previous edition that have been updated to acknowledge the changing conditions in social studies education, and it also features a number of chapters written by new contributors. Both editions of Wright and Sears' books share similar theoretical frameworks, chapter organizations, and authors, however *Challenges* includes several notable improvements. The authors removed some of the more dated and irrelevant chapters from *Trends* while offering recent research and a more pan-Canadian perspective on topics important to Canadian social studies teachers including chapters on: Global education, First Nations education, law education, technology use in social studies education, history and geography education, multiculturalism education, peace education, and critical thinking.

Challenges is organized into three distinct parts: *Part 1—Contextual Challenges and Prospects* features five chapters that attempt to introduce the reader to the wider contexts and debates in the field of social studies education across Canada. This section includes chapters on the historical context of social studies in English and French Canada, an analysis of the relationship between history education and social studies, and an examination of citizenship education in the Canadian context. *Part 2—Content Challenges and Prospects* includes nine chapters that provide distinct perspectives on the question of what content should be included in social studies curricula and how it should be taught? Various arguments are forwarded for more inclusion in the curriculum of the following topics: historical thinking, closer ties between school geography and academic geography, law-related education, preparation for the challenges of globalization, understanding of multiculturalism, social studies designed to understand First Nations' issues, instruction about gender and sexuality, education for peace-building and, instruction designed to help students improve their visual literacy. *Part 3—Process Challenges and Prospects* features seven chapters that focus primarily on social studies "methods", different pedagogies and processes used to teach social studies content. There are chapters that focus on instructional approaches for teaching conceptual understanding, critical thinking, situated learning, computer technologies, and assessment and evaluation in social studies classrooms.

E. Wayne Ross' third edition of *The Social Studies Curriculum: Purposes, Problems and Possibilities* (2006) (hereafter *The Social Studies Curriculum*) both updates and expands aspects of the 2001 revised edition while maintaining its focus on presenting an overview of contemporary perspectives on the enduring problems and broad range of issues facing social studies educators regarding "issues in curriculum development and implementation" (p. 7). The book includes chapters from a variety of authors, all of which strongly emphasize concerns for equality, social justice and diversity of purposes and forms of knowledge within the social studies curriculum. There are new chapters on race, gender, sexuality, critical multiculturalism, visual culture, moral deliberation, digital technologies, teaching democracy, and the future of social studies education. Ross (2006) identifies several purposes for the book—he hopes that this book will "stimulate readers to reconsider their assumptions and understanding about the origins, purposes and nature of the social studies curriculum" and that the book will enable "teachers and other curriculum workers to better understand and act on the nature, scope, and context of social studies curriculum concerns" (p. 13). Most importantly for Ross and the other

authors of the chapters included in the book is that social studies educators should challenge the status quo and actively work to transform society.

The Social Studies Curriculum is organized into four sections. *Part I—Purposes of the Social Studies Curriculum* features four chapters that focus on the purposes traditionally identified for social studies education in North America including a background to the disciplinary struggles for control of the social studies curriculum (particularly the history versus social studies debate) and an investigation into the ways in which various "actors" (departments of education, textbook publishers, and others) have influenced the curriculum. *Part II—Social Issues and the Social Studies Curriculum* presents five chapters that examine social issues in the social studies curriculum with a particular emphasis on diversity and inclusion. Ross is clear to point out that it is impossible to present a comprehensive overview of all the important diversity issues related to social studies, and as a result this section addresses the most frequently raised concerns, especially gender, race, class and participatory democracy. *Part III—The Social Studies Curriculum: Purposes, Problems and Possibilities* features seven chapters that examine the social studies curriculum in practice, particularly the issues that have emerged as a result of initiatives to transform social studies curriculum and teaching that are currently demanding the attention of teachers and curriculum specialists. Ross expanded the coverage of topics compared to the 2001 revised edition and included six new chapters on topics that represent the issues that he believes are particularly significant for social studies education in the twenty-first century. These topics include assessment in social studies, digital technology and social education, addressing Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) issues in the classroom, young children and moral deliberation, global education and teaching democracy in the classroom. In *Part IV—Conclusion* Ross brings all of the different aspects of the social studies curriculum together into a coherent arrangement that provides an effective starting place for social studies teachers and educators who believe that the purpose of social studies "should help children and young adults understand and transform their world" (p. 13).

For the past decade *The Canadian Anthology of Social Studies* (1997) has been used throughout Canada as a professional resource for practicing teachers and curriculum developers, and as a methods text for pre-service elementary and secondary social studies teachers. I was introduced to the book when I was a student-teacher in 1999, and I have referred to it throughout the past decade while teaching secondary social studies and history. A second edition, called *The Anthology of Social Studies Volume 2: Issues and Strategies for Secondary Teachers*, (hereafter, the *Anthology*) was published in the fall of 2008. The editors separated the previous single volume Canadian Anthology (1997) into elementary and secondary volumes to better address the different challenges each group faces in teaching social studies. It is the secondary Anthology that I will be discussing in this review.

The new edition of the *Anthology* features many revisions and updates from the original anthology. It includes new chapters on topics that represent the most recent and significant topics for social studies educators including: First Nations education, reading instruction for social studies, historical and geographic thinking, use of primary documents and feature films, creating a community of thinkers and enhancing critical thinking. The new volume has seven fewer chapters than the previous single volume of the anthology, as out-of-date chapters were removed and several chapters were shortened after irrelevant examples were removed. Eighteen chapters are new to this volume, and many of the chapters from the original anthology have been revised.

The *Anthology* is designed to integrate the best of theory and practice in social studies by including a multiplicity of viewpoints and perspectives that complement and accentuate each other in a way that provides an "exciting and powerful vision of social studies" (Case and Clark, 2008, p. ix). The *Anthology*'s thirty-four chapters are broken into three parts that are linked together by a vision of social studies that features constructivist and inquiry-based approaches designed to transform the ways in which social studies is taught in secondary school classrooms. *Part 1—Foundations* includes three chapters that introduce and examine the purposes, visions and rationales generally accepted as the purpose for teaching social studies—teaching democratic citizenship. *Part 2—Ends and Means* features nineteen chapters divided into five sections that focus on the different "ends" or purposes for teaching social studies and the different "means" or methods used to achieve those ends. *Part 3—Implementation* includes twelve chapters that describe a variety of strategies, resources and tools designed to help teachers plan meaningful lessons, units and courses, identify and utilize useful learning resources and "authentically" assess students' work.

The most recent publication of the four books, Alan J. Singer's third edition of *Social Studies for Secondary Schools: Teaching to Learn, Learning to Teach* (2009) (hereafter *Social Studies FSS*) is focused on the American context. Singer advocates an inquiry and activity-based approach to social studies teaching that is informed by both practice and theory, and he believes that *Social Studies FSS* can be used in a number of ways: as a text for graduate and undergraduate preservice social studies methods courses, for inservice training programs, and as a reference for both beginning and experienced social studies teachers. Throughout the book Singer encourages all teachers to become curriculum creators and not curriculum consumers, and to remind social studies educators that the way we teach reflects our understanding and beliefs about society and the purposes for history and social studies education.

The third edition of the book follows a similar structure and includes many of the same topics as the two previous editions, but Singer makes several important changes to address the criticisms incurred by the previous editions. The 2009 edition includes specific lesson ideas in each chapter designed to work in inclusive settings, address American learning standards, and promote literacy and the use of technology in social studies classes. In an attempt to connect social studies teaching with the current political context in the United States, Singer has included more essays on the politics of social studies education. He responds to the critics of activity-based education and multicultural education by including a "sharpened defence" of the efficacy of these approaches (p.xiv). Throughout the book Singer emphasizes the importance of social studies teachers having adequate conceptual knowledge of history and the social sciences before they begin teaching, and that successful teachers are committed to the continuous growth of their knowledge and understanding throughout their career.

In *Social Studies FSS* Singer attempts to blend theory with practice by integrating discussions about educational goals and the nature of history and social studies with ideas for organizing social studies curricula, units, lessons and activities. The book is written entirely by Singer and includes thirteen chapters that are divided into three major sections. Each chapter addresses a broad question about social studies education and is written as a question (for example Chapter 5 is entitled "Is Social Studies Teaching Political?", and then features a number of sub-chapters that begin with a narrower question that focuses on a more specific educational issue such as "Why was the debate on the National History Standards so heated?" and "Should teachers discuss their opinions in class?" . Each chapter concludes with a number of essays about related social studies topics, sources for further reading, lesson examples and activities

designed to promote discussion and different approaches for teaching social studies. One of Singer's more novel ideas is to include lesson ideas at the end of each chapter that reflect the themes in the unit and are created by new and experienced secondary school teachers to serve as exemplars for beginning teachers. After the introductory chapter *Part I—Thinking About Social Studies* includes five chapters that focus on philosophical issues such as the reasons for teaching and learning history and social studies, social studies goals and standards, the political nature of the social studies curriculum and the design of social studies curricula. *Part 2—Preparing to Teach Social Studies* is intended to be more practical and includes three chapters that focus on planning quality social studies units and lessons. *Part III—Implementing Your Ideas* contains four chapters that explore topics such as thematic and interdisciplinary teaching, a project approach to social studies, assessing student learning and our effectiveness of our teaching, and finally ideas for promoting literacy and the use of technology in social studies classrooms.

Critical Analysis

Despite the fact that all four books concentrate on the complicated and diverse field of social studies, there are some important differences in the purposes and ideological viewpoints between the books. Singer's *Social Studies FSS,* Case and Clark's *Anthology,* and Sears and Wright's *Challenge & Prospects* share similar purposes in that they attempt to introduce important contextual problems and the latest theories in social studies education while blending them with practical methods designed to help teachers improve and transform social studies teaching. All three books are best utilized as methods texts for pre-service teachers and as valuable resources for social studies teachers. Unlike the other three books, Ross' *The Social Studies Curriculum* attempts to present a comprehensive overview of the issues in curriculum development and implementation faced by social studies educators in order to push readers to reconsider their assumptions about the "origins, purposes and nature of the social studies curriculum" (2006, p. 13). Ross' book is less focused on practical solutions or "means", instead he hopes that the book will enable teachers and social studies educators to better understand and act on the nature, scope, and context of social studies curriculum concerns. Singer, Case and Clark, and Sears and Wright's books present the ends and potential means for social studies education, while Ross believes that his book is an effective starting place for social studies teachers and educators who believe that social studies should aim to transform society into a more just and inclusive space.

All of the books emphasize the belief that while social studies teachers face many mandated outcomes and expectations, they have the freedom to choose what content and goals in the curriculum to accentuate and how the content and goals in the curriculum will be taught. In other words, the books share the view that teachers should become curriculum developers not curriculum consumers (Singer, 2009). Furthermore, the four books share social constructivist and social reconstructionist orientations that emphasize that the purpose of social studies is not just to learn social studies content, but also to problematize the curriculum in order to help students "construct" and develop the knowledge, understandings, values, abilities and habits that strengthen participation in democratic society.

All four books also suggest that the purpose of social studies is to teach the values of democratic citizenship necessary for transforming society by making it more equitable, inclusive and just, however some books are more explicit about their commitment to these principles. Each book includes many of the same references to theorists and educators who advocate a

transformative approach to teaching democratic citizenship in social studies, including Kilpatrick, Rugg, Dewey, Freire, Giroux, Greene, McLaren and Apple amongst others. Ross' and the other contributors to his book offer a more explicit, passionate and politically radical (Neo-Marxist) view of the causes and potential solutions to the current problems in society. Ross logically argues that traditional social studies teaching, curriculum, and teacher education do not reflect a socially reconstructionist vision of the future, and current practices are more focused on implementing curriculum standards and responding to high-stakes tests than developing and working toward a vision of a socially just world (Ross, 2006, p. 321). In *The Social Studies Curriculum* Ross contends that social studies educators have focused too much on the "means" to transform society and not enough time on the "ends", or goals to be accomplished. The author reveals his belief in the role social studies education can play in social reconstruction when he asks "whether social studies should promote a brand of citizenship that is adaptive to the status quo and socially powerful, or whether it should promote a brand of citizenship that aims to reconstruct and transform society?" (Ross, 2006, p. 320). Social transformation will only occur when people realize that "...it is impossible to simultaneously champion participatory democracy and any system that supports a class-divided society, where public decision making is limited to the most narrow and controlled possibilities" (p. 329). Similarly, Ross argues that many teachers often implement curriculum created by others because they are not conscious of the reasons for their actions, and he challenges social studies educators (and others) who express a commitment to democracy to be self-critical of the values and interests represented in their use of language, their social relations and their practice (p.329). While Ross' book offers the most radical view of social reconstructionism, the overall belief that social studies education has an important role to play in providing students with the knowledge, attitudes, habits and dispositions required to transform society is shared by all books.

Many of the chapters in the four books contain many of the same topics. For example, each book includes chapters on the origins, purposes and goals for social studies education, computer technology and social studies education, potential implications of globalization for social studies, multiculturalism, anti-racist education, and critical history education. Given the fact that Case and Clark's *Anthology* includes the largest collection of (thirty-four) chapters, it is understandable why it provides a wider-variety of important contemporary perspectives and practical issues than the other three books. Furthermore, because of the number of chapters included, the *Anthology* is able to devote several chapters to important social studies topics which enable it to offer multi-perspectives and delve deeper into issues such as critical thinking, reading comprehension for social studies, learning resources for social studies, and assessment practices in social studies. The chapters in *Anthology* are written by thirty-four different teacher educators and practicing teachers which helps provide a more diverse view of social studies that appeal to a multiplicity of perspectives and experiences.

Social Studies FSS reveals Singer's strong belief that history education should be the center of the social studies curriculum, but because he is the sole writer, the book is limited to his perspective and biases. There is a lack of attention given to some topics currently capturing the interests of social studies educators in the United States and internationally, including historical and geographic thinking, reading literacy for social studies, critical thinking, multicultural and anti-racism education, and visual literacy. While Singer's experience and insights provided throughout the book are helpful, and he includes brief articles and excerpts from other social studies educators at the end of each chapter, the history only focus limits the applicability of the book to the diverse interests of pre-service and practicing social studies teachers. As previously

mentioned, Ross' book *The Social Studies Curriculum* concentrates more on providing a comprehensive overview of the issues in curriculum development and implementation, and focuses less on providing practical and methodological strategies for social studies educators to use in the classroom. As a result, Ross' book includes chapters on topics that help social studies teachers learn to uncover the taken for granted elements in our teaching. For example, *The Social Studies Curriculum* includes chapters on the future of social studies education, the influence and resistance to curriculum standardization and high-stakes testing, and Marxism and critical multicultural education to introduce teachers to some of the "taken for granted" aspects of the current context for social studies education.

Due to the different purposes of the books, the format and layout of the four books have similarities, but also several important differences. Ross' *The Social Studies Curriculum* attempts to present a comprehensive view of the issues in curriculum development and implementation faced by social studies educators, and is not designed to be a social studies methods text. As a result, the book and chapters follow a straightforward academic format and does not typically include photos, table, diagrams or tools meant to illustrate important concepts or ideas. *Challenges & Prospects* focuses to a greater extent on the issues, challenges and context for Canadian social studies, while the *Anthology* concentrates on marrying the theory with the practice to provide possible solutions, practical methods and resources designed to help teachers enhance their practice. The *Anthology* includes a variety of tools including tables, models, diagrams, anecdotes, and other visual sources like photographs, paintings and political cartoons to help the reader understand how to implement difficult resources and methods into their practice. For example, on page 163 a table is provided to illustrate how visual representations of common text structures can be used to help improve students' reading comprehension strategies in social studies. Sears and Wright's collection does not include these tools, and as a result readers may face greater difficulty understanding the practical applications of the theory discussed in the chapters. Singer's *Social Studies FSS* shares a comparable purpose to Case and Clark's book, to serve as a methods text for beginning teachers and as a resource to practicing teachers, yet the format and structure of the book is not nearly as accessible for pre-service and practicing teachers as the *Anthology*. Singer includes some visual resources such as tables, diagrams, charts, drawings, and photographs, but they are too few in number for a social studies methods book. Although the book is organized logically, many of the pages appear too busy—they include too many sample lesson ideas, teaching activities, essays, classroom activities and questions that obfuscate and divert the reader away from the central topics within each chapter.

When *Challenges & Prospects* was published in 2004 it featured a number of topics that were on the forefront of a new vision for social studies education: critical thinking, First Nations education, historical thinking, globalization, gender sexuality in the classroom, and authentic assessment and evaluation, were just a few subjects gaining an increasing amount of acceptance and interest among practicing teachers, educational academics and curriculum developers. Since 2004 these topics have been further researched, practiced and written about by educators around the world. As an upshot of more recent publication dates, the *Anthology, The Social Studies Curriculum* and *Social Studies FSS* capture more recent developments on a wider assortment of topics in social studies education. For example, Linda Farr-Darling and Ian Wright's article on critical thinking in *Challenges & Prospects* does not reflect subsequent developments that the conceptualization and practice of critical thinking has undergone in the past few years, developments that are unpacked in several of Roland Case's articles in the *Anthology*. Similarly,

because *Social Studies FSS* was published in 2009 Singer is able to include some of the most up-to-date theory from both the field of social studies education and education in general. For example, in his chapter on the project approach to social studies Singer refers to two research articles about the impact of technology on social studies classrooms from 2007. Singer also refers to topical issues, events and articles relevant to social studies teachers to provide readers with real-life examples from the world around them. Ross' *The Social Studies Curriculum* (2006) includes chapters that capture the latest data and arguments about high-stakes testing and standards-based-educational reform among other subjects.

The important differences between *Challenges & Prospects* and *Anthology* can be illustrated by the different treatments of historical thinking in the two books. In *Challenges* the article on historical thinking by Peter Seixas and Carla Peck presents an approach to teaching history that outlines the elements necessary to develop students' historical thinking abilities. The article was originally published in 1997, and was rewritten for *Challenges & Prospects* in 2004. In this article Seixas presents an early conception of historical thinking that has undergone considerable development since then. The *Challenges & Prospects* article delineates the concept of historical thinking and includes few practical ideas for implementing historical thinking except for a series of questions and exercises outlined at the end of the article. In 2006 Seixas built upon his previous work and created a more fully articulated conception of historical thinking called the "Benchmarks of Historical Thinking", a multi-year, Canada-wide project to reform history education through the development of classroom-based assessments (Peck & Seixas, 2008). The article on historical thinking in *The Anthology*, written by Seixas' University of British Columbia colleague Mike Denos outlines important goals for teaching historical thinking, and provides practical examples for implementing it in the classroom. Denos points out that his chapter borrows heavily from Seixas' latest theoretical developments, however, Denos attempts to do what Seixas' article in *Challenges* does not—to explain and provide practical examples that help teachers develop historical thinking in the classroom. Denos' chapter accomplishes this by providing important rationales for using historical thinking, using anecdotes from his classroom experiences to illustrate historical thinking methodologies, outlining challenges teachers face when implementing historical thinking, and by clarifying difficult concepts through the use of helpful tables, diagrams and figures.

Conclusions

After reviewing Singer's *Social Studies FSS* (2009), Case and Clark's the *Anthology* (2008), Ross' *The Social Studies Curriculum* (2006) and Sears and Wright's *Challenges & Prospects for Canadian Social Studies* (2004) I have come to the realization that it is impracticable to argue that one of these books is "the best" book about social studies education. No single book can meet the needs of a diverse Canadian and American audience of beginning and experienced social studies teachers, social studies educators and curriculum developers who have different realities, needs and requirements for a social studies text. Instead the most logical route is to discuss which books best satisfy the different needs of an audience.

If the purpose is to identify a book that will prompt readers to reconsider their assumptions and understandings about the purposes, origins and nature of the social studies curriculum then Ross' book is the best choice. Ross is not focused on laying out the exact methods for achieving social transformation, instead he wants social studies educators to critically examine and become conscious and self-critical of the social and political realities inherent in their own practice. Ross believes that teachers are the key component in any

curriculum improvement and he hopes that this book provides social studies teachers with the perspectives, insights and knowledge necessary to achieve this goal. To Ross these perspectives and insights are the starting point towards transforming society, and Ross believes that teachers, the education system in general, and especially social studies education must play a significant part in this. Unlike Ross' book, Case and Clark's *Anthology* and Singer's *Social Studies FSS* do not provide a wide enough overview and critique of the current issues and debates in curriculum development and implementation. Sears and Wright's *Challenges & Prospects* includes various chapters that provide as wide an overview of issues as Ross' book, but the Sears and Wright book focuses exclusively on describing the Canadian context, and some of the chapters are slightly dated, although at the time they was published these chapters represented the cutting edge in social studies education.

In recommending Ross' book I don't want to give the impression that many of the arguments and claims made in the book would go unchallenged by social studies educators from all sides of the ideological spectrum. The book provides one view of the problems created by "thin" spectator democracies in North America and the education system. Ross' book would be criticized by the "Right" for being too progressive or radical—for its adherence to the totalized belief that societal problems are the logical outcome of socio-economic inequalities. Similarly, *The Social Studies Curriculum* can be criticized for being too idealistic and utopian in its belief that our schools are important sites of possibility for transforming society into a more democratic, egalitarian, inclusive and just place. The problems may be too immense and embedded in our current society to possibly expect that schools and teachers can be responsible for alleviating them. Lastly, Ross focuses the book on identifying and uncovering the problems in social studies education to serve as a starting place for teachers to begin their transformative work. Ross believes that the contributors to his book have provided a variety of pathways for those who want to take up the challenge and he admits that there are "multiple means" to achieve this end (p. 329). I would argue that Ross' book has clearly identified the problems in social studies education that have led to the current "spectator democracy", but he has not provided enough practical suggestions for teachers to understand how to actively begin working towards transforming society.

If the purpose is to identify a social studies book that blends theory with practice in a way that is relevant and instructive as a methods text for student teachers in a teacher education program, and as a professional resource for practicing teachers, then Case and Clark's *Anthology* would get the nod over both Singer's *Social Studies FSS* and Sears and Wright's *Challenges & Prospects*. The *Anthology* is able to achieve the difficult task of including the important foundational issues and problems, practical strategies, and visions for social studies while interweaving a constructivist, inquiry-based approach that "stands on the shoulders" of previous and contemporary theory. Singer's book does not include as much of a variegated perspective of the issues, problems and practical strategies for social studies, and the format of his book isn't as readable and accessible as the Case and Clark book. The main strengths of the *Anthology* are the diversity of respected teacher practitioners and teacher educators who write different chapters, an attractive, helpful format and style that includes many useful suggestions helpful to both practicing and beginning teachers, and lastly the wide coverage of important social studies issues, problems, methods and strategies that help beginning and practicing teachers achieve their goals and visions for transforming the way that social studies is taught and learned.

Despite its strengths, the *Anthology* is not flawless and should not be considered the ultimate collection of articles on social studies education. Although it captures many of the latest

developments in social studies theory and practice, inevitably it too will require revision and restructuring because many of the topics in social studies education are relatively new, and have a great deal of room for continued growth. Several topics in the book, like geographic thinking, are still in their infancy and will require more development and research. In the future, the *Anthology* may want to include contributions and important developments from social studies educators outside of Canada in order to make the book more relevant to a wider audience.

I have used the *Anthology* with student-teachers in social studies methods courses that I taught over the past two years and the majority of the students found the book very helpful and accessible. Those that did complain said that the *Anthology* includes too many chapters and topics to consider. Although I commiserated with the students, I also realized that their comments were as much about the overwhelming diversity of topics within the field of social studies as they were about the book. Furthermore, these students failed to comprehend the purpose of an anthology—they viewed the book as a body of knowledge they needed to master in their one semester methods course rather than a diverse collection of scholarly thinking on a given topic. The *Anthology* represents the diversity of topics that constitute social studies education, and it is up to the individual teacher to choose which topics are germane to their vision, goals and values for social studies education.

While all four books are excellent examples of recent scholarship on social studies curriculum, methods and issues, Ross' *The Social Studies Curriculum* and Case and Clark's *Anthology* represent the two best books for their respective purposes. Ideally the two books would be used in concert in a social studies methods course. Ross' book would help students contextualize and uncover the current problems and issues facing social studies educators, while Case and Clark's book could be used to provide students with the abilities, methods, tools and resources necessary for transforming social studies education, and hopefully society.

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