

## **The Unofficial Federal School Curriculum in Canada: Issues and Implications for Quebec Education**

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### **Abstract**

*This study seeks to address the ways in which the federal government has influenced elementary and secondary education throughout Canada. By producing teaching and learning material that is neither provincially sanctioned nor provincially focused, are federal agencies crossing constitutional jurisdictions in ways that compete with provincially prescribed curricula? While scholars have considered federal involvement in education from an administrative and legal standpoint, they have done less to examine the actual teaching and learning material produced by federal departments and agencies. Such teaching and learning material represents an unofficial federal curriculum in Canada aimed at promoting a pan-Canadian shared sense of identity. Using the Quebec Education Program as a case study for comparison, this study suggests that the material in many instances conflicts with the aims and intentions of provincial curricula.*

In Canada, the constitution clearly makes schooling the exclusive domain of the provinces. For matters of political and social autonomy, the federal government should not be interfering with provincial curricula; and, considering the financial cost of public schooling, one might suppose that it should be happy to stay out of matters within provincial jurisdiction. Yet, it is not. Inside of Canadian classrooms, and in particular social studies classrooms, it is not uncommon to find resources that are designed, produced, and distributed by federal agencies. Various federal departments have been involved since at least the mid-twentieth century in the production of educational material for Canadian public school students. Since the advent of the internet, the sheer amount of resources, lessons and lesson plans, and direct curricular content produced beyond the borders of the provinces – disseminated despite these borders – has compounded exponentially. By producing teaching and learning material for teachers that is neither provincially sanctioned nor provincially focused, are federal agencies crossing constitutional jurisdictions in ways that complement or compete with provincially prescribed curricula? Is the federal government, through teaching and learning material created by federal agencies, instilling a Canadian national ethos within the learning environments of provincially-run schools? Are the materials produced by federal agencies compatible with learning outcomes and expectations established by provincial ministries of education? Using the Quebec Education Program as a case study for comparison, this study argues that such material is in many instances incompatible with provincial curricula. As such, the federal government may be interfering with a provincial jurisdiction in ways that negatively influence provincial education programs.

The province of Quebec offers a unique and exceptional opportunity upon which to base a case study that juxtaposes and analyzes federally produced teaching and learning material with

a provincial curriculum. Perhaps in no other province is the question of nationalism and provincial rights of autonomy more contested. Moreover, a central public debate has occurred in Quebec in recent years about the extent to which the History and Citizenship curriculum promotes a type of federal nationalism that is incompatible with the province's history and heritage. In 2006, the newspaper *Le Devoir* opened that debate in an overview of the new Quebec Education Program that suggested that the History and Citizenship Education program was written to promote Canadian nationalism through the purposeful concealment of historical and contemporary events and issues that have led to the development of a Quebecois identity (Robitaille, 2006). While critics of such arguments immediately pointed out that the Quebec History and Citizenship Education program in fact promoted the type and quality of critical thinking skills that would have students question any one single historical narrative, the debate has never fully settled. It has been a valuable learning experience, and reminder, for history educators and policy makers about "how much the national question weighs on perceptions of history education" (Éthier & Lefrançois, 2011, p. 22).

The production of resources by federal agencies raises broader and wider issues about the role of the federal government in education in Canada. Teaching and learning material produced by the federal government may very well represent an unofficial curriculum in Canada that is neither provincially prescribed nor provincially sanctioned. In this regard, all of the provinces should be concerned about the ability of federal agencies to enter into classrooms via these resources and influence the way that provincial curricula are carried out. An unofficial federal curriculum can, by its very nature, be appropriated by teachers in all of the provinces. It is often, unsurprisingly, aimed at promoting a pan-Canadian shared sense of identity. The findings from this case study suggest that teachers, curriculum planners, and policy makers in the provinces ought to more carefully examine the material produced at the federal level in order to determine the extent to which that material offers a complementary or contradictory influence on the aims and objectives of provincial education programs.

### **The Limits of Existing Scholarship on Federal Involvement in Canadian Education**

While scholarship on federal involvement in education in Canada has been substantial, it has characteristically focused on policy issues, and in particular the question of what the federal government's role is, or should be, in public education. Studies on federal involvement in education can be divided into four distinct periods that correlate roughly with the history of federal involvement in education. In the period from Confederation to the Second World War, scholars focused on attempting to make sense of the division of powers in the BNA Act and the extent to which the federal government could intervene in matters concerning schooling and education (Anderson, 1918; Miller, 1913). These scholars tended to shy away from theoretical aspects of policy concerning the legitimacy of federal involvement in education, and were more concerned about the practical implications of such involvement. Scholarship on federal involvement in education tended to be produced by the government itself, and was usually linked to the development of public policy (Canada, 1940). One major exception was James Collins Miller's study on rural schools in Canada, in which he put forward the case for a national policy on education. "Our leaders in educational work must come to realize more fully," he stated, "that, while it may be necessary to work through the medium of provincial and local machinery, our educational problems are as truly national as provincial" (Miller, 1913, p. iii).

In the period from the early 1940s to the early 1960s, scholarship on federal involvement in education was marked by optimism in centralized planning and the promise of uniform and equal education throughout Canada. Encouraged by the federal government's eagerness to spend relatively vast amounts of money on education throughout the country, scholars began to ask not what the role of the federal government was in education policy, but rather how that role could be effectively played out. The first major study to focus exclusively on the question of federal involvement in Canadian education was James Collins Miller's, *National Government and Education in Federated Democracies*, published in 1940. Miller not only suggested that the federal government could play an important role in education, but more importantly that there was an urgent need for national leadership in the field of education. The provision for education, he argued, was a basic function of government in a democracy and, as such, required government to provide equitable distribution of educational opportunity. In order to do so, funding ought to come from the federal, not the provincial, government. Given the economic pressures of the 1930s, Miller thought it was clear that the time for a national program in education had come and that the provinces, which "continue to insist on their constitutional right to practically exclusive jurisdiction in educational matters," ought to "realize more fully the implications of such a position" (Miller, 1940, p. 593).

In an article concerning control and responsibility of schooling in Canada, M.P. Toombs (1955) offered another perspective and asked why provincial governments should retain control over public education. Looking at the relationship between provincial governments and local school boards, Toombs suggested that the sharing of rights, duties, and responsibilities are key to successful state control. Toombs did not, however, argue that the federal government should play any major role in this state control. In fact, the administration of schools, he argued, "should be kept as close as possible to the community the school serves." Control from above, he thought, inevitably leads to "resentment, blind obedience, and ineffective action" (M.P. Toombs, 1955, p. 49).

In the 1960s and 1970s, scholars turned away from an "either-or" debate and toward questions about federal-provincial relations and the rights of both the federal government to intervene in education and the provincial governments to manage their educational infrastructure autonomously. The scholarship in this period tended to be either suspicious of federal involvement in education or, on the other hand, lament the inability of the federal government to effectively put forward a "national" educational strategy. Nevertheless, scholars in this period tended to agree that the federal government had, by the 1960s, assumed a role in the education of Canadians.

Wilbert Nelson Toombs (1963) questioned whether provincial control over schooling could continue to prevail in Canada. Concentration of wealth, centralization of economic control, and new technologies working to collapse geographical space and bring Canadians closer together than ever before, he argued, raised serious doubt about whether education could continue to be a purely local concern. The Canadian government, he suggested, was moving away from "a narrow constitutionalism, provincialism and isolationism" and toward "a more clearly defined and realistic position in education" (W.N. Toombs, 1963, p. 21). In a 1966 study Toombs furthered his argument by presenting his analysis of House of Commons debates pertaining to education from the period 1867 to 1960. He concluded that the federal government was broadening its financial participation in education and that parliamentary debate on federal aid in education was increasing. Toombs suggested that an increasing concern with Canada as a nation and the link between education and the promotion of nationhood had increasingly become

a central debate in the House of Commons and, by 1960, had seen an increasingly number of politicians argue for direct federal responsibilities in education. He admitted, however, that the legality of federal involvement in education remained a question and that no immediate overhaul of how education operated seemed probable.

Gibson Tallentire (1971) argued along the same line and pointed out that while in the 1940s and 1950s there was no overall central planning in Canadian education, by 1966 the federal government had little doubt that education was a national concern and thus laid claim to four areas where it could involve itself: the diffusion of Canadian culture, workforce training, higher education, and research. While other scholars (Henderson, 1960; Hyman, 1968) pointed out the federal government's involvement in these areas, Tallentire added that the federal government had also established an administrative structure to coordinate federal activities and spending in education. The federal government was increasingly building a national educational infrastructure through cooperative federalism that was respectful of provincial autonomy.

Still, other scholars presented the increased role of the federal government in educational matters in a less favourable light. Ernest D. Hodgson's *Federal Intervention in Public Education* (1976) examined Ottawa's role in education from a different perspective, concluding that while the federal government did indeed have clearly established constitutional responsibilities in education, it had, in many instances, invaded the provinces' territory. Hodgson was ultimately critical of federal involvement, and suggested that the federal government should not overstep its role.

Since the 1980s, most scholars examining federal involvement in education have begun to ask why the federal government should not have a more important role in school policy. J.W. George Ivany and Michael E. Manley-Casimir (1981) produced a collection of essays based on a symposium at Simon Fraser University on the question of federal-provincial relations in education. With Canada poised to repatriate the constitution, the time seemed ripe to reopen debates from the 1860s concerning whose jurisdiction education should fall under. The essays in this collection ranged from constitutional reform, to issues of national and cultural identity among English, French, Aboriginal, and new Canadians, to models of alternative governance structures. The authors, who included a range of voices from academics to politicians, were virtually unanimous in their belief that schools are vital instruments of nation-building. As such, they should fall under the authority of the national government, which, in this case, meant the federal government.

In an update to his 1976 book, Ernest D. Hodgson's *Federal Involvement in Public Education* (1988) continued to criticize the federal government for its interventions in education. Like other scholars at the time, however, Hodgson consciously balanced his new assessment with praise for many of the federal government's initiatives. The federal government, he argued, did have a role to play in the education of Canadians.

Support for federal involvement continued into the 1990s. Philip Nagy and Judy Lupart (1994) compiled a collection of essays in a volume on the question of a "national role" in education. The essays range from Michael E. Manley-Casimir's attempt to find a common purpose for education throughout Canada to Heather Jane Robertson's rationale for the "obvious" role that the federal government should play. Such an argument has continued to be put forward by Charles Ungerleider (2003) and Robertson (2006, 2007). With the establishment of the Canadian Council on Learning in 2002, advocates for a national educational strategy have garnered much attention and support, but, as Robertson argues, while the idea for a national

education program is one “whose time keeps coming” (Robertson, 2006, p. 410), it has failed to be realized because of a consensus-building void in educational politics.

Reva Joshee and Lauri Johnson (Joshee, 1995; Joshee & Johnson, 2005, 2007) have further advanced our understanding of the federal government’s role in education by considering how it became interested in policies and programs designed to address Canada’s increasing cultural diversity. While initially concerned with the assimilation of immigrants in post-war Canada, by the 1970s the federal government had established a range of initiatives that promoted contradictory objectives. Joshee and Johnson’s research reveal a long history of federal involvement in cultural diversity and education and suggests that the federal government has been involved in the education of Canadians in more ways than we have previously imagined. According to Lorna McLean (2007) and Alan Sears (1996, 1997), one of the ways in which the federal government has played a major role in education is in its efforts to influence citizenship education. McLean examines debates in early twentieth century Canada surrounding efforts to create a national education bureau. She finds that proponents of a national education program grounded their arguments in a national, and patriotic, definition of citizenship. A national education program, could, according to them, work toward constructing a pan-Canadian definition of citizenship. Sears finds that although policy makers were rhetorically committed to wide citizenship participation from 1947 to 1982, actual policies and programs of the state were designed to restrict the role of citizen more in line with what he calls an “elitist” conception of citizenship. In other words, federal policies in citizenship education have worked to maintain the idea of a small group of leaders that are especially capable of ruling and governing (Sears, 1996). Sears furthermore strikingly finds that while the federal government often implemented its educational policies through official agreements with the provinces, it very often bypassed the provinces altogether through training programs for teachers, the funding of third party educational organizations, and the production and dissemination of teaching and learning resources.

### **Toward an Analysis of Federal Involvement in Education**

The present study intends to move away from a policy analysis of federal involvement in education and toward a more comprehensive examination of the form and content of the actual teaching and learning resources produced at the federal level. Since at least the mid-twentieth century, the federal government has been involved in the development of pedagogical material to be used in the schools. This material represents an unofficial federal curriculum that we seldom consider. While scholars over the last century have considered the division of constitutional power, the question of federal involvement, and the potential for new political frameworks in public schooling, the federal government itself has been building an impressive infrastructure of teaching and learning material that can be used in classrooms throughout Canada every day. A question that needs to be addressed in the literature, then, is not what role in education *should* the federal government play, but rather, what role *does* it play, and what are the implications for provincial school systems?

This study undertakes an analysis of teaching and learning material produced by federal government departments and compares it to the Quebec Education Program. The content analyzed is drawn from the education and teaching branches of federal government departments. The total number of lessons created at the federal level for Canadian schools number in the hundreds. The sample chosen here is restricted to lessons dealing with citizenship, history, and

social studies education. A sample of lessons has been isolated from five federal departments: Citizenship and Immigration Canada; Elections Canada; Veterans Affairs Canada; Statistics Canada; and Canadian Heritage. These departments were isolated not only because of the extent to which they are involved in producing teaching and learning material, but also because the teaching and learning material they produce focuses directly on the social sciences, and, in particular, lessons surrounding history and citizenship.

In order to determine the extent to which the resources produced at the federal level are in line with history and citizenship education in Quebec, this study juxtaposes the intentions and expected learning outcomes of lessons produced at the federal level with the standards, expectations, and vision of history and citizenship education as outlined in the Quebec Education Program for the social sciences (Quebec, 2004, 2007). It concentrates on the secondary school curriculum, which, in Quebec, spans from grades seven to eleven.

The overarching question asked was whether the content produced by the federal government is in line with the aims and objectives of the Quebec Education Program. In instances where it is not, the question then posed is whether the alternative aims and objectives produced at the federal level complement or contradict those of the Quebec Education Program. It was then determined what the contradictory aims and objectives promoted in the federally-produced material are. In all instances, the aims and objectives promoted in the federally-produced material were grouped, and three main themes, which are discussed below, were identified. They include the promotion of: a sanitized history; federal-centric history and citizenship; and, finally, mindless, uncritical patriotism.

A number of resources are not examined here, but should explicitly be made note of as they will be useful for further investigations into the teaching and learning material produced at the federal level. They are not examined because they do not deal directly with aspects of the social science curriculum examined in this study. Such resources include other subject-specific topics including mathematics, the sciences, health, and other subject areas found in school curricula across Canada. This material is produced by federal agencies such as the National Research Council of Canada, the Public Health Agency of Canada, and Environment Canada, to name only a few. Other federal agencies, such as Parks Canada and the Canadian Museum of Civilization Corporation, produce a plethora of material related to history and citizenship education. Furthermore, because these agencies have a mandate to produce educational material for the public, they are outside of the scope of the present study, which deals specifically with material produced for use in the provincially administered schools.

An analysis of all of the above material is needed in order to come to a more complete understanding of the ways in which the federal government is influencing teaching and learning in provincial school curricula. Why is the federal government involved in producing this material, and what are the learning outcomes for our students? The present study addresses this question through a representative sample of federal influence in education as it relates to the social science curriculum in Quebec.

### **The Patterns of Cultural Diffusion and National Education in Federally Produced Teaching and Learning Material**

What do we find, then, in the teaching and learning material produced by federal agencies? What follows is a consideration of this question in light of the material produced at several federal departments. In an analysis of that material, three themes can be identified in the

material and are discussed below. First, teaching and learning material produced at the federal level overwhelmingly offers a “sanitized” history. That is, the history presented is selective and tends to reinforce myths about Canada that do not touch on the complex and often troublesome realities of the country’s past. Second, an analysis of the material highlights a federal-centric history and citizenship curriculum that tends to overlook the provinces and regions, and the complexity of Canadian history and governance. Third, the teaching and learning material produced by federal agencies reinforce a mindless, uncritical patriotism. Students are not expected to think critically about questions of identity and belonging, but rather they are encouraged to celebrate a form of patriotic nationalism as it is articulated in the teaching and learning material produced.

### **Sanitized History**

“By selectively representing the histories of the many people who live in Canada,” historian Timothy J. Stanley (2006) argues, “by identifying certain people as Canadian and largely ignoring the others, and by sanitizing the histories through which some people have become dominant, public memory sets the stage for racist denial” (pp. 32-33). Debates concerning what histories should be taught in schools have long consumed history educators in Canada (see Clark, 2012). Since at least the 1960s, historians have argued about whose history and whose culture should be represented in the curriculum. The grand narrative of Canadian history, which has tended to produce myths about a progressive and mainly positive development of the nation, has largely been challenged by social historians who have emphasized the multitude of complex narratives that should inform the student’s sense of the Canadian past. In Quebec, History and Citizenship curriculum planners have certainly been impacted by these debates and have made a concerted effort to shift the curriculum away from “historical narratives [that] could be used to instill a national identity and a belief in the validity of the existing social and political order” and toward a “well-informed, open-minded social participation in the public sphere” (Quebec, 2007, p. 1).

Do the resources produced by federal agencies, however, reflect the changes that have taken place in the field of History? Do they reflect the aims of the Quebec Education Program? A lesson on the War of 1812 produced by Citizenship and Immigration Canada suggests not, and in fact highlights a sanitized history that tends to ignore some of Canada’s more troubling history, especially that concerning minority and immigrant groups (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2012b). Designed for grades 7 to 12, the lesson does not target any specific course in the Quebec curriculum, nor any high school curriculum in Canada. As such, it does not address the competencies or broad areas of learning outlined in the History and Citizenship components of the Quebec Education Program. The purpose of the lesson, according to the lesson plan, is to give students “greater knowledge of Canadian black history, the War of 1812 and slavery in general. It can also be used to launch discussions on the concepts of slavery, freedom and dignity” (para. 5). A step by step outline is provided, as well as the resources needed, including links to a video of a fictitious interview with Richard Pierpoint, who petitioned to form an all-black militia to fight alongside the British during the War of 1812, and a poster “celebrating” the contribution of black soldiers during the war.

To what extent does this lesson correspond to and reflect the expectations of the Quebec Education Program? By juxtaposing the lesson with the Quebec Education Program itself, we can conclude that the extent is minimal. One of the primary goals of the History and Citizenship

curriculum is to have students examine the complexity of history. Quoting Robert V. Daniels, the Quebec Education Program states explicitly that, “a good historical sense appreciates how rarely, if ever, clear conflicts appear between good and evil, black and white. It recognizes the differences among the many distinct shades of grey. This is the most important lesson that history can offer its students for coping with their world” (Quebec, 2004, p. 302). On this mark, the lesson offered by Citizenship and Immigration Canada falls short. The lesson does not go into any sort of complexity, but rather is set up as a lesson in commemoration. By “celebrating” the contribution of black soldiers in the “Fight for Canada” (a country, it should be pointed out, that did not exist in 1812), the lesson makes the conflict appear to be a clear one between good and evil, establishing the type and quality of black and white thinking that Daniels’ warns of.

Indeed, whether we can say that the lesson recognizes complexity at all is at the very least questionable. While one of the goals of the lesson is to have students gain “greater knowledge” of slavery, the history of slavery is presented itself in a way that ignores British America’s involvement in perpetuating the selling and trading of slaves. In a link to a trivia game about black history in Canada, one of the questions asks what certificate was given to blacks in 1783 who had joined the British during the American Revolution (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2012c). The answer provided is “The Certificate of Freedom,” leading to the suggestion that black “Canadians” fought alongside their fellow “Canadians” in 1812 for their freedom from a tyrannical American system of slavery. Yet, there is no mention of the fact that slavery in the British Empire was still legal and continued into the 1830s, and that real “freedom” was thus impossible. Moreover, the lesson ignores recent historical research which demonstrates that many blacks in British North America were in fact escaping south, to northern U.S. states, where slavery had already been abolished (Robinson, 2010). Complexity in the history of slavery in North America is not embraced, and the simplistic lesson offered by Citizenship and Immigration Canada offers a sanitized history which does not adhere to the requirements of the Quebec Education Program.

### **Federal-Centric History and Citizenship**

In addition to promoting a sanitized history, teaching and learning material produced at the federal level overwhelmingly promote a federal-centric history and citizenship curriculum. One need not look any further than the material produced by Elections Canada. One of the most elaborate set of resources offered by this federal agency is the *Canada at the Polls!* kit. The kit includes two official Elections Canada polling stations, two ballot boxes, situation cards and notes, sample ballot papers, sample voters lists, tally sheets, pencils, and other material that would be found at a typical Elections Canada polling station. Included with the kit is a binder of suggested lessons for teachers, which can also be found online (Elections Canada, 2012b). Teachers can also access accompanying documents, audio/visual aids, and links to further resources.

The quality of the teaching and learning material produced by Elections Canada in the *Canada at the Polls!* kit is, in terms of pedagogy, excellent. There is no doubt that much time and effort has been put into the making of this material, and, indeed, continues to be put into making it a valuable resource for teachers, who are encouraged to provide feedback to Elections Canada on how the material can be made better. That said, Quebec educators should question the extent to which Elections Canada teaching and learning resources can, or should, be integrated into the History and Citizenship curriculum. The material itself is not aligned to the Quebec



Citizenship Education program, nor is it to any provincial civics or citizenship education curriculum. Elections, and democracy in general, are presented in a purely federal light and therefore not representative of the more complete electoral experience of most Canadians.

In many respects the federal bend should come as no surprise, as Elections Canada is, after all, a federal agency. However, when we remember that schooling does not fall under the mandate of the federal government, questions arise as to why the federal government is not attempting to align the teaching and learning material it produces with provincial curricula. In the case of the Quebec Education Program, while Elections Canada material meets program content designed to teach students about the formation of the Canadian federation (Quebec, 2007, pp. 51-54), it fails to meet the more substantial program content designed to teach students about Quebec society and politics (Quebec Education Program, 2007, pp. 55-63).

Part of the reason why provincial issues are overlooked may be in either an overt or covert effort to promote a Canadian national identity through this material. The argument can certainly be made that symbols of “banal nationalism” (Billig, 1995) abound in Elections Canada teaching material. The resources, activities, and material culture of the kits themselves are replete with maple leaves, caricatures of Parliament Hill, Canadian flags, and other federal symbols of nationalism. Very little learning, if any, of provincial or municipal elections and systems of government can be taught or learned through these resources. The extent to which governance in Canada is a symbiotic relationship between the provinces and the federal government is, despite its centrality in the history of Canada, simply not considered.

A federal agency that attempts to consider the importance of the provinces in its teaching and learning material, however, is Statistics Canada. In 1920, the Dominion Bureau of Statistics, which would become Statistics Canada, established an Education Division charged with the statistical analysis of public education throughout Canada. Since its inception, it has also had the dual purpose of providing educational material regarding statistics in Canada. In our own time, through a partnership with the Council of Ministers of Education, Statistics Canada has developed the Canadian Education Statistics Council, which reports on issues in education, training, and literacy. It also disseminates teaching and learning material to schools, school boards, and a variety of what it calls “educational stakeholders.”

Its online repository of lesson plans and activities for teachers and students is an impressive array of educational material that touches upon virtually every aspect of provincial curricula throughout Canada. Statistics Canada’s public outreach program ended in June 2012, but it continues to house its repository of teaching and learning material on an archived website (Statistics Canada, 2012). Lessons produced by Statistics Canada can be broken into themes, including Aboriginal Studies, Agriculture, Arts and Culture, Business Studies and Economics, Canadian Studies, Career Education, Civics, Environment, Family Studies and Home Economics, Geography, Health and Physical Education, History, Information and Communications Technology, and Language, Law, and Mathematics.

Through an analysis of this material, we can conclude that Statistics Canada houses some of the most value-neutral teaching and learning material produced at the federal level. That is, in many cases the data is left to speak for itself, and many of the lessons are geared toward teaching students how to use statistics. In some cases, however, Statistics Canada, like other federal agencies, covertly teaches a federal-centric civic nationalism aimed at propagating and instilling a Canadian national identity. It does this for the most part by promoting a sense of Canadian national awareness. While individual provinces can be studied through the teaching and learning material produced by Statistics Canada, the lesson plans characteristically discourage a study of

the provinces in isolation and instead encourage the study of provincial statistics in a pan-Canadian comparative nature.

Whether overtly ignoring the importance of the provinces in Canadian governance, as seen through the material produced by Elections Canada, or covertly marginalizing a study of the provinces in favour of pan-Canadian analyses, as seen through the material produced by Statistics Canada, the federal government is involved in the making of federal-centric history and citizenship teaching and learning material. The potential consequence, if relying solely on this material to teach the lessons described above, is for the student to obtain an incomplete understanding of the structure and workings of Canadian governance. Moreover, the student is more apt to develop a federal-centric perspective of matters concerning his or her history and citizenship.

### **Mindless, Uncritical Patriotism**

If the Quebec History and Citizenship curriculum attempts to produce critical thinkers who are infected with the ability to question and assess their sense of identity and belonging, then much of the material offered by federal agencies provides the antidote. Citizenship and Immigration Canada, for example, has produced a vast array of material in which patriotism and nationalism are glorified and exalted as pillars of citizenship, and little of it is to be reflected upon critically. Much of this material is offered as “A Fun Path to Learning” on its website, which includes resources available directly to children for use without the filter of the teacher or parent (Citizenship and Immigration, 2012a). Indeed, Citizenship and Immigration Canada’s website is replete with resources in which patriotic games and activities do little to promote critical thinking. Games include matching “Canadian” symbols such as beavers, Mounties, and the Queen’s crown, as well as multiple-choice trivia on “Great Canadians” and prime ministers. One activity designed by the federal department involves students taking an oath of citizenship and singing “O Canada” as they recreate and participate in a reaffirmation ceremony.

Perhaps nowhere is the promotion of a mindless, uncritical patriotism seen better than in the resources produced by the Department of Canadian Heritage. A lesson on the National Flag of Canada Day, for example, (Canadian Heritage, 2012a) celebrates the history of the making of the Canadian flag. “Red and white were designated as Canada’s official colours in 1921 by His Majesty King George V,” (para. 1) students are reminded, and National Flag of Canada Day “is a perfect opportunity to celebrate our flag and what it stands for: a Dominion that is the envy of the world” (para. 1). Teachers can order a National Flag of Canada Day poster for their classrooms, as well as other classroom posters such as “The Proclamation of the National Flag of Canada by Her Majesty the Queen (1965),” and “The Declaration of National Flag of Canada Day (1966).”

In one section of the Canadian Heritage website, teachers can find material concerning the Monarchy in Canada (Canadian Heritage, 2012b). Classroom posters can be ordered from a special “Teachers’ Corner” created for the Queen’s Diamond Jubilee in 2012 (Canadian Heritage, 2012c). Teachers are offered *A Crown of Maples: Constitutional Monarchy in Canada*, which can be downloaded digitally or ordered in a print version. The book itself is a celebration of the role and powers of the Canadian crown, and includes a section on “God Save The Queen,” which, students are reminded, is a Canadian royal anthem. Elementary students are encouraged to celebrate the Diamond Jubilee through material provided on the website, including a printable Diamond Jubilee Emblem “for your students to colour!” (para. 13).

Canadian Heritage certainly does not shy away from its mandate to promote Canadian patriotism. Indeed, it would be difficult to characterize the teaching and learning resources produced by Canadian Heritage as a form of “banal nationalism.” Its use of symbols and images as a way to promote a sense of Canadian identity is clear and overt, and teachers are themselves encouraged to take part in that effort. But whose sense of Canadian patriotism is being promoted? Who decides what constitutes the defining features of being Canadian? The Quebec Education Program, for its part, does not. While students are expected to “discover the roots of their personal and collective identity” (Quebec, 2007, p. 304), they are expected to do so critically while also “seeking to discover the origin of difference and specificity and the factors that explain them ... [understanding] that their identity is both personal and plural and that pluralism is not incompatible with the sharing of values” (Quebec, 2007, p. 306). The resources produced by Canadian Heritage, however, are not designed for a critical interpretation of Canadian identity. While much can be learned about Canadian politics, government, and constitutional monarchy in Canada, the teaching and learning material fails to meet the expectation of critical citizenship espoused in the Quebec Education Program.

Teaching and learning material produced by Veterans Affairs Canada is also problematic in this regard. Much of the material can be ordered directly by teachers free of charge via their website through an online shopping cart format (Veterans Affairs Canada, 2012a). Veterans Affairs Canada offers a slate of resources concerning the contribution of Canadian soldiers to the making of modern Canada. Their focus is especially on lessons revolving around Veterans’ Week and Remembrance Day – with a special teacher’s guide prepared each year for the week. Veterans Affairs Canada offers a rich array of material, including pamphlets, postcards, DVDs, games, and a special Veteran’s Week newspaper covering stories from the war field from the First World War to the Afghanistan mission. Like other material produced by federal agencies, however, the lessons created by Veterans Affairs Canada overwhelmingly emphasize a mindless, uncritical patriotism aimed at commemoration and honour as opposed to the focus on critical thinking promoted by the Quebec Education Program.

A lesson plan on the liberation of Belgium, for example, states that one of the specific learning outcomes is that students “should remember, honour, and appreciate the achievements and sacrifices made by Canadians during WWII” (Veterans Affairs Canada, 2012b). Such a subject-centred approach to the study of the Second World War is ultimately not compatible with the approach to the study of history promoted in the Quebec Education Program. Whereas the lesson above presents history as a series of facts and events that the student “should” remember and honour, the Quebec Education Program is quite explicit in its assertion that the student must not “memorize a simplified, student-friendly version of the academic knowledge produced and constructed by historians” (Quebec, 2004, p. 295). Rather, according to the Quebec Education Program, students should be encouraged to reflect upon history and come to their own conclusions and decisions to honour or appreciate it.

There exists a wealth of other teaching and learning material and resources produced at the federal level not examined here. Indeed, the sheer amount of material is impressive. Federal agencies’ teaching and learning resources represent a significantly large and free repository of resources at the disposal of teachers across Canada. Nevertheless, they do present some challenges to teaching and learning that must be considered before they are used. What impact do these externally produced curricular resources have on provincial curricula?

## **Issues and Implications for Quebec Education**

In the case of Quebec, one key conclusion is that the federally-produced resources contain overt and sometimes hidden messages that are incompatible with the aims and learning intentions set out by the Quebec History and Citizenship Education curriculum. The Quebec Education Program promotes a critical conception of citizenship, which does not assume that citizenship is a socio-cultural construct that must be transmitted to students. The unofficial federal curriculum overwhelmingly does. In fact, in many cases the lessons created at the federal level are based on an out of date pedagogical idea of culture as something that can be more or less defined and possessed, and thus passed on or transmitted to students. Moreover, the moral and ethical questions that allow students to critically think about what constitutes good citizenship have already been answered by the makers of federal teaching and learning resources. For example, the poster celebrating the role of black “Canadians” during the War of 1812 implies that the good black Canadian contributed to the war effort in 1812. The learning outcomes and objectives presented by Veterans Affairs Canada imply that the good Canadian student today should commemorate and honour the effort of soldiers who liberated Belgium. And perhaps they indeed should. But pedagogically speaking, students are not being encouraged, through these federal resources, to analyze and interpret the historical evidence in order to critically engage with the material; and they are not arriving at these conclusions themselves; rather they are being linearly directed to those conclusions.

In some cases, the messages teachers are encouraged to deliver are based on created or imagined histories that may or may not be supported by the available evidence in the historical record. In fact, fake records have even been created. For example, stories of war and peacekeeping are assembled in a pseudo-newspaper, entitled “Canada Remember Times,” that is developed each year by Veterans Affairs Canada. These stories are fun and interesting for children and adolescents, and they are indeed engaging, but Quebec teachers should make no mistake: they are not real news stories. Indeed, teachers throughout Canada clearly need to question the usefulness of presenting secondary source material in history as though it were primary source material. What’s more, when considering the wealth of real newspapers from the actual time available in libraries and archives across the country, and increasingly getting easier to access through digital technologies, the reasoning behind the production of pseudo-newspapers as a way to teach history in the classroom is furthermore questionable. In terms of promoting historical thinking, these resources produced at the federal level fall short of the mark, and students may be better served if teachers stayed away from the fake articles and stories and instead integrated real ones into their teaching.

Such an assertion is not meant to suggest that the intentions of the developers of this material are necessarily malevolent. But, ultimately, it is not the intentions teachers should be concerned about. Rather, it is the results. And the results may indeed be less than satisfying, and perhaps dangerous. The standards, expectations, and vision of history and citizenship education promoted at the federal level is often out of line, and in some cases at odds, with that of the provinces. If teachers decide to use these materials, then, they may be inadvertently handing over curricular development decisions to federal agencies that have no accountability to the provincial constituency they serve. That said, it is not my assertion that teachers should not use these resources. All resources, whether sanctioned by the Ministry of Education or not, contain forms of biases and hidden messages. In this regard, federally-produced resources, like all teaching and learning material that enters into the classroom, should be used critically by teachers. Further

research is needed, and could be helpful to Quebec teachers, which identifies the strengths and weaknesses of federally-produced material. This would allow teachers to build upon and supplement the material in ways that can make it more consistent with the Quebec Education Program.

Finally, and perhaps the most provocative conclusion we can draw from an analysis of this material, is that despite schooling being the constitutional domain of the provinces, we indeed have a federal school curriculum in Canada. It is one that is produced at the federal level, by federal employees. The lessons promote the civic interests of the federation, and it is a curriculum that can be shared by school children in every province and territory in the country. It is a curriculum that transcends provincial borders, or ignores them, and it certainly ignores the legal jurisdiction over schooling in Canada. By doing so, the federal government is engaging in a deliberate attempt to instil a Canadian national ethos within the learning environments of provincially-run schools. Through the appropriation of the unofficial federal curriculum, Canadian students are encouraged to acquire a sense of national identity and national citizenship as seen through a federal perspective.

The existence of an unofficial federal curriculum in Canada should at the very least raise our awareness to the multiple ways in which children are influenced to identify themselves as Canadians. This unofficial federal curriculum adds a layer of content neither anticipated nor often desired by provincial authorities. Teaching and learning material produced by federal agencies is aimed at promoting the integration of citizens into a national society and culture. The unofficial curriculum provides for a shared national teaching and learning experience inside of Canadian classrooms, and can reinforce notions of national belonging rooted in a federal identity.

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