

A Case for National Standards in Canadian School-Geography

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Canadian school-geography has over the past two decades become so detached from its academic parent discipline as to become irrelevant to the real geopolitical world. This irrelevance is poignant at a time when the very nation has been tottering on the brink of disintegration over the issues of Quebec sovereignty and Western Canadian autonomy. Ironically this threat of breakup has long been coloured by the geography of education, which has historically contraindicated the possibility of devising such national goals in education, as might support and enhance the economic and cultural basis for Canada's continuing survival as a viable political entity. After surveying the geohistorical factors in the balkanization of Canadian curricular authority, this paper proposes a national, educational policy framework for systematically raising the geocultural literacy of the general populace. Experience from other advanced industrial nations such as France, Germany and Japan indicates that centrally sponsored geocultural literacy-initiatives are a precondition for national economic development, cultural integration and political survival. The USA has recently followed suit. Canadians must do likewise if they are to achieve intellectual and moral occupancy of the national territory.

Highlights of the Contemporary Situation in Canadian School Geography

The Primacy of Ontario

Presently in all of Canada—according to information deducible from Baine (1991)—there are 47 school-geography courses listed on

the official provincial rosters. None occur below grade 7 of elementary school; 90% are to be found at the high-school level. Only 11 courses are mandatory. Ontario offers the greatest total for provincial courses—14 in all, while *Alberta offers not a single course*. Although the province of Prince Edward Island offers 9 courses, Ontario's population is 78 times greater. Thus if one were to compute and compare *geography-courses x population* products for all the provinces, one would infer that Ontario accounts for about 55% of Canada's school-geography. Given Ontario's primacy in area, population and its relatively senior history (settlement being 2–3 times as old as that of the provinces to its west), the story of Canada's geography-education (geodidactics) becomes largely Ontario's story. Given its agglomerative mass, the geodidactic fortunes of Ontario, of necessity, also impact upon those of the other provinces.

Contraindications for National Coordination of Educational Policy in Canada

The constitutional division of federal-provincial powers, with exclusive responsibility for education reserved to the provinces under presently volatile and indeterminate cost-sharing arrangements, has also preempted the possibility of a defined federal presence for coordinating Canadian educational policy. Bluntly stated, without a national educational policy, no matter how loose or tenuous, Canada cannot develop a uniquely national culture, or project a sense of national mission. This state of affairs was prophetically pinpointed, almost two decades ago, by OECD's *unsolicited critique* of Canadian educational policy in which the observations were made that

In vain the [Canadian] school searches for a particular specified set of knowledge, attitudes and values that it should impart. Its terms of reference can no longer be [Canadian] society as it is given at present... The fact that there is, and can be, no Federal Department of Education has created a vacuum in educational...decision-making. Education is always seen as a tool for "something else" and decisions relating to education are mostly made by "someone else"...Canada needs national goals in education. (OECD, 1975, *passim*)

But matters could not have been otherwise and the criticism, however merited, belies an ignorance of certain gross facts of historical geography, pertaining to Canada's relative youth as a political entity and its enormous size—to say nothing of the highly vari-

egated origins of its cultural streams. In the matter of youth, two prairie provinces (Alberta and Saskatchewan) were not created until 1905. Newfoundland joined in 1949, while Quebec—possessing one-third of the nation's population of 27 million, has not altogether assented to its present legal role in Canada and may actually be on the verge of seceding. The ongoing difficulty of establishing effective political-economic occupance, to say nothing of providing a common educational acculturation-experience for its citizenry, becomes apparent when one also considers Canada's relatively small population, as compared, for example, to that of Germany. Although Germany is only one-fifth the size, it contains 15.6 times the population and has 70 times the population density of the combined areas of British Columbia and Alberta—Canada's two westernmost Cordilleran provinces. This same region of 1.6 million sq. km. and 5.7 million persons, happens to employ only a single geography-educator (i.e., a geographer employed by a university faculty of education to train future teachers of secondary-school geography). The fact that, at present, only about five such geography-educators are to be found in all of Anglo-Canada—down from a figure of over 30 in the 1970s (Thomas, 1990)—is paralleled by considerable geocultural illiteracy on the part of a large segment of the populace at large. Indeed, this segment tends to be unaware of the gross facts already alluded to, and that most of the nation's greater (and therefore contested) per capita educational expenditures vis a vis other industrialized nations, are attributable to issues of distance, terrain, severe climate and diseconomies of scale, that are not nearly as problematical for Germany or Japan, both of which are seen as "more efficient" in terms of returns for educational expenditures.

The necessarily costly, horizontal duplication of services at the provincial levels also reverberates vertically, so that the Canadian educational scene is characterized by numerous actors operating at incommensurable scale-levels. These actors include provincial ministries, school districts, separate schools, parental groups, teachers' subject councils, teachers' unions, faculties of education, trustees' associations and so forth. Given such *balkanization* of the infrastructure, rarely are these actors able to communicate with one another in meaningful ways. The degree of balkanization, of course, has varied from province to province in ways that reflect historical and geographical predisposing factors. Ontario, for example, has understandably been able to articulate considerably better linkages amongst its various actors than has BC. The electronic highways now coming into existence are overcoming the physical obstacles, but not necessarily the political ones. Ontario school-geography is currently under severe siege by bureaucrats who want to eliminate

school-subjects before grade 10 in favour of the acquisition of “self-esteem” and generic “social skills”.

Although BC has not reduced its present course offerings in school-geography despite assaults from other curriculum areas seeking to displace geography, it must be remembered that the level of offerings has been quite low to begin with. At present, BC ranks the second lowest in Canada, for both the number of both mandatory and elective course offerings in school-geography. Only Alberta, which offers zero full-year courses on both counts, ranks lower. New political possibilities for expanding BC’s geography course-offerings are in the wind, but it is unlikely that any new offerings can approach the number of geography courses that existed prior to 1982—the year in which the greatest depredations took place. The net resultant of the various currents and countercurrents impinging upon public geocultural consciousness, many of them dimly apprehended or not apprised at all, can arguably be stated quite starkly.

On the very eve of the Quebec referendum of October 1995, Canadians at large continued to be blissfully unaware of the multifarious ways in which *Realgéographie* had shaped every aspect of their individual and collective lives—even as they awaited the possible disintegration of their nation.

Some Critical Historical Factors in the Genesis and Subsequent Fortunes of Canadian Geodidactics

Despite the problems posed by the realities of Canadian physical geography (or perhaps because of them), geography-education experienced a golden age of pre-eminence—especially in Ontario, at one time the English-speaking world’s Valhalla for geography-teaching—particularly in the 25-year period from 1960 to 1985. Ironically, this period was characterized by a fundamental lack of systematic research-base for its didactics. Also strange to say, the emergence of a much more scientific didactics circa 1985, seems to have cued the reversal and near-eclipse of school-geography’s fortunes. The credit for these later research-initiatives belongs to *non-geographers*. They are not altogether responsible for the subsequent problems of school-geography.

Beginnings

Historically, *the potential role of geography-education in nation-building* was promulgated by Griffith Taylor, founder of Canada’s first academic geography department at Toronto in 1936. It was he and his associates who infused hundreds of World War II veterans, re-

turning to university after 1945, with the conviction that the universal diffusion of systematic geographical knowledge would make for *a stronger nation* and a better world. Many of these veterans, upon entering the teaching profession, captured positions of the highest influence and shepherded the first-ever introduction of modern geography into a Canadian school in 1947. Within 15 years, Ontario was to become the bastion of school-geography in North America (Thomas, 1992). This pre-eminence was signalled by the creation of North America's first chair in geography-teaching methods by Professor Bill Sager at Toronto in 1961, an event paralleled by the creation of the province's first school-inspectorate for geography to ensure that such state-of-the-art didactics (for the times) were implemented by the schools.

The High Mark of Geography-Teacher Certification in Canada

The Toronto geography-didactics training program culminated in two forms of certification—a *Type B* for generalist teachers possessing ordinary academic qualifications; and a specialist's *Type A*, prerequisite for: teaching senior grades, curriculum writers, textbook writers, department heads, geography coordinators and other administrators. It was this two-tiered induction into geography-teaching, not to be found in any other province, that largely accounted for geography's temporal success as the most popular of non-mandatory school-subjects. The Type A program, soon copied by other Ontario universities, was in its early years, rigorous in the extreme. For admission (especially to the Toronto program), it required a geography honours B.A., or Master's degree with higher grade-point averages than the faculties of medicine or law were able to demand. Program elements included 90 instructional hours based on the Harvard intensive seminar approach, field work, numerous projects and presentations, practicum, then a tripartite examination of one's: 1) comprehensive knowledge of substantive geography; 2) knowledge of geopedagogy as demonstrated by one's ability to set up the micro-elements of any topic for optimal inductive discovery; 3) classroom teaching-performance as evidenced by the observation reports of a school-geography inspector. In such reports the candidate had to be rated as a "superior" teacher on a bell-curve whereon 70% of all teachers were rated as "average", which meant "good". Failure rates were high and often included persons who already possessed M.A. or Ph.D. degrees. The Type A system was elitist in the extreme, but it did produce battalions of shock-troopers whose proven erudition and enthusiasm compensated for any lack of didactics research-training. Affective domain considerations were

largely ignored in favour of knowledge of subject-matter. "Education as a field of study was regarded with scorn as intellectually jejune and unworthy of serious investigation" (Baine, 1988). What mattered were the methodological treatises of the British school; the total range of geophilosophical thought from Kant through Brunhes, Hartshorne (1961) and Broek (1965); and the structural psychology of Jerome Bruner (1962, 1963) that justified school-geography as a unique subject by virtue of its geosynthetic gestalt configurations. Ways of systematically testing the efficacy of these various notions from the learner's standpoint were not dealt with, but left to "experience".

Codification of the "Practical Knowledge" of Geography Teachers

Such *teachers' practical knowledge*, although not as well articulated and elaborated as today, was intuitively perceived as being very important. The geography-inspectors acted as cross-pollinators in conveying the most promising fruits of collective experience. All that this distilled, collective wisdom required was systematic codification to render it academically palatable for the present decade. The needed academic codification was initiated around 1985, by Floyd Robinson, an applied psychologist from the renowned Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE), who had proven himself capable of establishing productive relationships with classroom teachers, at a time when educational theorists were suspect. On the basis of intensive observation of numerous, experienced master-teachers, Robinson (1985) phenomenologically derived certain fundamental structures that optimized students' inquiry and problem-solving abilities. It was these structures codified by the academic, Robinson, that were soon to be used to reorganize the provincial school-geography curricula (OME, 1988), such materials being the first, truly research-enhanced geography-curriculum documents in North America. It should be noted, however, that considerable codification of an *administrative* character had already been accomplished in the previous two decades, beginning around 1968, by the geography consultants and coordinators (with status and remuneration exceeding that of senior professors) who had been appointed to meet the teacher in-service needs of expanding school boards.

The Politicization of Geodidactics

Such expansion had planted the seeds for the subsequent decline in school-geography's fortunes. This expansion was not the result of population pressure, but of bureaucratic rationalization and decentralization of ultimate authority. In 1968, hundreds of small school-dis-

tricts, many revolving around a single high school, had been amalgamated into 40 larger county boards with a view to “equalizing educational opportunities”. Such entailed eliminating the costly competition between hundreds of school-boards for teachers, one-third of whom changed schools in any given year, in pursuit of better salaries and working conditions. But in the process, the hierarchical central control-apparatus also produced 40 clones of itself, in effect creating a patronage system, to be known as “the big blue machine”, for the ruling Conservative party. The central geography-inspectorate disappeared, devolving its authority, to evaluate teachers and to nominate and eventually *train(!)* candidates for Type A certification, to the local county superintendents who had little knowledge of, or sympathy for, geography. This process, initiated in 1968, reached its apogee by the mid 1980s, at which time the Type A certificate-programs offered by the Ontario universities had all but disappeared. They were replaced by semi-formal discussion workshops, offered by local school boards, and centrally approved for credentialing purposes. It was this politicization of the process of higher teacher-certification, with its preference for adept school-community public-relations, over effective teaching skills, that gradually manifested as a serious, classroom deterioration of geographic program-content and quality. Ontario’s politicization of pedagogy became a contagion that was to infect the entire nation, in keeping with the “copy cat” ripple effect described in Thomas, 1988. Herein is a principal reason for the current perception in many quarters, that geography is a trivial pursuit, merely concerned with matters of location.

Void of Course

In the discourse of astronomy, a star that has lost its lustre is said to have gone *void of course*. Something similar seems to have happened with the Ontario school-geography situation, which is now a waning star slowly slipping into its nadir. The reverberative effects of this decline can not help but impact upon the fortunes of school-geography in the other provinces. Most of the Ontario master-teachers that Robinson observed have since disappeared, many having taken early retirement under special incentives in effect from 1985–1988. Their younger replacements, for reasons indicated previously, seem to have been insufficiently qualified and trained to do justice to Robinson’s geodidactic structures (Robinson, 1988). Due to the impact of the USA–Canada Free Trade Accord and the economic problems of Germany, Japan and C.I.S., Ontario’s economic recession has been the most serious in Canada. OISE, which was

threatened with closure many times over the years, was finally closed down in 1995. Many (costly) leadership positions in school-geography have disappeared, due to ever-escalating cutbacks in financing by the debt-laden, federal government. Despite the loss of this intellectual leadership, the existing curriculum documents of Ontario (although under intense attack by governmental forces desirous of eliminating discrete school subjects prior to grade 10) continue to provide *ballast* for school-geography that may see it through the present economic ebb-tides. Mr. Mike Harris' government in coming to power in 1995, intimated that it would maintain the "reform" aspects of the previous government's educational policies, that is to say reduce educational spending. How that will specifically affect the details of Ontario's present geography programs is not altogether clear. The rest of Canada is not so fortunate. The double threat of diminished financial base, plus an absence of officially sanctioned and research-based didactics, may sound the death knell for school-geography programs that were weakly established in the first instance. In any case, in the absence of national goals for education, geography-education—but for the countercurrents swelling across the border—would likely continue to be irrelevant to the *Realgeographie* of nation-building.

Irrelevance of Current Canadian Educational Policy to National Development

The federal government's avowed intention to further decrease transfer payments to the provinces has a political rationality that transcends the need to reduce the national debt. Some of the unarticulated rationale for the well-documented *feeling-good* movement in North American education [which has been implicitly derided by Neil Postman, 1985] may have a psycho-political basis. One-third of school students, but only 2 percent of school teachers in North America are innately *sensing-perceiving, concrete-thinking* types [SP typology], possessing aptitudes and interests that are not really met by the public schools as presently constituted (Kiersey 1985, 155). It is the attempt to keep these students in schools, so as to reduce very high drop-out rates [sometimes in the order of 40% before high school graduation (see Valpy, 1993)] that has inspired the recent watering down of provincial educational curricula in Ontario and British Columbia. The intent has been to have cognitive-domain (i.e., purely intellectual) tools serve affective-domain (i.e., social and emotional) needs. In point of fact, SP students might be better served by vocational, technical and technological training-schools at the secondary and post-secondary levels. And so would the Canadian

economy, as Canadian education is perceived by its critics as not yielding a reasonable return on its annual \$50 billion cost—a sum that would pay off the national debt (Wilson, 1994). At 2 percent, the Canadian level of participation in non-academic, vocational education at the upper secondary-school level, is the lowest among so-called advanced nations. [Germany's participation rate is 80 percent, according to 1991 statistics produced by the Canadian Labour Market and Productivity Centre. See Figure 1.] The resultant dearth of trained workers capable of making substantial contributions to *basic industrial* output reflects a popular prejudice that only academic education has any value. As a result, many universities are overcrowded with persons, possessing interests and aptitudes of an artisan or blue-collar character. They are intent upon obtaining academic diplomas perceived to have high-prestige, but which may prove to be irrelevant to the job market in a changing world that demands ever higher levels of technological expertise.

Instead of watering down high school curricula, and pressuring universities to be all things to all people, in order to have cognitive tools serve affective ends [which are better met by co-curricular tools—as occurs in the private schools], it might be better to release the human-resource potential of SP temperaments by providing *state-of-the-art* vocational, technical, technological and informatics training networks, as France and Germany are now doing. Historical experience across a number of jurisdictions—especially in Europe—indicates that *differentiated* institutional structures can be far more effective, than omnibus institutions, in providing more relevant and “different strokes for different folks”. Omnibus institutions often wind up catering to the lowest common denominator of natural aptitudes, whatever their character, and to the highest common factor of the affective-domain street culture. The differentiated approach also tends to entail *more electives* in any given subject. Toronto's Board of Education, for example, permits a *high school of commerce* to offer credit courses in *commercial geography* and *geography of tourism*, a *collegiate* (academic high school) to use *computerized data bases to teach world regional geography*, and a *technical high school* to offer elementary *cartographic techniques* as part of its surveying course. Another school board, some 30 kilometres away, which oversees only one type of high school, of the omnibus variety, offers none of the forementioned geography courses. The main point in all this foregoing discussion is that it is easier for relevant and substantial geography programs to take root in differential institutional settings than in the more prevalent omnibus mode. The use of the phrase *core-program* muddies the waters, as it has been all too often blithely

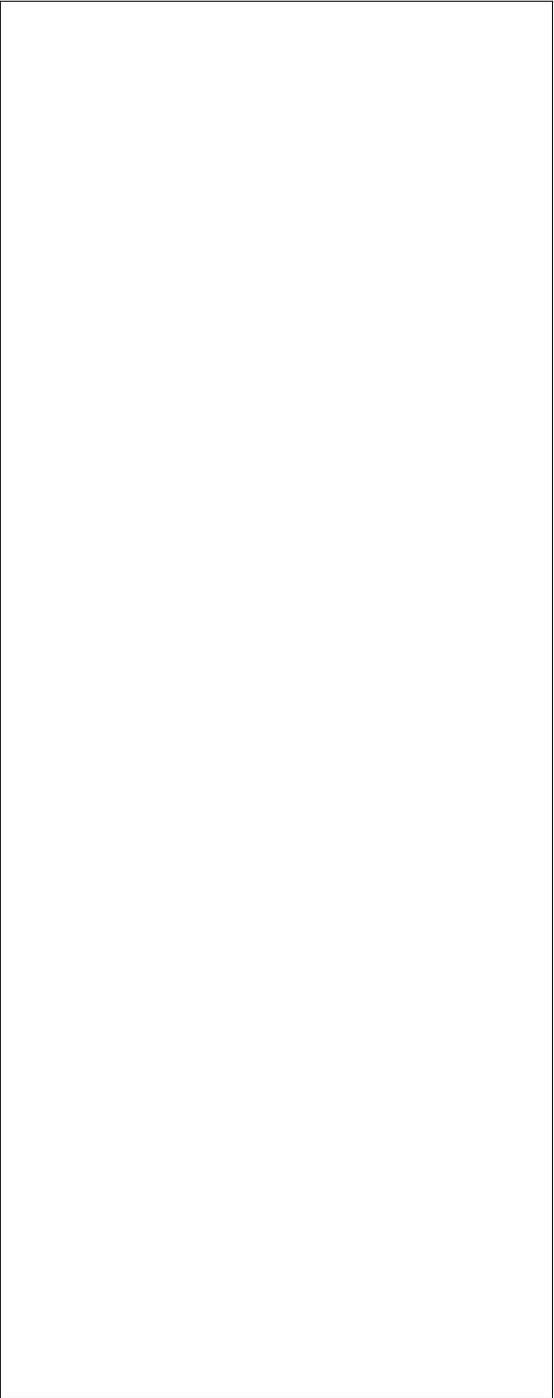


Figure 1 Percentage of Upper Secondary Students Enrolled in Vocational Education (Including Apprenticeship), 1991

and unwisely used to justify common static programs, when what is needed are differentiated programs with parallel but not identical outcomes. (An analogous error occurs when *national standards* are somehow taken as synonymous with *national curriculum*.)

Loss of Economic, Cultural and Political Sovereignty

Given the absence of a federal presence in Canadian education, and the concomitant balkanization of educational authority with its affective-domain concerns, a vicious circle develops. Thereby a continual erosion of meaningful school-geography precludes the levels of public *geocultural literacy* pertaining to Canada and the rest of the world, that are necessary to achieve and maintain *national identity, national unity and national survival*. According to Ralph Nader [in giving a public address in Victoria, B.C., February 1993], such illiteracy, i.e., *inadequate intellectual occupance of the national territory*, suits the agendas of certain multinational corporations who stand to increase their corporate profits from the breakup of Canada and its social-security system. The emergence of electronic superhighways poses special dangers in that regard. The corporate culture of conglomerates and merger-acquisition results in the *monopolization and control of informational resources*. As for the quality of such informational resources, "who will be minding the store?". Will the electronic versions of *Time* magazine and the highly pictorial, but uncritical *National Geographic*, then drive the national, and even international, geography / social-studies curricula?

A Case for a National Educational Policy

It is true that education is a provincial responsibility; but then so is health care. Ottawa maintains national standards in MEDICARE. For the sake of clarifying the stakes, might one not advocate a similar presence in EDUCARE? Without national goals and standards in education, Canada will not perdure as an autonomous political entity. By the same token, a certain level of public *geocultural literacy* is a precondition for national identity and survival. That the necessary, threshold level of geocultural literacy is simply not present, seems self-evident from the uncritical public acceptance of the fine print in the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), or from the way that BC voted in the last national referendum. Such literacy is held to be a precondition for harmonious economic development—if credence be given to the pivotal placement of *school-geography* in the educational systems of Germany and Japan (*qv* below). But in Canada, nothing has changed since the publication, 20

years ago, of the previously cited OECD External Examiners' *Report on Educational Policy in Canada*.

Under a national EDUCARE system, analogous to MEDICARE, the provinces would continue to administer education, but within a framework of consensually accepted, national standards. In its transfer payments to the provinces, the federal authorities could withhold [as do the federal authorities in the USA] certain sums to be applied towards implementation of national goals, standards and elimination of duplication and dysfunctional structures. Provinces and/or component subjurisdictions meeting the standards could be rewarded with bonus payments, whereas gross malfeasance could be subjected to financial penalties. *School-geography*, when properly taught, *can be* (in the light of European experience) *more central to the political/economic, developmental mission of education than any other single school-based discipline*. A well-conceived set of Canadian national standards that, *inter alia*, restored that discipline could also have very positive ripple impacts not only upon young minds and their future careers, but more importantly upon the geocultural consciousness of the adult population at large. Such geocultural consciousness is a necessary concomitant of the *national moral factor* needed to insure the future cultural autonomy, and economic viability of a country, whose human-resource development must be in keeping with the pre-eminence of its natural-resource endowments. Otherwise, the *Realpolitik* of the present international situation, if unchecked in its tendencies by the conscious counter-measures of a more geoculturally conscious populace, will lead to the dismemberment of Canada as we presently know it.

Harbingers of Change—Media Demands for a National Educational Policy

EDUCARE is, of course only one out of many possible scenarios for a heightened federal presence in education. The real issue is to get an authentic national dialogue going about the pros and cons of such a federal presence. Following the Quebec Referendum of October 1995 on sovereignty association with Canada, the federal government moved swiftly to placate the demands of Quebec and other provinces for greater political power, by offering legislative vetoes to five regions of Canada. Although numerous media commentators had been speculating that Ottawa would be devolving a number of powers to the provinces, other commentators also indicated that Ottawa would only do so on a *quid pro quo* basis, i.e., demand certain other powers from the provinces in exchange for the ones being surrendered. What powers then, might Ottawa reasonably request

from the provinces. In mid November, 1995 CBC national television devoted the best part of an hour to exploring this question. During the CBC telecast, *Pamela Wallin Live*, Richard Gwyn of the *Toronto Star*, indicated that *the single most important of all political powers* that the Canadian government could have, would be that of directing and coordinating *national educational policy*. Without a national educational policy framework, Gwyn observed, Canada would very decidedly disappear. Following the program, a number of political scientists communicated to the CBC, their essential agreement with the views expressed by Richard Gwyn.

Lessons from Other Advanced Nations

The potential of national geo-educational policy to stimulate economic/ cultural development and integration in advanced industrial nations, is more than an article of faith for a number of nations that the present writer has visited in recent years. A very striking case in point, is that of the new reunited Germany, where the mission of schooling in general, and that of school-geography in particular, are virtually congruent. Indeed, school-geography is seen there as the principal instrumentality for the *de facto* cultural and economic integration of the former Western and Eastern German entities. The average German businessman's operational knowledge of regional geography, with its attendant planning and geopolitical issues, far surpasses that of his North American counterpart. The city of Berlin's gigantic planning department, with its very extensive and sophisticated exhibits, virtually doubles as a museum and lay school for teaching geographical-planning concepts to the public at large. In a number of regions of Germany, the training of geography-teachers is seen as being far too important to be entrusted to faculties of education. Instead, that task is accomplished at special institutes for geodidactics (*GeoDidaktik*)—two of the better known institutes being found at the universities of Freiburg and Nurnberg. Broad educational policy reflects both German federal framework-agreements and permissible variations within the various administrative regions. In the new Germany, it is commonplace for the trainers of school-geography teachers to also hold academic posts in mainline geography departments. The similar situation prevails in other countries having national departments of education, namely: France, Netherlands, Scandinavia, Britain, Ukraine, Japan, USA and less frequently in Australia—but never in Canada. For example, at the Institute of Education in London, until quite recently the institute's director, Norman Graves, held the dual portfolios of both Pro-

fessor of Geography and Professor of Geography-Education. Countries with national educational departments also tend to have centres for research in geography-education that are often manned by non-teaching professors. The centres in Paris, Rotterdam, Germany, Kiyiv and Boulder, Colorado, in particular, are renowned for their contributions to geodidactic innovation. As a consequence, French national textbooks for school-geography are *differentiated* by ability-levels and not just by grades. The pedagogic quality and user-friendliness of their textual cartography is dazzling. There is no North American school-textbook publisher that could even conceptualize—let alone provide—a series of maps (for grade 10 students) to delineate the contemporary structures and interrelationships of *international banking!* (See Hachette, 1993.) But even French geopedagogy has its rivals. Grade 7 Dutch school-children are able to *draw* computerized weather maps, whereas the writer has seen would-be geography teachers in British Columbia, unable to even *read* similar maps. Senior students in some German high schools can perform complex *factor-analysis* operations upon computerized data bases, by way of carrying out certain geo-planning simulations for prioritizing developmental assistance to various African nations. Canadian students of the same age are unlikely to even know the names of these same African nations.

The American Situation

During the past 7 years, American school-geography has rebounded remarkably from the abysmal nadir of its fortunes during the 1975–1985 decade. The factors impelling this rebound, being both complex and instructive, would merit fuller exposition in a separate article. Suffice it to say here, that it is the presence of a federal Department of Education in the USA that rendered possible its current renaissance in school-geography. A second important factor was the participation of Canadian geography-activists in the front lines of the American lobbying efforts. Their role was significant, in that professional geographers are not generally to be found in the American faculties of education where potential geography-teachers might be trained. In the period from 1978—1982, a number of Ontario geography-educators, in effect, dominated the executive of the National Council for Geographic Education (NCGE) in the USA. These persons included Walter Kemball, a geography co-ordinator from the Toronto region, who became president of the Council circa 1981; Doug MacLeod, a former school-geography inspector, who was secretary of the Council; Doug Banks a geography-teacher from London, who also taught geography teaching methods at the Univer-

sity of Western Ontario; Len Swatridge, a geography-consultant from the Ontario Ministry of Education; and a number of other geography co-ordinators, administrators and professors of education. By means of a system of interlocking directorates, these persons were also leading lights in the executive of the Ontario Association for Geographic and Environmental Education (OAGEE), of which the present writer was then a permanent member (and presently an honorary life-member). Interpersonal bonding was of such a character as to engender a capacity for political action so remarkable, that a senior OAGEE member (Archie Carnahan, the founder of Ontario's school-geography inspectorate) for a number of years served as personal adviser on educational policy, to the Honorable Bill Davis, Premier of Ontario. Indeed, such was the influence of the Ontario "geography mafia", that in the late 1970s, the NCGE unsuccessfully petitioned OAGEE to take over its then-failing journal, the *Journal of Geography* (now recovered to its pristine health).

Circa 1985, Charles (Fritz) Gritzner, Distinguished Professor of Geography at South Dakota State University and a zealous promoter of school-geography, having served his term as President of the NCGE was appointed Chair of the Social Sciences Disciplines Committee of the National Council for Social Studies (NCSS) in the USA. The NCSS which had a far larger membership than the NCGE, was at that time far more interested in promoting school-anthropology than in considering questions pertaining to school-geography. Moreover, unlike the situation for NCGE, NCSS at that time had very little appeal to Canadian geography-educators, some appeal for Canadian geography / social studies teachers and virtually zero appeal to Canadian academic geographers. However, by historical accident, an anomalous situation occurred whereby for the first time a Canadian was parachuted into Gritzner's committee and promptly began to assist him in his geography-advocacy initiatives. By 1990, this Canadian [who will be called *Lawrence*, to respect the wish that his name be withheld] had become chair of the committee. Ever bearing in mind admonitions by battle-weary academic geographers, that any concerted attempts to redress his home province's dismal school-geography situation by frontal attacks would be a waste of time and energy, Lawrence redirected his efforts to assisting his American confreres, behind the scenes, in their ongoing lobbying efforts. Given the American genius for lobbying, Lawrence soon learned the importance of seeking the fulcrum that would give the greatest leverage for effort. By some strange irony, he felt able to do in the USA what he could not do in his home-province, i.e., assist in

reversing the fortunes of school-geography. School-geography by now had become a *cause célèbre* for a number of associations including the American Geographical Society, the Association of American Geographers, the National Council for Geographic Education and the National Geographic Society, all of which judiciously peppered the levers of political power with a barrage of cogently worded resolutions. Given the ideological leanings of Presidents Reagan and Bush, it was not difficult to argue the need for American citizenry to have a far more sophisticated understanding of other places, peoples and cultures, if the United States were to have a more credible, moral presence on the global stage that was in keeping with its superpower status. That Canadians were inclined to helping Americans to articulate the issues seemed to strengthen the argument as far as the White House was concerned. In July 1987, President Reagan and the USA Congress designated a national *Geography Awareness Week*. Around the same time, the intention to require national standards in school-geography was promulgated by the federal authorities. Although education was a matter of states' jurisdiction, the USA Department of Education announced that it would withhold funding from states that did not live up to future national testing standards. This intent became enshrined into law as *Goals 2000, Section 102 of the Educate America Act*, which reads as follows:

By the year 2000, all students will leave grades 4, 8 and 12 having demonstrated competency over challenging subject matter including...*geography*, and every school in America will ensure that all students learn to use their minds well, so that they may be prepared for responsible citizenship, further learning, and productive employment in our Nation's modern economy.

The various geographic associations alluded to earlier, combined their efforts to operationalize the application of Goals 2000 legislation to detailed standards for national school-geography curricula. The resultant, official 272-page document is now known as *Geography for Life*. (See Geography Education Standards Project, 1994.) A proper consideration of its intellectual origins and characteristics would require a separate article. Suffice it to say, that this document very ably demonstrates the integrative and synthesizing power of a well conceived school-geography program, at a time when a number of "pure" scholars have been lamenting the current fragmentation of the mother-discipline.

Implications for Canada and BC

The American geography-standards document will undoubtedly have multifold ripple effects upon Canadian school-geography curricula. It will now be less necessary for Canadians to re-argue the rationale for geography in a major way, as *Geography for Life* is a self-contained, intellectual armoury that is more sophisticated than any similar document that Canada has ever produced. Prior to the release of *Geography for Life*, Ontario's curriculum documents had represented the last word in North American school-geography curricula. More importantly, from this writer's standpoint, is the document's holistic ambit of substantive concern which starkly highlights the fragmented, and at times very sparse, school-geography fare that still prevails in most of Canada's provinces, including BC. In all fairness, one should also say that—prior to the recent American renaissance in school-geography—the prognosis for American school-geography was quite grave compared to the Canadian situation. Such comparisons are therefore relative. It is just that the recent developments south of the border have now leapfrogged prevailing Canadian practices, even if one considers provinces where school-geography has been traditionally the most highly developed. Such leapfrogging, as we have already seen, was made possible by a historically unprecedented consolidation and coordination of activist forces at a multiplicity of levels and areal ambits—the academic equivalent, perhaps, of a major military offensive.

This offensive has resulted in an extraordinarily coherent, richly textured framework for teaching school-geography with very firm economic and legislative underpinnings. The American geography standards have been codified under *eighteen overarching themes*, each of which is fully elaborated in very useful detail, as well as richly illustrated with pedagogical examples. It is important to appreciate that the USA's national legislative arrangements also shore up other school subject-areas such as history, mathematics and science in ways that forestall unnecessary territorial strife amongst them. Copies of the American national standards for school-geography have been sent to senior officials in the ministries of education of most Canadian provinces. In the case of BC for example, the very existence of the American document is helping to strengthen the case for beefing up and/or creating new offerings in school-geography. Thus when BC's curricular offerings are juxtaposed against it, their fragmented and incomplete character immediately become apparent. Were BC required to live up to the new American standards, then much of the current social studies from grades 7 to 11 would be reconceptualized as *historical geography*. The current grade 12 geog-

raphy would be moved down to the grade 9 or 10 level and expanded to include more generous doses of *cultural geography*. New geography options would appear in grades 11 and 12 to treat of *world regions* and *world political geography*—with special reference to the *new world order*, *global transportation and communications*. The current *consumer education* and *economics* would be subsumed under *economic geography*, *business geography* and *geography of tourism*. Additional options would permit the acquisition of *urban and geoplanning* concepts. Advanced classes would consider *global development issues*, *geographic information systems* and *future landscapes*. The American document has subsumed these topics under the following overarching standards:

- #17: *applying geography to understanding the past, and*
- #18: *applying geography to make the best use of the present and to plan for the future.*

Other course-development strands, declared as being of paramount significance in the American standards document, which the present writer will be discussing with the BC Ministry of Education, in a detailed way, include the following thematic standards:

- #9: *the characteristics, distribution and complexity of Earth's cultural mosaics,*
- #13: *how the forces of cooperation and conflict among people influence the division and control of the Earth's surface,*
- #11: *the patterns and networks of economic interdependence on the Earth's surface,*
- #2: *how to use mental maps to organize information about people, places and environments in a spatial context,*
- #3: *how to analyse the spatial organization of people, places and environments on the Earth's surface.*
- #1: *acquiring, processing and reporting information from a spatial perspective.*

A number of educational officials, who received copies of the American geography standards, have informally indicated some sympathy for enhancing BC's school-geography program, even going so far as to, for the first time, actively solicit the present writer's opinions on the issues. But in the absence of a prior legislated standards-framework, improvements, if they occur, can only be incremental. Making school-geography a core-subject for BC is simply "not on" during the present round of curriculum revisions, because the other cognate subject-areas within the social studies umbrella, are also striving to increase their influence. By way of contrast, the most

important political achievement of the American initiative was arguably the formal recognition of *geography* and *history* as distinctly different school-subjects, and the detachment of both from their previous *social studies* umbrella, thereby enshrining a unique place for geography in the public schools of America. In BC, on the other hand, in the absence of *force majeure*, the *social studies* umbrella continues to be graven in stone in BC. It will probably continue to be graven in stone, in any common curriculum proposed for the western provinces of Canada. As a consequence, present arguments for strengthening BC's school-geography offerings have usually tended to catalyse counter proposals from school-based advocates of *economics*, *consumer education*, *law*, *civilization*, *history* and even *anthropology*. At first blush it might seem that such entrenched resistance to the proliferation of school-geography would be insuperable, especially since the membership of the over-riding steering committees in BC's social studies curriculum revision process are over-represented by historians and do not include a single geographer. On the other hand, a majority of such committee members seem to be open to a kind of *multilateral disarmament*, that is to say a consensual suspension of the a priori need to defend and extend the present boundaries of discrete subject areas, in favour of an inductive approach that says: "*Let's look at the kinds of thematic things we want our young people to be able to know and do, regardless of their knowledge-territory of origin. We can prioritize these things in terms of their relevance and importance to the pupils' future real world, and then customize fresh delivery packages that need not look like anything we're doing now.*"

In the past, many non-geographers and ministry officials on curriculum committees have expressed dismay at the special pleadings of special interest groups representing physical geographers, or by the totalitarian claims of other well-meaning university-based persons, that geography "*contains all the other subjects anyway*". Ministry officials, in particular, variously possessing personal backgrounds in *political science*, *accounting*, *history*, *psychology* or *economics* then counter with equal cogency that similar arguments can be made for utilizing *politics*, *finance* or *whatever* as organizing principles. A particularly plausible case can be made for *psychology* as a curriculum organizing principle, by simply averring that all knowledge and understanding have to be mediated by the psyche in the first instance. It is precisely because BC's thinking about school curriculum is moving away from static, discipline-based, knowledge structures to functionally dynamic, thematic approaches that school-geography has the possibility to make inroads, providing that such inroads are framed in fresh and creative ways.

It is at this point that the American standards document can be used as both a tactical and strategic tool. The genius of that document was to combine a functionally dynamic and non-territorial approach to school curriculum within an extraordinarily coherent and comprehensive framework that spoke powerfully to vital issues in the life-worlds of both pupils and adults. Given BC's social studies framework, the American document stands as a doable model worthy of emulation, in the long term. In the short term, which is of greatest concern to curriculum committees, many of the of the document's functional themes can be easily be adapted for the BC situation, providing that one proceeds in a way that does not threaten existing territorial interests. How is that possible?

Very simply, one can usefully proceed by taking school-geography as a *spatial metaphor* for correlating and comprehending vital information and understandings, whatever their disciplinary source, that might otherwise remain incomprehensible to young minds. Such an approach totally accords with standards #1 and #2 in the American document. In this sense, the metaphor of geography now becomes *a map for finding one's way in life*. Purity of academic geographical doctrines will become diluted and the sense of disciplinary ownership may get lost. But does it matter if geography as *a way of looking at things* displaces traditional geography's view of itself as a set of subdisciplinary knowledge catalogues, as was the case for decades with Ontario's two dozen school-geography offerings in the 1970s? In exchange, the geographic metaphor for organizing and reconfiguring knowledge will more facilely permeate the other school-subjects. Why not consider the *geography of crime* or the *geography of the drug trade* in Law 12, the geography of AIDS in health classes, the geography of *banking* and *finance* in Economics 12, the *geography of business* in Consumer Education, the *geography of the automotive industry* in Industrial Arts and so forth?

One can argue that such matters can more properly be taught within a core geography program. That is true. For reasons indicated earlier in this discussion, the development of such an integrated geographical framework is not feasible in the short term. On the other hand, the incorporation of spatio-thematic discussions within the other disciplines, along the suggested lines, is unlikely to encounter any political obstacles. If successful, snowballing of such spatial-thematic methodology is likely to occur, to the extent that calls for more fully geographically integrated frameworks are likely to arise spontaneously. The long term result would be either stronger core-geography programs, or such pedagogical developments for easily manipulating geographical information systems (GIS) as

might render traditional core-programs unnecessary. In the short run, spatio-thematic studies of *crime*, of *AIDS*, of the *automotive industry* and *so forth* do not exist in the schools of BC. But they are very decidedly dealt with in the schools of France and Germany. Are such topics inherently less interesting than the study of *volcanoes*, *glaciers* or *river valleys*? The latter topics of physical geography are already adequately covered in Earth Science 11 without the need to revisit them in the present Geography 12. The latter course might be better freed up and utilized for *global perspectives in world regional, economic and political geography*.

It is precisely the absence of such global, geographic course-offerings that accounts for much of present day geocultural illiteracy in Canada. Courses in the geography of the homeland are not enough. Contrast-studies of other situations are also needed to understand and enhance one's own sense of nationhood. In much of Canada, and especially in Alberta and BC, a person can also graduate from high school without obtaining any systematic understanding as to how their home-province, or even Canada for that matter, fits into the global scheme of things. BC, unlike Ontario, offers neither mandatory nor optional full-year geographic study of the homeland. The geocultural illiteracy game for BC students, for the time being, continues to be one of double jeopardy. The importance of transmitting global geocultural and geonomic perspectives through the schools can not be overstated. It was the very drive to ensure such basic global understandings on the part of every citizen, that persuaded American legislators to mandate world geography courses for all future American citizens.

Where Do We Go From Here?

The Americans have a federal Department of Education which highly leveraged the concerted actions of both Canadian and American geography-activists in the matter of legislating national standards for their discipline. These conditions do not prevail in Canada. The American standards may impact here in ways that may compel Canadians to follow suit in *self-defence*. Many Canadian geographers—in view of the north-south grain of North America's physiography—believe that political integration between Canada and the USA is inevitable. Some persons even believe that NAFTA contains "secret protocols" setting a target date for such political union. Other Canadians, whilst accepting the economic benefits of American capital in their homeland, are anxious to resist the negative side of American cultural imperialism. Although the Americans have produced a brilliant national-standards document for school-geography, they

are still very far away from being able to produce the cadres of teachers able to exemplify such standards. To do so, they would have to come up with the equivalent of Ontario's former Type A teaching certificate, alluded to earlier. That would also entail a 2000% increase in the number of candidates with geography-honours degrees entering the American faculties of education.

American geography textbooks constitute another serious problem. Although at least two dozen, new, nationally distributed, schoolbooks on world geography have appeared over the past 6 years, the level of their geopedagogy is often markedly amateurish. Indeed, certain publishers have had to pay fines up to \$547,000 (US) owing to gross errors of fact that were detected by public advocacy groups. These errors have consisted of such statements as: "Sputnik was a Soviet missile carrying a nuclear weapon"; "President Truman settled the war in Korea by dropping a nuclear bomb"; "the world in 1992 had three hemispheres—the Chinese, the Russian and the American". American textbooks also tend to be rife with ethnocentric statements such as "Canada's physical regions (especially the Canadian shield) are extensions of American regions." (see Thomas, 1994).

On the positive side, unemployed Canadian geographers will likely—for the foreseeable future—be able to obtain positions as geography-educators south of the border. Since the 49th parallel is already a permeable membrane when it comes to cultural trade, an interesting informal exchange of codes seems to be taking place. In essence, in exchange for sharing the new national standards code with Canadians, Americans are closely examining our practices for training geography teachers—especially the seemingly elitist practices that were virtually codified in Ontario's halcyon days of geography-teacher training, alluded to earlier. In addition, a number of American school boards routinely visit Canada during hiring season each year, in an attempt to recruit fresh geography-education graduates for American schools.

Canadian geographers are not bashful when it comes to forming viable action networks. A Canadian Council for Geography Education (CCGE) has been in existence for some three years. Spearheaded by Roly Tinline and Dick Mansfield of Queen's University and Stuart Semple of Dalhousie, the CCGE is attempting to become the Canadian analogue of the American NCGE. It enjoys financial support from American Express and the *Canadian Geographic*. It does not have its own journal, or office staff, but it strives very diligently to distribute cutting-edge teaching materials, especially where new technologies are involved, to geography teachers across Canada. It

might be indicated here, that *Canadian Geographic* does attempt to stimulate national consciousness, but unlike the American *National Geographic*, it has no mandate to deal with the higher profile, global geographic issues that induced American legislators to mandate courses in world geography for all future American citizens. On the face of it, exploring and asserting one's place in the overall global culture, seems to be more glamorous and exciting than the more parochial exploration of one's place in the hinterland.

The present writer has neither the necessary charisma nor a heartland situation, to call for a concerted effort by the CAG and all members of the Canadian geographic mafia to mount a national offensive similar to the one that succeeded in the USA. However, he feels confident that a number of persons are already thinking along such lines and that the necessary leadership will come to the fore, in many cases from unexpected quarters. Although the American effort really took some ten years, matters might proceed more quickly in Canada, now that issues of national unity and survival have been greatly highlighted by recent political history. Letters have already been written to Prime Minister Chretien urging him to take some national education-policy initiatives in exchange for giving the provinces more powers in other policy areas. Perhaps the Prime Minister needs to be deluged with such letters. There is also good reason to expect that issues of national unity and cultural literacy will become strategic ones in the area of academic research grants. In that case, viable national action networks of academics and teachers will become easier to create and maintain. Given today's unremitting pressures on the academic community, public issues that have a research payoff are likely to attract the prime time interest, as opposed to the extracurricular interest of academic geographers. In the absence of substantial financial support, national networks of teachers interested in national geography standards would be hard to develop and maintain. The idea of national geocultural literacy, in itself, is not yet a sufficiently powerful catalyst to concerted political action because of the competing bread and butter issues that teachers in most provinces have to deal with. Depending on the province, such issues include job security in the light of financial cut-backs, elimination of teaching "subjects" in favour of more school counselling, special education issues, work load, release time, radical changes in government policy that require much more community involvement on the part of teachers, and so forth. As a result, teachers on the whole, no longer have time and energy for idealistic causes which are more likely to obtain rhetorical rather than active

support.

Given the finiteness of personal life, the present writer feels that the most efficient and effective strategy is likely to be the most leveraged one, namely that of political offensives at the highest level. Failing that, the second best initiative might be for each person to spread the message and network as they see fit. Persons in a position to do so might, within their own circle, apply such lessons from the American and European experience of stimulating national geocultural consciousness and global literacy, as they feel might contribute in some little way to the continuing unity, survival and prosperity of Canada within a harmonious world community.

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