

**“Moving Beyond the Canadian Standards for Geographic Education
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by

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On the anniversary of the publication of the Canadian National Standards for Geography the following is intended to illustrate the challenge as well as the practical value of this Canadian Council for Geographic Education publication. The authors, as geography consultants to a provincial K-12 curriculum writing process, also wish to contribute their current experiences to the ongoing discussions over the place and role of geography in schools. A final point for discussion will be the nature of the support that can be extended by the university in advancing the Canadian National Standards through such undertakings as summer institutes.

The Curriculum Building Process, a Manitoba Case Study.

In order to understand the curriculum context in which geography can be presented to learners in K-12 schools, elements of the ongoing Manitoba curriculum building process will be described since this experience is current and may well be reflected in many other educational jurisdictions in Canada.

Over the past five years representatives from education ministries of the Four Western Provinces and the Northern Territories were instructed by their Council of Ministers (1993) to create a common curriculum framework for Social Studies K-12. Several key things are to be noted here. What started out almost 10 years ago has finally resulted in the publication of a document awkwardly titled The Common Curriculum Framework for the Social Studies K-9. To create it a significantly inclusive process was utilized in that it involved Aboriginal, Francophone representatives as full and equal partners. Second, that at this date only Manitoba will utilize the framework (the K-9 portion of the document/framework) as a guide for developing its social studies curriculum. The other partners will, as intended in the Western Protocol agreement, decide how and when to use the framework to accommodate provincial and territorial needs.

The vision or mission entrusted to the Manitoba curriculum writing teams as stated in the Common Curriculum Framework (p.3), states rather emphatically, that the new curricula are to “meet the needs and reflect the nature of the 21st century learners and has at its heart the concept of citizenship and identity in the Canadian context”. In our view this statement allows for the advancement of the argument that this vision can only be fully realized through the teaching and understanding of the geographic context that fosters Canadian identity and citizenship. Importantly, the Canadian National Standards for Geographic Education, the “Standards” as they

will be referred to from now on, were made available to all personnel involved early in the Western Canadian Consortium's work in producing the Common Curriculum Framework for the Social Studies K-9. This process and now the draft curriculum documents and statements seem to reflect many of the fundamental concepts and broad learning objectives of the "Standards". Conversations with Manitoba Education leaders of this process indicate that they made good use of the "Standards" in choosing/designing the General Learning Outcomes, as outlined below;

1. Culture and Community: Students will explore the influences of culture and community on individuals and societies
2. The Land: Places and People: Students will explore the dynamic relationships of people with the land, places, and environments.
3. Time, Continuity and Change: Students will explore how people, relationships, events, and ideas of the past shape the present and influence the future.
4. Global Connections: Students will explore the global interdependence of people, communities, societies, nations, and environments.
5. Power and Authority: Students will explore the processes and structures of power and authority, and their implications for individuals, relationships, communities, and nations.
6. Economics and Resources: Students will explore the use and distribution of resources and wealth in relation to individuals, communities, nations and the natural environment.

From our point of view the Specific Learning Outcomes that are the next layer of description in the creation of the curriculum provide an even more significant opportunity to practice geography and geographic thinking in Social Studies classrooms. Here too the "Standards" prove valuable as vehicles to advance geographic perspectives. Since March 2002 three writing groups (K-4, 5-8, and 9-12) comprised of Aboriginal, francophone and anglophone teachers have met to identify these Basic Learning Outcomes for each of the grade themes and their sub themes. The main grade themes, as they presently stand, are listed below.

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| K | Being Together |
| 1 | Connecting and Belonging |
| 2 | Communities in Canada |
| 3 | Connecting with the World |
| 4 | Provinces and Territories: Our Places, Stories, and Traditions |
| 5 | Canada: The Peoples and Stories of this Land |
| 6 | Canada, A Country of Change. |
| 7 | People and Places of the World |
| 8 | Exploring World Views of the Past |
| 9 | Canada in the Contemporary World |
| 10 | Geography of Canada In North America |

- 11 Canadian History
- 12 World Geography/History (Elective)

In fitting the General and Specific Learning Outcomes to each of the grade themes above each group of teachers is being assisted by geography (the authors), history, social studies, aboriginal and francophone consultants with a view to ensure accuracy, transition/sequencing of knowledge and concepts, completeness, depth, and age level appropriateness. Major decisions are being made at this mid-point in the process as to whether the learning outcomes are flavoured geographically, historically, or from a focus on self, culture, and community. The “Standards” are proving invaluable in clearly articulating what is to be expected from the learner. The geographic vision for the classroom is thus ensured reasonable prominence.

Two more stages in the Manitoba Social Studies curriculum process remain. The above Specific Learning Outcomes need to be written into a Foundation for Implementation Document which can draw on the well described sample learning activities found in the “Standards”. These practicalized Specific Learning Outcomes are also referred to by educators as Content Standards simply put “what should students know and/or be able to do?”..

A final step will involve a focus on the crucial implementation strategies that teachers can use to direct and stimulate learning. It is in this final step where teacher guides, process/method suggestions, teacher resources, text books, and videos are assembled and access to them is planned. The “Standards” again will prove an invaluable checklist and guide to aid thinking through all these needed teacher supports.

Curriculum efforts such as the above are increasingly challenged to develop curricula that do more than merely reinforce and perpetuate what many educators see as inappropriate social values. There is a particular concern with inculcating values that are multicultural and antiracist, understood in a broad social science interdisciplinary context. Here in Manitoba, as briefly mentioned above, this concern has resulted in the active and valuable involvement in the curriculum reform process of Aboriginal, francophone, and multicultural consultants. However, there are two unfortunate consequences of these circumstances. First, many of the learning outcomes being developed reflect broad social science subject matter rather than specific disciplinary subject matter, a consequence that leads to dilution of the curriculum, as there is no formal disciplinary foundation to build upon. Second, value outcomes are frequently implicitly ranked above content or knowledge outcomes. What is sometimes forgotten is that the achievement of specific disciplinary knowledge outcomes is typically a necessary precursor to the achievement of value outcomes. Overall, at this stage of the curriculum revision process, both geography and history, traditionally the two core social science disciplines in the Manitoba Social Studies curriculum, are incorporated, but must share the stage with other social sciences and in fact, compete for the finite attention of the learner and favour of the teacher.

Can the “Standards” Bring about a Different Geography Learning Experience in Schools.

Bernie Hodgetts in his impactful book *What Culture What Heritage* focussed on the way Canadian History was taught in classrooms across Canada. His analysis was a significant condemnation of the history teaching practices of the late 60s. According to Hodgetts curricula were outdated, textbooks were awful, and the quality of teaching was even worse Osborne, 1999. (p.180). Herculean efforts to change the practice of teaching History have been ongoing since that condemnation. If Hodgetts had instead turned his sights on the present state of Geography teaching in Manitoba he would have found curricula more than two decades old, inadequate textbooks, and teaching practices that generate little enthusiasm for geography and all it stands for.

Certainly, writing the new Manitoba Social Studies Curriculum with Specific Learning Outcomes and backed up by the “Standards” and their suggested learning activities can be a much better foundation and prospect for geography. As indicated in the preceding descriptions richer curriculum implementation documents and guides can be anticipated. Although heresy for many teachers, as Libbee (P.175) puts it, the next natural steps for the curriculum writers will be to:

1. Design assessment tasks and (establish what the task the students will accomplish to demonstrate achievement)
2. Establish a Performance Standard (How good is good enough for the school or school system).

Thus in Manitoba with more deliberate delineation of the General Learning Outcomes and the many natural connection to the “Standards” the chance will be available to assess and diagnose the level of success of attaining the various learning outcomes.

Changing what presently is the state of geography in Manitoba Schools is not something “that can be done in a hurried manner. There is no quick fix. All the pieces have to be in place-- standards, curriculum, support systems for both students and their teachers, resources, adequate funding and fair and appropriate tests.” Marran, 2001.(p.272). Making all this happen so that all high school graduates have the necessary geography skills and vision is up to their teachers, the faculties of education and geography departments all significant partners in this preparation.

Does Geography Have a Compelling Why?

Why should anyone learn geography? Why should curriculum designers build geographic learning into the new Social Studies (in Manitoba K-9) and contemplate it as a separate course of study in Grades 10-12? After all what is the contribution of Geography to the future of Canadian/World societies? Mathematics, Science, Language Arts, and History and others continue to be well favoured by curriculum planners because the education stakeholders have been persuaded of their importance. Can geography compete for a share of the “timetable”? These are major challenges to those of us who believe that geography, as fleshed out by the

“Standards”, can and should provide the next generation the skills needed to bring about a sustainable human presence on this planet.

The message has been made abundantly clear by Historica, the Dominion Institute and others that Historical grounding is essential for a well rounded participation in society/citizenship and contributing to the democratic ideals of Canada. However, today’s Canadian must also think geographically who can argue that increasingly, the future of all Canadians is inextricably linked to the rest of the world in thousands of ways. The reality is that Canadians find themselves in various world locations having to prove their geographic worldliness through such involvements as:

1. Trade agreements such as NAFTA, and WTO.
2. Military contributions such as through NATO and UN Peacekeeping, Afghanistan...
3. Selling and sharing of industrial expertise in China (Three Gorges Dam), oil exploration in the Sudan and elsewhere.
4. Through humanitarian efforts of agencies such as the Mennonite Central Committee and the Canadian Red Cross.
5. Extensive participation by Canadians in major world sports events and locations.

Canadians live in a physically vast and geographically diverse country which of and by itself is a key geographic learning challenge. Canadians must also recognize that they can not exist in this country as through it is an island, disconnected from the geography of the rest of the world. They must realize that it does not carry all the necessary sustenance they need for their, by world standards, privileged and highly ranked standard of living. In this regard, it is imperative that geographic concepts learned at school give Canadians an accurate view of Canada and the world so that they understand such concepts like the fact that without the sale of Canadian goods and services to others outside the country there would be no opportunity to afford to have such things as:

1. Fresh produce especially in winter.
2. Winter retreats in the sunny south
3. Hollywood entertainment
4. Much modern technology such as computers, commercial and military aircraft.

If the above do not provide sufficient compelling reasons to practice geographic skills in a classroom setting then we urge you to consider the following 10 reasons to value geography as a core subject or a key component of any social studies program. A careful study of the

“Standards” will reveal that they can lead to the accomplishment of many of the following Compelling Why’s.

1. Geography is critical to building literacy.

To paraphrase Hirsch (1988) who argues convincingly that schools focus their energies to build cultural literacy. Within that broad concept we need to be geographically literate in particular. This means to possess the basic information needed to thrive in the modern world. Now more than ever humans must have effective and meaningful communications. A comfortable grasp of the symbols and concepts behind them will achieve this. The inevitable consequence of geographic illiteracy is to make bad collective decisions about the very environment that sustains us. The other key danger is to be at the mercy of self serving information “spinners” lobbying to wrest another piece of the “finite commons” to serve special interests.

Global citizens receive and have to respond to an increasing chorus of media messages about the planet that sustains them. The following are but a modest sampling of the print press;

- a. The Titanic cost of Kyoto Stall. Indecision inaction and infighting breed public contempt. Winnipeg Free Press, May 26, 2002.
- b. Cod Stocks haven’t rallied after 10 year fishing ban. The Globe and Mail, May 23, 2002.
- c. Oil Patch to Canada: Screw You. Winnipeg Free Press, May 19, 2002.
- d. Warming trends will have impact on health: official. (Three -day meeting discusses range of topics from diabetes to the effects of climate change) Winnipeg Free Press, June 9, 1999.
- e. Warning sounded over demographics. Quebec’s share of population pie shrinking. The Globe and Mail, June 2, 1999.
- f. B.C. to ponder drilling off Queen Charlottes. Commission hires consultant to look into lifting ban on oil and gas exploration, hold private meetings with North Coast residents. The Globe and Mail, June 3, 1999.
- g. Global warming threatens ocean food chain. The Globe and Mail, June 9, 1999.
- h. Bottlers free to drain off Ontario groundwater. The Globe and Mail, July 3, 1999

Through the vehicle of geography and the skills advocated by the “Standards” students can best be provided with the symbols (read language and literacy) and concept recognition for greater understanding of such issues as the above communications transmit. In this way a solid grounding in geography can make a key contribution to build a more literate public. Citizens of the 21st Century will not be full citizens without it.

2. Geographic knowledge is an essential ingredient of citizenship and key to participation in democracy.

A huge proportion of the thoughts, reflections and decisions as citizens are of necessity geographical in that they require contemplation of one or more of the five fundamental themes of geography, namely, Location (Position on the Earth’s surface), Place (Physical and Human Characteristics), Relationships with Places (Humans and Environments), Movement (Humans

Interacting on the Earth), Regions (How They Form and Change). Osborne, 1955 (p.15) puts it well when he points out that “education can at least aim to give all people the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that will enable them to exercise their rights and obligation, and more generally to ensure that citizenship is not curtailed.” Better grounding and perception achieved in practice with the five themes of geography will prepare students for this “citizenship.

3. Geography is a special opportunity to build invaluable thinking skills.

Geography as a description of the land, an analysis of Earth features and an understanding of the relationships of natural and human environments provides us with the relevant and exciting raw material to help students exercise and develop special thinking skills. Yes, other subjects are entrusted to do some of these tasks too. However, in Geography the teacher has a unique subject matter that can motivate deep learning and provides effective practice in all of the following:

- a. Analysis (eg. Establishing the elements in the whole, categorizing making generalizations.)
 - b. Acquiring and Analyzing Geographic information. Geography for Life (p.42).
 - c. Asking Geographic questions, speculation leading to hypotheses.
 - d. Synthesis (eg. Creative, big picture) Geographers tend to look at issues holistically, and the value of this broad perspective, particularly for environmental concerns, is gaining more acceptance.” Bednarz and Petersen (1994)
 - e. Inductive (eg. Brainstorming/breadth)
 - f. Deductive (eg. Using known patterns and generalizations)
 - g. Scientific Method
 - h. Future Casting
 - i. Spatial perception and data representation using maps and schematics.
- and many others, such as those advocated by DeBono (1992)

4. Geography can serve to unharness the right brain.

A very large proportion of school activities and subjects are abstract and much removed from reality (left brain). Geography can be very concrete and perceived by students to be really relevant to their world and futures. Properly designed and taught geography can function as a visual feast, concrete hands on experience, adrenalin raising passionate “taking stands on issues” and exchanges with fellow students, creative problem solving exercise and even public advocacy on issues. Geography also lends itself to field trips of various lengths from one class period, a half day, a day, or longer. All of the latter stimulate the right brain and with that a greater motivation to learn.

5. Geography can serve to integrate other school knowledge.

With proper effort and support teachers of geography can make a wonderful connection of real world events to what other subjects/disciplines impart to students. In Geography there is a need to practice mathematical skills, apply science concepts, speak, journal, and communicate ones learning. For those schools and curricula that are erasing the discipline boundaries geography is

an ideal interdisciplinary organizing vehicle in that within it all disciplines can participate when needed.

6. *Geography can foster positive human attitudes.*

Essential to the practice of geography are the following:

- a. A cross cultural perspectives
- b. Empathy for the place of others and their situation.
- c. Learning to consider all factors in making a decision.
- d. Generating alternative directions in problem solving.
- e. Learning to balance the thinking of the cult of the individual with the thinking that addresses the need of the commons.

7. *Geography offers us the chance to learn to think on different scales.*

Ludwig et. al puts it this way, “ geography combines the physical and human aspects of our world into one field of study. This combination focuses on the interdependent parts of our world to provide a practical framework for addressing local, (regional), national, and global questions.”

8. *Geography requires us to learn to communicate using diagrams, maps, graphs, and schematics.*

Ludwig et. al adds that geography also require the communication of observed physical and human factors on maps, with graphs, and/or charts and then analyzing patterns, distributions, and relationships as an essential component of the discipline. Surely a 21st century skill.

9. *Geography is the vehicle for the exploration of careers and variety of occupations.*

A well delivered series of geographic learning experiences can expose students to the many career opportunities for trained geographers but also in the pursuit of exploring various geographic topics it is possible to describe dozens of other occupations of our modern world.

10. *Geography is a vehicle to practice exciting learning processes that are rarely used in other disciplines.*

- a. Inductive and deductive field trips of various scales and ambitions.
- b. Simulations
- c. Role playing and decision making
- d. Priorizing and values clarification
- e. Community advocacy and involvement
- f. Public attitude surveys
- g. Geography fairs

h. Original Internet research

Canadian National Standards for Geography Teachers Summer Institutes.

The new Manitoba Social Studies curriculum one year from now will be ready for field testing. A successful proposal was made to the University of Manitoba and the Program Development Branch of Manitoba Education to organize and run a summer institute (2003) with the view to prepare teachers to field test the new curriculum and then to become active teacher trainers and resource persons in their school and immediate school region. Each institute would be a 6 credit post baccalaureate 17 day undertaking that would also utilize external university expert resource persons, for example, from the Department of Geography. Importantly, the plan is to involve the curriculum writers as participants and resource persons to the first institute. Ideally, in the subsequent summer (2004) the original participants will be coordinated/helped to run summer institutes as teams (several if the registration warrants) coordinating their efforts on such things as field trips and expenses such as tour busses. Thus, may well be born a very different way to have practising teachers familiarize themselves with a new curriculum.

James Stigler's (p.6) approach to creating a knowledge base for teaching seems to fit this scheme very well. In his interview with Scott Willis, Stigler states that

“over the past 5-10 years, professional development has changed a lot. The standards movement has created a real need for teacher learning, so people are looking critically at the kinds of learning experiences we're providing for teachers.

Today, people believe that professional development should be targeted and directly related to teachers' practice. It should be site-based and long term. It should be ongoing—part of a teacher's work week, not something that's tacked on. And it should be curriculum-based, to the extent possible, so that it helps teachers help their students master the curriculum at a higher level.”

Ideally, assignments and certain expectation of the summer institute participants would lead to a creation of web pages that catalogue resource material sources, lesson plans, strategies, micro video (computer) lesson demonstrations, and all importantly a sense of community and collective vision and challenge that would continue after the end of the institute by a deliberate setting up of a web page and list serve communication system. In this technological aspect technical experts and the needed hardware are literally waiting to be asked to get into action.

Overcoming Systemic Tensions and Constraints.

Working as geography consultants to the curriculum process as described above has produced many frustrating moments as we advocated the importance and timeliness of the discipline of geography and geographic skills. We can claim positively that the “Standards” have started to prove their worth, as shown in the preceding report and in our judgement Geography will remain a reasonably healthy component of the new Manitoba Social Studies school experience for students. However, we would be remiss to ignore pointing out the following tensions and

constraints that will be a part of the future for geography. This long process of curriculum reform is complicated by the fact that it is occurring at a time when schools, universities, and the academic discipline of geography are all experiencing tensions. These two sets of tensions are evident across Canada, but the purpose here is to note the specifics of the Manitoba situation.

First, Geography at the university level is experiencing tensions. The most significant changes are occurring at the University of Manitoba, the largest and most prestigious of the province's universities. A decision has been made (December 2001) to create a new Faculty of the Environment to be in place by the summer of 2003. The major players in this new Faculty are Geography, which is to move from the Arts Faculty, and Geology, which is to move from the Science Faculty. It is anticipated that the Geography Department in the new Faculty will be more specialized both in research and teaching, a circumstance that will probably involve reducing the number of courses offered such that students encounter depth rather than breadth. A likely outcome of this administrative and related curriculum change is that the number of students taking human geography courses will decline substantially, as Geography will no longer benefit from being a part of the largest enrollment Faculty. If this outcome does develop, it might in turn have significant implications for student intake into the Faculty of Education After Degree program and, in due course, for the geographic expertise of Social Studies teachers in Manitoba schools. Further, it is possible that the creation of the new environmentally centered Faculty will have real impacts on geography as an academic discipline at the University of Manitoba. Commenting on the Australian experience of similar administrative changes, Harvey, Forster, and Bourman (2002, p.31), noted that placing human geography along with environmental science results in it being "in danger of being marginalised." More generally, Holmes (2002, p. 18) asserted that such linkages are "inimical to the preservation of Geography's intellectual foundations."

Second, the academic discipline of geography continues to experience an identity crisis. This uncertainty about identity is, of course, one of the reasons why geography is vulnerable to change initiated by university administrators. Some commentators conclude in favour of either the need for or the presence of a unified physical-human discipline, while others conclude that the physical and human interests are essentially separate disciplines, with physical geography linked to the physical sciences and human geography linked to the social sciences and humanities. The balance of evidence today seems to favour separation. For example, the Association of American Geographers recent decision to divide their flagship journal, *The Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, into four sections stresses readily acknowledged disciplinary divisions. Similarly, reflecting on a long and distinguished career, Peter Haggett (1990, p.9) stated: "...geography occupies a very puzzling position within the traditional organization of knowledge ... it is neither a purely natural nor a purely social science." These uncertainties reverberate through the Manitoba universities and through the Manitoba schools curricula. Indeed, in schools, much physical geography, even including environmental topics, is now included in the new Science curriculum as well as in the old Social Studies curriculum. The extent to which physical geography subject matter will be included in the new Social Studies curriculum remains to be seen. A study of the new Manitoba Sciences curriculum sees a migration of physical geography topics to the science at all grades.

On the basis of the preceding three observations, it appears that, in both schools and universities, there is a real danger of losing sight of the key principles of geography, both human and physical. These were well stated by Gritzner (2002), when he defined geography as being concerned with: “What is Where, Why There, and Why Care?” This delightfully simple characterization of geography is playing a helpful role in current deliberations about the new curriculum. The experience of the United States, traditionally weak in school geography, is often cited and argued to lead to “global ignorance” (Lewis, 2000). If the process of Social Studies curriculum reform is not to result in a reduction of geography content, then it is essential that those involved include geography teachers and appropriate representatives from university departments of education and geography. Fortunately, at this stage of the proceedings, both of these groups are represented. Most notably, those involved in the process of curriculum reform might be inspired by the words of that great nineteenth century anarchist and geographer, Peter Kropotkin, who wrote about the need to reform geographic education in schools almost 120 years ago.

Geography] must teach us, from our earliest childhood, that we are all brethren, whatever our nationality. In our time of wars, of national self-conceit, of national jealousies and hatreds ably nourished by people who pursue their own egotistic, personal or class interests, geography must be—in so far as the school may do anything to counterbalance hostile influences—a means of dissipating these prejudices and of creating other feelings more worthy of humanity. (Kropotkin, 1885, p. 942)

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