
The Colonization of Canada's Curriculum and Its Effects on Our Societal Knowledge

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Education is what teaches our future generations to actively participate in our democratic society by becoming productive citizens who support the progression of modernity.

Modernity can be defined in a multitude of ways. For this paper, I view modernity as a system that began in the 19th century. It requires surface-level participation of its citizens, such as political engagement, consumerism, benefiting from technological advances, and being submerged in capitalist socio-cultural norms.

Canada is a world power that views education as a means of providing our students with knowledge and information that is advantageous for the nation's continuing development. Our education system influences our future citizens to behave, make decisions, and actively participate in accordance to our highly structured democratic society. By including content that is presented as truthful and factual, our curriculum implicitly proposes that the chosen information is the default for everyone to learn. It is thought to be the natural knowledge required to succeed within our society.

Canadian students learn to believe and accept throughout their education that the bearer of knowledge is most trusted from a European standpoint. The content presented in classrooms are based in the colonizer's perspective, and are rooted in democracy, modernity, and progressive

values—all of which are presented as Eurocentric ideals.

In this paper, I will shed light on how the colonization of knowledge overwhelms our current Canadian education system, and how the information approved by our government perpetuates the insufficiency of the other's perspective. I will finish this paper with a series of questions that I continue to battle with. This is in hopes of shaking the ground that Canadian teachers have been solidly standing on for decades, and to bring into light some injustices that are experienced by a large portion of Canadian citizens.

Canadian citizens often perceive the learning in our schools as the default standard to achieve—any other knowledge outside of this spectrum is viewed as undesirable, and has no place or value in our society. The colonization of our knowledge creates an ideology of dominance over all other existing voices. Not accepting this presented narrative makes it almost impossible to succeed in our society. If graduating students desire to acquire economic stability—and other versions of success within our capitalistic society—conforming to the democratic and modern context is not optional, but inevitable.

I have witnessed several of my friends support Canada's economic and political growth, such as with Trudeau's approval of the Trans Mountain oil pipeline—a project that will endanger the ecosystem of the Tsleil-Waututh First Nation reserve. It is beyond comprehensible, and only further proves the coloniality that persists in our knowledge and society. These friends view the pipeline as a natural progression of modernity and as a good use of our natural resources that will ultimately prove more valuable to Canada than the indigenous peoples that lives on the reserve. The lack of awareness that my friends have regarding the mistreatment of indigenous peoples in Canadian history allows for such events to be

viewed as a positive thing for Canada in the linear development of modernity.

The indigenous voice is expelled from the Canadian context because the learning that is acquired in our schools presents the European narrative as the logical default. The European context made itself the center of the world by having its literature, theories, and methods perceived as “the best that our culture has to offer.”¹ It is thought that those who exist outside of this reality do not have the proper knowledge, and therefore have no place in the curriculum.

These other realms of knowledge are viewed as exotic information—as uncivilized ideas that are a mere extension of the default. They are offered in schools as an “other” option of learning that will never compete with the presented neutral truth. “The knowledge, experience, culture, and art of half of the world is missing in most Western curricula, but ironically the West is generally perceived as being the most informed, educated, and cultured society.”² The selected narratives in our textbooks do not offer our students the opportunity to study beyond the boundaries placed by the coloniality of our knowledge.

Regarding the History and Citizenship program, the Quebec Education Program proposes that students should learn to define themselves in relation to other individuals while considering the diverse identities that make up

the pluralistic society of Quebec.³ All students should consider the notion of otherness as an essential element regarding the development of their own identity.⁴

This is a harmonious act for the Quebec Education Program, but it is unfortunate to not see the execution of such thought within government-issued

textbooks. How can students understand their place with the other when the other isn’t fairly represented—let alone even portrayed—in the classroom?

Competency 1, of The History and Citizenship Education program, has students examine social phenomena from a historical perspective.⁵ By the end of secondary school, students must consider “the origin and particular interests of the authors they consult and diversifying their sources of documentation.”⁶ Teaching students to critically assess the learning of historical events is mindful of our pluralistic society. However, when the documentation provided is limited to a white, European, francophone voice, the motives and hopes of the other do not survive the assessment, and are in this way excluded from the Canadian context.

This leaves students to trust a distorted version of Quebec’s history as the neutral truth, and provides them with barely any alternative documentation. This will not be ameliorated unless a specific teacher does additional research and comes up with resources that include other voices. Such resources can be difficult to find.

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¹ Shehla Burney, “The World, the Text, and the Teacher: Contrapuntal Analysis and Secular Criticism,” *Counterpoints* 417 (2012): 125.

² Burney, “The World, the Text, and the Teacher,” 123.

³ Ministère de l’Éducation et de l’Enseignement supérieur, *History and Citizenship Education*, 306, [http://www.education.gouv.qc.ca/en/teachers/quebec-](http://www.education.gouv.qc.ca/en/teachers/quebec-education-program/secondary/social-sciences/history-and-citizenship-education/)

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⁴ Ministère de l’Éducation et de l’Enseignement supérieur, *History and Citizenship Education*, 299.

⁵ Ministère de l’Éducation et de l’Enseignement supérieur, *History and Citizenship Education*, 303.

⁶ Ministère de l’Éducation et de l’Enseignement supérieur, *History and Citizenship Education*, 304.

Therefore, Canadian students tend to receive a very limited perspective.

The other's perspective of social phenomena goes untold, and this gradually eliminates the value to their voice in the Canadian context. This relates back to my friends' reaction towards the Trans Mountain oil pipeline, and their disregard towards the indigenous community. Alfred and Corntassel state that colonizing powers have transformed their violent methods of eradication with modernized subtle tactics, such as the devaluing of precolonial history.⁷ A key part of the Quebec Education Program is to help students construct their worldviews. However worldly perspectives are essentially non-existent in this one-sided view of Quebec's history: it is a subtle way to erase indigenous histories and voices.

In the Canadian context, the white European man has the highest ontological value. He is the embodiment of a being who knows and understands. Quebec's history textbooks exemplify this as they mainly focus on the contributions committed by white, male Francophones. Any mention of the voice of the Indigenous peoples, the Irish, the Haitians, and others, is excluded from the Quebec narrative. The coloniality of our knowledge labels Samuel de Champlain as the founder of Quebec, and posits the beginnings of Quebec as a result of European invasion—an invasion that is seen in our curriculum as a positive thing.

The Quebec Education Program desires for students to analyze historical events with healthy skepticism by “demonstrating critical judgment with regard to sources and interpretations.”⁸ Unfortunately, the relevant documents, and the facts that identify the different actors and witnesses from which the students are meant to

draw their conclusions, derive from a white, French, European voice. As a result, information on what it means to be indigenous is not grounded in the indigenous community life or perspective, and is therefore disconnected from their heritage.⁹ The common narrative places the indigenous story as an outcome of the colonizing power.¹⁰ To present such material as objective and neutral can be harmful. It leaves students with a distorted version that was created for the benefit of the colonizer.

Educators have attempted to broaden our curriculum by inserting “other” knowledge into the classroom, and diversifying the content. However, their attempts proved to be superficial fixes. Their actions lacked mindfulness of the eurocentrism that goes beyond our curriculum, and how it is embedded in our societal values and beliefs. For example, suggesting to include aspects of how indigenous people celebrate various events does not allow students to observe and be aware of the mistreatment that indigenous peoples have experienced since the arrival of the Europeans.

Rather, a real awareness of the residential schools, the 1960's “Indigenous Scoop,” and the ongoing oppression of the indigenous people is necessary when learning about current events that involve the indigenous population. It can serve real justice for these people—rather than having them live in a cycle of abuse and mistreatment by the settler.

Teachers cannot alter the traditional approach to education without observing the coloniality that rules our curriculum and the institutional constraints that are imposed on them. Even with the internalization of North American university curriculum over the past 30 years, professors are still being chastised by their

⁷ Alfred Taiaiake and Jeff Corntassel, “Being Indigenous: Resurgences against Contemporary Colonialism,” *Government and Opposition* 40, no. 4 (2005): 598.

⁸ Ministère de l'éducation et de l'Enseignement supérieur, *History and Citizenship Education*, 304.

⁹ Taiaiake and Corntassel, “Being Indigenous,” 605.

¹⁰ Taiaiake and Corntassel, “Being Indigenous,” 601.

institutions for “deploying cultural theory that [has] nothing to do with Education.”¹¹ While teachers from all education levels may attempt to include a voice of the other, the knowledge that is tested and viewed as worthy of our students’ learning is not this.

Students are bombarded with information throughout their day that is deemed as essential to their academic success. Therefore, trying to have them find meaning in material on which they will not be tested is difficult. As a result, the voice of the other is regarded as additional information and therefore unworthy of the student’s time and attention. The other realms of knowledge are essentially diminished to nothing, and this eurocentric mindset stays with the student as they enter Canadian society as active participants.

Teachers still have powerful voices. They are trusted by their students. Providing external documents that are written by people of color, and comparing them to the documentation provided by the government and school has the potential to be an eye-opening learning experience. Encountering resources that do not derive from the white settler is beneficial. It broadens the material students use to construct their opinions, their ideas, and their identities throughout their educational career.

Our curriculum proposes a European perspective as the trusted bearer of knowledge, and it defines information outside of this standard as irrational and unstructured. It directs the educator to teach material that presents the other through the lens of the “explorer.” The lack of exposure to and research of the indigenous identity, and to the other silenced voices of Quebec, demonstrates the low value that is placed on this knowledge, and the high

value that is placed on the colonizer’s perspective.

As viewed through the eyes of the colonizer, the indigenous did and does not have the right knowledge. Left alone, such societies could not develop into the correct version of a modern democratic society. Our government-approved textbooks maintain the coloniality of our knowledge, and we teach our students to listen to educators, too many of whom are preaching content that was written by others

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for others. Educators risk assuming that familiar material is all there is—that such material is somehow normal and “the standard.”

Accordingly, how do we push back the pressure that our educational institutions place on teachers, and extend the voice and narrative of the other? How do we demonstrate that indigenous peoples do exist, and their histories are worthy of learning?

Even though our Quebec Education Program suggests that students must learn to use otherness while constructing their identity within a pluralistic society, the coloniality of our curriculum produces a narrow, one-sided view of our world and continues the notion that eurocentric knowledge is the neutral truth. Thus, we should ask: How can the Quebec Education Program define Quebec as a pluralistic society when the presented narrative in our government-issued textbooks give indigenous peoples a fraction of the exposure—an exposure that comes within a narrative that is exclusively concerned with white, French, European voices?

Is it enough to give the responsibility to our teachers to find and highlight other voices? Without the support from the Ministry of Education, how do our educators attempt to look inward, and observe the coloniality that

¹¹ Burney, “The World, the Text, and the Teacher,” 124.

persists in our knowledge and values, and transfer that into our classrooms?

How do we become mindful of the harm that our current eurocentric narrative is causing within our communities and society when this neutral truth is embedded with our government—the protector of and provider for the people?