



Identity and Place from 1971 to 2009: Constructions of Land and Geography in Saskatchewan's Social Studies Education

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Abstract:

This article examines discourses of land and place in Saskatchewan Grade 9 to 12 social studies and history curriculum from 1971 to 2009. As such, the study provides insight into the function of discourses about land and place and situates these discourses in the broader context of enduring and dominant myths at the intersections of place and identity in Canada. As modern urban living undermines our connections to the landscapes we inhabit, this study provides a timely examination of both the notion of place in Canadian identity, as well as its current conception in social studies curricula in Saskatchewan.

Keywords: place; social studies; curriculum studies; discourse analysis

Identité et territoire de 1971 à 2009 : Constructions de la terre et de la géographie dans l'enseignement des sciences humaines en Saskatchewan

Résumé :

Cet article examine les discours sur la terre et le lieu dans le curriculum des sciences humaines de la 9e à la 12e année en Saskatchewan, entre 1971 et 2009. Cette étude offre un éclairage sur la fonction de ces discours et les situe dans un contexte plus large, celui des mythes dominants et persistants qui se trouvent à l'intersection du territoire et de l'identité au Canada. À une époque où la vie urbaine moderne tend à affaiblir nos liens avec les paysages que nous habitons, cette recherche propose une analyse opportune de la place du territoire dans la construction de l'identité canadienne, ainsi que de sa conception actuelle dans le curriculum des sciences humaines en Saskatchewan.

Mots clés : lieu; sciences humaines; études curriculaires; analyse de discours

From the earliest 19th century European exploration journals to more recent histories of Canada¹, a sense of geography and place has been a consistent theme in Canadian national histories (Mackey, 2002). Taken up in the context of nationalism, such historical narratives of place are inextricably connected to questions of collective identity. According to Northrop Frye (1976) for instance, a historical examination of Canadian literature highlights the extent to which Canadians have not so much been perplexed by the question of who am I as much as “where is here?” (p. 826). Echoing similar sentiments decades later, several scholars have examined the ongoing relationship of Canadian identity formation and notions of place (Chambers, 1999, 2006; Kobayashi, et al., 2011; Little, 2018; Mackey, 2002; Medby, 2018; Nicol, 2015; Walsh & Opp, 2010). Across both historical and contemporary studies that examine Canadian identity, it is clear that understanding the development and continual unfolding of images and ideals of Canada’s relationships with place is essential to understanding national visions of Canada.

This article seeks to examine and situate narratives of land, geography and place as they relate to notions of Canadian identity and nation-building as presented in Grades 7-12 Saskatchewan social studies and history curricula. These representations are situated in relation to the prevailing, dominant historical and contemporary discourses of place and identity in what is now Canada. Findings illustrate the continuing influence of dominant narratives of anthropocentrism and regional distinctness in curricular content that examines the intersection of place and identity.

Defining Place

While “place” is often framed in connection with the discipline of geography, it is common to see “place” taken up in multi/interdisciplinary ways. Such multi/interdisciplinary conceptions of place typically draw broadly from art, anthropology, cultural studies, geography, sociology, architecture and education (Pente, 2009). In the educational context, place-based education (PBE) gained considerable traction during the COVID-19 pandemic as a result of mass global school closures. Forced to seek alternative learning spaces outside of the four walls of a traditional classroom, teachers and students increasingly took learning to outside spaces (Yemini et al., 2023). From a western perspective, PBE encompasses pedagogical practices that are “experiential, community-based and ecological. PBE learning aims to cultivate greater connectivity to local contexts, cultures and environments” (Yemini et al., 2023, p. 1). Place, from the perspective of western PBE, encompasses much more than a physical or geographic sense of place; it also includes and engages with place as a political, social and ethical construct (Israel, 2012).

In more recent years, studies focusing on Indigenous notions of place have spurred long-overdue conversations about Indigenous ways of knowing. These notions of place are inextricably

¹ The Laurentian Thesis, for instance, tied the national and economic development of Canada directly to the commercial activities of the St. Lawrence Seaway. Set forth by several major English Canadian historians, this thesis became an influential theory of economic and national development from the 1930s to the 1950s (Harris, 2017; Kilbourn, 1965).

connected to an understanding of Land, with a capital “L”. Styres (2018) contends that using a notion of Land to think about place presents opportunities to disrupt and challenge colonial myths and stereotypical representations of Canadian landscapes contained in dominant narratives of Canada. As an Indigenous philosophical construct, Styres (2018) explains that place is a “physical geographic space” and includes everything in that space (p. 27). In this definition, place is denoted as land with a lower case “l”. Land with a capital “L” is a connected but a distinct concept. Land is not only a physical geographic space; it also includes the “underlying conceptual principles, philosophies, and ontologies of that space” (p. 27). Thus, Land embodies both the tangible and intangible qualities of a location. Land represents both the concrete and the abstract qualities of a location. As an Indigenous philosophical construct, Land is “spiritual, emotional, and relational; Land *is* experiential, (re)remembered, and storied; Land *is* consciousness—and *is* sentient” (p. 27).

Such articulations of the Land provide a philosophical frame for thinking through the ways in which Indigenous land-based education is very different from Western land-based education. While Western PBE attends to place as “more than geography”, it focuses more on scientific and environmental aspects that are consistent with Western anthropocentric perceptions of land as a resource (Yemini et al., 2023). Indigenous land-based learning stems from Indigenous worldviews and beliefs that center “respect, reciprocity, reverence, humility and responsibility as values connected to the land through Indigenous knowledges” (Parent in UNESCO, 2021, para. 3).

Whether taken up in the context of Western PBE and/or Indigenous land-based learning, places are not only physical locations; places are integral to human life because they are spaces where we live, work and (re)create. According to Hutchinson (2004), places are imbued with personal connections, histories and memories, and as such, our understanding of place and our connections with place, become largely influenced by the culture that we live in. These philosophical, emotive, constructed and collectively held notions of place provide clear implications for national identity formation and articulation (Porter, 2022). While anthropocentric, colonial worldview tends to minimize the intersection of belonging and place, preferring to situate collective identity within human agency, communities cannot be separated from the places that gift and nurture life. In the broad context of recent developments in global competencies focused on the development of sustainable, just and engaged citizens, curriculum, especially Social Studies curriculum, must address place and the stories we tell about place. As Phelan and Rogoff (2001) contend, “if nations, states, borders, and citizenships are not perceived as forms of belonging, or are not the naturalized relations of subjects to places, then they can be seen as active forms of unbelonging, or of being ‘without’” (p. 35). In similar ways, Noddings (2002) warns that a curriculum that is disconnected from place and belonging promotes an education for “anywhere” or schooling that is for “nowhere”. She suggests that an education that is not situated, leaves students with a sense that places and objects “have lost their uniqueness and their connection to natural life” (Noddings, 2002, p. 171).

A Study of Saskatchewan Social Studies and History Curricula Using Province-Sanctioned Teaching Guides

This study examined 25 Grades 7-12 social studies and history teaching guides in Saskatchewan for the years spanning 1971 to 2009 as a way of determining the overt and hidden curriculum of each. As an examination of the official Saskatchewan program of study, this research is limited to the documents outlining the aims and objectives of those 25 social studies and history curricula (Tomkins, 1986). While curricula do not necessarily represent or reflect what is taught by teachers and learned by students, the structure and content influence what and how teachers teach (Schaepli et al., 2018). Between 1971 and 2009, Saskatchewan undertook two major curricular renewal projects, resulting in new curricula for various grade levels across several disciplines, including social studies and history. The last round of curricular renewals with respect to history and social studies at the high school level (Grades 10, 11 and 12) were completed in 1991, 1993 and 1997 respectively. Table 1 below provides a comprehensive list of the curricula examined for this study. However, it should be noted that history as a subject discipline in the province of Saskatchewan was only reintroduced in 1991 following a 45-year absence and secondary school social studies guides have not undergone revision since 1991. Interpretations and findings concerning these guides are decidedly limited in terms of historical continuity and change.

Table 1

Social Studies and History Curricula Examined

Course	Number of Curricula 1971-2009	Year(s) of Publication
Social Studies 7	3	1988, 1999, 2009
Social Studies 8	3	1987, 1999, 2009
Social Studies 9 (Grade 9)	3	1971, 1999, 2009
Social Studies 10 (Grade 10)	4	1972, 1973, 1975, 1992
Social Studies 20 (Grade 11)	3	1973, 1976, 1994
Social Studies 30 (Grade 12)	2	1978, 1997
History 10 (Grade 10)	1	1992
History 20 (Grade 11)	1	1994
History 30 (Grade 12)	1	1997

Note. While this table provides an exhaustive list of the curricula studied, evidence presented in the discussion does not include examples from every curriculum document. Evidence and examples provided are those that support the aim of this paper, that is, to examine and situate narratives of land, geography and place as they relate to identity and nation-building.

Methods

Historical discourse analysis is used to examine the development of discourses over a period of time, and for the purposes of this study, to examine how the discourses of place in social studies and history curricula changed (Wodak, 2001). This study employs Wodak's (2001) discourse-historical approach. This approach was selected for two reasons. The first is because the underlying aim of the approach is to uncover and reveal social inequities within a discourse which also supports my aim to investigate educational discourses that are traditionally exclusionary and inherently power laden. The second is because historical CDA provides ways to analyze social and political factors that influence dominant discourses of a nation and national identity over time, and which can also be applied to social studies and history curricula. This approach also provides a guiding framework for a *contextualized* analysis, that is, a method for navigating back and forth between text and context through processes of analysis and the drawing of conclusions (Porter, 2022).

Informed by dominant discourses of geography, land and place as they intersect with notions of Canadian identity, the process of investigating curriculum documents unfolded over several rounds of analysis using a set of questions. These questions guided the identification and subsequent analysis of prevalent meta-narratives of land, place and geography. Analyses and interpretations were drawn by first identifying the presence, absence or modification in curriculum documents of identity myths and meta-narratives, and then by examining them.

A Place to Survive and Thrive: Narratives of Place in Canada and Canada's West

As noted above, dominant discourses of land, place and geography formed the foundation from which curricular analysis proceeded. Based on a broad examination of literature, I then focused on literature addressing the topic of place in the formation of a unique Canadian national identity (Atwood, 1972; Chamberlain, 2003; Chambers, 1999; Fry, 1965; Francis, 2007; Francis and Palmer, 1985; Mackey, 1999; Pente, 2009; Rennie, 2007; Wangler, 2007). From this body of work, I identified and compiled summaries of three prevalent narratives that were to inform my subsequent analyses and interpretations. They were Survival and the Northern Wilderness, Dominion over Nature, and the West as Promised Land.

Survival and the Northern Wilderness

As Frye (1965) discussed, the dominant motif in the history of Canadian literature has been one of survival: surviving an often-hostile environment, surviving the political challenges of British imperialism, and later surviving American cultural and economic imperialism. In the canon of Eurocentric Canadian literature, characters who battle the natural world and the Canadian wilderness inevitably lose. This early, and common meta-narrative, is one that gives credence to the deeply held belief that Canadians and their character are significantly shaped by climate and geographies. Informed and shaped by the fight to survive, Canadians are perpetually subordinate to nature (Chambers, 1999).

Canadian literary author, Margaret Atwood (1972), articulates a similar theme in Canadian literature, as one of 'hanging on' or 'staying alive' in the face of environmental adversity. In such narratives the survivor is not a hero, but instead is one who is barely alive, fully aware of the power of nature and in the end, subordinate to it (Atwood, 1972). Representations of nature are characterized by the wild, untamed, monstrous qualities of nature (Mackey, 1999).

For the historian, such narratives give credence to dominant stories of the backbreaking work of life as a settler in what would eventually become the country of Canada. In this story, hardworking settlers assembled in small, isolated communities. They were surrounded by the huge, unthinking vastness of Canadian landscapes which cemented the moral and social values of resilient individualism and cooperation. In such stories of perilous circumstances, motives and causes are not discussed; "one is either fighter or deserter" (Frye, 1965, p. 838).

Dominion Over Nature

Representations of an untamed, dominant wilderness are simultaneously contradicted by narratives that stress human dominion over nature. Two long-held beliefs underpin narratives about taming the wild lands. The first is a Western belief that progress is dependent upon the transformation and subordination of nature by humans. The second is a belief that human and non-human worlds are in binary opposition to each other (Mackey, 1999). Western, settler progress premised on the taming of the wild lands had and continues to have serious implications for the original inhabitants of these lands. This taming did not consider that for some, namely the Indigenous Peoples who called this place home, the Land was not wild or formidable in the way it was perceived by settlers. This taming was an extension and an expression of a belief that unused or idle land was wild unless implicated in agricultural and industrial activities. These beliefs can be directly related to the theft of lands and displacement of Indigenous Peoples across what is now Canada.

Romanticized Western interpretations of the land as uninhabited that idly erase traditional territorial rights, reinforces what Dawn (2006) describes as a "discourse of disappearance". This discourse, actively promoted by colonial leaders, justified expansion and framed Indigenous peoples as vanishing. It positioned Indigenous ways of life as both incapable of and incompatible with modernity (Jentz, 2018). As the Canadian government prioritized settlement in the West, settlers were increasingly led to believe that Indigenous peoples were a disappearing race—so much so that many early settlers simply ceased to acknowledge their presence (Jentz, 2018). This Western, utilitarian perception of land as vacant and available for development underpinned countless colonial incursions into Indigenous territories (Chamberlain, 2003). These narratives framed national progress as inevitable, beginning with the so-called taming of the wilderness and its inhabitants, followed by the imposition of European legal and governmental systems and culminating in the creation of vast networks of trade, communication and transportation (Clark, 2007). The notion that land exists solely to serve progress has had—and continues to have—devastating consequences for Indigenous peoples. As Chamberlain (2003) argues, when land is stolen under the guise of colonial advancement, so too are hearth, home and livelihood. Many Indigenous communities have been

removed and erased from the lands which sustain them, perpetuating cycles of dispossession and marginalization.

The West as Promised Land

The discourse of humanity's dominion over nature is an important intellectual and spiritual current in both the settlement and remaking of the Canadian West (Wangler, 2007). Early images of the West as *outopia*, or nowhere, began to shift in the wake of the completion of the Canadian Pacific Railway. Linked to Eastern Canada by an extensive rail network, the West was re-envisioned as *eutopia*, somewhere, and a good place. By the turn of the 20th century, a new vision for the West was being crafted by the Canadian government. The West was no longer viewed by the Canadian government as a far-off frontier land; instead, it became a bastion for unlimited progress, enterprise and development (Francis & Palmer, 1985). Building on notions of the land as a resource, theft of Indigenous lands was rationalized by the Canadian government and settlers who would eventually claim those stolen lands, especially when sources of material wealth were located (Wangler, 2007). Owing to settler accessibility to western regions because of the railroad, engendered a different view of Western Canada. A new belief that Western Canada was a physical location of endless bounty, as well as an idyllic region began to take shape in the minds of many post-Confederation politicians and writers.

Extending the notion of land-as-resource, the Prairies² were and oftentimes continue to be viewed primarily in relation to their role in wheat production for the metropolitan centers of Eastern Canada (Francis, 2007). Despite increases in both industrialization and urbanization since World War II, several historical geographers contend that social changes have had little influence on the vision of the Prairies as an economic hinterland. Even though intense droughts and recession hit the region in the 1930s, most Westerners maintained a utopic vision of their region (Rennie, 2007). While less pronounced in the fossil fuel economy of Alberta's oil country, the framing of the West and the Prairies as an agricultural hinterland still provided the region with a sense of unity and uniqueness even as it became increasingly urbanized and industrial (Francis, 2007). The persistence of the idea of the West as an agricultural hinterland highlights two points that are crucial in an examination of discourses relying on this story belief. The first is the staying power of language and representation. Despite shifts in external realities connected to lands in the Western context, such as challenges to unlawful Crown sovereignty and shifting economic activities, narratives of Canadian and Western lands as frontiers of survival, economic sustenance and idyllic agricultural havens remain integral to the storying of the land and the places within those lands. The second is the interplay of construction and perception in such narratives. These narratives persist because they are as much perceived and socially constructed as they are based on the real landscapes of life. As Francis (2007) asserts, to be

² The Prairie region in Canada refers to the occupy the southern parts of Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba. In colloquial terms, "prairie" is typically used as a collective term to refer to these three provinces.

Western is a way of perceiving that is grounded in but independent of the physical Prairie landscapes.

Findings and Interpretations

Findings and interpretations were initially presented as part of a dissertation that broadly examined the development of the myths and meta-narratives of the nation as they appeared in social studies and history curriculum in Saskatchewan from 1971 to 2009. Here, I provide a condensed overview of the notable curricular connections, focusing specifically on narratives of land, geography and place, including direct examples from the curricula examined. The discussion of each decade (1970s, 1980s, 1990s, 2000s) is interlaced with links to the broader discourses introduced earlier. These broader discourses are discussed in the following sub-sections: Overcome and Thrive, Reinforcing the Familiar, and One Step Forward, Two Steps Back.

Overcome and Thrive (1970s)

The overt anthropocentric and individualistic nature of social studies curriculum guides from the 1970s point to the dominant discourses that encourage viewing nature and geography almost exclusively in relation to Eurocentric progress and domination narratives. In 1979, the Saskatchewan Department of Education (SDE) published an overview of curricular aims for the entire program of social studies from Grades K-8, with geography included as one of several organizing strands. Reflective of the prevalent discourse in Canadian history and literature at the time, that emphasized the challenges of survival in the face of geographic obstacles, the overview supported an understanding of geography and place as challenges for individuals and societies. For example, Grade 8, students were to "explore the ways in which Canada and Eastern Hemisphere countries have attempted to overcome the problems of geography" (SDE, 1978, p. 35).

At the Grade 9 level, the social studies program of study was defined as the "study of man [sic] in time and place" (SDE, 1971, p. 3). In the study of ancient societies, which was the content focus for Social Studies 9, geographic features, such as rivers, were seen as influential factors that informed societies' advancement. Nature was depicted as a reason for change, as early societies would "attempt to come to terms with the forces of nature" (SDE, 1971, p. 11). While adapting to nature is a frame that recognizes the independence of the natural world, the phrasing "forces of nature" suggests that the natural world has powers that present challenges to those who face it. Strong ties between settlement and the physical environment appear again in the Grade 11 social studies curriculum. Students are encouraged to "explain the influence of geography and culture on settlement patterns" (SDE, 1971, p. 27). Such learning objectives suggest the essential role of geography in the development of societies but also frame nature solely in terms of its connection to human experience and development.

While social studies curricula for Grades 9 (1971), 10 (1972, 1973) primarily address the individual in relation to abstract contexts such as cross-cultural comparisons and social relationships in an individualistic sense, the Grade 11 and 12 curricula takes this foundation of individualism and turns attention to the development of man [sic] in Canadian society more specifically. Social Studies

20 (Grade 11, 1973) addresses the natural environment in a section titled: Relationship *to* the Physical Environment. Here, man's [sic] relationship with the natural world is explicitly and solely connected to economic need. Here, the physical environment is framed in terms of its potential to supply raw economic materials. The control of this potential is framed as leading to positive societal development, such as urbanization, industrialization and specialization (SDE, 1973).

In the curricular renewal of the social studies curriculum for Grade 12 in 1978, students were encouraged to study the relationship between geographic and regionalism in Canada to determine how geographic features contribute to regionalism. Once students grasped the connection between geography and regionalism, they were then further encouraged to see that regional distinctness "is characterized by economic, political and cultural differences" (SDE, 1978, p. 8). The curriculum document wanted students to articulate their views on Canadian identity in the context such regionalism. Reflective of the longstanding connection of identity with place in what is now Canada, geography is included as a factor that students are expected to draw upon to articulate their thinking around Canadian identity. Underpinning these explorations is the acknowledgment that students may arrive at various conclusions concerning the character of the Canadian identity. In this way, Grade 12 curricula from both 1973 and 1978 reinforce the common narrative in the Canadian identity question that Canada is not defined by a singular, uniform identity, but instead by its diversity.

Reinforcing the Familiar (1980s and 1990s)

As curricular renewals were released throughout the 1980s and into the 1990s, the treatment of geography and the natural environment in terms of its influence on individual and societal development and Canadian identity remained largely consistent. Despite this continuity in discourse, there is evidence of an increased quantitative focus on land, geography and place. In Grade 7, five of 20 core concepts for social studies are regarded as highly relevant to thinking about land and place. These concepts were: resources, environment, interaction, interdependence and location (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education [SME], 1988). In addition to these SME (1988) core concepts, the overview of the course describes "geography of the Pacific Rim and human interactions within this environment" as a central focus (p. 1). In both 1988 and 1999, the first unit of study about location echoes earlier curricula from the 1970s in emphasizing the role of geography and environment in the development and character of societies. Both the emergence of diverse viewpoints in modern society and settlement patterns are directly connected to geographic factors. While the emergence of diverse viewpoints aligns with ideas of regionalism advanced in the 1978 Grade 12 social studies curriculum, settlement patterns are explored in ways consistent with the geographic determinism of the 1970s social studies curricula, which encouraged students to view geography's influence on settlement patterns and economic utility.

These constructions, all related to the centrality of humans, permeate content about natural resources. The commodification of the natural world is explicit and there is an expectation that students "appreciate the value of the planet as a source of resources", "value Saskatchewan as a storehouse of resources" and "understand the impact that the resources industry has on the country and on the individual" (SME, 1988, p. 23). While environmental sustainability remains elusive in both

1988 and 1999 curricula, conservation and resource management are briefly addressed as viable measures in times of resource scarcity. However, excessive consumption and intensive resource extraction were omitted as possible reasons for resource scarcity and thus ignored in favour of a neoliberal approach that frames environmental crises solutions as personal choice. For example, the SME (1999) document states that students “appreciate the need for every individual to use resources wisely” (p. 94). Reflective of the influence of neoliberalism concerning both citizenship and environmental issues, this view focuses on strategies of individual action and choice as opposed to government led and implemented policy and regulation.

Contrary to the singular emphasis on man [sic] and his [sic] environment found in the 1970 documents, there is a modest shift from the centrality and dominance of humans. SME (1988) documents direct teachers to expose students to the idea that “the physical environment precedes, surrounds, conditions, and supports human existence and activities” (p. 17). This discourse of dependence and interdependence appears again as students are encouraged to “appreciate that changes in one part of the environment will result in changes in some other part of the environment” and, further, to “appreciate that humans . . . are dependent on the natural environment for survival” (SME, 1988, p. 17). There is a clear indication that human impact on natural environments has potential negative and harmful consequences. In conceptualizing location in the 1999 renewal curricula, dependence and interdependence remains, however, students are expected to “learn about the ways that humans affect or alter the physical environment, and the ways that humans and the environment are interdependent” (SME, 1999, p. 47).

A similar shift appears in the Grade 11 social studies curriculum from 1994, which features an entire unit aimed at contextualizing environmental issues in a manner that supports students in developing a historical understanding of the environment. The SME (1994) document suggests that environmental issues and concerns should not be viewed solely in the context of short-term natural disasters “but as another of the many challenges humanity has faced throughout history” (p. 304). Despite the shift, the same curriculum indicates continuity with long-standing narratives of victimization and survival that are common to stories of Canadian settlement and development. That is to say, the curriculum features outcomes that underscore the harsh and unforgiving Canadian landscapes. Students are asked to “question how modern societies have created a very high standard of living by learning to control and use nature for their purposes” and to consider the survival of early Canadian settlers in harsh Canadian environments. It specifically wants students to be reminded that “nature was seen as a threat which stood in the way of the aspirations of people. It cut short the promise of life with starvation, cold, and disease” (SME, 1994, p. 314).

Akin to the way students were expected to understand the influence of the natural environment in the cultivation of regional identities in the 1970s, the Social Studies 8 curriculum of 1999 encouraged the study of such connections through explicit outcomes connected to the core concept of “identity and environment” (p. 136). Students were expected to identify geographic features of Saskatchewan and think about how these influenced identity in the region (SME, 1999). The influence of geography in identity formation was then taken up in a broader national context in the Grade 12 curriculum document with specific attention given to connecting economic

development, Canadian landscapes and Canadian identity. In a suggested activity, the curriculum presents a statement like the land represents one of the possible “nationalistic values”, then asks students to consider whether “they feel a kinship with the land in some way” (SME, 1997, p. 251). Combining both individual and broad national connections, these outcomes indicate efforts to emphasize the relationship between place, belonging and identity.

In 1997, while one social studies guide begins to acknowledge the relationship between people and the land, there are several examples that support the myth of terra nullius and the erasure of Indigenous presence. Mirroring the pristine, uninhabited depictions of Canadian landscapes popularized by the works of the Group of Seven, the Grade 12, Social Studies 30 document presents a narrative of similarly vacant territories. The curriculum encouraged students to understand that Canadians embrace the belief that a standard of living is based on the consumption and production of goods while also recognizing that “an unspoiled natural environment is important to human wellbeing from psychological, health, and economic points of view” (SME, p. 114). Later in the course, commentary about the connection between standards of living and the natural environment includes the remark that “much of Canadian history has been about the struggle to create a high standard of living out of a threatening and difficult geography” (SME, 1997, p. 203). The construction of the narrative of the untamed wilderness of Canadian landscapes continues into explorations of early Canada in this Grade 12 curriculum. “The great difference” the course encourages students to see, “between France and New France was the wilderness. A mile or two down any river, a life of adventure, wealth, and freedom as a coureur de bois was possible” (SME, 1997, p. 128). In the curriculum document, History 30 for Grade 12, the environment is implicated as a factor that leads to the need for and adoption of government intervention in the economy because people who “faced the difficult task of developing in harsh environments demanded that government play a supporting role in the economic development of Canada” (SME, 1997, p. 236). In a sense, the document suggests an interesting logic, that it was the land that cultivated the political preference for government intervention in the West, not the people.

At the secondary level in general, notions of regionalism and identity combine to establish a narrative of the Canadian West influenced by and reflective of unique geography; a region decidedly defined by its physical distance from the industrial epicenter of Eastern Canada. Echoing Francis and Palmer’s (1985) characterization of regional identity, social studies from the 1990s feature farming and agriculture as fundamental to Prairie identity. First articulated in the 1978 Grade 12 social studies curriculum, regionalism and regional disparity were the primary focus of content studying Canadians and their connections with the physical environment. In that 1978 Grade 12 course, students were meant to understand that “geographic features have resulted in regionalism . . . [and that] this regionalism is characterized by economic, political, and cultural differences” (SME, 1978, p. 8). By the 1990s, this connection between Canadian regionalism and identity was more noticeable; the Grade 11 Social Studies 20 (1994) curriculum emphasized environmental conditions that enabled Saskatchewan to develop an agricultural economy. Further cementing the connection between geography, regionalism and economy, students were expected to understand that a market-driven economic system emerged because of its suitability to the “geographic and social realities of the

western Canadian frontier" (SME, 1992, p. 214). Students explored Saskatchewan's agricultural history in economic and political terms through several activities that supported the study of large-scale agricultural policies and small-scale agricultural management focused on farm accounts (SME, 1992).

The notion of the West as an idyllic and bountiful promised land was addressed directly at the Grade 12 level in the 1990s across both social studies and history. In Social Studies 30, students starting in 1997 were exposed to and presented with the notion that "the West with its golden prairies and invigorating climate would nurture a utopian community because it would transform ordinary people into superior beings who would create a new and better society" (SME, 1997, p. 144). Students were expected to learn that such beliefs underpinned the dominance of Anglo-Saxon cultural norms that saw "western farmers as God's chosen people and the family farm . . . [as] the ideal family unit" (SME, 1997, p. 144). As with the early settlers, students learned that the "West was a harsh land that could only be managed by those who were disciplined and hardworking" (SME, 1997, p. 144). Furthermore, students were expected to "know that . . . the west exacted a huge toll on those who attempted to conquer it" (SME, 1997, p. 144). Together, these historical and geographical narratives generated the regional character of the West. They constructed a perception of a landscape suitable for cooperative political and economic engagements and reflective of a dominant set of values for those who settled on those lands.

Where the Grade 12 1978 social studies curriculum alluded to regional discontent, in 1997, both the social studies and the history curriculums draw deliberate attention to Western alienation and regional discontent as serious threats to Canadian unity. Drawing an explicit link between geographic realities and Western alienation, Social Studies 30, published in 1997 includes an explanation regarding hinterland regions whose populations "have felt a sense of grievance at what they perceive as chronic favouritism to Central Canada" (SME, 1997, p. 234). History 30 published in the same year presents regionalism as an area of concern and a primary impetus for the development of a federal system of government. Specifically, students are offered up an idea that regionalism has "presented Canada with numerous challenges" and that the "forces of regionalism worked against a centralization of political and economic decision-making controlled by one national government" (SME, 1997, pp. 218, 220). As a result, the hinterland - heartland relationship between Western Canada and Central Canada, produced the notion of two Canadas. This regional divide left many westerners feeling like the "resource-rich prairie provinces [had] been exploited by national governments which reflected the interests of Central Canadians" (SME, 1997, p. 440). In all instances, the geographic uniqueness of the West and the vastness of Canada were employed in a narrative of Western discontent.

One Step Forward, Two Steps Back

Published in 2008 and implemented in 2009, the mandatory provincial social studies curricula renewals for Grades 7, 8 and 9 levels reflect a paradigm shift in the way that industrialized societies view the natural world. The newest guides began with an overview of the core curriculum, organized as Broad Areas of Learning and Cross Curricular Competencies. Within these foundational K-12 aims for education in Saskatchewan, identity and the natural world are explicitly connected. Not only is

identity shaped by place, but the natural world also facilitates students' developing a sense of interdependence. The hope was that students develop an "appreciation of the dependence of human beings upon nature" develop "an attitude of stewardship [that] implies a willingness to adapt one's lifestyle in order to contribute to the well-being of the environment" and encourage "an awareness of the impact of human societies and activities on the environment [which] enables students to make decisions that reflect concern for present and future quality of life" (SME, 2009, pp. 4-5).

Indicating continuity with earlier social studies guides from the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s, both Grade 7 and 9 social studies curricula include weighty references to the influence of the natural world on the development of societies. In Grade 7, for example, students are required to "analyze the relationship between current and historical events and the physical and social environments in Pacific and northern Canada and in a selection of Pacific Rim and circumpolar countries" (SME, 2009, p. 21). Suggestions for teachers to achieve this outcome include the examination of current issues in relation to location "to understand the role of geography in shaping political events . . . and economic activity . . . in Canada, and a selection of Pacific Rim and circumpolar countries" (SME, 2009, p. 21). At the Grade 9 level, ancient societies are studied with a view that they are clearly influenced by the natural environment. Students are expected to "assess the relationship of the natural environment in the development of a society" (SME, 2009, p. 22). Whether in Canadian or global, historical or contemporary contexts, these curricula emphasize the influence of the environment on societal development.

Since Grade 8 social studies deals primarily with the development of Canadian identity, student learning outcomes included under the heading of Dynamic Relationships indicate that land was a significant factor in the development of identity in Canada. While there is consistency between the old and new guides in the sense that they reiterate the connection between identity and geography in the construction of a Canadian identity, there is a distinct departure in the new guide in terms of the omission of wilderness and survival myths present in guides from previous years. Instead of framing the land as dangerous wilderness, the curriculum document wants students in Grade 8 to identify various land designations in Canada and investigate connections between Canadian landscapes and Canadian literature, visual arts, song, recreation and sports (SME, 2009).

The most significant shift in Grades 7-12 social studies curricula over the last 50 years has been the emphasis on the negative impacts of human activities on the natural world. In line with the broad K-12 goals of sustainability and stewardship as global competencies, students are expected to assess, investigate and critique the impact that people have on the natural world. In Grade 7, for example, students are expected to investigate the impact of humans on the natural environment as well as the influence of geographic factors on people (SME, 2009). Furthermore, the Grade 7 social studies curriculum of 2009 expects students to "assess the ecological stewardship of economies of Canada and the circumpolar and Pacific Rim countries" by researching and defining terms like stewardship and sustainability and by examining sustainability practices and policies in Canada and Pacific Rim countries as they relate to the economies of those nations (SME, 2009, p. 24).

The investigation of such environmentally conscious outcomes continues into the Grade 8 social studies curriculum as students are required to “critique approaches of Canada and Canadians to environmental stewardship and sustainability” (SME, 2009, p. 25). Achievement indicators include an investigation into issues where resource extraction and environmental stewardship collide (i.e., tar sands development), the creation of a timeline of environmental policy in Canada and the investigation of personal choices students can make to protect the environment (SME, 2009). Building on the development of these concepts, at the Grade 9 level, students are asked to “assess the relationship of the natural environment in the development of a society” including the influence of natural geographic features like “major water systems, topography, and climate” (SME, 2009, p. 25). Although chiefly indicative of anthropocentric views of the natural world and reflective of the neoliberal tendency to conflate stewardship with personal choice, it can be noted that these are attempts to integrate learning that support more ethical ways of viewing and interacting with the natural world.

Conclusions

The intersection of identity and place has been a clear theme in social studies curricula in Saskatchewan over the last 50 years. Of the discourses identified, findings point to the influence of two major themes in curriculum documents. They are geographic determinism and regionalism. In the curricula spanning the years examined in this study, there was a clear effort to guide students in accepting geographic determinism, that is, the role geography has played and continues to play in the development of societies, cultures and Canadian identities. For those familiar with the discourses of Canadian identity, it is not surprising that they speak to recurrent themes of regional diversity and the challenges of diversity. Reflective of the reverence for diversity that Canadian meta-narratives of identity, both past and present, rest on, geographic diversity is consistently represented as one dominant element of how Canadians explain who we are. Both History and Social Studies curricula pay substantial attention to the intersection of geographic factors, regional identity, regional disparity, and the impact of these realities on Canadian unity. Despite their dated existence, the student outcomes identified in the curricula point to a dominant trend in the framing of both regional identities and regional disparities as rooted, at least partially, in physical landscapes.

In addition to the heavy emphasis found in curricular documents, there are additional examples of geographic determinism intersecting with the regional character of the Prairies, and Saskatchewan more specifically. Even though the significance of agriculture has long since disappeared as the primary industry in Saskatchewan, social studies curricula in the province supports the argument that social changes have had little impact on the prevailing image of the West as an isolated, agricultural, cold hinterland. In instances where regional agricultural development is included in curricular documents, the influence of the environment of the Western Prairies is deliberately connected to the development of a unique political culture defined by its cultivation of a cooperative ethic.

These articulations concerning the environment cultivating a cooperative ethic may provide a common foundation for understanding the reality of ever increasing and deepening notions of

multiplicity and difference. Although curricular guides from the periods studied cover connections between identity and place, the opportunity to use these regional particularities to build a notion of shared belonging rooted in a broader notion of Canada as a vast landscape is lost. Framed in the broad context of PBE and with attention to Indigenous philosophical notions of Land, the historical development of social studies curricula suggests that we still find ourselves in a curricular climate largely dominated by articulations of land and place rooted in Western notions of utility and resource concerns. This is evident in the historical development of the hinterland-heartland dynamic in curricular documents, as well as in their more contemporary articulations of resources and resource development/management. While aims and goals provide some space for students to investigate issues related to human impacts on the natural world, curricula throughout the period spanning 1971 to 2009 fail to incorporate opportunities for students to examine deeper connections to the land beyond that of human use.

Curriculum developed in the future would benefit from investigating how PBE and Indigenous philosophical conceptions of Land can provide opportunities for students to consider land from diverse perspectives (Styres, 2018). As Chambers (1999) contends, we may find ways to tackle the difficult task of reaching across our vast differences to an understanding of the topography, including the physical and imaginary landscapes and the histories associated with them. In her reflections on investigating literacies of the Land (with postsecondary students), Styres (2018) suggests that because we all come from places where “all our tracks lie on what was and what still is First Nations Territories, [we] now exist in a relationship to each other and to this land” (p. 32). To exist in a good relationship with these lands that form part of Turtle Island (also called North America) and with one another, requires critical awareness of whose lands we now occupy, including “the historical and contemporary realities of those relationships” (Styres, 2018, p. 32).

Focusing on the histories of the places we live in can help foster a strong sense of belonging and personal agency rooted in ethical and reconciliatory values (Battiste, 2013; TRC, 2015). This focus, in educational terms, is sometimes called democratic action research (Greenwood & Levin, 2007). Democratic action research begins when students investigate and interact with local histories and these histories encompass diverse perspectives on place—including physical, emotional and spiritual dimensions (Gruenewald, 2003). Invested in cultivating a sense of belonging, such localized land and place-based experiences could potentially spur meaningful democratic action in local, regional and even global contexts. When students learn about places in diverse ways and are supported in nourishing their own stories of place, I suggest that there is a chance that they begin to see themselves implicated in real ways with the issues their communities face. Although undeniably challenging, developing a curriculum that enables students to investigate the complexities of identity—and how our connections to, or disconnections from, place shape those identities—is a worthwhile endeavor. Such a curriculum can foster a broader and more inclusive understanding of what it means to call Canada home, both now and in the future.

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