

“Anti-Glocality” Grounds New Quebec History Program

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[The purpose of history is] “...to understand the requirements of citizenship and have a greater understanding of ourselves and the global community in the past, present, and future tense” (anonymous student, *Independent Report*, page 29).

Abstract

In sharp contrast to the musings of a senior student, the mandatory history texts follow a narrow provincial orientation. The recently introduced Quebec high school history program offers adolescents a slanted narrative devoid of larger interconnected contexts as hailed; for example, by Oakeshott (2004), MacMillan (2009), and/or Canadine (2013). In our view, secondary students are forced to travel a historical journey that deals with Canadian and Quebec events through a “unique” Quebec lens (Woods, 2014). The widely engrained twenty-first century concept of global interconnectedness, first articulated on a wide scale over a hundred years ago (Wells, 1920), has been replaced by one anchored in a retro-nineteenth-century construct viewing only carefully selected unconnected historical snippets devoid of a contextualized narrative. Anchored in a narrow political perspective, this secondary course of study forces adolescents into a stilted and fragmented “patch-work” historical landscape. This journey silences many voices, brushes others from the chronicle, and twists recognized historiography to fit a specific contemporary self-determined internalized orientation. We review the official course of study to unpack several major world themes demonstrating this constrained point-of-view via a close investigation of one of the approved English language student texts. Further, we illustrate how the deliberate manipulation of historical stories, as well as “alternate facts,” leads adolescents into a realm deprived of meaningful connections.

Keywords

Anti-Glocality, Curriculum Development, Alternate History, False Narratives, & Educational Propaganda.

The Program and Student Texts on the Quebec Education Landscape

Quebec is one of the few Canadian provinces that demands History as a high school graduation certification subject. As Canada does not have a unified or federally mandated educational system, the ten provinces and three territories operate independent school systems akin to silos on a landscape. Each looks similar but is nonetheless independent regarding kind

and length of courses, student texts, instructional materials, etc.

Hence, the history program and authorized textbooks in Quebec will be different from every other region. In fact, half of the school systems across the Country do not even offer the domain of history at the senior high school levels or demand satisfactory completion of any history course for the awarding of certification. Unlike so-called “international”

subjects, such as sciences and mathematics, there are no outside agencies which scrutinize history programs, student course books, related instructional materials or examination benchmarks. Each separate ministry of education internally self-checks without outside perusal and implements programs, courses, classroom materials, and evaluation regimes free from any objective academic or pedagogical oversight.

This constitutional arrangement means that Canada, as a nation, cannot mandate anything of an educational concern within the domain of elementary and secondary public education. For example, this weakness is glaringly evident in that the many and varied educational orientated recommendations emanating from the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission* (2015), a multi-year First Nations, Inuit and Metis investigation into the sordid history of Residential and Indian Day schools, cannot be implemented by the Federal Government. Each province and territory will separately enact what appeals – determined by local political orientations. Tragically, any possible pan-Canadian education initiatives, no matter how meritorious, are moot.

Although the majority language in Quebec is French, there is a vibrant minority English speaking cohort which is guaranteed specific educational rights via Canada’s Constitutions. However, the English schools are mirrors of the French systems in all curriculum issues. Therefore, the same History program, student texts, and final examinations will be used simultaneously in both networks.

Reflections.qc.ca: 1840 to Our Times (Fortin, et al., 2016), authorized for use by Quebec authorities at this level (grade 10/secondary IV), is a direct translation (with no

accounting for linguistic adaptation) from a book originally written and published in French. Best described as a “graphic comic,” this colorful hard bound volume totals some 430 glossy pages approximately 23cm by 28cm.

Each page is roughly made up of 50% written text in several short separate statements surrounded or overlaid by copious images (maps, diagrams, pictures, quotations, etc.). While very colourful and perhaps initially visually appealing, the amount of meaningful textual historical narrative is severely limited due to this overall arrangement with the result that complex and interconnected situations (for example; migration, population shifts, territorial occupation, citizenship, economic relationships, etc.) are reduced to stark linguistic fragments lacking relationships.

Developed to replace an existing program that was barely a decade old, this new “History of Quebec and Canada” course of study was grounded on two major underpinnings. The first being that history would be studied through a specific Quebec lens (*Education et Enseignement superieur*, 2016, pages 3-4) with the second being that the global concept of citizenship education, which a foundational document termed “civic preaching”, would not form any part of this new historical template (Beauchemin & Fahmy-Eld, 2014, page 16).

In sharp contrast, the replaced curriculum carried the far more inclusive title of “History and Citizenship Education” and opened with the following statement:

The History and Citizenship Education program has two educational aims: to enable students to develop their understanding of the present in the light of the past and to prepare them to

participate as informed citizens in the social life of a democratic, pluralistic society that is receptive to a complex world. (Quebec, 2011, page 295).

On the other hand, this new course of study cogently observes in a subsection termed the “Nature of the Program”:

Studying the particular features of the path taken by a nation...helps its members to view themselves from a long-term perspective and to construct their identity as active participants in the historical process.” As well as “The History of Quebec and Canada program focuses on the characterization and interpretation of the particular features of the path taken by Quebec society. (Quebec, 2017, page 1).

Allocated 100 instructional hours over a 180-day school year, the import of this history course cannot be understated. As noted, passing the uniform June examination is a necessity for the awarding of the secondary school certificate. The only authorized in-school instructional materials are the student textbooks from which the final examination questions are drawn.

Contumacious in the Face of Widespread Criticism

Reaction to both the official history course and the student material was swift and vocal. However, criticisms were scattered and emanated from various elements within society who may have had a specific orientation. For example, the lack of any kind of overview acknowledging immigrant contributions to the historical tapestry were decried (Cooper, 2016; Commins, 2016; Laville & Dagenais, 2016; Allison & Bradley, 2017; Lalonde, 2020).

Further, the absence of Anglophone (English speaking Quebecers) contributions to Quebec’s development was seen as an insult to this large and important minority societal segment (Valiante, 2016; Nadeau, 2016; Scott, 2016; Allison & Bradley, 2018). Additionally, some directly challenged the decision of English school boards to accept what was viewed as a flawed student textbook (Montreal Gazette Editorial, 2016; Valiante, 2018).

Complicating the import of these criticisms, was the reality that these opinions were authored by scattered groups within the overall community. Many came from specific cultural groups (First Nations Peoples, Inuit, immigrant and religious communities, etc.) which may well be viewed as having a vested interest in promoting their own specific historical stance. However, perhaps the most damning and comprehensive review of both the new program and imposed classroom texts came from an independent group of professional historians.

An Independent Report of the History Experts Committee on the Provincial History of Quebec and Canada Program and Approved English Textbooks was issued in October of 2018 having been commissioned by the English Montreal School Board. This systematic independent study over several months by three eminent Canadian historians found that both the program of study and textbooks were fallacious and, in a scathing recommendation, declared that the “authorized textbooks ...are fundamentally flawed and must be withdrawn from all high schools” (page 22). Furthermore, this *Independent Report* characterized the overall program as “driven by a particular view of the past and its connection to a specific vision of the present and future” (page 3).

In spite of a swath of relentless public criticism over many months highlighting a crescendo of glaring weaknesses, in the face of the findings articulated in the *Independent Report*, and even after spending approximately 1.6-million dollars (taken from a Federal grant designed for second-language learning) to correct some Aboriginal language issues and reprint the texts (The Canadian Press, 2018), the Education Ministry would not ‘hit pause’ and forged ahead with full implementation. In the words of the Quebec Minister of Education, Jean-Francois Roberge, “History will always be subject to debate” (Shingler, 2018).

It may have been germane for the Minister, instead of so quickly dismissing the *Independent Report*, to have internalized the salient comments in an Appendix at the end of the Report. Here, a high school student whose quotation headed this expose and who was one of the first to use the new textbook, further commented:

- “Another goal of history is to eliminate ignorance and stereotypes, but that becomes impossible when the information provided isn’t enough to actually combat any of those things.”
- “...women tend to not be written about as if they were an inherent part of history, but instead sectioned off and talked about only under the context of feminism.”
- “In order to keep students interested in history you need to make it relevant, and that means including social issues regarding diverse

communities...” (*Independent Report*, 2018, pages 27-29).

In order to account for the phasing out of the older program and books, the new program and texts commenced with the September 2018 school year. Viewed as a ‘transition’ period, some students were finishing the old program while others started the new. Therefore, the September 2019-June 2020 school year was to be full implementation. However, both the school year and scheduled June uniform examinations were derailed by the world-wide COVID-19 pandemic with all schools in Quebec closed for in-school instruction as of mid-March. As a result, no June examinations took place and individual class grades were used to determine the History mark for certification purposes.

Unfortunately, with the continued imposition of wide-spread COVID-19 restrictions, the September 2020 to June 2021 school year was also truncated. Schools throughout the Province were forced to offer alternate schooling strategies ranging from temporary school closures to “class bubbles” to Zoom sessions. Definitely not a normal year in any sense, the June certification examinations were again cancelled with final marks being determined via individual in-school class tests.

Nationalist History had Fueled the Conflagration

Novelist and science fiction writer Herbert George Wells (born 1866 and forever known as HG) had spent the World War One years (1914-1918) in a flurry of frenzied literary activity. He threw himself into various writing projects and by any measure produced a watershed of accomplished works; including, a half-dozen novels (for example, *Boon*, *The*

Research Magnificent, The Soul of a Bishop as well as *Joan and Peter: The Story of an Education*) along with scores of short stories and newspaper articles. His many various newspaper articles published in the early months of the war were released at the end of 1914 as *The War That Will End War*. This latter collection postulated that this current war would demonstrate the futility of war, in and of itself, and render future wars moot!

He even found time and energy to work for the British Government in 1918 and seriously lobby (in speeches and writing) for the creation of what would become the League of Nations. More importantly, however, according to biographer David C. Smith (1960), the War fundamentally changed Wells and directed his significant energies, notoriety, and resources into fields that would occupy him until his last breath in 1946!

HG became convinced that unchecked nationalism had created the conditions that permitted World War One to take root and expand. As an antidote, he sought new avenues that would blunt these negative emotions. Although originally trained in biology with a BSc from the University of London External Programme, with his first published books being a two-volume tome on biology, he saw German and other nations' nationalism and militarism as the root causes for the War.

In his mind, the domains of history and education must become the instruments to thwart narrowly focused nationalistic rhetoric by offering a more balanced and nuanced world narrative overview that did not attempt to exalt one country over another. Smith oft quotes the Wellsian phrase of "What did matter was the future of the world, of the species; ...who would win the race between education and

catastrophe?" (Smith, 1960, page 218; Sherborne, 2010, page 251).

Biographer John Hammond suggests that Wells – like many others – had been fundamentally negatively impacted by the carnage that was World War One. The years following 1914 had decimated the existing world order and cast a pall over Wells and his literary output. His articles and books had taken a "dark" turn. However, with the hope he now saw in *The Outline of History*, Wells became reenergized and threw himself into this project that he felt would stem future tides of unchecked nationalism (Hammond, 2001, pages 61-62).

Not since Edward Gibbon's 6-volume publishing triumph of *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* in the late 1770s, had the English-speaking world seen such a literary- historical undertaking. Writing and researching almost non-stop, with his wife acting as researcher and typist, Wells wrote the world's journey in a twelve-month period. He had to undertake the task himself – although not a professional historian – as not one historian he approached would support his endeavor or even consent to take on the writing task. Originally appearing in November of 1919 in a 24-fortnightly illustrated format (Hammond, 2001, page 61), *The Outline of History* was an immediate success.

The first single book version appeared very shortly thereafter in late 1920. Importantly, the work has been revised and updated numerous times (including 1931, 1940, 1949, 1956, and 1961) over the ensuing half century, translated into several languages, with the last revised enlarged English language print edition appearing in 1971. While exact sales are difficult to chart, it is estimated that several million copies of all editions have been sold world-wide.

HG’s hope was that his *Outline* would provide an overview that highlighted world citizenship and global connectedness rather than country specific nationalism. Unfortunately, his book never became overly popular at university levels but, on the other hand, became a sort of “every man” staple whereby his tome found itself onto the shelves of countless homes throughout the world.

In his own Introduction, Wells cogently observed:

Men and women tried to recall the narrow history teaching of their brief schooldays and found an uninspiring and partially forgotten list of national kings or presidents. They tried to read about these matters, and found an endless wilderness of books. They had been taught history, they found, in nationalistic blinkers, ignoring every country but their own, and now they were turned into a blaze. It was extraordinarily difficult for them to determine the relative values of the matters under discussion (Wells, 1956, page 2).

Great Conversations Provide Global Connectedness

In his 1961 revision, Raymond Postgate contextualized *Outline* and stated that its genesis grew from the continuing ravages as World War One seemed to drag on and on:

It was the last, the weariest, most disillusioned year of the first World War. Everywhere there were unwanted privations; everywhere there was mourning. The tale of the dead and mutilated had mounted to many

millions. Men felt they had come to a crisis in the world’s affairs. ... There was a copious discussion of possible new arrangements of world politics; of world treaties for the abolition of war, of leagues of nations, leagues of peoples. Everyone was “thinking internationally” (page 1).

More succinctly, Sherborne (2012) noted that “if an alternate account of history, emphasizing human unity, could be put into the hands of teachers and general readers around the world, it might have the reverse effect and help create a culture for future peace” (page 251).

Over the ensuing decades, Wells’ challenge to both educators and historians resonated but sidetracked by the realities of politics and historical slants. Nonetheless, eminent academics have continued to voice for balance in historical narratives that eschew nationalistic points of view. Michael Oakeshott (1901-1990) maintained a basic premise that major philosophical quests are interconnected and can only be unpacked via wide-ranging critical investigations. He further surmised that individual freedom was challenged by nationalistic politics (Oakeshott, 1991).

David Cannadine (1950 -) suggests that simplistic historical slogans and catch political phrases hide complexities and block detailed investigations. He argues that the world has always been a complicated overlaid landscape and simple narratives without context do an injustice to the convoluted human journey (Cannadine, 2013).

On the other hand, Margaret MacMillan (1940 -) argues that too much of contemporary historiography has slipped into a study of

minutia. She further states that detailed and narrowly focused studies do not accurately reflect the overall global reality and often skew for specific orientations.

She admonished developers of history programs and authors of textbooks to note that “history should not be written to make the present generation feel good but to remind us that human affairs are complicated” (2009, page 138).

From a Canadian perspective, Jack Granatstein (1939 -) challenged historians and teachers with the release of *Who Killed Canadian History?* The tome argued that the study of Canadian history had devolved into meaningless studies of little-known small segments that in no way contributed to a pan-Canadian debate. He suggested that the constant (re)examination of separate and local events distorted a national landscape and contributed to separateness with a lack of a global connectedness (Granatstein, 2007).

Granatstein suggested a set of “benchmarks” to guide history curriculum development. As examples, he highlighted that “standards should strike a balance between broader themes and the study of specific events...”; “standards must stress techniques of reading, understanding, and researching the past”; and “standards for history should be intellectually rigorous and aim to promote questioning, not passive absorption of facts” (2007, pages 45).

Anti-Glocality Leads to Fake History

There are many ways for educators to evaluate textbooks and templates abundant on the Internet. While differing in scope and scale, all generally lead the educator through a series of

items that deal with vocabulary, visuals, textual material, quizzes, etc. The purpose of all such procedures is for teachers to ascertain comparable features for possible classroom use. For example, Cunningsworth (1995) prefaces his book with the admonishment that “it is of great importance that the best and most appropriate materials available should be adopted” (page v).

The *Independent Report* (2018) noted that “the [official] program [of study] focuses narrowly on the experience of and events pertaining to the French Canadiens/Quebecois, from contact until the present day. It pays too little attention to other Canadian content”. Furthermore, “Nationalism narrows the focus, as it is not addressed as part of a larger phenomenon having its roots in Europe in the late 18th century” (page 3). Offering a comment specifically on the textbook, the *Report* noted:

As in the program, there is but one ideological bent in the textbooks rather than a more objective approach or an attempt to explain history from various ideological perspectives. This limits the students’ interpretation and understanding of historical developments (page 4).

Scattered throughout *Reflections* are four “My Story” vignettes. Designed to intimately offer a very personal view to adolescents, these are two-page narratives highlighting specific events in Quebec’s history. The four short stories are: “From Rivière-Ouelle to Lowell: 1895” (pages 26-27); “Evelynne, the bluebird: 1914-1918” (pages 112-113); “The generation gap: 1973” (pages 202-203); and “From Mosul and from Montreal: 2009” (page 284-285). Very visual with much more narrative than many other sections of the text, these tales

highlight specific historical people. Unfortunately – all are fake!

Ponder for a moment: a required history text that actively uses composite stories supposedly depicting real people to tell a real story. The drama of the tale palls in comparison to its falsehood! Surely, real narratives abound, and the textbook authors did not have to resort to the questionable anti-history technique of inserting fiction into a factual landscape. The tales are fallacious, the people never existed, and yet the presentation purports to be historically accurate. The Director of Educational Services for the Quebec Ministry of Education stated that these vignettes “offer a snapshot of life of an ordinary person who *might have lived* during the period targeted in the chapter. The intention is to present the period under *study in a way that will spark students’ interest*” (Emphasis added; Lord, personal letter, 2018).

Mock stories can lead to many unanticipated consequences. Profoundly, one may question what else is false within the text? Are other events depicted as “might have been” or even “wish it were so”? The idea of peppering a student text with false and misleading “stories” to engage the learner is counter productive. After all, is the student text a “history book” or a “historical novel”? Is real and true history not interesting enough in its own right to grab attention?

An added insult to the intelligence of both student and teacher in inserting false narratives concerns where such fables may lead. For example, “Bluebirds” was a descriptor of affection bestowed upon Canadian nurses in WWI by wounded soldiers. It was a term of respect and endearment commenting on the blue capes/white blouses worn as part of their official dress uniform. Unfortunately, the

authors did not exercise due diligence and while enthralled in the crafting of narrative falsehoods neglected to verify that an Internet search of “bluebird” will lead inquisitive adolescents into the vile world of pornography. The (mis)use of the Internet is excused by Lord in that “nowhere in the student textbook or the teacher’s guide are students instructed to consult a website or do Internet research...” (Lord, 2018).

Pagination Suggests Importance

It is a truism that greater space is devoted to more significant events or to incidents that the authors deem important. Complicated and wide-ranging historical incidents of a global nature will necessarily demand a more detailed and nuisance telling.

In *Reflections*, students read about several of the most important events in the twentieth-century through truncated narratives. For example, World War One covers 10-pages (pages 154-163); the inter-war years 12-pages (pages 164-177); while World War Two receives 9-pages (pages 178-188). In both war segments, the reasons for warfare are not engaged; background information is absent; it is as if countries simply decided to fight! The complex notions of international connectedness, for example of treaties with Belgium and/or Poland, were non-existent. Going to war is the most serious of decisions a country can make; yet any sort of global contextualization is absent, and Quebec adolescents are left simply to wonder: “Why”?

In the inter-war section, most of the information concerns minor local Quebec politicians who espoused isolation. The evolving world-wide concerns surrounding fascism, communism and/or totalitarianism associated with events in Europe (the Spanish civil war?)

and Asia (European colonialism along with Japanese expansion?) are simply absent from the landscape.

For example, one of the most important pan-Canadian social aspects to come from WWI, and one reflected throughout the Western world, was the right of Canadian women to vote at the Federal level – in fact, some of the first Canadian women to vote were those very “Bluebird” nurses in France. Yet, the equally interesting fact that the Province of Quebec did not permit women to vote in Provincial elections for another twenty years is avoided.

Additionally, conscription is a Gordian conundrum fraught with deep societal complications that faced every country! Forcing people to fight, and maybe so in far away places, always calls for deep thought and reflection. The suggestion in the text that conscription was only an issue in Quebec and was somehow directed solely against French-Canadians by the Canadian authorities twists the historical record and stifles deeper debate. Conscription encompasses the most basic of clashes between individual freedoms and the need for the greater society to protect itself, and must be appreciated and contextualized within a wide global setting.

Surprisingly, for the adolescent reader, there was no war against Japan in World War Two! No mention is made of the dropping of the two atomic bombs! If there was one single action that had a global impact from 1945, it certainly was the bombing of both Nagasaki and Hiroshima. The continuing world-wide nuclear tension, arms races, and global political tensions permeates many aspects of contemporary political realities.

Equally questionable, a two-page spread on the Holocaust devotes half of its scarce space

to “residence” of the Nazis (page 184-185). The horrors of concentration camps are relegated to a single black & white photo along with 75-words with little attention paid to the lasting impact and consequences of Nazi horrors.

Glocality Thwarted

Two of the standards articulated by Granatstein (2007) highlight large historical issues; namely, “standards should contribute to citizenship education through the development of understanding about our common civic identity and shared values, and through the analysis of major policy issues” as well as “standards must reflect the global context...” (pages 45-46).

Granatstein stresses the concern that the teaching of history must not fall into the trap of narrow interpretations. He cogently argues that history must be taught with all of the warts and foibles, but in a large global context such that connections can be entertained by the learner. Furthermore, as postulated by HG, narrow nationalist interpretations that deliberately place one country/culture over another must be eschewed. As he noted, nationalistic narratives do not lead to global understanding.

Instead of embracing a global and interconnected historical narrative, the most recent Quebec program and student school texts take adolescents on a stilted journey. As aptly criticized by scores, and especially as articulated by the *Independent Report*, the education authorities refused all suggestions for globalization, citizenship education, and contextualization.

While every Quebec student must follow a course called “The History of Quebec and Canada” and required to successfully pass a

Ministerial imposed uniform examination, their understanding of the past will be deficient. Unfortunately, their historical journey will be narrowly focused, wrapped in a specific political orientation, and devoid of an overall world view.

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