

## The State of our Curricula

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I believe one of the trends of this conference has been a comment on the political education – or lack thereof – of Canadian Society. By and large, Canadians verge on being considered politically illiterate.

George Lafond spoke of the importance of teaching our young people of the events of the past in order to prepare them for the future. This idea, unfortunately, meets with Dean Ian Halloway's correct assertion that Canada has a strand of anti-historicism. Dr. David Smith captured this notion perfectly when he said "Canada has never been at the heart of its own history."

As was pointed out by the Minister of Canadian Heritage last week, only four provinces in this country (Ontario, Quebec, Manitoba and Nova Scotia) mandate a credit in Canadian History as a requirement for a secondary school diploma. Many provinces do incorporate history and the study of government together under the umbrella of "social studies," but there is little consistency across the country:

- Newfoundland explores government in Grade 7;
- Alberta (which has no history course) looks at Canadian government in Grade 9;
- Nova Scotia looks at the development of government from Grades 7-9 with NO explicit mention of responsible government;

A few provinces do offer Civics and history courses in secondary school, but they are elective. My own experience in Ontario is with the wonderful CHI4U1 (Canadian history, identity and culture) which covers the development of Canada from its First Nations to present-day. However, this is not a required course – Ontario only requires one credit of the thirty needed to graduate to be history, and that course is delivered

in Grade 10. In a graduating class of 300 from my high school, only 60 will take this course. Incidentally, the Grade 10 course that all Ontarians must have in order to graduate has some serious problems.

Ian Halloway commented earlier that Canadian history should not be taught from 1867, saying that our country's story stretches back millennia. In Ontario, high school history begins at 1914 with the start of the Great War. I should also point out that such things as the 1939 Royal Tour of King George VI and all other mentions of the Crown (whether it is the Queen, members of the Royal Family or any of the vice-regal representatives) have been removed from the curricula.

Ontario does have the distinction of being the only province to mandate that a course on the Canadian Government be required for a high school diploma. This course is a ½ credit, open level, Grade 10 course. The curriculum written for this course, and mandated by the provincial Ministry of Education, will make your head spin. In this document you will find no mention of the following terms:

- Responsible government
- Statute of Westminster (1931)
- Confidence Convention
- Royal Proclamation (1763)
- Written & Unwritten Constitution
- How Governments are Formed
- Constitutional Monarchy
- Queen
- Governor General
- Lieutenant Governor
- Prime Minister

- Cabinet
- Parliament (Strangely, a definition does exist in document's glossary that is wholly incorrect)

Currently, the Ministry of Education is reviewing the Civics document as part of a 7-year cycle, but when these differences were pointed out a response was offered that the terms previously listed are already captured by the existing overall expectation:

*“describe the main structures and functions of municipal, provincial and federal governments in Canada.”*

The remaining pages of the document focus on global citizenship and being a good Canadian.

Not to only pick on my home province, other curriculums are equally vague and problematic – including that of Saskatchewan. The Saskatchewan curriculum document has only two lines pertaining to the study of government (which occurs in Grade 8):

- Understand that Canada's Constitution has evolved over a long period of time;

and

- Know the three levels of government in Canada and the general areas of responsibility of each level.

I have compiled a list of the provincial curricula in relation to our teaching of the government that might interest you (copies available at [www.canadiancrown.com](http://www.canadiancrown.com)). Please remember, however, that in most cases the courses listed are – concerning secondary courses – elective or – concerning elementary courses – submerged under a mountain of competing curricula.

Another point that must be made is that often times – certainly in the case of Ontario's Civics – these courses are given to young teachers with little or no understanding of Canadian history and/or government.

These young teachers themselves are products of the dark days of the 1990s when the new curricula of Ontario was instituted. This means that their lessons are almost uniformly informed by the textbooks available to them – and this is where I think the future of the Crown in this country becomes very bleak.

I have brought with me Ontario Ministry of Education approved, Trillium Listed, textbooks (list available at [www.canadiancrown.com](http://www.canadiancrown.com)). In some cases, these books have formed the foundations of countless Civics courses for the past decade. I will read some examples to you now (please refer to list).

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In order to begin the process of healing in Saskatchewan between the descendants of its European settlers and its First Nations peoples Premier Brad Wall made the knowledge of the treaties compulsory for the province's students. The same needs to happen concerning not only the Crown, but the parliamentary democracy it has created. We are currently educating our schools to be illiterate, ambivalent or even hostile toward our constitutional monarchy, an institution that requires an educated population in order to work effectively.

The Ontario Ministry of Education has said that they will not disclose if the Civics curriculum has been improved – it will be released in January and cemented in for the next seven years. If we don't start educating our populace along the same lines as what as being done here in Saskatchewan concerning Treaties and the relationships they created this crisis of education will only get worse and will continue to attack the very heart of our democracy.

James Hamond's comments on educating his province on the role of the lieutenant governor of British Columbia, and the recent release of Rideau Hall's "Eduzone," need to have the support of prescriptive and clear curricula that steer teachers toward the wonderful resources being created.

If we do not fix this problem, the political literacy of our electorate has the potential of becoming a truly national crisis.

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