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### History in the Canadian Public-School Curriculum

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# HISTORY IN THE CANADIAN PUBLIC-SCHOOL CURRICULUM

By HUGH M. MORRISON

Education as a field of study, based upon scientific thought and procedure, gained only yesterday a place in the university. As a consequence of this infancy its terminology is in a loose, fluid, and at times chaotic, condition. It will be well, therefore, throughout this paper to define our terms with the greatest of care. The title, "History in the Canadian Public-School Curriculum", contains two expressions about which we must have a common understanding. They are "Public School" and "Curriculum". As for the word "History", we shall be on safe ground if we understand it as referring to man's past social relations.

The meaning attached in this article to "Public School" arises out of Professor H. C. Morrison's conception of the common school as covering that period in which the pupil, in order to be properly adjusted with his environment, must be given a general education resting squarely upon a comprehension of the physical, biological, and social foundations of civilization.<sup>1</sup> In theory—for it is far from being generally accepted in practice—this span of general education extends until the pupil's gaining of his majority at twenty-one years of age. Canadian education to the end of the secondary-school period falls easily within this scope, so that we may define the public school as that part of the common school, which is conducted at the public expense.

"Curriculum", the other term selected for definition, is a much abused word. It is not an outline of studies; an outline or programme of studies is a means toward the achievement of the curriculum. The word, curriculum, is derived from the Latin "to run". It is a process which has an ideal educational end, entailing teaching, courses of study, books, and other pedagogical aids. And in the common school that ideal is the harmonious adjustment, largely governed by a process of social evolution, of the individual to his environment. In Canada, as public education is based upon provincial organization, we consequently have various curricula, although in a broader sense one Canadian public-school curriculum should be in existence.

The common school is a social institution, and by institution is meant a set of relations which are anchored in the *mores* and folkways of the people. Being rooted, and very firmly rooted, in the *mores* it cannot rise above them, despite recent exhortations for the school to "build a new social order".<sup>2</sup> Rather it is its duty and high task to fit its pupils into the moulds of the life surrounding them so that they may know how to act with the least friction and harm to themselves and to others, not only in childhood but also in adult life. This adjustment is a prerequisite to sane social progress. The achievement of this state, which is the mark of a man's education, requires a thorough understanding of the physical, biological, and social foundations of the environment. The mastery of these

<sup>1</sup>See the writings of Professor Henry C. Morrison, especially *Basic Principles of Education* (Boston, Houghton Mifflin, 1934).

<sup>2</sup>George S. Counts, *Dare the School Build a New Social Order?* (New York, John Day Co., 1932).

three aspects constitutes the ideals of the common-school curriculum; and it is with the last, namely social understanding, with which the teaching of history is concerned. Note the two points which are strongly implied: one, that history in the common school deals with a phase of social relations, and two, that as the common school is for everybody, every normal citizen should have an intelligent understanding of the historical development of civilization.

We have accepted the fact that history, as we commonly understand it, deals with past social relations. If we trace for a moment the full meaning of this statement, we shall realize more fully how important history is in the common-school curriculum. Social relations, of course, suggest society. But the word society may cover anything these days from "a high born maiden in a palace tower" to the S.P.C.A. Talcott Parsons in the *Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences* devotes six pages in holding that "society may be regarded as the most general term referring to the whole complex of the relations of man to his fellows".<sup>3</sup> Professor R. G. Keller writes that "any such combination of individuals of different sexes, living in a cooperative effort to win subsistence and to perpetuate the species, is a human society".<sup>4</sup> A more positive definition, emphasizing the abstract quality of society—which is the important point that many miss—has been furnished to the writer by Professor H. C. Morrison. It is as follows:

"Society is in the first place one of the three primary conditions of human existence. The other two are the physical and biological environments.

Society is, further, sets of relationships between individuals which grow up out of the inevitable action and reaction between many individuals.

Society is not the community, the state, the public, or the people.

Society is not self-conscious: it neither invents, prescribes, approves, rewards, nor decrees."

In the light of these broad conceptions of society, and from the fact that history deals with the past, we may now see a justification—nay, an absolute necessity—for a constant place for history in the common-school curriculum. It constitutes by far the major portion of one section of the tripartite common-school curriculum.

History, then, is a social science, and furthermore, it is the cement that holds them together. It provides a rationalistic base for the social disciplines. Only through an understanding of the past can a sound appreciation of the problems of the present be gained, since the present has grown out of the past. Without a comprehension and mastery of history the individual is likely to be cast guideless upon the seas of contemporary social life, buffeted hither and yon before the fickle winds of the day. In these times children of yesterday show only too plainly the lack of this education. This deficiency extends in varying degrees, from the most simple occupations, through all social strata, even to professorial chairs in the universities.

<sup>3</sup>(New York, Macmillan, 1934), XIV, 225-31.

<sup>4</sup>*Man's Rough Road* (New York and New Haven, Frederick A. Stokes and Yale University Press, 1932, cited by courteous permission of the publishers), 13.

In the light of this important function of history it should occupy an important place in the common-school curriculum, and in Canada it does. We are fortunate in this country that the elective system has not been pushed so far, at least in history, as in the United States. At the present moment, with one great exception, Ontario, history, either upon a subject basis or treated with or in other social sciences, is a constant subject of study throughout our public school. In the Ontario secondary school, a perusal of the statistics indicates that the optional character of history study is more apparent than real. In the Lower School history is prescribed for one year, and it is optional in the Middle and Upper Schools. In the Upper School in 1933-4, out of 9,380 pupils, 5,112, or 54.6 per cent., were engaged in the study of modern history. Canadian history and ancient history are the optional courses in the Middle School. From an examination of the statistics for 1933 and 1934 it appears, if the two one-year courses are roughly balanced off against each other for the two-year period, that practically all the children take both courses through the Middle School period.<sup>5</sup> Thus, in one year of the two-year Lower School all children study British history; practically all take Canadian and ancient history throughout the two-year Middle School, and about half study modern history in the one-year Upper School. Undoubtedly, the new programme in this province will contain a definite decision as to whether there is to be more prescribed work or not.

All in all, then, there exists in Canada a foundation for a real organization of the social-science aspect of the common-school curriculum.

It is one thing, however, to put history into the curriculum; it is quite a different matter to administer it. We thus come to our second implication, namely, that the common school is duty bound to exert its resources to the utmost in giving every normal child an intelligent understanding of history; in short, if you please, to make him socially literate. In this task the school has laboured under profound difficulties. Just a few need to be mentioned here. Pioneer conditions, entailing aborted school careers, small schools, ill-prepared teachers, and lack of equipment, constitute probably the fundamental cause, but to this must be added the extreme recency of the treatment of education upon a scientific basis. As a result of these handicaps the school is only now, and very slowly, starting to pull away from the domination of the text-book, which in the field of history is extremely vicious. For the history text-books in the schools amount—with the exception of some new ones—to nothing but condensed university text-books embodying almost all the detail of historical research. Under such vast handicaps as these it is not surprising that the results in building a sound and stable citizenship have been so meagre.

This defect, so noticeable, has brought the educational world face to face with one of its gravest questions, namely, how to make the social-science aspect of the curriculum more effective. It challenges, and its solution is imperative. Since 1900 literally thousands of volumes and articles have been written on the problem. The Commission on the Social Studies of the American Historical Association compiled a bibliography of over fifteen thousand titles confined to the United States alone, and

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<sup>5</sup>*Annual Survey of Education in Canada, 1933, 1934* (Ottawa, King's Printer, 1935, 1936).

reported a great majority valueless.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, the report of this commission<sup>7</sup> itself, after five years of time and nearly \$250,000 had been spent, was more or less of a disappointment. It was not an unanimous document, and it has not by any means received general acceptance. Not only on this continent but also in England there has been much soul-searching. Leading English educationalists and social scientists, including eminent historians, have recently formed the Association for Education in Citizenship. Last year it issued a very thoughtful book upon this question.<sup>8</sup> The only general agreement in all this activity is the admission of the inadequacy of the traditional social-science aspect of the common-school curriculum, and, of course, this applies to history.

This inadequacy has served to emphasize the necessity for a general revision of the public-school curriculum. Now, the three most important elements in the administration of the curriculum are the programme or course of studies, the teacher, and the pupil. Although separate entities, they must function together with the least possible friction if satisfactory results are to be obtained. Hence we shall discuss our problem, namely history in the Canadian public school, from these curricular points of departure.

This is indeed the day of the makers of programmes of study. "There is probably no place between the Atlantic and the Pacific", writes the editor of *The B.C. Teacher*, "where a man could throw up a stone without danger of its falling upon the head of somebody engaged in rewriting a Programme of Studies."<sup>9</sup> Canadian educationalists and teachers are truly rewriting, not merely re-editing, their various programmes with energy and foresight which is admirable. The results of their efforts are being felt from the large urban schools to the isolated correspondence pupil on the pioneer fringe of the Canadian frontier. The greatest revision activity is in the West, for in all the western provinces revised curricula are in partial operation, and in British Columbia and possibly in Alberta, will be in full operation by next September. In the East, Nova Scotia, that seat of Canadian intellectualism, led the way. At the present moment the schoolmen of Ontario are busily engaged upon curricular revision.

The new programmes are more than bare syllabi or text-book outlines of courses of study. They constitute veritable volumes. This expansion was necessitated by the great gap which has arisen between the teacher in the field and the new discoveries which scientific procedures have brought about in education. By the use of these new programmes, filled with pedagogical suggestions, together with such steps as increased qualifications for teacher certification, improvement of teachers-in-service through summer courses, larger units of administrative organization, and more external supervision, provincial departments of education are endeavouring to cut down the "teacher-lag".

Space prohibits anything but a very general survey of the content of history to be found in our programmes and courses of study. In the

<sup>6</sup>American Historical Association, Commission on the Social Studies in the Schools, *Conclusions and Recommendations* (New York, Scribner's, 1934), 155-6.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup>*Education for Citizenship in Secondary Schools* (London, Oxford University Press, 1936).

<sup>9</sup>*The B.C. Teacher*, XVI, Oct., 1936, 49.

elementary school, which varies in length in the different provinces, formal history, either as a separate subject or embodied as the core of some social-science scheme, is started at the fourth or fifth grade and from there carried on to the final year. It is so arranged that both British and Canadian history are covered, and in some provinces excursions are taken into some world history. In the primary grades a little history gets some treatment in informal teaching of home geography in the unrevised curricula, and in what is called social education or social studies in the revised curricula.

Coming to the secondary school, note must be taken of a new unit of organization which is to be found in some of the western provinces and Nova Scotia, namely the junior high school or intermediate school. It extends from grade 7 to grade 9 inclusive. History in this unit usually covers, with many variations and methods of treatment, Canadian and British history, and sometimes emphasis is laid upon the British Commonwealth and some world history, all leading on to contemporary social problems. The purpose of this second cycle is obvious: it is designed to catch that great proportion of children who leave school at the end of the compulsory school age. The remaining part of the secondary-school period in the revised curricula, and the traditional high school in the unrevised curricula, concern themselves largely with formal British and Canadian history. Two noteworthy improvements, in the writer's estimation, are to be found in Nova Scotia and in British Columbia. In the former province a logical conclusion is brought into the final year by a study of world civilization and contemporary social problems. In British Columbia in grades 10 and 11, world history is taken as the core of a social-science course which leads up to the present. In the revised programme it is very likely that Canadian history will be included in a course on Canadian problems in grade 12. Ontario's unrevised programme has the course on modern history in the final year, but great improvements are possible here which very probably will appear under the present revision.

The organization of history for teaching purposes in the common school is far from a simple matter. The findings based upon the historian's scientific procedure must be maintained, and at the same time they must, in presentation to the child, be adapted to his mental level. In the last analysis, this demands the gaining and the keeping of the interest of the child, which may be achieved by a careful gradation of subject-matter and of activity upon the pupil's part. Exactly at this point the traditional text-books and teachers subservient to them failed.

What is needed is the injection of more point and more life into the history section of the curriculum. The pupil must be saved from becoming mentally lost in a welter of unrelated and insignificant data. A guiding unbroken chain of history forged from the story of the rise of our world civilization, about which man's past social relations will constantly play in a meaningful manner, must be maintained throughout the common school. Because of the practical conditions under which the public school labours, there should be, for the present at least, two, and preferably three, levels of this story, but underneath it all the main thesis of man's social development should be evident. These cores of thought should lead from the known to the unknown, until the known becomes almost a part of the pupil's personality, and then on to the unknown again—on to fresh fields

to conquer. Let him get lost and his desire to conquer may well be thwarted. In the primary grades the thought must lead off from the pupil's immediate environment; hence the justification for home geographical or local community concrete experiences. In addition, these concrete experiences will become more abstract in direct relation to the mental development, and hence the promotion in school, of the child.

This is the basis of the true unitary treatment of history. A unit implies a part of a whole; the whole in the case of history, is the evolution of civilization. The parts of this whole should be, to use Morrison's words, "significant and comprehensive".<sup>10</sup> Significant, in that it should be definitely interrelated to, and focused on, the central core of thought, and hence, of vital importance. Comprehensive, in that it signifies a great deal. Thus the Industrial Revolution is a comprehensive unit in general social history. Not only must the unit be significant and comprehensive, but, as it is a science type of study, it must be comprehensible; or more clearly, the relationship between the part and the whole must be apparent to the pupil. For example, a unit on the 1837 rebellions is not likely to be very comprehensible to high-school children, being more adapted to the university level. The high-school unit should be on the development of self-government, as it is a significant and comprehensive aspect of our Canadian social relations, and comprehensible at the high-school level.

British Columbia's proposed organization for grade 10 or 11 social studies furnishes a good example of unitary organization. It is as follows:

- Unit 1: The Foundations of Society
- Unit 2: The Dawn of History
- Unit 3: The Cradles of Civilization
- Unit 4: The Age of Grecian Civilization
- Unit 5: The Roman World
- Unit 6: The Birth of European States
- Unit 7: Medieval Civilization in Europe
- Unit 8: The Growth of National States in Western Europe
- Unit 9: The Age of the Renaissance and the Reformation
- Unit 10: The Building of Colonial Empire
- Unit 11: Our Social Inheritance.

Many of the revised Canadian programmes claim to contain units. But, in actuality, many are not units, but merely topics or projects. A great deal of work remains yet to be done in all the revised curricula if a true unitary organization is to be achieved.

Space and time again permit but a few observations upon the second point of curricular departure, namely the teacher. He is the most important element in the successful termination of any curriculum. Scholarship is a predominant factor essential to successful teaching. Without competent teaching excellent educational aids may be rendered futile. There is probably no course in the curriculum where a teacher must be master of his subject more than in history. It is stated in the Nova Scotian programme that "in order to teach history the teacher must know

<sup>10</sup>*The Practice of Teaching in the Secondary School* (rev. ed., Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1931).

history. Day to day 'preparation' from the pages of the prescribed text will not be enough."<sup>11</sup>

The total number of years of schooling plus years of teacher-training is not a wholly valid index upon which to judge scholarship; nevertheless, in the large, it is fairly valid. The background of Canadian secondary school-teachers in most of the provinces is upon the whole equal, if not better, than that of similar teachers upon this continent. The same cannot be said, however, about elementary-school teachers. In all fairness, it must be stated that some provinces have taken steps recently towards improvement. In one province it is still possible to become certificated to teach in elementary schools with only six years of elementary-school preparation plus two years of normal school, and in another province after a total school career, combined at its later stages with some teacher training, of only eleven years. Considering that these provinces are still in the unorganized and crude course of study stage, one naturally wonders how much scholarship in history such teachers possess.

If some of the teachers lack scholarship little of the blame may be attached to them when the niggardly financial encouragement which many receive is considered. For example, in 1933-4, the average salary paid female lay teachers in the Catholic system in Quebec was but \$331, and the highest average for five years preceding was but \$402. One regional inspector reported actual salaries of \$75 and \$150 per year.<sup>12</sup> In Prince Edward Island average salaries of all first-class teachers in 1934 was \$657 and for second-class teachers but \$445. In the same year Saskatchewan's rural elementary teachers were getting an average of \$505 upon which to subsist.<sup>13</sup> All salaries in Canada, or in Quebec or Saskatchewan, are fortunately not at that low level. Some provinces have adopted minimum-wage legislation.

A word on the pupil. In order to make the curriculum effective, the ideal situation would be the carrying of all individuals completely through the common school. Many believe that this is essential to the gaining of a general education, and in the light of increased complexity in social relations more so now than ever before.

Although in recent years healthy progress has been made towards this ideal situation, its realization is still far in the future. Because of many causes, the chief of which are economic circumstances and academic selection, many children drop out of school, roughly all the way from grade 6 upwards. A few figures compiled from the *Annual Surveys of Education* in Canada will serve to give a general idea of this loss. It should be noted that the following figures do not take into account the amount of retardation or the few who transfer to private schools. In 1932 in all of the Canadian public schools, except those of the Catholic system of Quebec, there were enrolled 164,987 children in grade 6. The following year in grade 7 there were but 143,676, a drop of 21,311, or 12.92 per cent. Again in 1932 for all the provinces, except the Quebec Catholic system, there were 129,180 pupils enrolled in grade 8, and in the

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<sup>11</sup>*Handbook to the Course of Study* (Halifax, Department of Education, 1935), 201.

<sup>12</sup>*Report of the Superintendent of Education of the Province of Quebec for the Year 1934-35* (Quebec, King's Printer, 1935), xxiii, 59.

<sup>13</sup>*Annual Survey of Education in Canada, 1934*, p. xiii.



following year there were only 95,644 in grade 9, a decline of 33,536, or 25.96 per cent. Finally, in 1933, there were 64,257 enrolled in the last year of all the public secondary schools of Canada, 28,032, or 62.3 per cent., of this figure were enrolled the following year in grade 12, senior matriculation in British Columbia, or first year in arts in Canadian universities.

It is thus quite apparent that under practical conditions the common-school curriculum must be so organized that the child will get as much of a general education as possible before leaving. This accounts for the organization of the junior high school and the senior fifth form in Ontario. With the junior high-school organization, courses in history may be arranged in three cycles corresponding to the elementary school, the junior high school, and the senior high school. There can be thus developed three chains of historical development, but underlying them there still can be maintained the central core of thought of the rise of civilization. Hence the pupils who complete the entire public-school period would not be sacrificed because of the needs of those who drop out.

Emphasis in this article has been laid upon the proper place of history in the common-school curriculum, and also upon the fact that it constitutes the very backbone of the social sciences. Good beginnings have been made to make history teaching more effective in many of the Canadian schools. Much improvement will still be made, and indeed, has to be made. Some provinces have not started yet; they remain asleep by the sea.

*Discussion.* Mr. A. R. M. Lower spoke of the situation in Manitoba, where low salaries and inadequate opportunities for study handicapped the teachers. Another fact that was in his opinion unfortunate was that individuals who were not properly prepared in history were obliged to teach it as well as other subjects.

Mr. G. deT. Glazebrook welcomed the subject of the teaching of history in the schools, and expressed the hope that in the future it would continue to receive the attention of the Canadian Historical Association. He suggested that the teacher should avoid the impression that any doctrines were being advocated, but rather should allow the pupil to absorb ideas naturally.

Mr. E. R. Adair urged that teachers should have better salaries and better preparation. The latter would enable them to make the text-books more interesting. The Association, he thought, should encourage school teachers to attend its meetings. He expressed a disbelief in too much emphasis on great periods of world history.

Mr. G. W. Brown agreed that teachers should be encouraged to attend the meetings, but added that the programme must have a particular attraction for them. One way in which the Association might be of service to the teachers would be by the publication of material that was useful to them. History, he thought, must be presented in a vivid fashion; but children must have loyalties, and if they did not get the right ones, might get the wrong.