One World

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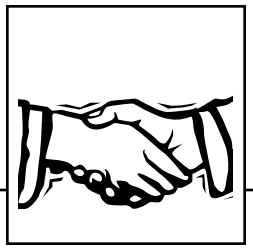

From the Editor

Ralph Dilworth

Welcome to the spring/summer issue of *One World.* This issue may seem, at first glance, to be somewhat thin. I had expected two more articles, but they were not to be. In the interests of keeping to our publication schedule, I have made the decision to run with what we have.

And what we have makes up in quality for what it may lack in quantity!

We open with a thoughtful and insightful piece from Alan Sears, keynote speaker at the Social Studies Council's annual conference last fall. In the face of what many perceive as a crisis in civic and citizenship education, Sears offers a compelling and eloquent argument for a more learner-centred approach that pays attention to the prior knowledge of the learner and teaches for deep understanding. This approach may seem to some a tall order and to others something that we have always done. Regardless of one's analysis of where we are right now, this article should provoke thought, growth and hope for the future.

Our second piece comes from the pen of Bill Baum, a high school teacher and world traveller from Lethbridge. I must admit to harbouring a special place in my heart for Lethbridge, where I began my teaching career. I must admit as well to a special place in my heart for Bill, for that girlfriend he speaks of happens to be my daughter. Bill offers us a personal, humorous and perceptive look at a China that he has seen change and open up. He wrestles with the dilemma that grips many of us: How do we act morally with regard to China? Do we boycott China and its products because of its abysmal human rights record? Or do we mute our revulsion by recognizing that much progress has been made? To watch or not to watch the Beijing Olympics became our summer 2008 existential question. My daughter had no trouble with it, but I did. I did not watch—a solution without consequences, I suppose, or an easy way to salve my conscience without paying much of a price. On a larger scale, the question remains—as we can tell by watching the contortions of our own government in its dealings with the Middle Empire.

Our third piece is a chapter from *A Fair Country: Telling Truths About Canada,* by John Ralston Saul. I was particularly interested in getting permission to reprint this chapter because it addresses (as only John Ralston Saul can) the issues of identity, history and sense of self. "Learning to See Ourselves" looks at the intersection of Aboriginal, anglophone and francophone identities and their role in defining the Canadian experience. The author speaks to the conversations unleashed by the new Grade 11 curriculum on nationalism and the fashioning of identity. Many thanks to John Ralston Saul and Penguin Group (Canada) for granting us permission to reprint this chapter.

Our final piece comes to us from William C Frick, of the University of Oklahoma, and Jim Parsons, a frequent and always-welcome contributor to the pages of *One World.* The authors offer us a highly interesting take on the complicity of schools in producing citizens wedded to consumerism and the acquisition of material goods. Given our heightened sensitivity to economic matters in these straitened times, this article is sure to provoke thought and analysis.

I conclude by expressing my thanks once again to all the contributors to this issue of *One World.* As my term as editor winds down, my awe in the face of the dedication and energy of those who take the time to write for us and share their views and wisdom only increases. Learning is and should be a growth industry, and whatever our age or experience, we remain in debt to those who help us grow.

Turning the World Upside Down: Paying Attention to the Learners in Civic Education

Alan Sears

Alan Sears teaches social studies education in the Faculty of Education at the University of New Brunswick. He has been a social studies teacher for more than 30 years and has taught at all levels, from Grade 2 to graduate school.

The following article has been adapted from the author's keynote address at the 2008 annual conference of the Social Studies Council. Some of the ideas also appear in his article "Making Room for Revolution in Social Studies Classrooms," which will be published in the spring 2009 issue of Education Canada.

It is no exaggeration to say that across the democratic world there is widespread panic about the disengagement of citizens, particularly young ones, from both formal and informal civic processes. The most common evidence presented to support this sense of crisis is the precipitous drop in voter turnout, especially among young people. The title of a report for the Centre for Research and Information on Canada (CRIC 2001), for example, asks the question, Is Canadian democracy in crisis? Even in Australia, where voting is compulsory and turnout relatively high, there is pervasive evidence that "voting has scant value in itself" for young people and many see it "only as a matter of compulsion and punishment" (Edwards 2007, 93).

Democratic jurisdictions have not been complacent in the face of this crisis; they have swung into action—funding research, creating high-profile media campaigns to get out the youth vote, and looking to civic education to turn things around and solve the long-term problem. Indeed, there is consensus around the world that the crisis exists and that citizenship education is the most effective means to address it (Hughes and Sears 2008). Significant national and cross-national projects have been initiated in Australia, England, the United States and the European Union (to name just a few). While Canada has not committed nearly as many resources to the effort as other jurisdictions, virtually all the provinces have recently instituted reforms to their social studies curricula to pay more attention to developing thoughtful, engaged citizens. The most extensive of those reforms have been in Alberta.

As a citizenship educator, I should be delighted that this crisis has resulted in such a flurry of activity in the field. I have certainly benefited in terms of research funding and opportunities to work on interesting projects, including text resources for the new Alberta curriculum. As an educator, however, I am skeptical about crisis as a driver of reform. Since its inception, public education has been plagued by a continuing "search for panaceas"—in simplistic and ill-considered responses to crises of various sorts

(Hunt 2002). The perceived crisis in citizenship and citizenship education is no different; the crisis is often misunderstood, and proposed solutions are rushed into effect with little or no consideration of actual evidence. I have argued elsewhere that it is well past time to move beyond crisis into careful analysis, both in diagnosing educational problems and in prescribing solutions (Sears and Hyslop-Margison 2007).

One sign of hope is the attention researchers and practitioners in social education are beginning to pay to the "cognitive revolution" of the 20th century (Gardner 2006, 75); they are building a body of knowledge about how young people understand and learn key ideas and concepts in the field. In other words, they are beginning to focus on the learners themselves and are drawing lessons from learners about how social studies in general and citizenship education in particular should be structured and taught. In this article, I will discuss two key implications of that work for citizenship education in the classroom: (1) prior knowledge matters, and (2) we should be teaching for understanding.

Implication 1: Prior Knowledge Matters

In 1909, Charles Doolittle Walcott, a paleontologist and director of the Smithsonian Institution, discovered what came to be known as the Burgess Shale, high in the mountains of British Columbia. The rocky outcropping is one of the richest deposits of fossils in the world, and its discovery precipitated a significant rethinking of evolutionary theory. This rethinking did not begin right away, however; it was delayed by more than 50 years because the scientists who first worked on the shale saw not what was actually there but, rather, what they wanted to be there. In his book *Wonderful Life: The Burgess Shale and the Nature of History,* the late Harvard paleontologist Stephen Jay Gould (1989) argues that Walcott and his immediate successors were so locked into the evolutionary framework of the day that they shoehorned the evidence into that framework instead of letting it speak for itself. It was decades before another group of scientists allowed the fossil evidence to challenge their prior conceptions of evolution.

This story illustrates a central tenet of the cognitive revolution: that people come to any learning situation with a set of cognitive structures that filter and shape new information in powerful ways. Gardner (2006, 76) calls these structures "mental representations" and contends that "individuals do not just react to or perform in the world; they possess minds and these minds contain images, schemes, pictures, frames, languages, ideas, and the like." He writes, "Many of the theories espoused by young children are wonderful; some are charming; some of them are dead wrong from the point of view of physics, biology, psychology, history" (p 227). When presented with information that does not fit into their existing frameworks, learners will often distort the information or discard it completely rather than do the difficult work needed to restructure their frameworks.

Elsewhere, a colleague and I have developed an analogy comparing these frameworks to modular bookshelves (Hughes and Sears 2004). Like bookshelves support and structure books, existing frameworks help to structure pieces of knowledge. As one acquires new knowledge (a new book), a number of things can happen. The knowledge might fit well with what one already knows, and the new book will slide neatly onto the shelf beside other books. Alternatively, the knowledge might be almost completely new and will require a new shelf to accommodate it.

Another possibility, however, is that the new knowledge is related to knowledge already on one of the shelves but does not quite fit. This is like getting an oversized book that will not slide neatly onto a shelf. Learners have some options here. They can do what many of us would do with an oversized book—set it aside for the time being, perhaps putting it on the coffee table. In other words, they can decide not to deal with the new knowledge, at least not right now. Another possibility is to slide the book onto the shelf horizontally. In this option, learners decide to not accept the knowledge as it is presented but, rather, to manipulate it so that it fits their already existing framework. This choice often means distorting the knowledge, creating or adding to misconceptions, which is exactly what Walcott and his colleagues did with the fossil evidence from the Burgess Shale.

Finally, one can choose to pull the pins and adjust the shelves to accommodate the new book. We know, however, that changing the shelves is hard work, and further adjustment will be needed as books on other shelves are affected by the change. In the same way that it is much easier to set an oversized book aside or turn it horizontally to fit, learners often find it easier to reject new knowledge or manipulate it to fit their current framework than to do the difficult work of changing their mind. Research on prior knowledge consistently shows that cognitive schemata are persistent and resistant to change.

To be effective, curricula and teaching must take students' cognitive frameworks into account, and

create the cognitive dissonance that is necessary for fostering the reframing of those frameworks in line with more accurate and sophisticated understandings of the concepts and processes. If this is not done, teaching all the right information in the world will be largely ineffective. As Gardner (2006, 77) writes, "If one wants to educate for genuine understanding, . . . it is important to identify these early representations, appreciate their power, and confront them directly and repeatedly."

An obvious implication for civic education is that it is necessary to build a body of work on how students understand key ideas and processes related to democracy and democratic participation. Compared with mathematics and science educators, social studies educators have been slow to build a body of knowledge about how children and young people understand the social and political world. A significant exception is history education, where researchers worldwide have been building a knowledge base for how students understand historical ideas and processes and the implications of those understandings for policy and practice. Much of the best of that work has been done in Canada (see, for example, Seixas 2004, forthcoming; Sandwell 2006; Lévesque 2008; Clark, forthcoming).

While the knowledge base for young people's understandings of the key concepts and processes of democratic citizenship is not nearly as comprehensive as that in history education, it is growing and it has important implications for practice in the field. For example, a number of studies indicate that young people around the world have a strong orientation away from the conventional forms of political participation associated with formal political systems and toward more unconventional or grassroots engagement. A study of 90,000 youths in 28 countries found that "the generation of young people represented by the study's 14-year-olds is gravitating to affiliation and action connected to social movement groups and not to political discussions or formal relations with political parties" (Torney-Purta et al 2001, 81). Similarly, work out of Australia (Vromen 2003) and the United States (Levine 2007) shows that young people are generally moving away from engagement in the formal political realm but are participating in a range of other ways. In these cases, the research demonstrates not only that young people behave in particular ways but also that they understand good citizenship and participation in distinct ways. Dalton (2008, 75) argues that young people's civic behaviour can be attributed more to their "different images of citizenship" than to their levels of interest or apathy.

This kind of framework is clearly demonstrated in the research on understandings of democratic participation that I conducted with Ottilia Chareka (Chareka and Sears 2005, 2006). As part of this work, participants were shown sets of pictures depicting civic engagement ranging from community-based activities (such as volunteering at a food bank) to more formal political activities (such as voting or running for office). The participants were asked to select pictures or sets of pictures that they wanted to talk about and were then interviewed about their choices.

Virtually all the participants separated the pictures into two groups, clearly identifying the activities as either political or nonpolitical. In looking at the pictures of people voting, participating in party meetings or running for office, participants said things like "Now we are talking politics" or "This is politics. Are you political?" (Chareka and Sears 2005, 53). All the participants were also explicit and forceful in saying that they saw their own participation as falling in the realm they considered nonpolitical. About the pictures showing grassroots community involvement, one participant even said, "Things like this are real citizen involvement, not politics" (p 54).

It is clear that a significant number of young people across democratic jurisdictions have a conception of participation that privileges forms of engagement other than those associated with formal political systems. Some have argued that this is not necessarily a problem for democratic societies, but I disagree for at least two reasons. First, disengagement from formal politics is a threat to the legitimacy and long-term health of democratic governments and, second, the depoliticizing or privatizing of community-based or grassroots forms of participation demeans their real importance to shaping the common good. The fact that young people seem to both discount political involvement and too narrowly construe it should be addressed by civic education.

As noted earlier, the area of civic involvement that has raised the most concern for political theorists and civic educators is the decline of voting rates among young people across the democratic world. This concern has precipitated a flood of voter education programs that often focus on voting as a civic duty or on the mechanics of voting. Research demonstrates, however, that young people's reasons for voting or not voting are complex and that they are engaging in a range of ways they see as more effective and satisfying than voting.

Chareka and I examined conceptions of voting among a small group of young people (aged 14–25) in eastern Canada, and found that they lacked neither

basic knowledge about the mechanics of voting nor more complex understandings of the place of voting in democratic governance (Chareka and Sears 2006). In fact, participants in the study "exhibited a fairly sophisticated understanding of voting and its place in the political system. They knew the role voting plays in democratic governance and had a fairly well-developed sense of its evolution as a democratic right" (p 532). In spite of this, most said that they did not vote or that they did not intend to vote when they became eligible. They saw voting as ineffective for three reasons: (1) there are no real differences between political parties, (2) individual MPs and MLAs have no real power to shape policy, and (3) politicians cannot be trusted (p 530). Leaving aside discussion of the accuracy of these perceptions, it is clear that voter education programs that focus on the mechanics and purposes of voting will do little to either inform these young people or alter the framework through which they understand voting as democratic participation.

Research on prior knowledge tells us that addressing students' cognitive frameworks for democratic participation generally or voting in particular is not as simple as telling them the right answer. Students' prior conceptions must be brought to the surface and then connected in meaningful ways to evidence that calls them into question. Students should encounter other voices that lead them to think about and rethink their conceptions. This leads us directly to consideration of the second implication of current work in civic education.

Implication 2: We Should Be Teaching for Understanding

The authors of a recent major review of the citizenship curriculum in England have noted the concern that "teaching Citizenship with History could mean a return to the old curriculum of British constitutional history and civics" (Ajegbo, Kiwan and Sharma 2007, 8). Of course, if students are to pay attention to the British context of English citizenship, they must learn about British constitutional history and civics. The real concern is not subject matter but a traditional approach to teaching that presents constitutional and legal structures as fixed, final and forever, and students as sponges whose main function is to absorb that material and release it again when squeezed at exam time. Gardner (2006) calls this "the correct answer compromise" (p 135), where knowing is reduced to "a ritualistic memorization of meaningless facts and disembodied procedures" (p 147).

This approach to social education generally and civic education in particular has been all too common. Forty years ago, the most comprehensive study of history and civic education in Canada found that a "bland consensus version of history" was being taught across the country (Hodgetts 1968, 24). This teaching focused almost exclusively on political and military matters, avoided controversy, did not make any connections to the present, and emphasized the memorization of, among other things, "nice, neat little acts of parliament" (p 19).

In her recent examination of history education in Australia and Canada, Clark (2008) found the same thing. Students in both countries told her that they thought national history was important to know, but the history education they had experienced was "excessively content-driven and teacher-focused" (p 114), almost never considering multiple perspectives or developing deep understanding.

Torney-Purta et al's (2001) international study of civic education largely confirmed this pattern of teaching across the 28 countries involved. Teachers reported relying mostly on transmissive approaches to teaching, with rote learning activities being far more common than those that promote critical engagement with the material. These approaches "frequently consist of encyclopedic coverage of details of government structures or historical documents that may have little meaning to students and do not connect to their own identity as a citizen with responsibilities and rights" (Torney-Purta and Vermeer 2004, 14).

Gardner (2006) calls for education focused on developing understanding of key concepts, ideas and processes so that students can employ that understanding in new situations and in creative ways. For Gardner, *understanding* is "the capacity to take knowledge, skills, concepts, facts learned in one context, usually the school context, and use that knowledge in a new context, in a place where you haven't been forewarned to make use of that knowledge" (p 134). In terms of citizenship, then, understanding would mean being able to act effectively in an informed manner in the civic sphere—the major goal of virtually every civics curriculum in the democratic world.

Research in cognition demonstrates not only that children (even quite young children) can handle conceptual complexity but also that they are interested in important ideas. Brophy and Alleman (2006, 433) note, "We and others have found that primary-grade students are interested in and able to learn a much greater range of social studies content than many educators give them credit for." Unfortunately, their

review of curricula across the US indicated that "primary students in most American elementary schools are not systematically introduced to such content, nor to much, if any, significant social education content at all" (p 3). They argue,

> If cultural universals are taught with appropriate focus on powerful ideas and their potential life applications, students should develop basic sets of connected understandings about how the social system works, how and why it got to be that way over time, how and why it varies across locations and cultures, and what all of this might mean for personal, social, and civic decision making. (p 422)

My and my colleagues' work with children from Canada and Russia demonstrates that quite young children can develop complex understandings of civic ideas and processes (Hughes and Sears 2007).

If civic education is to focus on helping students develop sophisticated conceptual and procedural understanding, it will necessarily eschew the coverage of vast amounts of material in favour of focusing in depth on a more limited range of ideas and processes. As Gardner (2006, 148) argues,

> Certainly, the greatest enemy of understanding is coverage—the compulsion to touch on everything in the textbook or the syllabus just because it is there, rather than taking the time to present materials from multiple perspectives, allowing students to approach the materials in ways that are initially congenial to them but that ultimately challenge them, and assessing understandings in as direct and flexible a manner as possible.

Similarly, Brophy and Alleman (2006, 430) call for a social studies curriculum for young children in which "the content is organized into clusters structured around big ideas, so these big ideas are the focus of the information presented to the students and the questions addressed to them." In the Spirit of Democracy project (www.spiritofdemocracy.com), colleagues from Russia and Canada have designed an approach to teaching civics that is centred around the fundamental concepts underlying democracy: "the rule of law, freedom, tolerance, equality, justice, privacy and so on" (Hughes and Sears 2007, 83). Through pedagogy rooted in situated learning and anchored instruction, students from Grade 3 through high school have wrestled with questions about how these fundamental concepts have been worked out and manifested in democratic jurisdictions across time and contexts.

Concentrating on the key concepts and processes of civic life does not imply that specific information is not important. The most basic test for understanding of any concept is whether the learner can correctly categorize something as an example or a nonexample. Take the very broad concept of democracy. The fact that students can parrot a definition of democracy provided by the teacher or the textbook is not a reliable indicator of understanding. Students quite regularly parrot definitions, but asking them to apply the concepts to real cases often confounds them. Understanding of democracy is evident when students can reasonably judge whether, or the degree to which, particular systems are democratic. Making this kind of judgment means comparing the specific attributes of the system in question with those of the concept in the abstract, as well as with specific manifestations of those attributes in other democratic jurisdictions. It requires a complex and connected understanding of both theoretical knowledge and specific information. Research evidence demonstrates that students are far more likely to remember specific information learned in this sort of connected or anchored manner than information presented in a superficial and disconnected manner (Hughes and Sears 2004, 2007).

Teaching for understanding in civics requires well-educated teachers with both content and pedagogical expertise. Research in cognition demonstrates clearly that merely bringing students into contact with accurate information is not enough to help them acquire the kind of understanding they will need in order to use the information in new and creative ways. Teaching for conceptual change and deep understanding requires that the teacher have quite sophisticated knowledge of the material to be learned, the learning process and the specific learners to be taught (Darling-Hammond and Bransford 2005). Hammerness et al (2005, 370) note that "a strong body of research indicates that learning experiences that support understanding and effective action are different from those that simply support the ability to remember facts or perform rote sets of skills." Good teachers are absolutely necessary.

Unfortunately, the teaching profession in North America and elsewhere is plagued by the phenomenon of "out-of-field teaching" (Ingersoll 1999, 2001). Teachers are being assigned to teach subjects or areas in which they have no academic background. This is endemic in social education generally and civic education in particular. If the intent of education is the delivery of low-level information, out-of-field teaching is probably not a significant problem. But if the intent, as argued above, is to develop complex conceptual and procedural understanding in students, it is quite a significant problem. Teachers with little or

no understanding of the key ideas, concepts and procedures in a field can hardly be expected to teach them to students. It is time to put to rest for good the dangerous fiction that a good teacher can teach anything. Pedagogical expertise is a necessary but not sufficient condition for good teaching. Teachers also require proficiency in the concepts and processes related to the subject matter they have been charged with teaching.

England is one of the few jurisdictions that have established substantive initiatives in both preservice and inservice education for teachers of civics. Concurrent with the implementation of the national curriculum in citizenship in 2002, the country established training for citizenship specialists in undergraduate teacher education programs. As well, funding was provided for a substantial, ongoing, coordinated program of inservice education through citizED (www.citized.info), a consortium of teacher educators, teacher education institutions and other partners from across the country.

A key implication of research in cognitive science is that teaching is a complex task requiring overlapping expertise in academic subject matter, human development and pedagogy. Both teacher education and placement must be conducted with this in mind, and at present that is happening almost nowhere.

Conclusion: Signs of Progress and Hope

The research on how social studies is commonly taught in classrooms around the world might lead to pessimism—especially if one considers that more progressive approaches have been emphasized in policy, curricula and teacher education programs since at least the early years of the 20th century, yet nothing much has changed.

It is important to keep several things in mind, however. First, there have always been good teachers who have engaged their students in the substantive consideration of important ideas and the development of high-level skills.

Second, there are early signs that policy makers are seeing the importance of social education. As Osborne (forthcoming) argues, after years of decline and relative obscurity compared with math, literacy and other subjects considered more useful, "by the end of the 1990s, history's place in school curricula seemed stronger than it had been for some years." In 2007, the new Liberal government in New Brunswick set out its vision for education and argued that "the first occupation for which students must be prepared is that of citizen" (New Brunswick Department of Education 2007, 14).

Third, a number of key elements are being put in place to support teachers who want to teach for understanding. Space does not permit detailed examination of those elements here, but I will review them briefly:

- Citizenship education curricula across Canada and around the world are focusing on important ideas and processes. The new social studies curriculum in Alberta, for example, mandates that students will come to understand complex ideas, such as individual rights and collective rights (and the tension between them), a range of ethnic and cultural perspectives, and how public policy decisions are made and implemented. Along with this, students are to develop facility with a range of critical processes, such as historical and geographic thinking, decision making and problem solving.
- Important concepts and processes are being delineated in specific ways that help teachers structure both instruction and assessment. The best example of this is the articulation of procedural concepts related to historical thinking. A considerable body of work shows how students and expert historians think about these concepts, as well as providing instructional ideas for moving students toward more sophisticated understandings and for assessing that movement (Lévesque 2008; Seixas, forthcoming). Similar work related to civic ideas and processes is beginning.
- Teaching approaches have been developed that flow directly from the growing body of research on cognition. These approaches are evidence-based and focus on fostering substantive conceptual change. Two well-articulated examples from teams of Canadian researchers and teachers are (1) the Spirit of Democracy project (www.spiritofdemocracy.com), which draws on situated learning and anchored instruction to teach the contested and fluid nature of democratic ideas (Hughes and Sears 2004, 2007), and (2) the Benchmarks of Historical Thinking project (www.histori.ca/benchmarks), which outlines approaches to teaching and assessing six historical-thinking concepts (Seixas, forthcoming).
- Substantive and usable materials are being produced to support teaching for conceptual change and significant skill development. The Critical Thinking Consortium (www.tc2.ca/wp/), for example, has produced materials related to teaching for critical thinking, including historical and geographic thinking. Much of what is being produced is affordable and easily accessible.

- Collaborative partnerships are being established between teachers, university-based researchers and other practitioners to engage in all of the activities described above: researching students' understandings of key ideas and processes, working out in usable form what progression in conceptual change might look like in particular areas, developing evidence-based teaching approaches to support conceptual change, and producing high-quality teaching and learning materials. The History Education Network (THEN) in Canada (www.historyeducation.ca) and citizED (www.citized.info) in England are two examples. Educational reforms are often unsuccessful because they are mandated in the form of pronouncements from researchers or policy makers, with no regard for the knowledge and expertise of practitioners. Partnerships such as THEN and citizED move into a much healthier and more functional model of collaboration and reform.

The cognitive revolution, beginning with Piaget and flowing through Vygotsky, Bruner, Gardner and many others, has called on us to pay attention to learners as the beginning point for structuring coherent and substantial approaches to teaching and learning. Math and science educators were among the first to grab hold of the ideas from this revolution and to begin to work out the implications for their subject areas. History educators have been leading the way in social education, but the cause is now being taken up by others, including some in citizenship education. It is as if we have realized the promise of the Hebrew prophet Isaiah that "a child shall lead them."

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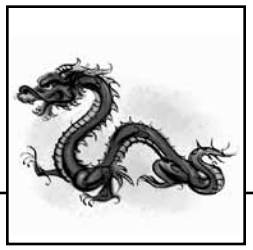

The Dragon Wears Nikes

Bill Baum

Bill Baum has taught high school social studies for seven years at Lethbridge Collegiate Institute. He has visited China two times, once in 2002 and again in the summer of 2008. He has also lived in Japan twice, for a year in 2001/02 and during a three-month teacher exchange in 2006.

Prior to my three-week stay in China last summer, I had full intentions of boycotting the Beijing Olympics. In the euphoria of spring fever, I declared that it was important to protest the abuses of the Chinese Communist regime in my own quiet way. My girlfriend laughed at me and claimed the TV as hers and hers alone so she could indulge in her Olympic hysteria. I had to admit, I loved watching the games. But as a display of my social conscience, I would stay strong and take a stand for the people of China.

Imagine my excitement when Alberta Education offered the opportunity for a two-week cultural study right in the dragon's lair! I could experience first-hand the oppression I had viewed over the years on CBC. I could gather anecdotal evidence that would help me convince others to join me in my protest, sitting on our lawn chairs while my girlfriend sat inside, watching China almost surely cheat its way to Olympic gold. I began planning my journey to Beijing.

A few short months later, standing in front of a Hooters restaurant in Shanghai, I realized that I had grossly misjudged China.

The Program

Alberta Education has been lucky enough to align itself with the Office of Chinese Language Council International (aka Hanban), a branch of the Chinese Ministry of Education. Hanban sponsors a senior educational officials' and teachers' study. Launched in 2007, the program regularly invites a group of 20–30 Alberta educators to Beijing for two weeks to study Chinese culture, language, education and history. Meals, travel and accommodations linked to the study activities are provided, and the international dormitories at Capital Normal University play host. Because participants are responsible for funding and scheduling their own flights, they have the option of arriving early or leaving late so they can visit other parts of the country, which many in our group did.

From July 12 to July 26, I took part in the Hanban study, and I extended my stay to July 31 to visit Xi'an and Shanghai. Our two-week study was a pleasant mixture of scheduled activities and free time. Weekday activities included morning exercise (usually Tai Chi) followed by a language lesson and a lecture on a topic in history, society, education or religion. Art activities were planned for a few afternoons, and in all cases, the professors who presented to us were fantastic. Usually afternoons and weekends were reserved for field trips to historic attractions such as the Emperor's Summer Palace, the Great Wall and the Forbidden City. We had plenty of opportunities to shop at the Silk Market and the Pearl Market, dine at various traditional and mainstream restaurants, and when the schedule permitted, explore the city on our own. Evening also allowed for time to enjoy local tea houses, theatre, food and drink (and, as the trip wore on, foot massages).

Disclaimer

It's hard to write an article on China for the social studies community. I'm not an expert, and I can't tell you anything that you can't read about elsewhere. What I would like to share is my perspective on China with respect to our new curriculum, particularly the impacts of globalization. I hope that you can use some of the information in your classroom as you see fit.

It is important to note that my experiences were based almost entirely in urban settings and tourist hot spots, so there is a bias in my perspective. The stats and quotes presented here all came from the professors who presented to us on a variety of topics, from the Chinese perspective.

So, where to begin? How about with my expectations? I was expecting to gain mind-blowing insight into the stories of human rights abuses I had been exposed to through our Western media. I also expected to experience "Big Brother is watching" paranoia mixed with hostility toward our Western presence, as revealed in news stories I had seen shortly before I left. I had experienced those conditions on my first visit to Beijing in 2002. How much could things have changed? As it turned out, change—good and bad—was the one constant of my trip.

Just to Be Sure, I Want You to Know That Mao Is Dead

I know you may realize this, but I must repeat it: Mao is dead. I didn't actually see his body, as his mausoleum closed at noon every day for Olympic preparations. However, it is safe to say that we can talk about him without fear of persecution. The Chinese people seem to have realized this, too.

When asked how the Chinese people feel about Mao today, one presenter informed us that the common opinion is that "Mao was 70 per cent good, 30 per cent bad." This isn't quite as extreme as Gwynne Dyer's (2005) claim that, as it turns out, Mao was *all* bad, but it is a starting point. Another lecturer admitted that during the Cultural Revolution, they were ready to answer the party's call to do anything, simply because they were brainwashed.

However, Mao is still revered, in a strange twist of fate. In markets where, in true capitalist fashion, you can barter for goods, a common artifact is a Mao watch with a waving right arm as the second hand. Shortly after I purchased mine, the arm stopped waving, which seemed to prove that the watch was indeed a product of Mao's economy. And, of course, you can't go home without having haggled over the price of a copy of Mao's infamous Little Red Book filled with Communist rhetoric. Oh, the irony. To be fair, these entrepreneurs wouldn't be caught dead peddling their wares in front of the grand portrait of the man himself, which hangs at the entrance to the *emperor's* Forbidden City. (Am I the only one who finds that amusing?)

I will have you know that I was very relieved to experience at least one aspect of the old planned economy. In our dormitory, we had one English channel, which was a government-sponsored channel. Mine was channel 4. My friend Cynthia's was channel 8. Dawn, who was next door to Cynthia, watched her propaganda on channel 5. Adding to this was the inefficiency of the Internet. I paid for Internet access. It never worked, though. I guess that's one good way to make sure I don't blog about something inappropriate! On the flip side, the taxi drivers were very good at getting us to our destinations as fast as possible—perhaps because most of them had recently arrived from the countryside and, unable to speak English, were annoyed by our attempts to speak Mandarin.

Witnessing the Growing Pains of an Industrial Revolution

When one thinks about Chinese history, it is hard not to be impressed. The Great Wall inspires and horrifies in all its majesty. The terracotta warriors are breathtaking. And from a Chinese perspective, the Watermelon (Silk) Road brought Asian trade to Europe, only to have gunpowder unleash a cruel irony on China's history.

The ancient sites and stories are hard to fully comprehend when compared with our documented, postcontact "Canadian" history. At the same time, we are watching history unfold before our eyes.

Perhaps one of the most impressive aspects of China's Communist government is its awareness of the trials it faces with the country's rapid modernization. The topic of infrastructure often came up in our lectures. We were told that in the past two decades, approximately 200 million people from rural areas have flocked to the cities in search of work. The stress this growth has placed on the infrastructure was obvious everywhere we went.

The government has made significant efforts to provide housing for its people. Where we in Canada would see one apartment complex being built, Beijing seems to erect a legion of them. Yet, true to Deng Xiaoping's reforms, they are sold off for a profit. As

such housing is out of reach for most rural workers, we also saw our share of slums. Though they are surrounded by large cement walls and therefore difficult to see from the street, a walk along an overpass will give you a bird's-eye view of the poverty many still experience. A comparison to the shantytowns of South Africa is not inappropriate.

Most of us are aware of the other issue surrounding the impoverished community and this rapid construction. What are they doing with all of those people being displaced by the new buildings? We were told that, contrary to what we had heard, the government had promised new homes in Beijing for all displaced people. Some fought with the government because they didn't want to move, and they then failed to explain to the media that they had this option available to them.

One need only look at the skyline to see that this rapid construction is not limited to housing. The new joke is that China's national bird is the crane, as our language instructor, Tony, informed us. Two new subway lines opened when we were there, with two more scheduled to open before the Olympic Games.

Many not-so-obvious problems were also brought to our attention. Another instructor informed us that there are issues surrounding the emerging classes that did not exist before. (Mao is rolling over in his crystal coffin!) It seems that established urban citizens are hostile toward the rural newcomers as they occupy more and more space. (Apartments often house five transient workers per room!) Education also faces new challenges, as the government has forced schools to open their doors to the rural youth. Principals question where the money and resources will come from, and for those youths lucky enough to move into the city with their parents, being bullied is a daily ritual. At the same time, philanthropy is emerging as private donors offer money to start up private registered schools.

This was the point where I began to question my perceptions of China. Given our Western media's presentation of China, it was only a matter of time before that little critical thinker in me started asking the obvious questions. *How much of this is happening only because of the Olympics? How much of this modernization is a way to put on a dignified face as the world flocks to the games? At the same time, how many of these problems have been caused by the need for workers to modernize?*

But as I thought about it, I realized that these questions are irrelevant. With the Olympics, change has come to China. (Didn't Obama win the presidency with the promise of change?) This change has provided the people with opportunity. For example, in Beijing, teachers have a full university education and training in the field of education. In rural areas, where there has been a shortage of teachers (as people flock to service, industrial and white-collar jobs), many teachers have no education beyond high school. Moreover, rural schools do not have government funding, so 6 per cent of children can't even go to school. Because of the rapid changes, more students are now going to school, and many are gaining access to a higher-quality education. And education, as so many of us believe, leads to new perspectives. These perspectives are starting to show themselves.

Green? I Thought They Were Red!

With 10,000 new cars hitting the road every day, China's pollution problem has reached a state of crisis. Whether because of international pressure or because it has learned from our own mistakes, the Beijing government has been taking measures to solve this problem.

I'm pretty sure that if I'd stood around long enough, a gardener would've tried to plant a flower in my pocket. On almost every square inch of open space in Beijing, there is a plant. If there's a bit of room between a tree trunk and the sidewalk, flowers are planted there. Space has been reduced in homes, and the death of the traditional courtyard houses means less common space, so Beijing has increased its number of parks to 10 times what it had 15 years ago. We even saw trees lining the highways in the countryside surrounding Xi'an. Sure, one could argue that the trees were planted to obstruct our view of the impoverished countryside. But in the context of the environment, they are helping the cause.

Through increased awareness of the problems pollution brings and improved education, it seems only natural that this environmental trend in China will continue. Yet I don't think that these small fixes are enough. I can't help but feel a sense of urgency that we Western nations need to develop green technology to reduce the environmental damage China is capable of unleashing. Of course, Thomas Friedman (2008) shares this sentiment, pointing out that we can also make a heap of money in the process.

An amusing aspect of this environmentalism was the driving ban placed on Beijing drivers in the weeks prior to the Olympic Games to improve the air quality. Drivers with licence plates ending in an odd number

were allowed to drive on one day; those with licence plates ending in an even number, the other. Watching a news report on the transformation, I laughed when I heard how wonderful it was to not drive to work every day. One enthusiastic man was excited to try out the subway for the first time. Another claimed that carpooling allowed him to get closer to his friends and colleagues. These sentiments contradicted the opinions I had heard first-hand about how inconvenient the driving ban was and how its end couldn't come soon enough. It seems that when it comes to supporting government programs, propaganda is alive and well in China. And part of me understands the need for this controlled message.

Dictatorship Revisited

As I walked from pub to pub along the beautiful lake at Beihai Park, beer in hand, I had to admit that Communism isn't all bad. I considered this again when one of my colleagues commented that at no time had he felt threatened in Beijing. In fact, he said that he felt safer there at night than on the streets of his small town back home! The more I learned about the change Beijing is facing, the more I began to question what I knew of Chinese Communism. Part of me even began to feel that this form of government is a necessity given the situation. In a land so large, with so many people, perhaps a government that can make swift decisions on issues such as housing and the environment is necessary to minimize suffering.

That's right—I said it! Before you judge me, let me explain. The people in China now have more rights and freedoms than ever before. Though the Internet is restricted, the people do at least have access to this information and communication source, which is a huge leap from where they were. The government has shown flexibility by modifying the economy so that the people can accumulate wealth and spend their money on consumer items—which was once unimaginable. Mild democratic reforms have allowed the people to freely choose a career anywhere they want in China.

When comparing their freedom with the repressive experience of their parents and grandparents, it is easy to understand why today's urban population is pleased with the government. At the same time, with a population so large, the potential for chaos is high. If the population did not support the government, a large protest could quickly get out of hand. As well, following the rule of law is much easier when people believe that it is good for them to do so. Take the driving ban, for example. The government was able to swiftly impose this rule on the people. While I laughed at the controlled message about the wonderful opportunities the driving ban was giving the people, I also believe that when it comes to the environment, it is important for people to follow the rules. With the number of drivers on the road, enforcing the ban wouldn't have been easy. So it was important that the people supported the policy.

I believe that, eventually, democracy will take hold in China. With the economy now slowing, the people will begin to realize that times are not always good in the market economy, and because they are used to growth, they will demand more from their government as times get tougher. If the government can ease their pains and meet their demands, then good will have happened. If it can't, the time may then be right for the last push into democracy. It is clear that change has not only come to China but will continue to come.

"Women Should Be Treated Equal but Different"

This was the message that perhaps our most interesting lecturer left us with. When the Cultural Revolution began, our women's studies professor was 19 years old. In her lectures, she often used her own stories, as well as those of her mother and her daughter, to illustrate the changes in society. Her insights included comments on sexuality and marriage.

During Mao's revolution, women became so asexual that it was difficult to distinguish them from men. Short hair and the standard grey uniform took Mao's idea of equality to an extreme level, as did the expectation that women in the work fields perform the same labour as men. Sexuality was not discussed, and education about sexuality was not provided. (We can see remnants of this today, as it was not until recently that the Chinese government began to recognize the AIDS crisis in China.) Our lecturer pointed out that there was a baby boom during the Cultural Revolution, but she was quick to explain why: because people were too scared to engage in public discussion, they often stayed home . . . and there was nothing else to do! She reflected on her marriage and how her mother had told her she was too young to be married, but she got married anyway—for no better reason than to legitimately spend the night with her husband.

A sexual revolution is occurring in urban China today. Of course, the one-child policy has created a male-heavy demographic, which has led to other issues. This hit home when I came across a huge

English sign in Shanghai that read STD Clinic. Public displays of affection have been taken to a new level—I saw one man attempting to swallow his girlfriend's face. So I guess I shouldn't have been surprised to come across a Hooters restaurant.

Change has indeed come to China. And the trained eye of a Westerner can see that the potential for negative change has already taken hold.

TVs, Nikes, Ferraris . . . Where's the Cool Stuff?

Much like the Industrial Revolution in England, the rapid modernization of China has made an abundance of material goods available to the rising Chinese middle class. The desire for material goods is nowhere more evident than in the Chinese home. In a lecture on modern Chinese society, we were informed that over the last 50 years, there have been three items that brides have expected their husbands to provide for them. In the 1950s, those items were a watch, a bicycle and a radio. In the '70s, a washing machine, a sewing machine and a camera were the most popular items. By the '80s, a fridge, a colour TV and a video camera were most sought after. Today, a new bride expects an apartment, a computer and a private car.

This emerging consumer culture stood in the way of one of my goals while in China. I wanted to take home something really cool—something that would shock my friends or wow them as I explained how I had come to possess this relic from the past. I had no idea what this item might be, but I had plenty of opportunities to shop and find something.

The antique market in Beijing seemed a pretty good place to look. But I didn't find anything that fulfilled my expectations. (There were a few authentic copies of the Little Red Book, but they were pretty worn and I had already purchased 10 as gifts for my colleagues, so space and weight were becoming an issue.)

My fellow travellers were heading down to the Pearl Market and the Silk Market, so I tagged along. Now, these two venues are where you go if you want to buy really cheap knock-offs, jade or pearls. However, most of the workers are new to the city, so their English is a little rough, and they are extremely aggressive. (To put it into perspective, even Brad Pitt and the Jonas Brothers haven't been groped that much.) As I fought my way through the vendors, I saw many options, but most of the items I had seen back home. So I did what so many before me had done and purchased a Rolex, before heading outside to regroup.

When I took inventory of my purchases, I felt a bit disappointed. That one unique item still eluded me. So I decided to head down to the Wangfujing Street area, as I remembered an interesting side street with all kinds of "traditional" items. You'll never guess what I found! More Mao watches, bags, books and T-shirts. After purchasing a few teacups and silk fans, I still didn't feel like I'd found that unique item. So I headed down Wangfujing Street in a last effort. This street is a few blocks from Tiananmen Square and is a draw for tourists. It's the trendy shopping street, but it still has some stores with "Chinese" items.

I had to laugh as I walked past a McDonald's. I headed to the Olympic store, only to find that all of the items there were just more expensive versions of the stuff I had found in the other markets. Heading further down the street, I began to tire as I passed Adidas, Nike and many other stores I could find in Lethbridge. I told myself that this was likely because of the expected Olympic rush.

My journey to Xi'an would surely lead me to an awesome sword or something! Xi'an is inland, far from Beijing, and as I had heard on the news, it harbours a bit of anti-Westernism. My hopes were crushed quickly on our first night there, when our taxi passed a Wal-Mart on the way to the theatre. Again, I asked myself why I was surprised. After all, Xi'an is the final destination along the Silk Road, which brought Western goods to China. Still, I had one more hope—Shanghai.

Again, I failed to remember that Shanghai is the business centre of China and thus was the first city to really modernize. As I stood on the shores of the Bund and looked down Nanjing Road, another famous shopping area, all I could see were Pepsi banners. I had to once again laugh at the irony as I passed Ferrari and Mercedes dealerships on the way to the People's Park.

At last, I realized that I was experiencing first-hand the Westernization of Chinese culture. I know that I shouldn't have been surprised. After all, many items in my home were made in China. It was ridiculous to expect to go there and find anything different. Wasn't it? I felt disappointed as I recognized the truth of the words I had delivered to my Social 10-1 classes—words such as *assimilation, homogenization* and *Westernization.* Most of the areas I visited in China are tourist areas, which are obviously geared toward consumerism, but this in itself says a great deal about the change in the priorities of the Chinese people.

Which Brings Us Back to Hooters

After hours of walking around, people-watching and looking for my Chinese souvenir, I realized that I had to eat. I looked along the shoreline of the Huangpu River, in the shadow of the Orient Pearl TV Tower, where I stumbled across Hooters. My initial response was laughter, but I soon recognized that the restaurant was in fact an appropriate symbol of the change that is coming to China.

Inside, the scantily clad waitresses catered to the needs of the male clientele. Their service represented the rising employment opportunities offered by the cities. Their song-and-dance routines revealed the spirit and attitude of the younger generations. The songs telling patrons to "keep your hands to yourself" and "stay at the YMCA" were supplemented with a serenade of the "Hokey Pokey" in broken English. Their gyrations and behaviour revealed their evolving ideas about sexuality. Even the fact that there is a Hooters in this nation that once would have imprisoned one for such displays of liberalism is hugely significant.

Sadly, it became evident that the waitresses' dress demonstrated the corruption of values that so many around the world associate with American popular culture. While it's true that improved diet has led to a taller, fuller, healthier generation, one need only step into the Shanghai Hooters to start wondering how long it will be before a plastic surgeon's clinic opens in the neighbourhood. If Hooters is any indication, the extreme version of beauty that many in our culture torture themselves to achieve is already infiltrating and perverting Chinese culture.

After All This, There Is Hope!

As I was driving to the airport, the first ideas for an article began to come to me. Driving away from the Bund, where one side of the river has a Victorian feel and the other looks like something out of a futuristic movie, I thought about all the contradictions I had seen and felt. Whether the people realize it or not, the material world emerging in China is Westernizing its culture.

At the same time, I can truly say that I was able to find a piece of old China. Traditional Chinese theatre offers the stories and sounds of the past. A trip to the Lao She Teahouse allows one to imagine the entertainment the nobility once enjoyed. The acrobatics and message of *The Legend of Kung Fu* remind one of the Confucian philosophy.

Most of all, the people are amazing. They were embracing the opportunity that hosting the Olympic Games had given them, and they were eager to show everyone that China is ready to take its place in the world. Never have I felt so welcome. Everywhere we went people were asking to have a picture taken with us. Always eager to try their English out, they at times made me feel like a celebrity. In the six years since my last visit to China, this has been the greatest change.

Though we may not agree with the way the Chinese people are ruled, we must remember that, in our global world, we are linked. With every purchase that says Made in China, we are supporting their future. Despite the tales of oppression, China is freer than it has ever been. The spirit of the people is vibrant. It was this spirit that gave me hope. Change will continue in China.

Did you see the opening ceremonies of the Beijing Olympics? They were magnificent, weren't they?

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Learning to See Ourselves

John Ralston Saul

John Ralston Saul's philosophical works—Voltaire's Bastards *(1992),* The Doubter's Companion *(1994),* The Unconscious Civilization *(1995) and* On Equilibrium *(2001)—have had a growing impact on political thought in many countries. His five novels, including the international bestseller* The Birds of Prey *(1977), deal with modern power and its clash with the individual. In* The Collapse of Globalism and the Reinvention of the World *(2005), Saul confronts the economic ideology of globalization. His 13 books have been translated into over a dozen languages. His work has received many national and international awards, including the Governor General's Literary Award, the Premio Lettarario Internazionale in Italy and, most recently, Chile's Pablo Neruda Medal.* Reflections of a Siamese Twin *(1997) was chosen by* Maclean's *as one of the 10 best nonfiction books of the 20th century. Mr Saul was born in Ottawa and studied at McGill University and King's College, London, where he obtained his PhD.*

The following excerpt (Chapter 5, "Learning to See Ourselves") from John Ralston Saul's A Fair Country: Telling Truths About Canada *has been reprinted with the permission of Penguin Group (Canada). Minor changes to spelling, punctuation and documentation have been made to fit ATA style.*

How we might lay out a Canadian point of view that matches our reality is complicated. But what we need to do, how we need to act, is not so difficult. Ideas, intellectual concepts don't always come first, but they can't lag far behind existential action. The results of such actions, on the other hand, are impossible to predict, let alone design. What I am talking about is the need for an interim stage. Either we stumble on, ever more frustrated that our society doesn't function as it should, or we start to rethink our history, to re-examine it. If we look, we will discover the First Nations, the Métis and the Inuit at its core. We have to learn how to express that reality, the reality of our history. I am not talking about a passive projection of our past, but rather about all of us learning how to imagine ourselves differently. And this is not something that we must do—we, the people who don't think of ourselves as Aboriginal. It's something we have to do *with* Aboriginals. Otherwise, it will be just another romantic delusion.

Nor do I mean that this is just a matter of utilitarian action. That would be insulting to all parties. Indigenous peoples are already there, at the core of our civilization. That is our reality. Our challenge is to learn how to recognize what we have trained ourselves not to see. We must remove the imaginative and historical veils that we have used to obscure this reality. That means trying to identify the elements that make this Aboriginal presence real to both non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal.

And this is not primarily about thanking or apologizing or admitting wrong or settling outstanding accounts. All of that needs to be done. What I am talking about is a quite different stage—one in which we learn how to see ourselves, to identify ourselves and, finally, to describe ourselves. Then we would be able to talk to each other in a language that makes

sense here, a language that is not yet another tortured attempt to apply European or US concepts to a very different reality.

How would this happen? Some of it is deceptively simple. In the National Gallery in Ottawa a few years ago, the curators reimagined their Canadian galleries and began to integrate Aboriginal art of the equivalent era alongside those paintings and sculptures we used to think of as mainstream. In other words, the Aboriginal work is no longer treated as ethnographic or marginal or even as distantly parallel. They exist in the same rooms together. And as soon as what was thought of as the art of separate worlds is hung together, you begin to view our society differently—in a more holistic way. The Glenbow Museum in Calgary is now doing the same thing. This is a small first step. But art—culture in general—is never really a small step. It is the sign that we are getting ready to think differently—that we are starting to imagine ourselves in another manner.

Some of this change is much more deceptively complex. Our Supreme Court has now given serious weight to oral culture through a series of judgments focused on indigenous questions. In fact, it has ruled that it is willing to believe oral evidence over written. Our universities, which ought to be in the same philosophical and cultural universe as our highest levels of justice, are instead entirely designed to deny the importance of the oral. At the core of higher learning in Canada lies an obsession with the written and a concept in which learning means written. The higher your studies go, the more they are built around narrow, exclusionary ideas of truth, tightly tied to a world of people footnoting one another. And so our intellectual class, whether lawyers or social scientists or those who teach literature, is constituted to deny the centrality of the Aboriginal cultures. The intellectual class exists to deny any particular Canadian approach toward culture. They write it out, marginalize it, even when ways are found to give the oral written form.

Many would say there is no alternative. Yet the historic basis for most of what is taught in the humanities was oral or largely oral for thousands of years.

Of course, separating out elements in a complicated world is a valid intellectual activity. It must be done. But the capacity to see how the elements fit together is a completely different form of intelligence and is of equal if not greater importance.

It is that horizontal, inclusive approach to thought that will allow us to see what we have trained ourselves not to see. If we suffer from an imaginative blockage, it is all about generations of tightly argued assumptions. We no longer remember that many of our contemporary *facts* are merely the expression of political assumptions from the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Our studies may be immersed in modern methodology, but their intellectual base remains an old-fashioned, imperial view of the world. After all, it is the intellectual idea of the rational human that has made it so difficult to focus on a balanced use of natural resources. It is the 19th-century concepts of individualism that have made it so difficult to maintain social cooperation. It is the 18th-century idea linking science and progress that has made it so difficult for us to judge our technical initiatives.

If we begin to look directly at those assumptions, what we find is remarkably inaccurate. For example, the idea that the Europeans discovered a poor, backward culture here, one of mere hunters and gatherers, remains in place even if not expressed in such a direct way. The reality was quite different. In technical, Western terms, 400 years ago, the Europeans arriving in Canada and the indigenous peoples they met here could both be described as belonging to medieval civilizations. Each had certain advantages. Western advantages such as guns and metal implements were quickly adopted by the Aboriginals. These were advantages in the same way that computers were a Western-produced advantage in Asia a few decades ago. Technical advantages last at best a decade. The advantages of the Aboriginals, on the other hand, were all about living and moving in this place. Both the French and the British adapted to Aboriginal ways, first to survive and then to do well. In fact, the newcomers became an adapted form of hunters and gatherers in order to become wealthy. And the reign of the Aboriginal advance lasted not a decade, but centuries. This raises a central question about our idea of stages of progress.

First, Aboriginals were not poorer, did not eat less well or live roughly when compared to the newcomers. They considered the newcomers poorer in part because they dressed so inappropriately and ate so badly that they died of scurvy or lost their teeth, then hair. And part of this had to do with the great class differentiations in European civilization. Aboriginals considered any society that was intentionally so unfair to so many to be inferior.[1] That someone would insist on eating in a particular way because it was appropriate to their class even if it was bad for their teeth, or be obliged to dress a certain way by others because of class, was a sign of limited intelligence.

The idea of egalitarianism that we have today is far closer to that of the 17th- or 18th-century First Nations than it is to that of the newcomers of that period. And if this were untrue, why did both colonial

armies have a problem with men deserting to the Aboriginals? These men escaped to a world in which they ate better, lived in greater comfort, were healthier in the winter and were cleaner. And if the Aboriginal civilization was not attractive, how did we all together come to create a whole new race—the Métis—in such a short period of time?

Tied to such basic realities is the concept of exploration. The newcomers did not discover the interior of Canada. They were shown it, thanks to alliances, treaties and commercial agreements. And most of it was shown to them by canoe. Writer John Jennings (2002) has demonstrated that Canada is the only country invested in by the Europeans in which the local means of transport and much of the way of life was maintained. Everywhere else the Europeans introduced their own boats, carriages or horses. The wheel was one of those strategic tools of conquest and occupation pretty well everywhere, except in Canada. The canoe in all its forms and sizes, sometimes slightly altered for specific purposes, was to be used as our principal means of transport—personal, governmental, military and commercial—for several centuries. Why? Because the First Nations had developed the appropriate means of transport for our road system, that is, our rivers and lakes. It wasn't until the middle of the 19th century that we seriously set about developing metallic rivers—railway tracks. Even these could take you only so far. It was thanks to the canoe and to the First Nations that, in moving across the country through the waters, we became a financially viable society. The fur trade was our first source of wealth. It set the pattern for an endless sequence of raw materials upon which we are still dependent. Farming for a long time was the poorest of options until we began to develop hardy crops.

If this enormous space was shaped and held back long enough from the manifest destiny of our neighbour to evolve into a country, it was largely thanks to Aboriginal alliances and Métis prowess. It was the Maliseet–Acadian alliance that held the New Englanders at bay for decades, long enough to produce the unintended result that there was a place to which Loyalists could come in the 1780s. It was the Métis and the Cree, among others, who held the prairies to a latitude not far off our Canadian border. The new country appropriated and solidified that line. The First Nations were central to holding the borders of Ontario and Quebec. The most famous turning point in ensuring the long-term existence of what would become Canada was probably the Battle of Queenston Heights in 1812. A surprise invasion across the Niagara River gave the US troops a key strategic position. Had they held on to the Heights long enough for reinforcements to join them—one night would have been sufficient—their advantage would have made it difficult for the divided Canadian forces to reverse. It was John Norton, Joseph Brant's successor, commanding a coalition of Aboriginal forces dominated by the Six Nations from the Grand River, who led a guerrilla-style attack, destabilized the US position and so turned the battle.

The simple question is this: How many times did the First Nations or the Métis defend, save or help save the space that would become Canada? Queenston Heights is a strategic example. The Battle of Grand Coteau in 1851 in North Dakota, in which the Métis defeated the Sioux coming from farther south, was just as important, but is even less understood. It was a victory that solidified spheres of influence. These spheres were taken over by the Canadian and US governments and thus settled the border to within a few hundred kilometres. There were hundreds of other smaller military incidents, each of which contributed to shaping this country. The life of the great Métis guide Jerry Potts is a perfect example of the way we misunderstand how we came to develop this country. He made it possible for the North West Mounted Police to establish themselves in Alberta. In the most basic terms, they had little idea of where they were. He was central to First Nations–government relations and to the relative peace among First Nations during the Riel Rebellion. Had he been white, he would have been bemedalled and much statued. He is remembered, but more as a colourful figure than a builder of the province. Yet the existence of Alberta owes more to him than to the standard short list of policemen, politicians, land speculators and other businessmen who are often cited as provincial heroes.

This indigenous military role was not an accident. From the beginning, the European strategy in the northern half of North America was to govern and defend via patterns of alliances with Aboriginals. This was the New France strategy and the Hudson's Bay Company strategy. It became the British-Loyalist-Canadien strategy after 1759,[2] and then the Canadian strategy until almost two decades after the War of 1812. In other words, this was the Canadian strategy for two and a half centuries.

The broad reality was an integrated First Nations role, central to the shaping of this country, which went on for twice as long as Canada has existed as a confederation. It was military, civil and commercial. We never really ask ourselves why so many of our provinces, cities and towns, our rivers and lakes, have Aboriginal names, as do our animals, birds, fish, pieces of clothing

and means of transport; why there is an Aboriginal presence in the cadence of much of our popular music, particularly in Acadie and Quebec; why Aboriginal art seems to fit us like a glove. These are not names, images, sounds, objects chosen in flights of romantic fancy—tributes to a disappearing past. These are the marks of our reality.

And this reality means that we need to examine the language most of us use to be certain that we understand what we mean. After all, both English and French are understood in different ways in different countries. Here our sense of both languages has been subtly shaped by Aboriginal assumptions. I'm referring to our practical use of these languages but equally to the philosophical, ethical and metaphysical.

For example, we struggle endlessly with the concept of *sovereignty*. Why? Because the concept we are searching for is not part of the Western tradition. What we are after is an indigenous idea with which we have centuries of experience. The Mohawk call it *tewatutowie.* It is all about being able both to help yourself and to look at yourself: "Sovereignty is harmony achieved through balanced relationships."[3] This is very different from the England–US English meaning or the France French meaning. In the European tradition, sovereignty is built around all sorts of rigid legalistic implications defining borders and the application of laws.

Yet it is this European sense that dominates in our universities, our standard legal theory and our civil services. It stands directly in the way each time Aboriginals attempt to explain what they mean by *sovereignty* or *self-government*. Why are we so eager to use this European intellectual approach? After all, it has a long, tired history of bloodied conflicts produced by a particular idea of the nation-state. This is the sort of conflict we have more or less avoided. What's more, the Europeans themselves have been slowly abandoning their own meaning as they construct the European Union. But their changes are quite naturally developed as intellectual amendments to their own meaning. We are having a great deal more difficulty because we are using their language to describe our very different experience and reality. Meaning in language is an evolution. For us to try to get intellectually to where we are physically by following the Europeans' political evolution is ridiculously tortuous.

This is one way of understanding the continuing frustration over the place of Quebec in Canada—frustration both from within Quebec and in the rest of Canada. It comes from our confused sense of concepts such as sovereignty. We feel it to mean one thing but intellectually oblige ourselves to explain it to mean another. We may feel or sense differently because of the long-term Aboriginal influence. Because we have not consciously accepted that this influence exists, we have not developed the intellectual mechanisms—the appropriate language in English and French—to express that difference. And so in our collective unconscious an idea such as sovereignty may be close to the Mohawk, but we contradict this intelligence with our conscious intellectual explanations, which have not been adapted to this place. They are imported, as if they were static international terms. At most we fiddle about with the surface details, leaving the core meaning the same.

For that matter, after four centuries of functioning together, we don't even look at French and English as if they have had an influence on each other. How could this long coexistence not have led to very different senses of understanding and intention in each language? Of course, they have profoundly influenced each other. And we know this. And our politics and our laws actually try to express these influences, as do some of our music and plays and poetry and novels.

But there is almost no formal discussion of the implications of such influence. Our universities—anglophone and francophone—are largely constructed as pale imitations of European models led by language. And so ideas—to say nothing of literature and history—are separated out by language, as if that were the ultimate statement of meaning, as if an Algerian novel had more to say to a francophone or a Sri Lankan novel had more to say to an anglophone just because it was written in *their* language, even if the experiences and influences are completely different. That is the way culture is taught in our universities. I'll come back to the question of the colonial mind later [in the book], but it is hard to think of anything more colonial than to deal with civilization as if it unfolds principally via a language, the shape of which is set elsewhere. Even when there is much protest about the importance of Canadianisms in English and French, it is almost always treated as a linguistically limited phenomenon. In other words, these particularities are seen as derivatives from the motherland English or French, but not as meanings derived from two linguistic groups living and working together and so influencing each other's tongue.

If we have difficulty accepting the profound meaning of this English–French crossover, it is even less surprising that we don't deal with the Aboriginal influence on both. And yet, if we accept the idea that our civilization has been built upon three pillars and so has a triangular foundation, that must mean something. And the central meaning must be the effect on our thinking.

Was Parti Québécois (PQ) founder René Lévesque's sense of sovereignty closer to the Mohawk sense or to that expressed in theoretically international dictionaries such as *Le Robert* or *Oxford?* Was his sense expressed accurately anywhere in our studies of political philosophy? Again, this whole field is treated in Canada as if it were centred on international norms, which are actually neither international nor norms. One of the great tricks of today's virtual empires—in which communications and corporations replace the occupying of vast territories around the world with troops—is that they present the meanings produced by their personal experience as being disinterested and geography-free. And they use their long historic catalogue of writers and thinkers as the footnote proof of their neutrality. What we are often dealing with are simply concepts developed for circumstances very different to ours. And if this question of meaning was never clarified in French, it isn't surprising that the confusion is even greater in English.

When you look at how our federalism works at its best, as opposed to how we formally describe it, the Mohawk idea of how things should be done—harmony achieved through balanced relationships—seems much more accurate than the linear, carefully measured, theoretically rational assumptions of common or civil law. Equally, the European-derived laws have great difficulty adapting their defined concepts to different eras. Yet in the Aboriginal manner Canada seems to have eased its way into a relatively flexible approach.

It is that history of Canada, that Canadian experience, which our courts, and in particular our Supreme Court, have gravitated toward, both in their interpretation of Aboriginal rights and treaties, but also in their approach to justice for the country as a whole. It is as if we are slowly rediscovering a reality about ourselves that was swept out of sight by the force of imported European-style nationalisms. And if we still have trouble recognizing this old and new connection, it is in part because we continue to be inundated by that European idea of nationalism via the constant drumbeat of US films, television, magazines, indeed most details of our neighbour's beliefs.

And I notice increasingly debates in Quebec in favour of pure secularism or *laïcité.* Much of what is said is mere parroting of old-fashioned Parisian arguments. This purism came out of France's very particular two-century-long battle between violently antidemocratic forces tied to the idea of a state religion versus democratic forces, equally violent and determined to destroy all hints of religious presence in any corner of public life. By the end of it, there had been many coups, dictatorships and civil wars, and a serious percentage of the population had been killed by their fellow citizens. These very French arguments about education and religion seem to have made their way into a remarkably different culture simply because the only other major French-language interlocutor is France, and France, as do the United States and Britain, advances itself as a virtual empire of universal principles and norms, which are merely the evocation of their national experience.

There are those among us who will interpret my statements as classic Canadian anti-Americanism or anti-Parisianism, and either be pleased or displeased. My statements are neither. French arguments are French arguments. They apply to a history filled with brilliant initiatives, political instability and violence, interesting democratic experiments interrupted by a variety of dictatorships, but also by remarkable successes. France simply has a different history to us. The United States has the right to its myths and its sense of itself. That it thinks of itself as the only true child of Europe and the only true child of the Americas is entirely its privilege. These are the collective unconsciousnesses of other people with their own fascinating experiences through time. It doesn't follow that a deafening drumbeat of their myths is helpful to Canadians trying to work out what is true about ourselves and our experience.

Notes

1. See, for example, Franks (2002, 556).
2. See especially Allen (1992).
3. See Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996), Volume 2, Part 1, Chapter 3: "Governance," in a paper by Greg Johnson of Eskasoni discussing arguments made by the Mohawk philosopher Taiaiake Alfred, pp 9, 111–12, 117.

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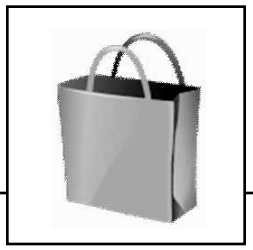

School Sorting and the Building of Consumer Society

Jim Parsons and William C Frick

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Only two weeks after 9/11, George W Bush encouraged Americans to carry on as if there were no war. His specific words were "Get down to Disney World in Florida. Take your families and enjoy life, the way we want it to be enjoyed" (quoted in Bacevich 2008).

Such talk might seem strange, but we believe that Bush's comments are representative of a society focused on consumption—a focus that schools foster by sorting students and equipping them for particular futures. Specifically, the point we will make in this article is that students' lack of work ethic and their tendency to make decisions for instant gratification emerge from a consumer ethic that schools unconsciously support. Such student behaviour has little to do with standards or student ability, and much to do with unconscious school design. Our task here is to outline how schools become unknowingly complicit in the building of consumerist culture by creating a curriculum of sorting that works to build a consumer class whose main job is to practise materialism and fuel economic growth.

Jardine (2004) discusses an enduring irony in Western economic life. The Protestant work ethic stresses hard work, thrift and self-denial. Hard work produces many goods, but if everyone practised thrift and self-denial, no one would be purchasing those goods. The Protestant work ethic requires people to work hard, save for their needs, buy when they can afford to and delay gratification. But too many hard-working, save-for-tomorrow citizens depress the economy; the economy can grow only when people buy consumer goods or services. Thus, the breakdown of the Protestant work ethic was necessary for economic growth and the creation of a large middle class.

In the mid-20th century, business had to change people's patterns of consumption in order to prosper and grow. So it worked to reshape people's identity as workers into an identity as consumers. It used a great ally—advertising. Most advertising of the early 1900s focused on product presence (the existence of the product) and concrete benefits (how the product meets needs). Today, the product benefits include more of the mythological than the physical. So, for Ralph Lauren, a coat is restitched into more than protection from inclement weather; it becomes a key to entering the top echelon of society.[1] Of course,

because it opens such an expensive door, there is a corresponding cost. Designer labels are wonderful keys, because companies can now produce fewer products and make larger profits, which suggests that designer labels are created more from identity than from fabric.

In less than 100 years, the conception of what makes life worth living and what constitutes human value was reshaped, from the value of character and the heroes of history to the value of material goods and the beautiful people. Consumption became the good life, and trying to keep up with the Joneses pushed people to believe that they were the total of what they could buy. Their personal image was shaped by what they had gathered, and when needs related to survival and protection have been met, what's left? The answer is the aesthetic—the need for beauty. This consumptive nature of beauty-identity has been depicted in the popular PBS documentary *Affluenza,* which makes the point that we live in a diseased culture. The disease is not consumption to support and maintain life but, rather, overconsumption and the feigning that such behaviour is the good life.

When the aesthetic became the measure of value, people's need for consumption changed. As Jardine (2004) notes, in the early and middle 20th century, one was judged on the basis of production, and baby boomers grew up hearing their parents' admonitions that "the world doesn't owe you a living." In today's consumer society, people are judged by the aesthetic image they project. Personality becomes more important than character, and one's role models become Angelina Jolie, Brad Pitt and other beautiful people upon whom celebrity has been bestowed and whose lives are valued as powerful.

Saying that people bought into this myth and its material symbols is an understatement. The invention and extension of credit meant that they didn't even need money. By the end of the 20th century, fuelled by people's increased ability to act out instant gratification, credit card debt skyrocketed.[2] It is more than fair to say that the current real estate crash in the United States, while blamed almost entirely on banks and credit institutions, was a partnership forged between individuals unwilling to practise self-denial and the credit institutions that gave those people opportunities for instant gratification without considering the consequences. As credit began to feed itself, homes grew larger to store all the unneeded consumer goods bought on credit. Consumption had become a way of life.

This culture of overconsumption, beauty-identity and celebrity has become a model of being for the younger members of North America's middle class, who have internalized this conception of what makes a person valuable, worthy and important. In a consumer society, people are judged on the basis of their image, and they spend to create and project that image—the food they eat, the clothes they wear, the technology they possess, the personality they project. Advertisers show the way by pragmatically mirroring culture back to us; their goal is to sell, and they carefully research public opinion toward that end. Ads only work when they capture the logic of the culture for which they are intended.

Self-denial and delayed gratification render a consumer society dysfunctional. If it didn't exist already, Jardine (2004) notes, a culture of consumerism would have to be created and, to sustain itself, would have to teach people to practise spending instead of saving. Instant gratification, encouraged by credit, is more useful in growing a "free" market than is the Protestant work ethic. Thus, it is necessary that vibrant free market economics coincide with liberal attitudes toward personal spending. When a 9/11 happens, a president who acts within this logic will encourage people to go "enjoy life."

Let us consider what happens in schools within this frame. First, schools operate within a broad context that includes and embeds society's prevailing mythologies. When young people come to school, they engage that broad context, and they are shaped by a school culture that includes being evaluated by both the exams and the values (formal and informal) of that culture. They cannot help but be shaped by their experiences—either by compliance or by resistance. Some children succeed; some children fail. And sometimes it is difficult to answer why.

By the time our young people leave school, either by dropping out or by graduating, many have had negative school experiences. They become the parents of a new generation of schoolchildren, and the lack of success often repeats itself. One of us (Jim) taught Grade 7 for several years, and came to believe that by the time students hit junior high school, they have undergone enough formal or informal assessments to know where they stand in the school's pecking order. Some students already know that they will glide into university; others opt for vocations. All of this is typically decided early in a student's career, even in the so-called open and accessible educational systems of North America. Those who "apply themselves" in sanctioned school ways become society's intellectual leaders; others are streamed toward other goals.

Instead of gaining a vision of leadership, those who are not intelligent in the ways of schools gain

a vision of a good job that is clearly tied to wages and the promise that if they apply themselves at work, they will earn consumer goods and a comfortable life. In other words, they embrace the goals of materialism and consumerism. These people are good at being consumers of materialism because of the same attributes that made them poor students: most don't study or work hard. Instead, they do something more enjoyable in the short term—watch TV, talk to friends, play Nintendo Wii. Whatever they opt for, they opt toward short-term gratification and away from the self-denial needed to succeed as a student.

They become part of a consumer society whose lack of self-denial and corresponding bent toward instant gratification are counted on to fuel the consumerist economic activities of business. Such positive consumer skills are negative school skills. However, they are far from new skills; they have already been practised and even rewarded in the school setting. Specifically, in junior high and high school, these young people practise behaviours that are prized in consumer society. They play instead of work, they avoid responsibility and eschew consequences, and they regularly choose instant gratification over self-denial.

Schools and the philosophy that runs schools lament this behaviour, yet they are complicit in creating it by regularly sorting students and shaping their behaviour. Not that stemming such behaviour is easy, but any high-stakes redundant sorting device that permanently pegs student performance also bifurcates and creates student identity, and helps to build a consumer class.

Such a view might seem radical, but we are not alone. An April 2008 *Newsweek* article by Thomas Toch, titled "Still at Risk," refers to public schools as "sorting machines" that offer students different educations based on assumptions about their futures. Toch notes that by the end of the 1980s, educators had accepted the idea that many students could not achieve higher levels of education. In the United States, such thinking led to George W Bush's 2002 *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB).

Although NCLB is generally seen as inherently corrupt policy, it should have been expected as the step following the elder George Bush's and Bill Clinton's establishment of state education standards and national educational goals that required student testing (Alberta's high-stakes tests are a version of such control) and that pressured schools from the outside by holding educators accountable for results (as the Fraser Institute routinely does). Such exams exacerbate the sorting process of schools. But the problem was not one of policy; it was a problem of culture. And when policy and culture conflict, culture usually trumps policy. By the time NCLB became policy, most students had already accepted their place within the larger society—whether they knew it or not.

The consumerist myth has been formed deep within the fabric of North American society, and like it or not, schools have done exactly what they were supposed to do. They have sorted students into two groups: an elite who will follow an advanced educational track, and a middle class who will fuel the economy through consumption. Our society's past economic "success" was shaped by "the smartest guys in the room"—a small segment of highly educated, efficacious leaders. But the North American economy, as a whole, is driven by those who have, for reasons that have made them poor students but good consumers, gained enough power to use their best economic weapons—instant gratification and the lack of self-denial for the sake of consumerism and materialism.

Culturally, the interests, attitudes and self-views of youths have dramatically changed. Schools are both victims of this change and responsible for it. Students possess a consumptive identity formed by powerful and pervasive cultural elements (including their parents) that schools cannot possibly counteract on their own. That said, schools respond in ways that exacerbate the problem of the formation of citizens as consumers.

How can schools possibly respond to such a pervasive cultural value system when the institution of schooling is itself a cultural manifestation of prevailing economic values? Is there anything in mass schooling that constitutes a critique of the consequences of our collective economic life? Success in learning supposedly breeds success. But schooling as a system, as opposed to a site where a few heroic teachers change lives, is a life-shaping and identity-forming institution. The masses—the growing number of people who consider themselves middle class—are evaluated and shaped differently from those efficacious leaders who conform to school-defined intelligence and achievement.

Finally, what of our schools? If children raised in homes where books are prized and celebrated tend to become more literate, what literacy do children gain when they are raised in homes where uncritical materialism and consumer goods are prized and celebrated? One thing is certain: teachers will find out over the next decade or two.

Notes

1. Ralph Lauren, who has come to sell beauty, has said, "My look is not really European. . . . It's an American's visualization of Europe in the 1930s. I look in from the other side" (quoted in Matthews 2002, 25). To understand the culture of Lauren's Polo ads, one need only look at the faces of the people on display. These faces capture an "easy arrogance that says 'I was born to this'" (p 25). Lauren's store has become a temple to beauty, "where the newly rich come to worship the old rich and leave carrying clothes and furnishings that promise not just a comfortable look but a comforting history" (p 26)—and a comfortable identity.

2. Until 1986, credit card interest was tax-deductible in the United States.

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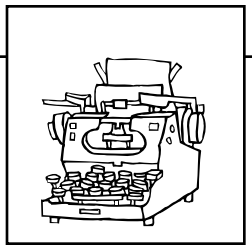

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