

## Aboriginal Social Studies Curriculum Development

Jurisdiction: Manitoba

Contact: Aileen Najduch

Level: K-12

Theme: Curriculum

Description of Practice: Inclusion of Aboriginal peoples in the social studies curriculum development process.

The Manitoba social studies curriculum reflects Aboriginal perspectives and includes learning outcomes related to Aboriginal cultures in each grade, from Kindergarten to Senior 4.

The Manitoba curriculum is based on the WNCP Common Curriculum Framework for Social Studies Kindergarten to Grade 9. As noted in the Introduction on page 1, the WNCP social studies framework was “developed through a collaborative process intended to reflect the diversity of voices in Canada. This collaboration is unprecedented in the inclusion of Aboriginal and francophone representatives as full and equal partners throughout the process.”

### Background:

A culturally inclusive philosophy guides Manitoba’s social studies curriculum development, and has done so from the beginning stages of the WNCP project. With a recognition of the culturally diverse nature of Canada, the inter-jurisdictional WNCP project was intended to create a curriculum framework in which diverse voices were authentically reflected. Because of the inclusion of First Nations, Métis and Inuit representatives on the WNCP committee, it was indeed authentic Aboriginal voices that guided the ways in which Aboriginal perspectives were to be included in the ensuing Framework.

Following the work of the WNCP, as the Manitoba curriculum and teacher support documents were developed, Manitoba continued to include Aboriginal peoples in the development and consultation processes.

### Development:

The inclusion of Aboriginal peoples in the WNCP Framework process, and later in the Manitoba development process was a natural evolution in the social studies curriculum development process. It was not a case of senior management directing the project to proceed in a culturally inclusive manner. Instead, and from the very outset of the inter-jurisdictional project, there was a recognition amongst all team members that previous approaches to curriculum development in which the dominant, mainstream, anglophone culture created curriculum, could no longer work in current culturally diverse times.

The challenges were many, particularly for a project that was, for all intents and purposes, leaderless. In order to be truly reflective and equal in nature, three co-leads – Aboriginal, Anglophone, and Francophone – managed the project.

In general, agreements were reached through a process of consensus decision-making, no small feat considering meetings would often involve a committee as large as 24 members. Each of the six jurisdictions had at least three members on the committee –

Aboriginal, Anglophone, and Francophone – and often more. On those exceedingly rare occasions when agreement could not be reached, advice was sought from senior managers and Assistant Deputy Ministers.

Evidence:

Evidence of success is difficult to gauge in something as far-reaching and long-lasting as a provincial curriculum, particularly in a subject such as social studies that focuses on harder to measure attitudes and values. Much of the evidence of the success of a culturally inclusive curriculum – at least in these early stages of implementation – is based on intuition and anecdote.

It may in fact be years before the positive results of the new curriculum manifest in society. And, even in the future, those results may be perceived as shifting attitudes and values amongst non-Aboriginals regarding Aboriginal peoples (and others), and differing self-perceptions amongst Aboriginal peoples. Any attempt to attribute causality to the social studies curriculum alone would be almost impossible.

Adaptability:

The Manitoba social studies curriculum has been designed to allow adaptability. Although learning outcomes are mandated, Manitoba provides a variety of teaching strategies which teachers may select according to local needs and resources.

Further information:

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