

Curriculum Mapping Exercise

Drawing Together the Grade 7, 8 and 9 Social Studies Curriculum in a Visual Way



This curriculum “map” is a literal interpretation of the curriculum mapping assignment for the secondary social studies curriculum course at the University of Calgary, winter semester 2011. As a literal interpretation, this map aims to draw out visually, the connections that exist between the grade 7, 8 and 9 social studies curriculum as outlined in the Alberta Program of Studies. This map consists of an outline of Canada’s territory, filling nearly two thirds of the poster (*just as Canada covers 2/3 of the junior high curriculum*). The other third features the continental and country outlines representing the three units of study from grade 8: Mexico – for the Spanish and the Aztecs, Continental Europe – for Renaissance Europe, and Japan – obviously for Japan. These four self constructed images are place over a current map of the world, artistically designed to appear as an older, more vintage map. Leaving the self constructed outlines somewhat transparent symbolizes the interconnectedness of the curriculum and the countries it encompasses and their relationship to a larger understanding of the world, not necessarily covered in the curriculum, though no specific connections are meant to be implied by where these overlays appear.

In the top layer of materials added to the curriculum map are various samplings of images, pieces of artwork, cultural artefacts and vintage maps which all in some way relate to the grade 8 specific and general outcomes listed on the map. Over top of Canada there appears several images and excerpts from the Alberta Program of Studies; specifically the general outcomes for grades 7 and 9, as well as the key terms outlined in the POS for grade 7, 8 and 9. Also, the front page of the Alberta Program of studies appears, artistically embellished as the provincial outline of Alberta, filled with additional colouration and logos from the Alberta Education website. Along the far left hand side of the map, as well as along the bottom, are the central focus of this map, or rather the theme which I believe ties together the 7,8,9 curriculum, known within the POS as the 6 strands of social studies, other than the two primary strands or focuses, which are Identity and Citizenship. The six strands listed are: Global Connections – Power, Authority and Decision Making – Economics and Resources – The Land: People and Places – Culture and Community – and Time, Continuity and Change. Finally, the bottom left hand corner of the map is adorned with the social studies compass found in the Alberta POS to symbolize how the aims of building Identity and developing Citizenship ultimately guide the curriculum.

Within the Alberta social studies curriculum there exist endless connections between units of study in each grade level, and indeed between the grade levels themselves, though for the most part these connections are not explicitly laid out. Teachers who use the curriculum verbatim are likely to establish these connections without much effort, though whether or not the students will be able to discover these connections for themselves remains to be a reflection of how well the teacher performs in leading the students towards these discoveries. In other words, even though the curriculum draws strings throughout the units of studies, namely through the strands of social studies, this does not insure that these connections will be understood, or even noticed by the students. To put it more topically, the teacher must act as the guide and map reader for the students who ultimately must take the journey throughout the curriculum.

In an attempt to highlight the connections made through the strands of social studies – in an attempt to better understand how the curriculum acts as a whole to develop Citizenship and Identity – I have included 2 sets of lines and arrows; The first leading from each of the strands to the specific

outcomes of the grade 8 units of study, and the others leading back from these specific outcomes to one or several of the general outcomes for grades 7 and 9. The first set of lines which connect the strands with the grade 8 specific outcomes are taken directly from the Alberta Program of Studies. Through this visualization, the intention is to clarify, or rather expose how these connections work their way across, through, and between the units of study in the grade 8 curriculum. The second set of arrows, seen as black dashes, is my personal interpretation of how the grade 8 specific outcomes feed back into, or come out of, the general outcomes for grade 7 and 9. Moreover, these connections are less explicit than those which come from the strands of social studies outlined for each grade, and each unit; A further indication that the teacher must understand the depth of the content and issues which essentially tie together the curriculum and collectively build a holistic understanding of the bigger picture the curriculum exposes, which ultimately leads towards the grade 10, 11, and 12 curriculum.

When looking at the curriculum map as a whole, it is easy to become overwhelmed and somewhat disoriented because of the complexities of the curriculum being presented in a visual manner. I believe this speaks to the inherent complexities of the curriculum, and the multiple layers of overlap which exist within and between the content of the grade 7, 8 and 9 curriculums. As previously suggested, the role of any teacher must be to break down, clarify, and dissect these connections, with the ultimate goal of preparing themselves to guide students through the curriculum. Along the way, teachers who are able to learn from the paths they have already travelled, and who are able to chart new ways of making connections will be far superior guides for students than those who can't. This is not an easy task, but I do not believe it is daunting either. Like any venture that requires a map and a guide, the success and enjoyment of the journey often depends on experience, which is not to say always travelling the same route over and over. If the same path is taken time after time, it leaves the travellers (or in this case students) tired, uninterested, and oriented straight forward without any consideration of the scenery which surrounds them. Experience then, in the context and metaphor of the curriculum serving as a map, and the teacher as the guide, should be interpreted more so as an indication of a willingness to explore, the ability to lead students towards their own discoveries, and an extensive knowledge and appreciation of the interdisciplinary nature of the social studies curriculum.