Amy J. von Heyking
Creating Citizens: History and Identity in Alberta's Schools, 1905 to 1980.

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Amy von Heyking's historical examination of Alberta's schools during the greater part of the twentieth century focuses on the history and social studies curricula, and makes the argument that these subjects were integral to the shaping of a national and provincial identity. Heyking's thesis is that these subjects were the principal means by which students learned about citizenship and received powerful messages about what it meant to be Canadian. The author's detailed depiction of how the curricula, teaching methods, and instructional resources relating to history and social studies changed over the last century traces the evolution of official ideologies and beliefs concerning identity-and-nationhood-formation.

The book progresses chronologically. Each of the text's chapters addresses a period of ten to twenty years in length, and each roughly demarcates changes in school content and purpose. The author, basing her arguments upon strong warrants, argues that Alberta's schools went through five major phases of curriculum reform, representing evolving beliefs concerning what Canadian students ought to know and what their future place and responsibilities ought to be. *Creating Citizens* argues that the five major purposes of citizenship education through the history and social studies curricula have been: a) developing 'good character'; b) working towards 'group' or social living; c) fostering social activism; d) preparing for the workforce and defending democracy; and, e) nurturing 'self-actualization.'

The text has two appendices: a curriculum overview and a note on the sources. The first appendix is a summary of the changes in the history and social studies curricula from 1905 to 1981. It is an astounding précis of how the standards (then, grades and subjects) evolved, supplemented by quotations or guiding notes. While many of the topics of study listed in the appendix are mere placeholders for broader

themes (e.g. 'Canadian Studies'), the first appendix serves as a catalogue of how Albertans have been taught to interpret their selves as Canadians in relation to others and to the world. The second appendix makes evident that the author interprets the curriculum as a complex structure that is inseparable from both the socio-political conditions in which it is enacted and the dominant notions relating to the functions and aims of schools.

Right from the introduction, the book subtly frames this complexity in light of postmodern or existential questions of selfhood or being. At the turn of the century, Canada was in its adolescence; Alberta was welcomed into the union in 1905, the starting point for von Heyking's analysis. The country faced the dilemma of forging a national identity but it had no unitary self. Education, the principal means by which citizenship social learning could be disseminated, was under the jurisdiction of provincial governments. Throughout the book, we see this tension between the regional (Albertan) and national (Canadian) identities working as a catalyst to drive curriculum reform and debate. In 1925, for example, when the Educational Committee of the United Farmers of Alberta lobbied the premier to increase funding and resources for vocational and practical education in rural areas, von Heyking demonstrates that local community concerns for useful and relevant schooling did not necessarily coincide with the mandated status quo or official ideologies. This is only one of many examples in the book of how political and socio-economic pressures influenced schools, schooling, and content.

The security and unity of Canada's budding national identity, then, was vulnerable to particular needs, demands or regional community interests. In this light, it was necessary for the country to develop a national meta-narrative that could represent a coherent vision of what it meant to be Canadian. The national identity, von Heyking argues, was set up and defined in oppositional terms to 'others.' This means that history instruction would celebrate and honour the morals inherent in particular stories, people, and circumstances while vilifying and marginalizing other beliefs and movements.

Whose history, it might be asked, was taught in the early part of the twentieth century? *Creating Citizens* shows that the textbooks and curriculum were set up to emphasize Canada's Anglo-British history and its place within the Commonwealth. Women's contributions to history were mostly trivialized unless very clear moral lessons concerning devotion and fidelity to the country could be extrapolated from some narrative, like, for example, the tale of Laura Secord's heroic actions during the war of 1812. Minority groups and immigrant populations were for the most part represented stereotypically and defined in terms that emphasized the difference of their ethnicity, social class, and traditional politic leanings. First Nations peoples were, according to some early textbooks, fairly treated by fur traders and never turned away empty-handed by the representative of European companies and interests.

The book sets out numerous examples of the way historical narratives and personages were selected in order to achieve the aim of defining a national self in oppositional terms to others. The most significant and dangerous 'other,' the American neighbour to the south, has always represented paradigms which Canadians, by necessity, have been taught to repel. Much as it remains today, Canadians were taught that they differed much from the US with respect to their attitudes toward violence and civility. The way

that Canadian Confederation came about, it seems, was civil and just; ties to Great Britain and the Commonwealth were maintained. The US, on the other hand, achieved its independence through violence and rebellion. Revolution against the state was wrong. Louis Riel, a Canadian who followed the wrong example and rebelled against his country, was a murderer and a bad example to follow. While George Washington made his reputation in the military, Sir John A. MacDonald was a Loyalist, a visionary, a leader, and a gentleman.

Another theme that emerges in the text is the frequent disparities between the official dicta concerning the content / methods of schooling and actual classroom practice. The Department (now Ministry) of Education and the school boards often imposed messages and instructions upon teachers that were undermined, challenged, or ignored. The author notes that in the 1930s, for example, despite pressures upon educators to teach history in dynamic or exciting ways, students' notebooks that have survived in archives show a heavy emphasis on teaching through text and textbooks — copying notes from blackboard, reading and annotating texts, and writing compositions. This shows, as von Heyking astutely argues, that the government's reforms and initiatives were not always specified and clarified for educators; they also often failed to address teachers' concerns relating to content and methods.

Throughout, the book's historical treatment of citizenship instruction through social studies and history education in Alberta demonstrates the complexity of curriculum reform and implementation. The tensions that pull upon each other and stimulate or restrain the transformation of schooling, as discussed in *Creating Citizens*, are many; reforms have embodied and have been shaped by the interplay between the interests of the federal government, provincial authority, urban populations, rural advocacy groups, economists, industry, and politicians. Albertans' sense of self too, then, embodies and has been shaped by this complexity; the curriculum reforms studied in *Creating Citizens* characterize a people's evolving understanding of what it means to *be* and to *belong* within a province in Canada.