

# Harold Rugg's Social Studies in Alberta

Amy von Heyking

University of Lethbridge

*This historical inquiry analyzes the appeal of Harold Rugg's social reconstructionist social studies for Alberta educators in the 1930s. It demonstrates why and how this small, rural province adapted Rugg's curriculum, a program and resources he developed to guide American students' understanding of what he called "the American problem." It identifies key elements of Rugg's program, including its philosophical orientation and its practical teaching resources that were particularly appealing to educational leaders. The inquiry identifies legacies of the origins of the program for the provincial social studies curriculum.*

*Cette enquête historique analyse l'attrait des études sociales reconstructionnistes de Harold Rugg pour les éducateurs de l'Alberta dans les années 1930. Elle démontre pourquoi et comment cette petite province rurale a adapté le curriculum de Rugg, un programme et des ressources qu'il a développés pour aider les élèves américains à comprendre ce qu'il appelait "le problème américain". Elle identifie les éléments clés du programme de Rugg, notamment son orientation philosophique et ses ressources pédagogiques pratiques qui attiraient particulièrement les leaders en éducation. L'enquête identifie les retombées des origines du programme sur le programme provincial d'études sociales.*

Alberta is experiencing a heated and ideologically-charged debate about curriculum reform. After a decade of discussion, development, and revision under three different provincial governments of varying political leanings, the Minister of Education from the governing United Conservative Party released a draft Kindergarten to Grade 6 program of studies in March 2021 (Government of Alberta, 2021). The draft included six subject areas, but the content of social studies was singled out by critics as particularly inappropriate, even regressive. The Minister asserted that the program was intended to “refocus learning on essential knowledge and skills” (Kanygin, 2021), and supporters of the program described it as “content-rich” (Anglin, 2021; Mrazik, 2021). Critics, which included most researchers in Alberta's faculties of Education, the provincial teachers' association, and organized parents' groups, decried its focus on long lists of facts of questionable relevance to young children, its lack of attention to the development of students' critical thinking, and the fact that sections of it seem to have been lifted from the *Core Knowledge Sequence*, a Kindergarten to Grade 8 curriculum developed by the American Core Knowledge Foundation (Association of Alberta Deans of Education, 2021; Eaton, 2021; French, 2021; Peck et al, 2021). A significant sign of stakeholders' disapproval of the draft is the fact that 58 of 61 school divisions in the province refused to pilot it (Johnson, 2021).

There is no question that the draft curriculum's approach to social studies represented a significant shift in a program that has long borne the hallmarks of its roots in social reconstructionism. Indeed, when the province introduced social studies as a school subject in the

intermediate grades in the late 1930s, the program was based on Harold Rugg's series, *Man and his Changing Society*. Although the content of the program has changed in the following decades, Rugg's vision of social studies has largely been maintained. The provincial high school curriculum has long focused on social issues. Indeed, other Canadian provinces' secondary school programs include compulsory courses in history, geography, or other social sciences, but Alberta's current program is defined as an "issues-focused and inquiry-based interdisciplinary subject" from kindergarten through Grade 12 (Alberta Education, 2005, p. 1). The program explicitly facilitates constructive social criticism and empowers students to be agents of change. The program of studies describes the role of Social Studies as developing:

The key values and attitudes, knowledge and understanding, and skills and processes necessary for students to become active and responsible citizens, engaged in the democratic process and aware of their capacity to effect change in their communities, society and the world. (Alberta Education, 2005, p. 1)

Canadian curriculum scholars have recognized that compared to other provinces, "Alberta has a more socially active vision of the ideal citizen" (Case & Abbott, 2008, p. 23). Clark and Case also pointed out that, consistent with a social reform orientation to social studies, Alberta's program is one of the few in the country that identifies outcomes such as social action (2016). In his account of the development of and reaction to Rugg's program, Evans contended that it demonstrated that "Curricula cannot be neutral. But it can strive to present multiple alternatives and to be fair to a full range of perspectives" (2007, p. 298). Reflecting this goal, Alberta's social studies program is grounded in core concepts of citizenship and identity, and requires that students understand Aboriginal, Francophone, and pluralist perspectives on historical and current issues and "how diversity and differences are assets that enrich our lives" (Alberta Education, 2005, p. 5). A shift to a program that requires that students "acquire a strong base of essential knowledge" is significant indeed (Government of Alberta, 2021). That the response from a wide range of education stakeholders was overwhelmingly negative demonstrates how enduring the legacy of Rugg's social studies is in the province. How did this happen? Why would educators in this small, western Canadian province have taken up this work?

### **Research in Curriculum History**

Alberta's development and implementation of Rugg's social studies in the 1930s is an interesting historical case study of how curriculum initiatives are taken up and adapted in different contexts but it is one example of a range of progressive reforms in curriculum and education policy across Canada in the 1930s. Patterson argued that many educators were drawn to child-centred, activity-based, and democratic conceptions of schooling out of concern about the poor quality and irrelevance of rural schooling in the first decades of the twentieth century. He pointed to the economic hardships and social unrest of the 1930s as the reason educators "were prepared to try something different" (1986, p. 67). He attributed their reliance on American curriculum models and materials to the fact that Canadian educational leaders received graduate education at American universities with prominent progressive scholars such as Teachers' College, Columbia (1986). Tomkins also identified their American graduate education as a key factor in Canadian educators' enthusiasm for progressive reform but argued that they also drew on professional connections in the British New Education Fellowship and intentionally referenced the subject-

integrated, activity-based enterprises described in the Hadow Reports to avoid accusations of Americanizing Canadian schools (2008). He described progressive reforms as moving from western Canada eastward, arguing that they were also motivated by “a growing resentment over eastern Canadian domination” (2008, p. 174).

Though all English-Canadian provinces underwent some progressive reforms in the 1930s, scholars have agreed that Alberta's educational leaders were notably committed to the cause, ambitious in the curriculum initiatives they undertook, and other Canadian provinces often drew on their expertise and experience (Patterson, 1990; Tomkins, 2008; von Heyking, 2006a). Though they were progressive, they differed in their understanding of and commitment to theories of progressive education (Lemisko, 2016). Some, like Deputy Minister G. Fred McNally, would best be described as child-centred in that they agreed that “the child's own purposes should provide the basis for the development of the curriculum” (Kliebard, 1995, p. 143). Normal School instructors Donald Dickie and Olive Fisher, along with Inspector William Hay, sought to put child-centred, pedagogical progressivism into practice in their creation of the activity-based elementary school curriculum called, “The Enterprise,” implemented in 1936 (von Heyking, 2006a).

Coulter (2005) provided a detailed analysis of Dickie's remarkable career as a Normal School instructor, curriculum developer, and author of several series of history textbooks and readers as well as the Normal School textbook, *The Enterprise in Theory and Practice* (1940). Coulter demonstrated the value of a biographical approach to curriculum history by detailing Dickie's nuanced approach to progressive curriculum, one that was informed by a sophisticated understanding of theory and considerable experience as and respect for the work of elementary school teachers. Rather than labeling her as child-centred or pedagogically progressive, she demonstrated how Dickie's progressivism could simultaneously value academic discipline and intellectual development, and pedagogy that respected children's interests and capabilities in order to prepare them to address social problems (2005).

Tomkins insisted that “Alberta educators made the most systematic effort to develop a theoretical base that would undergird curriculum change” (2008, p. 175). Detailed examinations of curriculum reforms that address the reasoning of those responsible for them can help us better understand the nuances of their theory, rather than assuming that it fits the versions or branches of progressivism identified by American historians such as Cremin (1961) and Kliebard (1995). It helps us understand the unique context in which Alberta educators developed and put their theory into action. Although curriculum change was not authored or caused by a single individual, historical inquiries into specific reforms helps us appreciate the contingent nature of educational reform, depending as it did in Alberta on the work of and relationships among key educators.

In *Creating Citizens* (von Heyking, 2006a), I provided an account of the development and implementation of the social studies program for Alberta's intermediate grades in the late 1930s and early 1940s. I agreed that key figures were largely motivated by their understanding of American progressivism and said, “rather than analyzing the American roots of progressivism, it is more important here that we understand how Alberta educationalists came to understand and apply those ideas in the province's schools” (p. 65). This study builds on that work by unearthing those roots and demonstrating how and why Rugg's social reconstructionist social studies was adapted and ultimately flourished in unfamiliar soil.

In her historical overview of Canadian social studies curriculum, Clark contended that Canadian educators largely adopted American programs “by taking the models and strategies that seem useful, adapting them to the Canadian context, and discarding the rest” (2004, p. 32).

Exploring what exactly Alberta educators found useful and examining the nature and purpose of their modifications can help us better understand the process by which programs are adapted, the features that made them unique and significant in their time and place, and help us bring an informed historical perspective to contemporary debates about curriculum reform.

### Sources

In order to explore how Alberta curriculum writers were influenced by the Rugg approach, this historical inquiry examines Rugg's key publications and teaching materials, particularly his social science series published by Ginn and Company in the 1920s and 1930s. For the Alberta context, it is grounded in the examination of primary source material such as the minutes of curriculum development committees of the provincial Department of Education, the Department's annual reports, and the official programs of study. Memoirs of those who developed the program and minutes of their organization, the Education Society of Edmonton, provide specific information about its origins and the process by which it was developed. Addresses by Alberta's educational leaders provide evidence for their theory of progressive education and understanding of the nature and purpose of social studies. The textbooks created specifically for the program and authored by McDougall and Paterson (1937a, 1937b, 1938) indicate the extent to which they drew on the design and content of Rugg's social science series. Like Rugg, the authors of the textbooks faced public controversy and demands to withdraw the books from schools. Information about this controversy is drawn from newspaper accounts of the time, and the minutes of the curriculum committee that addressed the issue.

### Rugg's Theory and Practice of Social Studies

Harold Rugg (1886–1960) was trained as a civil engineer but moved into education and received his PhD in 1915 at the University of Illinois. He was briefly on faculty at the University of Chicago before moving to Teachers College, Columbia in 1920. He remained there for thirty years, one of several leaders of the Progressive Education movement (Evans, 2007). He was a founding member of the John Dewey Society and of the National Council for the Social Studies. He, along with George Counts, is most associated with the social reconstructionist branch of the progressive education movement which “sought to enhance the role of the public school curriculum in reconstructing society. These reconstruction efforts were to be aimed toward the redressing of social, economic, and political ills that were seen as threatening the foundations of U.S. democracy” (Barone, 2010, p. 752).

A brief summary here cannot do justice to Rugg's social reconstructionist philosophy of education, but it is crucial to identify essential principles of his theory of social studies in order to understand how they were adapted by Alberta educators. When he was invited to oversee the *Twenty-second Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education* which focused entirely on work in social studies, Rugg wrote three chapters that detailed his criticisms of traditional history, geography, and civics courses, articulated his theory of social studies, and described how his new resources were being organized and developed. He argued that schools should prepare students “to meet the difficulties of industrial, social, and political life” (Rugg, 1923a, p. 1). He went on to identify some of those difficulties: environmentally harmful development of natural resources, industrial monopolies, mistreatment of labourers, increases in the cost of living, urban decay, assimilation of immigrants, adult illiteracy. He insisted that

schools must provide students with the “trained intelligence” to deal with problems rather than allowing them to continue to respond with the “impulse and predisposition” of the typical American (1923a, p. 1). Rugg then outlined the specific features of social studies that would “prepare pupils adequately for life activities” (1923a, p.1).

First, the topics in the program should reflect issues that are relevant for all people and they should be presented in a way that stressed human agency. They should be presented to students through anecdotes and engaging stories that, as much as possible, were connected to their own experiences. Second, the program should provide a framework and process for developing students’ reasoning. This meant that topics should be organized around compelling social problems. Relevant information from history and the social sciences should be presented, and students should be invited to weigh alternative courses of action. He was adamant that social studies courses should not be reading courses; democratic deliberation requires that students become active in “organizing and carrying on the group discussions” (1923a, p. 24). Third, because in the 1920s history, geography, and civics courses were frequently offered under the label of “social studies,” Rugg was clear that in developing his social studies program, he “completely disregard[ed] current courses. Only one criterion is employed in selecting the content of the course: its contribution to present living” (Rugg et al., 1923, p. 188). Although the historical content included in the course might be considered chronologically, only information related to the specific problem being examined should be presented to students: “History is to ‘move rapidly’ in these grades ... One era, one condition, one stage of a movement is to be sharply contrasted with another and especially with the current order of things” (Rugg et al., 1923, p. 189).

When Rugg explained the development of his program, he clarified that it was organized around “insistent and permanent problems” of American society drawn from the research of social scientists he called “frontier thinkers” (1923b, p. 266). These included American progressive theorists such as historian Charles A. Beard and British political and economic theorists such as Harold Laski, John A. Hobson, and John Maynard Keynes. Sympathetic biographers of Rugg have insisted that his problem-solving approach was intended to be open-minded and objective: “he was reluctant to suggest solutions and did not expect students to provide solutions to these problems” (Stanley, 1992, p. 23). In reality, the social and economic criticism that defined his materials made it clear that he was not neutral and that “proved Rugg’s undoing” (Evans, 2007).

Rugg put his reconstructionist theory of social studies into action by creating curriculum and resources that would provide teachers not just with the content but also pedagogical approaches that would prepare students for critical citizenship. His teaching resources began as a set of booklets written by a team throughout the 1920s. These went through several revisions based on feedback from teachers and testing with students before they were published as textbooks with accompanying student workbooks and teacher guides. Compared to textbooks then in use, his were exceptionally innovative: “With their emphasis on dramatic episodes and provocative questions and liberal use of graphics, photos, maps, and political cartoons, the books were easily the most interesting texts of their time” (Boyle-Baise & Goodman, 2009, p. 31). The series, called *Man and his Changing Society*, was published by Ginn for 11 years. In that time 1,317,960 copies of the texts and 2,687,000 copies of the workbooks were sold. Evans characterized the resources as “the zenith of issues-centered social studies materials’ entree into classrooms in the 20th century” (2019, p. 16).

Looking at Rugg’s resources, there seemed to be few reasons for western Canadian educators to see them as relevant for their schools. One reviewer stated “Canada receives scant attention in

this series” (Loomis, 1932, p. 474). Another said “If a general criticism of this volume may be ventured, it is that the materials are better suited to the needs of urban rather than rural children” (Anderson, 1932, p. 798). In the mid 1930s, when officials in Alberta’s Department of Education began developing the social studies program, there were 172,040 students enrolled in Alberta schools, about half of them in rural graded or one-room schools (Alberta Department of Education, 1934). Why then would Alberta’s educational leaders adopt a social studies program focused on the problems of industrialization and urbanization, on challenges to American democracy, and on addressing the social consequences of capitalist excesses, what Rugg called, “the American problem” (Rugg, 1939, p. vi)?

### **Alberta’s Educational Context**

Alberta’s ambitious progressive curriculum reform was remarkable given the economic and political context of the 1930s. The largely rural province was extremely hard hit by the financial collapse and drought conditions. Per capita income dropped 50 per cent between 1928 and 1933 (Palmer & Palmer, 1990). But as small and as poor as the province was, it had a small, tight knit and ambitious group of educational leaders, and a very centralized system of education policy making.

In the 1930s, Department of Education officials wrote programs of study, occasionally with the help of appointed classroom teachers and university specialists. Textbooks were approved by department officials and provided to schools. The Department ensured that curriculum guidelines were followed by inspecting classrooms and by setting school-leaving examinations, often based on the content of approved texts. In the 1930s, Alberta’s Deputy Minister of Education was G. Fred McNally, one of the first generation of Canadian leaders to receive graduate education in the United States. In 1914 when he was serving as a school inspector, the Department of Education paid for his doctoral studies at Teachers’ College, Columbia where he took courses from E. L. Thorndike, G. D. Strayer, and W. H. Kilpatrick, whose lively and demanding instruction he particularly appreciated (McNally, 1964). The Supervisor of Schools was Hubert C. Newland, who completed his PhD at the University of Chicago in 1932. A colleague later explained that he returned to Alberta,

with all the latest inspiration and information on the progress and status of elementary and secondary education in North America, and he was “all set to force the issue here and begin the long uphill struggle to bring our education up to a more satisfactory level” (as quoted in Oviatt, 1970, p. 96).

As Supervisor of Schools, he was well positioned to lead this effort since he was responsible for all curriculum development for the schools in the province.

### **H. C. Newland’s Social Reconstructionism**

Understanding Newland’s background is important for understanding the theory of social reconstructionism that he embraced and sought to put into practice in the new social studies program for the intermediate grades. He did not leave personal papers in archives but we can piece together his conception of education and the social responsibilities of educators from his speeches to a wide range of audiences. In 1968, the Alberta Advisory Committee on Educational Research sponsored the printing and distribution of a collection of Newland’s papers consisting

of previously published newspaper articles, unpublished addresses, and tributes by former colleagues written shortly after his death in 1948. These sources provide important insights into Newland's guiding principles and his intentions for the new Enterprise and social studies programs he oversaw.

Like Donald Dickie, Newland brought a combination of deep scholarship and professional practice to his thinking about education and work as an educational leader. Newland taught in several one-room schools in Saskatchewan and Alberta before completing a first-class BA in Honours Philosophy in 1910 at the University of Toronto (Patterson, 1974). Between 1915 and 1928, he taught Latin at Victoria High School in Edmonton, became a founding member of the Alberta Teachers' Alliance, served as its President and as the founder and editor of *Alberta Teachers' Association Magazine*, and served as President of the Canadian Teachers' Federation. In those roles he worked diligently toward professionalizing teaching, improving teachers' working conditions, and helping teachers understand the importance of organizing in order to do those things. In these years he also earned LLB, MA (Psychology) and BEd degrees from the University of Alberta. It is no surprise that colleagues referred to him as "Doc" long before he earned his PhD. Newland took a position teaching psychology at Edmonton Normal School in 1928 and then began his doctoral studies. After Newland's death, M. E. LaZerte said that his education had made Newland "a classicist, a humanist and a philosopher," who brought scientific thinking and humanistic values to bear on modern educational problems: "firmly grounded in the psychology and techniques of the new education, he saw them as instruments for achieving an ideal of culture quite in harmony with the technological facts of modern living" (1948/1968, p. 3).

Newland's doctoral dissertation was a quantitative analysis of changing attitudes toward gender roles and relationships as expressed in American periodicals between 1911 and 1930 (Newland, 1932). We can only speculate on the reasons for this focus of study but there is some evidence that his progressive views extended to his family relationships and approach to parenting. His wife, Elsie earned a BA and MA from the University of Alberta while married and raising two young daughters, and his daughters both made careers in male-dominated professions. His daughter Enid became a physician, and Doris was the only woman in her class in the Bachelor of Architecture program at the University of Manitoba, graduating in 1944 (Mahaffy, n.d.). In 1934, as he prepared the ground for progressive curriculum reforms, he told school trustees that "we parents have no right whatever to expect our children to conform to our personalities, our attitudes, our creeds and beliefs ... we are on the western summit; they are rising with the sun" ("Sees changes in school courses", p. 18). In a province often dominated by conservative values, Newland was clearly not bound by tradition.

When Newland returned to Alberta doctorate in hand, he rapidly rose through the ranks of the Department of Education, moving from high school inspector to Chief Inspector to Supervisor of Schools in three years. His studies provided him with the opportunity to immerse himself in the publications of key American progressive theorists; his new positions gave him the chance to share this learning with colleagues and work to put these ideas into practice in Alberta schools. Addresses he gave as the Enterprise and the social studies programs were developed and implemented indicate his familiarity with and enthusiasm for the social reconstructionism of Counts and Rugg.

Newland was a democratic socialist. In his public speeches in the 1930s and during World War II, he frequently argued for the need for what he called "total democracy." By that, he meant a democracy that would provide economic and social security for all: "until this problem is solved, talk about the 'good life' or the 'democratic way of life' is hollow mockery" (Newland, 1968a, p. 9).

He blamed schools for supporting “the obsolete ideology of laissez-faire” and argued that “the alleged neutrality of our schools has really played into the hands of those who desire to manage our democracy for purposes other than the welfare of the common man” (1968d, p. 3). He declared:

The teacher should expound, both within the classroom and without, the thesis that a modern society must provide adequate food, clothing, shelter, education, health and other social services for 100% of its population, and that any society which neglects so to provide for 30% of its population cannot survive and does not deserve to survive. (1968d, p. 3)

Others might have moderated their social criticisms during the war or toned down rhetoric that might have been seen as divisive. Newland, however, insisted that if we can mobilize the economy to support the war effort, it is “equally possible and equally necessary to control our economy in order to maximize our effort for social welfare—for health, education, and social services” (1968d, p. 5).

Like Rugg, Newland stressed that political elites have benefited from the lazy and/or flawed thinking of most of the population and expressed concerns about the sloganeering, emotional appeals, and manipulation that had become typical of political campaigns and consumer advertising (1968d). He also consistently emphasized the need for schools to teach critical thinking. He argued that could not be done in traditional, authoritarian classrooms; democracy could only flourish if classrooms cultivated free inquiry, and respected students’ autonomy as well as objectivity of thinking. In a speech delivered to a number of different audiences during the war, Newland explained:

our schools must encourage the scientific approach to social problems in a spirit of free enquiry. No interests or propaganda should be permitted to bar the way in a search for truth. Pupils need training the art of critical and independent thinking, in order that they may help overcome the blindness and inertia of tradition, and be ready to perform their share in the task of social reconstruction that awaits both us and them. (1968b, p. 4)

As High School Inspector, Newland began to make the case for introducing social studies into the schools, telling school trustees that that the secondary school curriculum should be organized around English, health, and social science (“See changes in school courses”, 1934). These subjects, which he argued would be framed around issues of contemporary relevance to all people, would better suit the interests and needs of the expanding high school population, all of whom, in his view, required schooling that would provide them with “social intelligence and social conscience” (Newland, 1968c, p. 11). Newland’s commitment to a much broader and more holistic high school program than the traditional academic curriculum was not just theoretical; it reflected the problems he had witnessed as a high-school Latin teacher and an abiding frustration that so many adolescents dropped out of school just as they, in his view, reached a point in their maturity where schooling could significantly impact their intellectual, personal, and vocational development. It is not surprising that he saw in Rugg’s social studies, an effective program and a pedagogical approach to teach for critical deliberation and prepare students for the task of building a more just society.

## Political and Practical Support

As historian Schneider (2014) contended, philosophical compatibility is one key characteristic of educational theories that are enacted by practitioners. As Supervisor of Schools, Newland was well placed to direct the implementation of Rugg's social studies in Alberta's schools. Although Newland's commitment to social reconstructionist vision of schooling was not shared by all leading educators in the province, it was inspiring for key figures working in the province's Normal schools and the Department of Education. But clearly one man alone, no matter how committed, could neither impose a new program on the schools of the province, nor ensure its implementation.

Previous Supervisors had worked closely with university professors in the arts and sciences when revising curricula, Newland, however, selected like-minded educators to serve on committees and personally supervised their work. He often drew on contacts in an organization called the Education Society of Edmonton. Established by Newland and like-minded colleagues in 1927, the Society was an exclusive club focused on educational reform and leadership. It accepted members by invitation only and throughout the 1930s never had more than 25 members. Membership was limited to senior school board administrators, school inspectors, and Normal School instructors. Ideas and readings that Newland was introduced to in Chicago began to appear in the Society's discussions and on their reading lists after 1932. Discussion topics included "Educational Problems in Light of Present Day Conditions" and "Social Purposes in Education." The Society dedicated a year to the study of Counts' *Social Foundations of Education* and months to the study of Rugg's social studies materials. This led to a motion by Newland and approved by the membership "That the course of study for secondary education be revised around a core of social studies with a view to giving the normal adolescent a realistic view of contemporary life" (Oviatt, 1970, p. 87). Among these province's educational leaders Newland found many colleagues ready and willing to take on the task of revising curriculum along social reconstructionist lines.

Support for Newland's social democratic vision and a new direction for social education also came from other important sources, including the United Farmers of Alberta, the farmers' organization that governed the province from 1921 until 1935. This organization and its partner, the United Farm Women of Alberta implemented a range of informal citizenship education programs for rural communities grounded in an understanding of democratic cooperation and justice informed by the social gospel (Wouts, 2013). Throughout the 1920s and early 1930s, their publications, Sunday school programs, conferences, and extension programs communicated principles and specific strategies for applying Christian ethics of care and compassion to social, political, and economic problems. Their annual conferences regularly passed motions calling for the introduction of courses in economic cooperation. Concerned about the social and economic impacts of the Great Depression, in 1934 the UFA passed a resolution calling for the Department of Education to infuse throughout the curriculum, "the idea of the advance of society towards a new form of social organization in which the principle of a struggle for private profit shall be displaced by the principles of equity, justice, mutual aid and social well being" (Annual Convention of the United Farmers of Alberta, 1934).

In the same year, the annual general meeting of the provincial teachers' association passed a resolution that called for the development of a new course in the social sciences so that "the student may leave the school well trained for the intelligent exercise of his rights and responsibilities in a democratic citizenship" (Alberta Teachers' Association, 1934, p. 9). Therefore, Newland was encouraged by the support of his political masters and of the teachers' association

as he initiated the curriculum revision. When a new government was elected in 1935, he was able to continue with the revision largely because the new premier and Minister of Education, school principal and radio evangelist William Aberhart, trusted McNally and Newland, officials he had known and worked with for many years, to carry on what he saw as a much-needed modernization of the school program (von Heyking, 2006a).

Another element key to the successful development of the new Alberta social studies program was what Schneider called the program's perceived significance. Schneider explained that a scholarly initiative is successfully taken up in schools because "it answers a question central to the profession" (Schneider, 2014, p. 8). In Alberta, educational leaders felt that Rugg's social studies program could address key challenges facing their schools. A government investigation into problems of rural schooling identified an academic curriculum largely irrelevant for rural students as a significant reason for low rates of high school participation (Legislative Assembly of Alberta, 1935). In 1934, for example, fewer than 12% of all students enrolled in Alberta schools were in high school (Alberta Department of Education, 1934). Advocates of curriculum reform, not just Newland, argued that schools should provide appropriate and meaningful curriculum for citizenship for all students, not just those bound for university.

Alberta educators and others were also concerned about the disconnect between life as reflected in the school curriculum, and the real life problems students encountered in the 1930s. Teachers, inspectors, and leaders in the Department of Education questioned the relevance of history in the school curriculum in particular. History was described not just as badly-taught by ill-prepared teachers, but as counterproductive in preparation for citizenship. Within the context of the economic crisis of the Great Depression, school history courses were blamed for supporting outdated and ineffective economic and political institutions; critics argued that history instruction had reinforced passive acceptance of a fundamentally flawed and unjust system, and inculcated students with an uncritical loyalty to the state (von Heyking, 2006a). For Alberta educators, a new social studies program represented a much-needed attempt to make the content of schooling meaningful for all students.

There is evidence that the province's educational leaders felt that the intermediate grades were the most appropriate level at which to introduce Rugg's problem-focused social studies program. In the December 1935 meeting of the Education Society, after considerable and apparently lively discussion, members concluded that this approach would be most useful to students and teachers in Grades 7, 8, and 9, in the newly created intermediate division. This suited Newland because he knew that many students completed their formal schooling at the school-leaving age of 16 and he wanted to ensure that they would finish their education with the skills and attitudes required for his social reconstructionist vision of citizenship (Education Society of Edmonton, 1935; Oviatt, 1970).

Alberta's educational leaders also appreciated the potential of Rugg's social studies to enhance the effectiveness of classroom instruction. The Normal school instructor Newland selected to write the new program, W. D. McDougall, later remembered that what was particularly appealing to him and the teachers he consulted as he developed the materials was "the discovery of teaching techniques designed to involve the pupils more responsibly in their own learning" (McDougall, 1969, p. 27). Educational leaders such as school inspectors and Normal school instructors had long pushed teachers to implement discussion groups, research projects, and other cooperative strategies. The Rugg teaching guides offered a model for how to do this, and McDougall followed this model closely as he wrote the program and its supporting teaching materials.

## Adopting and Adapting the Rugg Approach

In the fall of 1935, Newland asked Normal school instructor W. D. McDougall to develop courses for Grades 7, 8, and 9 based on "Rugg's Social Studies." The Education Society had purchased a complete set of Rugg's materials, so McDougall had access to these as he began work on the course proposals. From November 1935 to March 1936 the Society vetted materials and drafts of the course outlines McDougall prepared. In Rugg's program, the 7<sup>th</sup> grade included a study of urban life in America, resources and industries, and American trade with other nations (Evans, 2007). Accordingly, McDougall's outline for Grade 7 focused on Canadian history and geography, particularly focusing on resource development, and the course was titled "Canadian Problems" (Alberta Department of Education, 1936, p. 11). Rugg's 8<sup>th</sup> grade program included the history of western settlement in the United States, its industrialization, and political history focused on "the march toward democracy" (Evans, 2007, p. 66). McDougall's Grade 8 course, "Problems of the British Commonwealth," was focused on the industrialization of Britain, expansion of trade and the growth of its empire, and its economic relations with the United States and South America (Alberta Department of Education, 1936, p. 11). In the initial draft of the course outline McDougall simply inserted units III, IV, and V from Rugg's *Changing Civilizations in the Modern World* (1930), units on European industrialization and the resulting conflicts over markets, colonies, and boundaries, into his list of units (Education Society of Edmonton, 1936).

Rugg's 9<sup>th</sup> grade course in many ways best embodied his problem-solving approach to social studies. Rather than framing historical and geographical studies around issues, "problems and issues are the main content emphasis, with an explicit focus on different races and cultures, economic problems, and current issues in government" (Evans, 2007, p. 66). McDougall's Grade 9 course, initially called "The World in which we Live," was organized around eight problems inspired by Rugg's *An Introduction to Problems of American Culture* (1931) and *Changing Governments and Changing Cultures* (1932):

- Problem I: How the environment affects living
- Problem II: How industrialism is revolutionizing home and community life
- Problem III: How modern industrialized nations produce and distribute goods
- Problem IV: How science affects living
- Problem V: How Britain and Canada have developed a system of democratic government
- Problem VI: How certain world powers are dealing with their post-war [i.e., Great War] problems
- Problem VII: What about the future? (Alberta Department of Education, 1937)

This course was the first to be introduced in schools in fall 1936.

The definition of social studies in the 1936 Grade 9 *Programme of Studies* was quoted directly from the state of Virginia's course of study. It explained that the course "will introduce pupils to the problems of modern civilization in their historical and geographical setting" (Alberta Department of Education, 1936, p. 11). In the preface to his textbooks, Rugg explained how the disciplines are integrated in social studies: "Whenever history is needed to understand the present, history is presented. If geographic relationships are needed to throw light upon contemporary problems, those geographic relationships are incorporated" (1931, p. vii). In strikingly similar language, the *Programme* said that Social Studies "is in no sense an attempt to camouflage history, geography and civics. When the content of these formal subject categories sheds any light on the problems under study, it is then introduced" (Alberta Department of

Education, 1936, p. 11). The three objectives of the course also reflected Rugg's vision for social studies:

1. To facilitate an understanding of the social and economic realities.
2. To develop the ability to see both sides of a question, and to think independently on a basis of facts.
3. To induce an attitude of fair-mindedness, and a desire to co-operate with others for the welfare of the community. (p. 12)

The program document not only quoted Rugg's definition and vision of social studies, but also described his instructional approach. It listed teaching suggestions from his *Teacher's Guide to the Social Studies Series*, including allowing pupil committees to organize projects, field trips, and manage other classroom responsibilities. Specific directions were provided for open forum discussions and to develop thoughtful questions for speakers. Teachers were told that the classroom should "be a real laboratory, where co-operation, initiative, originality and responsibility are developed" (p. 12).

Kliebard and Wegner (2002) argued that as controversial as some of the content in Rugg's textbooks was, his resources were successful because they provided content that was accessible to students and specific directions for activities that teachers could realistically implement within the context of their classrooms. After writing the curriculum, the Department of Education hired McDougall and a staff writer from Ryerson Press to develop what were called "guide books" for the program. McDougall and Paterson drew heavily on the content, format, and tone of Rugg's materials; they integrated many of the features of his workbooks and teachers' guides. They included suggestions for teaching activities and topics for "open forums" which were structured discussions to enhance students' skills of debate and deliberation. The texts were written in a lively, accessible style and made good use of what Rugg called "dramatic episodes" often directly addressing the reader. They included informational maps, charts, and images and also encouraged teachers to have students draw editorial cartoons, complete timelines, and create dramatizations to demonstrate their learning. The texts provided specific strategies to develop students' critical thinking. Explicit instructions for important skills such as finding sufficient evidence to support one's position were frequently included in the texts. Students were instructed to construct charts with arguments for and against particular positions on issues. They were encouraged to consider unfamiliar perspectives and explicitly asked to revisit their initial thinking after completing units of study (See Figures 1 and 2). There is considerable evidence that teachers used these textbooks not just to transmit the content of the program but also to guide their instruction.

A review of the textbooks praised their teaching suggestions, saying "while a student may forget material conned without any attempt at organization from a dog-eared book, the same student will not forget an intellectual method once he has by diligent effort and training acquired it" ("New books in social studies", 1937, p. 12). Years later, T. G. Finn, Professor of Education at University of Alberta in Calgary, explained that the books "gave an indication of the way in which such a course should be handled ... for many teachers the books became the course, which really was not what had been intended by Paterson and McDougall" (1966, p. 30).

There were some ways in the which the textbooks reflected the Alberta context in which they were to be implemented. The fact that course content and instructional directions were combined into a single, relatively short, grade-specific text rather than Rugg's format which included student text, workbook, and teacher guide meant that they were affordable at a time of fiscal restraint.

Figure 1

Images from McDougall & Paterson, *Our Empire and its Neighbors* (pp. 46, 141, 182, 200 and 208).

Year	Total Trade	Great Britain	U.S.A	Germany	France
1840	2,800,000,000	~45%	~5%	~5%	~5%
1880	14,800,000,000	~35%	~15%	~10%	~10%
1929	66,700,000,000	~25%	~35%	~15%	~10%

ALBERTA  
AREA 251,171 SQUARE MILES  
POPULATION 172,000  
POPULATION PER SQUARE MILE 0.7

ALBERTA  
AREA 151,774 SQUARE MILES  
POPULATION 4,353,000  
POPULATION PER SQUARE MILE 28.7

**ALL-BRITISH AIR ROUTES**

- Imagine yourself seated in a giant Empire Air Liner poised for a round-the-world tour on which your ship will never touch anything but British soil. There are several routes which may be followed. Have a number of committees plan tours over these routes. Distances must be estimated carefully, for your ship has a flying range of only 3,000 miles. There will be one part of your journey where your determination to land only on British territory may be badly shaken. Try to obtain pictures and descriptions of the places at which you would stop to rest and refuel.
- Use a globe and a piece of string to show the relationship of Canada to the air routes between Chicago and Kobe, New York and Moscow, Oakland (California) and Tokyo, London and New York, Chicago and Liverpool, New York and Paris, New York and Berlin, Moscow and San Francisco.
- Complete the study of the Mediterranean-Asian route from Aden to Hong Kong. Why is Britain busily fortifying Singapore? To what extent will Singapore safeguard India, Australia and New Zealand?
- Open Forum: Is international peace more necessary to the British Commonwealth than to any other nation or group of nations?  
Is the British Commonwealth less secure to-day than it was twenty-five years ago?

5. As an outcome of your reading you should now be able to make quite lengthy lists of the beneficial and harmful effects of the industrial revolution on the world in general (or on England in particular, if you prefer). From all the lists of suggestions make one list on the blackboard, revising the items where necessary.

6. Open Forum: Is power machinery beneficial or harmful to the workers?

Country	Area in Square Miles	Population, Census of 1931
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	93,991	46,042,000
Ire.	26,601	2,957,000
Canada	3,694,900	10,376,216
Australia	2,974,581	6,448,707
New Zealand	103,415	1,442,116
South Africa	471,917	8,132,600

It may be observed that Canada, which occupies practically one-half the area of the whole Commonwealth, has only about one-seventh of its population.

**SOME GRAPHIC ILLUSTRATIONS**

Represent the area and populations in this table by means of graphs. There are three types which may be used: bar graphs, circle graphs and picture-graphs. Have committees use each of these methods and then decide which has the most meaning.

Figure 2

Images from McDougall & Paterson, *The World of Today* (pp. 39, 169, 180, 216, 224 and 328).

8. A final Open Forum: For upwards of a century machines have been adding to the world's stock of goods. Thousands of men and machines are employed in producing food, clothing, houses, automobiles, radios, and a multitude of other things. Has the worker been getting a fair share of these goods, produced in apparently unlimited quantities? That is, has the worker's standard of living improved in proportion to the producing capacity of the modern industrial world? While discussing this problem it would be advisable for you to review your first conclusions regarding "production for use" which was discussed in the preceding chapter. You may have occasion to revise some of your opinions, but you should be prepared to do this on any issue whenever new evidence is presented.

6. George III is frequently blamed for the loss of the American colonies. To what extent can he be fairly blamed?

Open Forum: Some people urge that party government should be abolished, that the best brains in parliament, regardless of party connections, should be asked to sit in the Cabinet. Discuss this proposal and list its desirable and undesirable features.

**THE OPEN FORUM**

The first step in your Open Forum work is to get properly organized. You should draw up a constitution (rules for conducting the business of the meeting), and all meetings should be conducted in a business-like manner. Devote the first two or three meetings to drawing up a constitution and to learning how to conduct a public meeting.

The following are some questions that arise from the studies you have been making and which it might be profitable for you to discuss:

- Is overpopulation a menace to world peace?
- Should any more immigrants be allowed to enter Canada?
- Should literacy, intelligence and money tests be applied to all immigrants entering Canada?

4. What are some of the bad social and business effects of strikes and lockouts? How are strikes and lockouts being prevented, to a certain extent, in Canada?

- Prepare a report on the advantages and disadvantages of profit-sharing and other schemes for giving the workers a larger share in the profits made by their labor.
- In some countries the trade unions have created strong political parties. Name such countries and tell to what extent these parties have been successful in controlling the government and in securing laws beneficial to the working man.
- The working day is becoming increasingly shorter. This means that there is increased leisure for the workers. Suggest ways in which further education may help workers to enjoy this leisure.

**KNOWLEDGE versus PREJUDICE**

1. Knowledge overcomes prejudice. We know the United States very well, and American people are well acquainted with Canadians. What modern developments are in part responsible for this mutual improvement of knowledge and understanding?

Through your committees make brief studies of the past relations between France and Germany, France and Britain, Britain and Germany, Italy and Austria, Russia and Poland, Japan and Russia, China and Japan, Greece and Turkey. Does the story of the past shed any light on present relations?

- Discuss ways in which school education might be improved with a view to teaching coöperation and removing international prejudice.

**EVEN THE CHILDREN!**

- In your reference books you will find further information on conditions in factories and mines in the early days of modern industrial development. "Oliver Twist" reveals how horribly pauper children might be treated. Investigate working conditions in the mines. Illustrate your study by a series of contrasting pictures of a day in the life of an eight-year-old (Grade II) boy in 1836 and 1936.
- Make a chart which will show the succession of Acts of Parliament which improved conditions for children. Find out to what extent the laws of your Province protect children from abuse and overwork.

The textbook content also included much more regional, rather than national, history and geography compared to Rugg's. Indeed, these texts were the first to communicate "a distinctively Alberta perspective of the country" (von Heyking, 2006b, p. 1137). Almost a quarter of the Grade 7 text described the agricultural development and settlement of the prairies and the final section explained local government institutions (McDougall & Patterson, 1938). The texts addressed how Canada's federal system and unfair internal trade policies resulted in economic and political injustices for Alberta and celebrated Alberta's economic contributions to Canada and the British empire (von Heyking, 2006b). Even when addressing global issues, the textbooks consistently explained their relevance for Albertans and provided discussion questions asking students to compare and contrast what they had read with aspects of their own communities.

The texts also reflected prevailing Anglocentric values of the period and celebrated Canada's identity as a British nation. The textbook, *Our Empire and its Neighbors* (McDougall & Paterson, 1937a) began with an imaginary tour of London, "the heart of the empire," characterizing such a trip as "a never-to-be-forgotten experience" (p. 9). McDougall and Paterson attributed Britain's commercial success and imperial accomplishments to their superior personal qualities: "the people of Britain, a northern race, are industrious and energetic, and this fact combined with their favorable situation, has made the British Isles a world centre" (1937a, pp. 9–10). The Grade 7 text included detailed descriptions of the people and industries of the "homelands" of European and Asian immigrants to Canada, focusing particularly on their similarities and differences to Britain. Suggestions for open forum debates at the end of the unit included questions such as "Does Canada need any more European immigrants?" and "Should immigrants of any country be welcomed or should they be limited to selected nationalities?" (McDougall & Paterson, 1938, p. 207). When describing increasing political tensions in Europe, the authors contended that they were "due in partly to acute differences in race," but the long-standing, peaceful relationship between Canada and the United States was because "Not only are we of much the same racial stock ... we have learned how to settle our international differences peaceably" (McDougall & Paterson, 1938, p. 223). Although the new social studies program provided the opportunity for students to examine and critique some historical and contemporary economic issues, it also cultivated enduring, ethnocentric elements of English-Canadian identity.

### **Supporting Implementation**

To support the implementation of the new program, Alberta educators were able to draw on what Alcorn called a "mechanism of transfer" of American educational initiatives to western Canadian settings (2013, p. 28). Newland was a member of the Progressive Education Association executive, and likely heavily involved in bringing the annual meeting of the Association to Edmonton in April 1939 (Patterson, 1986). He drew on his network to invite Rugg, and other leading American progressive education scholars, Carleton Washburne, Boyd Bode, Hilda Taba, to teachers' conventions (Tomkins, 2008). They gave talks on child-centered and social reconstructionist curriculum and pedagogy. Some also recorded radio addresses intended to help parents and the public understand the nature of and need for the progressive reforms the Department was introducing. Others, such as Lester Dix from Teachers College, Columbia and Clara Lyden from Francis Parker School in Chicago led professional learning sessions during summer schools organized for teachers by the Department of Education (Alberta Department of Education, 1941).

In April 1941 Harold Rugg visited Edmonton. During his visit he gave the keynote address at the annual Easter Convention of the Alberta Teachers' Association. In honor of his visit, the

convention included an Open Forum discussion by participants on “Our Concept of Democracy.” He met with Normal School instructors and school superintendents and led a discussion about how best to help teachers implement and parents understand the new progressive curriculum (Alberta Department of Education, 1941). He also gave a public talk that was broadcast over the provincial radio station and later published in the teachers’ association magazine. At a time when conservative opponents were calling Rugg’s materials un-American and anti-capitalist and were convincing American school districts to abandon them (Evans, 2007; Laats, 2015), he was in Alberta to observe the success of a social studies program modeled on his work. Here, he found a supportive audience for his message about the possibilities of progress for North American democracy: “We have, I am convinced, all the makings—the indispensable natural resources, the democratic tradition, the scientist-engineers, to design a fine material civilization, the capable technicians to operate it and the artists to guarantee its beauty” (Rugg, 1941, p. 11). With Canada already in the war, he celebrated the “unique North American brand of democracy,” and assured his audience that the United States “will join with yours in defending it—even to go to war if that becomes necessary” (1941, p 11).

Rugg also found sympathy for the difficulties he experienced in defending his textbooks in the face of a powerful, organized conservative lobby. He told Albertans that one force endangering democracy were those who “stamp on the Bill of Rights, destroy tolerant discussion of issues, bear false witness, and defame the characters and reputations of other Americans who are sincerely striving to honor and protect the democratic process” (1941, p. 11). One of the textbooks developed for the Alberta program had also become the focus of textbook controversy in 1939. In contrast to Rugg’s experience, however, the controversy resulted in minor editorial changes to the text and affirmed the commitment of the Department of Education to a program it saw as crucial to the development of thoughtful, democratic citizens.

### **Alberta’s Textbook Controversy**

The conservative crusade against Rugg’s textbooks in the United States resulted in a 90% decline in sales between 1940 and 1944 (Dorn, 2008), and a retreat in terms of the social reconstructionist influence on American social studies programs. As Lagemann (2000) pointed out, the resources that replaced Rugg’s textbooks, like those authored by Hanna and Quillen, were less overtly critical of American economic and social policies. In contrast, in Alberta, the attempt to ban or withdraw the text demonstrated the strength of educational leaders’ social reconstructionist vision in the face of public criticism.

In the fall of 1939 candidates in Calgary’s municipal election called for the withdrawal of McDougall and Paterson’s Grade 9 text, *The World of To-day* (1937b). They characterized the book as German propaganda because it described the Treaty of Versailles as a “humiliating peace” and the level of reparations as unreasonable (“Independents demand withdrawal of gov’t textbook”, 1939, p. 14). In the context of the fall of 1939, they and other critics read this as a justification for the Nazi regime. They further criticized the book for stressing the inefficiencies of parliamentary democracy, and praising social welfare supports and worker protections introduced in Russia and Sweden (“Nazi propaganda in Alberta school book?”, 1939). When trustees of the Calgary public school board were asked about the book, those running under a united conservative affiliation were vociferous in their criticism, with one saying “I condemn the book most heartily. It creates hatred, hostilities, prejudices in the minds of girls and boys of tender years. Something must be done when any department of any government uses any text book for

propaganda purposes” (“Trustees powerless to change text book”, 1939, p. 13). As the campaign grew, the Department of Education received other complaints that the textbook provided an overly negative picture of conditions in postwar Britain and questioned the unity of the British Commonwealth countries in the face of conflict (“Starr charges Nazi propaganda in school book”, 1939). Newspaper editorialists dismissed the criticisms and enthusiastically supported the critical thinking approach of the textbook, but the Department of Education faced considerable pressure to revise or withdraw the book.

Initially both Deputy Minister McNally and Newland responded to critics by stressing that the textbook was not meant to be the sole resource for the Grade 9 course. In correspondence that came to the Department from lawyer and retired militia Lieutenant-Colonel J. H. Jackson, Newland also defended the tone of the text insisting that students in a democratic society must learn to respond to controversial issues. In follow up correspondence, Jackson threatened to take the matter to the “Canadian Legion and all other patriotic organizations to investigate into the ancestry of every member of the Legislature and ascertain where the Pro-Nazi views originate” (Jackson, 1939). Under increasing pressure to clear up the controversy, the Department’s Social Studies committee recommended eliminating problematic passages and rephrasing some of the guiding questions to better ensure open and informed investigation by students (Newland, 1940). The committee stressed that the textbook had been scheduled for revision to correct minor factual errors and include updated information about the current global context. It should be noted that the Calgary school board candidate who led the charge against the textbook, Starr, failed to secure a seat in the election.

In the same way that Rugg’s social studies program was adapted to suit the Alberta context, so was the textbook controversy. Although the organized campaign against Rugg’s program was largely successful in eliminating the materials from American classrooms, in Alberta it resulted in modifications to one textbook. Because decisions about curriculum and teaching resources were made by authorities in the provincial Department of Education, and not by locally elected school trustees who might be more likely to be persuaded by organized interest groups, the Alberta controversy was defused relatively quickly and served to affirm the Department’s commitment to its new reconstructionist Social Studies program.

### **Legacy**

In the 1950s, most Canadian provinces that had experimented with some progressive curriculum reforms returned to more traditional history and geography programs (Tomkins, 2008). In Alberta, the over-arching, reconstructionist vision of Social Studies and its issues-focus continued, particularly, at the high school level. This is consistent with Newland’s contention that students should be prepared for the responsibilities of democratic citizenship as they complete their formal schooling. This program vision has endured not necessarily because of widespread public support, but because of commitment on the part of those who designed and supervised the program: officials in the Department of Education and the educators who advised and collaborated with them. Indeed, Alberta’s Social Studies program has been the target of regular criticisms ever since from those who see the need for more coherent and focused history teaching. But even when the program was revised to include more explicit history instruction, social studies advocates insisted the historical content was there in order to inform the social problem-solving process.

After a contentious and unsuccessful revision of the social studies program in the 1970s that featured social inquiry and values clarification, the 1981 revision was described by the minister of education as including mandatory units in Canadian history (von Heyking, 2006a). Although some social studies educators expressed concern about this perceived conservative turn in the program, Department officials and educational researchers argued that it “was a much more integrated and elaborated expression” of the social inquiry approach to social studies that teachers would be forced to implement given its clear articulation in curriculum documents and the specially-designed teaching resources (de Leeuw, 1986, p. 26). Because the historical content of the program was included to facilitate students’ examination of issues such as Canadian identity and regional disparity, they characterized it as “a more complete—and for teachers, more demanding—expression of social reconstructionism” (Skau, 1988, p. 217). Critics seemed to agree with this assessment, insisting that “nowhere [in Canada] is history’s plight better illustrated than in Alberta” (Nikiforuk, 1982, p. 52).

Criticisms of the program’s approach to historical study have continued. Privately-funded organizations such as the Dominion Institute and Historica Canada, organizations that lobby for national history teaching standards and fund a range of public history projects, have regularly singled out Alberta’s Social Studies program as problematic. Their *Canadian History Report Cards* assess provincial and territorial school curricula for their historical content and development of students’ historical thinking skills. Every iteration of their assessment has scored Alberta among the lowest in the country (Chalifoux & Stewart, 2009; Historica Canada, 2015, 2021).

The province’s Social Studies teachers have expressed support for curriculum change, but their concerns focused more on issues with resourcing and instruction than the program’s social reconceptualist framing. Indeed a 2016 survey of 500 teachers demonstrated overwhelming support for the program’s “central focus on the development of active and engaged citizens of a democratic society,” “the emphasis on multiple perspectives ... including a specific focus on Aboriginal perspectives and experiences,” and its “issues-centred and inquiry-based approach.” They valued the program’s attention to “current affairs and controversial issues,” and the program’s “emphasis on helping students become more adept at dealing with complexity, ambiguity and uncertainty” (Alberta Teachers’ Association, 2016, p. 8). It is no surprise then that their response to the United Conservative government’s draft social studies curriculum was overwhelming negative.

When the United Conservative Party was elected to form the provincial government in April 2019, its leader vowed to remove what he characterized as a left-wing political agenda and discovery learning in schools. The Minister of Education celebrated the draft kindergarten to Grade 6 curriculum released in March 2021 because “students will hopefully develop not only a deep sense of gratitude to past generations and a pride in who we are today, but also the responsibility to carry this legacy forward” (French, 2021). In December 2021, in the wake of overwhelmingly negative feedback, the government announced a pause on implementation and its intention to revise some of the subject-specific programs (Baig, 2021). Social studies was the only subject that was, in effect, withdrawn and is being redeveloped using a new design blueprint (Alberta Education, 2021). Whether the redesign reflects educators’ preference for the continuation of the social reconstructionist orientation or a slight modification of the governing party’s focus on a common core of historical knowledge remains to be seen.

## Conclusion

As Evans explained,

At its heart, the progressive approach to schooling championed by Rugg and others held that students must be challenged to confront social realities, to understand how the problems and dilemmas of the contemporary world came to be what they are, and to think about what might be done about it (2007, p. 295).

The Alberta program's explicit social critique has been muted from time to time, but Rugg's social reconstructionist vision has guided curriculum in Alberta since the mid-1930s when the province's educational leaders adapted his curriculum design and teaching resources to suit the context and secondary students of the province. Studies of the American intellectual roots of these progressive curriculum revisions are important in helping us understand the origins of education reforms and the ways in which Alberta educators interpreted, adapted, and implemented those ideas. It demonstrates why leading Alberta educators and key stakeholders in the 1930s shared Rugg's social reconstructionist conception of schooling and the extent to which his teaching resources could be adapted to guide instruction and suit different contexts. Alberta's program has changed over the course of 90 years, but its overarching vision continues to reflect Rugg's social education characterized by the multidisciplinary examination of current issues, by the nurturing of skills of critical thinking and respectful deliberation, and by the desire for social progress.

## References

- Alberta Department of Education. (1934). *Annual report*. Author.
- Alberta Department of Education. (1936). *Programme of studies for grade IX and departmental regulations relating to the Grade IX examination for the year 1936–1937*. Author.
- Alberta Department of Education. (1937). *Programme of studies for the intermediate school, Grades VII–IX*. Author.
- Alberta Department of Education. (1941). *Annual report*. Author.
- Alberta Education. (2005). *Social studies program of studies, kindergarten to grade 12*. Author.  
<http://www.learnalberta.ca/ProgramOfStudy.aspx?lang=en&ProgramId=564423#>
- Alberta Education. (2021). *Social studies: Highlights of the draft social studies design blueprint (Dec 2021)*.
- Alberta Teachers' Association. (1934). *Annual general meeting*. Annual General Meeting Records, Alberta Teachers' Association Archives, Edmonton, Canada.
- Alberta Teachers' Association. (2016). *The future of social studies—the voices of Alberta teachers*.  
<https://ssc.teachers.ab.ca/SiteCollectionDocuments/Future%20of%20Social%20Studies/Full%20Doc%20The%20Future%20of%20Social%20Studies.pdf>
- Alcorn, K. (2013). *Border crossings: U. S. culture and education in Saskatchewan, 1905–1937*. McGill-Queen's University Press.
- Anderson, H. R. (1932). A textbook in social science. *The Elementary School Journal*, 32(10), 797–799.  
<https://doi.org/10.1086/456821>
- Anglin, H. (2021, Sept. 7). *Alberta's social studies curriculum is filled with facts and the left can't handle that*. National Post. <https://nationalpost.com/opinion/howard-anglin-albertas-social-studies-curriculum-is-filled-with-facts-and-the-left-cant-handle-that>
- Annual Convention of the United Farmers of Alberta. (1934). *Social science in schools*. Premier's Papers (69.289/170D), Provincial Archives of Alberta, Edmonton, Canada.

- Association of Alberta Deans of Education. (2021). *Alberta curriculum analysis*. <https://alberta-curriculum-analysis.ca/>
- Baig, F. (2021, December 13). *Province announces changes to Alberta's controversial school curriculum*. Global News. <https://globalnews.ca/news/8447676/alberta-government-changes-school-curriculum/>
- Barone, T. (2010). Harold Rugg. In C. Kridel (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of curriculum studies* (Vol. 2, pp. 751–753). Sage.
- Boyle-Baise, L., & Goodman, J. (2009). The influence of Harold O. Rugg: Conceptual and pedagogical considerations. *The Social Studies*, 100(1), 31–40. <https://doi.org/10.3200/TSSS.100.1.31-40>
- Case, R., & Abbott, M. (2008). Purposeful teaching in secondary social studies. In R. Case & P. Clark (Eds.), *The anthology of social studies: Issues and strategies for secondary teachers* (pp. 15–24). Pacific Educational Press.
- Chalifoux, M., & Stewart, J. D. M. (2009). *The Canadian history report card: Curriculum analysis of high schools in Canada*. The Dominion Institute.
- Clark, P. (2004). The historical context of social studies in English Canada. In A. Sears & I. Wright (Eds.), *Challenges and prospects for Canadian social studies* (pp. 17–37). Pacific Educational Press.
- Clark, P., & Case, R. (2016). Defining the purpose of citizenship education. In R. Case & P. Clark (Eds.), *The anthology of social studies: Issues and strategies for elementary teachers* (pp. 19–31). Pacific Educational Press.
- Coulter, R. (2005). Getting things done: Donald J. Dickie and leadership through practice. *Canadian Journal of Education / Revue canadienne de l'éducation*, 28(4), 669–699. <https://journals.sfu.ca/cje/index.php/cje-rce/index>
- Cremin, L. (1961). *The transformation of the school: Progressivism in American education, 1876–1957*. Knopf.
- de Leeuw, G. (1986). Reactions. *One World*, 24(3), 25–26.
- Dickie, D. (1940). *The enterprise in theory and practice*. W.J. Gage & Co., Limited.
- Dorn, C. (2008). "Treason in the textbooks": Reinterpreting the Harold Rugg textbook controversy in the context of wartime schooling. *Paedagogica Historica*, 44(4), 457–79. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00309230802042805>
- Eaton, S. E. (2021, Apr. 3). Analysis of plagiarism in the draft Alberta K-6 curriculum. *Learning, Teaching, and Leadership*. <https://drsaraheaton.wordpress.com/2021/04/03/analysis-of-plagiarism-in-the-draft-alberta-k-6-curriculum/>
- Education Society of Edmonton. (1935, December 14). *Minutes of meeting*. Proceedings, Education Society of Edmonton fonds (73-185), University of Alberta Archives, Edmonton, Canada.
- Education Society of Edmonton. (1936, March 28). *Minutes of meeting*. Proceedings, Education Society of Edmonton fonds (73-185), University of Alberta Archives, Edmonton, Canada.
- Evans, R. W. (2007). *This happened in America: Harold Rugg and the censure of social studies*. Information Age Publishing, Inc.
- Evans, R. W. (2019). *Fear and schooling: Understanding the troubled history of progressive education*. Routledge.
- Finn, T. G. (1966). History of the social studies in Alberta. In S.N. Odynak (Ed.), *The Alberta conference on the social studies curriculum for grades I–XII: A rationale for the social studies*, 24–37. Department of Education.
- French, J. (2021, Mar. 29). Alberta unveils new elementary school curriculum with emphasis on common cache of knowledge. *CBC News*. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/edmonton/alberta-unveils-new-draft-elementary-school-curriculum-with-focus-on-common-cache-of-knowledge-1.5968354>
- Government of Alberta. (2021). *Draft K–6 curriculum*. <https://open.alberta.ca/dataset/9f8e10af-7ae8-466e-857f-09204b101454/resource/b575fdd9-04da-4c73-bf6a-eb18a6b3085a/download/edc-draft-curr-k6-social-studies.pdf>
- Historica Canada. (2015). *The Canadian history report card*.

- Historica Canada. (2021). *Canadian history report card. Full report*.  
[https://www.historicacanada.ca/cms/public/pdf/2023/05/01/history-report-card-2021\\_full-report.pdf](https://www.historicacanada.ca/cms/public/pdf/2023/05/01/history-report-card-2021_full-report.pdf)
- Independents demand withdrawal of gov't textbook. (1939, October 6). *Calgary Herald*, 14.
- Jackson, J. H. (1939, November 3). [Letter to G. F McNally, Deputy Minister of Education]. Premier's Papers (69.289/740B), Provincial Archives of Alberta, Edmonton, Canada.
- Johnson, L. (2021, Nov. 8). LaGrange defends value of K–6 draft curriculum pilot, despite only two per cent of Alberta students participating. *Calgary Herald*.  
<https://calgaryherald.com/news/politics/lagrange-defends-value-of-k-6-draft-curriculum-pilot-despite-only-two-per-cent-of-alberta-students-participating/wcm/eb95ebd5-f9da-4051-ad26-40a982ba75c1>
- Kanygin, J. (2021, Mar. 29). *Alberta releases draft of new kindergarten to grade 6 curriculum*. CTV News. <https://calgary.ctvnews.ca/alberta-releases-draft-of-new-kindergarten-to-grade-6-curriculum-1.5366715>
- Kliebard, H. M. (1995). *The struggle for the American curriculum, 1893–1958* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
- Kliebard, H. M., & Wegner, G. (2002). Harold Rugg and the reconstruction of the social studies curriculum: The treatment of the “great war” in his textbook series. In H. M. Kliebard (Ed.), *Changing course: American curriculum reform in the twentieth century* (pp. 61–75). Teachers College Press.
- Laats, A. (2015). *The other school reformers: Conservative activism in American education*. Harvard University Press.
- Lagemann, E. C. (2000). *An elusive science: The troubling history of education research*. University of Chicago Press.
- LaZerte, M. E. (1968). Dr. H. C. Newland. In H. C. Newland, *Collected papers*. [Unpublished manuscript]. Reprinted from “H. C. Newland,” 1948, *Alberta Teachers' Association Magazine*, 29(1), 2–3.
- Legislative Assembly of Alberta. (1935). *Report of the committee on education in the rural districts of Alberta*. King's Printer.
- Lemisko, L. (2016). Turning the inside out: Presuppositions of Alberta's educational leaders promoting progressive reform, c. 1920–1950. *Historical Studies in Education / Revue d'histoire de l'éducation*, 28(1), 73–95. <https://doi.org/10.32316/hse/rhe.v28i1.4430>
- Loomis, A. K. (1932). World-culture in the junior high school. *The School Review*, 40(6), 472–475. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1080919>
- Mahaffy, C. (n.d.). *Doris Newland Tanner*. Women building Alberta: The early female architects of Alberta. <https://womenbuildingalberta.wordpress.com/doris-newland-tanner/>
- McDougall, W. D. (1969). *In and out of the classroom, 1914 to 1964*. William Dewar McDougall fonds (1969-157), University of Alberta Archives, Edmonton, Canada.
- McDougall, W. D., & Paterson, G. (1937a). *Our empire and its neighbors*. The Ryerson Press.
- McDougall, W. D., & Paterson, G. (1937b). *The world of today*. The Ryerson Press.
- McDougall, W. D., & Paterson, G. (1938). *Our country and its people*. The Ryerson Press.
- McNally, G. F. (1964). *G. Fred: The story of G. Fred McNally*. J. M. Dent & Sons (Canada) Limited.
- Mrazik, M. (2021, Jun. 8). *Alberta's draft curriculum provides strong base for critical thinking*. Calgary Herald. <https://calgaryherald.com/opinion/columnists/opinion-albertas-draft-curriculum-provides-strong-base-for-critical-thinking>
- Nazi propaganda in Alberta school book? (1939, November 15). *The Calgary Herald*, 13.
- New books in social studies. (1937). *Alberta Teachers' Association Magazine*, 18(2), 12.
- Newland, H. C. (1932). *The change in attitude toward sex freedom as disclosed by American journals of opinion during the same years 1911–1930* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. University of Chicago.
- Newland, H. C. (1940, January 17). [Memorandum to W. Aberhart, Minister of Education]. Premier's Papers (69.289/741A), Provincial Archives of Alberta, Edmonton, Canada.
- Newland, H. C. (1968a). A sketch of present-day education. In *Collected papers*. [Unpublished

- manuscript].
- Newland, H. C. (1968b). Building democratic morale in our schools. In *Collected papers*. [Unpublished manuscript].
- Newland, H. C. (1968c). Education for intelligent living. In *Collected papers*. [Unpublished manuscript].
- Newland, H. C. (1968d). The line of action. In *Collected papers*. [Unpublished manuscript].
- Nikiforuk, A. (1982). History's last stand in the classroom. *Maclean's*, 95(14), 52.
- Oviatt, P. (1970). *The educational contributions of H. C. Newland*. [Unpublished M.Ed thesis]. University of Alberta.
- Palmer, H., & Palmer, T. (1990). *Alberta: A new history*. Hurtig Publishers.
- Patterson, R. S. (1974). Hubert C. Newland: Theorist of progressive education. In R. S. Patterson, J. W. Chalmers & J. W. Friesen (Eds.), *Profiles of Canadian educators* (pp. 289–307). D. C. Heath, Canada Ltd.
- Patterson, R. S. (1986). The Canadian response to progressive education. In N. Kach, K. Mazurek, R. S. Patterson & I. DeFaveri (Eds.), *Essays on Canadian education* (pp. 61–77). Detselig.
- Patterson, R. S. (1990). The Canadian experience with progressive education. In E. B. Titley (Ed.), *Canadian education: Historical themes and contemporary issues* (pp. 95–110). Detselig.
- Peck, C., Wright-Maley, C., Scott, D., & von Heyking, A. (2021, Apr. 6). *Alberta's draft social studies curriculum will hinder students*. Edmonton Journal.  
<https://edmontonjournal.com/opinion/columnists/opinion-albertas-draft-social-studies-curriculum-will-hinder-students>
- Rugg, H. (1923a). Do the social studies prepare pupils adequately for life activities? In G.M. Whipple (Ed.), *The twenty-second yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education: The social studies in elementary and secondary school, Part II* (pp. 1–27). Public School Publishing Company.
- Rugg, H. (1923b). Problems of contemporary life as the basis for curriculum-making in the social studies. In G. M. Whipple (Ed.), *The twenty-second yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education: The social studies in elementary and secondary school, Part II* (pp. 260–273). Public School Publishing Company.
- Rugg, H. (1930). *Changing civilizations in the modern world*. Ginn & Co.
- Rugg, H. (1931). *An introduction to problems of American culture*. Ginn & Co.
- Rugg, H. (1932) *Changing governments and changing cultures*. Ginn & Co.
- Rugg, H. (Ed.). (1939). *Democracy and the curriculum: The life and program of the American school. Third Yearbook of the John Dewey Society*. D. Appleton-Century Company.
- Rugg, H. (1941). Education and the North American way of life. *Alberta Teachers' Association Magazine*, 21(9), 11–12.
- Rugg, H., Rugg, E., & Schweppe, E. (1923). A proposed social science course for the junior high school. In G. M. Whipple (Ed.), *The twenty-second yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education: The social studies in elementary and secondary school, Part II* (pp. 185–207). Public School Publishing Company.
- Schneider, J. (2014). *From the ivory tower to the schoolhouse: How scholarship becomes common knowledge in education*. Harvard Education Press.
- Sees changes in school courses of study needed. (1934, February 9). *Calgary Herald*, 18.
- Skau, K. G. (1988). A curriculum of change: Social studies in Alberta. *History and Social Science Teacher*, 23(4), 214–220.
- Stanley, W. B. (1992). *Curriculum for utopia: Social reconstructionism and critical pedagogy in the postmodern era*. State University of New York Press.
- Starr charges Nazi propaganda in school book. (1939, November 15). *Calgary Herald*, 14.
- Tomkins, G. (2008). *A common countenance: Stability and change in the Canadian curriculum* (New ed.). Pacific Educational Press.
- Trustees powerless to change text book. (1939, November 15). *The Calgary Herald*, 13.

- von Heyking, A. (2006a). *Creating citizens: History and identity in Alberta's schools, 1905 to 1980*. University of Calgary Press.
- von Heyking, A. (2006b). Fostering a provincial identity: Two eras in Alberta schooling. *Canadian Journal of Education / Revue canadienne de l'éducation*, 29(4), 1127–1156.  
<https://journals.sfu.ca/cje/index.php/cje-rce/index>
- Wouts, A. J. (2013). *Evangelism for democracy and social engineering: The origins of social studies curriculum in Alberta, 1919–1935*. [Master's thesis, University of Calgary]. PRISM.  
<https://doi.org/10.11575/PRISM/25995>

---

*Dr. Amy von Heyking* is an Associate Professor in the Faculty of Education at the University of Lethbridge. She is the author of *Creating Citizens: History and Identity in Alberta's Schools* and co-editor of *Becoming a History Teacher*. Her research has been published in journals such as the *Canadian Journal of Education*, *Historical Studies in Education/Revue d'histoire de l'éducation*, *History of Education Quarterly*. Her research interests include the history of Canadian schooling and history teaching and learning.