The World Portrayed in Texts: An Analysis of the Content of Elementary School Textbooks

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Textbook content continues to frame a great deal of classroom learning. In this paper, the perception of society and its ideals portrayed in elementary-level textbooks commonly used in British Columbia, Canada, are investigated and analyzed. Prominent themes are teased out and discussed under four broad headings: technology and consumerism, the personal world of children, what it means to be a Canadian, and morality and religion. Questions are raised about the potential effects of the nature and scope of textbook content.

L'objet de cet article est de mettre au jour les représentations et les idéaux de société tels qu'ils se dégagent des manuels généralement en usage au niveau de l'école élémentaire en Colombie-Britannique. Nous dégageons les thèmes suivants: technologie et consommation, le monde de l'enfance, l'identité canadienne, la moralité et la religion. Nos questions portent sur la nature, l'envergure et les effets des contenus de ces manuels.

Despite ongoing pedagogical and curricular changes in elementary schooling, grade-level-specific textbooks continue to frame most classroom learning situations. To a large extent, textbooks still define instructional programs in the schools (Apple, 1986, p.12; Elliott and Woodward, 1990, pp.1-3). Teachers agree that textbooks "exert a powerful influence on what is taught and how it is taught" (Rogers, 1989, p. 25). Goodlad (1984) concluded that textbooks and workbooks are still the major classroom teaching vehicles, especially in language arts, mathematics, and science (pp. 205-15). Several recent studies indicate that even when teachers do not follow textbooks page by page, they use them as topical guides and key information banks (Davey, 1988; Stodolsky, 1989). Although teachers' dependence on textbooks varies with such factors as knowledge background and years of experience, textbooks are used extensively and their place is firmly entrenched in the schools (Elliott & Woodward, 1990).

The content of textbooks cannot be neutral or unbiased. Thus, the curricular dominance of textbooks underscores the importance of thorough analyses of their nature and scope. Generally, textbook content has propagated economic, cultural, and moral conceptions legitimized by educational and political leaders

(Anyon, 1983; Tomkins, 1986). This officially sanctioned lifeworld influences, at least to some degree, the beliefs, values, and attitudes of students (Klein, 1985, p. 14).

Increasingly, therefore, the question is asked whether textbook content provides children with a realistic and edifying perception of society, its ideals, and its ideologies. Concurrently, textbooks have become a source of controversy, particularly in the United States (Moffett, 1988; Van Brummelen, 1989). Worldwide studies have addressed how racial minorities and women are often given short shrift in textbooks (Garcia & Sadoski, 1986; Michel, 1986; Parsons, 1982). Critical theorists have outlined how American history textbooks downplay the role of workers as well as the previously mentioned groups (Anyon, 1983). American researchers have concluded that the deliberate exclusion of the historical and current impact of religion on North American society has led to a distorted view of American history and culture (Bryant, 1984; Davis, 1986; Haynes, 1987; Vitz, 1986). Ravitch has objected to the abundance of myth and legend and the neglect of classic literature in current American readers. Pedagogically, she has joined others in claiming that textbooks are "dumbed-down" and "blanded down" by readability formulas and attempts to be noncontroversial as well as by being "compressed into incomprehensibility" to satisfy content requirements (Ravitch, 1987; Tyson-Bernstein, 1988).

Few studies exist which determine in what ways and to what extent such claims hold for Canadian textbooks. Murray (1986) showed that, in one Canadian grade four and five social studies series, dominant social norms and existing authority structures are accepted and that truth and reality are portrayed as empirical constructions rather than as value commitments. Seney (1986) concluded that a majority of secondary Canadian social studies texts use "value-laden descriptive language" to present a negative view of the United States. More general studies of textbook content, however, have dealt with their historical evolution rather than with current content (Sheehan, 1979; Ahsan, 1984; Van Brummelen, 1986; Luke, 1987; Curtis, 1989).

In the study reported herein, the ways in which Canadian textbooks in four basic subjects areas portray Canadian culture and its ideals to elementary-level students are analyzed. The project focused on the 1989 grades one through six mathematics, science, and social studies textbooks prescribed by the British Columbia Ministry of Education as well as on two popular reading series. Because the prescribed language arts materials in British Columbia were more than a decade old, two current Canadian reading series, both used in many elementary schools in the province, were used instead. All books in the study have also been authorized in several other provinces and therefore the conclusions of this study have implications for all of English-speaking Canada.
The purpose of this study, then, was to analyze the *content* of elementary-level textbooks used in British Columbia. It was designed to determine how textbooks

portray society and the present and future roles of students in society. Many questions, of course, must be considered before it is possible to grasp the entire actual place and role of textbooks in inducting children into society. In what ways do the form and structure and the explicit and implicit pedagogy of texts, teachers' manuals, and provincial curriculum guides influence how teachers actually use textbooks in the classroom? How are students affected by the quality of the writing, readability, and broad but superficial content coverage? Does the exclusion of controversial topics inhibit creative thinking? What are the political, cultural and economic factors affecting textbook production? Apple (1986) has addressed the last question in some depth and there is no reason to doubt that the broad brushstrokes of his picture apply to Canadian as well as to American textbooks. The other questions need further investigation but go beyond the scope of the present study.

Methodology

In a study of this type, the empirical data must be verifiable. How the data were gathered, categorized, and chosen for presentation, however, affected the final picture. The bits and pieces of data in this study were like interchangeable jigsaw puzzle pieces that could be framed and fit together in diverse ways. It should be noted first, therefore, that a number of broad questions framed and guided the investigation — questions that I believe need to be answered about textbook content in order to choose and use it judiciously in the classroom. What values and commitments are stated or assumed in the textbooks as important for the individual and for the well-being of society as a whole? What are the contours of the embedded worldviews (i.e., of the visions of life) that the authors promote and that they therefore presumably want to guide students in their thinking and conduct? Is there a dominant, coherent vision intended to orient students to life? Or are diverse points of view expressed that help students sort out their own positions? In other words, what ideals do those who write and approve textbooks appear to wish to transmit to Canadian children?

The philosopher Dooyeweerd, when addressing worldview questions, distinguished 15 aspects of reality (Kalsbeek, 1975), 12 of which proved relevant categories for textbook content analysis: physical, biological, emotional/psychological, rational, historical, lingual, social, economic, aesthetic, political, moral, and religious aspects. As notations about the textbook content were made and categorized, it soon became apparent that some of these categories were too encompassing; further subdivisions and additions were made for a total of 28 categories. Ten subcategories replaced the social one: the role of the individual in society, family structure, living accommodations, friendship, entertainment and sports, relationships between children and adults, gender roles, social class, social institutions, and culture groups/ discrimination. Other separate categories that were added as the data base expanded included

technological, ecological, geographical, nutritional, creative, consumerism, and business and industry.

A total of 94 documents was examined. Fifty-two of them were short student booklets from reading and social studies series at the primary level; the others, longer literary anthologies as well as mathematics, science, and social studies textbooks, were intended mainly for grades three to six. For ease of referencing, each book was designated by an abbreviation; for example, HM5 represents the Houghton Mifflin *Mathematics 5* text intended for use in grade 5; J43 is the third booklet for the fourth reading level in the *Journeys in Reading* series. (See the book referencing designations in the *Textbook References* on pages 219-221). Supplementary resources and teachers' manuals were not included for analysis.

As the books were perused, notes on the verbal and pictorial content were made in each of the 28 categories. Comments summarized the knowledge, skills, attitudes, values, and dispositions described in the textbooks — those, presumably, that the textbook authors deemed worthy of consideration as children become encultured. The bulk of notations consisted of notes on all written and pictorial content. From the notes in each category, recurring or prominent themes were determined. The resulting descriptions revealed the common conceptions, attitudes, and values portrayed in the books. Specific quotes from the textbooks were used to illustrate the motifs thus identified. Frequency counts were also made for specific quantifiable items within some of the categories: for example, the different types of families and homes portrayed; the number of situations shown involving adults, children, or both; and the number of portrayals of members of diverse minorities. These were used to verify, where possible and applicable, the prevalence of the identified themes. Quantitative results are provided only when they clarify a point being made (see Van Brummelen & Ahsan, 1985).

Related themes were combined and grouped together under a broader heading. A consideration of these groupings in terms of the frame questions provided earlier as well as of those topics that authors seemed to disregard or minimize led to the categories being reduced to four broad clusters: technology and consumerism, the social world of children, being a Canadian, and morality and religion. In the next four sections of this paper I deal, in turn, with each of these clusters, describing and analyzing what the authors regard as significant content for children (or for their teachers). To a certain extent, the scope of the descriptions is bounded by the frame questions and the identification of the four major categories. Data in some subcategories (e.g., biological and nutritional) contributed relatively little to the common motifs and, while given due consideration, are not reported in depth. In the last two sections of the paper I provide my interpretation of and conclusions about the findings in terms of what I consider desirable textbook content. Finally, I raise some questions about the

potential influence of textbooks on how students view themselves, their roles in Canadian society and culture, and their values and beliefs.

Technology and Consumerism

The authors of the grades one through six textbooks chosen for this study promote, first of all, a Whig conception of progress. In other words, the writers support the view that long-term positive change, rooted in science and technology as well as in our economic system, is inevitable despite minor setbacks: "Nothing is certain but all is possible" (IM61, p. 165; DM5, p. 10). Technology, especially as exemplified by the ubiquitous computer and other progressive inventions, enables students to look forward to comfortable and exciting futures (e.g., Q4, p.74; Q6, p. 89; J3, p. 319; ST6, p. 81; DM5, pp. 122, 161, 192). The authors posit that people control technology and economic life for their own benefit. New technology in the lumber industry, for example, is beneficial because it leads to improved efficiency and a greater lumber harvest (DM5, pp. 42-43). Similarly, technological change has led to good health care and big and modern hospitals (DM31, p. 39). Accounts of gold rush Barkerville and other settlements mention technical improvements (e.g., the telegraph, transportation, photography) but not social problems nor the fact that technology can cause economic and social dislocation (DM31, pp. 52ff., 71, 78). In general, the view promoted is that change, fueled by economic and technological progress, eventually will prove salutary for everyone.

Mathematics and science textbooks most often present factual material about the physical and biological world in isolation, without an everyday context. The authors present scientific facts and processes but seldom do they discuss their purpose or meaning or implications for society. The overwhelming proportion of science content focuses on factually-based knowledge and observation skills rather than on students' own experiential knowledge or insight. Knowledge is broken into manageable parts that can be used to control our environment efficiently (ST6, pp. 81, 102-31; EX5, pp. 48-95).

Rather than emphasizing the special nature of life, the authors of one science text use a physical analogy to explain the meaning of life: "Just as a house is made of bricks or pieces of wood, a living thing is made of cells" (ST4, p. 91). The introductory pages of each unit of the *Exploring Science* series have photographs of human-made mural appliques rather than of actual phenomena in everyday life, even in life science units. Particularly, the authors of mathematics and science textbooks persistently and without hesitation acclaim new inventions and technologies. The compilers of readers and social studies texts also laud technological progress, but do stress the need to use inventions wisely. They do also laud the importance of loving animals and the singular significance of human life (e.g., DM5, pp. 107ff.; J5, pp. 245ff.). Yet technology, according to one selection in a reading series, will probably prevail: "Someday it may be possible for factories to operate without any humans at all" (IM42, p. 181).

Most textbook authors include content that augments students' ecological insights. In science textbooks, however, such material seems like an afterthought. As well, the mathematics texts contain almost no problems that could create environmental awareness. Nuclear and fossil fuel power generation are described without a hint of any related problems except for the excess heat produced that we must learn to use without wasting (HM6, p. 113; EX5, p. 105; ST4, pp. 274-77). The thrust of discussions on pollution is that governments and industries are successfully solving existing difficulties. For example, auto makers have installed pollution control devices and factories are finding better ways to dispose of their waste products (DM6, p. 75; ST6, pp. 262, 275, 308; EX6, p. 182).

The authors of social studies texts and readers are more sensitive to the difficult environmental problems society needs to resolve: "People affect the physical environment ... these factors may even be changing the climate throughout the world" (DM6, p. 12). A grade five social studies text indicates that not enough new trees are planted to replace those that are logged. This is the only instance where the existence and role of environmental groups is mentioned. Elsewhere, nevertheless, the same authors conclude that we will find acceptable compromises between commercial and environmental interests as long as we all remain reasonable (DM5, pp. 41ff.). Selections in one of the reading series posit that personal positive attitudes such as conserving materials will overcome ecological problems, without confronting students with the seriousness of the earth's ecological plight (J5, pp. 43-46, 54-61). In a science text, responsibility for stewardship is limited to individuals: "Remember that there is only so much of everything. How you use it is up to you!" (ST6, p. 262).

At the same time, the textbook authors present a picture of students reaping the benefits of technology by fitting, as consumers, into an entrepreneurial economic system. (See, for instance, the numerous problems about buying and selling, working for wages, and part-time jobs based on children's initiatives in the Ginn and Houghton Mifflin grades four to six mathematics texts.) These authors say little, however, about how our economic system functions, or about its advantages and disadvantages. They show that the profit motive was valuable for the fur traders (even if deleterious to First Nations people and workers), but do not discuss it in today's context (PH5, pp. 4ff.; DM42, p. 84). Businessmen make money, the authors of one textbook state, by being practical, diligent, hardworking, ambitious, and responsible (J5, pp. 33ff.). Workers through their jobs help their families and communities (DM13, DM21). Authors of the textbooks in this study refer to labor unions only twice: Being a union leader is mentioned as a possible occupation in the lumber industry, and in the next book in the same series students are asked to imagine what it would be like to be a member of a union in Peru's unstable economic and political context (DM5, pp. 68ff.; DM6, p. 195). While these authors discuss the strike that took place

during the building of the Canadian Pacific railway (DM5, pp. 168ff.), none deals with current labor-management disputes.

Textbook authors usually show contemporary people in lower middle and middle class settings and indicate that they can achieve a better (economic) life within our present system (DM31, author's message; J6, p. 384). In particular, many situations are provided in mathematics texts where, if children take individual initiative and persist at their goals, they earn the money that they need to meet their material goals — for instance, by babysitting, delivering newspapers, walking a neighbor's dog, or operating a fruit or lemonade stand (JM4, pp. 37, 63, 82, 281; JM6, p. 185; HM6, p. 97; IM15, pp. 82-85). Work is shown as the means to earn money, not as something that may involve intrinsic satisfaction or be a way of serving others. People are portrayed in mathematics texts as earning money in order to partake in a middle class, materialistic lifestyle: to buy pizza, cameras, aluminum foil, ski clothes, cassette tapes, and restaurant meals. Buying "wisely" is interpreted narrowly in terms of choosing the least expensive alternative: "You will probably spend more than $1 000 000 in your lifetime! To get value for your money, you will need to compare prices" (Q5, p. 304). Purchasing material goods is assumed to be beneficial for individual persons as well as for society ((DM5, pp. 68ff.). Only one reader selection, set in the year 2080, raises the possibility that buying material goods may not lead to total happiness. Our responsibility to the disadvantaged in other cultures is mentioned just once, when a child thinks about people who have no food to eat (IM31, p. 139).

In short, textbook authors generally proffer a picture of a technological- and consumer- oriented society with few problems. The authors of mathematics and science texts in particular impress students with the benefits of a technologically-advanced, materialistic society. On the other hand, they pay little attention to the development of a social conscience and communal economic and environmental responsibility that might foster greater justice for all.

The Personal World of Children

"No man is an island," a grade six social studies text quotes John Donne and then continues, "Your actions can change the lives of your family and your friends, and their actions can change your life" (DM6, p. 385). This, in essence, sums up the individualistic view of society in current textbooks. People are portrayed as individuals who may decide, on a personal basis, to band together for common advantage. But the authors give little indication that social institutions may be more than the sum of the individuals, that they may possess a life of their own, or that concepts of social power and communal responsibility affect life in our culture.

The textbooks show people living in adequate but not extravagant older single houses or apartments, usually in cities. Such homes "are the one place in the world where we can really be ourselves" (IM41, p. 80). While families are shown to include relatives such as cousins and grandparents, the definition of a family, according to one social studies text, is any group of people living together (DM11, pp. 8-10). Authors indicate that it is especially within such groups that people extend help and love to each other and where they band together to provide housing, food, safety, love, and opportunities to do special things (HM5, p. 134; HM6, p. 56; DM12; DM13; DM14, pp. 105ff.). The generally modest family dwellings are shown as geographical launching pads for children's amusements: Especially in mathematics texts children spend most of their time in the unrelenting pursuit of playing, watching games and sports, and attending entertainment events.

Of the family situations in the primary levels of *Journeys* and *Impressions*, 40% and 53%, respectively, include both a mother and a father. At the primary level, the *Journeys* series balances the number of remaining family situations between those with only fathers or only mothers; in the *Impressions* series all but one have mothers only. The authors seldom make clear, however, whether the other parent lives in the household or not and they almost always present family life as stable and blissful. Separation and divorce are seldom mentioned. In only one selection are family problems realistically and honestly portrayed: A boy tells about his parents getting a divorce and the problems caused by his father forgetting to send support payments (J6, p. 14). The authors generally do not address the difficult questions that many elementary pupils face, such as family tensions, negligence, abuse, or poverty and hunger. The few selections that portray superficial friction or minor difficulties between parents and children (IM61, p. 170) do so without attempting to resolve them; they do not suggest or encourage creative problem solving. Adults are shown in positions of power and teachers, like other adults, are often shown to be insensitive to children's needs (JM3, pp. 29, 55, 59; ST6, p. 205; IM61, pp. 112ff., 170ff.).

According to the texts, family and other groupings can be advantageous, but the individual's autonomy and power is paramount. Children play in groups in three-quarters of the situations pictured in one science textbook, but for scientific experimentation are shown working alone in 81% of the cases (EX3). Authors point to the individual initiative of early explorers (DM42), and stress that even children can already be authors, artists, singers, or inventors (J71, pp. 26-28; J62, pp. 19ff.). A common theme in the readers is that individual courage and persistence are all that are needed for a successful and happy life (IM21, pp. 232-41; J5, p. 59). Persons are portrayed as islands — islands that must be linked, but that can accomplish much by themselves nevertheless.

This is not to say that interpersonal links are held to be unimportant. Many situations in the texts make clear that people benefit by cooperating and sharing

with each other, both within families and within communities (J42, pp. 57-58; J62, pp. 44-51). Friends, for instance, are shown to accept each other, to prevent loneliness, and to accomplish mutually salutary aims — even when the friends are quite different in age or background, or when one is handicapped (J4, pp. 26ff.; IM22, pp. 192ff.; IM31, pp. 238-43). Authors describe other cooperative efforts positively as well. For instance, when people work cooperatively in communities they help to maintain good employment opportunities, enable volunteer groups to carry out community services, raise funds for worthwhile causes, and promote the needs of minorities and the handicapped. They also allow people to influence governments (J4, p. 262; J5, p. 83; J6, pp. 60, 121).

During the past decade, textbook producers have tried to shut out sexism and racism. In the examined texts published during the 1980s, the situations that authors portray strike an equal balance between men and women in traditional and nontraditional gender roles. Women are shown nontraditionally in such occupations as carpenters and hardware store owners, while fathers vacuum and bake (J4, p. 222; HM6, p. 220; DM13). Authors give nontraditional twists to some stories of romance: for example, a princess rescues a prince but does not marry him because he is a "creep," and another prince chooses to marry a plain woman rather than a beautiful but mean princess (J61, p. 33; J72, pp. 19ff.; IM61, pp. 32ff.). Some authors also discuss why certain occupations still involve persons of mainly one sex (J61, p. 33; IM61, pp. 32ff.) and one describes a court case won by a girl who wanted to play on a boys' sports team (J6, pp. 243-47). Pictures of persons belonging to visible minorities appear regularly, although this is generally limited to Blacks in books with American roots such as the *Exploring Science* series. At the same time, by showing how members of minority groups, especially immigrants, have overcome discrimination through individual effort, authors leave the impression that the status of minorities in our society depends on personal decisions and attitudes rather than on political, economic, and social barriers.

Authors promote the view that through their own individual efforts children can fit, more or less comfortably, into our present way of life. They show how cooperation in communities provides work and services and thus enhances lifestyles (DM31; DM32), but tend to disregard how individuals are bound by the customs, values, and support systems embedded in communities. Further, by omitting situations involving such social institutions as corporations, unions, the media, and churches, they implicitly suggest that their role is unimportant in community life. Some authors contrast the role of the community in mainstream Canada with that of Canada's First Nations people, where the community is shown to be the focal point of existence, structured for interdependence for common purposes (DM41 and PH4). The authors of one book suggest that these aspects of aboriginal culture result in people of "strength and spirit" and are to be preferred to Western individualism: "There is much we can learn from Canada's native people" (DM41, p. 164).

What It Means to be a Canadian

According to the authors of the textbooks examined during this study, being a Canadian means being mutedly patriotic within a multicultural setting. Pictures of the Canadian flag appear five times in mathematics books and three times in social studies texts, including once on the front cover. Only two books contain the national anthem. In contrast with texts of previous generations, heroes are not shown to do things for their country. Nevertheless, authors state that we can be proud that our democratic way of life protects our freedoms. They add that native people as well as immigrants of all creeds and colors have enriched Canada with their traditions, customs, and initiatives. In the past, they continue, instances of unfair treatment did sometimes occur, but today the Canadian *Charter of Rights* guarantees that we no longer discriminate. They then encourage students to fulfill their civic duty to help immigrants feel welcome so that they will be proud to join us as Canadian citizens (Q3, p. 125; DM5, pp. 293, 306, 328ff., 366, 372; PH5, pp. 366ff., 425).

However, authors posit a saccharine version of Canada's multicultural experience. They include selections that show immigrants relatively easily overcoming problems caused by loneliness and special customs (e.g., DM5, pp. 317ff.). They portray native cultures respectfully, but hardly mention the problems created by encroaching white settlement and lifestyle. They describe how white authorities have settled disputes between whites and Indians in the best interests of everyone involved and overlook current problems and issues (PH5, pp. 75ff., 240ff.; DM31, pp. 22, 27). The pervasive theme is that, while students must appreciate people's culturally diverse backgrounds, everyone can fit comfortably into the dominant Western way of life. Pictures of First Nations communities leave the impression that, despite some special ceremonies and customs, their aim is to hold similar jobs, own similar furniture, and enjoy similar entertainment as whites. Furthermore, the authors show little of Canada becoming a nation through struggles between British and French cultures. Multiculturalism is shown to add some interesting dimensions to Canadian life, but not to lead to radically different choices or alternate ways of life.

Authors of social studies texts support the view that what unites us as a nation, besides the accomplishments of notable individuals, is our appreciation for obeying rules and laws (e.g., DM33, p. 38; DM5, pp. 197ff.). They indicate that obedience is necessary in families, schools, and communities for logistical rather than value-based reasons. For example, they mention that chaos results if people don't line up, but not that people must be prevented from doing things that harm others (DM13, p. 19; DM21, p. 13). Authors indicate that protest groups may legitimately try to influence governments, but must do so without breaking the law (DM5, pp. 247-58; PH5, pp. 252-55). They hold that governments provide beneficial services and responsive, reasonable justice (J4, p. 287) and therefore that Canadians apparently have no reason for conscientious objection to certain laws. Egerton Ryerson's 150-year-old emphasis on the

schools contributing to maintaining a stable social and political order continues unabated (Ryerson, 1846, p. 185; McDonald, 1978, p. 84).

The writers of the intermediate social studies books foster an appreciation of Canadian society by comparing it to other cultures in the world. They indicate that problems in some nations still prevent democratic government and that Canada is fortunate in having a democratic government with fewer stifling regulations than some other nations (DM6, pp. 3, 360ff., 383). They believe that this serves Canadian self-interest: "It is important for us to understand how people in other countries think and feel so that we can be friends instead of enemies" (DM6, p. 385). Ironically, such understanding does not seem to apply to the United States whose existence is hardly acknowledged except for achievements in space. In one textbook, it is mentioned that Canadians persevered when Americans caused economic difficulties for our fur traders and that when American gold rushers began to practice vigilante law, superior British law and justice were quickly restored (PH5, pp. 4ff, 87ff.). But otherwise textbook authors generally ignore the presence of the United States on Canada's doorsteps.

According to the textbook authors, then, being Canadian means being a content, law-abiding citizen within a multicultural mosaic. They hold that the pieces of that mosaic must fit together to support the common democratic aim of using technological and economic change to forge the good life. Students are told that Canadians, on the whole, are better off than citizens of most nations in the world, but from the textbooks they learn almost nothing about their closest neighbor, the United States.

The Place of Morality and Religion

The textbook authors provide few selections that encourage consideration of moral issues and dilemmas and give almost no attention to the place of religion in Canadian society. Authors of social studies texts advocate obedience to the law: "Everyone has to obey the law" (DM33, p. 38; DM5, pp. 228ff; PH5, p. 384). However, they do not discuss the ethical principles on which it is founded. In readers, moral edicts are provided most often in stories of bygone days. They seldom describe situations with important moral facets in which today's elementary students may find themselves — theft, vandalism, drugs, abuse, violence, being a victim of crime, and so on. Nor do they portray situations that help students consider the need for long-term commitments in life such as values and related dispositions that might lead to more caring and just family and community life. Readers include many selections with little point to them except attractive form; book excerpts are often so short that they do not make clear the author's intent or theme. The *Impressions* language arts series in particular is full of what appear to be superficial selections: counting bottles falling off the wall, animal alphabets, and "rhymes without reason" (IM22, pp. 243-45).

Nevertheless, the textbooks do include selections that sustain four of the Ten Commandments, often in the context of legends or historical narratives. First, thou shalt not bear false witness; it pays to be honest with each other (e.g., DM41, p. 147; IM21, pp. 122ff.; IM22, pp. 176-79; J6, pp. 62ff., IM61, pp. 32-37, 81). Second, thou shalt not kill; malevolence and warlike actions are deplored, although personal hatred and cruelty are seldom mentioned (e.g., DM5, pp. 108-09; J5, pp. 47-53; J6, pp. 126-28; PH4, p. 183; IM42, pp. 210-17). Third and fourth, thou shalt not steal and thou shalt not covet. Persons portrayed as guilty of these are usually rich and stingy and take advantage of the poor. That riches do not make people happy and that greed will get its just reward are emphasized in reader selections; those content with what they have and those who practice self-sacrifice will find that life rewards them (J52, pp. 67-74; J72, pp. 59-65; IM22, pp. 220-225; J81, pp. 72-76; IM32, pp. 92-101, 70-74; IM61, pp. 44-57; IM62, pp. 271-77; J6, pp. 222-28).

The authors promote two other premises for individual students. First, they should do unto others what they would have others do unto them. It is worthwhile, they tell children, to help parents, the sick, the disadvantaged, the handicapped, and those with special needs, as well as to repay evil with good (J42, pp. 51-58; J51, pp. 47-51; J53, pp. 14-21; J62, pp. 44-51; J4, p.74; IM22, pp. 166-75; IM41, pp. 72, 274-83). Second, they add that hard work, determination, and ingenuity pay off and can overcome obstacles and lead to success (DM6, p. 162; J43, p. 24; J52, p. 24; IM22, pp. 246-55; IM31, pp. 82-88; IM32, pp. 22-28, 75-80; J5, pp. 70-78, 326-30, 336-46). If at first you don't succeed, they recommend, try, try again for your own personal gain (IM31, pp. 89-94; IM32, pp. 34-35).

The textbook authors now and then refer to religion, but not as something that is of great concern to Canadians. They show a futuristic space community with a "worship dome," and how in earlier days people engaged in religious practices such as reading from the Bible and going to church on Sundays (Q3, pp. 48-49; J6, p. 240; DM22, p. 87; DM5, p. 228; J72, p. 38; J6, p. 392; IM41, p. 75; IM42, p. 75). Only one selection describes religion as personally significant: During a church pageant, a family is moved by the wonder of the Christmas story and the idea of God. However, even Christmas is usually portrayed without religious significance: Its meaning is set forth in terms of "being together" or "what you make of it" (HM4, p. 122; IM15, p. 198; IM31, pp. 170-84). A well-known children's prayer has been replaced by a secular version ("Now I lay me down to sleep, A bag of apples at my feet. If I should die before I wake, you'll know it was a stomach ache" (IM62, p. 119). Except when Martin Luther King fought segregation (IM52, pp. 148ff.), the occasional clergyman is generally portrayed as impractical or irrelevant (J6, pp. 251ff.; IM62, p. 128).

In cultures other than mainstream Canadian ones, the authors do show that religious beliefs define what people consider most important in life, explain

humanity's place in the world, lead "to a certain way of thinking, acting, and behaving," and therefore cannot be neglected in understanding culture (DM6, pp. 27, 380). They also describe how the way of life of Canadian natives depends on their view of spirits, religious rituals, and sacred objects. The readers contain many non-Christian religiously-based legends from throughout the world. The Islam faith of a Nigerian family is shown to affect their whole way of life. The discussion of Christianity in Nigeria, however, is limited to noting that a popular novel shows how "the traditional Nigerian culture fell apart as a result of the missionary schools" and that Roman Catholic missionaries "celebrate religious rites and holidays as the Catholics do in Canada" (DM6, pp. 240, 251). Indeed, especially the authors of the *Impressions* readers have included far more material about the occult and the paranormal than about Christianity (e.g., IM31, pp. 196-207).

What the authors write about Christianity generally is so truncated that it is incomprehensible except to practicing Christians. The clearest statement about the life of Christ is that Christians "listen to talks about the teachings of Jesus Christ." Elsewhere authors of the same book add, without explanation, that "[t]hey believe there is also a holy spirit." The short descriptions of Catholic Christianity exemplify unintelligible "blanding down" (DM6, pp. 61, 156, 326). Further, the texts nowhere mention what Protestant Christians and Jews believe, despite the import of these groups in English-speaking Canada.

How Textbook Authors Portray Society and Students' Roles in Culture

By and large, the compilers of the textbooks in this study present a functionalist view of society. By default, they reject a social reconstruction or transformation orientation to curriculum. In other words, the content they write and choose promotes the view that society is basically stable, with its members sharing common values, and that the main road to social advancement is individual achievement, not social ascription. The possibilities of inequitable intergenerational inequality or of economic or political injustice are not raised. Curriculum content may be used to encourage incremental improvements to the status quo, but not to promote perceptive, critical questioning, analysis and consciousness that might lead persons to seek the transformation of society and its structures. The authors therefore downplay conflicts of cultural ideals and values. Implicit in the lack of fundamental questioning of Canadian history and society is the belief that students should conform to society rather than try to transform it.

The textbook authors also endorse this functionalist view of society with their view of the self-sufficient individual. They emphasize self-reliant, technologically-based individualism: "Everything is possible when I am me" (J5, p. 59). They suggest that long-term progress can be assured through personal initiative and persistence and the effective use of technology. The

authors promote the view that human cultural artifacts and inventions will bring about such progress. Their views remain uninfluenced by thinkers such as Jacques Ellul (1964) and George Grant (1986) who have posited the contrary view that technology has the potential to cause major disruptions and even enslave us. On a personal level, textbook authors show situations where the financial remuneration for work allows students to set and achieve personal, usually consumer-oriented goals. Continued societal progress, they imply, is assured as long as individuals put forth good effort, obey the law, and use new technological inventions.

Textbook authors downplay the role of social institutions and thus fail to make students aware of social structures and the circuits of power affecting or governing their lives. Cultural influence and power other than that wielded by individuals tend to be disregarded. Where they are indicated, current roles of social institutions are accepted as they are presently experienced. Business and industry, for instance, are shown to exist, but students are given no insight into the production side of our economic system or of controversies arising from corporate structure and conduct. Social phenomena and institutions are often described in the context of give-and-take situations where individuals reach suitable compromises in order to optimize personal benefits. Vitz (1986) has claimed that traditional family life is excluded from United States textbooks. More to the point, in Canada, is that textbook selections involving families usually focus on actions of individuals who happen to live in a family setting for social and economic advantage, rather than on the dynamics of family life. In short, authors portray an incomplete view of social reality, one that supports the view that individuals by themselves can make or break their own destiny.

There are yet other ways by which the textbook authors, perhaps inadvertently, bolster the cultural status quo. By presenting a narrow, individualistic view of moral life, for instance, they do not lead students to ask how our society may become a more just and moral one. Also, they imply that persons of different cultural background should fit themselves into the present social system; new immigrants are welcome in Canadian society as long as they make themselves part of a preconceived social and economic framework. People are shown to have similar personal needs and therefore to be able to overcome conflict through reasoned discussion (Murray, 1986, p. 44). Authors point out minor mistakes and setbacks that society may experience, but emphasize that in time we can scientifically engineer our environment to produce all the comfort and happiness we desire.

The textbook authors avoid content that deals with most contemporary social problems, as well as issues of social justice and injustice and their implications. Nowhere do they indicate that laws may be unjust, or that protesters sometimes conscientiously object and break the law in order to convince governments to take action, such as in the case of perceived inadequate environmental or

abortion laws. Similarly, they give short shrift to our responsibility towards Third World nations; African legends are given much more attention than acquaintance with the starvation and oppression plaguing that continent. Books for six-to-twelve-year-olds cannot include in-depth analyses of social problems, but they can point out that children throughout the world as well as in Canada face hunger, poverty, parental neglect or abuse, and prejudice — and that business and government policies as well as social values and attitudes may contribute to such situations. While it is understandable that authors do not wish to present children with unduly depressing views of life, burying or glossing over basic problems and key value conflicts in society is untruthful and fails to help students even sense the need for social transformation, let alone prepare them for social and economic empowerment.

Furthermore, the authors of the textbooks in this study appear to downplay the importance of moral development and the achievement of virtue. Their selections delineate a truncated morality apparently assumed to be noncontroversial. Contemporary people portrayed in the books, therefore, seldom do anything wrong; only those far away or long ago are shown to have done evil deeds. With evil having been excised from contemporary society, children seldom get the opportunity to consider moral dilemmas and thus develop ethical values and dispositions that may help bring about a better society.

Textbook authors also negate the influence of religion on mainstream Canadian society and keep children unaware that white Canadians have had and often still hold religious beliefs. They say nothing about the contributions of religious leaders, major church groupings, religiously-based schools and institutions, or the influence of people's religious motives on society. They have expunged, by and large, the role that religion has played in the development of Canadian history. In the United States, a similar "decline of curricular integrity" (ASCD, 1987, p. 8) has led the California State Board of Education, for instance, to instruct its teachers to "encourage students to become aware of their richly diverse and complex religious traditions and to examine new forms of religious expression and insight" (1988, p. 48). Current British Columbia textbooks, however, fail to acquaint students with the values and beliefs that have played a significant role in molding both French and English Canadian culture.

Conclusion

The influence of textbook content on classroom learning and students' attitudes is real, but, at the same time, limited. Various textbook selections may promote diverse beliefs and values and are open to differing interpretations. Even where textbook selections promote clearly defined elements of a specific worldview, these elements are not necessarily accepted by students. Further,

teachers do not select content from textbooks randomly as they structure learning activities and they discuss and use it within certain contexts and parameters. Indeed, they sometimes use content as a foil to test or promote other points of view. Students may and often do neglect or reject what authors hold dear.

Yet, taken as a group, textbooks do influence children, whether directly by legitimizing certain points of view, or indirectly by affecting the choice and structure of curriculum content and classroom activities. This underscores the importance of using textbook content analysis as one tool to choose (and to produce) curriculum materials more judiciously. If students were to accept the overall views presented in British Columbia's elementary-level textbooks, they would believe that they alone can make or break their own lives in a society that provides them with ample opportunities. They would be willing to cooperate in social groups, mainly to promote their own welfare and, as the mission statement of the B.C. public schools puts it, "to contribute ... to a prosperous and sustainable economy." Morally, they would support the view that they should have "tolerance and respect for the ideas and beliefs of others" (B.C. Ministry of Education, 1989, p. 7), but from the textbooks they would not recognize the importance of such traditional Judeo-Christian traits as compassion, forgiveness, humility, truthfulness, and self-sacrifice.

The themes embedded in the textbooks in this study raise questions similar to those asked by such writers as Bellah et al. (1985) and Bowers (1987) about the possibility of education inhibiting the restoration of community. Does textbook content contribute to the pursuit of short-sighted technological, economic, and personal interests? Does it fail to promote essential shared commitments and moral understandings? Could the promotion of narrow individualistic autonomy, presented outside of a meaningful context of moral and religious obligation, eventually detract from a socially viable way of life? As Apple (1986) has pointed out, the textbook does not stand alone, and he calls for research that follows a textbook from its production, circulation, and classroom consumption (p. 104). More investigation is needed of the effects of textbook content on students' thinking, values, and attitudes. In the meantime, a keen perception of the nature of textbook content will enhance teachers' ability to use texts as valuable tools within their own philosophical frameworks.

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