

A Glimpse Inside: Considering the Impact of Curriculum Outcomes and Personal Ideology on Social Studies Pedagogy: A Study Summary

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Abstract:

This article aims to explore how social studies teachers understand their role in the delivery of course content. Drawing on data from an interpretive study completed as part of a Master of Education degree, the article investigates how social studies teachers understand their personal ideology as it relates to their teaching, navigate the prescriptions of the curriculum outcome model, and justify their respective positions on the political, economic, and social issues examined in their classrooms. These considerations will seek to present a clear understanding of contemporary social studies pedagogy, the extent of ideological liberties taken by public school social studies teachers, their implications, and potential impacts on student learning and political, social, and economic understandings.

Key words: social studies, indoctrination, history, ideology

Introduction and Author Positionality

The notion of political indoctrination in public schools, a matter that ostensibly reached its academic zenith decades ago, remains a protracted and unresolved matter. Great minds from the past (Dewey, Freire, Foucault, Popper, Mill) and contemporary scholars (Apple, Hess, Galston, Chomsky) alike have considered both the structure and function of schooling as a core component of a healthy democratic society, and the implications for political indoctrination within that context to both enhance and toxify discourse. Conclusions have varied: some argue (Bialystok, 2014; MacDonald, 2013) that schools have a duty to engage students in political

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discourse with differing degrees of neutrality, while others (Brandes & Kelly, 2001) promote the ideal of evenhandedness and critical open-mindedness. New branches of scholarship have also emerged, each with strong links to political indoctrination. Social justice education, controversial issues education, and post-modern critical pedagogy have deepened the pool of consideration for the potential of schools as indoctrinating agents.

Issues related to political indoctrination in schools drove a course of inquiry spurred by intensely personal motivations. In a previous time, the authors of this article worked as high school social studies teachers, delivering courses in politics and history. We viewed this as an important charge, for the chance to engage young people in citizenship-focused discourse is, to be sure, one of the most important functions of education. This work, however, was not without its professional dilemmas. In the realm of social studies education, this dilemma manifests in the demands of curricula outcomes and how an ostensibly politically minded teacher navigates them under the concern for political indoctrination, department of education directives, and professional accountability.

A Social Studies Education

There are few school subjects with content as diverse as social studies. In many countries, it is not uncommon for a social studies education to exist as a veritable mix of history, geography, civics, economics, and sociology. This content density often prompts the question: What are the social studies? This is a question with no clear answer.

The National Education Association (NEA) (1916) offered the first definition of a social studies education: "...those [disciplines] whose subject matter relates directly to the organization and development of human society, and to man as a member of social groups" (p. 1). This definition was refined by the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) (2013), which developed and continues to use, in a variety of ways, "to equip a citizenry with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions needed for active and engaged civic life." This promotion of civic competence refers to nurturing awareness and understanding of students' immediate communities and the many others to which they belong.

The temporality of the NEA definition is intriguing. Developed during a thrust of immigration in Western states, social studies education was seen as a mechanism for the promotion of socialization to the democratic values linked with Canada, the United States, and the United Kingdom. Important leaders of the education progressivism movement, John Dewey in particular, viewed the public school as an institution that should improve one's way of life through the

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experience of freedom and democracy. Achieving this meant the creation of a curriculum that heralded the Western, democratic values of patriotism, economic self-determination, and social justice. Many of these values are still present in global social studies curricula.

Considering Indoctrination, Academic Freedom, Standards-Based Education, and Social Justice Education

Defining Indoctrination

The charge of issuing a universally accepted definition of indoctrination remains a protracted matter of debate among scholars. These debates have focused on the conclusion that indoctrination is a pejorative term versus the assertion that indoctrination might be both morally and ethically necessary. In an earlier temporal context, indoctrination was easier to locate, as Thayer (1953) notes that "...our early schools were little more than the agents of religious communities, being charged with the task of indoctrinating the young in the religious tenets of one religious faith" (p. 116). Thayer's sentiments were predated by McGucken (1937), who claimed that "...the Catholic educator makes no apology for indoctrinating his students in these essential matters" (p. 60). McGucken's writings signaled the start of an anti-indoctrinationist shift in public education. This shift, championed by Dewey, connected pedagogy with Western liberalism and the goals of citizenship.

Although locating the presence of indoctrination in schools is chaotic and undefined, it pales in comparison to the efforts to define the term. Dewey (1915) saw indoctrination as the "act of implanting ideas in children" in a manner that "...opposes and undermines the concept of student-centered learning and offends liberal-democratic principles" (p. 68). He called for an educational system that valued and promoted reflection, judgment and reasoning, which he viewed, quite unapologetically, as "central requisites of the true democrat and the faithful pursuit of scientific method" which "cannot be acquired via impositional methods." Raywid (1980), in lieu of indoctrination, uses the term "authoritarian education," which manifests in the engendering of "attitudes of obedience, docility, submission and passivity" upon students in a manner that "uses the individual as a means to an end," "denies the recipient the right to choose his own beliefs and simultaneously by foreclosing to the individual the right to function as an independent judge in weighing alternatives," and "forever restricts the learner" (p. 2).

Hare (2006) builds on the voluminous definition of pedagogical indoctrination:

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Philosophers who have been concerned with the problem of indoctrination have focused attention chiefly on teaching, text books, and the curriculum... and the fact that they have yet to fully develop their own critical judgment suggests a certain vulnerability and susceptibility to non-rational persuasion. On the one hand, teachers may abuse their power and authority and seek to impose certain beliefs and values, actively discouraging their students from raising problems or objections; on the other hand, certain views may simply escape scrutiny and pass unchallenged in education because they have become part of what Karl Popper (1975) labels uncritical common sense. In either case, the real danger is that young students will become incapable of assessing such views for themselves. (p. 49)

To counter any tendency towards indoctrination in schools and to prepare students to recognize and resist indoctrination, a conception of education is needed that involves teachers with open-minded attitudes and a commitment to critical questioning in classrooms. As Scheffler (1989) argues, "the manner of teaching should respect the student's intellectual integrity and capacity for independent judgment" (p. 89). This means that students must be encouraged to develop skills and attitudes that will enable them to assess the reasons and evidence that are thought to support various ideas, to evaluate the credibility of the sources where such ideas originate, and to resist the efforts of those who wish to control their thinking. Educational philosophy, with its emphasis on critical thinking, consciousness-raising, and open-mindedness, has done much to remind us of the need to remain vigilant regarding the danger of indoctrination and authoritarianism in schooling (Hare, 2006, p. 50).

Academic Freedom

Issues surrounding academic freedom, freedom of speech, and freedom of expression have existed in education for centuries. Abuses of academic freedom are legion in Western history, from Socrates' death sentence after having been convicted by the Athenian citizenry of "corruption of youth" to Galileo and his challenge of ecclesiastical doctrine. As Dahlgren (2009) notes, "academic freedom has long been held as a sacrosanct principle in the realm of academia" (p. 26), and in fact, influential philosophers such as Descartes and Mill wrote frequently about intellectual autonomy as a minimum condition for pluralistic democracy. Apple (2011) linked these historical perspectives to contemporary education by surmising that public school teachers have not been afforded the same rights as, for example, university faculty due to the practice of watering down curricula through standardization. Apple argues that teachers are expected to toe the line, avoid controversy, and adhere to strict school board rules of governance.

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The concept of academic freedom is not easily defined in the public school realm. Unlike those who teach at post-secondary institutions, public school teachers must be careful to present curricula from a more neutral position, a trait enhanced by even-handed textbooks and department-sanctioned resources.

Socially Just Curriculum

As neo-liberal globalization became further entrenched as the political and economic juggernaut of our times, with its often-associated economic disparity and environmental degradation, public school curricula began a shift toward a new concept: social justice. Designed to help students become so-called critical consumers and assist them in becoming flexible regarding their burgeoning political cleavages, social justice meant weaving liberal, social-democratic values into the curricula of public school courses. As Reynolds (2012) notes:

Increasingly, faculties of education in Canada and much of the Western world are preparing their student teachers to weave social justice throughout the primary school curriculum—in math and science, language arts and social studies, drama and even gym—as well as into a range of cross-curricular activities, events and projects. The idea is to encourage kids to become critical analysts of contemporary issues, empathetic defenders of human rights and gatekeepers of the beleaguered Earth. But social justice—which encompasses diversity, sustainability, global affairs and issues of race and class—is a broad term with varying interpretations. It can manifest in wildly different ways. In the hands of one teacher, social justice might entail teaching kids to care for the Earth by having them plant trees in the schoolyard. Another might have the same children write letters to the government about the environmental effects of mining, urging it to reform how mining claims are processed. (p. 38)

Teachers began receiving professional learning opportunities on social justice concepts. In addition, new supporting documents like *Re-Thinking Globalization: Teaching for Justice in an Unjust World* (this series has since grown and includes titles for math and biology), *Teaching Economics as if People Mattered*, and *Math that Matters: A Teacher Resource for Linking Math and Social Justice* populated school resource catalogues. In lieu of the rules of mathematics or the facts of history, students were pushed to question the dominant discourse, consider the constructs of society, and develop empathy for the many forms of inequality in the modern world.

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By extension, Social Justice Education (SJE) is a pedagogical methodology gaining momentum in the Canadian classroom. Defined by Ayers, Quinn, and Stoval (2009) as a methodology that “addresses issues of inequality in society and the way in which burdens and responsibilities are unequally distributed along structurally engineered fault lines that become ciphers or markers of exclusion and inclusion” (p. 5), SJE is inherently ideological and pushes students to reconsider dominant social narratives in the interests of the pursuit of social equity. Fortin (1997) sees SJE as a mechanism that “calls for a radical redistribution of material resources or, short of that, the establishment of a system that reduces as much as possible the distance separating the social classes” (p. 273). Other scholars have produced similar definitions, all of which generally include one of the following words: oppression, inequality, hierarchies, disruption, justice, and understanding. Social Justice Education is often confused with citizenship education. Lister (1997) makes a distinction between the two disciplines and elucidates citizenship education as “legal status, membership of communities and relationships between members of those communities, but also to relationships between individuals, communities and nations. These definitions may also assume rights and obligations” (p. 1).

The issues surrounding the appropriateness of SJE can be assembled in two major camps: advocacy and discontent. There has been extensive research on both approaches with no shortage of passionate dialogue, both in a supporting and oppositional frame. People who adhere to the principles of social justice often view it as a moral imperative, a foundation of an “inclusive (educational) community” (Meyer & Mitchell, 2010, p. 12). Walker (2007) argues that maintaining a commitment to social justice values obligates administrators and educators to “facilitate access for and to empower all vulnerable parties so as to achieve equal educational outcomes” (Meyer & Mitchell, 2010, p. 12). This view complements the work of Rawls and Fiere who push for the universality of justice and the dismantling of oppressive power systems. Russo (2004) sees teachers as a vital part of social justice advocacy: “Teachers can interrupt the cycles of oppression....Teachers can work as change agents through the content or topics they address as well as through particular pedagogical practices that tend to undermine patterns of oppression”. Kelly (2012) sees SJE as a means to counter cultural imperialism, marginalization, systemic violence, exploitation, and powerlessness.

In terms of objections to social justice in the realm of education, the arguments fall into two categories:

- Social Justice Education is too commonly linked with liberalism; and

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- Liberal applications of social justice programs, both in and out of schools, are flawed and worth challenging.

Some educational commentators have decried aspects of SJE in public schools. According to Marilyn Cochran-Smith et al. (2009), there are three major criticisms of the teaching of social justice in the classroom. The first is that the term “social justice” is vague in nature and thus controversial as to what it constitutes. Another critique is that in teaching for social justice, regular academic curriculum gets neglected. The belief is that neglect in academics can lead to a decrease in student learning. Finally, various other critics feel as though teaching for social justice is instilling specific political ideologies. Graff (1997) argues:

What right do we have to be the self-appointed political conscience of our students? Given the inequality in power and experience between students and teachers (even teachers from disempowered groups) students are often justifiably afraid to challenge our political views even if we beg them to do so. . . . Making it the main object of teaching to open students’ minds to leftist...ideas and stimulate them to work for egalitarian change has been the fatal mistake of the liberatory pedagogy movement. (p. 27)

Standards-Based Education

The historical origins of standards-based education are well documented. Often associated with the economic tumult of the 19th century, standardization became part and parcel of the wider push for enhanced industrial efficiency. Schools, searching for ways to contribute to economic growth (Egan, 1998), sought a more scientific approach to pedagogy. The endgame was a fundamental shift in the purpose and function of public education, as Waldow (2014) explains:

Individual programmes for standards-based reform differ considerably in their aims and in how they are to be implemented in detail, but the general idea of educational standards today is attractive from the perspective of very different educational agendas, from “child-centred education” via “education for growth” to “accountability in education.” (p. 54)

In the Canadian context, and indeed in many Western states, curriculum standards are subject to a creeping enforcement vis-à-vis the creation and propagation of teaching standards. For example, in the provincial jurisdiction associated with this study, the Department of Education (2016) expects that “Teachers are knowledgeable about and utilize provincial curricula,

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initiatives, policies, learning resources, technologies, and assessment strategies” (p. 1). The language in this directive is quite clear: teachers are to *know* and *teach* the provincial curriculum.

Research Questions and Aims

This study principally aimed to assess the extent, if any, of pedagogical differences between social studies educators who self-identify as “liberal” or “conservative.” More specifically, we were interested in exploring how those who self-identify as being on the left (liberal) of the political spectrum would deliver the curriculum for a senior high social studies course and, conversely, how those who identify as being on the political right (conservative) would deliver the same course content.

Methodology and Design

In an attempt to unpack and interpret how social studies teachers confront political indoctrination in their classrooms, we engaged in a course of qualitative inquiry. Guided by an interpretive approach, data for this study was gathered from a collection of seven senior high school social studies teachers. The employ of interpretivism was deemed most preferable for the aims of this study as, in human sciences, it is necessary to have understanding rather than mere explanation. Interpretivists conclude that, ontologically, there are many differing, socially constructed realities that inform human behavior. In this world, research needs to take into account how human situations, behaviors, and experiences construct realities that are inherently subjective (Brooke, 2013).

The process of interpreting experience, as per the intention of this study, must be supported by a complementary methodology. Given my attempts understand the motivations behind action, I engaged in a hermeneutic analysis of generated data. According to Taylor (1985), “...interpretation aims to bring to light an underlying coherence or sense. This means that any science which can be called ‘hermeneutical’ even in an extended sense, must be dealing with...forms of meaning” (p. 206). Given the qualitative nature of this study and the preponderance of language-based inquiry, hermeneutics provides the metaphorical equivalent of a Rosetta Stone for deciphering the sometimes hidden meaning behind language. In specific terms, my aim was to actively engage with the generated data.

I began this process with the ontological understanding that my research participants live in a unique, socially-constructed reality, which would differ between participants. Their experiences, I assumed, are shaped by a variety of factors (e.g., geographic location, political cleavages, age,

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economic status) and would account for a heterogeneity of knowledge. Uncovering the motivations for behavior while acknowledging the various epistemological and ontological forces at play demanded a focused engagement with data through the continuous, hermeneutic reading and interpretation of text.

This hermeneutic process was further supported by an explanatory case study analysis method. According to Yin (2008), the explanatory case study earns its stripes by posing “competing explanations for the same set of events and to indicate how such explanations may apply to other situations” (p. 5). Guided by this, I set out to compare the responses of teachers in an attempt to find areas of convergence and divergence. Through this method of analysis, I discovered a series of contradictions (e.g., some participants espoused an even-handed approach to teaching but then made seemingly contradictory statements about the need to arouse critical thinking through an advocacy approach) that provided fodder for my conclusions.

The participant sample was particularistic in that we worked with specific teachers who deliver a specific course. Study participants were drawn from colleagues, both past and present, as well as from professional acquaintances. Preference was given to social studies teachers who have taught the Nova Scotia, Canada, grade 12 course Global History a minimum of three times within a ten-year period. Teachers who have limited experience with the course were not interviewed, as I hypothesized that curricula comfort might be a factor that influences political activism—a theory that was ultimately sustained. Additionally, I assumed that teachers who had more than a baseline familiarity with Global History might be more willing to delve into controversial topics or let their political cleavages be known, as they are able to spend less time on resource accumulation and pedagogical approach. Drawing from personal experience, the degree of unfamiliarity with a given class could chart a course of reservation and avoidance. The sample size comprised seven participants, mostly from the school board associated with the geographic area of the researchers; however, two participants were drawn from other locales, as political regionalism is a congruent topic of this study. Each participant was interviewed once for approximately an hour and a half. Outside of the dedicated interview time, we purposely roamed the classrooms of the participants who are active teachers, making observations and asking informal questions, which were all noted as part of the wider data collection. By situating an interview in the classroom of the participant, we made observations on the supporting resources that were present, such as images around the room, and gained access to course material, including teacher-created power points and lesson handouts.

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Three teacher-participants had recently retired after careers in public education spanning more than 30 years. One teacher participant recently changed careers, becoming a university basketball coach after 25 years of teaching social studies in the public education system. Three teacher-participants are active social studies teachers in the middle to late stages of their respective careers. The sample selection was drawn from three geographic regions of Nova Scotia, Canada: two that could be described as rural and one urban.

Participant	Age	Major	Years Teaching	*Location of School / School Population
Howie	62	History/English	35 - Retired	Rural / 1000
Robert	58	Sociology	32 - Retired	Urban / 1300
Ellen	63	English	33 - Retired	Rural / 1100
Hank	49	History	27	Rural / 760
Jerry	43	French	20	Rural / 760
Arthur	41	History	19	Rural/300
John	63	History	33 - Retired	Rural / 400

Table 1. Research participant biographic information. Names presented are pseudonyms.

*School location and population denotes the average number of students in attendance during the working years of the research participant.

Among the 11 interview questions posed to participants were three related to the handling of ministry-mandated outcomes:

- Do you find course outcomes appropriate for helping students reach the mandate of the course?

- Describe to me your ideal vision for a social studies course; that being, what types of students did/do you enjoy working with and what type of activities/lessons would you like to conduct?
- How would you define the “spirit” of a social studies education?

Participants, as a second mode of data collection, were also asked to explain how they would teach two senior high school history class outcomes:

- Demonstrate an understanding of factors that contributed to the start of the “Cold War” between the “East” and “West.”
- Examine an issue that illustrates the economic disparity between the global “North” and “South.”

Both outcomes were sourced from the Nova Scotia Department of Education’s Global History 12, a survey course that examines post-World War II (WWII) developments. Built around five units of study, students examine the Cold War, economics, social change, the concept of justice, and modern globalization. Included in each unit is a suite of case studies designed to complement the major themes of the curriculum. For example, the unit on social change includes a case study on the 1949 Chinese Revolution, and for the justice section, South African Apartheid. The prevailing course outcome is to help students understand how the world arrived at its current state. It is a course steeped in ideology. The tenets of Liberalism, Conservatism, Communism, Socialism, Libertarianism, Neo-Liberalism, and Neo-Conservatism are all addressed as the tumultuous decades after WWII are examined.

Theoretical Framework

The researcher has identified three major frameworks that provide a foundation for this study. First, Corngold and Waddington’s 2006 study, *Strategies for Addressing Controversial Issues in the Social Studies Classroom*, enhanced by Hess (2012), demonstrates that teachers can, and indeed are, utilizing a range of teaching strategies, from avoidance to advocacy, when they examine political content. Their discussion on “advocacy” is of particular interest to this study. Second, the Nova Scotia Department of Education’s *Foundation for the Atlantic Canada Social Studies Curriculum* (1999) is a direction-setting document that outlines the expectations of a social studies teacher. It includes provisions for a well-rounded examination of topics with opportunities for students to examine multiple viewpoints. Finally, the work of iconic education contributor John Dewey (1915) provided the researcher with a context for understanding the

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harm associated with the political indoctrination of students. Dewey's 1915 *Schools of Tomorrow* provides a forceful rebuke of indoctrination by making wider connections to democracy and Western Liberalism. Dewey's definition of political indoctrination is the anchor of this study when he defines indoctrination as the "...act of implanting ideas in children" in a manner that "opposes and undermines the concept of student-centered learning and offends liberal-democratic principles" (p. 278). His call for an education system that values and promotes reflection, judgment and reasoning, which he viewed, quite unapologetically, as "central requisites of the true democrat and the faithful pursuit of scientific method" which "cannot be acquired via impositional methods" serves as one of the major motives behind this study.

Analysis of Findings and Discussion

Each of the seven research participants provided valuable insights into contemporary social studies pedagogy. Participants converged on many questions and diverged on others, providing a window into the social studies classroom and allowing for the creation of five distinct findings.

One: Teachers' Adherence to Global History 12 Mandated Outcomes

Research participants were asked during their respective interviews if they actively took liberties with provincial outcomes in Global History 12. Taking curricular liberties was defined as knowingly and/or deliberately over-representing some outcomes, under-representing others, and/or teaching topics not included in provincially mandated curricula outcomes. Six of the seven participants admitted to taking liberties with outcomes; some stated they were selective and sparing, while others admitted to a wide deviance from provincial outcomes. Robert used very strong language in expressing his aversion with the outcome model, viewing it as a set of restrictions on potentially good teaching. Ellen stated that she paid little attention to outcomes, choosing to teach according to feel or, as she said, her "gut." John reasoned his curricula liberties by stating that Global History 12 was "outdated" and, in order to stay current, one must navigate outside of the outcomes. Arthur gave a similar account, stating that he followed outcomes as closely as he could but admitted that some outcomes are not "real" or "meaningful." Hank saw outcomes as antithetical to the "spirit" of a social studies classroom, while Howie stated that he "probably" took liberties with content. The only participant who commented that he did not take liberties with content was Jerry, but this was motivated not ideologically but rather in the interests of practicality, as restrictions on contact time with students prevent him from deviating from the provincial mandate.

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The six participants who admitted to curricular liberties share a few traits in common. Arthur and Ellen enjoy/enjoyed a good deal of independence in their classrooms. Ellen was never supervised by an administrator and Arthur was confident that no one would be scrutinizing his pedagogical approach. Robert stated that he was often “left alone” and even received a tacit endorsement at one point in his career to “teach away from the text book.” It appears that they all viewed this supervisory emancipation in favorable terms and saw it perhaps as a means to sculpt Global History 12 outcomes into a shape that matched their intent. Additionally, those six participants used similar language when describing outcomes. The words “outdated,” “restrictive,” “limiting,” and their synonyms became a common refrain.

Two: Liberals Abound

As later points will reveal, it is perhaps not a surprise that more than half of the study participants self-identified as solidly liberal. One participant identified, in a limited way, with conservatism and another described himself as a left-leaning centrist. Only one participant self-identified as undefined, stating that he holds a mix of liberal and conservative principles.

The liberal affiliation of the majority of research participants was predictable. Two participants ran in Canadian federal elections for leftist parties, and another was approached to run for a provincial Liberal Party. A fourth participant was a volunteer for a Liberal Party candidate in a federal election. Liberalism, in the party sense, is a strong presence in the geographic locations of all of the research participants. Those participants who self-identified as politically liberal stated that they think liberally on both social and economic matters. Those same participants cited concern for the common good of society as their overarching motivation for thinking liberally.

Related to voting, and contrary to the self-described liberalism of the majority of participants, only one participant could claim exclusive support for leftist parties. The other six participants, despite their varying degrees of liberalism, noted that they have voted across the political spectrum. Robert, Hank, Howie, Jerry, and Arthur described themselves as issue-specific and claimed to give the personality of the candidate more weight than the policies of their party. Ellen stood alone as the only participant who claimed to have voted exclusively for liberal parties.

All participants described themselves as politically engaged in one form or another. For some, that engagement took the form of candidacy and political party volunteerism and, for others, that meant the close monitoring of political events and careful inclusion of politics in their classrooms. All participants saw the inclusion of political topics in their classes as important and

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in the interests of civics. During election time, all participants spoke of their efforts to engage their students in the democratic process. Arthur, John, Robert, Hank, and Jerry made specific reference to activities they sponsored that aimed to help students understand the importance of civic involvement.

Three: A Matter of Opinion

In every interview, all participants were exposed, in differing degrees of complexity, to Waddington and Corngold's (2005) typology of social studies teachers. Work in this area is longstanding (Warnock, 1975; Kelly, 1986), for there appears to be ongoing uncertainty about the role, or presence, of the teacher in the delivery on content. In every interview, participants were briefed on the terms "even-handed teacher" and "advocate teacher." All participants self-identified as "even-handed teachers" or, according to Waddington and Corngold (2006), a "... Social Studies teacher" who "...discloses his/her own position on a disputed topic, while presenting and soliciting alternative points of view" (p. 4). Additionally, all participants reacted negatively to the presumption of advocacy teaching by the researcher. Waddington and Corngold (2006) define advocacy teachers as a "...Social Studies teacher" who "espouses a certain position on a given topic, makes that position known and dismisses any positions contrary to their view" (p. 5).

As a means of exploring the notion of even-handedness versus advocacy, a series of questions were posed related to the presence of teacher opinion on content in their respective classes. The responses were intriguing and often in conflict. All participants initially explained that they shielded their students from their personal opinions on subject matter, but as the line of questioning became more focused, it was clear that teachers do indeed share their personal opinions on classroom topics.

John and Hank explained that they would share their opinion on course content at the outset of its examination. They justified this practice by stating that it might spur some classroom discussion on the topic. Howie and Ellen stated that they were not overly comfortable sharing their opinions in class but both concluded that their students could probably *figure out* where they stood on particular topics. That figuring out likely came, from their admission, by comments made in class. Robert shared similar experiences, agreeing when asked if his students would be aware of his opinion on issues related to Global History outcomes. Jerry and Arthur explained a more restrained approach, both stating that they would only share their opinions in class after they felt students had a good understanding of the topic. Jerry claimed to weigh in during the

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final phases of a topic examination, while Arthur stated that he may not share his opinion at all, choosing to “keep his cards close to his chest,” as it were.

Those participants who disclosed that they shared their opinions were asked to explain their perceptions of that practice. Many explained that they would preface their opinions with statements akin to “This is just my opinion,” or “Just because this is my opinion doesn’t mean it is right.” These statements are designed to soften and minimize the potential sway value of the opinion of an authority figure. Hank explained that he would even revisit his comments in subsequent classes in an effort to remit any indoctrination that may have occurred from his opinion-sharing. Arthur would not, explaining that if his opinion came out in class, he would not revisit it but rather closely monitor through his assessments the presence of his line of thought, and then address it in the context of that assessment. Howie and Ellen both claimed to revisit their comments in later classes, using statements like “My opinion is just that, my opinion,” in an effort to reduce any possible impact they had on their students’ understanding of a topic. John and Robert would preface their comments and explicitly state that their opinion might not be one that resonates with their students. All participants stated that they were not seeking their opinion in the ideas of their students in assessments nor in classroom discussions.

Four: Teachers’ Political Identity in the Global History 12 Classroom

The presence of political bias in any classroom is difficult to locate and verify. Political indoctrination has been so wholly vilified that many teachers, including some in this study, are extremely reticent when confronting topics with political implications. Every participant in this study appeared to confirm that political indoctrination in the classroom is undesirable and should be avoided. Comments similar to “I would never force my politics on my students” were a common utterance, and all participants recognized that they did hold the power to politically influence their students.

With regard to their political identity, all participants except Jerry positioned themselves along the official political spectrum—left (liberal), right (conservative). As noted earlier, four participants self-identified as solidly liberal, one identified as a centrist, one claimed small C affiliations, and the last was undefined. Early in each interview, all participants seemed to shrug off their various political identities and tended to describe their political views as moderate, presumably to ward off any assumptions of indoctrination by the researcher. Many of the teachers also spoke about their political identities in ways suggesting that they believed this aspect of their identity to be open to redefinition. Howie, despite his self-identification as a

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liberal, made several references to the fluidity of his political identity, and Hank explained that he was an “issues guy,” molding his ideology by the issues of the day. Robert explained (as did Arthur, Jerry, and Hank) that over the course of different elections, he had voted for parties on both sides of the political spectrum. Robert described how he explained his political identity as complicated and open to change, while Ellen noted that she is decidedly on the left and views the world in those terms.

Neutrality was to be interpreted as the goal for both teaching and learning. Every participant at one point or another during their interviews made statements aimed at minimizing the presence of their political identity as a means to uphold their presumed neutral identity status by avoiding positioning themselves ideologically on particular issues. This was in line with another common idea, that teaching students to hold multiple positions on issues is very important. These types of responses were just a sample of indicators of the extent to which the teachers *believed* that being a teacher meant having a neutral identity, carefully crafted to avoid political indoctrination. Many of the teachers viewed identity—and, by extension, strong beliefs, values, opinions, or culture—as an obstacle that stood in the way of producing open-minded students. This belief was predominantly expressed in their articulation of what MacDonald (2013) calls the “blank slate ideal for teaching and learning” (p. 254). The blank slate ideal refers to the ways in which participants spoke about their political identity and their associated values, beliefs, and interests as potential obstacles for effective teaching. All participants agreed that a strong political identity was dangerous, a reality that robs students of valuable critical thinking skills. The blank slate was perceived as an ideal condition for social studies pedagogy. All teachers explained that students need to make personal decisions about their political worldviews and that an overly present political identity by teachers could skew this development. Indeed, the primary reason teachers gave for believing that the absence of a strong political identity was favorable was the belief that it obstructed students’ capacities to appreciate multiple perspectives, universally decried as an undesirable outcome.

Five: On Teaching Economics and Communism

Provincial outcomes for Global History 12 call for the examination of five units of study, among which are units titled *East-West* and *North-South*. *East-West* is a history-inspired unit that chiefly examines the Cold War, while *North-South* is largely related to economics, specifically economic disparity. To further support potential conclusions, two interview questions were specifically designed to understand how teachers teach selected outcomes in these two units. Those outcomes are:

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- Demonstrate an understanding of factors that contributed to the start of the “Cold War” between the “East” and “West.”
- Examine an issue that illustrates the economic disparity between “North” and “South.”

Both outcomes are inherently ideological, and many teachers in this study noted feeling a moral tug when examining them. To develop a sense of understanding of how teachers address the first outcome, and to conquer the vague language of the outcome, the researcher simply asked each participant how he/she would deliver a class on communism, and for the second outcome, sweat shops or labor exploitation.

Such topics are inherently political and often solicit a visceral response from those pondering its many implications. The charge of teaching communism is challenging and, empirically speaking, teachers have to walk a fine line between condemnation and critical analysis. Regardless of one’s attitudes toward communism, it is a matter of great importance in the realm of social studies.

Each participant in this study agreed that communism holds potential as a viable ideology, with many stating that communism “looks great on paper,” and every participant noted as well the horrors of modern communism. Howie and Ellen could appreciate the support for communism in states like Cuba, Vietnam, and China. Howie described Mao’s communist reforms as “transformational” and explained how he could “understand” why communism was popular in Vietnam, while Ellen made rather positive comments about communism in Cuba. John, a union supporter, noted that he held respect for communist philosophies about the worker and could reason the motivations behind Marx’s writings. Arthur articulated his views on communism by noting the human obsession with greed, later explaining that communism was the “opposite” of that. None of the research participants were quick to condemn communism, demonstrating a commitment to a critical analysis of it; however, as with opinion-sharing, each participant was quick to qualify their respective statements about communism with commentary on the horrors of its implications.

Each participant was asked how they would teach a class or classes on communism. The responses were remarkably similar. John and Arthur would both start their examinations with class discussions about consumerism, greed, and inequalities. They would then lead their classes through a series of participatory activities designed to explore the nature of human self-interest; John used the term “tension” and Arthur “greed.” These activities, by virtue of their explanation, appear to be an effective means of demonstrating the motivations behind the communist ideal.

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Robert and Jerry began their examinations with an analysis of the writings of Marx, often putting them into an historical context like the Industrial Revolution or the lifespan of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. Howie would examine communism almost exclusively through case studies, using Vietnam, Cambodia, and China as his examples. Through these examples, he would explore the various manifestations of communism and compare them with the original writings of Marx. Ellen took a similar approach, using case studies and writing analysis to uncover the motivations and implications of communism. Hank was a bit of an exception in that he did not fully explain how he would teach communism, but rather he explained why he thought communism was largely unfavorable.

Hank's approach was reflective of others. He explained that communism placed limits on human potential and allowed for those whom he described as "less motivated" to reap the benefits earned by the motivated, conceding that his line of thought might be a "right-wing" idea. Jerry explained that communism is flawed not as an ideology but rather in its application, a view shared by Ellen, John, Arthur, Howie, and Robert. Every participant made sure that their respective examinations included ample analysis of the ills of communism, something not explicitly stated in course outcomes. The reasons for this might be twofold: perhaps, even in 2015, in the interests of avoiding a far-left label or as a tactic for achieving the coveted multi-sided pedagogical approach spoken of by all participants. No participant went so far as to praise communist ideals, and every explanation followed a similar path: a brief statement about the potential of communism followed by much discussion about its shortfalls.

The second outcome presented to participants was related to labor exploitation via the consideration of so-called sweat shops. The topic of sweat shops is a staple in the Global History 12 classroom and many ministry-approved resources provide teachers with ideas on how to engage their students in the topic. The notion of exploitation began the pedagogical explanation offered by Robert, Arthur, and Ellen. Ellen noted that she would often begin her examination of labor exploitation by considering who, implying young people, works in garment factories in South America. Robert and Arthur were similar, asking students to consider where their clothing originates from and how much it costs a manufacturer to produce. John used the word "tension" in his description and explained that the topic was a difficult one for him on moral grounds, although he did not elaborate on how that affects his examination of it. Hank, while troubled by empathetic considerations, explained his approach in a pragmatic way, simply noting that people need jobs.

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It would be correct to assume that all participants had varying degrees of moral reservation about labor exploitation. The consistent calls for students to consider where their clothes are made, why they are made there, who is making them, and the challenges workers face were echoed by all participants. No participants used blunt or harsh language regarding sweat shops, nor did they make any statements along the lines of “they should be happy to have a job” or “that job is better than nothing.” Like their presumed concerns about communism, each participant appeared reluctant to remove their sense of empathy from their examination, even in the interests of critical thinking. Every activity cited by participants could be construed as critical, not in the sense of diversity of thought, but in terms of actual criticism of sweat shops. There is evidence to suggest that each participant held negative views about sweat shops, and while this could certainly be morally correct, it clashes with the notion of providing a balanced examination of content.

Discussion and Implications

The guiding thesis of this study was to examine the extent, if any, of pedagogical difference between Global History 12 teachers who self-identify as liberal versus those who self-identify as conservative. Unexpectedly, the thesis fell short, as liberalism was the clear winner in terms of political values held by research participants. While it was expected that there would be a strong liberal presence among those who delivered the course, the glaring absence of conservative principles among participants was not. This reality made it difficult to arrive at a conclusion regarding pedagogical difference, as there was simply no means to compare the two ideologies; however, two conclusions are noteworthy and have important considerations for contemporary social studies education.

Concluding Point One: On Outcomes and Curricula Liberties

It is certainly reasonable to conclude that the great majority of Global History 12 teachers interviewed for this study hold generally negative opinions on the course content prescriptions of the outcome model of pedagogy. Indeed, it appears that participating teachers indicated only a passing adherence to the outcome model in favor of a more cafeteria-style approach. These teachers, so it seems, feel completely justified in their practice of picking and choosing learning outcomes informed by their personal vision for social studies education. There are three implications of this: First, questions emerge about the outcome model matching the spirit of a social studies class; second, if outcomes do not hold a place in a social studies classroom, what is the alternative? Third, if outcomes are viewed in negative terms and result in Global History 12 teachers taking liberties with content, what does this mean for the integrity of the course?

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Judging from their commentary, teacher participants would likely agree that outcome-based pedagogy would find a comfortable home in courses with more objective content—math, science or biology—in a manner that fits with the industrial-science motivations (Waldow, 2015) behind this education philosophy.

This study has shown that Global History 12 teachers value their professional autonomy. All interviewees enjoy the curricular freedom to move outside of course outcomes or to mold them as they see fit. This pursuit of curricular freedom perhaps speaks to the spirit of a social studies education. Social studies teachers relish the opportunity to examine current events, make connections between topics, and facilitate classes related to the interests of their students

The generally unfavorable regard for outcomes could be problematic. If outcomes are deemed restrictive and ultimately a hindrance to effective teaching, then questions must emerge about alternatives. No participants offered an alternative to outcomes, which could lead to deep concerns about *what* is being taught in the Global History 12 classroom.

Concluding Point Two: Why Even-Handed?

During each interview for this study, participants were asked to consider the *type*, according to the typology of Waddington and Corngold (2006) and Hess (2006), of the Global History 12 teacher they would call themselves. The differences between the “advocate” and the “even-handed” teacher were explained and, one by one, in every interview, all participants described themselves as even-handed. The preponderance of even-handed self-description has two intriguing implications: a means of assisting student critical thinking and a means of handicapping it.

All participants saw the promotion of critical thinking as one of the most important aspects of good social studies teaching, and it appears that the way the teachers in this study internalized that was through a multi-sided examination of topics. However, there might be something of a contradiction here, as respecting diversity of views, customs, and cultures does not mean that you cannot also critically and discursively engage them. Doing this kind of work cannot involve accepting all perspectives as potentially valid. According to McDonald (2013):

Since when does democracy presuppose neutrality and the adoption of all perspectives? How did this discourse become so engrained in teachers’ thinking and pedagogy for teaching political and social issues? As seen earlier, the all-views-are-equal approach can result in adoption of no one particular perspective on issues. Similarly, the avoidance of —rather than critical engagement

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with—perspectives that have been shaped by our multiple identity locations can result in empty democracy, where people have no opinions or positions on issues, where relations of subordination are left unchallenged, where difficult questions about the social construction of identity and difference are discouraged. (p. 317)

The findings of this study are specific to Nova Scotia, Canada, and are not necessarily reflective of other geographic areas. In fact, further study about the political identities of social studies teachers and the impact on their pedagogy in other regions would fill a significant gap in scholarly educational literature. Additionally, this study was specific to Global History 12 teachers in the social studies curriculum stream; no teachers from outside this stream of programming were interviewed. A frequent comment by participants in this study was a consideration of the political identities of teachers in other humanities classes or the sciences, something that provides impetus for further research. Finally, future research on the student perspective of the political identity of their teachers would complete the circle of understanding related to politics in the senior high social studies classroom. All of these points provide grounds for further study.

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