

Lessons Learned from Two Neighbors: How Educators Teach of United States Policies

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Abstract: This study provides an analysis of data collected from Chihuahua, Mexico, and Ontario, Canada, educators on how United States (U. S.) policies are taught and discussed in their classrooms. Teachers and administrators were interviewed with regard to their respective curricula and classroom discussions. The researcher sought to gain insight on how historical and current U. S. policies are addressed. Participants responded to questions regarding how much time was devoted to U. S. policies in classroom discussions, how much open discourse exists in classrooms, what ideological differences are evident, and why Americans should be informed of perspectives in another country's social studies classrooms. The researcher uses border pedagogy and meliorism to analyze how educators present geographic, historic, socioeconomic, and political issues as they relate to U. S. classrooms. Addressed are implications for integrating perspectives in U. S. classroom discussions and, in turn, broadening the social studies curriculum in American schools. Moreover, this study seeks to provide additional insight for those who educate on common issues in U. S. classrooms.

Key words: social studies, curriculum and instruction, meliorism, transnational and comparative studies, border pedagogies, perspectives on politics

Introduction

This study compares the pedagogies of educators in Chihuahua, Mexico, and eastern Ontario, Canada, as they discuss the roles of United States (US) decision-making and policies in their respective Mexican and Canadian classrooms. This study serves as a follow-up to research conducted with teachers in Malaysia at the onset of the Iraq War. Thus, my interests in how educators in other countries teach the impact of US policies developed from being in Malaysia on March 20, 2003, when US bombs fell on Baghdad, Iraq. As a visitor to the east Malaysian state of Sabah I was concerned with the reactions of local citizens, and particularly educators in Malaysia, a Muslim majority country. Ultimately, events during the onset of the war became a catalyst for me to seek insight on how the US invasion of Iraq and other strategic decisions of the US government impacted teaching and learning in Malaysia.

The initial study in Malaysia promoted a desire to compare the perspectives and classroom discussions of educators in other countries, including two neighboring countries of the US, Mexico and Canada. I proceeded to carry out research for the Mexican component in Chihuahua, Chihuahua, less than four hours by automobile from the US and Mexico border. Eastern Ontario, Canada, served as a separate site for the investigation of how US policies are taught and discussed in Canadian classrooms. The key objective of the investigations in Mexico and Canada was to uncover attitudes and pedagogical comparisons of educators regarding recent and current US policies, including the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

What follows is a study draws upon the principles of both international and comparative investigations. According to Wilson (2000), an operational definition for international education is "applications of descriptions, analyses, and insights learned in one or more nations to the problems of developing educational systems and institutions in other countries" (p. 116). Phillips and

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Schweisfurth (2006) maintain individuals, to a certain extent, are innate comparativists. All of us, on some level, seek to compare situations in familiar settings with environs less recognizable. Epstein (2008) argues international and comparative education provides opportunities for better comprehension and insightful consideration of our own education. In this sense, it is important for the comparativist in all of us to identify further with internationalist perspectives. At the heart of transnational, comparative, and international studies is the notion of meliorism, or an attempt by human to improve societal conditions. Melioristic, transnational investigations are concerned with "the improvement of national educational systems by the addition of models, practices, innovations, and the like, borrowed or transferred from other national educational systems" (Wilson, 2003).

It should be noted that research was completed in Chihuahua, Mexico, during the George H. W. Bush US presidency; whereas, the data were collected in Ontario, Canada within the first year of the Obama administration. Guiding the research in both cases was the desire to uncover comparative aspects of social studies educators who teach of US policies in their respective curricula. This study seeks to provide perspectives that have been lacking in the US school curriculum. My research sought to uncover the following: What points of view do educators in Chihuahua, Mexico, and eastern Ontario, Canada, bring to discussions of US policies, including recent US-led wars and anti-terrorism measures?

Purpose of the Study

Educators were interviewed and surveyed in Mexico and Canada to better understand differences in social studies discourses among schools in two countries bordering the US. This study seeks to provide additional comparative insight for those who educate on common issues in US classrooms.

The problem that needed addressing was "How can the US social studies curriculum be enhanced through border pedagogy and transnational, comparative studies?" Also, given the constraints placed on many social studies educators with demands of high stakes testing, how can I impress upon others the validity of perspectives from transnational and comparative studies? Whereas, Mexican and Canadian educators have an immense amount of social studies knowledge and pedagogy that is noteworthy and should be shared, how can US social studies educators incorporate this knowledge into a highly prescriptive, standards-based curriculum, as in the scope-and-sequence approach to social studies? By carefully considering the perspectives of educators in our neighboring countries this research seeks to provide additional insight to impact of momentous US policies, such as the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and the "War on Terrorism." Indeed, some of these perspectives fill the information and social studies knowledge void resulting from selective mainstream media censorship of war and terrorism perspectives presented to US audiences.

The following questions guided research:

1. How much time is devoted to the discussion of US policies?
2. How much open discourse exists in classrooms?
3. What, if any, ideological differences are evident in classrooms during their discussions that included US policies?
4. How have discussions of US policies changed?
5. Why should others, and particularly Americans, be informed of perspectives in another country's social studies classrooms?

Theoretical Framework

Border pedagogy provided lenses for the consideration of what occurs in classrooms in Mexico and Canada, not too far removed from the US border. According to Reyes (2005), border pedagogy is defined "as a set of multifaceted, complex, and interactive factors; educational policies; curriculum; instructional practices; and a knowledge base that educators need to consider to increase the academic achievement of diverse students" (p. 149). Giroux (1991) put forth assertions that border pedagogy utilizes diverse cultural resources that promote new identities within existing configurations of power. Border pedagogy teaches students the skills of critical thinking, debating power, meaning, and identity. The goals of transformative education are embedded within the discourses of border pedagogy (Garza, 2007; Giroux, 1991; Romo & Chavez, 2006). According to Romo and Chavez (2006), border pedagogy "encourages tolerance, ethical sophistication, and openness" (p. 143). Border pedagogy also engages students in multiple references to better consider different cultural codes, experiences, and languages. This engagement, in turn, assists students in constructing their own narratives and histories, reconsidering democracy through sociocultural negotiation.

Research that considers border pedagogy has implications for constructivist, critical engagement with social studies content. Garza (2007) found, after considering border pedagogies, and specifically border experiences, the conversations of educators on the California and Mexico border revealed an interconnectedness as educators in the borderlands. Participants in the study learned how they could inform and strengthen each other's educational practices. Educators reconsidered how Mexican influences impacted local US schools (Garza, 2007).

Border pedagogy overlaps with comparative and transnational approaches to understanding our own nature as it relates to other societies and cultures. Zhao, Lin, and Hoge (2007) maintain there is a need for further comparative and transnational studies on how well students know each other and each other's histories and cultures. American students and teachers alike are not well-prepared in global education, and it is critical more efforts be made to foster both American students' and teachers' knowledge of other nations. There is a need for promoting cultural and global understanding and awareness (Zhao, Lin, & Hoge, 2007).

Education in Mexico and Canada

Educators from Mexico and Canada perform their responsibilities under unique conditions that are, in turn, influenced by each respective country's historical background, sociocultural conditions, and government policies. These circumstances influence the present day curriculum, and, in some cases, place constraints on the discourses that take place in classrooms.

In Mexico, the Secretary of Education (SEP) oversaw changes in the curriculum during the 1960s and 1970s so students could take a more active role in learning (Erickson, 2003). Pedagogy that promoted more creativity, scientific inquiry, and critical thinking was introduced. The government has continued to promote modernization in education, including educational technologies; yet many broad goals remain unattained and adequate funding is needed (Rippberger & Staudt, 2003).

A key responsibility of the office of the SEP was and is to promote a sense of national identity and patriotism (Erickson, 2003). Mexican basic education is intended to provide students with fundamental knowledge and intellectual abilities (Sistema Educativo de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos, 2004). Accordingly, a main goal of public schools is to promote a sense of conscience in social disciplines. In Mexico, the process of nation-building and construction of national identity

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remains a firm imperative, especially as the shadow of the powerful neighbor that is the US looms large (Levinson, 1998).

Mexico considers itself as pluricultural because of its “distinct peoples, cultures, communities, and groups that share rights and obligations common to economic, political, and educational life, in spite of cultural, ethnic, and linguistic distinctions” (Morales & Caballero, 2002, p. 55). The indigenous population believes more than government rhetoric is needed. Hence, there should be respect for cultural diversity that also eradicates various forms of discrimination and social inequality. There is a call for a new indigenous education that recognizes “universal philosophical and scientific principles, and at the same time, bases itself on its own historical traditions and knowledge, for example, teaching in the mother tongue” (Morales & Caballero, 2002, p. 56). For significant change to occur, education must serve the role of empowering, providing identity, and promoting indigenous cultures (Diaz-Couder, 1998).

Canadian and US relations, though intertwined, have always been multi-dimensional, ranging from, in some respects, supportive; to, in many cases, oppositional. Sentiments vary from community to community and province to province.

Thompson (2009) posits that a majority of Canadians think the US is Canada’s best ally in the world and one in four Canadians think both countries should eliminate the border. Conservative Canadian historian Granatstein (2009, para. 3) argues to the contrary, maintaining, “If they could vote in U.S. elections Canadians would be Democrats. But that has never given Democratic presidents a free ride.” For instance, John F. Kennedy came under fire for his Bay of Pigs campaign, and Bill Clinton was under attack for his role in the approval of NAFTA [North American Free Trade Agreement] (Granatstein, 2009). Accordingly, the author contends, “What this means is that Canadian anti-Americanism has never been a tap to be turned on and off. It’s not dead today; it’s only sleeping” (Granatstein, 2009, para. 4).

Earl (2006) notes these divergent Canadian perspectives in his writings. In the early 2000s Canadian and US relations were the most strained since the War of 1812 and the Pierre Trudeau era, according to Earl. Trudeau had, himself, described the relationship between Canada and the US as one of a mouse with an elephant. Accordingly, in 1969 Trudeau remarked:

America should never underestimate the constant pressure on Canada that the mere presence of the US has produced. We're different people from you and we're different people because of you. Living next to you is in some ways like sleeping with an elephant. No matter how friendly and even-tempered is the beast, if I can call it that, one is affected by every twitch and groan (Earl, 2004, para. 3).

The Bush administration was mistrusted and immensely unpopular among a majority of the Canadian public (Ek, 2009). Barack Obama’s election as US president in 2008 offered for a strengthening of US and Canada relations (Ek, 2009).

Canadian educational policy, according to Davies and Issitt (2005), is determined at the provincial level, resulting in diverse policies throughout Canada. Additionally, they refer to any social education in Canada as being marginalized within the greater educational context. With regard to discussions of Canadian relations with the US in classrooms, Osborne (2003) makes the assertion that Canadian students may comprehend more of US historical and political figures than they do of Canadian figures.

Thus, I considered the effects of distinct histories, sociocultural and socio-economic contexts, and the decisions of policymakers in Chihuahua, Mexico and eastern Ontario, Canada. I also examined the conditions for teaching and the extent to which US policies were taught in the social studies curricula of Mexico and Canada.

Method

In Chihuahua, Mexico, face-to-face interviews and focus group discussions were conducted with 21 social studies teachers and 4 school administrators at two school sites.

The research in Ontario, Canada, focused on 10 teacher participants at three sites and their reporting of classroom discussions (See Table 1).

Research methodologies followed Stake's (2000) model for a substantive case study. Accordingly, I reflected on impressions, data, records, and salient elements at the observed site. Open-ended questions were asked with regard to the research problem. Data were subsequently collected, noted for frequency, and categorized. The next step was to develop interpretive explanations of observations, interviews, and archives (Creswell, 2007). Data analysis followed what Glesne (2011) refers to as thematic analysis, whereby the data was read many times in search of emerging themes or categories and subcategories. This also corresponds with Creswell's (2007) description of the data analysis spiral, wherein the analysis process is iterative, including multiple coding phases. For analysis of the overall case study, I took into consideration the recommendations of Yin (2003) for considering local meanings and foreshadowed meanings in their context. The work was highly reflective, with border pedagogy (Giroux, 1991) as a framework for uncovering contextual conditions relevant to phenomena (Yin, 2003).

For trustworthiness, interpretations of the data were clarified by paraphrasing or restating what I believed to be the intended positions and replies. I also sought to verify the interpretations were reflective of the participants' true sentiments in the responses, either orally with the interviewees or through online communications. Finally, I tested counterexamples of major themes to ensure the researchers' interpretations were trustworthy (Maxwell, 2010).

The key categories of data that emerged were as follows:

- 1) curriculum emphasis
- 2) US international policies,
- 3) war and terrorism, and
- 4) comparative perspectives of government and society

Table 1: *Participants' Demographics or Characteristics (N =Number of Participants)*

Variable	Country of experience (M)=Mexico (C)=Canada	Number (N)	% of total participants in either (M) OR (C)
School site	Upper Elementary (M)	13	52 %
	Secondary (M)	12	48 %
	Secondary (C)	10	100 %
Professional role	Administrators (M)	4	16 %
	Teachers (M)	21	84 %
	Teachers (C)	10	100 %
Teacher gender	Male (M)	10	48 %
	Female (M)	11	52 %
	Male (C)	9	90 %
	Female (C)	1	10 %
Administrator gender	Male (M)	2	50 %
	Female (M)	2	50 %
	(C)	0	0

Results

Curriculum Emphasis

In both Mexico and Canada instructional modes and time allotted to discussions of US policies varied in terms of pedagogy and how present and historical issues were discussed. Mexican educators reported variable amounts of time spent on classrooms discussions of US international affairs. Many participants pointed out that the national curriculum as it related to Mexico had to be dealt with first. Accordingly, dialogue on US policies took place after the formal curriculum had been addressed. Teachers and administrators reported their classroom discussions centered on students' feelings of family members residing and working in the US. Many of the students, themselves, had lived in the US at some point. Invariably, when democratic systems were discussed, students offered their perspectives on policies of the US, largely based on their own personal experiences or family members' experiences and accounts.

Canadian participants maintained that the extent of discussions depended, in large part, on the provincial curriculum. Nonetheless, it was pointed out that considerable time (20% or more) in courses such as Geography, World Issues, Canadian and International Law was devoted to dialogue

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on US policies. In addition, a one semester elective course in US history was a popular elective and had a comparatively large student enrollment each time it was offered.

As there was considerable room for comparisons between Canada and the US in the Ontario curriculum, many issues addressed by teachers included some discussion of US policies. Accordingly, teachers were afforded opportunities to discuss US and international policies and the effects of those policies on the lives of Canadian citizens (See Table 2).

Table 2: *Total number of participants in each setting and the frequency of participants who contributed to the discussion of key themes*

Chihuahua, Mexico	Total respondents	f=frequency
1. Dialogue on US policies took place after the formal curriculum had been addressed.	25	17
2. Classroom discussions centered on students' feelings of family members in the US	25	25
3. Learning was enhanced when students were engaged in the discussion of US policies.	25	25
4. Most students wanted an end to violence and felt the War in Iraq was a war of "expansion and imperialism".	25	25
5. Superstitions and fatalism were reported as part of students' explanations for strife in the US	25	7
6. Students' generalized with regard to US policies.	25	3
Ontario, Canada	Total respondents	f=frequency
1. The provincial curriculum determined the extent of discussions.	10	10
2. Time was spent discussing differences between the US and Canadian health care systems	10	9
3. There was a lack of support for the War in Iraq; support for the War in Afghanistan has waned.	10	9
4. The effects of international trade and NAFTA were discussed.	10	8
5. US and Canada treaty issues were discussed.	10	9
6. Students questioned the level of crime and violence in the US.	10	5
7. Students questioned Americans' lack of understanding of Canadian history, geography, and economics.	10	10
8. Educators discussed with students their concerns for "dirty" politics in the US and possible spill-over effects on Canadian politics.	10	7
9. Students questioned and often resented the portrayal of Canadians in the US media and textbooks.	10	9
10. Students revealed a strong awareness of the US media and pop culture.	10	10
11. Canadian teachers were self critical of Canadian policies, yet reserved the right to critique and contest US policies.	10	10

US International Policies

Classroom discussions centered around the US projecting itself as a model for racial equality to the rest of the world, a leader in addressing issues of pollution and global warming, and at the forefront in disaster preparedness and relief. However, educators readily noted that students perceived a wide scope of hypocrisies within American society, such as individuals of minority backgrounds being valued for their athleticism rather than other potential contributions to society, the US as a perpetrator of carboniferous emissions and its present refusal to abide by the Kyoto Accords, and the lack of assistance for the victims of Hurricane Katrina along with the questions of possible racism in the government's slow response to the hurricane victims. There were concerns over discrimination in the US, which was something students, themselves, or family members had experienced firsthand while living in the US.

Teachers in Chihuahua, Mexico, remarked of some students' proclivities to make generalizations; for example, certain students simply stated that the US has oil-driven politics. Yet, the same teachers noted that there were students who asked poignant questions during classroom discussions. Accordingly, students sought answers to questions such as the following:

"What about the US and the killing of children and innocent people in Iraq?"

"Why don't they spend their money on other causes (besides war), such as hunger in Africa?"

"Why are there such differences in pay from multinational corporations in Mexico as compared to the US (for the same work)?"

Teachers in eastern Ontario, Canada, stated that students and members of their communities discuss the effects of international trade and NAFTA, specifically, and observe locally the local loss of assembly line and industrial employment, including numerous factory closings because of the decisions of US-based multinational mega-corporations. Educators discussed recent US and Canada treaty issues, such as the opening of the Northwest Passage in the Arctic Sea for petroleum exploration, which Canada ardently opposes.

War and Terrorism

Chihuahuan educators noted students were heavily influenced by the events that unfolded on television after the September 11th attacks. They reported that students expressed their sorrow for the victims of the US terrorist attacks. At the time, most students had not yet contemplated historical events that led to the terrorist attacks. More recently, many of the same individuals' attitudes have changed, as some view the American empire as "a modern-day Rome," with many of the same problems and pressures. More recently, students have expressed resentment because the economic demands of the US "affect everyone else in the world."

Although most students expressed their disapproval of terrorism, many also put forth the argument that the US is in a position to have continuing terrorist problems because of its policies. Students overwhelmingly expressed a desire for peace. The Chihuahuan teachers and administrators stated most students wanted an end to violence and felt that the War in Iraq was a war of "expansion and imperialism". Educators made note of students being leery of the long tradition of wars in the US, and most felt that the terrorism developed as a reaction to the US involvement throughout the world. Classroom discussions centered on nationalism, religion, and power struggles as root causes of terrorism.

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Canadian perspectives and classroom discussions stood in contrast with the official US government positions. Yet, Canadian support, itself, has differed immensely from the Iraq War to the Afghanistan war. Teachers offered that their classroom discussions revealed an overwhelming lack of support for the War in Iraq, while support for the War in Afghanistan was originally strong but waned as the death toll among Canadian soldiers increased.

Comparative Perspectives of Government and Society

Other key themes from the Mexican educators regarded (a) discussions of US military engagement; (b) hypocrisies in US rhetoric and society, overall; and (c) fatalistic views of current US problems. Participants asserted student learning was enhanced when students were engaged in the discussion of such issues. Most teachers felt the discourse on US policies encouraged student leadership and responsibility. By incorporating such discussions into the school curriculum students learned to compare, analyze, and reflect. It was noted that part of students' education should involve taking an "*actitud propositiva*" or a position, composing a strategy, and being prepared to take action.

Some teachers in Chihuahua observed what they termed as superstitions and fatalism in students' explanations for strife in the US. Accordingly, there were contentions that the US is being punished for its past crimes. Mexican educators reported that their students thought US society is suffering a breakdown in morality because of its past and present mistakes. Due its close physical proximity to the US border, Mexican students were reportedly influenced by the US media, economic shifts, and military decisions. Their teachers and administrators reported the following:

"(Chihuahua) students are aware of US policies because of media coverage."

"They (the students in Chihuahua) are personally concerned with US international decisions because of higher prices and other effects on the local standard of living."

"Many students are interested (in US international policies) because they have family members in the United States military."

Ontario teachers facilitated discussions that compared Canadian domestic policies and laws with those of the US. Also, the influences of the US media, pop culture, and domestic politics on Canadian students were popular themes for classroom discourse. For example, teachers reported considerable time spent discussing the differences between the US and Canadian health care systems.

Themes of globalization, comparisons and contrasts of Canadian and US internal and domestic policies, and the roles of the US media and pop culture emerged during interviews with teachers from Ontario, Canada. Teachers put forth that students ask questions about the level of crime and violence in the US, as compared to Canada and other economically developed countries. Discussions center on the history of the US versus other countries, and how cultural norms vary in the two countries. Teachers and their students consider how a culture of violence has existed and developed within the US, particularly gun violence. Furthermore, discussions take place on how that culture of violence affects Canada.

Participants stated that Canadian students are curious with regard to the level of understanding their American peers have of Canadian history, geography, and economics. More specifically, a common question is "Why is there such a lack of understanding of other countries among American students?" Given the close proximity of eastern Ontario to the US border, students base their

questions on observations made while travelling in the US and from US media reports of social studies assessments in American classrooms.

There were open concerns among educators that the escalating and polarizing crescendo of “dirty” politics, including the apprehension that campaigns and elections may have a spill-over effect on Canadian politics. Some educators argued there was already plenty of evidence of copy-cat tactics being employed in the more historically reserved Canadian version of politics. On another note, teachers and students engaged in debates on the differences between US multiculturalism versus Canadian multiculturalism. Educators were quick to point out that racism exists in both countries, but the different histories and laws of each country led to variances in racism that can be found in locales and regions of each country.

Teachers reported their students questioned and often resented the portrayal of Canadians in the US media and textbooks. In particular, the portrayal of Canada’s war contributions in US textbooks, both historically and in the present, drew the ire of educators and their students alike. Educators noted a strong familiarity and awareness of US media and pop culture. Teachers felt that there were almost predictable influences from US pop culture, both for their students and for Canadian society, in general, given the close proximity to the US border. Canadian teachers asked their students to reflect on the impact of US pop culture and the US media.

Time was devoted to the discussion of differences between the Canadian and US health care systems. A commonly expressed sentiment was, “Why is the current health care debate even taking place in the US?” Participants put forth that while the Canadian health care system has inherent problems, the shortcomings are not nearly as dire as portrayed in the US media and by opponents of government-supported health care. Teachers offered that universal health care is considered a “given” in Canada, and younger Canadians take the system for granted. After all, the Canadian Broadcasting System conducted a national survey and named Tommy Douglas, the “Father of the Canadian Health System,” the most famous citizen in Canadian history based on the results of the survey.

Overall, Canadian teachers were willing to be self critical of Canadian policies while they reserved the right to critique and contest US government policies. Moreover, the general pattern was to critique US government policies and not American people, as a whole (See Table 3).

Common themes of concern emerged from participants in the two neighboring countries. In both cases discussions took place with regard to the necessity and legality of the US War in Iraq. After 9/11 both countries supported counter-terrorist measures in Afghanistan, but support for continuing US war efforts declined. Educators in both countries discussed the treatment of immigrants and US immigration policies. In Canada, discussions of immigration policies compared and contrasted Canadian and US policies; whereas, discussions in Mexican classrooms focused on the treatment of immigrants in the US.

Much attention was paid to the effects of the US media and pop culture on Canadian society. Conversely, Mexican participants noted that their students offered historical and sometimes fatalistic perspectives on current US societal issues as presented in the US media or portrayed in US pop culture.

Table 3. Emergent key broad discussion topics and the numbers of participants who addressed such broad discussion topics in Chihuahua and Eastern Ontario

Chihuahua, Mexico	Eastern Ontario, Canada
Total N = 25; f = frequency	Total N = 10; f = frequency
US international policies, f=25	US international policies, f=10
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Iraq 2. Afghanistan 3. Changing views post-9/11 4. "War on Terrorism" 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Iraq 2. Afghanistan 3. other military engagement 4. treaty issues with Canada 5. globalization
US domestic policies, f=25	US domestic policies, f=9
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. effects of US policies on friends and family 2. treatment of immigrants and minorities 3. lack of initiative on pollution and global warming 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. health care 2. crime and violence 3. immigration 4. education 5. religion in politics 6. racism 7. multiculturalism
US rhetoric, f=7	US media and cultural influences, f=10
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. fatalism 2. hypocrisies 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. media portrayal of Canada 2. pop cultural influences on Canada 3. smear politics

Discussion

Social studies educators in the US can learn valuable lessons from their fellow educators in Chihuahua, Mexico, and eastern Ontario, Canada. It is important for US educators, in turn, to feel empowered to implement discussions on international law, immigration policies, comparative perspectives of societal issues, the culture of violence in the US, or the impact of the US media and pop culture. In this manner, the US social studies curriculum is enhanced and broader academic achievement, including in-depth understandings, can be promoted through transnational, comparative studies of social studies concepts. Broader academic achievement implies successful life-long learning experiences and knowledge development that surpasses the achievement associated with doing well on a standardized test. There needs to be less emphasis on standardized test scores in US, and more emphasis on key domestic and international issues within the existing historical, political, social, and economic contexts. Hahn (2001) recommends paying more attention to democratic discourse, decision making, and civic action. Students should feel empowered to have a voice must as part of a democracy that is "continuously expanded into a world of new possibilities and opportunities for keeping justice and hope alive" (Giroux, 2009, p. 18). Students must be challenged by exploring transnational issues and making informed decisions with regard to those issues.

Hahn (2001) also encourages promoting dialogue with colleagues cross-nationally. Moreover, social studies educators should better prepare students "for their roles as knowledgeable, caring, and effective civic actors in pluralistic democracies in a globally interdependent world" (Hahn, 2001, p. 21). Teachers and their students need to be engaged in effective dialogue on policy issues facing the US To better promote transnational understandings, the curriculum in US schools should possess significant and reasonable discussions on the effects of US actions globally. For example, on the basis of my findings in this study, students can engage in comparative discourses on the following topics:

- 1) the legality of wars
- 2) immigration policies
- 3) international perspectives of US society and societal issues
- 4) crime, including white collar corruption, and violence
- 5) critiques of the mainstream media and pop culture

Border pedagogy serves to situate comparative discourses in both local and international contexts. As Giroux (1991) noted, border pedagogy works to "further create borderlands in which the diverse cultural resources allow for the fashioning of new identities within existing configurations of power (p. 28)." According to Romo and Chavez (2006) border pedagogy "works to decolonize and revitalize learning and teaching and engages students in multiple references that constitute different cultural codes, experiences, and languages to help them construct their own narratives and histories, and revise democracy through sociocultural negotiation" (p.143).

In this study teachers and administrators expressed a desire to augment better understandings of life beyond their own domestic borders. They recommended more critical self-assessments of their own educational systems, and put forth the argument that all educational systems benefit from educational interchanges. Some teachers observed their students learning about themselves by studying other cultures in depth. Educators can assist students in the US, in turn, to reflect on their own knowledge bases and their own political system by drawing comparisons with other societal perspectives. Research has indicated that without educational intervention adolescents tend to simply reflect opinions held by their own society (Garatti & Rudnitski, 2007).

To better promote transnational understandings, the curriculum in US schools should possess significant and reasonable discussions on the effects of US actions globally. Moreover, times of war and conflict, such as the present, are phases when contemplating the perspectives of others, especially those not directly engaged in the violence, is a fundamental imperative (Bender, 2002). America's unilateral decision-making should be continually challenged (Young, 2002). As Bigelow (2006, p. 605) argues, "We need to have the courage to challenge our students to question the narrow nationalism so deeply embedded in the traditional curriculum." Indeed, political, historical, social, and educational narratives from outside of the US can provide enriched understandings of the US, itself.

I maintain that educators should look critically at policies separating us, and understand more about the "wedges that educational and power systems push between children and quality educational experiences" (Hampton, Liguori, & Rippberger, 2003, p. 9). Border pedagogy can be used by decision makers, administrators, and classroom teachers to broaden perspectives and better understand and contemplate comparative social studies education. The findings of this study indicate that the US educators can learn from the narratives of educators in other countries and through meliorism, in turn, reflect on what should be preeminent among their personal goals as educators.

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