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Balancing Social Integration and Cultural Diversity in the Social Studies Curriculum: A Case Study of Ontario, Canada

Xingxing ZHOU

School of Foreign Languages, Shijiazhuang University, Shijiazhuang, China

Corresponding author: Xingxing Zhou (xingxing_den@yahoo.co.jp)

Abstract

This study seeks to define an ideal curriculum that promotes social integration while respecting diversity, through an analysis of the social studies curriculum in Ontario, Canada. We particularly focus on the “big idea,” which acts as a vital bridge between academic exploration and the development of a civic identity among students. By examining how these big ideas are woven into the curriculum, we aim to underscore their role in fostering critical thinking and encouraging students to engage thoughtfully with contemporary social issues. The exploration investigates how Ontario’s education system is structured to accommodate diverse perspectives and backgrounds, thus promoting a more inclusive learning environment. We review specific curricular frameworks and teaching strategies designed to develop an understanding of both individual rights and communal responsibilities. This study also discusses how this approach enhances students’ academic skills while fostering belonging and commitment to the wider community. Through this analysis, we seek to highlight the continuous efforts of Ontario’s educational institutions to achieve gradual social integration. In this context, we examine how Ontario’s social studies curriculum balances diversity and unity, arguing that this framework provides valuable insights for social studies education in Japan, China, and Hong Kong.

Keywords: Diversity, Social integration, Social studies Curriculum, Ontario

Introduction

This study highlights the Ontario Social Studies curriculum as a particularly instructive case for East Asian educational reforms, given its demonstrated capacity to: (a) reconcile cultural diversity with social cohesion as a central challenge for East Asian societies undergoing rapid demographic and globalization pressures; (b) operationalize intercultural competence development through its innovative “big ideas” framework and inquiry-based pedagogy while preserving academic rigor; and (c) successfully integrate minority perspectives and global citizenship education within established national narratives. These dimensions offer actionable insights for East Asian systems navigating comparable tensions between cultural preservation and cosmopolitan imperatives.

In recent years, against the backdrop of Japan's expanded acceptance of foreign workers, prejudices and discrimination against individuals with foreign roots have become more pronounced. As multiculturalism in Japanese society progresses further, the issue of multicultural coexistence has emerged as an increasingly significant challenge within the educational sphere. For instance, in the practice of multicultural education, it is insufficient to merely respect the diversity and differences of minority students with foreign connections. It is essential for Japanese students, who belong to the majority, to recognize their own privileges and to foster a transformative awareness aimed at achieving social justice. Furthermore, in light of these social conditions, it is anticipated that multicultural education, which seeks to balance diversity with a sense of unity as a nation and community, will become increasingly important in Japan moving forward (Morimo et al., 2019).

Similarly, as an East Asian country, China's multicultural education possesses unique characteristics. Firstly, as a country with a long history and diverse cultures, China is home to 56 ethnic groups, each with its own distinct languages, customs, and cultural practices. Multicultural education emphasizes the importance of respecting and understanding these diverse cultures to promote national unity¹. In this context, the Chinese government advocates for national unity and cultural diversity within its educational policies, encouraging various ethnic groups to reflect their cultural characteristics in education. Additionally, the primary beneficiaries of China's multicultural education are students from domestic minority regions, with a significant focus on the implementation of bilingual education. However, China's multicultural education faces several key challenges. First, the issue of unequal distribution of educational resources persists, particularly evident between coastal developed areas and underdeveloped inland regions, as well as between urban and rural areas. Moreover, in terms of educational content, there is an overall emphasis on fostering students' sense of national identity. Within the context of globalization, an important challenge is how to embrace cultural diversity while continuing to emphasize national identity and promote traditional Chinese culture (Jiang, 2017; Zhou & Kuwabara, 2020).

However, Hong Kong differs from other regions in China, as it has experienced a significant influx of individuals from diverse ethnic backgrounds in recent years due to globalization. Consequently, the education system in Hong Kong has been influenced by multicultural education concepts (Hu, 2021). Nevertheless, the secondary education curriculum faces challenges, as it places limited emphasis on multiculturalism, focusing more on subject knowledge (Penfold & van der Veen, 2014). Therefore, it is essential to integrate multicultural education into the curriculum of primary and secondary schools in Hong Kong to enhance students' intercultural sensitivity and competence, preparing them to become global citizens.

As discussed above, multicultural education in East Asian countries, such as Japan and China, faces various challenges. In order to improve the state of multicultural education in these countries and regions, I intend to examine case studies of multicultural education from countries that actively promote multiculturalism. In particular, I aim to focus on how to balance cultural diversity with social integration when establishing a national curriculum, especially in light of the advancements brought about by globalization.

Literature Review

Among Asian countries, Japan is recognized as a nation that actively accepts immigrants and foreign workers, and it is also actively promoting both the practical implementation and research of multicultural education and education for multicultural coexistence. In Japan, significant research into multicultural education that honors

social diversity includes Fujiwara Takaaki's work on lesson development, which addresses social challenges such as discrimination (Fujiwara, 1997). There is also substantial research aimed at articulating educational principles for fostering a multicultural society by analyzing curricula and teaching materials from various countries. Noteworthy among these are the studies by Kiritani (2010, 2012) and Tsubota (2009, 2012, 2015). This study builds upon this body of work by Kiritani and Tsubota, extending their inquiries from understanding respect for diversity to promoting a balance between diversity and unity to encourage social integration rooted in diversity.

Will Kymlicka emphasizes the significance of integration in multicultural education, arguing that shared values are crucial for national solidarity and that a shared identity is vital for social integration (Kymlicka, 1996). He cites the multi-ethnic United States as an example, where despite a lack of universally shared values, Americans embrace a common national identity. Typically, in nation-states, shared identity stems from commonalities in history, language, and religion. However, Kymlicka notes that these elements might not be uniformly present in multi-ethnic nations. In such contexts, he argues that inclusion and nurturing are essential for fostering solidarity and a shared purpose. He suggests that "for people from diverse ethnic groups to feel a stronger allegiance to the state, they must see it as a space that cultivates their ethnic identity, rather than one that diminishes it" (Kymlicka, 1996). Similarly, the approach to social integration that emphasizes embracing and nurturing diversity is also reflected in the research of Yumi Kishida. Kishida explores Canadian multiculturalism and citizenship development as tools for "society building," analyzing how citizenship relates to Canadian society and its constituents (Kishida, 2010). She posits that Canadian identity and citizenship, characterized by their territorial and legal frameworks rather than race or ethnicity, facilitate participation in societal construction (Kishida, 2010). In this study, these traits are indicative of a moderate multiculturalism approach. We focus on Ontario's social studies curriculum to elucidate curriculum design principles that can gradually facilitate social integration under this moderate multiculturalism framework.

During the 2010s, a wealth of research on multicultural education surfaced within the realm of social studies education in Japan. These studies largely focus on two objectives: understanding the importance of respecting diversity to foster coexistence and balancing diversity with unity to promote social integration. I will discuss these studies by categorizing them into three distinct groups.

The first category, represented by Chiba (2012) and Nakayama (2006, 2012), champions learning that cultivates equitable relationships between minorities and majorities by reexamining the education of indigenous peoples and immigrants. Nakayama (2006) underscores the critical role of integrating immigrant education, while Chiba (2012) and Nakayama (2012) investigate educational strategies for the integration of the Ainu people in Japan. The second category includes research that empowers learners to make informed decisions and act independently towards achieving social justice and fairness within a multicultural society. Prominent examples are Isoyama (2012), who explores the realization of social justice through multicultural law education, and Kawasaki (2012), who highlights the integration of fairness into multicultural education. The third category, featuring Tsubota (2009, 2012, 2015) and Kiritani (2012), strives to reconcile respect for diversity with social integration. Both Kiritani and Tsubota examine the interplay of diversity and unity in multicultural education, emphasizing the significance of shared values in fostering social integration.

Although these categories of research were developed concurrently, their approaches to a multicultural society vary considerably. Chiba and Nakayama focus on understanding diversity, whereas Isoyama and

Kawasaki concentrate on pursuing universally acceptable values. In contrast, Kiritani and Tsubota attempt to synthesize these perspectives. This study adopts the approach of Kiritani and Tsubota, aiming to elucidate the principles of curriculum construction that balance respect for diversity with the promotion of social integration—an aspect insufficiently explored in their work. Therefore, we will examine Kiritani’s and Tsubota’s research in greater detail.

In Kiritani’s study, students engage with the historical contributions of diverse individuals within the history curriculum, acknowledging how the United States has developed a set of common democratic values, institutions, and traditions. They also recognize that the United States has maintained a strong, unified nation while protecting various cultural traditions. Thus, Kiritani posits that diversity and unity are complementary (Kiritani, 2012).

Conversely, Tsubota analyzed the citizenship curriculum in Alberta, Canada, to define an educational framework that promotes social integration based on shared values. She introduced the concept of social cohesion, describing it as “a shared goal of coexistence, despite diversity and the conflicts it brings, with members collaborating towards that goal based on their independent will” (Tsubota, 2009). Tsubota argues that common values are pivotal in uniting a multi-ethnic nation, stating that “the act of creating and transforming new common values fosters social cohesion” (Tsubota, 2009).

She views “common values” and “common goals” not as static entities determined by “majority vote,” but as intersubjective constructs continuously shaped through consensus (Tsubota, 2015). Furthermore, Tsubota stresses that maintaining a balance between “diversity” and “unity” requires ongoing adjustments and continual reassessment of their relationship to prevent an imbalance in either direction (Tsubota, 2015).

Building on this discourse, Kiritani’s and Tsubota’s theories converge on the notion that achieving a balance between “diversity” and “uniformity” in multicultural education facilitates social integration. Recognizing the parallels between their views, I aim to further delineate the framework for value adjustment necessary to achieve this balance in a multicultural society. Consequently, I propose a theoretical framework outlining the grounds and standards learners should use to reconcile the values underpinning diversity with those of uniformity. Additionally, I will explore how this reconciliation can facilitate social integration at specific learning stages.

Moderate Multicultural Education in Ontario, Canada

Theoretical Foundations of Multicultural Education in Canada

The multicultural approach to achieving a democratic society has ignited debates about its potential to foster ethnic divisionism (Bibby, 1990). While some scholars warn of the risks of overemphasizing diversity, others contend that multiculturalism should not be completely disparaged; instead, its methodologies need to be judiciously categorized and assessed. Acknowledging the perceived conflict between multiculturalism and nationalism, Kymlicka (2007) suggests that nation-building policies in various countries have been influenced and altered by multicultural initiatives to varying extents. To evaluate how nation-building has shifted towards a multicultural framework, Kymlicka classifies countries into three types: “strong multiculturalism countries,” which have fully embraced multiculturalism and prioritize minority acceptance; “moderate multiculturalism countries,” which demonstrate a moderate shift towards multiculturalism; and “weak multiculturalism

countries,” which have shown some resistance to multiculturalism while still promoting robust nation-building policies (Kymlicka, 2007).

In addition, democratic societies continuously confront the challenge of balancing national policies—whether they should lean more towards national interests or protect individual freedoms, especially as multiculturalism progresses. This dilemma requires a decision on whether to prioritize respect for diversity or social integration, underscoring the need to develop citizens who can navigate between these objectives. As societal expectations evolve, there is an increasing call for a moderate form of multiculturalism that integrates nation-building policies while also valuing the diversity of minorities. Furthermore, in today’s society, conflicts often emerge between individual diversity and societal unity due to varying values. Therefore, multicultural education must include a curriculum that fosters the reconciliation of these diverse values. The envisioned citizen is one capable of making rational decisions and actively balancing the values of respecting diversity and maintaining social integration to address the complexities of a multicultural society.

The selection of Canada as the focus of this study is informed by Will Kymlicka’s assertion that Canada, while recognizing the challenges of multiculturalism, strives to enhance social cohesion through its multicultural policies and integrate immigrants into a unified civil and political framework (Kymlicka, 2001). In Japan, Canada is often viewed as a paragon of moderate multiculturalism. Kato Hiroaki examines the concept of Canadian multiculturalism within its unique historical context, arguing that “Canada has historically lacked strong national integration” (Kato, 2018). He suggests that, despite the advent of multiculturalism, Canada has pursued a form of “soft” national integration due to its intrinsic tendency towards division. Based on these perspectives, this study positions Canada as a model of moderate multiculturalism.

A Fair and Inclusive Educational Philosophy: Ensuring Diversity and Embracing Minorities

The focus of this paper, stands as a quintessential immigrant nation that upholds multiculturalism as a core social principle. In the terms of multicultural education, Canada strives to foster a society that not only respects diversity but also maintains social integration.

Furthermore, in recent years, Canada’s national immigration policy has become increasingly accepting of diversity (Troper, 2002). Historically, Canadian history education policies and resources have emphasized a singular national narrative centred on political leaders and events; however, there is now a greater emphasis on the social histories of diverse ordinary citizens. Consequently, students are increasingly expected to engage in inquiry and critical thinking akin to that of historians and democratic citizens, understanding multiple sources and perspectives (Evans, 2006; Evans et al., 2010; Bickmore, 2014).

Ontario, in particular, aims to achieve gradual integration through its educational policies and has implemented a fair and inclusive educational strategy that addresses the diverse backgrounds of children to enhance equity (Sekiguchi, 1998). In 2009, Ontario introduced the Fair and Inclusive Education Policy, replacing the previous anti-racism framework. This shift acknowledges that discrimination arises not only from racial differences but also from various other factors such as sexual orientation, gender, disability status, and socioeconomic class, among others (Kodama, 2017). The Fair and Inclusive Education policy in Ontario promotes an integrated educational approach that recognizes and addresses the needs of children from diverse backgrounds, including immigrants, thereby advancing equity.

The essence of citizenship education in Ontario revolves around values such as societal impact on

individuals, power dynamics, community participation, rights and responsibilities, relationships, cooperation, and unity. The primary goal of citizenship education in Ontario is to develop responsible and positive community members, equipping citizens with the knowledge and critical consciousness necessary for fostering an inclusive society. This educational framework encourages learners to take responsibility for their society.

This emphasis on cultivating rights and responsibilities by both provincial and national governments aligns with the overarching aim of citizenship education: to “create a Canadian society with a common future.” This approach contrasts with the methods typically employed by nations that focus on integration through a “common past.” Hence, the focus on rights and responsibilities within Ontario’s citizenship education is seen as a crucial component supporting the gradual integration of citizens.

This study specifically analyzes the social studies curriculum revised following the introduction of the Fair and Inclusive Education Policy (2018 version for grades 1-10 and 2015 version for grades 11-12), rather than the curriculum in place at the time of the policy’s introduction (2013 version for grades 1-10 and 2005 version for grades 11-12)².

Key Characteristics of the Social Studies Curriculum in Ontario

Structural Content of the Ontario Social Studies Curriculum

In Ontario, Canada, the primary school years span grades 1-8, while the secondary school years encompass grades 9-12. The compulsory education stage includes grades 1-10. Social studies education in Ontario (grades K-12) is broadly divided into four components designed to foster a gradual sense of unity among citizens: a special course for kindergarten (K), Social Studies (2018 edition) for grades 1-6, History and Geography (2018 edition) for grades 7-8, and Canadians and the World for grades 9-10 (2018 edition) and grades 11-12 (2015 edition).

Moreover, the Canadians and the World curriculum for grades 9-10 is subdivided into three areas: geography, history, and civics (politics). For grades 11-12, the curriculum focuses on economics, geography, history, law, and politics.

Primary Education: Fostering Diverse Identities Through Self-awareness

Grades 1-6 represent a developmental stage where the emphasis is on acquiring knowledge of facts, phenomena, values, and concepts that serve as tools for decision-making and value judgment. During this period, students are encouraged to embrace a collective vision as community members. This shared vision serves as a universal framework applicable to various phenomena. The objective for students in grades 1-6 is to recognize the significant role that their groups and communities play in their lives. These groups and communities are diverse and multi-layered, prompting students to become aware of their memberships in various contexts.

The aim of social studies at this stage is to “develop a sense of who I am, and who we are.” Consequently, students are expected to cultivate diverse identities as they gain insights into their own.

In grades 7-8, the history curriculum emphasizes the development of students’ awareness of time. Learning is structured around the identities of students and others within a historical context. Meanwhile, the geography curriculum aims to enhance students’ awareness of place (geographical location) by deepening their understanding of the diversity and characteristics of natural environments and communities, from their local

Table 1. Structural content of the Ontario social studies curriculum (grades 1-12)

grade	subject	learning items
1	Social Studies	Our Changing Roles and Responsibilities The Local Community
2		Changing Family and Community Traditions Global Communities
3		Communities in Canada, 1780–1850 Living and Working in Ontario
4		Early Societies to 1500 CE Political and Physical Regions of Canada
5		Interactions of Indigenous Peoples and Europeans prior to 1713, in What Would Eventually Become Canada The Role of Government and Responsible Citizenship
6		Communities in Canada, Past and Present Canada's Interactions with the Global Community
7	Geography	Physical Patterns in a Changing World Natural Resources around the World: Use and Sustainability
	History	New France and British North America, 1713–1800 Canada, 1800–1850: Conflict and Challenges
8	Geography	Global Settlement: Patterns and Sustainability Global Inequalities: Economic Development and Quality of Life
	History	Creating Canada, 1850–1890 Canada, 1890–1914: A Changing Society
9	Geography	Issues in Canadian Geography
10	History	Canadian History since World War
	Civics (Politics)	Civics and Citizenship
11	Economics	The Individual and the Economy
	Geography	Regional Geography Forces of Nature: Physical Processes and Disasters Travel and Tourism: A Geographic Perspective Introduction to Spatial Technologies
	History	American History World History to the End of the Fifteenth Century Origins and Citizenship: The History of a Canadian Ethnic Group World History since 1900: Global and Regional Interactions
	Law	Understanding Canadian Law Understanding Canadian Law in Everyday Life
	Politics	Politics in Action: Making Change
	Economics	Analysing Current Economic Issues Making Personal Economic Choices
	Geography	World Issues: A Geographic Analysis World Geography: Urban Patterns and Population Issues The Environment and Resource Management Spatial Technologies in Action World Issues: A Geographic Analysis Living in a Sustainable World
	History	Canada: History, Identity, and Culture World History since the Fifteenth Century Adventures in World History
	Law	Canadian and International Law Legal Studies
	Politics	Canadian and International Politics

area to the broader world. Students are encouraged to consider their own identities and those of others within a spatial context.

As discussed in “Literature Review,” students are guided to understand that the United States has established common democratic values, systems, and traditions. This study refers to education promoting national unity through political beliefs and ideology as “strong integration through the unity of ideology” and “common values.” In contrast, the Canadian curriculum expresses national unity by incorporating diverse perspectives, including the local community (1st grade), changes in family and community traditions (2nd grade), life and work in Ontario (3rd grade), and the Canadian community, both past and present (6th grade).

Based on the preceding discussion, there is a clear trend to emphasize an educational approach that begins with learning from the local community in both grades 1 to 6 and grades 7 and 8. This method likely facilitates the formation of diverse identities by encouraging students to recognize their own identities within the context of their local community, rather than solely focusing on a deepened awareness of the common values uniting the nation.

Secondary Education: Cultivating Complex Identities Through Academic Disciplines

In grades 9-12, subject areas are further subdivided into civics, economics, politics, law, and geography. Geography courses allow students to explore universal geographical issues through individual investigations of various topics within Canada. History courses for grades 10-12 help students understand the diversity and complexity of identity, citizenship, community, and rights by examining the origins of government and citizenship. In grade 10, the study of civil rights and citizenship encourages students to explore how individuals can belong to a fair system of social participation.

Economic studies in grades 11-12 help students recognize the diverse relationships between individuals and the economy, fostering an understanding of various economic models. Students are encouraged to investigate the impact of economic rules, norms, and fairness on individual economic decisions. Law courses in grades 11-12 raise awareness of social justice through the examination of Canadian and international law. In political studies for grades 11 and 12, students learn how political dynamics evolve over time, while also focusing on the diversity of ideologies that persist as societal contexts change.

As outlined, learning and research activities in grades 9-12 are based on academic disciplines. The concept of shared identity is not only about cultivating a sense of special rights or belonging to a community, state, or nation; it also seeks to embrace a universal principle of “oneness in diversity.” This notion shows that the individual identities examined across various academic fields are complex and foster a nuanced sense of unity as citizens.

A Methodology for Gradual Integration Through the Exploration of “Big Ideas”

Ontario’s social studies curriculum relies on inquiry-based learning centred around “big ideas.” For each grade, from 1 to 12, several strands are defined under each learning category³. Due to space limitations, this study focuses on Strand 2, “Civicism,” in Learning Item 1, “Civil Rights and Citizenship,” within the 10th grade Civics curriculum, and Strand 4, “Markets, Consumers, and Producers,” in Learning Item 2, “Personal Economic Decisions,” within the 12th grade Economics curriculum (Table 2). Each strand includes two to four “big ideas.” The rationale for structuring the curriculum around these “big ideas” is that through inquiry activities, students

can grasp facts and their social context, and reflect on their identities.

“Big ideas” are characterized by two primary features. First, they link facts and encourage critical thinking and judgment. In the context of Japanese social studies, these concepts are comparable to perspectives and modes of thinking. By exploring “big ideas,” learners not only gather information but also synthesize it effectively.

Second, “big ideas” are supported by questions that guide the learning process. These questions, known as “framing questions,” stimulate inquiry-based activities. “Framing questions” are crafted to be more abstract than the factual content of the learning material, and they connect learners to the relevant issues.

In the field of education and educational research, the concept of “big ideas” was initially widely applied in science education (Harlen, 2010; Harlen et al., 2015; Eleftheria et al., 2016) and has since been increasingly integrated into STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) education (Chalmers et al., 2017) as a whole. “Big ideas” serves as a foundational element that not only guides curriculum development and instructional strategies but also encourages deeper student engagement and understanding. By emphasizing overarching concepts that connect various disciplines, the “big ideas” approach fosters critical thinking and problem-solving skills essential for students to navigate complex real-world challenges. Consequently, this pedagogical model not only enhances educational outcomes but also prepares learners to become informed and capable citizens in an increasingly interdisciplinary and technologically advanced society.

Table 2. Examples of learning contents and strands

Grade10 CIVICS (POLITICS)
learning item 1 : Civics and Citizenship
Strands1 : Political Inquiry and Skill Development
Strands2 : Civic Awareness
Strands3 : Civic Engagement and Action
Grade12 ECONOMICS
learning item 1 : Analysing Current Economic Issues
Strands1 : Economic inquiry and skill development
Strands2 : Fundamentals of economics
Strands3 : Firms, markets, and economic stakeholders
Strands4 : Macroeconomics
Strands5 : Global interdependence and inequalities
learning item 2 : Making Personal Economic Choices
Strands1 : Economic inquiry and skill development
Strands2 : Developing financial literacy
Strands3 : Economic fundamentals
Strands4 : Markets, consumers, and producers
Strands5 : Economies of Canadian communities

In Table 3, expectations for students regarding inquiry activities that support identity formation based on academic fields in secondary education are organized into three stages, structured by “big ideas” and “framing questions” (FQs). The units divided into these three stages correspond to the sub-items under the learning items listed in Table 1. For instance, learning item “1. Civil Rights and Citizenship” in the 10th grade civics course (Table 1), is broken down into three strands: “Political Inquiry and Skills,” “Civic Consciousness,” and “Citizen Participation and Action.” Using the “Civic Consciousness” strand as a case study, we examine how the three “big ideas” and their corresponding FQs are formatted as learning stages and aid identity formation.

Table 3. Three stages of learning by “big ideas”

	Stage 1: Understanding systems and academic concepts	Stage 2: Recognizing the importance of individual diverse rights and diversity	Stage 3: Deepening the understanding of the interrelationship between rights and responsibilities to achieve social integration
Grade 10 CIVICS (POLITICS)			
<i>learning item 1: Civics and Citizenship</i>			
Strands2: Civic Awareness			
Learning Stage:	Understanding that diversity is guaranteed in a democratic society	Becoming aware of the significance of diverse opinions reaching politics and acquiring skills for political participation	Recognizing that while diverse rights are guaranteed, individuals also bear responsibilities related to citizenship
Big idea	Big idea 1: In a democratic society, people have different beliefs, which influence their position and actions with respect to issues of civic importance.	Big idea 2: An understanding of how various levels of government function and make decisions enables people to effectively engage in the political process.	Big idea 3: People living in Canada have rights and freedoms based in law; at the same time, they have responsibilities associated with citizenship.
FQ	1.What is the relationship between people’s beliefs and values and their positions on civic issues?	2. Why is it important to understand how political structures and processes work? 3. What are some ways in which I can make my voice heard within the political process?	4. In what ways does the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms protect me? What responsibilities come with these rights?
Grade12 ECONOMICS			
<i>learning item 2: Making Personal Economic Choices</i>			
Strands 4: Markets, consumers, and producers			
Learning Stage	Understanding the significance of systems for production, resource allocation, and the distribution of goods and services.	Understanding that the diverse decisions of consumers influence the economic system.	Recognizing that producers should meet the diverse demands of consumers while adhering to government regulations.
Big idea	Big idea 1: There are many ways in which people can exchange goods and services. Markets are affected by supply and demand as well as by the decisions of consumers and producers.	Big idea 2: Consumers have rights and responsibilities. Consumers’ choices can affect the economy and the environment.	Big idea 3: Government regulations help enforce the responsibilities of producers.
FQ	1. How does scarcity affect the price of a product? 2. How do producers create demand for their products? 3. How do consumers affect the economy?	4. What are the responsibilities of businesses? How do government rules influence those responsibilities?	

In the civics strand of “Civil Rights and Citizenship” for grade 10, the “big ideas” encapsulate the ideal attributes of a democratic society, government, and citizenship. “Big idea 1” provides a foundational definition of a democratic society, highlighting the importance of ensuring citizens’ rights to hold diverse beliefs. Through learning at this stage, students become aware of the fundamental principles of their community. “Big idea 2” suggests that a comprehensive understanding of governmental decision-making processes is crucial for effective citizen participation in political activities.

This stage aims to highlight the significance of expressing diverse individual opinions in the political sphere and their role as citizens within the community. “Big idea 3” asserts that citizens in a democratic society enjoy rights and freedoms guaranteed by law, but also bear responsibilities to the state. For instance, the curriculum includes a specific question: “should there be penalties for abstaining from voting?” Students are encouraged to engage with this question as responsible citizens whose rights and freedoms are protected.

Through the two stages of learning leading up to this point, students who have grasped the concept of diversity and the social mechanisms that support it will contemplate what actions should be taken, considering the varying opinions regarding the merits of imposing penalties for voter abstention. They will realize that their own stance may vary based on context and perspective. This learning experience is intended to foster an understanding that their identity as members of a community is dynamic, diverse, and layered.

In the 12th grade Economics course, the unit titled “Markets, Consumers, and Producers” follows a similar structure. “Big idea 1” posits that the market is propelled by the autonomous decisions of consumers and producers. At this stage, students understand the significance of the economic system, focusing on production, resource allocation, and the distribution of goods and services. Consequently, the aim is for students to identify the traits of the economic system to which they contribute.

“Big idea 2” enables students to comprehend the role of consumers in the market and their impact on economic dynamics. This phase underscores the significant impact of consumer choices on the economic framework. “Big idea 3” highlights the necessity for government regulation of producers who hold considerable power in the market, rather than allowing them to operate without oversight. This principle demonstrates that in markets filled with varied consumers and producers, both entities engage freely while upholding specific roles and duties.

The structure of this learning topic is designed to promote social integration while respecting the diverse choices made by producers and consumers. It strives to inform students about the mechanisms of social diversity and integration through exploring social science concepts. Mirroring the political domain, this approach enhances students’ awareness of both diversity and integration in their communities.

In the 10th grade “Civics” course, each strand includes three stages of learning, culminating in three instructional cycles. Similarly, in the 12th grade “Economics” course, three stages of learning are blended into ten cycles. This pattern persists across various subjects. It is anticipated that the repetition of these stages will support students in cultivating a more complex identity.

A Framework for Aligning Values to Achieve Social Integration Through “Big ideas”

In this section, we will analyze how “big ideas” contribute to the gradual formation of learners’ identities, drawing on the cases presented in Table 3. Will Kymlicka asserts that Canada seeks to promote social integration through multiculturalism, which facilitates the integration of immigrants into a cohesive civil and political

structure. Accordingly, this study references Kymlicka's theory to elucidate how the pedagogical approaches employed in Ontario's social studies curriculum encourage social integration (Kymlicka, 2005). Kymlicka's model reveals that state-led nation-building and advocacy for minority rights are interdependent. Furthermore, by perceiving this synergistic relationship as an optimal form of multiculturalism, it aligns with the study's examination of the compatibility between "respect for diversity" and "social integration."

Stage 1 is characterized by students' exploration of shared values within their nation and community, and their acknowledgment of facts and values. This stage serves as an introduction to understanding the definitions of systems and institutions, with an emphasis on recognizing the community identity to which they belong.

Stage 2 involves students establishing a framework for adjusting values after acknowledging the diverse needs of minorities and individuals. At this stage, students deepen their understanding of individual rights and the importance of diversity, leading to an awareness of the complexities of diverse identities.

In Stage 3, students learn to reconcile the various demands of individuals with the community's integration values. This stage is designed to gradually shape an identity that balances diversity with social integration. These three stages are explored within a single strand, with each subject incorporating these phases cyclically.

In the context of value adjustment, "social integration" and "respect for diversity" are concretely manifested as the "pursuit of shared values by the state and community" and the "diverse demands of minorities and individuals," respectively. Within Kymlicka's theoretical framework, these concepts correspond to "nation-building policies by the state" and "demands for minority rights." The former ensures that respect for diversity is effectively implemented through the latter, as illustrated by the arrow labelled "B: Making it function appropriately" in Figure 1. Conversely, the latter is both supplemented and limited by the former, as indicated by the arrow "A: Complemented and restricted."

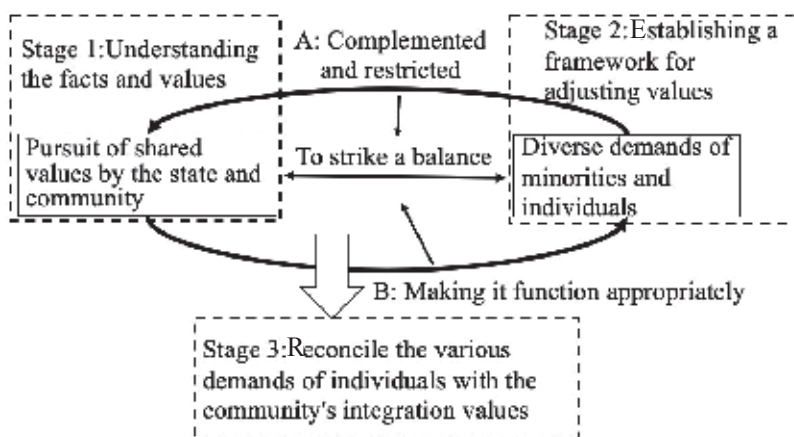


Figure 1. The process of achieving social integration and the gradual formation of identity through "big ideas"

The interaction between A and B is pivotal in the value adjustment framework. When learners pursue shared values within the community to achieve "social integration" at stage 3, they are encouraged to consider

how far they are willing to accommodate the demands of minorities and individuals. This exploration represents the analysis of B. Additionally, it raises important questions regarding the limits of minority assertions of individual demands and their attempts to complement shared values, which corresponds to the examination of A.

A Comprehensive Overview of Gradual Social Integration Through Ontario's Social Studies Curriculum

From the analysis presented, it is evident that the social studies curriculum in Ontario is structured to foster progressive social integration among its citizens. In grades 1-8, students are motivated to recognize their identities and cultivate a varied self-perception. In grades 9-12, the curriculum focuses on academic disciplines, guiding students toward the formation of a complex identity that facilitates "gradual social integration." The vehicles for this identity formation are the "big ideas" incorporated within each academic subject. Notably, the objective of social integration transcends the simple adoption of "common values," it involves nurturing a sophisticated identity that equips students with the determination, capabilities, and skills essential for actively pursuing social integration.

Participants from various backgrounds in society not only seek assurance of their rights from both the state and community but also must acknowledge their duties to these entities. Additionally, when individuals advocate for changes to state and community policies, it is crucial that shared values are both complemented and constrained. The trajectory of this value adjustment indicates a need for revising state and community policies to aptly meet diverse needs. Within this framework, learners explore the notion of value adjustment, aimed at gradually shaping their identities.

Discussion and Conclusion

This study analyzed the social studies curriculum in Ontario, Canada, and elucidated how it manifests moderate multiculturalism. The curriculum is founded on the principles of inclusive education, promoting the development of fair relationships among majority and minority groups with the aim of "cultivating active and responsible citizens." This goal ensures learners' active participation in society while emphasizing the interrelationship between rights and responsibilities.

In primary education, as students advance through the grades, their educational scope broadens from local to national and wider community levels. This broadening makes students increasingly cognizant of their identity's diversity. In secondary education, the curriculum is designed to facilitate the formation of a complex identity that supports "moderate social integration" within various academic fields.

The fundamental component of the curriculum's structural principle is the "big ideas." "Big ideas" encourage students to engage in academic inquiry, allowing them to examine the interrelationships between rights and obligations within the context of real society. This approach helps students harmonize differing values and aim to forge an identity that honors diversity while pursuing social integration.

The optimal model of a curriculum that seeks social integration while respecting diversity has been elucidated by Kiritani and Tsubota, as highlighted in previous studies. However, this study argues for a more nuanced examination of the curriculum's structure, designed to promote multicultural coexistence as explicated by these authors, facilitating a more profound comprehension of the educational principle that balances diversity with social integration. Rather than offering a binary choice between respect for diversity and social integration-a

common dilemma in multicultural societal pursuits—Ontario’s curriculum serves as a model for achieving a balanced integration of diversity and social integration through the educational strategy of value adjustment.

Implications

By analyzing how the social studies curriculum in Ontario balances diversity and unity, we believe its framework offers adaptable insights for Japan, China, and Hong Kong—with necessary contextual considerations for each. Japan’s ongoing curriculum reforms could integrate Ontario’s critical inquiry methods to reconcile its traditional collectivism with internationalization goals. The “big ideas” framework proves particularly relevant for Japan’s competency-based education shift. China’s social studies system, while firmly rooted in socialist core values, might adapt Ontario’s graduated approach to sensitive topics. This could prove valuable in coastal regions experiencing rapid demographic shifts through urbanization and migration. Hong Kong’s unique “one country, two systems” context presents both challenges and opportunities for adopting Ontario’s reconciliation model. The SAR could develop parallel projects engaging local cultural communities while respecting national identity parameters.

Japan

In reference to Canada’s multicultural education curriculum, Japan can consider the following points when advancing multicultural education. Firstly, the application of “big ideas” to balance diversity and unity is essential. In the field of education in Japan, there have been significant developments in the practice and research of big concepts in recent years (Matsubara & Kosaka, 2021). “Big ideas” are often compared with the “discipline-based epistemological approaches” situated in Japanese national curriculum standards. However, their theoretical framework and practical experiences remain underdeveloped. Japan needs to explore the role and significance of “big ideas” more thoroughly in teaching and research while drawing on the experiences of other countries. As mentioned, Canada utilizes “big ideas” to mediate the relationship between ethnic and cultural diversity and national unity. Japan should actively integrate the concept of “big ideas” into practical classroom instruction, particularly in the social studies domain. Following Tsubota and Chong’s (2023) approach to community-based learning, these concepts could be effectively taught through intergenerational and cross-cultural community projects. By researching and discussing these concepts, students can be guided to develop the ability to address social issues from various cultural and social perspectives, thereby achieving the goal of promoting social stability while respecting diversity.

Secondly, Japan should actively promote cross-cultural exchange and collaboration. This can be accomplished by organizing cross-cultural exchange programs and activities that encourage students to interact with peers from diverse cultural backgrounds. Such initiatives may include international exchanges, cultural festivals, language learning partnerships, and workshops involving different identity groups within the community. As demonstrated by Chong and Tsubota (2023), such activities are most effective when they involve authentic community participation and service-learning components. These experiences will help students appreciate the importance of diversity and cultivate their cross-cultural communication skills.

Additionally, it is crucial to advance teacher training and the development of educational resources. To effectively implement multicultural education, Japan must strengthen teacher training programs to ensure educators possess the necessary knowledge and skills to teach multicultural content. Training should include

methods for facilitating community-engaged learning, as suggested by Chong and Tsubota's (2023) study of successful Japanese elementary school programs. Moreover, leveraging advanced technologies such as big data, ICT, and AI, it is essential to develop a rich array of educational resources, including textbooks, case studies, and teaching tools, to support teachers in the classroom. Through these measures, Japan can establish a more inclusive and equitable social environment in the advancement of multicultural education.

China

Based on the current Chinese education policy, which places a strong emphasis on cultivating national consciousness (Jiang, 2017), the reform of multicultural education in China requires careful consideration of the distinct socio-educational contexts between Mainland China and Hong Kong SAR, as highlighted by Zhang et al. (2019) in their comparative analysis of educational research in Chinese societies. Drawing upon their analytical framework, this study proposes following fundamental dimensions for educational reform in China.

Firstly, there should be a diversification of the curriculum content. In addition to emphasizing national identity and traditional culture, the curriculum should incorporate multicultural education, helping students to understand and respect the values of different cultures. This objective can be accomplished through the systematic integration of curricular modules encompassing global cultures, histories, and languages, an approach that aligns with Zhang et al.'s (2019) framework for developing transnational educational competencies in Chinese contexts.

Secondly, the focus should be on cultivating students' cultural awareness and inclusivity, enabling them to comprehend the interconnections and exchanges between different cultures. This can be facilitated through the organization of multicultural exchange activities and cultural festivals, which would enhance students' understanding and acceptance of cultural diversity.

Thirdly, it is essential to improve policy support and evaluation mechanisms. The government should develop relevant policies to support the advancement of multicultural education and establish evaluation mechanisms to regularly assess the implementation and impact of multicultural education, allowing for timely adjustments to policies and measures.

Additionally, to address the issue of unequal resource distribution, the Chinese government should increase investment in education in underdeveloped and rural areas to ensure a more equitable allocation of educational resources. Furthermore, there should be an emphasis on training teachers in multicultural education, enhancing their cultural sensitivity and cross-cultural communication skills, enabling them to better guide students in understanding and respecting diversity. Schools should also encourage family and community involvement in the educational process, promoting parents' and communities' understanding and support for multicultural education.

Hong Kong, China

Based on the understanding that multicultural education in Hong Kong is primarily limited to the teaching of subject knowledge (Bhowmik & Kennedy, 2016), and drawing on the civic education curriculum in Canada, the following aspects can be considered for multicultural education reform in Hong Kong.

Firstly, there should be curriculum integration and diversification. Multicultural education in Hong Kong should be systematically integrated as a cross-curricular theme within Hong Kong's subject-based

curriculum framework, rather than being established as a discrete subject. This integrative approach requires the purposeful incorporation of multicultural perspectives across both traditional academic disciplines (including history, geography, languages, arts) and the newly implemented citizenship-related subjects introduced in the 2021/2022 curriculum reform. Specifically, these new subjects, namely Citizenship, Economics, and Society for Secondary 1 to 3 and Citizenship and Social Development for Secondary 4 to 6, provide particularly relevant platforms for embedding multicultural education within the current educational landscape of Hong Kong.

This approach aligns with Chong and Cheng's examination of how Hong Kong secondary teachers conceptualize Global Citizenship Education (GCE) amid political shifts (Chong & Cheng, 2025). Their study of 22 educators reveals tensions between liberal and nationalistic approaches in pedagogy, while contributing a conceptual framework for understanding how teachers' values shape GCE implementation - particularly relevant for curriculum design in Hong Kong's unique context.

Secondly, this paper acknowledges that students' understanding of identity affects their perceptions of cultural diversity and social integration. In particular, it is observed that many contemporary Hong Kong residents commonly perceive themselves as having dual identities (Chong, 2022). Therefore, there should be an emphasis on identity education, recognizing that individuals belong to their communities, to Hong Kong, to China, and are also part of the international community. This awareness of diverse social identities will help cultivate the necessary capabilities, responsibilities, and attitudes of global citizens.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the balance between diversity and unity in Canada's social studies curriculum provides valuable insights for educational reform in Japan, China, and Hong Kong. Canada's approach emphasizes the importance of recognizing and celebrating cultural diversity while simultaneously fostering a sense of shared identity and social integration among its citizens. This dual focus can serve as a model for other nations seeking to navigate the complexities of multiculturalism in their educational systems.

By more effectively integrating multicultural educational concepts into the curriculum, educators in Japan, China, and Hong Kong can create learning environments that not only acknowledge the rich tapestry of cultural backgrounds present in their societies but also encourage students to engage with and learn from one another. Such integration can be achieved through inclusive teaching practices, diverse curricular materials, and opportunities for cross-cultural dialogue.

Moreover, actively fostering a sense of social responsibility among students is crucial. By encouraging young people to understand their roles within a multicultural society, we can cultivate a generation that values empathy, collaboration, and active participation in community life. This sense of social responsibility can be nurtured through service-learning projects, community engagement initiatives, and collaborative problem-solving activities that address real-world issues faced by diverse populations.

Ultimately, by embracing these principles and adapting them to their unique cultural contexts, Japan, China, and Hong Kong can promote the harmonious development of their societies. Educational reform that prioritizes both diversity and unity will not only enhance social integration but also prepare students to thrive in an increasingly interconnected world. In this way, the lessons drawn from Canada's social studies curriculum can contribute significantly to the creation of more inclusive, equitable, and resilient educational frameworks in these countries and territories.

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Note

1. The statement regarding the Chinese government's promotion of national unity and cultural diversity in educational policies, encouraging various ethnic groups to reflect their cultural characteristics in education, is based on information from the following government websites (State Council of the People's Republic of China, 2015).
2. Ontario Ministry of Education, <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/teachers/curriculum.html> (Grades 1-10 follow the 2018 version, and grades 11-12 follow the 2015 version.) Moreover, in the analysis of social studies education in Ontario conducted in this study, the following website issued by the Ontario Ministry of Education (2024) were also referenced.
3. In this study, the concept of "strands" is based on the interpretation provided by Kawaguchi (2010).

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