Nova Scotia

Nova Scotia has recently revised its Social Studies curriculum for the elementary level to broadly support global education. However, as in other provinces, global education in Nova Scotia is widely understood to be dependent upon the initiative of individual teachers and we found limited provincial and district support in the form of professional development or in-servicing. Educators that we spoke with at the school level seemed to be attempting to implement global education in ways largely consistent with the global education “ideal type” we elaborated on in Chapter 2. Nonetheless, many educators felt that more coordinated and consistent partnerships across administrative levels and with external groups were needed.

One of the interesting features of the educational system in Nova Scotia, is the Race Relations, Cross-Cultural Understanding and Human Rights (RCH) division at the Department of Education. The RCH offers an institutional innovation that addresses themes congruent with global education, such as inter-cultural dialogue, human rights, social justice, and opportunities to engage diverse perspectives. It also attempts to coordinate a common strategy across provincial, district and school levels. This effort at coordination offers a point of potential collaboration for future global education efforts in the province. It also offers interesting insights into the opportunities and challenges faced by other educators strivings to develop similar province-wide mechanisms for coordinating and enhancing global education in Canadian schools.

Background

Demographically, Nova Scotia is home to a majority white, English-speaking population, as well as Acadians, Aboriginal Peoples, and a substantial immigrant population living mainly in Halifax. Nova Scotia also has Canada’s oldest African-Canadian population. Table 6.1 offers key demographic details in terms of setting the socioeconomic and political context of global education in the province.

| Table 6.1 |
| DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION: NOVA SCOTIA¹ |

| Population          | 937,889 (2005) |
| Major Ethnic Groups | Aboriginal; Acadian; African-Canadians |
| GDP                 | 31,451 ($CDN millions) (2005)² |
| Major Economic Sectors | Service; Public Administration; Manufacturing; Resource Industries |
| Dominant Political Parties at the Provincial Level | Progressive Conservative; NDP; Liberal |
| Premier             | Rodney MacDonald (Progressive Conservative) |
Nova Scotia has seven English regional school boards and one French provincial school board. In 2002/03, there were 450 schools (325 elementary), enrolling 150,599 students (75,965 elementary) with 9,592 teachers.\(^3\)

We conducted one interview at the provincial level, where curriculum policy and guidelines are made. We also met with an official from a rural school district in the province. Research was conducted at two rural elementary schools, as reflected in the figure below. Provincial curricula were analyzed using the matrices attached in Appendix A.

**Global Education at the Provincial Level**

Nova Scotia shares a core elementary curriculum with the other provinces that comprise the Atlantic Canada region, namely Prince Edward Island, Newfoundland and Labrador, and New Brunswick (Nova Scotia Department of Education, 2003b). Global education themes are found across the elementary years, but are particularly apparent in the recently revised Social Studies curriculum, which we analyze in more detail below. At the time of our research, the revised Social Studies curriculum had been implemented in Grades 1, 2 and 7. The Grades 3, 4, 5, and 6 curricula will be pilot-tested and implemented in stages over the next three years (Nova Scotia Department of Education, 2003c, 2004a, 2004b, 2004c).

We interviewed one official in the provincial department of education responsible for the Social Studies curriculum. When asked if, or how, the department of education defines global education, the official indicated that he/she would “have to dig it [the definition] up” — but doubted that there was one. We were then offered a rather vague description of global education: “Students need to know about their own country but they also need to situate themselves in the world” (Nova Scotia Provincial 1). The provincial official viewed global education as both a means of equipping students for participation in globalized markets, and as a means of preparing students for their roles as citizens in an interdependent, yet culturally diverse world system.
Among the key innovations of the new curriculum is its movement way from the “Expanding Horizons” philosophy of dealing (in ascending order) with the child, the family, the local neighbourhood, the region, the province, the country and the world. In the new curriculum, personal, local, national and world-level citizenship issues are presented in each grade. According to the department official, “We are trying to expose kids to national and global everywhere” (Nova Scotia Provincial 1).

However, rather than emphasizing the opportunities for global education that exist across the curriculum, our informant highlighted the department's commitment to global education by identifying the compulsory Global Geography and Global History course in high school and the development of the new Grade 6 course in Social Studies, to be called “Culture Quest: Exploring the World's Cultures.” The department considers Grades 6, 9 and 12 “key stages” in the provincial curriculum and as years where global education themes are addressed in a more focused manner. The official we interviewed suggested that the goal is to “ensure that students get the global piece at least once before leaving elementary, junior high school and high school” (Nova Scotia Provincial 1).

At the provincial level, one staff member is responsible for overseeing the implementation of the Social Studies curriculum across the province. As part of the implementation of the new curriculum (including the forthcoming launch of the Grade 6 curriculum), the department plans a “launching ceremony,” in-servicing, provision of additional resources, and other professional development opportunities. However, our official did not mention any professional development opportunities directly connected to global education. Materials from NGOs and other external partners are distributed at the district level, according to the direction received from district school boards.

One of the major sources of support for global education-like activities within the department of education in Nova Scotia is the previously mentioned RCH division. According to department policy, this division is formally responsible for identifying and implementing policy, programs and activities relating to race relations and the recognition of cultural differences. In its broadest sense, race relations includes anti-racist education, cross-cultural understanding, multicultural education and human rights. The division's responsibilities include providing input into and responding to programming, curriculum guides, support documents, and learning resources relating to race relations and cross-cultural understanding.

As in each of our other provincial cases, there are no formal plans to evaluate the new Social Studies curriculum in Nova Scotia. Department activities related to global education concentrate on curriculum development and the introduction of new curricular frameworks. A great deal of energy has been focused on rolling out the Grade 6, 9, and 12 Social Studies curriculum. However, much less attention is paid to enhancing the cross-cutting opportunities for introducing global education themes and issues in other grades and subjects. This appears to be in contrast to the past when, according to our informant, David Ferns, a now retired department official, the department provided in-service training on global education that “laid a foundation that's affected a whole generation of teachers” (Nova Scotia Provincial 1).

The department official we spoke with indicated that there are few sustained opportunities for professional development or online information exchange about global education supported by the department. Department-supported professional development concentrates on introducing the new curriculum. Nor were any external partnerships or online resources for global education mentioned. As in several other cases, our department-level informant remarked that global education – and particularly global education focused on issues of international development – is heavily dependent on the initiative of individual teachers. Only the book-end Social Studies courses in Grade 6 guarantee that teachers will introduce global themes to the classroom.
How does the Nova Scotia curriculum compare to the global education “ideal type”?

Although “global citizenship” is not a phrase used in the new Atlantic curriculum, the region’s goal of linking citizenship education to global education themes is broadly consistent with the global education ideal type we elaborated in Chapter 2. In 1994, citizenship was chosen as one of several essential areas for the curriculum, through a series of public consultations. Citizenship is now one of the six “Essential Graduation Learnings” in the new curriculum, and it includes the expectation that graduates “be able to assess social, cultural, economic and environmental interdependence in a local and global context”; “demonstrate an understanding of Canada’s political, social and economic systems in a global context”; and “determine the principals and actions of just, pluralistic and democratic societies” (Nova Scotia Department of Education, 1999).

Social Studies is viewed as the key area for developing citizenship in the Atlantic curriculum, and emphasizes giving students the tools to understand “interrelationships among Earth, its peoples and its systems.” The new Social Studies curriculum is intended to provide “the multidisciplinary lens through which students examine issues affecting their lives from personal, academic, pluralistic and global perspectives” (ibid.). Outcomes specified in the Social Studies curriculum are all directly or indirectly linked to global education-related topics, skills and attitudes and thus can be viewed as strongly supportive of global education in the region. Learning outcomes are specified in terms of three levels of “cognitive taxonomy” that move from acquiring basic information to critical reflection and application.

Although we could find examples of units at all grade levels in the new Social Studies curriculum that fit with the global education ideal type, it is the Grade 6 curriculum that most explicitly addresses themes related to global education. Here there is a firm emphasis on world cultures, politics and global inequality.

Aspects of the global education ideal type – including an emphasis on interdependence, citizenship rights and responsibilities, the environment, critical thinking and ethno-cultural diversity and social justice – are reflected in the core curriculum used in Nova Scotia. A “systems” view of the world is advocated to some extent in the curriculum, although this orientation is perhaps less explicitly promoted than in the Manitoba case, for example.

The curriculum also mandates action components related to global education. Generally, these include “applying” knowledge or research and critical-thinking skills to various topics and exercises. However, the emphasis on criticality seems to lack support in the curriculum. For example, in one unit students are asked to demonstrate an understanding of how cultures from around the world have participated in the development of Canadian culture; but the unit does not address why, for instance, people from around the world emigrate in the first place. Similarly, while “Canada’s multicultural and multi-racial mosaic” are mentioned, there is no mention of cultural conflict, past or present.

As in several of our other cases, there is some tension in the Nova Scotia curriculum between attention to human rights and social justice issues and frequent references to the competitiveness in the “global economy” and to “economic renewal.” In addition, while the curriculum formally promotes the idea of linking history and current political contexts to plans for future transformation, the weight of the curriculum is focused on the past and offers few opportunities for students to think critically about their ability to engage in productive change in the future.

Global Education at the District Level

We conducted our Nova Scotia research in one rural school board. The mission statement of the school
board we visited indicated that the area's schools reflect “the nature and culture of our region,” and focuses in particular on improving race relations, cross-cultural understanding and respect for human rights. The board has strong links to the department's RCH division and therefore offered us an opportunity to explore this mechanism both as a model for global education and as its potential supporter.

The district official we spoke with discussed global education with particular reference to multicultural and intercultural issues, expressing a desire to create a school environment which redresses inequalities and fosters an atmosphere of understanding between communities. The official strongly emphasized critical thinking as a core skill that the curriculum aimed to develop, explaining that it is important that:

...we see how we are directly tied to, or how things we do that impact ‘there’...or things that we have here because of...It's not a charity thing; looking at things like ‘help eliminate world poverty’ and how that creates and reinforces stereotypes, as though these are things ‘over there' that need to be ‘fixed'. (Nova Scotia District 1)

For this informant, global education was about making world events relevant to the lives of children, and to have them understand their rights and responsibilities as “global citizens.”

The district recognizes the important differences between “awareness” and “critical understanding.” For example, part of a recruitment advertisement for teachers to assist in the organization of the annual Heritage Fair on the board’s website explains that:

When students create a Heritage Fair project, they are not just telling what happened in the past: they are explaining why it happened and why it is important to us today. (Nova Scotia District 1)

Our district-level respondent indicated that global education was not “high on the radar,” compared with more specific emphases on Aboriginal, black or Acadian issues in the curriculum. However, the respondent noted that students were very interested in global education and often engaged in leadership activities around global education issues. This person also spoke of assisting students working on projects on social equity issues, such as sweatshops, with a clear global component. Interview data indicated very limited participation of non-governmental groups in global education activities and initiatives at the district level. Two NGOs were mentioned by name as being involved in a “UN Day” and the “Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.”

Each district has an RCH Standing Committee and participates in the province's RCH initiatives, and each school has an RCH representative, which the ministry respondent had indicated as an area of provincial-level support to schools and districts (although the respondent was not aware of specific support to global education activities). The district we visited has created an assessment questionnaire to allow staff to monitor school-level promotion of RCH goals, and disseminates a “Bias Evaluation Instrument” that educators and administrators can use to evaluate resource material according to RCH guidelines. The school board also maintains an RCH website which offers information on policies, student support workers, administration, “celebrations/observances” and upcoming events. However, despite these efforts, our informant noted that, “I don't know if the teachers use them” (Nova Scotia District 1) – suggesting as we found elsewhere that there is a very weak relationship between district staff and local teachers. Overall, the RCH initiative seemed to have only weak ability to generate new forms of curricular engagement with global education themes: Its main role is to critique existing resources for bias.

Our district-level informant identified the main barrier to global education as the fact that people tend to have a narrow view of the world and their place in it. Our informant also criticized the tendency to equate global education with charity – something our informant felt the curriculum continued to do through its
framing of global issues as “outside” and “things that are separate.” When we asked about specific advice for external partners, the informant noted that external partners must go beyond sending out resource materials and emphasized that personal contact would have a big impact on whether or not teachers will use their materials.

**Global Education at the School Level**

When asked how they defined global education, educators and principals at the two schools we visited in Nova Scotia were quite vague in their descriptions, with several tending to replicate themes introduced in the department of education curriculum guidelines. They generally viewed global education as being most heavily concentrated in Social Studies, although Science and Language Arts were mentioned as offering opportunities for introducing global education themes.

Many of the educators seemed to hold an “us/them” perspective about global education. For example, one informant mentioned global education is about “raising awareness” of students of “the world beyond their backyard” (Nova Scotia School 1d). Another suggested “It's trying to get them [students] to see the things we take for granted” (Nova Scotia School 1b). Several participants also spoke of “culture” in their definitions of global education, specifically with respect to interaction between “Canadian culture” and “other cultures.”

One participant articulated an understanding of “basic needs” and linked this to social justice and equity in a manner consistent with the global education ideal type (Nova Scotia School 1b). Similarly, another participant emphasized critical thinking and “looking at the bigger picture and understanding where we fit in that picture” (Nova Scotia School 2d), as key elements in their understanding of global education.

Throughout the interviews, educators made reference to various fundraising events in connection with their school’s global education activities. They spoke frequently of student leadership in fundraising, and how these initiatives were supported by the school community and particularly by teachers. One educator we spoke with thought that at a rural school, the children that attended “are kind of sheltered” (Nova Scotia School 1a). At this school, educators questioned the difficulty of raising funds when many students are suffering from poverty and hunger themselves. However, the other educators we spoke with described student response to global education as “very enthusiastic,” much the same as district- and provincial-level participants.

One participant did speculate that the new curriculum would “change focus, remove some of the stereotypes and challenge the children to have critical discussions” (Nova Scotia School 1b). Another participant thought the new Social Studies curriculum would include a stronger “systems” view of the “interconnectedness of earth’s peoples” (Nova Scotia School 2b). At present, participants did not think global education was a priority area, as compared with Math or Language Arts, in either the formal curriculum or in the orientations and practices of schools and educators. One educator said that Social Studies, the area most amenable to global education was “viewed as an extra…and parents don’t ask about it” (Nova Scotia School 2c).

One of the schools we visited had as its “special mission” to be a “Green School” and to practice environmental conscientiousness as a “whole school” community. This innovation seemed to correspond directly with global educators’ calls for whole-school/cross-curricular integration of active global citizenship.

**School-level supports and resources**

Educators at the two schools we visited were largely unaware of provincial-level support for global
education activities. There seemed to be few formal or informal channels for information-sharing between and within schools, districts and the department of education. Only one participant identified the teacher resource centre run by the department of education, but noted that they had never borrowed any resources from there. This participant was also the most optimistic about forthcoming provincial support in the form of in-servicing around the implementation of the new Social Studies curriculum. Several of the participants also noted that their vice-principal was a valuable source of support through their relaying of in-service information with educators.

Each school board in Nova Scotia has an RCH coordinator and each school has a representative. The RCH representative at each school is responsible for providing support by relaying information from in-services and meetings they attend as part of their duties. However, while several of the participants mentioned that their school had “support workers” who work with Aboriginal and black students, few linked Aboriginal and black “issues” to global education or the idea of linking local and global issues.

Library staff at one of the schools we visited provided support for global education through organizing and hosting guest speakers as part of a “multicultural day.”

**Integrating global education - challenges**

One educator we spoke with, who saw global education taught mainly in the Social Studies curriculum, regretted that the new curriculum was not yet in place; in this educator’s opinion, the old one did not have the space for the amount of global education that the new one would contain. This particular participant spoke at considerable length on how some educators attempt to integrate global education throughout the curriculum, and used as an example, the idea of bringing issues of poverty to the Language Arts unit. Since teachers seem to lack time to cover the entire curriculum, integrating materials in this way is essential. Also, one educator felt unsure of how “deeply” to explore global education topics considering student age and level of maturity. Tempering concern for the age-appropriateness of global education lessons, one educator believed that “Children at this age are able to have critical discussions about why things are the way they are” (Nova Scotia School 1c).

The strongest challenge identified across all our school-level interviews was the need for more opportunity to work with NGOs who develop global education resources. Educators want support from trained global educators, not just resource kits. School participants also identified a lack of resource material and difficulties in accessing materials that matched the curriculum as two other major challenges to enhancing the profile of global education across the curriculum.

**Innovations**

We found two main innovations at the school level. First, one school had adopted an environmental mission. It participates in a “SEEDs” program that promotes and recognizes projects and activities that encourage students to care for and learn about their environment. The entire school participates in a recycling program, with individual classes involved in varying degrees with the design and implementation of “environmental projects.” The main goal of the school’s participation in the SEEDs program is to facilitate the development of critical thinking around environmental issues as well as to promote student action in addressing environmental problems. In another school, “Peace Groups” had been established that met weekly to “discuss respect and friendship.”

In Nova Scotia, school-level participants also spoke of finding ways to evaluate global education in their own classes. One indicated that they evaluate students’ learning by keeping anecdotal notes about their engagement in classroom activities. Another used class quizzes that tested students’ knowledge and
understanding. Since global education expectations are rarely evaluated as part of provincial accountability frameworks (largely focused on literacy and numeracy), this effort at the classroom level is extremely important.

**Partnerships and resources**

When asked about the engagement of external organizations, participants generally identified UNICEF, and specifically the organization’s annual Halloween fundraising drive. Several participants were not aware of any external partners that were engaged in global education, although one principal thought that there was “quite a bit” of partnership at the school, but just not concerning global education activities. However, a couple of educators identified that representatives from Clean Nova Scotia and Nova Scotia Power visited the school and did an “in-service” on energy conservation.

Participants at the two schools we visited could not identify many resources that they used in connection with global education. UNICEF materials were the most frequently mentioned, with the Internet being the second most common source of information and ideas. One educator described a program that they had begun using with their class called “What in the World?” – a Canadian resource that connects international, national, and community items to current events. “What in the World?” was credited by this educator as being responsible for revitalizing this teacher’s enthusiasm for Social Studies teaching. This educator expressed that they had been unenthusiastic about the Social Studies curriculum until the use of this resource.

**Advice from educators for external partners**

Educators at the school level all asked for human resources: specifically, in-school interaction with global educators and external partners, so that teachers could learn about global education issues before they have to teach them. Educators also emphasized the need for resources that are:

- Age-appropriate for pre-kindergarten to Grade 12 students
- Connected to the curriculum
- Teacher-friendly, “ready-to-use” and readily available (i.e., have material right in schools rather than teachers having to track them down, order them, etc.)

Most participants agreed that visual materials (e.g., videos, picture-books), along with guest speakers, work best to spark and sustain student interest in global education. In connection with guest speakers, the educators we spoke with wanted greater involvement of external partners in informing them about who and what is available, as well as assistance organizing guest speaker visits. Overall, participants emphasized the need for stronger connections between schools, and between schools and external partners. When asked how they would strengthen global education in the system, most spoke of the need to improve school-NGO relations, rather than say, strengthening the vertical relationship between the department of education, district school boards and schools.

**Summary**

Although it has no formal definition of global education, the core Atlantic Canada curriculum used in elementary schools in Nova Scotia supports global education in several ways, with notable emphases on interdependence, citizenship rights and responsibilities, the environment, critical thinking and ethnocultural diversity and social justice. Reference to global issues occurs across the grades, but it is most notable in the Grade 6 curriculum.
Despite this emphasis, few teachers spoke directly of these issues when asked about global education in their schools. As in the other cases, much of what was described as global education at the school level involved fundraising, even though fundraising at one of the schools we visited was described as difficult due to the poverty of many of its students. Fundraising activities seemed to reinforce the tendency to reproduce an “us/them” discourse when describing the purposes of global education.

As in our other cases, ministry and district officials believed that global education relied on the energy and motivations of individual teachers. Support for global education from the provincial ministry and the local boards, either through professional development or other forms of resource sharing, was extremely limited. The RCH Division of the department of education did offer some support but focused its work primarily on removing bias from the curriculum. Only a few NGOs were mentioned as offering external support for global education.

Overall, we concluded that while global education is quite central to the formal curriculum in Nova Scotia, there is very little in the way of systemic effort to ensure that high quality global education reaches children across the elementary years.

**ENDNOTES:**

1. Unless otherwise noted, the information presented here is from the Government of Nova Scotia (2005).