In British Columbia, a provincial teachers’ strike in the fall of 2005 made it impossible to undertake research at the school and district level during the period we conducted our field research. In this case, we report only on our analysis of the provincial curriculum and our interview with a ministry of education staff member.

Global education themes are quite visible in the elementary curriculum in BC, even though teaching about global issues does not appear to be a provincial priority at the elementary level. As in the Ontario case, we found interesting tensions between attention to global economic competitiveness and global social justice. Plans for revision of the 1998 elementary curriculum may signal an opening for greater emphasis on global issues and approaches.

**Background**

BC has a multicultural population with significant Asian and Aboriginal influences. Its population is 85 per cent urban, and is concentrated in the Lower Mainland and in Victoria. Table 9.1 offers information concerning key demographic details in terms of setting the socioeconomic and political context of global education in the province.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 9.1</th>
<th>DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION: BRITISH COLUMBIA¹</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Major Ethnic Groups</td>
<td>Chinese; French; East Indian; Aboriginal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GDP</td>
<td>168,011 million (CDN$)²</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major Economic Sectors</td>
<td>Service Sector; Agriculture; Fishing; Forestry; Mining</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dominant Political Parties at the Provincial Level</td>
<td>British Columbia Liberal Party; New Democratic Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Premier</td>
<td>The Honourable Gordon Campbell (BC Liberal)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Schools in British Columbia are either public or independent, with several choices available within the public system. At the time of the study, there were 61 school districts, and an additional 348 independent schools. In 2004/05, there were 671,224 students enrolled in BC, taught by 33,314 teachers.³ There were 1508 schools offering elementary education at the time of the study.⁴
Since 2001, the BC Ministry of Education has undergone substantial fiscal restraint and reorganizing. An amendment to the School Act has resulted in increased local school board autonomy and parental input into educational decisions (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2004). However legislation requiring school boards to be free of deficits, coupled with a freeze of education funding, has resulted in significant staff layoffs, rural school closures, and other cost-saving measures (Shoveller, Elliott & Johnson, 2005). As in other Canadian provinces, standardized testing has been introduced, as well as linking school/teacher performance evaluations with student outcomes. Tensions culminated in an illegal strike by teachers in the fall of 2005. In what is seen as a positive move by all groups, the government has since introduced restrictions on class sizes, although it continues to be criticized for not adequately funding these changes (BCTF, 2006).

The BC case is unique in this study because of the provincial teachers’ strike that occurred in the fall of 2005. Since it was not possible to do interviews at the district and schools levels, the recommendations here are drawn from an interview with a staff person at the provincial level. We also collected and analyzed province-level curriculum documents using the conceptual matrices attached in Appendix A.

**Global Education at the Provincial Level**

*Global education in the BC Curriculum*

BC uses a comprehensive Integrated Resource Package (IRP) for its curriculum, which consists of learning outcomes, suggested ideas for instruction, a list of recommended learning resources and possible methods for evaluating students’ progress. The K-7 Social Studies IRP currently being used was published in 1998 under the direction of three project coordinators from the Curriculum and Resources Branch, after extensive consultation with school districts, teachers’ organizations, and various partners in education. At the time of data collection, Social Studies courses were designed for Grades 10-12, and not the elementary level. The ministry is planning research on the kindergarten-Grade 7 Social Studies curriculum in 2006 to assess the current trends in education.

We conducted one interview with an education officer within the ministry of education, which is responsible for elementary and secondary schools in the province. The officer noted that the department was significantly smaller than it had been a decade earlier, a change which left less time available to concentrate on specific issues. The participant did not express confidence defining global education officially, but gave a personal view, stating: “It’s basically an awareness of issues on the global front,” including politics, human geography, the environment, and the impact on global citizenry.

Data from our analysis suggest that although global education is not mentioned explicitly in the formal Grades 4-6 curricula, learning outcomes related to global education are predominantly found in the Social Studies curriculum. Child-centred pedagogies are emphasized throughout the Social Studies IRP,
suggesting a variety of instructional approaches that “include group work, problem solving, and the use of technology” (BC Ministry of Education, 1998, p. v). The IRP emphasizes that teachers should adapt their strategies to suit the various developmental needs of their students.

According to the ministry official, global education is not singled out in the elementary level program, but is integrated into the curriculum. It is more explicitly found in secondary school, particularly in the new Grade 11 course, Civics Education (which is outside the bounds of this study). The participant felt that students wishing to pursue global education could do so in post-secondary studies, where “there are a myriad of courses offered.” The reason for this concentration of global education in the higher grades is that the elementary grades start with the individual’s identity, broaden into the community and school, and then widen further into provincial, national and global understandings.6

The ministry official also emphasized that Aboriginal issues and multiculturalism are both priorities within the kindergarten-Grade 7 Social Studies curriculum. The official felt that global education is predominantly brought into the classroom in the form of current events, but that this depends upon the interests of the individual teacher.

In addition to the above, our ministry informant noted time constraints as a major barrier to global education at the elementary level. The strong focus on numeracy and literacy (Math and English) makes it logistically difficult for the average elementary teacher to fit other curricular matters into classroom time.

**How does the BC curriculum compare to the global education “ideal type”?**

Although global education is not a term we found in the curriculum, some curriculum content resembled the global education “ideal type,” including specific topics on global citizenship, critical thinking, and human rights. Throughout, we found a dominant theme of fostering multiple perspectives, particularly in the areas of various interpretations of historical events, environment and trade debates, local and national issues, and different cultural viewpoints. Tolerance and valuing diversity are heavily emphasized through multiculturalism, including an examination of both the challenges that immigrants face and the contribution they make to Canadian society.

The BC curriculum pays attention to global social justice and global competitiveness. This is demonstrated in the tension between issues of the environment and the economy, two sub-categories found in each grade. The curriculum views trade and economic growth as positive elements that contribute to society’s well-being, although ethical trade is emphasized, particularly in regards to natural resource consumption and urbanization. In terms of the environment, there is a brief examination of Aboriginal holistic environmental views in Grade 4, and sustainability and the “ecological footprint” in Grade 6. However, the environment is framed predominantly as a natural resource that is being depleted due to population growth, over-consumption and industry. Suggested activities include: “Hav[ing] students role-play industry representatives and make presentations to convince the United Nations that industry will not damage the global environment;” and debating that “Jobs are more important than forests; current fisheries policies meet the needs of commercial, sport, and Aboriginal fishers; selling freshwater to the United States is a good idea.” Although debating will bring to light the inherent multiple perspectives, it is of note that the examples are consistently framed in favor of trade, and to the detriment of the environment.

The BC curriculum fosters regional, national and global citizenship; however, each is treated independently from the others, a result perhaps of the overall design of the kindergarten-Grade 7 Social Studies (starting with the individual, community, province, etc.) curriculum. Global citizenship becomes an explicit topic in Grade 6, including discussions on the characteristics of global citizens. In the area of human rights, the
curriculum integrates the many different layers of citizenship while fostering a notion of moral purpose. In the span of Grade 4-6, students cover the Indian Act, Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, BC Human Rights Code, Ombudsman Act, and UN human rights initiatives including Rights of the Child. Both historical Canadian inequalities, such as the Chinese Head Tax and Japanese internship, as well as present day inequalities experienced in poorer countries, are discussed. Despite this human rights focus, the curriculum does not touch upon inequalities in present-day Canada. As a result, there is also a lost opportunity of engaging students in “active citizenship,” or developing a sense of moral purpose in their immediate environment.

Active citizenship is meant to be one of the major emphases of the curriculum, along with developing understanding, making connections and applying knowledge. However, although the last three skills are prevalent, our participant did not highlight the notion of “action,” nor was it easily found within the curriculum. In addition, controversy was treated cautiously; the curriculum aims “not to remove controversy, but to ensure that controversial views and opinions are presented in a contextual framework” (BC Ministry of Education, 1998, p. B5). When choosing resources from the ministry’s recommendations, teachers are asked to “consider the appropriateness of any resource from the perspective of the local community” (BC Ministry of Education, 1998, p. B5). Some contentious issues are brought into the curriculum in the areas of human rights and Aboriginal issues, but these are few in relation to the large number of issues covered in the curriculum. However, the ministry official we spoke with mentioned that teachers could naturally bring contentious and global issues into the classroom through their current events units.

**Provincial-level curriculum support and resources**

Provincial-level support for teachers is mostly found within the Integrated Resource Package (IRP), which gathers learning outcomes, instruction and evaluation suggestions, and learning resources into one document. Aside from the support offered in the IRP, the role of the ministry of education is seen as providing occasional financial support for the introduction of new courses and funding workshops. The funding provided directly to the district is allocated on the basis of the district’s priorities. According to the participant, it is the district level that decides on the various professional development days and the workshops provided.

The ministry also develops and evaluates teaching resources that teachers have the option to use. In addition to the formal curriculum and teaching resources, the participant noted that information sharing was done through the ministry’s website, and that a bi-weekly newsletter called Education Info contains news of any new developments.

The participant noted a lack of print resources available for global education. Although the Internet enabled children and teachers to have greater access to education and resources, the participant was cautious about the information being “reputable or accurate.” This concern for the integrity of electronic sources was mentioned by informants in other provinces too.

The participant emphasized the lack of time for the classroom teacher to implement global education when there was so much emphasis on literacy and numeracy. The interviewee expressed, “There is so much that is deemed of import in education, and everyone wants a piece of the pie.”

**Partnerships and informal curriculum**

The ministry official we interviewed was not aware of any sustained partnerships between the ministry and NGOs or community groups. The official referred to a video from World Vision, which was used for the higher grades. The respondent also noted that the United Nations website link was included in the ministry’s
website. Students’ leadership efforts were noted with approval. The official also stated that UNICEF was “in the public eye. It’s huge!” and gave an example of canvassing for public donations for the following year.

The participant thought informal global education activities were more likely to occur in the independent schools, based on the interest and motivation of the principals, teachers, parents and students. The official expressed the difference that individual teachers can make; that one needs “passionate people, and then it will fly on its own.” The participant indicated, however, that there was likely more going on than the participant was aware of, given that his/her position was not in direct contact with the schools.

Interestingly, several websites at the provincial level offered informal global education activities. The British Columbia Teachers Federation (BCTF) hosted a “Global Education” website that included ten different lesson plans for kindergarten-Grade 7, which had been developed by BC teachers, and had direct links to the formal curriculum. In addition, the BCTF has two specialists’ associations that link to global education. The Peace and Global Education (PAGE) association represents 2 per cent of elementary teachers; while the second association, the BC Social Studies Teachers Association (BCSSTA), represents almost 40 per cent of secondary school teachers, but has limited elementary representation. The BCSSTA website lists several global education-related projects, as well as a 2006 conference titled “Canada’s Role in the Global Community.” Separate from the BCTF “Global Education” website, British Columbian districts, teachers, universities and organizations have managed to obtain funding from the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) for five Global Classroom Initiatives.

These initiatives suggest that much more may be happening in the area of global education than the ministry is aware of - including activities at the local, district and provincial levels.

Advice from educators for external partners

Our ministry informant emphasized that external partners need to become more visible and synchronized with the ministry of education. This includes being cognizant of the provincial curriculum developers’ timeline, and working directly with the curriculum publishers, in order to insert resources on global education into the formal curriculum. It was also suggested that NGOs should contact the provincial specialist associations, such as the BCSSTA. In addition, NGOs have the opportunity to develop partnerships directly with schools for courses such as the new Grade 11 Civics.

Summary

Global education does not feature explicitly in the BC Grades 4-6 formal curriculum, but elements of the global education ideal type appear throughout. Attention is paid to global citizenship and human rights, critical thinking, tolerance, and respect for diversity. The curriculum also includes environmental issues but these are often in tension with support for global trade and competitiveness. Although “active citizenship” is described as a goal of the curriculum, we found little evidence of it.

The fact that global education is not explicitly mentioned in the Grades 4-6 curriculum may have to do with the organizing principles of the kindergarten-Grade 12 Social Studies curriculum. This curriculum follows a more traditional approach to Social Studies, moving from knowledge of self and local community before branching out to the wider world. This view seems to be supported by the BC ministry, which concentrates most of its global education efforts at the secondary level.

At the provincial level, there are several further constraints. The emphasis on strengthening numeracy and literacy in the schools has led to less time for other aspects of education. As well, there are fewer people currently working in the ministry of education, leading to a need to prioritize more pressing issues.
several of the other cases, the integration of global education into the classroom is viewed at the provincial level as something that is appropriately left to the discretion of individual teachers.

ENDNOTES:

1 Unless otherwise noted, the data presented in this table is available from the Government of British Columbia (n.d.).
3 British Columbia Ministry of Education (2005b)
5 A list of partners can be found in Appendix E of British Columbia Ministry of Education(1998).
6 The official noted that this approach was in line with the Social Studies component of the Western Canadian Protocol for Collaboration.