

DOMINION INSTITUTE / IPSOS-REID

ANALYSIS OF SURVEY FINDINGS

Methodology

The survey was conducted by Ipsos-Reid via mail between March 29th to April 30th, 2001. The results were then compiled in July and August 2001. The poll's scheduled release was delayed by the events of September 11. The survey sample consists of 766 heads of high school (including CEGEP in Québec) history departments from across Canada. The results are considered accurate to within ± 3.6 percentage points, 19 times out of 20, of what they would have been had the entire population of Canadian heads of high school history departments been poll. The margin of error will be larger within regions and for other sub-groupings of the survey population. These data are statistically weighted to ensure the sample reflects the regional distribution of Canadian high schools across the country.

This poll is the final component of a three-part research study into the teaching of Canadian history in schools. The research began in November 2000, with a series of four focus groups with high school history/social studies teachers. The result of a nation wide survey of 1000 Canadians on the teaching of history was released in September 2001. The history teacher's survey is the largest of its kind ever conducted in Canada.

Overview

This survey explores five themes related to the teaching of Canadian history in high schools and CEGEPs.

1. Support for the establishment of national guidelines for teaching history, stakeholders that should be involved in this process and likelihood to use a voluntary national history exam;
2. Opinions about provincial curricula including the amount of flexibility, themes and balance;
3. Opinions on educational resources available to teachers;
4. Teachers' educational philosophy and their assessment of the goals of teaching history; and
5. Assumptions regarding what historical knowledge and facts about Canada students should learn in high school.

National Guidelines

- There is a high degree of consensus (91%) among history/social studies teachers that it is important for students from across Canada to acquire the same body of historical facts and knowledge. This includes a majority of teachers (51%) who say that it is "very important" and four in ten (40%) who say that it is "somewhat important".
- Clearly teachers are on the same page (though to a slightly lesser degree) as Canadian public on this issue. Fully 96% of Canadians said that it is important for students from across Canada to learn the same body of historical facts and knowledge.

- Nearly nine in ten (87%) teachers say they would support their province participating in the development of national guidelines for the teaching of Canadian history. Once again, teachers feel strongly about this with 48% saying they would “strongly support” this initiative and a further 39% who would “somewhat support” it. Teachers from Québec are least likely (74%) to support their province participating in the development of national guidelines, while teachers from Alberta (95%) are most likely to support their province’s participation in this endeavour.
- The primary reason teachers give for supporting national guidelines is “to promote national unity” (17%) followed by “all students should learn the same things about Canada” (15%) and “teach all Canadians about our history/culture” (13%). Those who oppose national guideline do so on the basis that “regional history is more important” (17%), “standards should not neglect regional history” and “we have nothing in common with other provinces” (12%) – an opinion expressed by teachers from Québec.
- Assuming the provinces were to agree to national guidelines, teachers say that on average 54% of each province’s curriculum should be common across the country. This is slightly lower than the average percentage of each province’s curriculum that Canadian public said should be common (60%) across the country.
- In the development of a pan-Canadian approach to teaching history, there are many stakeholders that history teachers say are important to have involved. For each group tested, a majority of teachers say the involvement of each stakeholder is important. The one exception being non-governmental organisations (48%). Provincial teachers' associations (93%) receive the highest number of mentions saying it is important that they be involved. Provincial ministries come second at 81% followed by university academics (77%). Farther down the list, one in seven (70%) say it is important that students be involved and a similar number (69%), say it is important that the Council of Ministers of Education be involved. Despite education being a provincial jurisdiction, six in ten (61%) of those surveyed say that it is important that the federal government be involved. On a similar note, 81% of Canadian public agreed that the federal government should have a “strong role” in setting national standards.
- More than two thirds (69%) of high school history teachers say they would be likely to use a voluntary national history exam as an assessment tool in their history or social studies classes. About three in ten (28%) say they would be “very likely” while four in ten (41%) say they would be “somewhat likely” to use a voluntary exam.
- Finally, a majority (56%) of teachers would support their province introducing mandatory testing in history and social studies. This is considerably lower than the national average of 73% of Canadian public (September 2001 poll) who said that they would support the introduction of mandatory testing of students.

Provincial Curriculum and Policies

- Generally speaking, history teachers (46%) report that at least half of the teachers in their province have a university degree in history. Ontario has the highest proportion of history teachers with a university degree in history. Four in ten (40%) teachers say that

3/4 or more of that province's history teachers have a university degree in history. The situation is reversed in Atlantic Canada where 51% of teachers say that less than half of the history teachers in their province have a university degree in history.

- Teachers are split (44% say yes, 46% say no) as to whether it should be mandatory for all history and social studies teachers in their province to have a university degree in history. There is tremendous regional variation on this issue. Teachers from Québec (76%) are most likely to say that a university degree in history should be mandatory while Alberta teachers are on the other end of the spectrum - 71% say that it *should not* be mandatory.
- The number of professional development days teachers spend on history varies widely from region to region. The national average is 10.5 days but responses vary from a low of 2.5 days in Atlantic Canada to a high of 22 days in Québec.
- Teachers are generally satisfied with most areas of their province's curriculum. Overall, three quarters (76%) of teachers say they are satisfied with their province's curriculum. This satisfaction is not strong with only 9% saying that they are "very satisfied" and 67% saying they are "somewhat satisfied". Teachers in Ontario (66%) and Atlantic Canada (67%) are less satisfied with their curricula than teachers in other regions.

More specifically, teachers are relatively more satisfied on aspects such as facts and chronology, the breadth of content and clear learning outcomes and generally less satisfied on items such as feedback mechanisms, evaluation tools and pedagogy. The table below shows teachers' satisfaction on each aspect:

	% very satisfied	% satisfied
Facts and chronology	19%	78%
Breadth of the content	18%	74%
Clear learning outcomes	21%	72%
Structure	12%	70%
Autonomy	25%	69%
Support material available	13%	66%
Flexibility	19%	65%
Pedagogy	10%	62%
Evaluation tools	9%	56%
Feedback mechanisms	3%	37%

- Provincial curricula are clearly influential when it comes to the day-to-day decisions teachers make in the classroom. Fifty percent of history teachers say their provincial curriculum has influence (rate 8, 9 or 10 out of 10) while only 8% say the curriculum does not have influence (rate 1, 2 or 3). Forty-one percent say the provincial curriculum has some influence (rate 4, 5, 6 or 7) on the day-to-day decisions they make. Teachers in Alberta (65%) are most likely to say their provincial curriculum influences their decisions while teachers from Atlantic Canada (38%) are least likely to say that their provincial curriculum has influence on their day to day decisions.

- A comparison of the weight currently accorded to local, regional, national and world history in the curriculum and teachers' preferred weight for these subjects shows that

overall they would like to see more local history and less national history. Currently teachers say their curriculum is weighted 48% towards national history, 32% towards world history, 16% to regional history and 8% to local history. Ideally teachers say they would prefer to see the proportion of national history drop somewhat to 41%, world and regional history stay relatively unchanged (at 31% and 17% respectively) and to see the proportion of local history to rise to 13%. This trend is consistent across all regions.

- Six in ten (62%) teachers say their province's curriculum strikes the right balance between chronology versus themes and subjects. A majority (57%) of the 28% of teachers who do not think the right balance is being struck say more emphasis should be placed on chronology while 40% say more emphasis should be on themes and subjects.
- Teachers (76%) report that their provincial curriculum is specific in terms of setting out a series of specific historical people, events and themes for each history or social studies course. Most (60%) say their curriculum is "somewhat specific" while one in six (16%) say their provincial curriculum is "very specific". Teachers in Ontario (84%) are most likely to say that their provincial curriculum is specific.

Educational Resources

- Out of a list of five educational resources, the traditional tools are most used while newer mediums are starting to take a foothold. Fully 83% of teachers say they use textbooks either "a great deal" (37%) or "a fair amount" (46%) in their history and social studies classes. Next on the list comes "traditional lecturing" (72%) and "videos and film" (72%). In terms of the use of newer media "the Internet" is used by four in ten (38%) while "interactive CD ROMs" are used by less than one in ten (7%).

Educational Philosophy

- Teachers' attitudes towards teaching history reveal their philosophical orientations. Teachers are divided (53% agree, 45% disagree) over whether it is "more important to teach students about social history than it is to teach them about political and military history." They are much more in agreement (70% agree, 20% disagree) that "a good history teacher will focus primarily on historical themes and subjects that are relevant to students today". Alberta is a bit of an anomaly. It is the only province where less than a majority (44%) of teachers says it is more important to teach students about social history.
- Three quarters (73%) of teachers agree that "history courses should be specifically designed to foster a student's sense of national identity". A slightly smaller number (68%) say "when it comes to the study of Canadian history, we should focus more on what we share in common instead of what divides us". History teachers in Québec are on the whole in agreement with both of these statements but are much more divided. Fifty percent agree (47% disagree) that history courses should be designed specifically to foster a student's sense of national identity. Similarly, 52% agree (45% disagree)

that in teaching Canadian history, we should focus more on what we share in common as opposed to what divides us.

- Teachers are clear that critical thinking skills are more important to learn than facts. In all, 78% agree that “when it comes to history education, learning critical thinking skills is more important than mastering a body of factual knowledge”.
- On the teaching side of the equation, teachers have similar views. Eighty-two percent disagree that “teaching my students a body of historical knowledge is more important to me than teaching them critical thinking skills.” Teachers in Québec (90%) are more likely than teachers in other provinces to say that it is more important for students to learn critical thinking skills than mastering a body of factual knowledge.
- Only one in five (19%) teachers believes that history is taught better in their province than in any other. Québecers are much more bold with one third (34%) saying that history is taught better in their province than in any other. Most teachers (67%) simply say they “don’t know”.
- Eight in ten (80%) say they would “support the development of national guidelines for the teaching of Canadian history”. In Québec, the figure is much lower but still two thirds (64%) of teachers in that province say they would support national guidelines.
- Six in ten (61%) teachers agree that “not enough is being done to teach students about veterans’ contributions to Canada”. This sentiment is much less pronounced in Québec (52%) and BC (51%).
- Given teachers’ philosophical orientation, it is perhaps not surprising that “developing critical thinking skills” emerges as the number one goal of teaching history and social studies. In all, 77% of teachers say this is a “very important” goal of teaching history. Next, at 64% “very important”, is “developing research skills” followed by “developing citizenship skills” (59% “very important”). Other goals such as “revealing injustices” (34% “very important”), “learning historical facts” (22% “very important”) and “inculcating patriotism” (11% “very important”) are considered relatively less important.

Great Historical Events

- The top three events (defined broadly) in Canada’s past that history teachers feel are most important to teach their students about are: “Canada at war” (48%), “Confederation” (46%), and “modern Canada (1867-2001)” (19%).
- History teachers from Québec are much different. Their top three most important historical events are: Conquest of 1760 (51% , 15% nationally), Québec nationalism (38%, 18% nationally) and Confederation (36%, 46% nationally).
- When it comes to most important historical events, the Canadian public is of a similar mind as the teachers. Their top choice to teach Canadian students about is Confederation (27%), followed by Canada’s involvement in the First and Second World Wars (12%) and the patriation of the Canadian constitution (7%).

DOMINION INSTITUTE

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Commenting on the survey results, the Dominion Institute's executive director, Rudyard Griffiths made the following policy recommendations:

In light of teacher support for standards, we are calling on the Council of Ministers of Education to convene an expert group of academics and classroom teachers to develop National standards for history education in Canada.

- Every G9 country except Canada has national standards for history education
- As the survey indicates, teachers overwhelmingly support (87%) the concept of national history standards, including 74% of Quebec residents
- Teachers also largely agree on what events are important in Canada's past. This cultural consensus suggests that an agreement could be reached as to what people, places and events should be featured in National History Standards
- Council of Ministers of Education (CMEC) is ideally suited to be the catalyst for the development and implementation of National History Standards
- CMEC has already developed national assessment standards for math, reading and writing, and sciences. History standards would be the next logical step for the CMEC to broaden inter-provincial and inter-governmental cooperation on education standards

We are calling on the six provinces that do not require high school students to take at least one course dedicated to the study of Canadian history to reverse this shameful policy and introduce at least one mandatory Canadian history course.

- Currently only four provinces (PEI, QC, ON & MN) require students to take at least one course dedicated to the study of Canadian history to graduate from high school
- Understanding the link between collective memory and identity, Quebec is considering requiring high school students to take two mandatory Canadian history courses
- 83% of the Canadian public agree (of which 54% 'strongly agree') that high school students should be required to take at least two Canadian history courses

For explanations and further comment, contact the Institute's executive director, Rudyard Griffiths (see end of this release for contact information).

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