

Recent Developments in the Teaching of Local Studies in the Maritimes: An Overview

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Recent Developments in the Teaching of Local Studies in the Maritimes: an Overview

During the 1970s a renewed awareness of the history and culture of the Maritime Provinces has become increasingly evident in elementary and secondary schools throughout these provinces.¹ Some of the feelings and attitudes associated with this development are expressed in a letter written by a Halifax teacher a few years ago:

My course is really coming together. I am so wrapped up in it that I can think of little else. Our examinations ended at the end of November and since then I've been doing a . . . history of Nova Scotia settlement. We finished off in a whirlwind with the settlement of Halifax and the establishment of a fort at the head of the Bedford Basin at the mouth of the tiny Sackville River. This brings the kids to something they have never studied — the establishment of the Bedford, Waverley, Sackville area. I've planned urban development to begin in January so we'll be able to apply present principles to a historical background simultaneously. I'm really anxious for it to begin.²

Similar enthusiasm is felt by teachers in other parts of the Maritimes. A teacher from Souris, P.E.I., made the following informal comments recently:

We are currently working on projects on pioneer folklore, customs, and lifestyles . . . We are also trying to put together a slide-sound package on fishing in our area (fishing methods, sailors — local and American, boat building, fishing songs and sagas, architecture, and lifestyle).

1 This phenomenon is occurring in Newfoundland-Labrador as well. In the 1970s six teams of teachers and students there have been developing locally based materials under the auspices of the Canada Studies Foundation. During my two visits to Newfoundland in this period I have spoken with several teachers who have independently initiated work in local studies and I have corresponded with several more. I suspect that much of what is said in this article is also true in Newfoundland-Labrador, but I have excluded discussion of this province not because I believe there is little happening there in local studies, but because I have too little knowledge to include accurate descriptions of what is happening.

2 Paul Gouett in letter to the author, 23 December 1974.

* Henceforth the Education section will be a recurring feature in *Acadiensis* and will present news and reviews of educational developments in the field of local studies.—*Editor's note.*

We put together a program for the whole school for Heritage Day. . . . We . . . had a frolic in the gym with the whole school singing local folk songs — boy, what a roof-raiser!³

A teacher from Sackville, N. B., wrote that "My students . . . have done research on various aspects of folklore. . . . [They]. . . have done original collecting and transcribing wherever possible. They were given three weeks to go off privately and work. . . . The system has worked very well and some students are very enthusiastic."⁴ From Hartland, N. B.⁵, to Wood's Harbour, Shelburne County, N.S.⁶, teachers are trying to make curricula more relevant to the lives of their students by using their communities both as the subject matter of study and as a source of teaching resources.

Other than this interest in teaching local studies and a willingness to do more preparation and planning for their teaching than is normally required, the teachers involved in this trend in Maritime education share few common characteristics. Over the past four years the Atlantic Institute of Education has been in contact with a group of teachers and other educators from the Atlantic Provinces who are interested in the teaching of local studies. This group, now numbering about 350 and known simply as the Local Studies Group, were sent questionnaires in early 1975. One of the most remarkable things revealed by the answers was the diversity of the teachers who responded. Of those teaching junior or senior high school, most were teaching social studies, but some were specializing in subjects as varied as geography, French, English, music, and industrial arts. Of those respondents who taught many or all subjects, most were elementary teachers, but a few taught at small secondary schools. The group included new teachers and teachers with years of experience; native Maritimers and immigrant Maritimers; anglophones and francophones; teachers from city schools and teachers from rural schools; and, men and women.⁷

A number of those now active in teaching local studies have at some time either been in contact with or participated in the work of the Canada Studies Foundation's eastern component, Project Atlantic Canada. The Canada Studies Foundation was incorporated in 1970 in response to the report of the

3 Lloyd Soloman in letter to the author, 15 March 1976.

4 Reg Porter in letter to the author, 24 April 1975.

5 See Audrey Barss, *The Americans in Our Midst: What Can They Tell Us?* (New Brunswick Canada Studies Foundation, Fredericton, n.d.).

6 See Betty Cameron, "Wood's Harbour—Fishing Community", *Lighthouse*, vol. 3, no. 2 (Spring, 1976), pp. 31-38.

7 Mary Fredrickson, ed., *Guide to the Members of the Local Studies Group* (Atlantic Institute of Education, Halifax, 1975).

National History Project. Its broad purpose was to involve people from different levels of the educational system in developing curricula which would help "give Canadian students a better understanding of themselves and other Canadians."⁸ Canada was divided up into regional projects each of which had a theme of both regional and national significance. Regional projects were further divided into teams of educators who would work on a more local aspect of the regional theme. Selected educators from the Maritime Provinces, as well as from Newfoundland-Labrador, became part of Project Atlantic Canada which began to be funded by the Foundation in June, 1972. The theme of Project Atlantic Canada was "regionalism and cultural diversity."⁹ Anglophone teachers from New Brunswick became part of a provincial division, and those from Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island became part of another two-province division. Francophone teachers from all four Atlantic Provinces became part of a division called *Projet des francophones de l'Atlantique* (PROFAT). These three divisions, as well as the anglophone division of Newfoundland-Labrador, have usually worked independently over the past four years, although a joint meeting of the anglophone groups was held at Mount Allison University in August, 1973, and a meeting of all of Project Atlantic Canada was held in conjunction with the annual meeting of the Canadian Association for the Social Studies at Mount Allison in August, 1974.¹⁰

The work of the Canada Studies Foundation that has most directly affected the thinking of Maritime classroom teachers has not been done at the national, regional, or provincial levels.¹¹ It has been done by the most articulate and determined of the local teams which make up the provincial divisions and PROFAT. There were about twenty-eight of these local teams in the Maritimes, some of which were comprised of only one or two dedicated teachers

8 *The Canada Studies Foundation Directory of Secretariat and Projects* (n.p.,n.d.).

9 *Canada Studies Foundation Annual Report* (1973), p.17.

10 *C.S.F. Annual Report* (1974), p.12.

11 In fact a continuing concern has been that the work of some educators involved in the Canada Studies Foundation has ignored the Foundation's commitment to better national understanding. I made the following comment in my report to the Atlantic Institute of Education after I attended the conference at Mount Allison in 1973:

There seemed to be concern that the curriculum units be developed so that they could be used in other parts of Canada. One idea behind the C.S.F. program is that curricula developed under their auspices be of both regional and national significance. As Dr. George Tomkins said, teachers get so involved in their own local communities that they forget to relate their work to the rest of Canada. Some teachers . . . felt that the immediate involvement of their students in their own communities was more important than the broader perspective.

during most of their working existence. The teams designed curriculum materials and developed teaching strategies around topics like "The Effects of the Atlantic on the Shore Communities of Nova Scotia", "Port Hawksbury, A Small Town and Industrialization", "The Shelburne Loyalists", "Caraquet: Village Acadien", "Etude d'un village agricole: Ste-Marie-de-Kent", "Bathurst: The Study of a Town Based on Resource Industries", and "Moncton: Family Lifestyles in a Bilingual Community." The methods used in approaching these studies were as varied as the study topics and the people involved. The Sackville, N.S. project, "Dartmouth, 1871", is an example of one of the most academically rigorous projects. For the past three years classes at Sackville High School under the leadership of John Grant and Doug Hill have been exploring the use of techniques in quantitative history in the secondary school curriculum. They have gathered massive amounts of information about Dartmouth, N.S., much of which has been coded on data cards which are kept for every resident in Dartmouth in 1871. From this information they are also developing materials which will make it possible for other students to raise and answer questions about regionalism and cultural diversity in a nineteenth-century Maritime city. In contrast to this is the Hartland, N.B., project which was much more contemporary in content and which relied heavily on oral history techniques. *The Americans in Our Midst: What Can They Tell Us?* was the work of Audrey Barss and her students. The core of it was interviews with some of the influx of American immigrants who had come into this border community between 1967 and 1972.

Another organization which was devoted in part to encouraging the teaching of local studies was the Lighthouse Learning Project of the Atlantic Institute of Education. Established in 1971, the Lighthouse Project had as its objective to give support, encouragement, and regional publicity to innovative teachers in the Atlantic Provinces. Often the teachers identified by the Project were teaching or were interested in teaching local studies. In May, 1973, the first of three small conferences attended by people who wanted to share ideas about the teaching of local studies was held at the Institute. Some of the teachers who came were already involved with the Canada Studies Foundation and others had been awarded professional development grants from their teachers' associations or provincial departments of education to work in local studies.¹² Many, however, were developing local studies curricula independently and they were sometimes surprised to discover at this meeting, and at two subsequent meetings held in April, 1974, and October, 1974, that there were other teachers doing similar work. Twice at these meetings a teacher mentioned that he had been inspired by the recently published

12 For example, during the 1972-73 school year, the Nova Scotia Teachers' Union awarded \$139,000 to teachers who wanted to develop special programs. About \$17,000 of this was given to projects relating to local studies.

The Foxfire Book, only to discover that others in the group had read the book and had been influenced by it.¹³

Out of these small, often exuberant, exchanges developed the beginnings of the Local Studies Group. From 1973 through 1975, the Lighthouse Learning Project's field workers identified other teachers who were then added to the Group's mailing list. Lighthouse staff also encouraged the teaching of local studies through teacher workshops and personal contact with interested individuals. The Institute's journal, *Lighthouse*, began regularly to include articles about the teaching of local studies and in the spring of 1976 devoted an entire issue to local studies.¹⁴ Throughout this period several staff members of the Nova Scotia Museum became interested in the Group, particularly by its members' often expressed need for information about how to understand local history and culture through the interpretation of artifacts. In the summer of 1974 the Museum, through the Nova Scotia Teachers' Summer School, offered a workshop course for teachers, "The Folk History of Nova Scotia", which examined the lives of ordinary people in seventeenth and eighteenth-century Nova Scotia through the artifacts they had left.¹⁵

At the May, 1973, conference most of the people who were not from Prince Edward Island heard about the Island History Project for the first time. The Project developed from a proposal made by Harry Baglole and David Weale to the Prince Edward Island Department of Education in December, 1972, which outlined a comprehensive course in Island history designed to utilize the resources of the students' own communities and families in the course of study.¹⁶ In the following year it was established as a course option in all Island high schools. The Island History Project is more than simply another high school course. Because the kind of teaching it advocates asks the teacher to act as a resource person knowledgeable in local resources, the community often becomes involved in the teaching-learning process. It could be argued that much of the community of Prince Edward Island has been influenced by the Project. For example, the Prince Edward Island Heritage Foundation in cooperation with the Project has begun to produce classroom materials about the Island.¹⁷ The Confederation Players produced a play, "Benjamin Chappell's

13 See Eliot Wigginton, ed., *The Foxfire Book* (New York, 1972). This is a collection of articles about life in the backwoods of Georgia written by high school students who lived there and edited by their teacher.

14 *Lighthouse*, vol. 3, no. 2 (Spring, 1976).

15 Mary Fredrickson, "The Folk History of Nova Scotia", *Lighthouse*, vol. 2, no. 2 (Winter, 1975), pp. 20-21.

16 Harry Baglole, "Proposal and Outline: A High School Course in Prince Edward Island History" (unpublished, 1972), p. 1.

17 In 1974 the Foundation published three packages of facsimile documents, *Agriculture*, *Fisheries*, and *Shipbuilding*, compiled and edited by Wayne E. MacKinnon.

Book", based on the eighteenth-century diary of an Island settler. It was a prototype designed to demonstrate how documents could be explored with drama within the confinement of a classroom. During the summer of 1975 the University of Prince Edward Island offered the course "Teaching Island History."

The question of why there has been this substantial recent demonstration of interest in teaching the history and culture of the Maritimes is a complicated one. To try to provide a complete answer now would only result in presumptuous failure, but it is possible to suggest some of its components. One direct cause of projects like those conducted by the Canada Studies Foundation and an indirect cause of many others was the increased consciousness of our heritage which came with the national centennial. Another factor was the changing role of teachers.¹⁸ Teachers are now often encouraged to act as resource consultants. The logical outcome for many history teachers is that they move away from a dependence on traditional history texts which have tended to present history in the most general terms for uncontroversial classroom use. In the Maritimes dissatisfaction with such texts is compounded by the feeling that the Maritime Provinces are often portrayed inaccurately or are given too little mention. In his proposal to the Prince Edward Island Department of Education, Harry Baglole pointed out:

At the present time there is very little in the school curriculum which deals with Prince Edward Island. Most, if not all, our textbooks are imported, as are T.V. and radio programs and magazines. It should therefore not be thought unreasonable — or overly "provincial" — to have one course in the high school curriculum devoted to Island affairs. In addition the present trend in Canadian historiography is toward regional histories. A centralist interpretation of Island history is both misleading and inaccurate — not to mention the fact that it is a rarity to find a textbook on Canadian history in which more than one page in one hundred is devoted to the Island.¹⁹

Instead of relying on textbooks, teachers of local studies usually encourage students to learn about the historian's work by asking them to do it on a local level. James P. Milligan explained in his course proposal to the Halifax County School Board:

Local history allows more investigation of the historical method. The location and analysis of primary sources, the interviewing of local resource people, the cooperation necessary to correlate information, all

18 See W. B. Hamilton, "Structuring a Program in Local History", *The History and Social Science Teacher*, vol. X, no. 2 (Winter, 1974), pp. 3-4.

19 Baglole, "Proposal", p. 2.

of this and more will give students . . . insight into the trials and triumphs historians face. Surely this first-hand contact will be more valuable than anything they are told or are forced to read.²⁰

Teachers, particularly history teachers, are becoming increasingly conscious that the story of the past should be more than history in the great tradition: that is, of momentous events like wars and acts of parliament and of the men involved in these events. The introduction to a history sometimes used by local studies teachers and produced under the auspices of Opportunities for Youth puts it this way: "This is the story of the working people of Cape Breton. It is not your usual kind of history. It is not about kings and queens, explorers, adventurers, politicians, and prime ministers. It is the history of the common people of Cape Breton."²¹ The development of this consciousness is connected to recent broad changes in social thinking which have come about with the women's movement and the concern for the civil rights of minority groups. It allows teachers and students to look at curricula and textbooks with the critical realization that, except in statistical terms, not much is said about the people who were the ancestors of most of us: women, workers, Blacks, Indian peoples, Acadians, etc. This awareness has been specifically encouraged by organizations representing some of these groups, like the Nova Scotia Human Rights Commission, which has published an analysis of prejudice in the textbooks used in Nova Scotia and also a booklet for students on the history of Nova Scotia's Blacks.²² It has been heightened by the work of the provincial museums whose job it is to collect, preserve, and interpret artifacts which are the main part of the record left to us by these people. In the 1970s the Nova Scotia and New Brunswick Museums and the Prince Edward Island Heritage Foundation have been actively translating their work into booklets and multi-media kits which they make available to the schools through their extension services. All of these factors have combined to make teachers aware that history in the little tradition, the history of ordinary people, must also be included in the course of study. The easiest way to add this dimension is to study one's own community where the sources of information are most accessible.

Another reason for the trend toward local studies which should be noted, because it is often mentioned by teachers themselves, is the growing disenchantment with large, regional schools. Small communities have suffered

20 James P. Milligan, "Proposal for a Course in Local History", *Social Studies Review*, vol. 4, no. 8 (Sept., 1973), p. 4.

21 *The People's History of Cape Breton* (Halifax, 1971).

22 Nova Scotia Human Rights Commission, *Textbook Analysis: Nova Scotia* (Halifax, 1974) and *Pictorial on Black History: Nova Scotia* (Halifax, n.d.).

greatly by the removal of local schools which were often at the centre of their social as well as educational life. Their students, who were supposed to be the beneficiaries of regionalization, now have a home life completely separated from their school life by as much as three hours of bus travel.²³ Since home life experiences have little credibility in the distant classrooms, some teachers see local studies as an opportunity to re-establish the links between home and school.

One result of the current interest in local studies which is occurring already is increased official acceptance of local studies as part of provincial curricula. Until recently, unless special permission was granted, the only officially acceptable place for local studies was at the grade five or six level when the history of one's province was studied. With the advent of a new social studies curriculum in New Brunswick, the establishment of a Local Studies Task Force under the Nova Scotia Department of Education, and the implementation of the Island History Project, the opportunities for doing local studies within prescribed curricula have been broadened.

The interest in local studies is also encouraging the integration of subject matter since it is difficult to study a microcosm without blurring subject boundaries. As one teacher commented, "The children were doing science work, math work, art work, mapping, language arts — all from one program — which might be labelled social studies so you were breaking down some of those barriers that exist when information gets to be slotted into different areas."²⁴ Similar sentiments were expressed in James P. Milligan's course proposal: "There is bound to be some crossover into other subject areas, especially economics and geography, but possibly even home economics and industrial arts."²⁵ Evidence of this growing inter-disciplinary interest in local studies could be seen in the popularity of the course, "Teaching Local Studies", offered at Mount Allison University last summer. The workshop course was advertised as an examination of local teaching resources divided into four week-long sessions devoted to the study of written resources, human resources, flora and fauna, and artifacts of a community. It had the largest enrollment of any course offered during the 1976 summer session.

One of the ironies of the recent activity in the teaching of local studies is that although teachers often became involved because they were tired of using textbooks, a number of books designed for their use are being published as a result — but they are usually different from the old style text. In 1974 W. B. Hamilton provided teachers and students in the Atlantic Region with

23 Some of the students travelling to the regional high school in my own area, Sackville, N.B., commute more than eighty miles every day.

24 Ann Brimer, "Parents as Teachers", *Lighthouse*, vol. 3, no. 2 (Spring, 1976), p. 18.

25 Milligan, "Proposal", p. 5.

the first book written for them as an aid to local studies. *Local History in Atlantic Canada* was emphatically not to be used like an ordinary textbook: "Full responsibility is placed on the teacher and student to select, to adapt, and to organize the material as may best suit their purpose. Portions not applicable to one part of the region may well be omitted, while others with local relevance will require greater stress. Everyone who uses this book is encouraged to develop an individual syllabus."²⁶ Although in 1975 the Lighthouse Learning Project came to an end, it was replaced by the Lighthouse Centre for the Development of Learning Resources. The emphasis of this new branch of the Atlantic Institute of Education was placed on the production of learning materials and one of the first things produced by it was a guide to resources and ideas that would be useful to teachers of local studies.²⁷ Harry Baglole, after successfully launching the Island History Project, is now using the information he collected in the process to compile a book of resources and teaching strategies for people teaching or learning about Island history.²⁸ The first phase of the Canada Studies Foundation's work came to a close in June, 1975, but the Foundation has now begun Phase II which is, in part, devoted to disseminating materials developed during Phase I. Some of these materials are being published. One example is that of the work of the largest PROFAT team, which is now available in the form of *Atlas de l'Acadie*, a source book of information previously unavailable to Acadian teachers and students.²⁹

Another result of this trend may not be fully felt for a few years and so, at this time, it is a prediction. It seems reasonable to assume that this activity in the public school systems will produce a generation keenly aware of and, hopefully, interested in Maritime history and culture. Some of this generation will have an impact on the teaching of history at the university level. It is not that local studies courses are usually only offered to a university-bound elite; this is rarely the case. However, some of the students involved in these local studies courses will attend university and they will take history. As was argued in one course proposal:

This could be a challenging and rewarding course from a purely *academic* point of view. Students should be encouraged to study and make use of primary sources, and thus to gain insights into the intellectual skills of the historian. The type of inquisitiveness and open frame of mind which this should engender would be an ideal preparation for university work.³⁰

26 William B. Hamilton, *Local History in Atlantic Canada* (Toronto, 1974), p. xi.

27 Mary Fredrickson, *Local Studies* (Halifax, 1976).

28 Harry Baglole in letters to the author, 1, 27 April, 11 June 1976.

29 PROFAT, *Atlas de l'Acadie* (Moncton, 1976).

30 Baglole, "Proposal", p.2.

Not only will they be well prepared, they will also probably be adventurous in their attitudes toward teaching and learning history. They will not be willing to accept a curriculum based solely on lectures and assigned readings. They will expect that history in the great tradition be taught in balance with the history of the common people. They will insist that tombstones, folklore, architectural styles, and even escaped garden and agricultural flora be admissible evidence in the classrooms of all university history departments, not just at the universities large enough to offer separate courses in archaeology, folklore, and art history. If these students do have the impact predicted here, a further outcome will be the reinforcement of the trends discussed in this article. History teachers, after all, are trained in universities.

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