

# Methodologically Historicizing Social Studies Education: Curricular Filtering and Historical Thinking as Social Studies Thinking

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Bryan Smith  
*York University*

## Abstract

This article explores the implementation of what the Ontario Ministry of Education (OME) calls “social studies thinking concepts” in its current social studies, history, and geography curriculum. As a six-part framework largely influenced by historical thinking, I argue that the OME, in essence, creates a context wherein historical thinking, beyond simply influencing social studies thinking, comes to largely conflate with social studies thinking through what I call a curricular filter, a process of including incompatible or incongruous ideas through more amenable language. I suggest that this is incongruent with the OME’s positioning of social studies as an integrated field and effectively denies social studies of its inherent interdisciplinary nature by privileging historically informed methods of inquiry.

*Keywords:* social studies thinking concepts, historical thinking, curricular filter, Ontario Ministry of Education

## **Résumé**

Cet article porte sur la place qu'accorde le ministère de l'Éducation de l'Ontario (MÉO) à ce qu'il désigne comme les « concepts de la pensée critique propres aux sciences sociales » dans son curriculum actuel en sciences sociales, en histoire et en géographie. L'auteur soutient que, dans son programme-cadre en six sections, qui est largement influencé par la pensée historique, le MÉO crée un contexte où la pensée historique ne se limite pas simplement à influencer la pensée propre aux sciences sociales, mais en vient de fait à assimiler la pensée en sciences sociales à travers ce que l'auteur appelle un filtre curriculaire, un processus qui consiste à inclure des idées incompatibles ou incongrues par le biais d'un vocabulaire plus souple. L'auteur estime que cette approche vient non seulement contredire le fait que le MÉO positionne les sciences sociales comme un domaine d'apprentissage intégré, mais également infirmer la nature interdisciplinaire inhérente aux sciences sociales en privilégiant des méthodes d'enquête propres à l'histoire.

*Mots-clés :* concepts de la pensée critique propres aux sciences sociales, pensée historique, filtre curriculaire, ministère de l'Éducation de l'Ontario

## Introduction

The six concepts of social studies thinking—significance, cause and consequence, continuity and change, patterns and trends, interrelationships, perspective—underpin all thinking and learning in social studies. (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013, p. 58)

Historians **establish historical significance**... Historians **use primary source evidence**... Historians **examine continuity and change**... Historians **analyze cause and consequence**... Historians **take historical perspective**... Historians **attempt to understand the ethical dimension** of history [emphasis in original]. (Seixas & Morton, 2013, pp. 5–6)

In 2013, the Ontario Ministry of Education (hereafter referred to as OME) released a revised social studies, history, and geography curriculum for students in Grades 1–8. In the summer leading up to the implementation of this curriculum revision, Deputy Minister of Education George Zegarac sent a memo to various stakeholders noting that the curriculum “review process was guided by research on new approaches specific to this discipline” (Zegarac, 2013, p. 1). One can reasonably assume that the new disciplinary thinking concepts in the curriculum, called “social studies thinking,” were developed through this review process given both their introduction to the curriculum and the work being done in educational scholarship to foster disciplinary specific pedagogical skills. These “social studies thinking concepts”—“significance, cause and consequence, continuity and change, patterns and trends, interrelationships, and perspective” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013, p. 13)—are designed to, as noted in the epigraph, “underpin all thinking and learning in social studies” (p. 58). What is particularly notable about Zegarac’s comment, and the curriculum more generally, is the positioning of these thinking concepts as “specific to *this* discipline” which positions these concepts as originating out of scholarship in social studies as a field<sup>1</sup> more broadly. However, these concepts

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1 I use the term *field* purposefully as social studies is comprised of multiple disciplines. Given that the term “field” offers an acknowledgement of the inherent multi-disciplinarity of social studies that “discipline” cannot, I think it is important to acknowledge that calling social studies a discipline fails to recognize that the field depends on the complex relationships between disciplines.

are ultimately rooted in and informed by the theoretical and pedagogical work done to advance historical thinking, the set of skills developed to help students explore the past in ways similar to professional historians (Lévesque, 2008; Seixas & Morton, 2013).

In this article, I argue that this introduction of “social studies thinking” is largely informed by historical thinking, circumscribing the type of possible inquiry in the social studies curriculum by framing it as largely historical in its methodological and pedagogical orientation. As a consequence, pedagogical and methodological possibilities afforded by other disciplines (such as, although not exclusively, geography) are precluded through their very absence. This is made possible through what I call “curricular filtering,” a process wherein one set of incongruent or incompatible ideas (historical thinking) is filtered through the language of another idea (social studies thinking) to make the original idea(s) appear more palatable or congruent with what is intended or desired (an applicable methodology for an integrated social studies). I begin by elaborating on the theory of curriculum filtering. To illustrate this, I discuss the methods of historical thinking and highlight how the OME adopts the principles of historical thinking as a method for all of social studies by filtering historical thinking through “social studies thinking.” I analyze the current revision of the social studies curriculum for elementary students in Ontario as a means of detailing the articulation of historical thinking through the curricular filter of social studies thinking. I conclude by exploring some implications for an integrated and multidisciplinary social studies in Ontario.<sup>2</sup>

## **Making Historical Thinking into Social Studies Thinking: Curricular**

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2 It's important to note that, although the argument outlined here pertains specifically to Ontario, similar introductions of historical thinking into social studies occurs elsewhere in Canada as well. For example, the British Columbia Ministry of Education (2016) notes that the province's renewed social studies curriculum standards “places greater emphasis on acquiring and developing key disciplinary thinking skills” which are centred on “six major historical and geographical thinking concepts: significance, evidence, continuity and change, cause and consequence, perspective, and ethical judgment” (para. 7). This is so amidst a curriculum that asks teachers to help students become aware of the environmental, economic, political, geographic and historic contexts necessary for informed citizenship.

## Filtering

Successful teaching is often framed as ensuring learning that conforms with expectations about knowledge. To teach history successfully, for example, is often to teach a particular history that not only speaks to a taken-for-granted conception of the past but one that mitigates and polices other interpretations of that very past. This can be seen in, for example, myopic and particular understandings of citizenship (Smith, 2014a, 2014b), resistance to privileging Aboriginal content (St. Denis, 2011), or tensions around negotiating multiple perspectives (den Heyer & Abbott, 2011). What ultimately underscores these tensions and resistances is the power of particular narratives that circulate with regularity, positioning one form of knowing as the way of being. Speaking specifically about history (something I would argue applies to each of the constituent disciplines in social studies), Stanley (2000) argues that the “grand narrative,” the discursive template that traces European colonial presence and espouses the unquestioned normalcy of Euro-Canadian political legitimacy,

is widely reproduced and *appears to explain the world as it is*. It is so much a part of “common sense” that for many people it has ceased to be a story about the past, but *has come to be the past itself* [emphasis added]. (p. 82)

What makes this successful delimitation of knowledge largely possible is the control over meaning itself that scholars such as Apple (2004) argue is central to the process of education. Content alone, however, is not powerful enough to frame and shape social imaginings; the process of generating these kinds of meanings that “come to be the past [/present/future] itself” (Stanley, 2000, p. 82) also works to circumscribe the realm of possible knowledge. For example, the scientific method, the often taken-for-granted method of scientific inquiry, limits the kinds and nature of knowledge knowable in science, which not only has consequences for the types of possible constructed understandings, but also for the types of people and cultures acknowledged and accepted in (re)conceptualizing the epistemological and methodological roots of science. The same kinds of discursive and methodological circumscription happens in social studies as well, but, unlike science, there is no “social studies method” that commands the same kind of intellectual or methodological hegemony as the scientific method. Yet, the OME, I will argue, has attempted to introduce a “social studies method” by incorporating a methodological approach

from one of its varied disciplines, history. On the face of it, such reimagining of historical method as a method for the field appears either to be a novel application of method to social studies pedagogy, or it would appear to reinscribe the powerful conflation of social studies and history that has persisted over the history of social studies in education (Broom, 2007; Dougan, 1989; Evans, 2004). In either case, to make historical thinking possible as a “social studies method,” work needs to be done to obscure and/or reframe the purely historical focus of historical thinking to make it a palatable method for social studies. This is accomplished through what I call a “curricular filter.”

**Curricular Filtering.** By curricular filtering, I refer to the idea that difficult, problematic, or incompatible ideas or methodological approaches can be introduced into pedagogical praxis through language or an interpretation of that language that might be more widely accepted, thus effectively obscuring the (potential) incompatibility of the original language or meaning. This filtering can happen in one of two ways:

1. A term/idea ( $A^{\text{original}}$ ) is retained for any of a variety of reasons (nostalgia, political/pedagogical utility, etc.) but given a new meaning/use despite some potential problems or limits. Here,  $A^{\text{original}}$  is filtered through itself,  $A^{\text{new}}$ , and  $A^{\text{new}}$  comes to be the preferred way of imagining and speaking about  $A$  broadly. For example, the popular use of the word “colonial” (see more detailed example below) where “colonial” is often not used to refer to the process of violent dispossession and dominance ( $A^{\text{original}}$ ) but rather, used to signify “colonial times” or something such as “colonial architecture” ( $A^{\text{new}}$ ).
2. A new term is introduced ( $B$ ) through which an incompatible or incongruent idea ( $A$ ) is filtered but the incompatible/incongruent idea ( $A$ ) is not necessarily abandoned or denied (although it may be imagined as incongruent). Instead, the new word ( $B$ ) filters the old term/idea to make it more suitable for one context all the while not actively denying that the original term/idea ( $A$ ) has utility elsewhere. For example, “social studies thinking” filters “historical thinking” and makes it palatable for social studies but such a process does not deny the utility of historical thinking elsewhere (explored in depth later).

**Curricular Filtering: The “Colonial” Example.** As an example of the first variant of curricular filtering at work, I offer up the following from my childhood as a student of history. When learning about the history of Canada, the phrase “colonial” was designated to signify the character of political formations that were intrinsically benevolent or, at their worst, non-violent. Colonial Canada, a place no longer in existence, displaced permanently to a past that has no mark on the present (except, for example, in the presence of “colonial style housing”), was home to the “intrepid pioneer” or the “brave explorer” from Britain or France who came to survive the brutality of an unforgiving landscape. Colonial times came to be a constituent part of the national mythology of innocence (Schick & St. Denis, 2005), a time in which “we” were seeking to forge new homes on lands occupied by Indigenous people who themselves were subsequently lost to the narrative of history once European establishment was firmly set. This was the “simple and easily digestible plotline” (den Heyer & Abbott, 2011, p. 618) of the grand historical narrative that had “come to be the past itself” (Stanley, 2000, p. 82). Colonial, thus, became a powerful signifier for intrepid survival and the benevolent narrative of “our” shared past, an understanding of colonial that was filtered through a new definition that obscured the systematic process of dispossession, erasure, and violence. Consequently, “colonial” came to be understood as shown below in Figure 1.

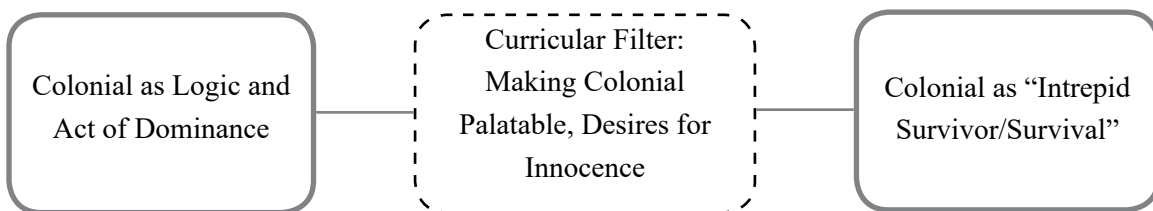


Figure 1. Visual representation of the curricular filter “colonial”

Instead of being understood as a logic through which people are divided on the basis of racialized assumptions of naturalized difference which then come to serve as a means of justifying exclusions (Donald, 2009, 2012) (*Colonial as Logic and Act of Dominance*), the idea of “colonial” is filtered through a discourse that sought to (and continues to) reframe “colonial” as harkening back to an idyllic past.

While conversations about the filtering of “colonial” is a worthy topic on its own, my concern here in this article is in exploring the process of curricular filtering as it

pertains to methodologies of teaching and learning in social studies. Here, then, I return to the second variety of filtering, namely, the presentation of new vocabularies to filter the ideas of one concept through a new term that appears to be more congruent with immediate pedagogical needs. To explore this, I refer once again back to Zegarac's comment about research "specific to this discipline" (Zegarac, 2013, p. 1). As noted earlier, by positioning a body of research as "specific to this discipline," Zegarac has suggested that the body of research from one of the many disciplines that fall under the auspices of social studies can and ought to apply equally to all areas of social studies inquiry. To accomplish this, the Ministry of Education engages in a process of curricular filtering by filtering the body of research on historical thinking through the Ministry's language of "social studies thinking" so as to present historical thinking as a method for social studies more broadly. While this may not necessarily appear to be all that problematic or odd, especially given history's prominent role as an organizing discipline for social studies historically in places including Canada (Broom, 2007) and the United States (Dougan, 1989; Evans, 2004), social studies, as a field of inquiry, is not exclusively nor intrinsically historical in its epistemological and ontological assumptions. Some, for example, have suggested that social studies has been/is oriented toward citizenship (Carpenter, 2006; Longstreet, 1985; Shaver, 1997), and the OME calls social studies, "an interdisciplinary subject that draws upon economics, geography, history, law, and politics" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013, p. 10)—yet, to apply the methods of historical thinking across the varied and interlinked disciplines of social studies precludes working through/with/in the necessary complexity of the field's many varied disciplines. As I will show, the Ministry of Education takes the language and methodology of historical thinking, filters it through its own term "social studies thinking" and applies it throughout the elementary social studies curriculum without due consideration of the limits that this application has for non-historically focused inquiry in social studies.

## **Historical Thinking and "Social Studies Thinking"**

To provide some context, it is worth exploring what historical thinking is and why, although it might be pedagogically sound for historical inquiry, it is not necessarily "non-historical enough" in nature to be applicable across the disciplines of social studies.



As a praxis of inquiry, historical thinking asks us to consider the application of professional historical techniques to the varied educational contexts that we teach and learn within. These methods, although taken up and theorized in different ways, often serve to provide a framework for developing and refining skills of investigation that mirror the types of techniques and approaches used by professional historians. Here, historical thinking is less about preparing students for futures as professional historians, and more about “helping students to think about how historians transform the past into history and to begin constructing history themselves” (Seixas & Morton, 2013, p. 3). Arguably the largest and most prominent proponent of such an approach in Canada is Peter Seixas, whose six-part framework has come to reshape how Canadian educators think about what is often called “doing history.” For Seixas and other scholars who have taken up historical thinking (Peck, 2010; Peck & Seixas, 2008; Seixas & Morton, 2013), these six thinking concepts—historical significance, historical perspective, continuity and change, cause and consequence, primary source evidence and the ethical dimension—together comprise a concise and easily understood approach to investigating the past and its legacy for the present.<sup>3</sup> These second order concepts, those which “provide the tools for doing history, for thinking historically” (Peck & Seixas, 2008, p. 1021), serve to provide a frame for how one goes about learning to generate historical understandings by encountering the past and tracing its legacy in the present. Specifically, “historical thinking is the creative process that historians go through to interpret the evidence of the past and generate the stories of history” (Seixas & Morton, 2013, p. 2). This approach helps students better understand the interpretive nature of historical narrativization (Seixas & Morton, 2013; von Heyking, 2013) and the role of individuals (and students) in creating knowledge of the past.

## **The Six Historical Thinking Concepts**

While differing theorizations of historical thinking exist, I outline the form developed by Peter Seixas and colleagues primarily since this framework, as will be demonstrated later,

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3 This is not the only formulation of what constitutes historical thinking in Canada. For example, Stéphane Lévesque (2008) identifies historical significance, continuity and change, progress and decline, evidence and historical empathy as the constituent parts of historical thinking.

has had the largest apparent influence on what became social studies thinking. From this body of work, we can describe six dimensions of Seixas's framework, as shown in Table 1.

**Table 1.** The six dimensions of Seixas's historical thinking framework

Concept	Key concern/question
Historical Significance	<p>"Why we care, today, about certain events, trends and issues in history." (Seixas, 2006, p. 1)</p> <p>"How do we decide what is important to learn about the past?" (Seixas &amp; Morton, 2013, p. 10)</p>
Primary Source Evidence	<p>"How to find, select, contextualize, and interpret sources for a historical argument." (Seixas, 2006, p. 1)</p> <p>"How do we know what we know about the past?" (Seixas &amp; Morton, 2013, p. 10)</p>
Historical Perspective	<p>"Understanding the 'past as a foreign country,' with its different social, cultural, intellectual, and even emotional contexts that shaped people's lives and actions." (Seixas, 2006, p. 2)</p> <p>"How can we better understand the people of the past?" (Seixas &amp; Morton, 2013, p. 11)</p>
Continuity and Change	<p>"What has changed and what has remained the same over time." (Seixas, 2006, p. 2)</p> <p>"How can we make sense of the complex flows of history?" (Seixas &amp; Morton, 2013, p. 10)</p>
Cause and Consequence	<p>"How and why certain conditions and actions led to others." (Seixas, 2006, p. 2)</p> <p>"Why do events happen, and what are their impacts?" (Seixas &amp; Morton, 2013, p. 11)</p>
The Ethical/Moral Dimension	<p>"How we, in the present, judge actors in different circumstances in the past; how different interpretations of the past reflect different moral stances today; when and how crimes of the past bear consequences today." (Seixas, 2006, p. 2)</p> <p>"How can history help us to live in the present?" (Seixas &amp; Morton, 2013, p. 11)</p>

While these concepts may help to foster critical explorations with the “stuff” of the past and model approaches to history that better reflect the process of constructing and articulating narratives of history, this framework—and the field of historical thinking more broadly—is positioned as, and rightly so, specific to history. Indeed, historical thinking scholarship makes no claim to providing a framework for developing, for example, geographic or ecological understandings of place.

This type of disciplinary methodological development is not unique to history. Other social studies disciplines, distinct in meaningful epistemological, methodological, and even ethical ways, are often theorized and researched in ways to account for the specificities of the discipline. Geography education research and policy in the United States (primarily), for example, often explores the limits and potential of five guiding themes for inquiry: location, place, human–environment interaction, movement, and region. These serve not only to differentiate geography but also to emphasize the specific needs of geographic inquiry (Natoli, 1994; Young, 2013) by acknowledging the specificities of the disciplinary focus. In Canadian literature, however, geography education has come to adapt the methods of historical thinking under the banner of “geographic thinking.” These geographic thinking concepts—patterns and trends, geographical importance, evidence and interpretation, interactions and associations, sense of place, geographical value judgements—mirror some of the methods of historical thinking in the kinds of things they ask students to do (Bahbahani & Huynh, 2008). For example, asking students to work with evidence and interpretation (primary source evidence), value judgements (the ethical dimension,) and even importance (significance?) correspond to some of the methods of historical thinking and indeed, Bahbahani and Huynh acknowledge that their conceptualization of geographic thinking is based off the work of Peter Seixas. And while scholars such as Bahbahani and Huynh (2008) do note that their decision to not adopt the more geographically centred five themes of geography—location, place, human–environment interaction, region and movement—was because “their focus is more on the key knowledge outcomes of geography than on the knowledge building and geographical thinking”

(p. 10), others have applied those themes as skills and means of inquiry.<sup>4</sup> For instance, Andrew Young (2013) notes:

The five themes have been widely adopted in provincial curricula across Canada and are a simple way to introduce geographic skills and content throughout all grade levels... Using the five themes of geography as an organizational tool for social studies curricula allows students to interpret discrete data and make connections among the data in order to comprehend complex information through the lens of geography. (p. 48)

To illustrate how historical thinking operates to frame social studies thinking more broadly (beyond just geography), I turn to the Ontario elementary social studies curriculum as a means of demonstrating how “social studies thinking,” acting as a curricular filter, accomplishes something similar to the work to articulate a method of geographic thinking by applying the methods of one discipline (history) to the field of social studies as a whole. While I don’t want to engage in a sort of “disciplinary polarization” by suggesting that the disciplines that underlie an integrated social studies need to be understood as mutually exclusive, both in content coverage and methodological considerations, I do think it is important to recognize that each social studies discipline has its own unique set of challenges, ethical and epistemological considerations, and intellectual focal points that do necessitate some level of methodological distinction.

In the next section, I argue that the OME rarely acknowledges such disciplinary specific methods and instead adopts/adapts the methods of historical thinking for all disciplines, ignoring the kind of methodological offerings made by those from scholars of other disciplines. As a consequence, the necessary pedagogical and theoretical tools from non-historical disciplines are excluded as part of the effort to build a conception of social studies thinking that filters historical thinking to make it fit with the curriculum’s

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4 While some of the social studies thinking concepts could arguably address some of these geographic thematic areas (e.g., inquiries into continuity and change could address differences and similarities across regions), the themes, in their specificity, address unique fundamental notions in geography, namely, the role of space and how humans adapt/use/move across it. Additionally, even if the themes of geography are congruent with social studies thinking, the issue here is not one of congruence but one of asking why these concepts need to fit within a historically focused method of inquiry. Here, congruence isn’t what is important but rather the question of why such congruence has to be established in the first place.

orientation and content coverage. Visually, such filtering might look like what is shown in Figure 2.

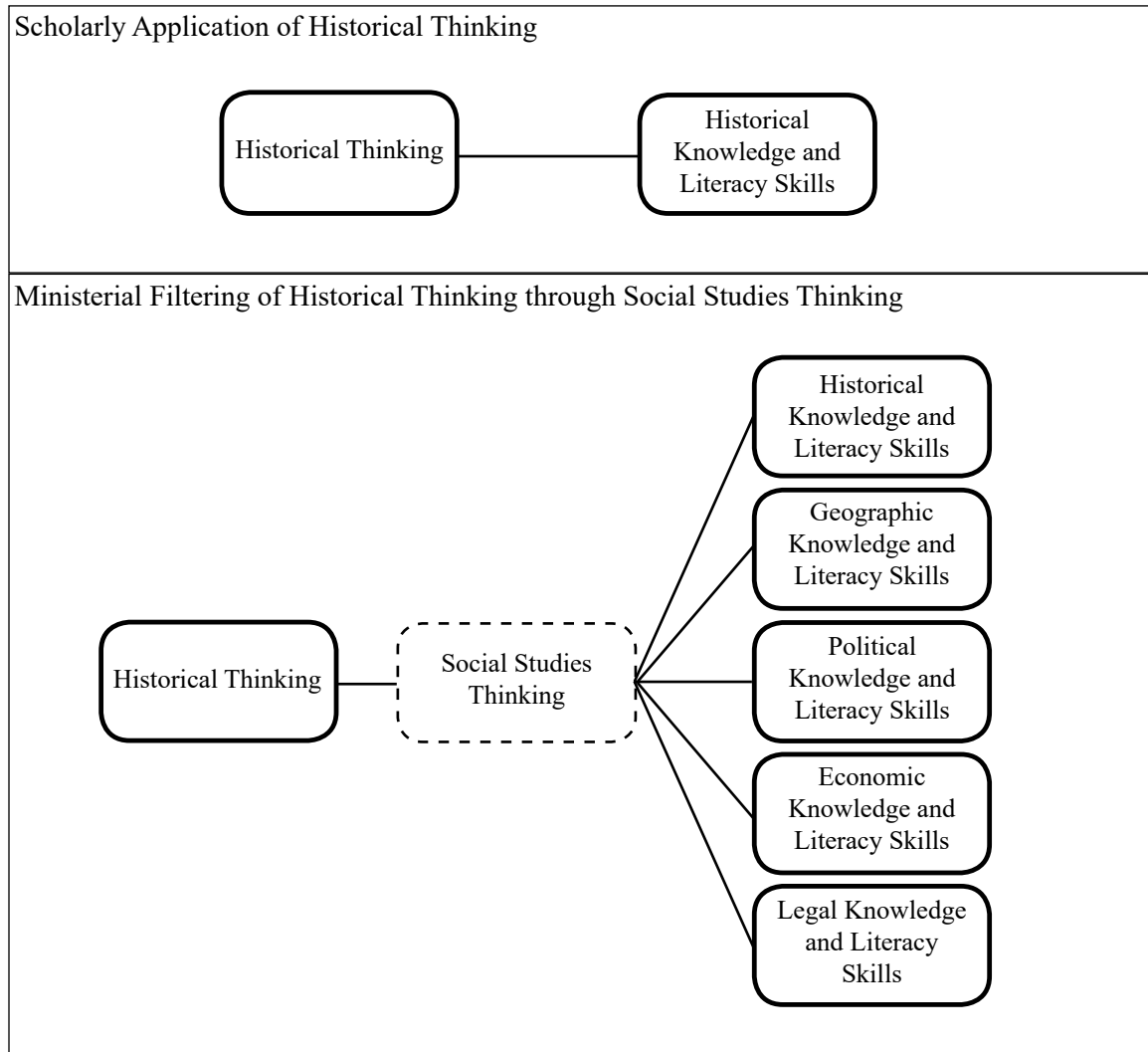


Figure 2. Visual representation of the different methodological applications

## **Specific to a Discipline? The Curricular Filtering of Historical Thinking as “Social Studies Thinking”**

### **Interdisciplinary Inquiry through “This” Discipline**

The Ontario elementary social studies curriculum, in its current incarnation, reflects an integrated approach for students up to Grade 6, at which point students focus on history and geography as discrete academic subjects. As an integrated approach to social studies, students learn a variety of historic, geographic, social, and cultural ideas and concepts in relation to other considerations and areas of inquiry, including environmental and political education (i.e., learning the importance of relationships, particularly in the early grades). While the social studies curriculum is largely “an interdisciplinary approach, giving students an integrated learning experience” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013, p. 11), students learn social studies through two strands (or thematic areas), “Heritage and Identity” and “People and Environments,” which are themselves largely historically (the former) and geographically (the latter) oriented. That said, the social studies curriculum is ultimately framed as being in service of the development of a “deeper understanding of the interconnections between social, political, economic, and environmental ideas and issues” (p. 11). In trying to build that sense of interconnectedness, the Ministry of Education has sought to articulate their goal of building an integrated/multidisciplinary approach to social studies education for Ontario students. Such positioning of social studies as multidisciplinary in its orientation reflects, at the level of defining the field, an understanding that social studies inherently crosses disciplines (Case & Clark, 2013; Kirman, 2008).

By articulating a vision of social studies that includes “interconnections” between various areas of inquiry, the OME has intimated that social studies, by design, ought to pull in pedagogical practices and ideas from across disciplinary bounds. Yet Zegarac’s (2013) use of the phrase “this discipline” and, more specifically, the singular pronoun “this,” suggests that one discipline in particular structures the development of pedagogical inquiry for social studies. If it is true that the OME honoured the intrinsic interdisciplinarity of social studies, as suggested by the curriculum itself, then Zegarac’s comment contradicts, at the level of methodology, the curriculum’s own positioning of the field.

When looking at the implementation of the social studies thinking framework, the pedagogical backbone for social studies, it becomes abundantly clear that “this discipline” is history and that there is an element of filtering the work of “this discipline’s” methodology through a more palatable language so as to make it fit with the “interdisciplinary approach” espoused by the social studies curriculum.

## Social Studies Thinking

The exploration of the varied topics in the social studies curriculum, as noted, is underpinned by the methods of social studies thinking, a set of six interrelated concepts designed to help students build knowledge of and develop the critical dispositions necessary to better learn about the world. These concepts, when taken together, are largely similar in nature to the methods of historical thinking, as expressed in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Historical and social studies thinking

	Historical Thinking	Social Studies Thinking
	Seixas & Morton (2013)	Ontario Ministry of Education (2013)
Shared	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Historical Significance</li> <li>- Continuity and Change</li> <li>- Cause and Consequence</li> <li>- Historical Perspective</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Significance</li> <li>- Continuity and Change</li> <li>- Cause and Consequence</li> <li>- Perspective</li> </ul>
Distinct	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Primary Source Evidence</li> <li>- The Ethical Dimension</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Interrelationships</li> <li>- Patterns and Trends</li> </ul>

Focusing specifically on Seixas and Morton’s (2013) conception of historical thinking, we can see that four of the six historical thinking concepts are carried over to the social studies variant, with the only differences being the last two: “primary source evidence” and “the ethical dimension.” The last two historical thinking concepts, and their absence from the social studies thinking concepts, can be explained. First, the absence of “primary source evidence” as an explicit social studies thinking concept is accounted for elsewhere in the curriculum as students are expected to become adept at reading sources for provenance and for the purposes of inferring possible meanings. For instance, as part of the “social studies inquiry process,” the process through which students are asked to inquire and investigate, students are asked to “gather and organize,” which involves, “collect[ing] relevant data, evidence, and/or information from primary sources, secondary sources,

and/or field studies” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013, p. 61). The curriculum also asks that students make use of primary sources in the overviews for some grades, as detailed in Table 3.

**Table 3.** References to primary sources in social studies

Grade	Reference to Primary Sources
Three	Students, “will use primary sources such as journals, letters, maps, and paintings to investigate how people in early Canada responded to challenges in their lives.” (p. 83)
Five	“Using primary sources, such as treaties, historical images, and diaries, as well as secondary sources, they will investigate relationships and interactions among these communities from a variety of perspectives and will develop their understanding of how historical events in early Canada have had an impact on present-day Canada.” (p. 105)

The exclusion of the “ethical dimension” is likely excluded as a thinking concept for reasons similar to the exclusion of primary source evidence; in the curriculum document, students are required to “investigate moral and ethical dimensions of developments, events, and issues” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013, p. 10) as part of the “citizenship education framework” that itself outlines what is required to foster active and meaningful citizenship. As students are expected to think about their responsibilities as actively engaged citizens in every grade (p. 10), ethical considerations pervade each grade in social studies. While this does not explicitly require students to engage with the ethics of the past and its legacy for the present in the same way that is called for through historical thinking, ethics suffuses curricular exploration by virtue of the fact that it is central to the purpose of social studies as a whole in Ontario.

The exclusion of both “primary source evidence” and the “ethical dimension” as explicit thinking concepts is notable in that it suggests an imperfect correspondence; social studies thinking as a curricular filter, then, is not all-encompassing or totalizing in that it does not filter every part of historical thinking. Yet what is important to consider here is the almost perfect correspondence between four of the historical thinking concepts with four of the social studies variants. And while it is true that the curriculum does not say that the four similarities are a consequence of historical thinking’s influence, the semantic correspondence and the lack of such language in other disciplinary thinking approaches would suggest that historical thinking has played a prominent role in the articulation of social studies thinking. Indeed, this is what makes social studies thinking



a powerful curricular filter—it “hides” the epistemological origins of its own ideas. To illustrate this, I discuss the correspondences noted above to highlight how social studies thinking inherits from historical thinking.

### **(Historical) Significance and (Historical) Perspective**

When accounting for the divergent concepts (primary source evidence/ethical dimension and interrelationships/patterns and trends), we can see that four of the six historical thinking concepts are mirrored almost perfectly. When paying closer attention to the naming scheme, two of the concepts are copied directly—continuity and change and cause and consequence—and two are copies of the historical thinking variant without the word “historical” (perhaps in an attempt to once again engage in curricular filtering by removing the word “historical” to make the concept more palatable): significance and perspective. With regards to the latter two, little differentiates the articulation of either. For instance, Seixas and Morton (2013) argue that students can be taught historical significance “by testing an event or individual against two specific criteria” (p. 17). The first of these is, “the degree of impact of an event, person or development” (p. 17). The second criterion concerns whether or not something from the past reveals to us something about the present. As Seixas and Morton (2013) suggest, “otherwise insignificant flotsam of history becomes historically significant when it reveals to us something about the time period in question, and more importantly, about an issue that interests us today” (p. 19). Together, the impactful and revelatory essence of an historical actor’s action or an event’s lingering traces on the present frame what it means for something to be historically significant.<sup>5</sup> The OME’s definition of significance attends to one of these criterion, in suggesting that impact is important: “the significance of something is generally determined by its short-and/or long-term impact on people and or places” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013, p. 58). Here, the impact and lingering effect of actions in the past come to define the essence of each conceptualization of significance. Indeed, the OME conception of significance is essentially temporal in asking students to measure significance against “short-and/or long-term impact” (p. 58).

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5 Seixas and Morton (2013) acknowledge that there are more than two often-cited criteria when it comes to determining historical significance in the literature. However, they argue that the two criteria serve a pragmatic purpose in providing a necessary simplicity for the sake of utility (p. 17).

Perspective, as defined in Seixas and Morton's (2013) historical thinking framework, involves having students attempt, as best as possible, to understand the social, cultural, and political milieu in which historical actors made particular choices. This process of acknowledging the context(s) of the past is not one in which we are asked to build a sense of identification with those in the past. Indeed, engaging in perspective-taking requires avoiding the adoption of an empathetic connection with those in the past. As Seixas and Morton (2013) argue, "taking an historical perspective does not entail identifying with or experiencing the feelings of an historical actor, as you would if you were empathizing with that person" (p. 146). While the notion of empathy is taken up by history education scholars, historical empathy is more akin to taking the perspective of those in the past to better understand their actions, decisions and potential choices (Bryant & Clark, 2006; Lévesque, 2008; Yilmaz, 2007). The OME's formulation of perspective for social studies students attends to similar concerns when it comes to building the capacity for perspective-taking. For instance, the perspective social studies thinking concept "refers to the ways in which different individuals and/or groups view something" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013, p. 60). Here, "students learn that different groups have different perspectives, which depend on factors such as beliefs, social position, and geographic location, among others" (p. 60). The necessary work required here to recognize differential understandings and the essential need to attend to the ways in which groups or actors may view things differently reflects similar concerns outlined in the historical thinking articulation of perspective. While the call for teachers and students to recognize that individuals see events differently is laudable and ought to be central to explorations of the social world, what is most important here is how some of the central concerns of perspective-taking in historical thinking are mirrored in social studies.

An alternative to this way of thinking can be gleaned from one of the major themes of geographic knowledge: human–environment relations. The relationship between humans and the environment involves recognizing and seeing the ways that humans engage with and shape/are shaped by the environment. Central to this understanding is a broad definition of environment, which Golledge (2002) argues, has come to be defined, through history, as including not just physical space but the "built," the behavioural, the socio-cultural, the political, and the cognitive environment. One of the reasons that these dimensions flourished in geography was, in part, to develop, "a more complete base for interpreting human-environment relations at scales ranging from personal

to global spaces” (p. 2). If we take seriously this idea that environment is a broad term including socio-cultural and cognitive dimensions, or cultural and “internal representations” of the world (p. 2), investigations into human–environment interactions can serve as a base from which to explore and provoke questioning about how it is that others understand the complex changes and relationships in the world around them. While I don’t want to suggest through this example that a historically informed theorization of perspective be supplanted by a geographically grounded one, it is worth recognizing the value of other disciplinary approaches in fostering student awareness of how others see and consequently act on the world. Indeed, concepts such as these can be and are integrated elsewhere under the “patterns and trends” thinking concept, which “requires students to study characteristics that are similar and that repeat themselves in a **natural or human environment** (patterns) [emphasis in original] and characteristics or traits that exhibit a consistent tendency in a particular setting and/or over a period of time (trends)” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013, p. 59). However, including these concepts under the umbrella of other thinking concepts positions them as “subordinate concepts”—the concept of human–environment interactions is not understood as a valuable lens to understand patterns, trends, and relationships in its own right.

### **Continuity and Change, Cause and Consequence**

The two concepts that share identical titles are, unsurprisingly, taken up in similar ways. The OME defines continuity and change as “[requiring] students to determine what has stayed the same and what has changed over a period of time” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013, p. 59). As noted earlier, Seixas (2006) has argued that continuity and change is the exploration of “what has changed and what has remained the same over time” (p. 2). Aside from a reversal of wording, the language used in the two concepts is largely identical. What gets lost here, though, is a broader understanding of change (in particular). For instance, active citizenship work, something central to the curriculum, identifies social and political change as the key factor in citizenship education (Ponder & Lewis-Ferrell, 2009; Westheimer & Kahne, 2004). Change, here, is about seeking to ameliorate injustices, question inequities, and develop a resolve oriented at making the community and broader world a more egalitarian place. In a similar vein, continuity can (and ought to) be engaged in critically: What kinds of social and political concerns are continuous across

both time and space? What role does change serve in breaking the continuous reinforcement of injustice? What is continuous across different socio-political spaces? Instead of broaching more critical conversations about change and continuities, the OME “doubles down” on an historically centred version of continuity and change by asking students to “make judgements about continuity and change by making comparisons between some point in the past and the present, or between two points in the past” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013, p. 59).

Cause and consequence, while borrowing the same title, does diverge from the historical thinking variety. While historical thinking’s articulation of cause and consequence, not surprisingly, focuses on “[teaching] them [students] to think beyond the immediate, to consider the interplay of causal factors ranging from the focused influence of the choices made by historical actors to the broad influence of prevailing social, political, cultural and economic conditions” (Seixas & Morton, 2013, p. 104), the OME asks “students [to] study the causes and consequences of various types of events, situations, and interactions in both the natural environment and human society” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013, p. 59). Here, students are asked to think beyond the causes and consequences of purely historical actors and events to those areas of life more broadly affected by political, cultural, and geographic constraints. For instance, students in Grade 6 might be asked the following “related question”: “What impact does Canada’s consumption of coffee or chocolate have on the people and environment of the producer countries?” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013, p. 59). This question opens a space to explore geographic, political, and cultural questions around consumption, consumerism, political relationships, and cultural trends about the social value/utility of certain goods. Here, then, is an important divergence from the temporally focused orientation found in the other social studies thinking concepts. However, I think it important to note the persistence of the same language found in historical thinking. The use of the term “cause and consequence” is a powerful reminder of the traces of historical thinking that linger in the OME’s formulation of thinking concepts. Here, “cause and consequence” was filtered through itself to become something new while retaining the language from historical thinking (much like “colonial” is filtered through itself as per the discussion of curricular filtering).

## Implications

As I have argued, the OME, in its current social studies curriculum, has included what it calls social studies thinking, a conceptual framework for social studies inquiry that I argue is a curricular filter through which historical thinking can operate as the pedagogical approach for learning across each of the varied disciplines that exist under the auspices of an integrated social studies. This filtering is pervasive across the curriculum. Take, for example, the chart in Table 4, taken from the social studies curriculum document detailing the thinking frameworks across the curriculum.

**Table 4.** “Concepts of disciplinary thinking across subjects”

Social Studies	History	Geography	Politics	Economics	Law
Significance	Historical Significance	Spatial Significance	Political Significance	Economic Significance	Legal Significance
Cause and Consequence	Cause and Consequence		Objectives and Results	Cause and Effect	
Continuity and Change	Continuity and Change		Stability and Change		Continuity and Change
Patterns and Trends		Patterns and Trends		Stability and Variability	
Interrelationships		Interrelationships			Interrelationships
Perspective	Historical Perspective	Geographic Perspective	Political Perspective	Economic Perspective	Legal Perspective

Source: Ontario Ministry of Education (2013, p. 13).

In this table, historical thinking manifests itself across different disciplines and the field of social studies. That said, potential moments of divergence (highlighted in Table 4) from the common language are potentially interesting deviations from historical thinking. These are only *potentially* powerful, however, as these concepts are not discussed beyond the confines of this chart (for example, “stability and variability” is not discussed elsewhere). Instead, it is up to the teacher to decide what these mean and, given their location on the chart, one might reasonably assume that these terms would have a meaning that likely corresponds with similar concepts in the same row.

While this dominance of historical thinking filtered through social studies thinking may itself not be problematic, what a historical methodological dominance forecloses

on is the opportunity to see social studies as more than historical style inquiry. This, I argue, has two implications. First, it is important to understand what history can and cannot offer. Stanley (1998) argues that history, or histories, are “the narratives that people construct in order to make meaning of the past” (p. 41). These narratives inform understandings of the present by telling “us” who “we” are, where “we” come from, and where “we” might go. What is important to note here is the fact that there is no one history—there are histories, all of which render the past in different, sometimes incongruent, incompatible, and epistemologically unintelligible ways. Yet, despite the innumerable narratives that tell us where we have come from and where we might go, history can’t provide us with everything that we need to know about who we are or our political, social, and cultural trajectories. Just as we are children of multiple histories, we are also children of multiple geographies, children of multiple politics, children of multiple economics, children of multiple ecologies. The power of history to shape who we are is no more or less powerful than the lessons from other disciplines.

Second, the predominance of any one discipline serves to undermine other disciplines, implicitly establishing a “disciplinary hierarchy.” The same applies to thinking frameworks. If historical thinking, however much the curricular filter that is social studies seeks to obscure its influence, comes to be *the* framework (or at least its exclusive progenitor), other thinking approaches are by necessity excluded or devalued. This inhibits the possible learning that comes from employing different approaches to thinking. In other words, if students are only furnished with the six-part social studies/historical thinking framework, it is possible that students will not be able to appreciate what other disciplines can offer methodologically. And while curriculum documents are, by their very nature, powerful constraints on teacher and student learning (and thus, there will always be some imposed limit on how students are expected to inquire), the prioritization of historical thinking through social studies thinking sends a powerful message that particular disciplinary ways of knowing are more powerful, important, or necessary than others.

## Conclusion

While it may appear as though I am highly critical of the role of history and historical thinking in social studies, my intention is not to suggest that historical thinking, operating

as it does through the curricular filter of social studies, is incompatible with doing historical work in social studies. Indeed, explicitly historically grounded inquiries in social studies may benefit from some of the suggestions put forth by the framework in getting students to think about the past differently than many of their teachers might (personal experience with social studies teacher candidates suggests that the “read the textbook and write notes” approach is still the predominant method of history “teaching” in classrooms and in their own experiences as students). What is important to note, though, is that social studies needs to make space for different ways of knowing, both in terms of content and in terms of methodology. The OME, by incorporating methods “specific to this discipline” (Zegarac, 2013, p. 1), does Ontario students a disservice by positioning historical work as implicitly equal to social studies. And, while it could be argued that the adaptation of historical thinking for all disciplines still creates space for powerful inquiry by provoking questions about how knowledge is constructed, the epistemological assumption that history can, with little question, serve as the methodological basis for inquiry across social studies positions “this discipline” as a privileged site of inquiry and frames historical thinking as easily adaptable despite its very specific disciplinary origins.

In their piece on developing meaningful goals for social studies, Roland Case and Mary Abbott (2013) argue that developing clear understandings of what meaningful social studies is should not be found in a definition of the field but, “rather, it is important that individual teachers come to a coherent and defensible purpose that drives their social studies teaching” (p. 10). When historical thinking becomes social studies thinking, the field’s purpose in schools is oriented toward building historically biased understandings of the world that by design proscribe the possibly different purposes for social studies that teachers and students may want to develop. While this, in and of itself, is perhaps not all that problematic in some classroom contexts where an historically oriented social studies is desired, it does limit the kinds of exciting possibilities for inquiry that might occur through a geographic, ecological, or political lens (to name a few). It is thus imperative that we, as social studies educators, critically engage with potential curricular filtering that serves to prioritize approaches to social studies “specific to this discipline” (Zegarac, 2013, p. 1) in our respective political and curricular contexts.

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