

A Topography for Canadian Curriculum Theory

Cynthia Chambers
university of lethbridge

Canada—as a place—is often absent from the topography of curriculum theorizing. Looking to Canadian literature that explores the themes of survival and alienation/victimization within a varied and demanding physical, imaginary, and sociopolitical landscape, this article presents four challenges to Canadian curriculum theorists: to create curriculum languages and genres that name the sociopolitical, geophysical, and imaginative landscape in which Canadians live now, as well as the landscapes of the past and the future; to turn to Canadian scholars, indigenous languages, and traditions for that language and those genres; to seek new interpretive tools for understanding what it means to be Canadian and what Canadians might become in the 21st century; and, finally, to create curriculum theory that is written at home but works on behalf of everyone.

Le Canada—en tant que lieu—est souvent absent de la topographie des théories sur les programmes scolaires. Analysant des documents canadiens qui explorent les thèmes de la survie et de l'aliénation ou de la victimisation, l'auteure présente quatre défis aux théoriciens canadiens des programmes scolaires : créer des genres et des langages qui tiennent compte du paysage sociopolitique, géophysique et imaginaire dans lequel vivent les Canadiens; trouver ce langage chez les chercheurs canadiens ainsi que dans les langues vernaculaires et les traditions; chercher de nouveaux outils d'interprétation pour comprendre ce que signifie le fait d'être Canadien et ce que les Canadiens pourraient devenir au XIX^e siècle; en somme, créer une théorie des programmes scolaires qui soient bien nôtres.

Northrop Frye (1971) claims that for Canadians the answer to the question “Who are we?” cannot be separated from the answer to the question “Where is here?” (p. 220). The classic existential question — “Who am I?” — can be posed only by people for whom “where” they are is not an issue, the place itself apparently being fully known and well defined. These would be people from places such as Europe and the United States. Posing the question “Where is here?” implies a preoccupation with where we are in relation to other places. It also implies asking: “How do I find my way around here? Can I survive here? How can I survive here? Who were the people here before me?”

Robert Kroetsch (1994), a Canadian poet and novelist, has described growing up in Alberta on the Canadian prairies in the 1930s, a time when the school curriculum and the body of literature it referenced were strangely silent about the place he was living. Kroetsch read books at school but he neither read, heard, nor learned anything about Alberta itself. The school curriculum was a colonial curriculum in that home was either somewhere else or not worth consideration.

It was as if there were no Alberta, no landscape, no life, or no Alberta writers to name and describe the place where he lived then and where I live now.

The situation did not improve much in the next couple of decades. In a creative documentary of his return to the prairies, Mark Abley (1986) realizes the school curriculum always turned his attention, his vision, elsewhere, beyond the prairie landscape and history where he was living. When he drives into Lethbridge, Alberta—the place of his childhood and the place where I now live and work—he suddenly recalls:

I grew up ignorant of the little city; I grew up hardly knowing where I was. . . . My schooling taught me nothing about place. I could hardly have expected my teachers to mention that in the 1920s, Lethbridge contained one of the largest brothels on the prairies; but they might at least have talked about Fort Whoop-Up. For me, as for Wallace Stegner in the Eastend of 1918, “Knowledge of place, knowledge of past, meant . . . knowledge of the far and foreign.” I remember studying in painful detail the geography of the Hudson Bay Lowlands; I remember compiling a scrapbook about New Zealand; but I recall no lessons about Southern Alberta. Its literature, its history, even its sundry landscapes remained a closed book. (pp. 213–214)

In the Canadian north where I grew up in the late 1950s and 1960s, the silence—in response to the question “Where is here?”—was even more pervasive. There was no radio or television, no curriculum or textbooks, no trade books or comic books that spoke of the place I lived and knew, the place that has formed my memories, shaped my sensibilities as a woman, a Canadian, and a curriculum writer. Whereas the children I went to school with, our families, and I lived without central heating, running water, or sewage systems, the textbooks we read were illustrated with children living in suburban homes delineated with cement sidewalks, rows of evenly trimmed hedges, and white picket fences. Whereas we sat in classrooms heated by diesel or wood-burning stoves in our snow pants, mukluks, and parkas trimmed with wolf fur, knowing our parents at home were not dressed much differently, the textbooks were illustrated with children dressed in sunsuits, oxfords, and dress pants. Father went off to work in a grey suit, carrying a brown leather briefcase, while Mother stayed at home, cooking and baking in a dress, an apron, and high-heels. Outside our northern classroom windows, the tiny leaves of the all-too-sparse birch and poplar fell to the ground and were ignored in a brief autumn that came and went before school was even in full swing. In our *Fun with Dick and Jane* and *We Work and Play* basal readers (Gray & Hill, n.d.; Gray, Baruch, & Montgomery, n.d.-b) and *Think-and-do* workbooks (Gray, Baruch, & Montgomery, n.d.-a), a hired man named Zeke raked up the large red and orange maple leaves that threatened the moral correctness of the rational, suburban order assumed in the textual narrative.

Kroetsch (1994) contrasts his childhood in the 1930s with the present, when there are so many Alberta writers that there is cacophony rather than silence:

fiction writers such as Merna Summers, Rudy Wiebe, W. P. Kinsella, Greg Hollingshead, and W. O. Mitchell; poets such as Kristjana Gunnars, Alice Major, and Robert Hilles; nonfiction writers such as Myrna Kostash and Hugh Dempsey; speculative fiction writers such as Dave Duncan and Candace Jane Dorsey; children/young adult fiction writers such as Monica Hughes and Martin Godfrey. I can contrast my northern childhood of the 1950s and 1960s with the present, when there are at least two northern writers in print: Michael Kusugak (1990, 1993, 1998), an Inuit from Repulse Bay, and Richard Van Camp (1996, 1997, 1998), self-described as “half Dogrib and half white” (cited in Perren, 1999, p. 1), both of whom collaborate with illustrators to produce beautiful northern children’s literature. There is the well-known Yukon-born nonfiction writer Pierre Berton as well as southern writers such as Rudy Wiebe (1994) with a literary interest in the north.

Thus, there appears to be an explosion of writing, not only in Alberta but in all of Canada, in all genres. For example, the amount of Canadian speculative fiction being published has increased dramatically in the last decade. However, as Canadian speculative fiction critics (Runté & Kulyk, 1995) point out, the growth spurt cannot be disconnected from the realization that Canadian speculative fiction is distinct, particularly from its American counterpart. Two characteristics of Canadian speculative fiction pertinent to curriculum theorizing are first, the critical role that setting plays in the stories, and second, the theme of the Alienated Outsider. In their stories, Canadian speculative fiction writers speculate about how humans are shaped by their environment and the effects, both manifest and potential, of ignoring the intimacy of this relationship. Dorsey, a speculative fiction writer from Alberta, observes that “in some cases the protagonist’s relationship to the environment is the story, more so than the tendency in American SF for characters to collect ‘plot coupons’ to get out of the story” (cited in Runté & Kulyk, 1995, p. 16). Writers of speculative fiction continue the Canadian literary tradition of wondering “Where is here?” and “How do we survive living here?” When the characters of these novels battle the environment, they inevitably lose, giving voice to the deeply held belief that Canadians are shaped by the climate and geographies of where they live, and that they are always ultimately subordinate to nature.

THEMES EVIDENT IN CANADIAN FICTION

Survival

In *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature*, the classic criticism of what has fondly and irreverently been named Can-Lit, Margaret Atwood (1972) claims that “there”—America, England and France—has always been more important than “here.” Whatever is produced “there” eclipses what is produced here, rendering “invisible the values and artifacts that actually exist ‘here’ . . .

so people can look at a thing without really seeing it, or look at it and mistake it for something else” (p. 18). Thus, as Canadians, we may not recognize our own literature, land, and history, our uniqueness—our own curriculum and its theory—even when we are living in the midst of it. This invisibility is even more poignant, and dangerous, perhaps, in that it keeps us from seeing what is here as being of any value. Atwood decided that those living north of the 49th parallel needed “a geography of the mind” to navigate and traverse the *terra incognita*, the unknown land that is Canada, and that Canadian literature could provide such a map.

We need such a map desperately . . . we need to know about here, because here is where we live. For members of a country or a culture, shared knowledge of their place, their here, is not a luxury but a necessity. Without that knowledge we will not survive. (p. 19)

Atwood’s manifesto may seem a bit old fashioned now, written as if there was a single Canadian culture or identity. Perhaps she was a bit hegemonic and colonizing herself: writing from Ontario, the deeply resented capital of the Canadian culture and knowledge industries, a site that rarely seems to question its own right to speak for others—for those of us who speak languages other than English, and who live on the prairies, in the mountains, or by the oceans, particularly the Arctic Ocean. But her prophesy that Canadians must find a way to share their knowledge of this place in order to survive sounds neither old fashioned nor quaint. Although apocalyptic, I suspect it is closer to the truth than what we might want to imagine.

Particular countries have specific and central symbols which identify their literature (Atwood, 1972). For England, the predominant symbol is the island with its allusions to the body-as-island (with the monarchy being the head and the peasant class the feet), the island as self-contained and self-sufficient society. For the United States of America, the central symbol is the frontier. This image infuses American literature, and consciousness, with the hope of continual expansion and redemption through the conquest of new lands, the ever-present possibility of Utopia and the fantasy of its realization. Since Fredrick Jackson Turner’s 1920 essay “The Significance of the Frontier in American History,” claim social historians such as Jill Conway (1974), the frontier has been the key symbol of American mythology because in the wilderness

a man first throws off the artificial values of European culture, reverts to primitive savagery or simplicity, and then emerges from the conflict with nature literally metamorphosed into the archetypal American whose masculine virtues must forever be tempered by some form of struggle or conquest. (p. 76)

Conway, an Australian immigrant who was vice-president of the University of Toronto before leaving for the United States to be president of Smith College,

claims there is striking similarity between the national ethos of Australia and that of the U.S.A. Whereas most Australians live in urban centres, it is the bush that offers opportunity to reject the social restraint of European culture, the hegemony of colonialism. The mythical Australian swagman and the American dime-novel western hero share the ethos that human beings will always triumph in their conflict with the wilderness.

For reasons of imagination, as well as of ideology, geography, and history, Canadians have always been much more ambivalent about their relationship to the unknown, to the wilderness. Frye claims that for Canada, the dominant motif, particularly of our early literature, has been survival: bare survival in the face of a hostile environment and hostile people; grim survival in the face of disaster and crisis; cultural survival for all of Canada in the shadow of the United States' cultural imperialism; political survival for a country recently emerged from the long shadow of British colonialism to find itself in the deeper shadows of a political, economic, and military machine to the south; and, finally, for spiritual survival that might allow Canadians to imagine and forge a life beyond the minimal or perhaps to live well where they are right now.

A few years ago I had the pleasure of working with a Dene curriculum team from the Government of the Northwest Territories. In preparing the rationale for an elementary curriculum that was to integrate Dene language learning with knowledge about Dene culture (Northwest Territories Education, Culture and Employment, 1993), the team struggled with the age-old curriculum question: "What knowledge is of most worth?" with the addendum "of most worth *here*, for the Dene?" Fibbie Tatti and Mistu Oishi, the team's key leaders, posed this question to Dene elders in a series of workshops throughout the Mackenzie River valley. The Dene elders stated unequivocally and repeatedly that education and the curriculum must teach children survival, survival not only of the Dene people and their language and way of life, but survival of all living beings and the world in which they live. As a latecomer to the team, and someone charged with helping the team to articulate the philosophical rationale for the curriculum, I resisted what I perceived, at the time, to be a simplistic and utilitarian answer to a complex and philosophical question. Survival seemed too basic, too mundane a concept around which to organize a curriculum.

It took me several years to understand that the Dene elders were saying that without education there can be no survival. I then realized that the elders on the curriculum team were echoing the claims of the 1,000 witnesses to the Mackenzie Valley Pipeline Inquiry 20 years earlier. These witnesses stood up and spoke out publicly against the world's largest proposed megaproject, a 48-inch natural gas pipeline that, from its origin in Prudhoe Bay, Alaska to its destination in the American midwest, would traverse primarily Canadian and Dene land. In making his case that such a pipeline would be dangerous and should not be built, Eddie Cook, a Dene who had been schooled by the Oblates of Mary Immaculate

missionaries, told the Inquiry, “The land was the best teacher I ever had” (cited in Chambers, 1989, p. 140). So perhaps the speculative fiction writers, as well as Canadian nature writers such as Sharon Butala (1994) and the Dene elders, have it right: the aim of curriculum is survival, the survival of children and of all that sustains them. And, they tell us, this survival comes not from grand forms of theorizing and memorizing abstractions, but from human beings learning and living in a respectful relationship to their lived topos of here.

The *Dene Kede* curriculum team faced the task of finding an image, a metaphor, a metonym that would highlight the educative responsibility of adults to children implied by the notion of survival. In the curriculum discussions that followed, the team arrived at the hand-drum as a central metaphor for survival; the beat of the drum was a metaphor for the beat of the human heart and a metonym for life itself. On the front of the hand drum, caribou hide is stretched tautly so that when it is struck a musical note radiates out, in concentric circles of sound, from the drum to the people listening and dancing. The beat of the hand drum resonates with the beating of the human heart. At the back of the drum are four babiche thongs, woven into the edges of the hide and pulled to the centre from the four directions, at once drawing tight the hide and creating a handle. The outer rim of the drum was the child and each of the four thongs represented a key spiritual trait that children must be taught in their relationship to all living things, including the land and each other, such as respect. Following these four spiritual codes made it possible that the child and his/her community could survive. Thus the babiche hand-grip at the centre of the thongs, the hub by which a drummer holds the drum, was survival itself. The curriculum team had found a metonym for life and survival that was at once particular and universal, from here but able to speak to there.

Although curriculum guides and school materials of the 1990s may better reflect the land in which students live than they did in Kroetsch’s Alberta of the 1930s or Abley’s of the 1960s or my Yukon and Northwest Territories of the 1950s and early 1960s, curriculum theory in Canada may not. Although there is more home-grown curricula in all Canadian provinces and territories than in the past, when they read and try to apply curriculum theory to practice, Canadian educators and students have a harder time seeing themselves and the place where they live than they ought to. (This is especially true when they look beyond the social studies curriculum, with its traditional focus on human and physical geography.) And although some fine Canadian works such as Milburn and Herbert’s (1973) *National Consciousness and the Curriculum: The Canadian Case* and Tomkin’s (1986) classic *A Common Countenance: Stability and Change in the Canadian Curriculum*, do, in a way, address the question of “Where is here?” in Canadian curriculum, by and large they still tend to speak from an imaginal space derived from and created by the cognitive habits of Europe. More than anything else, my interest is precisely to cultivate a new kind of curricular

imagination that not only honours the multitude of ways the Canadian landscape shapes how Canadians “see” things, but, more importantly, that explores how such shaping itself is an active process that cannot be simply described through the Eurocentric instrumentalities of previous generations.

Colonialism and Beyond

Atwood (1972) claims that in Canadian literature “victim” is a sister preoccupation to that of survival. There is no question that the land now known as Canada has a long history as a colonized nation—with the French and the English, as well as much earlier the Scots, driving their flags into the soil—and that shaking off colonial status [has] occurred only in the last few decades of the 20th century. The Union Jack was exchanged for the Maple Leaf on the country’s flag in the 1960s and the Canadian constitution made its (final) journey across the Atlantic in the early 1980s. Ven Begamudré (1994), a Canadian short story writer, claims Canadians as a whole are a marginalized people. We live on a continent dominated by the United States; we are a country of women living in a culture dominated by men; we are a country of recent immigrants of colour dominated by former immigrants who forget that white is a colour too; and we are a country of linguistic multiplicity dominated by the English language and a political fiction of linguistic duality.

Until recently, writers preoccupied with the experience of victimization at the hands of a hostile environment dominated English Canadian literature. On the other hand, French Canadian writers wrote of being victims of internal colonization, of political and cultural survival in the colony within. The hostile topos of which Francophones wrote included not just the landscape, weather, and the “Indians,” but British cultural, economic, and political power, which constantly threatened and continues to threaten what it means to be French and to live in Canada. With the exception of a very few writers such as Pauline Johnson, the 19th-century romantic poet born of a Mohawk father and an English mother, there were no Aboriginal literary voices. Certainly, there were no published descriptions of the Aboriginal experience of colonization either as survival or as victimization.

Recently, the marginal space of Canadian literature has become quite crowded, not just with male Francophones but with women writers from all backgrounds, recent immigrants for whom neither English nor French is mother tongue, gays and lesbians, Aboriginal writers, and even a few of us from Canada’s other colonies, the Yukon, Northwest Territories, and Nunavut. There is a similar trend in Canadian curriculum theory and writing, a trend that must be followed if we are to survive, as Atwood reminds us. These writers and theorists have reconfigured the margins, the place of survival, as a topos filled with life worth living and at certain times worth talking and writing about. Just as our primarily English-speaking literary ancestors found the ferocity of Canadian winters—as

well as the immensity of the prairies—rich fodder for writing, the most recent generation of Canadian writers finds our marginality, as individuals and groups, provides grist for the literary mill. Thus not only writers in marginalized genres such as speculative fiction explore the theme of the Alienated Outsider; recently, mainstream writers such as Atwood (1996), Timothy Findley (1995), and Jane Urquhart (1993) have written historical novels excavating the immigrant experience for crazy and/or poor women of Irish descent. Social scientists, feminists, and political philosophers may continue to theorize marginalization primarily as a form of oppression and thus inherently unjust (Young, 1990). Canadian writers (many of whom are themselves feminists) are working creatively, as well as critically, within the location of Alienated Outsider. Perhaps the Canadian experience of marginalization as a site of both critique and creativity opens the possibility for sensitivity to otherness, difference, life, and seeing the world simultaneously from multiple intersecting latitudes and longitudes. Perhaps, just as the characters in Canadian speculative fiction discover and as much Canadian fiction suggests to its readers, living in the hinterland is in many ways superior to living in the centre, for exactly this reason.

Just as Canadians need a literature about “here” because this is where we live, Canadians also need a form of curriculum theorizing grounded in “here,” which maps out the territory of who we are in relation to the topography of where we live—the physical topos as well as the sociopolitical, historical, and institutional landscape of our lives. Canadians need a curriculum theorizing that helps educators and students come to grips with how Canada, such as it is, has survived to date, and how we who occupy this multi-variegated landscape called Canada can continue both to survive and—to move beyond grim survival—to find our way together in this place.

To accomplish such a task, Canadian curriculum theorists will have to reshape tools inherited from others and make them our own. I suggest that like the four babiche thongs stringing the drum together for survival, four challenges face us.

FOUR CHALLENGES FACING CANADIAN CURRICULUM THEORISTS

Writing From This Place

Our first challenge will be to name where we are, and what it looks and feels like to be in this place, even when we feel “out of place.” Canadian curriculum theorists may need to experiment with tools from the indigenous Canadian intellectual tradition and incorporate them into our theorizing. For example, a home-grown curriculum document, theory, or enquiry might draw more extensively upon the rich Canadian traditions of journalism and creative documentary (Kostash, 1994). Canadian curriculum theorists could even explore the poetic voice, in the tradition of down-to-earth Canadian poets such as Lorna Crozier (1992, 1995, 1999), who are often accused of dragging prairie dust through their

poems. T. E. Hulme, an Englishman who came to the Canadian prairies in the late 19th century, eventually returned to England to write poetry then called modern. Hulme (cited in Abley, 1986) wrote:

The first time I ever felt the necessity or inevitableness of verse, was in the desire to reproduce the peculiar quality of feeling which is induced by the flat spaces and wide horizons of the virgin prairie of Western Canada. (p. 123)

With poetry forged on the vastness of the landscape outside my studio window, Hulme helped overturn the dominance of the Romantic tradition in English poetry. Experiencing the Canadian prairies, as either a visitor or a lifelong resident, calls a poet to write gritty verse shaped by that landscape, to craft words and images that purport not to explain the enormity of the world but to turn readers to face the very place where they live. The Canadian prairies never let writers forget how difficult it is to simply hang on to their pen and hat in the dry, relentless wind. As prairie writers and other Canadians explore how it is we can possibly survive here, they also find themselves humbled by the task of creating down-to-earth art rather than theorizing grandly. By reading and following their example, Canadian curriculum theorists can write from this place, of this place, and for this place.

A Language of Our Own

The second challenge will be to find and create a language of our own, and to turn to our own for that language. Perhaps we can begin to meet this challenge by reading *Saturday Night*, *Geist: The Canadian Magazine of Ideas and Culture*, and *Event* as well as—or, when time is tight, instead of—*Harper's*, *The Atlantic Monthly*, and *The New Yorker*. Canadian curriculum scholars can make more diligent efforts to seek out the work of other Canadian scholars: political philosopher Charles Taylor, metallurgist and philosopher of technology Ursula Franklin, media theorist Marshall McLuhan, and Blackfoot lawyer and philosopher Leroy Little Bear. These Canadian scholars have retooled philosophy, politics, technology, and media in ways that can help Canadian curriculum scholars map the territory of the sociopolitical and cultural “here.” Perhaps those of us writing curricula and curriculum theory can turn to prolific Canadian postmodernists such as Arthur Kroker and Linda Hutcheon to trace the postmodern divide through the Canadian consciousness. And of course “here” is not just the academy. To listen to, and to hear, the languages and the stories of the landscape, imagination, and vast otherness that is Canada, curriculum writers may need to turn to Canadian poets, novelists, and writers of nonfiction, including Aboriginal writers of fiction and memoir, prairie poets, and northern journalists.

Understanding and drawing upon Canadian literary and scholarly traditions may not be enough to ensure survival in any of its various forms. If, as Atwood suggested 30 years ago, Canadians must take survival for ourselves and our children seriously, then we may be compelled to move beyond our official languages and theories as well as our traditional ways of taking care of business in curriculum. Finding, creating, and using a curriculum language of our own may require listening (for which curriculum theorists are not known), learning, and using the language of our neighbourhoods, the languages and dialects that both predate and follow the arrival of English and French. If we cannot learn to speak to each other, at least we can begin by learning to hear each other. Following the example of Canadian literature, finding our own language may mean blurring the lines between fiction and nonfiction, mixing languages within a single text, or crossing genres. Perhaps Aboriginal writers can provide an example the rest can follow. For example, Louise Halfe (1994) carefully juxtaposes English and Cree words in her poems to heighten the meaning of the words in each language, as well as the overall effect and significance of the poem. Maria Campbell, who articulated the agony and beauty of growing up Métis in her classic *Halfbreed* (1973) recounts the bawdy and humorous stories of her community of origin in *Stories of the Road Allowance People* (1995). She partially translates these stories so that English speakers can understand the narrative and the humour, but retains enough of the original Michif for the reader to be acutely aware that she or he is hearing another language, another way of speaking the world. Perhaps Canadian curriculum theorists can experiment with creating a linguistic hybrid such as Michif.¹ A new hybrid trade language of curricular and linguistic multiplicity could offer Canadian curriculum scholars the possibility of both creating and locating a curricular landscape of our own. This language of our own might bear a much closer relationship to the imaginary landscape of Canadian fiction and creative nonfiction, as well as to the physical landscape in which Canadian educators and their students live and work, than most contemporary curriculum discourses.

Interpretive Tools of Our Own

Our third challenge will be to seek out or create interpretive tools that allow Canadian curriculum theorists to write and interpret who Canadians are, what we know, and where we want to go, all the while remaining cognizant of an important truism: there will be no single answer to these questions. "The flats of Canada," Hulme once observed of the Canadian prairies, "are incomprehensible on any single theory" (cited in Abley, 1986, p. 122).

When she attempted to write a biography of her mother's working-class English life as well her own autobiography in a single narrative, Steedman (1986) found that the interpretive tools for analyzing exclusionary narratives of

class, childhood, and girlhood—as well as the studies these tools produced—had not and could not account for the particularities of either her own life or her mother's. Traditional Marxist analysis of working-class life, for example, “denies its subjects a particular story, a personal history, except when that story illustrates a general thesis,” writes Steedman (p. 10). She makes a case for the need for a new set of interpretive tools, ones that do not deny the particularities of place or personal history for the sake of the explanatory or universal.

Most interpretive devices Canadian curriculum theorists have inherited are from the European imaginary space, tools meant to dislodge, to show what is behind and beyond what is taken for granted, to make individuals uncomfortable with society and possibly with themselves. As Theodor Adorno said, “It is part of morality not to be at home in one's home” (cited in Abley, 1986, p. 134). Perhaps Canadians, preoccupied with ourselves as Alienated Outsiders, have learned this lesson too well. From our literature it appears that home is a very ambiguous notion for most English-speaking and immigrant Canadians. Many of us are unsure where we come from, where here is, and whether we belong. This ambiguity about home has not necessarily improved our morality, as Adorno might have hoped. Although this ambiguity has played a large part in the birth of our rich literary tradition, a certain malaise, which might be described as spiritual, has been the twin in this birth, and this malaise has left many Canadians longing to know who we are and where our home is. The single most important task for Canadian curriculum theorists may be to search within the physical and imaginary landscape of Canada for the tools we need to see our home, to help us understand how we have come to be “out of place” in this home, and how we can finally come home here.

Topography for Canadian Curriculum Theory

If anything offers the possibility for community and commonality in this era of multiplicity and difference, it is the land that we share. When Atwood (1972) wrote *Survival*, she wanted to write a geography of mind to guide Canadians through their own literature, to aid us in understanding ourselves and others, and ultimately to ensure that we survive, as a society, a people, and a nation. In its original meaning, *geo-graphy* was to write or scribe *geo*, the world, a rather grand task. Perhaps Canadian curriculum theorists would be content to begin with the slightly more humble but no less difficult task of beginning a topography, rather than a geography, of curriculum theory. We need to write in a detailed way the topos—the particular places and regions where we live and work—and how these places are inscribed in our theorizing, as either presence or absence, whether we want them there or not. Through recovery of an understanding of the topos, especially of imaginary and physical landscape and our history within it, we may find a place to begin the difficult work of reaching into and across the

territories of difference. And thus our fourth challenge will be to write a topography for curriculum theory, one that begins at home but journeys elsewhere. When the Dene elders spoke of survival, they meant survival for us all, not just Dene people; when the Cree elders hold a pipe in a ceremony and pray, they pray for us all, not just for Cree people. So too curriculum theorizing must begin at home but it must work on behalf of everyone.

CONCLUSION

Canadian curriculum theorists and practitioners—on behalf of all Canadians—must continue to ask the question “Who are we?” And as curriculum scholars and practitioners, they can only begin to answer the question as they write from here, from this particular place, even if they are not writing it directly. Perhaps they can turn to such tools as indigenous Canadian languages and literatures, in their efforts to better understand how topos writes us rather than how we write it. In their quest for a way offering the possibility of survival for us all, curriculum writers are not alone; Canadian novelists, poets, essayists, and (creative) nonfiction writers have made this journey before and have left a map to follow. If Canadian curriculum theorists meet their challenge, curriculum Canadiana will live out the question “Who are we?” in relation to the questions “Where are we?” and “Who are they?” and bear witness to the possibilities for us all of doing so. Such writing and theorizing may elucidate how for the Dene of northern Canada, the French both inside and outside Quebec, and all Canadians in the era of North American and Asia-Pacific free trade, it is possible to survive and to thrive in—and possibly even to subvert—the economic and political shadow of others. To accomplish this, Canadian curriculum theorists must come to understand that the topos from which they write is the physical, imaginary, and sociopolitical landscape they share with the communities and children on behalf of whom they work and write.

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NOTE

¹ Michif is a language that combines Cree syntax, particularly verbs, with French and Cree nouns as well as more recently with English words that have migrated into the language. Two kinds of Michif exist: Michif French, a variety of French spoken by Métis people in Métis communities (Douaud, 1985; Lavalée, 1991), and Michif, in which the syntax is Cree and most nouns and modifiers, as well as prepositional phrases, come from French (Crawford, 1983; Bakker, 1997).

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Cynthia Chambers is Director of Graduate Studies and teaches English/language arts and curriculum studies in the Faculty of Education, University of Lethbridge, Lethbridge, Alberta, T1K 3M4.