



## Context matters in history textbook studies: A call to address the socio-political landscape of textbook production

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### ABSTRACT

History textbooks are a tool of nation-building and often the only account of particular events, people and issues to which students will be exposed. This is one reason why it is important to examine, not only their content, but the context of their production. Research attention needs to be directed not only at disentangling the logics of textbook content, a purpose that dominates the field, but also at the social and political contexts of their development, including their production (publishing and authorship) and the processes by which they receive official approval. This work analyzed 100 history textbook studies in order to identify current trends in textbook research. This article focuses on one of the four major findings of the study: textbook studies often focus on the content of the textbook in isolation from the socio-political landscape of textbook production. The socio-political landscape refers, but is not limited to, the influence of local and geopolitics; the influence of the state, evident primarily in the official approval processes employed by governments; the economic dimension and publication parameters; and authorship factors. Among the relatively few studies that address the socio-political landscape, the authors often employ a historiographical or comparative perspective. The historiographical perspective, which is dominant, offers an analysis of textbooks over time in order to reveal both continuities and changes in the historical narratives produced by their authors. One example is a study by Yeow Tong Chia (2013), who examines conceptions of 'Chineseness' and China in Ontario high school history curricula and textbooks in the post Second World War to the 1980s period. More broadly, the paper locates the Ontario textbooks in the international context of the western-centric perspectives that were prevalent following the Second World War. The comparative perspective analyzes textbooks across regions in one historical moment. For example, Jason Nicholls (2006) addresses the role of national contexts in determining how the Second World War is portrayed in textbooks found in the United States, Italy, Sweden, Japan, and England.

## KEYWORDS

History textbook studies, Textbook production, Socio-political context of textbooks, Historiographical approach, Comparative approach

## CITATION

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## Introduction

History textbooks are viewed as a crucial vehicle for representing a nation to that nation's young citizens (Grever & van der Vlies, 2017; Ngo, 2014; Sakki, 2014). This becomes particularly clear when totalitarian states rewrite textbook content to suit changing political circumstances. For example, authorities in Hong Kong recently erased references in new textbooks to the fact that it was a colony of Britain from 1898 to 1997 (Oung, 2022, pp. A1, A11) and Russia is currently reviewing its history textbooks with the aim of making them more "patriotic" by removing references to Ukraine (Dixon, 2022, n.p.). In many educational jurisdictions around the world, textbooks are either selected or developed under government direction and then officially approved for classroom use. They are thus deemed to contain "official knowledge" (Apple, 1999) that is considered suitable to be conveyed to the next generation of adult citizens. Often, they are accepted uncritically by their student readers. As one Canadian secondary student declared, "You can't disagree with it . . . it's what you are supposed to learn" (Seixas, 1994, p. 93).

Maria Repoussi and Nicole Tutiaux-Guillon (2010) note that textbooks are "the dominant translation of the curriculum in schools and they continue to constitute the most widely used resource for teaching and learning" (p. 156). However, textbook status and use are more nuanced than Repoussi and Tutiaux-Guillon acknowledge. Stuart Foster (2011) reminds us that "the production, solution, deployment, and status of history textbooks differs considerably in different countries" (p. 5). Foster's point is supported by the work of other scholars (e.g., Hein & Selden, 2000; Nicholls, 2006; Pingel, 2010; Vickers & Jones, 2005). The United Kingdom and some European Union nations are at one end of a continuum because they do not have authorized textbooks. Teachers are free to choose their textbooks, or, for that matter, to choose not to use them at all (Haydn, 2011). At the other end of the continuum, Terry Haydn (2011) refers to "the reverence, status and importance attached to history textbooks that can be found in countries such as Greece and Japan" (p. 83). As Ogawa and Field (2006) point out:

[T]he Japanese national government directly monitors, supervises and censors textbook content, a policy pursued from the nineteenth century, schoolbooks provide authoritative statements on national policy and ideology. In the case of Japanese history textbooks, the content portrays the preferred history of the nation, especially with regard to the treatment of World War II and its aftermath. (p. 44)

While it is hardly unexpected for history textbooks to portray "the preferred history of the nation," Japan's textbooks have been the focus of national and international attention due to the lack of

acknowledgement of, in particular, the harsh treatment of prisoners of war and the exploitation of the “comfort” women during the Second World War. This topic has been extensively discussed in the literature (e.g., McCormack, 2000; Nozaki, 2008; Yoshida, 2007; Yoshiko & Hiromitsu, 2000). Regardless of how and to what extent history textbooks are used or not used in classrooms, textbooks are cultural artifacts, “a public form of knowledge indicative of the general and overall discourse permeating a society at a given time” (Morgan & Henning, 2013, n.p.).

Textbook studies have been central to the recent work of *Teaching History for Canada’s Future* (THFCF), a pan-Canadian research project funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. The Curriculum and Resources Cluster within this project has a mandate to examine the curriculum and key resources in each of Canada’s 13 provincial and territorial educational jurisdictions. As a means toward preparing for this end, we conducted an analysis of history textbook studies.

We gathered a comprehensive corpus of 100 journal articles and book chapters published between 1991 and 2021 in English and French to identify current trends in textbook studies. We systematically examined key social studies, history education, curriculum studies, and media studies scholarly journals and prominent edited collections to identify relevant research based on contribution to the field of textbook analysis.<sup>1</sup> The list is not exhaustive as our intent is to offer examples of relevant literature rather than a complete list of textbook studies conducted in the past three decades. We acknowledge that we include a disproportionate number of studies from the Global North; a factor of language barriers and the dominance of English language academic journals.

The framework for our analysis was presented to the THFCF Executive Committee and validated by it prior to commencing the study. The process of gathering and analyzing data occurred from 2019 to 2022. All researchers read articles deductively, applying a predetermined analytical framework to critically assess an author’s epistemological claims; theoretical framework; core methodological assumptions; application of methods, including selection criteria; the strengths and limitations of the methods employed; and the findings. In addition, they judged each article on its overall strengths and limitations, as well as its contribution to the field. After analyzing individual studies, the research team identified the prevalent trends across the studies reviewed. The researchers shared and assessed their work to maintain validity and transparency.

We note that our focus is on studies of elementary and high school textbooks (Kindergarten to grade 12 in most of North America, to Secondary IV in the province of Quebec and A-levels in Britain), rather than those used in postsecondary courses. This is because the content of the elementary and high school texts is typically vetted by educational authorities for wide use in classrooms, often across a nation. Postsecondary textbooks are far more idiosyncratic since they are selected, and often authored by, individual instructors or instructor collectives. One must exercise caution in any attempts to generalize about them and thus, they are far less frequently studied. We note, as well, that publishers’ development processes and marketing strategies are very different at the two levels.

Following the review, we identified four areas that require greater attention in history textbook studies. First, textbook researchers need to be more explicit about their methodologies and methods. Second, they need to consider a holistic approach. The third finding concerns the paucity of studies related to classroom use and particularly how textbook content is mediated by both teachers and students. This article focuses on our fourth major finding which is that studies often are concerned with textbook content in isolation from the socio-political landscape of production, inclusive of historical, curricular, and economic contexts. Studies might ask, for example, how do textbooks differ between totalitarian and democratic nations or what entities within an educational jurisdiction control curriculum policy, what are the means employed and what is the nature of the resulting textbooks? As Elie Podeh (2000) reminds us, “since textbooks are not compiled in a vacuum and their contents reflect trends in society and culture, the texts can be assessed only within the framework of their historical context” (p. 69). Jordan Reed (2018) argues, the field “needs to be re-centered on the textbook and the methods of book history” (p.

398) in order to “look at the intricate processes that created these textbooks—publishers’ pecuniary motives, authors’ intent, and the books’ materiality” (p. 412).

We took note of Eckhardt Fuchs’ (2011) assertion that the field of textbook research is mired with studies taking the research object, the textbook, as “its point of departure” rather than “various thematic, methodological, and disciplinary contexts” (p. 17). Most history textbook studies do not offer substantive attention to contextual elements – the inherent socio-political landscape. The socio-political context of textbook production refers to, but is not limited to, the influence of local and geopolitics, government objectives, authorship, and publication, each of which contributes to shaping a textbook at a given time in the production process. Official approval processes must also be taken into consideration. This article offers a comprehensive review of history textbook studies and demonstrates that such context matters for the field.

### ***The socio-political context: Historiographical and comparative approaches***

Some scholars do discuss the socio-political context in which textbooks are produced (e.g., Carrier, 2018; Naseem, 2014; Oteiza and Achugar, 2018). For example, when analyzing the inclusion/exclusion of Chamorro women from Guamanian history textbooks, Perez Hattori (2018) explores the textbook industry in the 1990s, including her own authorship, as a source for reinforcing western traditions of what counts as knowledge.

We found that among those relatively few studies that address the socio-political landscape, the authors often provide a historiographical or comparative perspective. It is clear from the dataset that a historiographical approach is the more common. Such an approach offers an analysis of textbooks over time to reveal both continuities and changes in historical narratives produced by their authors (Podeh, 2000, p. 69). For example, Yeow Tong Chia (2013) examines conceptions of China and ‘Chineseness’ in high school history textbooks in Ontario, Canada. He found that textbooks perpetuated the western-centric views of Chinese history that have been prevalent internationally. His study points to the 1940s in which seemingly western-inspired democratic reforms in China were first included in the Modern World History course and to 1980’s textbooks which refer to China’s economic prominence as an entry into western modernity (pp. 203–207). Similarly, Clark (2007) offers a historiographical investigation of the treatment of Aboriginals and Aboriginal issues (using the language of the 1982 Constitution Act) in Canadian school history textbooks. She demonstrates that textbooks from the early to mid-twentieth century often treated Aboriginal peoples with “paternalism and repugnance” (p. 95). By the turn of the 21st century, Clark found that textbooks reflected some of the socio-political changes towards greater rights for Aboriginal peoples; e.g., Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996) and the Supreme Court *Delgamuukw* ruling (1997), among other events. Textbook depictions of Aboriginal peoples became more positive over time but still failed to acknowledge colonial relationships of power, thereby ‘othering’ them within a dominant narrative of progress (pp. 103–111).

Rather than a historiographical approach, other scholars, albeit again limited in numbers, take a comparative approach to socio-political analysis. A comparative approach analyzes textbooks across regions in one historical moment. For example, Simona Szakács (2018) examines how current textbooks construct the concept of ‘Europeanness.’ She found, given the geopolitical landscape, that most European countries emphasize post-Second World War ideals of human rights and global citizenship, whereas Russian and Polish textbooks emphasize nationalist citizenship as part of an ongoing postwar reclamation in opposition to their western neighbours. While the transnational politics of history is central to Szakács’ study, the sheer number and breadth of textbooks results in insufficient information regarding the politics of governance over textbook content in each region. Similarly, and perhaps unsurprisingly, Jason Nicholls (2006) reveals how national contexts play a significant role in determining how the Second World War is portrayed within textbooks in the United States, Italy, Sweden, Japan, and England. He found that Italy and Japan minimized their role and responsibilities by either blaming Mussolini and fascism in the case of Italy or paying little attention to the atrocities committed against the Chinese in the

case of Japan. In contrast, the United States exaggerated its role as “the natural and pseudo-unilateral defender of the world” (p. 97). Nicholls comments that “perspectives of World War II in United States textbooks appear anchored in the international politics of the present...portrayals of United States forces toppling dictators in World War II bare an uncanny resemblance to recent coverage of the ousting of regimes in Afghanistan and Iraq” (p. 97). Likewise, Julian Dierkes (2010) compares how postwar textbooks in Japan and East and West Germany reconceived national identity following the Second World War. He points out that researchers tend to overlook the central role of the institutional context of policy-making at the level of the nation-state. Dierkes demonstrates that in postwar East Germany, where the curriculum was controlled by party cadres, the war was presented as a result of capitalism. In West Germany, where teachers controlled the curriculum, grand national narratives were abandoned, and historical responsibility was addressed. In Japan, where government bureaucrats were more powerful, curriculum focussed on the who, the what and the where at the expense of consideration of dilemmas around historical responsibility.

Whether a historiographical or contemporary comparative approach is used, these studies highlight that the context of textbook production matters to any analysis. History textbooks are a tool for governments to shape a nation’s historical consciousness – how they make sense of and act upon their understanding of the past. Textbooks are part of nation-building whether by means of denial, mythology, or celebration narratives of the past. In the case of Clark’s (2007) study, history textbooks offered a white settler narrative framework comfortable to a public that has not yet come to grips with what reconciliation means (p. 111). In the case of Nicholls’ (2006) study, history textbooks perpetuated a military industrial complex that has come to define the national identity of the United States. As these examples and others from our dataset show, textbooks are cultural artifacts that reflect “the concerns, the conventional wisdom, and even the fads of the age that produced them,” as Frances Fitzgerald (1979, p. 20) so aptly put it. It is critical that such conventions be unraveled by scholars to “demystify and dethrone” (Osborne, 1995, p. 155) the textbook as an objective, closed narrative of the past and instead consider how textbooks may be used as tools to open lines of inquiry about interpretation of the past.

While some scholars have offered an analysis of the political ideologies that challenge the status of textbooks, it is far less common to see an additional examination of how decisions are made regarding textbook content and who makes those decisions. Textbooks are not simply a reflection of the historical and cultural contexts, but rather carefully authored and developed products overseen by for-profit companies to meet the curricular objectives set out by a government.<sup>2</sup> Production (including publishing and authorship) and approval processes should, therefore, be a crucial aspect of any consideration of the socio-political landscape for textbook creation.

Elie Podeh (2000) addresses the role of historians and educators in shaping textbooks, the relationship between the *zeitgeist* and textbook content, and the impact of historiography on textbooks (p. 69). Podeh analyzes the representation of the Arab-Israeli conflict in history textbooks within the Israeli education system from 1948 to 2000. He found that pre-1967, textbooks were influenced by a nation-building objective that promoted Zionist values and portrayed Arab populations with negative stereotypes (p. 74). Progressively, he argues, textbooks were shaped by the ascension of an intellectual school that sought a more critical approach to history. From 1984 onwards, Podeh writes, “textbooks are fundamentally different from their predecessors...on the whole, these textbooks seem to present a balanced picture of the Arab-Israeli conflict” (p. 85).

Although Podeh’s study suggests that intellectual and academic trends can play an important role in textbook development, this is not always the case. Keith Crawford and Stuart J. Foster (2008) address French history textbooks and their representation of the Second World War and the Vichy Regime. They argue that most textbooks before the 1980s “spread false or extremely vague information about Vichy’s anti-Jewish policy” (p. 65) and constructed a myth of broad resistance by the French population. They contend that even as French historians began to deconstruct these myths, textbooks maintained that the French were a cohesive people fighting

against tyranny (p. 70). By paying close attention to the historiographical currents in French history, Crawford and Foster clearly demonstrate that the textbooks embellished or misrepresented these events in the past to shape collective memory and identity. While nation-building efforts provide some explanation for misrepresentation, the authors importantly discuss the politics of the textbook industry in France. They attribute mythologies of the Second World War in the texts, in part, to a lack of diversity within multinational publishing companies (p. 66). Even though schools have a choice of textbooks, the textbooks produced are eerily similar in their interpretation of the past and maintain a steadfast commitment to the requirements of French curricula. Rather than textbooks engaging students in historical debates, in this case, industry and government perpetuate a history of “common ideas, shared values, and a cohesive past” (p. 83).

In the Global South, Rafael Capó García (in press), in his analysis of social science and history textbooks, takes into consideration the dominant academic and state sanctioned narratives that have shaped the cultural politics of Puerto Rico. His study shows how most textbooks deploy the discourse of *mestizaje*, or miscegenation and racial mixture, to conceal the violence of colonial conquest. Capó García recounts how this narrative was established as a depoliticized nation-building story to legitimize the country’s newly founded Commonwealth status and unify its people. Echoing Crawford and Foster’s (2008) findings about the distortion of France’s Vichy past, Capó García shows how violence against Indigenous Peoples is mostly portrayed as exceptional acts perpetrated by individuals rather than by a collective evangelizing and civilizing project. The textbooks use the resulting *mestizaje* as a counter to genocide, emphasizing the bright side of it all.

Many other studies point to this denial of shared culpability as well, a practice that is best understood if contextualized within the country’s historiographical currents and cultural political context. Ken Montgomery (2005), for instance, shows how in the interest of Canada’s raceless state-sponsored multiculturalism, textbooks presented racism as “isolated occurrences confined to exceptionally flawed individuals or to unusual times” (p. 437). Marta Araújo and Silvia Rodríguez Maeso (2012) make similar arguments about Portuguese textbooks and their assuaging of colonization and slavery with terms such as “‘circulation’, ‘acculturation’, and ‘miscegenation’” (p. 1279). Jason Nicholls (2006) shows how this is evident in Italian textbooks, where “we find that by placing blame for Italian involvement on the ‘fascist degenerate’ Mussolini, the Italian people are cleared of responsibility” (p. 98). These tactics of concealing and reframing historical injustices by means of shifting blame to certain communities or individuals highlight the role of official narratives in textbooks and the importance of addressing the political, historical, and cultural context in which they are produced.

## Textbook Production: Publishing, Authorship and Approval

A number of scholars have identified publishing as a lacuna when it comes to textbook studies. For purposes of this discussion, we will use the definition of educational publishing provided by Miha Kovač and Mojca Šebat (2019): “any production of print and digital objects that include[s] instructions and recommendations and are used for the transmission of knowledge in primary and secondary education” (p. 276). Christoph Bläsi (2018) notes that there are significant gaps in research on educational publishing and that it is not well represented in book publishing studies. Historian Leslie Howsam (2009) contends that studies in book and publishing history fail to sufficiently acknowledge the role of the publisher and editors, leaving the impression that historians are self-published. Howsam calls for greater scholarly attention to be directed specifically to textbook publishing due to the impact of textbooks on publisher profits, their role in promotion of national pride and the fact that they are the only form of history that most people ever encounter.

Educational publishers play a unique part in both textbook production and provision, but this role can be somewhat hidden from view. In the case of trade books, authors typically submit unsolicited manuscripts to a publisher. In the case of textbooks, on the other hand, publishers solicit authors on the basis of their reputations as teachers or through channels such as teachers’

associations. The publisher guides the authorship process, monitoring to ensure that the textbook is congruent with official curriculum policy documents in order to obtain official approval status. Once complete, the publisher markets the book through whatever channels are available in a particular jurisdiction, which can include grassroots approaches such as sending sales representatives to individual school boards and schools and providing professional development workshops for teachers. All of this demonstrates that the publisher plays a central role when it comes to textbook publishing.

In her comprehensive introduction to the then new publication, *Journal of Educational Media, Memory, and Society*, Simone Lässig (2009) points to a number of contexts in which textbooks function. She identifies the mechanisms of textbook production and approval as a new and promising area of research. She argues that research on textbook publishing should include such topics as the relationship between school textbooks and other educational media, including new media. This research should also examine the “delicate processes of negotiation that differ greatly from one country to the next in terms of their often obstinate participants such as politicians and publicists, parliamentarians and pressure groups, industrial representatives and social activists, textbook authors and textbook publishing houses, parents and peer groups, pupils and teachers” (p. 130). She also suggests that state influence on textbook production, approval, and use, and the economic dimension require examination. We will briefly discuss each of these in turn.

Investigation into the relationship between textbooks and new media is particularly timely and important. Christoph Bläsi (2018) points to a number of new models of textbook production that have emerged as a result of digitization. One example is the advent of open-access textbooks with free creative commons licences that allow teachers to revise content as desired. While digital resources are increasingly impactful, there are many questions related to their use and more research is needed regarding what this change may mean going forward.

Of the participants who are involved in negotiation that Lässig lists, it is perhaps most important to examine the role of the author, even though that role may not be as central as it appears at first glance. Marcus Otto (2018) points out, “the extent of textbook authors’ actual influence on the content of ‘their’ books, the issue of who holds effective responsibility for the knowledge in textbooks—of who authorizes it—is a highly interesting one, which as yet largely awaits systematic academic exploration” (p. 100). Leslie Howsam’s publication, *Past into Print: The Publishing of History in Britain, 1850-1950* is somewhat of an exception. A major source for her work on British history textbooks was the extensive correspondence between textbook authors and publishers, Cambridge University Press, Oxford University Press and Macmillan Company, found in the publishers’ archives.<sup>3</sup>

The bulk of the evidence to date indicates that the textbook author does not play as key a role as might be reasonably expected. First, the author has little impact on choice of content due to the need to ensure that it is congruent with national or regional curriculum specifications and examination requirements. This is necessary in order for the textbook to receive official approval status in targeted jurisdictions. Without this, the book will fail to achieve sales targets. Second, individual authors can lack autonomy because they often work in “collective forms of authoring,” as team members under the supervision of curriculum specialists and editors (Otto, 2018, p. 96). In the case of a history textbook, the team might consist of history teachers (for pedagogical expertise), a historian (for content expertise), curriculum experts, production editors, artwork editors, designers, and illustrators. Third, authors must take the interests of various stakeholders into consideration. In addition to the groups listed by Lässig, these can include teacher unions, religious organizations, and advocates for international causes such as Holocaust education, human rights education, environmental education, and food security, as well as an infinite array of local interests (Fitzgibbons, 1985; Sammler, et al., 2016). Otto (2018) calls for research “which seeks to identify ways in which textbook authors exercise or can exercise agency, how their author function actually plays itself out, and how they simultaneously interact with a range of other actors and networks” (p. 101).

The influence of the state on textbook production and approval is pervasive in most nations. In fact, the key difference between educational publishing and other types of publishing is the central

place of the state. It is the government's curricular guidelines that publishers use to largely determine the development of textbook content. The state also often controls design, production and distribution of textbooks and the state is responsible for textbook approval requirements and procedures. The state typically either provides the funding for textbook purchase or purchases the textbooks and then provides them to schools.

Like publishing and authorship, very little scholarly attention is directed towards state approval processes. An examination of government approval procedures and how they are enacted will reveal the negotiation processes between school content and the various participants. Both Terry Haydn (2011) with reference to the UK and Inari Sakki (2014) to EU countries, have explained that while any private publisher can publish a textbook, typically a few publishers dominate the market. This is, as Sakki points out, because "the structures and contents of the textbooks are based on the guidelines provided by the national curricula. This makes it a big risk for a publisher to publish a book that does not match the core curriculum; hence, history and civics textbooks can be regarded as a technology of the state" (p. 37).

Tony Taylor and Stuart Macintyre (2017) offer three categories of what they call textbook culture in developed nations: These are pluralist, where there are significant numbers of rival publishers (Australia and the United Kingdom), adopted, where there is a limited number of mega-publishers that compete for sole adoption by a major education system (certain individual states in the United States) and endorsed, which rely on state-approved textbooks (Japan, Russia Federation).

Maria Repoussi and Nicole Tutiaux-Guillon (2010) point to five models of approval procedures and two models of textbook distribution:

one single officially approved textbook; several officially approved textbooks; coexistence of official approved and non-approved textbooks; officially recommended textbooks; and textbooks only produced by private publishers, without official approval. These models combine with two systems of textbook distribution: approved by the state or chosen by teachers, with some influence from the local community. (p. 160)

Given that the authorization of only one single officially approved textbook is often accompanied by government examinations, the above represents a lengthy continuum that ranges from extreme state control to a high degree of teacher autonomy. Although Repoussi and Tutiaux-Guillon (2010) do not make this point, the choice of model is influenced by the political nature of a national government. Democratic nations provide greater choice. Totalitarian nations typically are more authoritarian, often prescribing one authorized government-selected or -developed textbook per grade level, accompanied by government-developed and -administered examinations to ensure instructional adherence to their content.

Very little work has been carried out on the intricacies of the processes by which textbooks receive, or do not receive, official approval. Part of the reason for this is the difficulty of obtaining the documents which provide evidence of the decision-making processes since government bureaucracies are typically highly protective of such information. We will mention two recent exceptions to this. In *Civil Rights, Culture Wars*, author Charles W. Eagles (2017) describes the saga of *Mississippi: Conflict and Change*, a high school history textbook authored by James Loewen (author of *Lies My Teacher Told Me*) and Charles Sallis. This "boldly revisionist" (p. 87) textbook was rejected by the Mississippi State Textbook Purchasing Board. Members of the rating panel wanted students to "take pride in [their] state history, not question it" (p. 184), as this text encouraged them to do. Many of the appraisers, including one Black member, objected to a photograph of a lynching. The authors subsequently challenged the decision in a successful court case. It is solely due to this court case that documents related to the decision to reject the book became part of the public record, thus becoming available to researchers.

*No School for Suckers: Textbooks, Political Censorship and Mind Control in a Democracy* by Jeremy Richard Tompkins (2014) is a study of the political economy of textbooks in Ontario, Canada from the 1940s through to 1985. This study relies on extensive research in the Archives

of Ontario, where Tompkins was able to access not only textbook evaluations, but other contextual documents including memos and other correspondence, reports, and minutes. The author was able to gain access to these closely guarded documents by means of a Freedom of Information request and by signing a Research Agreement which prohibited photocopying or photographing of the materials. We are not aware of a previous published study using these documents. Like the Charles W. Eagles study, this author closely examined reviewers' comments and recommendations in textbook evaluation documents. He also looked at the extent to which the final decision to approve or reject a book was in agreement with the reviewers' recommendations and considered the question of if not, why not. In particular, he considered the extent to which the final decision was based in political considerations; ultimately discovering that the process was intensely political. In fact, the government was deceptive in the way it went about its business. He states:

[T]he government obfuscated the rationale for such decisions. In crafting rejection letters to publishers, officers habitually excerpted negative reviews to give the impression that the books were broadly panned even when a majority of reviewers had approved them. Only when a majority of reviewers agreed with rejection did the Ministry reveal the consensus. (p. 23)

According to Tompkins, "The Ministry's lack of transparency resulted in a controlling regime that overstepped its authority, hobbled publishers and students, and kept the population in the dark about its operation" (p. 24).

In "Textbooks in the Balance," Dave Neuman (2019) writes from the perspective of a reviewer in the History-Social Science textbook adoption process in California. Newman describes the vicissitudes of the processes involved. This complex task was complicated further by individual agendas, political protest, and complex requirements at the state level. Much time was consumed by discussion of minutia. He recommends that the required state criteria should be dramatically reduced in order to allow panels to give adequate time to issues that are truly significant. He notes that, after months of work on the part of many people, the State Board of Education overturned his panel's recommendation. This article provides a rare glimpse behind the curtain that is typically drawn around this process. We need more such studies that are written from the perspectives of various insider roles.

Lässig also points to the economic dimension. It is important to examine the economic aspect of publishing since publishing is a business. As such it exists to make a profit and the relationship between the profit motive and the concept of equality of opportunity to access education, which includes the tools of education, such as textbooks, is worth examining. There has been some limited work in this area in Canada. In two reports, industry insiders, Glen Rollans and Michel de la Chenelière (2010) and Rollans and Simon de Jocas (2012), have provided detailed snapshots of the state of Canadian education publishing, with an emphasis on economic aspects. Penney Clark (2017) has traced the development of Canadian educational publisher Copp Clark from its beginnings in 1841 as a retail book and stationery store with printing and lithography services offered on the side to a full-fledged educational publisher, to its purchase by the British firm, Pitman, and finally as part of the multinational, Pearson PLC and its disappearance as an independent educational publishing firm.<sup>4</sup> She demonstrates how this was a typical path for a Canadian educational publisher. Clark and Wayne Knights (2011; 2013) have portrayed Canadian educational publishing as an enterprise located at the intersection of economics, politics and nationalistic expectations related to ownership, authorship and content. Clark (2017) has also examined regional educational publishing in Canada, identifying it as "a business activity surrounded by a cultural environment," as publisher Robin Farr called it in 1973. Her conclusion was that educational publishing in Canada is not sustainable at the level of region. These studies point out to an implicit tension between the view of Canadian publishing as a cultural activity versus as an industry.

Educational publishing, once "the brightest and most popular star on the publishing horizon," (McClelland, 1956, 32) has become a precarious proposition. Of the five largest educational book

publishers (K-12 and higher education), Prentice-Hall Pearson, McGraw-Hill, John Wiley, Cengage, and Houghton Mifflin, three have recently either filed for creditor protection or been taken private (Wischenbart, 2017).

## Conclusion

As this article demonstrates, research on history textbooks is a burgeoning field that emphasizes the position of textbooks as “primary sources of knowledge and understanding” and their highly politicized capacity to influence how students perceive the world around them (Roberts 2014, p. 52). It is well acknowledged that the textbook represents a fruitful area for analysis that offers a multiplicity of insights regarding what is valued by the educational system in which they receive official approval (Klymenko, 2016; Podeh, 2000).

Context matters when it comes to analyzing textbooks because they are important communication devices that are widely used in environments where they have a captive audience. History textbooks are particularly important because they perpetuate national narratives as Grever & van der Vlies (2017) and many others point out. Overwhelmingly, the field of history textbook research still lacks attention to the positionality and perpetuation of historical knowledge(s) as shaped by the context in which the textbook is created and disseminated. Greater research attention needs to be directed not only at disentangling the logics of textbook content, which dominates the field, but also at the social and political contexts of their development, including their production (publishing and authorship) and the processes by which they receive official approval. Such attention is needed to further challenge the politicized nature of history textbook development, curation and approval that, albeit highly impactful, is disproportionately under-analyzed in the field of study.

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## Author Contributions

This paper was very much a collaborative effort. As lead author, Penney Clark developed the framework for analysis of the textbook studies and supervised the analysis process. She and Kristina Llewellyn, in concert with graduate students Rafael Capó Garcia and Sarah Clifford, conceptualized the paper. Clark wrote the section on textbook production and all authors contributed to other parts of the paper.

## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> To demonstrate the range of articles consulted, our corpus features work from the following 27 journals: *Alter Native*, *An International Journal of Indigenous Peoples*; *BC Studies*; *Citizens Education Research Journal*; *Comunicación y Sociedad*; *Curriculum Inquiry*; *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*; *Education, Citizenship and Social Justice*; *Education Inquiry*; *Educational Studies*; *History and Memory*; *ENSAYOS. Revista de la Facultad de Educación de Albacete*; *Ethnic and Racial Studies*; *History of Education*; *Historical Studies in Education*; *History of Education Review*; *International Journal of Historical Learning, Teaching and Research*; *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*; *International Journal of Science Education*; *Journal of Curriculum Studies*; *Journal of Educational Media, Memory and Society*; *Journal of International Cooperation in Education*; *Journal of Social and Political Psychology*; *McGill Journal of Education*; *Paedagogica Historica*; *Social Studies Research and Practice*; *South African Journal of Education*; and *Teachers College Record*.

Our selection of edited volumes consists of 12 works, which are: *Analyzing Textbooks: Methodological Issues* (2011); *Censoring History: Citizenship and Memory in Japan, Germany, and the United States* (2000); *History Wars and the Classroom: Global Perspectives* (2012); *The Palgrave Handbook of Research in Historical Culture and Education* (2019); *The Palgrave Handbook of Textbook Studies* (2018); *(Re)Constructing Memory: School Textbooks and the Imagination of the Nation* (2014); *The Politics of the Textbook* (1991); *Reconciling Ancient and Indigenous Belief Systems: Textbooks and Curriculum in Contention* (in press); *School History Textbooks Across Cultures: International Debates and Perspectives* (2006); *Teaching the Violent Past: History Education and Reconciliation* (2007); *War, Nation, Memory: International Perspectives on World War II in School History Textbooks* (2008); and *What Shall We Tell the Children? International Perspectives on School History Textbooks* (2006).

<sup>2</sup> We note that there are instances where the government itself is the publisher of textbooks. In Canada, this is most likely to be encountered in the three northern territories, which publish some of their own resources.

<sup>3</sup> One interesting finding is the attitude of male historian authors towards female authors. Howsam mentions male historians who referred to “highly teachable” women who produced “baby histories” for the popular market or for schoolchildren. The attitudes of these male historians to women’s authorship “ranged from patronizing to dismissive” (Clark, 2010, p. 224).

<sup>4</sup> Its name remains as a publisher of financial trading and settlement calendars.