Divergent Histories: Narrative Asymmetry in French and English History Curricula in Canada

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ABSTRACT

What happens when students in the same country learn markedly different versions of its past? This article examines divergent narratives in French- and English-language history curricula across six Canadian provinces outside Québec. Drawing on a comparative analysis of Grades 7–11 curriculum documents and critical discourse analysis of key expectations and rationales, it identifies persistent asymmetries in how francophone minority histories are represented… or omitted. French-language curricula tend to foreground resistance, community survival, and political agency, whereas English-language curricula frequently marginalise or dilute episodes such as the Conquest (1759), Regulation 17, and the legacy of Louis Riel. These contrasts are not merely lexical; they organise different distributions of agency, responsibility, and visibility, with significant consequences for how students learn to imagine who belongs to the national "we". To capture this structural imbalance, the article develops the concept of *narrative asymmetry in bilingual curriculum ecosystems* and argues that such curricular inequity undermines both bilingualism and civic pluralism. The discussion then explores the identity and pedagogical implications of these asymmetries, showing how they shape francophone and anglophone students' sense of recognition, legitimacy, and historical understanding. The article concludes by outlining avenues toward *narrative equity* in history education through curriculum reform, teacher education, and historical-thinking pedagogy, and suggests how this framework might be adapted to other multilingual societies grappling with tensions between official narratives and marginalised histories.

Keywords: History education, Curriculum studies, Bilingualism in Canada, National identity, Francophone minorities

INTRODUCTION

What happens when young people who share a country do not share a past? In officially bilingual Canada, history education is supposed to be a meeting place for collective memory, civic identity, and mutual recognition. Yet growing evidence suggests that francophone and anglophone students often leave secondary school with sharply different, sometimes incompatible, understandings of what Canada has been and who counts within it (Létourneau, 2014). This is not only a Canadian paradox. It echoes a broader question for multilingual democracies: whose histories are carried by the curriculum, and whose are quietly set aside?

This article responds to that question by examining discrepancies between French- and English-language history curricula in six Canadian provinces: Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, British Columbia, and New Brunswick, where French-speaking communities live as minorities. We deliberately exclude Quebec, where French is the majority language and the education system is shaped by a distinct national narrative. Our focus is on settings where identity, belonging, and language rights are negotiated within officially bilingual but structurally asymmetrical schooling systems. As researchers working in and with minority francophone contexts, we are acutely aware that these asymmetries are not abstract. They are felt in classrooms, staff rooms, and community debates. Our central research question is: to what extent do provincial curricula in both official languages convey different historical narratives, and what are the implications for students' identity formation and intergroup understanding?

At stake are more than technical questions of scope and sequencing. While bilingualism is constitutionally enshrined, its pedagogical enactment remains uneven. Ongoing debates on language rights, cultural recognition,

and educational equity suggest that curriculum is one of the places where these tensions crystallise. Recent studies have shown that French-language programmes often foreground key moments of resistance and struggle, such as Règlement 17 in Ontario or the role of Louis Riel in Manitoba, whereas English-language curricula tend to mute, relativise, or omit the same episodes (Brunet & Gani, 2023; Chouinard & Wallner, 2023). When young people encounter conflicting stories about the same events, the result is a fractured civic narrative that complicates efforts to build mutual respect within a shared polity. In a global context where polarised histories fuel mistrust, this fragmentation should concern educators and policymakers far beyond Canada (Karn, Llewellyn, & Clark, 2024; Tuck & Yang, 2012).

We treat official programmes of study as narrative frameworks that invite students to locate themselves in time, space, and community, drawing on work in curriculum studies, political philosophy, and memory studies (Létourneau, 2014; Ricoeur, 2000; Taylor, 1994; Thériault, 2007). Our comparative analysis makes two main contributions. First, we introduce the concept of *narrative asymmetry in bilingual curriculum ecosystems* to name the uneven representation and valuation of collective histories within state-mandated French- and English-language curricula. Second, we offer, to our knowledge, the first systematic multi-province comparison of paired French- and English-language history curricula (Grades 7–11) outside Québec, using a common analytic grid that attends to vocabulary, representations of agency, and the presence or absence of francophone minority narratives. Taken together, these contributions extend existing work on nation-building and curriculum (Chouinard & Wallner, 2023) by shifting the focus from isolated systems to the relational dynamics of bilingual education, and by centring francophone minorities as a critical lens for rethinking equity in Canadian history education (Dallaire & Denis, 2005; Luoma, 2024). Building on recent studies of Canadian history curricula (Brunet & Gani, 2023; Chouinard & Wallner, 2023), our contribution is both conceptual and empirical, with a particular emphasis on a comparative, text-based analysis. Rather than asking only whether francophone experiences "appear" in provincial documents, we follow two intertwined questions: what kinds of stories about francophones are told in each language stream, and what work do these stories do in shaping how young people learn to imagine who belongs, who decides, and who remembers? By placing side by side the French- and English-language curricula of six provinces outside Québec, we treat bilingual schooling not simply as a technical arrangement of programmes but as a shared narrative space in which recognition is unevenly distributed.

Throughout the article, we use the expression *narrative asymmetry in bilingual curriculum ecosystems* to name this pattern, and we work towards a more hopeful counter-horizon that we call *narrative equity*. By narrative equity we mean a condition in which different language communities have a fair chance to see their histories named, contextualised, and debated within the common school. We do not claim to offer a grand theory of memory or nationhood. What we offer instead is an empirically grounded, comparative map of how current curricula pull francophone and anglophone students toward different understandings of Canada's past, and an invitation to think with teachers, policymakers, and communities about what a more equitable narrative landscape might require.

Methodologically, the study employs a comparative qualitative design focused on provincial history and social studies curricula for Grades 7 to 11 in both language streams. We analyse recent documents from six provinces, examining key events, actors, and themes, as well as the lexical choices and narrative arcs that surround them, within the broader context of reforms in history education and historical thinking (Seixas & Morton, 2013; Duquette, Pageau, & Tremblay, 2023; Gibson, Peck, Miles, & Duquette, 2025). Four tables embedded in the manuscript summarise, respectively, the corpus of curriculum documents and the comparative treatment of Louis Riel, Regulation 17, and the Conquest, in order to enhance transparency and to facilitate dialogue with researchers and policymakers in Canada and in other multilingual systems. The article proceeds in six sections: the next section outlines the theoretical and empirical background that informs our analysis; Section 3 details our methodological choices; Section 4 presents the comparative findings; Section 5 discusses the pedagogical and identity implications of narrative asymmetry; and Section 6 synthesises the contributions of the study and draws out lessons for the future of bilingual curriculum design in Canada and other multilingual societies.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND BACKGROUND

Understanding how historical narratives shape, affirm, or erase collective identities in bilingual societies requires an approach that holds together political philosophy, curriculum studies, sociolinguistics, and memory studies.

In Canada, where language, territory, and national identity remain contested rather than settled, what appears as "content" in the history classroom is also a series of choices about power, belonging, and legitimacy. Curriculum is never a neutral space. It encodes decisions about which events, figures, and values are deemed essential for forming the "good citizen" (Apple, 2004; Bouchard, 2017). In history education, this function is magnified: curricula select and organise fragments of the past to tell a story about who "we" are, what "we" have endured, and what "we" have a duty to remember. This narrative role resonates with Anderson's (1983) notion of "imagined communities", in which nations emerge through shared media, commemorations, and statesponsored narratives rather than any pre-given cultural essence.

In officially bilingual Canada, at least two partly overlapping imagined communities coexist within a single constitutional project. English- and French-speaking populations often learn parallel, and sometimes incompatible, histories, particularly in provinces where French is a minority language. Research on minority francophone youth shows that they do not simply "add" English to a stable francophone identity, but live what Dallaire and Denis (2005) call *asymmetrical hybridities*: blends of francophoneness and anglophoneness structured by unequal power relations. Their work on events such as the Jeux de l'Acadie and Jeux francoontariens suggests that francophone identities are reproduced as components of hybrid cultural and linguistic identities in which English remains dominant. This insight underpins our use of *narrative asymmetry* to describe how French- and English-language curricula can offer structurally unbalanced accounts of the past, even when they refer to similar events.

Ricoeur's (2000) work on memory, history, and forgetting provides a second pillar of our framework. For Ricoeur, historical writing is not a neutral chronicle but a work of emplotment: the weaving of coherent stories out of fragmentary traces. Forgetting is not simply the absence of memory. It is built into every narrative, since remembering some things means sidelining others. In school curricula, this dynamic appears both in explicit content and in what is often called the hidden curriculum: silences, omissions, and implicit hierarchies that shape students' worldviews as powerfully as prescribed knowledge.

When a provincial programme presents certain episodes as foundational, for example Confederation or the Charter, and treats others, such as Règlement 17 or the Manitoba Schools Question, as marginal or optional, it performs an act of narrative selection that is also an act of political ordering. Lexical choices matter here. Vocabulary such as "educational reform" instead of "assimilation," or "shift of power" instead of "conquest," softens conflict and folds minority experiences into a story of gradual reconciliation (Luoma, 2024; Tuck & Yang, 2012).

These silences are not only curricular but ontological. Taylor's (1994) theory of recognition insists that identities emerge dialogically, in relation to how others acknowledge or misrecognise us. When official curricula fail to give sustained space to the historical struggles and cultural production of linguistic minorities, this absence becomes a form of symbolic violence, a denial of a group's historical legitimacy. Taylor (1994) warns that persistent misrecognition can generate fragmentation, alienation, and resentment, especially among young people who are still building their civic and cultural selves.

In the Canadian context, Cardinal (2005) and Thériault (2007) argue that many francophone minorities function as minority nations rather than simple ethnolinguistic groups. They seek not only cultural inclusion but recognition as political agents with their own historical trajectories. This distinction is central to our interest in how curricula allocate narrative space to francophone communities outside Québec.

At the same time, contemporary research on history education reminds us that students do not simply absorb curricular narratives; they negotiate, reassemble, and sometimes contest them. Since the early 2000s, several Canadian provinces have adopted "historical thinking" and inquiry-based models that foreground sourcing, evidence use, and perspective-taking over memorisation of dates (Seixas & Morton, 2013; Lévesque, 2017). In practice, this can mean working with primary documents, reconstructing events from multiple viewpoints, or conducting local oral history projects. Empirical work suggests that many teachers use this flexibility to foreground community resilience and connect historical events to students' lived experiences, including francophone minority histories (Duquette, Pageau, & Tremblay, 2023; Gibson, Peck, Miles, & Duquette, 2025). As reported in a Francopresse investigation, for example, Manitoba educator Joël Ruest emphasises the need to help students "find their place in the francophonie" by explicitly teaching the history of language-rights struggles

in Western Canada (Dépelteau, 2025). Research on two-way bilingual education offers a useful parallel. Hamman-Ortiz and Palmer (2023) argue that student identity work should not be treated as a secondary outcome but as central to the goals of sociocultural competence and a "fourth goal" of sociopolitical consciousness, following Freire. Their framework underscores that children in dual-language programmes actively make sense of complex power dynamics in and beyond the classroom. We draw on this insight to think about how francophone and anglophone youth in Canadian schools interpret the histories that curricula make available, or keep off-stage.

However, these pedagogical possibilities unfold within a policy environment shaped by neoliberal and neoconservative logics. Di Giovanni and Parker (2024), in their study of Ontario education reform, describe how discourses of choice, accountability, and performance metrics frame education as a competitive market, while moralising language appeals to anxieties about order, values, and national cohesion. Within such a "markets and morals" configuration, curriculum expectations remain central instruments of governance: they underpin assessment, guide resource allocation, and signal what knowledge is considered worthwhile. Comparative research in other subjects reinforces this structural reading. In a mixed-methods study of numeracy curricula and teacher education in Québec and Ontario, Vezina (2023) shows how differences in curricular organisation and theoretical coherence correspond to divergent trajectories in student achievement. Her work, though focused on mathematics, underscores two points crucial for our purposes: provincial curricula are deeply embedded in wider policy logics, and cross-jurisdictional comparison can reveal patterns that remain invisible within a single system.

Taken together, these strands help us frame a central tension in our investigation: the space between curricular structure and pedagogical agency. Teachers in the provinces we examine do have interpretive room, and many use it to broaden narratives, integrate Indigenous and minority perspectives, or connect official content to local histories. Research on bilingual and dual-language education documents moments where students and teachers subvert programme structures and reorient them toward more emancipatory aims (Hamman-Ortiz & Palmer, 2023). Yet when systemic silences are embedded in the curriculum itself, the burden of correction falls unevenly on individual educators and communities. Without institutional support, explicit expectations, or suitable materials, the histories of francophone minorities remain optional, vulnerable to omission, and dependent on local will rather than shared responsibility.

In this article, we therefore bring together four strands. First, we treat curriculum as a narrative technology of the nation, drawing on Anderson (1983) and Ricoeur (2000) to analyse how stories of the past are assembled and what they leave unsaid. Second, we mobilise Taylor's (1994) theory of recognition, along with Cardinal's (2005) and Thériault's (2007) work on minority nations, to interpret curricular inclusion or exclusion as a matter of justice rather than simple representation. Third, we build on research on asymmetrical hybridity in francophone youth identities (Dallaire & Denis, 2005) and on identity negotiation in two-way bilingual education (Hamman-Ortiz & Palmer, 2023) to highlight how curricular asymmetries are lived in students' everyday meaning-making. Finally, we situate provincial history curricula within a neoliberal policy environment that shapes both content and reform rhetoric (Di Giovanni & Parker, 2024; Vezina, 2023). Together, these strands support our central concept of *narrative asymmetry in bilingual curriculum ecosystems* and orient our comparative analysis of French- and English-language history programmes in six Canadian provinces.

METHODOLOGY

Our primary data consist of provincial curriculum documents in history and social studies for Grades 7 to 11 in six provinces outside Québec. For each province, we collected the most recent French- and Englishlanguage programs available at the time of the study and treated them as parallel windows on how public schooling frames the past for different language groups. We read these documents comparatively, attending to four recurring questions: which francophone actors and communities are named; which events involving language conflict or school rights are foregrounded or muted; how responsibility and agency are distributed across groups; and what kinds of civic dispositions students are invited to adopt. This work combines a descriptive mapping of content with a more interpretive discourse analysis focused on lexical choices, silences, and the narrative arcs constructed around key episodes such as the Conquest, Louis Riel, Regulation 17, and constitutional reform.

The study adopts a comparative, qualitative research design to identify and interpret divergences between French- and English-language curricula in officially bilingual but structurally asymmetrical schooling systems. The six provinces—Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, British Columbia, and New Brunswick—were selected on the basis of two criteria: (a) the presence of an officially recognised francophone minority population; and (b) the availability of both French- and English-language curriculum documents, making within-province comparison possible. Québec is intentionally excluded because its status as a francophone-majority province, with a distinct curricular logic and national narrative, would introduce a different kind of asymmetry and risk obscuring the dynamics of minority francophone schooling that are central to this study.

Although this study engages exclusively with official curriculum documents, this focus is deliberate rather than incidental. Our aim is to analyse the narrative architecture of state-sanctioned history education: the policy frameworks that define what counts as legitimate content, how events are sequenced, and which collectivities are named as historical agents. In doing so, we follow curriculum studies and critical discourse research that treat official programs as a privileged window onto nation-building projects and the distribution of symbolic recognition in schools (Apple, 2004; Brunet & Gani, 2023; Chouinard & Wallner, 2023). The findings therefore speak primarily to the constraints and possibilities embedded in these texts, rather than to the full range of classroom practices that teachers and students may enact in response to them.

Within each province, the corpus includes the most recent iterations of the relevant history or social studies curricula available at the time of data collection. All documents were published after 2010 and, in most cases, after the 2015–2018 reform cycle that foregrounded competencies, inquiry-based learning, and more inclusive language in history education (Seixas & Morton, 2013; Lévesque, 2017). Curriculum documents were downloaded and archived between August and November 2025; readers should therefore interpret the findings in light of ongoing revisions that may not yet be fully implemented in classrooms. This temporal framing matters: it allows us to ask whether, in an era of explicit commitments to diversity and reconciliation, francophone minority histories are integrated into or sidelined from official narratives. The analysis focuses on programme rationales, core learning expectations, and content strands that address Canadian history, colonial and postcolonial developments, Indigenous perspectives, immigration, and provincial histories. Particular attention is given to both explicit references to francophone communities and implicit narrative framings of linguistic and cultural diversity.

To make sense of these documents as narrative and political artefacts, the study combines thematic content analysis with critical discourse analysis (CDA). Thematic content analysis is used first, to establish a systematic overview of francophone presence or absence in each curriculum. The analysis began with an exploratory reading of all documents, during which recurring references to francophone actors, language rights, and schooling were noted. Based on this initial pass, a provisional coding grid was developed, including categories such as: (a) whether francophone communities outside Québec are mentioned; (b) which events involving francophone actors are included; (c) the roles assigned to francophone figures (for example, victims, rebels, intermediaries, founders, builders); and (d) whether institutional struggles for language rights and school governance are addressed explicitly. These categories were then applied systematically across the corpus, with analytic memos used to record emerging patterns, ambiguities, and links to the theoretical framework. Table 1 provides an overview of the curriculum documents analysed in this study, by province, level, language, and year of publication.

Table 1. List of Official Curriculum Documents Analyzed

Province	Language	Title	Year
Ontario	English	The Ontario Curriculum: Canadian and World Studies, Grades 9–10	2018
Ontario	French	Le curriculum de l'Ontario : Études canadiennes et mondiales, 9e et 10e année	2018
Manitoba	English	Social Studies Curriculum Framework: Grade 11 – History of Canada	2019
Manitoba	French	Cadre de l'apprentissage – Sciences humaines : 11e année – Histoire du Canada	2019
Saskatchewan	English	Social Studies 30: Canadian Studies Curriculum Guide	2012

Saskatchewan	French	Études canadiennes 30 : Guide pédagogique	2012
Alberta	English	Social Studies 10–20–30 Program of Studies	2021
Alberta	French	Programme d'études : Études sociales 10–20–30	2021
British Columbia	English	BC Social Studies 9–11 Curriculum Overview	2018
British Columbia	French	Aperçu du curriculum : Sciences humaines 9 à 11	2018
New Brunswick	English	Canadian History 122 Curriculum	2019
New Brunswick	French	Histoire du Canada 122 : Programme d'études	2019

Building on Fairclough (1995) and van Dijk (1998), CDA is then employed to examine lexical choices, grammatical structures, and recurring discursive patterns in the curriculum texts. Here the focus shifts from whether francophones are present to how they are positioned through language. We analyse, for example, how Louis Riel is labelled ("rebel", "resistor", "father of Manitoba"), how the Conquest of 1759 is characterised ("power shift", "transfer of sovereignty", "military occupation"), and whether francophone communities are portrayed as contributors to national development, obstacles to unity, or regional exceptions. These micro-level choices are treated as markers of deeper narrative logics: they signal which groups are granted agency, which conflicts are softened or depoliticised, and which trajectories are cast as central or peripheral. In this sense, CDA allows us to connect apparently technical wording to broader questions of recognition, legitimacy, and national belonging (Apple, 2004; Taylor, 1994; Thériault, 2007).

Initial coding and recoding were conducted by the first author. To enhance consistency, the coding grid was refined iteratively. After the initial pass across all documents, a subset of curricula from two provinces was recoded several weeks later and the results compared. Discrepancies were used to clarify category boundaries, adjust illustrative examples, and ensure that codes were applied in a conceptually coherent manner, rather than to calculate a formal reliability coefficient. Throughout this process, memo-writing and repeated returns to the theoretical framework supported reflexivity and helped reduce idiosyncratic readings. The summary tables in the findings section illustrate how these categories were operationalised for key events and actors across provinces.

This study acknowledges several limitations, which are important to contextualise the scope and claims of our analysis. First, while curriculum documents represent the official policy framework, they do not fully determine classroom practice. Teachers retain significant autonomy in how they interpret, sequence, and deepen prescribed content, and students actively reconstruct meaning in ways that cannot be inferred from policy texts alone. We do not analyse textbooks, classroom observations, or assessment materials, nor do we systematically interview teachers in each jurisdiction. As a result, our findings should be read as identifying the state-sanctioned narrative template that frames history education, rather than offering a comprehensive account of how historical narratives are enacted in everyday classrooms.

Second, the study adopts a qualitative, interpretive approach to thematic content analysis and CDA. Coding was carried out iteratively by the first author, with codes and categories refined through repeated close readings, memo-writing, and returns to the theoretical framework (Fairclough, 1995; van Dijk, 1998). We did not calculate inter-coder reliability or engage a second independent coder. In a discourse-analytic design of this kind, the primary aim is interpretive coherence rather than statistical agreement, but we recognise that additional forms of validation, such as multiple coders, peer debriefing, or member checking with educators, would further strengthen the analysis. To compensate in part, we have made the coding grid and corpus as transparent as possible by describing our categories in detail in the methodology section and by including comparative tables of formulations and terminology in the findings section, so that readers can see how our interpretations are grounded in the curriculum texts themselves.

Third, recent pedagogical reforms and teacher-led initiatives mean that curriculum is best understood as one layer in a broader curriculum ecosystem that also includes resource selection, local projects, and community partnerships (Dallaire & Denis, 2005; Hamman-Ortiz & Palmer, 2023; Seixas & Morton, 2013). Some teachers may actively compensate for curricular silences by drawing on local archives, oral histories, or community knowledge, particularly in francophone minority settings. Our document-based design cannot capture this compensatory work, but the patterns of omission and asymmetry identified here signal the institutional baseline from which such practices must depart.

Finally, the comparative scope of six provinces entails a degree of abstraction. Each province has its own curricular style, learning outcomes framework, and political context. Even within a single jurisdiction, French- and English-language programs may be structured differently, not only in terms of content, but also in how competencies and themes are integrated.

We have mitigated this complexity by focusing on a limited set of recurring events and actors, by including detailed comparative tables and excerpts in the findings section, and by grounding our interpretations in direct textual evidence. Nevertheless, the analysis necessarily simplifies some contextual nuances, and we encourage researchers to build on this work through province-specific case studies, textbook analyses, and classroom-based inquiries.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF CURRICULUM CONTENT

This section presents the results of a comparative analysis of French- and English-language history curricula in Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, British Columbia, and New Brunswick. We organise the findings into four dimensions: (1) terminology and dominant narrative framing; (2) representation of key historical events and actors; (3) visibility of francophone minorities outside Québec; and (4) the comparative treatment of francophone and Indigenous narratives. Across all four, a consistent pattern emerges: English curricula tend to offer neutralised, multicultural narratives that minimise language conflict, whereas French curricula foreground struggle, resistance, and institutional marginalisation. The following subsections summarise these patterns, with comparative tables highlighting provincial variation.

Terminology and dominant narrative framing

Key finding. Across all six provinces, the lexical and discursive framing of major historical events differs systematically between French- and English-language curricula. English versions tend to employ abstract, bureaucratic, or euphemistic wording that softens conflict and obscures power asymmetries, while French versions make more frequent use of terms associated with conquest, domination, resistance, and collective rights. These contrasts are not incidental stylistic choices; they signal deeper narrative logics about who is portrayed as a legitimate historical agent and how linguistic minorities are positioned within the Canadian project (Apple, 2004; Fairclough, 1995; van Dijk, 1998).

A first illustration concerns the British Conquest of New France (1759–1763), a turning point that reconfigured political authority and laid the groundwork for the minoritisation of French-speaking populations. In several English curricula (notably in British Columbia and Ontario), the event is referred to as a "transfer of power," "shift in colonial rule," or "change in governance," terms that foreground institutional continuity rather than dispossession. By contrast, French versions speak of "la Conquête," "la perte de la Nouvelle-France," or "la domination britannique," explicitly naming loss and subordination. As summarised in Table 2, this lexical divergence recurs across provinces, even when the underlying content headings are otherwise aligned.

Table 2. Representation of The Conquest in Secondary History Curricula (Grades 7–11)

Province	Language	Curricular Reference to The Conquest	Lexical Framing / Role Assigned	Presence of Francophone Historical Perspective
Ontario	French	The Conquest of 1759 is presented as a major turning point leading to British domination and the loss of rights for French Canadians.	Conquest, subjugation, loss of sovereignty	Yes – marked critical contextualization
Ontario	English	Students explore the transition of New France to British control in 1763.	Transfer of power, colonial transition	No – French-speaking perspective absent

Quebec (excluded)	—	—	—	—
New Brunswick	French	Mention of the Conquest in the context of political and social transformations in the 18th century.	Regime change, cultural loss	Yes – mentioned in a measured but present manner
New Brunswick	English	Students examine the British acquisition of New France.	Acquisition, peaceful transition	Partial – little French Canadian perspective
British Columbia	French	Brief mention of the Conquest in a unit on colonization and empires.	Imperial conflict, loss of autonomy	Yes – but not in depth
British Columbia	English	The shift of power from France to Britain is presented as part of colonial rivalry.	Imperial conflict, shift of power	No – French-speaking perspective absent

The Red River and North-West uprisings led by Louis Riel (1869–1870, 1885) offer a second example. English curricula in Alberta and Saskatchewan frequently label these events as "rebellions" that "threatened national unity," whereas French curricula are more likely to employ terms such as "résistance," "mouvement de défense," or "affirmation de droits collectifs," foregrounding Métis and francophone claims to land, culture, and political recognition. In Manitoba's French programme, Riel is described as "fondateur de la province et défenseur des droits des minorités," while the English curriculum focuses on "the controversy surrounding his trial and execution for treason." These lexical choices assign agency and moral authority differently, framing Riel either as a destabilising figure or as a legitimate representative of a marginalised people.

Finally, Lord Durham's Report on the Affairs of British North America (1839) is often presented in English curricula as "a foundational document for reform" or a step toward responsible government. French versions, while acknowledging its role in institutional change, devote greater attention to Durham's infamous characterisation of French Canadians as "a people without history and without culture" (Durham, 1839/2006, p. xx). In most English-language texts, this passage is either downplayed or omitted. Here again, quotation and omission practices reassign moral depth: one language stream presents Durham primarily as an architect of progress, the other as a source of symbolic violence and delegitimation. Together, these examples show how terminology functions as a key mechanism of narrative asymmetry in bilingual curriculum ecosystems.

Key historical events and actors

Key finding. When we track specific events and actors across provinces, we observe systematic asymmetries in both inclusion and interpretation. Four moments are particularly revealing: the Conquest (1759–1763), the Red River and North-West conflicts, Regulation 17 in Ontario, and the 1980–1982 constitutional crisis. French curricula tend to frame these as turning points in the struggle for francophone and Métis rights, while English curricula either omit them, treat them briefly, or interpret them primarily through national unity and institutional reform.

The Conquest (1759–1763). In French-language curricula in Ontario and New Brunswick, the Conquest is consistently presented as a rupture in which "la Nouvelle-France est perdue" and francophones are subjected to "la domination britannique." Learning expectations invite students to analyse the consequences for language rights, religion, and institutional control. In English curricula, when the Conquest appears at all outside Québecfocused units, it is often described in terms of "a shift in imperial power" or "outcomes of the Seven Years' War," with little attention to long-term linguistic and cultural effects on francophone communities. This framing encourages students to view the event as a geopolitical adjustment rather than the beginning of a durable asymmetry in status and recognition.

Louis Riel and Métis resistance. Riel is the most visible francophone-associated figure across the six provinces, yet his portrayal remains highly contingent on language stream. In Manitoba's French curriculum, he is explicitly named "fondateur du Manitoba" and "leader métis visionnaire," and students are asked to assess his contribution to minority rights and provincial institutions. Saskatchewan's French documents emphasise Métis land claims and collective rights in 1885. By contrast, English curricula frequently stress "the rebellion" and the federal government's response, foregrounding law and order and national consolidation. The francophone dimension of Riel's identity, and his efforts to protect French-language schooling in the West, are rarely highlighted in English programmes (see Brunet & Gani, 2023). As summarised in Table 3, Louis Riel appears across the six provinces in all French-language curricula but with very uneven treatment in the English-language stream.

Table 3. Representation of Louis Riel in Secondary History Curricula (Grades 7–11)

Province	Language	Curricular Reference to Louis Riel	Lexical Framing / Role Assigned	Presence of Métis/Francophone Perspective
Manitoba	French	Louis Riel is presented as the founder of Manitoba and a defender of the rights of the Métis and Francophones.	Founder, rights advocate, community hero	Yes – central role, strong community vision
Manitoba	English	Students examine the Red River Rebellion and the role of Riel in the formation of Manitoba.	Rebel, controversial figure	Partial – little reference to the French-speaking world
Saskatchewan	French	The program addresses the Northwest Resistance and highlights the defense of Métis territorial and cultural rights.	Resistant, spokesperson for a people	Yes – critical and contextualized perspective
Saskatchewan	English	North-West Rebellion and Riel's trial and execution are studied in the context of national expansion.	Rebellion, law and order discourse	No – lack of Francophone or Métis perspective
Alberta	French	Riel is studied in the context of the conflicts between the Métis and the Canadian government. His political role is recognized.	Political leader, controversial but analyzed figure	Yes—but sometimes simplified
Alberta	English	Students learn about the North-West Rebellion and Riel's resistance to the Canadian government.	Rebel, resistance framed as a threat to unity	No – focus on the federal government

Regulation 17 (Ontario). Regulation 17, adopted in 1912, restricted French-language instruction in Ontario schools and became a focal point for Franco-Ontarian mobilisation. In the French curriculum, it is treated as a pivotal episode in the history of linguistic rights: students are asked to examine its impact on community cohesion, access to education, and identity, as well as the resistance strategies it provoked. In the parallel English curriculum, Regulation 17 is absent as a named topic. Language policy issues are sometimes addressed under general themes such as "educational reform" or "Canadian social policy," but without explicit attention to Franco-Ontarian struggles. As Table 4 shows, this omission contributes to a representation of Ontario's past as linguistically homogeneous and politically stable, obscuring the contentious history of French schooling.

Table 4. Representation of Regulation 17 in Secondary History Curricula (Grades 7–11)

Province	Language	Curricular Reference to Regulation 17	Lexical Framing / Role Assigned	Presence of Franco-Ontarian Perspective
Ontario	French	Regulation 17 is presented as a key moment in the struggle of Franco-Ontarians to preserve their language and education.	Linguistic oppression, identity struggle, community resistance	Yes – central to regional identity building
Ontario	English	No mention of Regulation 17 in the curriculum documents reviewed.	Absent	No – no reference to the Franco-Ontarian context
Manitoba	French	Contextual reference to Regulation 17 as an example of linguistic repression in relation to educational rights in minority communities.	Linguistic repression, a historical comparison	Yes – in connection with other Francophone struggles
Manitoba	English	No reference to Regulation 17 in the context of language rights or education.	Absent	No – invisibility of French-Canadian struggles
New Brunswick	French	Indirect reference to Regulation 17 in the context of language rights in Canada, without detailed elaboration.	Peripheral mention, without in-depth analysis	Partial – present but not central
New Brunswick	English	Possible indirect reference within broader language rights discussions, but no explicit mention of Regulation 17.	Generalized rights discourse, lacks specificity	Partial – Francophonie addressed without specific reference to Ontario

Constitutional crises and the "Night of the Long Knives." The patriation of the Constitution (1982) and the so-called "Night of the Long Knives" (the November 1981 meeting where all premiers except Québec's reached agreement with the federal government) are treated unevenly. In New Brunswick, both French and English curricula address the 1980–1982 constitutional negotiations, but with different emphases: the French version frames the 1981 meeting as a moment of exclusion and betrayal from a francophone perspective, whereas the English version refers more generically to "negotiations that led to Canadian autonomy." In other provinces, constitutional reform is often discussed without reference to Québec's non-signature or to its implications for francophones outside Québec. Once again, narrative asymmetry appears not only in which events are selected, but in how they are morally and affectively framed.

Visibility of francophone minorities outside Québec

Key finding. Perhaps the most consistent pattern across the corpus is the reduction of the francophone presence to Québec in English-language curricula, contrasted with a more place-specific, but uneven, recognition of francophone minorities in French-language curricula. English programmes in Alberta, British Columbia, and Saskatchewan seldom mention francophone communities outside Québec beyond brief references to "French settlers" or "Québécois nationalism," whereas French programmes name concrete communities, institutions, and struggles in their own provinces. Table 4 maps this contrast in visibility.

In English curricula, "francophones" most often appear as Québécois actors during constitutional crises, as early colonists, or as one element within a broad narrative of "two founding peoples and multicultural immigration."

The longstanding presence of francophone communities in the Prairies, British Columbia, or Atlantic Canada is rarely presented as a continuous historical thread. As a result, anglophone students can complete their schooling with little awareness that francophone schools, parishes, newspapers, and associations have existed for over a century in their own province (Chouinard & Wallner, 2023).

French-language curricula, by contrast, more frequently anchor their narratives in local and regional histories. Ontario and Manitoba highlight the creation of francophone school boards, the role of communities such as Saint-Boniface, and specific campaigns for language rights. New Brunswick gives sustained attention to Acadian history and institutions, presenting them as constitutive of the province's identity. These narratives do not simply "add culture"; they position francophone minorities as historical agents whose struggles and contributions help define the province itself (Thériault, 2007).

Even within French programming, however, the depth of treatment varies. British Columbia's French curriculum, for example, briefly mentions francophone communities, but offers limited detail on places such as Maillardville or Victoria, despite their documented historical presence. The variation suggests that political orientation, demographic weight, and provincial identity discourses shape how fully francophone minorities are woven into official narratives. In this sense, visibility is not an all-or-nothing variable but a gradient, influenced by both institutional recognition and local memory work.

Francophone and Indigenous narratives: A comparative perspective

Key finding. Since the publication of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action, most provincial curricula have significantly expanded the presence of Indigenous histories and perspectives (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015). In both French and English programmes, residential schools, treaties, and reconciliation now figure prominently. By contrast, the treatment of francophone minorities— especially outside Québec—has not undergone a comparable shift. In several provinces, Indigenous content is now mandatory, while francophone minority histories remain optional, marginal, or absent in English-language curricula. This divergence raises important questions about hierarchies of recognition within curriculum policy (Tuck & Yang, 2012; Karn, Llewellyn, & Clark, 2024).

Across the six provinces, we observe a clear trend toward structured, competency-based expectations around Indigenous content: students are required to "analyse the impact of residential schools," "examine treaty relationships," or "consider contemporary issues related to reconciliation." These expectations are typically similar in French and English programmes, reflecting legal obligations and a broader societal consensus on the need to address colonial injustice. By contrast, expectations related to francophone minorities outside Québec, when present, are more often framed as examples or extension topics, left to teacher discretion or local choice. Across the six provinces, our comparative overview shows that Indigenous content is thus systematically more central than francophone minority content in the required canon of Canadian history.

Importantly, this is not an argument against the curricular centrality of Indigenous histories, which are necessary and long overdue. Rather, it suggests that the politics of decolonisation and reconciliation can coexist with a blind spot toward other forms of minoritisation and structural inequality. In New Brunswick, the only officially bilingual province, both Indigenous and francophone narratives are integrated across subject areas, yet francophone history is still more fragmented and less robustly structured than Indigenous content. In British Columbia and Alberta, the disparity is sharper: Indigenous perspectives are built into mandatory competencies, while francophone experiences are often relegated to sidebars, optional units, or teacher initiative.

Taken together, these findings reveal a complex pattern. On the one hand, curricula are evolving toward more inclusive and critical accounts of Canada's colonial past, especially with respect to Indigenous peoples. On the other hand, francophone minority histories continue to occupy a precarious position, especially in Englishlanguage curricula, where they are vulnerable to omission. In a bilingual federation that presents itself as founded on two official languages, this imbalance poses particular problems for narrative equity. It suggests that different histories of marginalisation are being incorporated into the curriculum at different speeds and depths, with consequences for how students understand both the country's plural heritage and their own place within it.

IDENTITY AND PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

The curricular asymmetries observed in the previous section do not remain confined to policy documents. They shape how students experience school, how they understand others, and how they position themselves within the wider civic landscape. This section examines the pedagogical and identity-related implications of divergent historical narratives in bilingual and minority settings, focusing on three axes: (1) civic and cultural identity among francophone and anglophone students; (2) the role of teachers as mediators, resisters, or reproducers of curricular narratives; and (3) the challenges and opportunities posed by historical thinking pedagogy in linguistically diverse classrooms.

Curriculum is a tool of nation-building not only because of what it teaches, but because of whom it teaches students to become. As Ricoeur (2000) and Taylor (1994) argue, narrative identity is shaped through acts of memory, recognition, and interpretation. School curricula are primary sites where youth encounter official versions of national history; whether these versions are inclusive or exclusionary profoundly affects students' sense of legitimacy, belonging, and civic agency.

For francophone students in minority settings, the presence or absence of their community's history signals more than content. It indicates whether their story matters, their struggles are remembered, and their contributions acknowledged as part of the national project. When francophone resistance, institutional battles, or cultural milestones are included, as in most French-language programmes, students receive a narrative scaffold that affirms their heritage and validates their linguistic identity. This fosters continuity between past experience and imagined futures.

In contrast, anglophone students in the same provinces are often presented with a vision of Canadian history in which francophones appear mainly as Québécois separatists, early colonists, or political adversaries. Francophone communities outside Québec remain largely invisible. This omission reinforces the idea that linguistic duality is a constitutional abstraction rather than a lived reality. Anglophone students may thus grow up unaware of the presence, contributions, or struggles of their francophone peers, undermining intercultural empathy and civic pluralism. When conflicts arise over language rights, school closures, or cultural funding, they may lack the historical context to interpret these acts as legitimate democratic participation, a gap that Chouinard and Wallner (2023) link to weak literacy around minority rights.

While curricula set official parameters, teachers play a crucial role in translating, adapting, or contesting these parameters in classroom practice. Studies and practitioner accounts suggest that educators frequently grapple with tensions between curricular constraints and their own pedagogical commitments, especially where official documents fail to reflect students' realities or histories (Duquette et al., 2023; Gibson et al., 2025). Some francophone teachers in minority contexts describe themselves as "guardians of memory" or "narrative bridgebuilders," deliberately integrating community-specific content even when it is not required, for instance by drawing on local archives, oral histories, or community organisations to make visible francophone and Métis presence in provincial histories. Such initiatives amount to curricular activism: educators expand the historical record to include marginalised voices.

In French immersion or anglophone schools, the picture is more constrained. Many teachers acknowledge a lack of training or resources to represent francophone history adequately, and the curriculum's silence on francophone struggles can make it difficult to justify their inclusion within mandated outcomes (Brunet & Gani, 2023; Chouinard & Wallner, 2023). Where events such as Règlement 17 or Franco-Ontarian mobilisation are absent from English-language curricula, students are left with "no frame of reference" for understanding local francophone attachment to language rights. Pedagogical agency is both enabled and limited by institutional frameworks: where teachers enrich the historical narrative, they often do so on their own initiative, with uneven support.

One small but telling example concerns public celebrations. June 24, la Saint-Jean-Baptiste, is both Québec's national holiday and a long-standing celebration of francophone identity across Canada. Yet, while provincial curricula make room for other civic and cultural events as markers of multicultural expression, the Saint-JeanBaptiste is largely absent from official expectations. This silence around a foundational francophone marker of belonging quietly signals to students that some forms of diversity are publicly celebrated while others remain

unnamed. Such omissions echo the deeper narrative marginalisation documented in this study and reinforce the message that francophone presence outside Québec is, at best, secondary.

Moreover, in the absence of explicit curricular expectations, even well-intentioned educators may default to dominant narratives, especially where textbooks, standardised assessments, and digital resources reinforce the invisibility of francophone experiences. Systemic asymmetry in curricula is therefore not simply a matter of content, but of institutional epistemology: which histories are considered worth teaching, and who is authorised to decide.

The rise of historical thinking pedagogy has created new opportunities for more inclusive, critical, and student-centred history education. As Seixas and Morton (2013) outline, this model encourages students to engage with primary sources, evaluate competing interpretations, and construct evidence-based narratives. In practice, however, the potential of historical thinking depends on implementation. Without institutional mandates, curricular resources, or teacher education focused on francophone issues, these perspectives risk remaining absent from classroom inquiry. Recent work in francophone and minority settings documents promising uses of inquiry-based approaches to foreground community resilience and connect historical events to students' lived experiences (Duquette et al., 2023; Gibson et al., 2025; Lévesque, 2017). Such examples show how historical thinking can be mobilised to deconstruct hegemonic narratives and build historical literacy across difference, but they also underline that this requires intentional choices about which questions are asked and which sources are brought into the classroom.

Yet these innovations remain contingent on teacher initiative, institutional support, and curricular alignment. Where curricula are silent or ambiguous, teachers may hesitate to explore contentious topics. Where learning outcomes emphasise political unity or abstract civic values, localised minority histories may be perceived as tangential. Historical thinking's emphasis on "multiple perspectives" can either support narrative inclusion or allow the status quo to persist if equity is not an explicit goal.

The identity and pedagogical implications of curricular asymmetry in Canadian history education are thus profound and underacknowledged. While francophone curricula often provide students with tools for historical affirmation and critical citizenship, English-language curricula frequently fail to reflect the lived realities, struggles, and contributions of francophone communities outside Québec. This narrative imbalance distorts national memory and hinders intercultural understanding, undermining the goals of bilingual education. Teachers occupy a pivotal position in mediating these dynamics, but their agency is constrained by systemic factors. Without explicit curricular guidance, sustained institutional support, and accessible resources, the inclusion of francophone perspectives remains inconsistent and dependent on individual will. Historical thinking pedagogy offers a promising avenue for transformation, but it must be anchored in curricular justice and supported by coherent policy frameworks that recognise and affirm Canada's bilingual and pluralistic heritage. In the following section, we synthesise the article's contributions and propose principles for a more equitable and inclusive approach to history curriculum design in Canada's bilingual education systems.

CONCLUSION

Across six Canadian provinces outside Québec, French and English history curricula do not simply tune a single national story to different registers. They usher students into divergent narratives about who belongs, who has agency, and whose struggles merit remembrance. In minority settings, French programmes often centre histories of resistance, survival, and institutional marginalisation, offering francophone communities a name, a past, and a horizon. English programmes, by contrast, more often neutralise conflict, absorb francophones into a generic multicultural frame, or omit francophone minorities outside Québec altogether. These are not minor discrepancies in wording or emphasis. Taken together, they constitute what we have called narrative asymmetry in bilingual curriculum ecosystems: a systematic unevenness in how collective histories are selected, framed, and valued within state sanctioned frameworks of knowledge.

In a country that constitutionally enshrines official bilingualism and increasingly commits itself to equity, inclusion, and reconciliation, such asymmetry is more than a technical flaw. It undermines the promise that public education can serve as a shared space of memory and recognition. Bilingualism in Canada is not only a matter of service provision or legal rights; it is also a commitment to sustaining two linguistic imaginaries within a

common political project (Cardinal, 2005; Thériault, 2007). Similarly, the Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2015) have pushed ministries and school systems to rework history curricula so that Indigenous experiences and perspectives are no longer peripheral. Our findings suggest that these important shifts have not yet been matched by a comparable effort to integrate francophone minority histories into the core canon of Canadian history, particularly in English language curricula.

We use the term narrative equity to name the policy and pedagogical horizon that follows from this diagnosis. Narrative equity does not mean that every community's history should occupy the same number of pages or hours of instruction. Rather, it denotes a condition in which the foundational experiences of key collectivities Indigenous peoples, francophone minorities, anglophone majorities, and other groups are presented as structurally relevant to the national story, and not as optional, exotic, or episodic. In a bilingual federation, narrative equity requires that francophone minorities outside Québec be treated not simply as regional cultural groups, but as political and historical agents whose presence predates Confederation and whose struggles have shaped institutions, laws, and public debates (Bouchard, 2017; Brunet & Gani, 2023; Chouinard & Wallner, 2023).

Several policy implications follow from this conceptualisation. First, curriculum revision processes in English language streams should explicitly incorporate key episodes of francophone minoritisation and mobilisation, such as Regulation 17 in Ontario, the Manitoba Schools Question, the role of Saint Boniface and Acadian institutions, or post Charter struggles over school governance. These should appear as required learning expectations rather than optional extensions. Doing so would acknowledge that the trajectory of Canadian federalism and rights regimes cannot be understood without these episodes. Second, narrative equity requires investment in teacher education in both streams. Initial and continuing training should provide history and social studies teachers, whether anglophone, francophone, or immersion, with grounding in francophone minority histories, the legal architecture of language rights, and the lived realities of bilingual communities. Without this knowledge base, even revised curricula may be unevenly enacted, and teachers may hesitate to address topics they perceive as unfamiliar or politically sensitive.

Third, ministries and school divisions can support narrative equity by developing accessible bilingual resource banks that bring together archival documents, oral histories, local case studies, and didactic materials focused on francophone minorities, often in dialogue with Indigenous histories and other minoritised experiences. Projects that invite students to explore the intersection of francophone and Indigenous histories in specific places, such as the Prairies or the Atlantic region, can foster a more relational understanding of colonialism, resistance, and solidarity, while avoiding competitive or zero sum framings of recognition (Tuck & Yang, 2012). Fourth, curriculum policy should encourage pedagogical spaces where students compare and critically examine multiple narratives. Historical thinking frameworks already emphasise perspective taking, evidence use, and interpretive plurality (Seixas & Morton, 2013). Building on these, teachers could be invited to design units in which students juxtapose French and English accounts of events such as the Conquest, the Red River Resistance, constitutional reform, or debates on language rights. These comparative exercises do not aim at imposing consensus, but at equipping young people to recognise how the same past can be told differently from distinct positionalities, and to deliberate about the implications of these differences for democratic life.

Finally, narrative equity has implications beyond Canada. Many multilingual democracies grapple with competing histories within a single state, whether between Welsh and English in the United Kingdom, German and French in Switzerland, or Flemish and francophone communities in Belgium. Our framework of narrative asymmetry in bilingual curriculum ecosystems offers a transferable tool for analysing how curricular architectures distribute legitimacy across linguistic and cultural groups, and for imagining reforms that make room for plural, sometimes conflicting narratives without collapsing into fragmentation.

The stakes are high. History education is not simply a window onto the past; it is also a medium through which societies negotiate who counts, whose grief is acknowledged, and whose aspirations are imagined as legitimate (Ricoeur, 2000; Taylor, 1994). When one language stream learns a story of resilience and marginalisation and the other a story of continuity and cohesion, young people may emerge from the same school system inhabiting different moral landscapes. They will confront referendums, constitutional debates, and rights struggles with unequal historical literacy about the communities most affected. In such a context, bilingualism risks becoming a technical label rather than a lived practice of mutual recognition.

By bringing to light the structural narrative asymmetries embedded in current curricula, this study does not claim to resolve the tensions of Canadian bilingualism. It does, however, suggest that curriculum is a crucial lever for rebalancing recognition. If Canada is to take seriously its commitments to bilingualism, reconciliation, equity, and inclusion, history education must be redesigned so that francophone minority histories are no longer contingent on individual teacher initiative or local activism, but embedded in the shared educational contract. Narrative equity is not a luxury for stable times; it is a condition for navigating future disagreements without sliding into polarisation. Our hope is that the concepts and evidence offered here will inform ongoing debates on curriculum reform and stimulate further research on how young people learn to live with, and learn from, multiple histories.

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