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President's Message



Being new to the idea of becoming the next president of the Social Studies Council, I browsed through previous issues of *Focus Newsletter* for inspiration for what to write. What struck me as I read the newsletters was how often something exciting was happening in the field of social studies. This is what makes being a social studies teacher great: you never know what global or local event is going to change our world. I really do become excited when I am teaching my students about, say, plebiscites and then the City of Calgary announces that it is looking into holding one for the Olympic bid—making my teaching relevant to my students right now.

I realized what a “social nerd” I was about a decade ago, when I was on vacation, sitting on the beach thoroughly enjoying my copy of Thomas L. Friedman’s *The World Is Flat: A Brief History of the Twenty-First Century* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2005) instead of playing in the water. Since then, I have embraced this identity, always on the lookout for another interesting angle to see the world from. I’ve included a picture of myself in social nerd heaven—sitting in the chief government whip’s seat in the House of Commons during the Teachers Institute on Canadian Parliamentary Democracy. (The prime minister’s seat was already taken.) If you have not applied for this professional development opportunity, I highly recommend doing so. For more information, go to <https://lop.parl.ca/About/Parliament/Education/Teachers-institute-e.html>.

Recently, I had the opportunity to spend a few days in Washington, DC. At the National Museum of African American History and Culture is a display with the door panel from a bus used in a scholarship drive for African American students. The motto of civil rights leader Esau Jenkins is

painted on the bus: “Love is progress; hate is expensive.” On the wall in another area, a quotation from civil rights leader Ida B. Wells figures largely: “The way to right wrongs is to turn the light of truth upon them.” I feel like our mission as social studies teachers is to allow our students to understand a myriad of viewpoints on world events in order to have greater compassion and to overcome hate.

As we go through a provincial curriculum redesign, and continually adapt our teaching practices to changing times, my goal is to provide support to teachers

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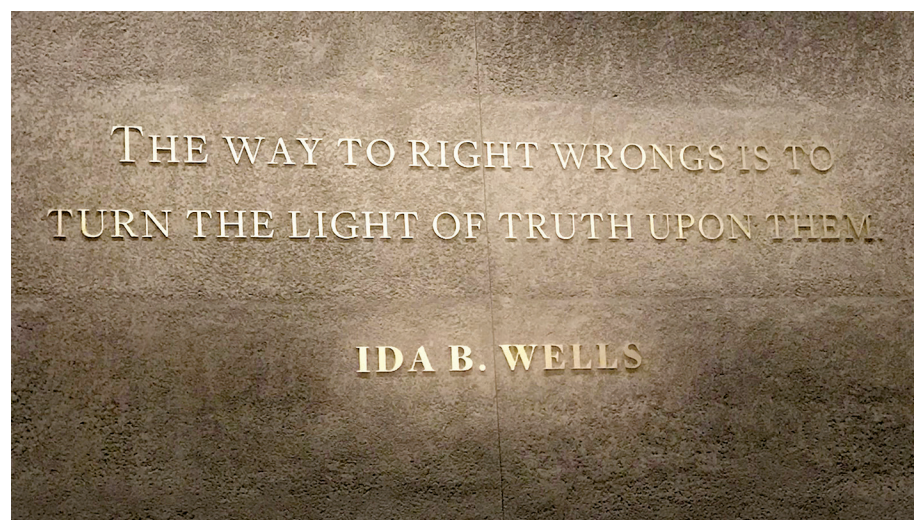
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through the Social Studies Council. Amazing people are leading in each region, volunteering their time to provide engaging activities to help all of us turn on that “light of truth” for our students. We also have various social media platforms for connecting with other teachers around the province. In the 18 years I’ve been teaching humanities, I’ve been blessed by the interactions and ideas from my colleagues, and that is what has really made the difference—gaining inspiration from each other, which in turn allows me to inspire my students. Hopefully, you will be able to find some time in your busy schedule to take advantage of activities hosted by your Social Studies Council regional. Please let us know about any events



or research you feel would be a good fit for our mandate to support social studies teachers.

Jennifer Williams

Message from the Past President



There was a disconcerting news story recently that the Trump White House wants to merge the Department of Education and the Department of Labor into one federal agency. While still just a proposal, such a policy, if enacted, would inevitably lead to an education system whose only purpose is to train students to join the workforce. This story reminded me of just how important social studies is, and how critical it is that all of us teach it and promote it wherever and whenever we can.

Advocating for our subject has long been part of the job for those of us who are passionate about social studies. Historically, this has often

meant insisting that enough time and resources are allocated so that all curriculum outcomes can be met in an effective way. In recent years, this advocacy has been complicated by flex programming, cross-curricular projects, and the current emphasis on literacy and numeracy. While these are not necessarily negative developments, it is critical that social studies continue to be valued and included in all K–12 education programs in Alberta. I believe that this advocacy is now more important than ever. In many ways, social studies is the critical subject area for students today.

One could make many arguments to justify this assertion. Most relate to the ideas of citizenship and identity. The first sentence of our program of studies clearly states that social studies is meant to enable our students “to become engaged,

active, informed and responsible citizens” (Alberta Education 2005, 1). Further, this idea of citizenship, which involves “enjoying individual and collective rights and equitable status in contemporary society, impacts an individual’s sense of identity” (p 4). It is this complex relationship between identity and citizenship that is the heart of what we teach. And only social studies deliberately addresses this relationship.

Living in a democracy presents many challenges. While there is evidence that the number of countries with citizen political participation has been growing over the last 200 years, there is no question that Western democracies are currently facing some serious challenges. Low voter turnout, apathy and ridicule of political engagement are all symptomatic of these challenges. The segregating of society into ideological echo chambers, each with its own media sources reinforcing preconceived views, only exacerbates the situation.

Arguably, though, the biggest challenge to democracies in the West rests with another social science—economics. The guaranteed rights and freedoms associated with democracies have been increasingly jeopardized by corporate interests over the last century. With the benefit of big data and other technologies, corporate influence is becoming stronger and having a more profound influence on people's sense of identity and the collectives they value most. Corporate influence is profound in many ways, including the fact that most of our information comes to us through media that is concentrated in the hands of a few corporate interests who often have a stake in what they are reporting. As a result, it is difficult to know the full story about any issue without consulting multiple sources. Another factor is advertising, which permeates our culture in myriad ways. Whether through TV, radio, billboards, vehicle graphics, product placement, websites, social media or ads embedded in apps, we cannot

escape the barrage of marketing being delivered to us. These messages are developed using the latest understanding of psychology and are often individualized based on sophisticated profiles that advertisers have on all of us. It can be a challenge for social studies teachers to counter these messages and help our students see that their identity is much more complex than merely what they consume. In this regard, social studies is the only subject that truly explores how ideological and economic factors influence identity.

Another critical role played by social studies teachers in democracies is to teach and inspire students to study history. George Santayana (1905) famously stated that "those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it." We now understand that teaching history is much more than having students memorize key dates and facts. Students must develop the historical-thinking skills needed to assess historical significance, to critically examine

claims made in the media, to appreciate cause and effect, and to appreciate that there are ethical dimensions to historical interpretations that require empathy and understanding. Social studies helps students understand events in context. Today, anyone can present himself or herself as a historian, but social studies teachers know that wide-ranging knowledge and historical-thinking skills are essential to an understanding of the contemporary world.

References

Alberta Education. 2005. *Social Studies Kindergarten to Grade 12*. Edmonton, Alta: Alberta Education. Also available at <https://education.alberta.ca/media/160209/program-of-study-grade-10.pdf> (accessed September 7, 2018).

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John Tidswell

From the Editor



Sadly, this will be my final editor's message for *Focus Newsletter*. I would like to thank the Social Studies Council for giving me the opportunity to

keep social studies teachers throughout Alberta up to date on the latest happenings and developments in the field. I took over editor duties from Craig Harding in 2015, while still

completing my PhD. Now, as a faculty member in the Werklund School of Education at the University of Calgary, I look toward a new chapter of supporting social studies in Alberta.

Over the last three years, I have been heartened to see the hard work the Social Studies Council has undertaken in service of the wider social studies community in Alberta. As we move forward, into a new era of curriculum change and new political leadership at the provincial level, the work of the council will be more important than ever in order

to ensure that the interests and voice of the social studies community are heard.

The council is in good hands with Jennifer Williams as president. Jennifer is a passionate advocate of social studies and brings her enthusiasm and dedication to education to everything she does. I wish her and the council the best of luck, and I look forward to supporting the council in other ways, including hosting events at the University of Calgary.

David Scott

Conference 2018 Highlights

In October, the Social Studies Council, along with the First Nations, Métis and Inuit Education Council (FNMIEC) and the Global, Environmental and Outdoor Education Council (GEOEC), hosted the fall conference Grounded in Truth, Soaring with Knowledge. This conference, which took place at the River Cree Resort and Casino, in Enoch, was our first conference in two years, and it was a huge success. Attendees had opportunities to share ideas, engage in professional learning, collaborate with others across subject areas and listen to speakers presenting multiple perspectives on topics critical to Alberta in the 21st century.

Immediately after our last conference, in 2016, we began to explore possible partnerships. After holding our annual general meeting at the FNMIEC conference in 2017, we decided that the FNMIEC would be the ideal partner for us. GEOEC joined in shortly after. Drawing personnel from all three councils provided us with an excellent committee that immediately began working on our event.

We were very pleased with the large number of presenters and

vendors who wanted to be part of this event, and we were sorry to have to turn so many away. In the end, we created a program that gave members of all three councils relevant professional development opportunities. We ended up with four keynote speakers, 27 breakout sessions spread over five time slots and three excursions (although one was cancelled due to the weather). GEOEC hosted a social gathering on Friday evening, and the other two councils held AGMs.

Laura Grizzlypaws opened our conference on Thursday night with a presentation that touched on the challenges and the opportunities facing Indigenous educators, as well as perspectives on teaching about Indigenous peoples in non-Indigenous schools. At the last minute, we had the opportunity to add Phyllis Webstad, whose story inspired Orange Shirt Day, to our program. While we were unable to give her a keynote time slot, we did provide her with a double-sized breakout space so that more attendees could hear her story. The breakout sessions touched on a variety of topics and were all well attended. Some were so popular that we had to turn people away.

The first keynote speaker we booked was Tzeporah Berman—a Canadian environmental activist who has done extensive work with Indigenous people across the country. Her efforts focus on issues related to climate change. We felt that she would be a perfect fit for our conference theme while honouring the Seventh Generation Principle.

As the conference approached, questions were raised about our choice of Berman as a keynote speaker. A petition demanding that we uninvite her was circulated, and the Alberta Teachers' Association received numerous complaints. Ultimately, we decided to also provide a forum for an alternative perspective and asked Chris Slubicki, an oil executive, to speak at the event. Shortly after this booking, the premier's office reached out to express an interest in having then premier Rachel Notley also speak at the conference. Having three closing keynotes, rather than one, necessitated considerable juggling of the schedule. However, we were ultimately able to accommodate these changes. All three presentations were well received and appreciated by the attendees.

John Tidswell

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Regional Updates

Calgary and District

On March 22, 2018, a group of preservice and practising teachers met at the University of Calgary to share ideas for best practices. Our goal was to provide both new and veteran educators with the opportunity to make connections and network with one another.

The event started with each preservice teacher “speed dating” with four different teachers to ask advice about lesson ideas and classroom management. The conversations were quick but animated, filling the room with enthusiasm.

After a quick snack break, all participants joined in a gallery walk, where six practising teachers shared their favourite lesson plans. A link to a Google folder was provided so

that everyone could download the lesson plans and adjust them to fit their own practice.

Then, everybody enjoyed presentations on various PD opportunities for social studies teachers, including the following:

- Teachers Institute on Canadian Parliamentary Democracy (<https://lop.parl.ca/About/Parliament/Education/Teachers-institute-e.html>)
- Historical Thinking Summer Institute (which is taking place in Ottawa this year) (www.canadashistory.ca/education/historical-thinking-summer-institute)

Finally, we held a discussion on the impact of poverty in our classrooms.

It was an engaging and enlightening evening. I want to say a special thank you to David Scott

and Craig Harding for helping me organize this evening. We would like to make this an annual event, so stay tuned for further information—and maybe even consider being a presenter!

Jennifer Williams

Edmonton and District

The Edmonton Regional held its fall/winter event in November 2017. The trivia night at the Carrot Community Arts Coffeehouse was well attended and lots of fun.

We held our spring event on May 30, 2018. Participants had the opportunity to tour two exhibitions at the Art Gallery of Alberta. The tours were followed by a networking session with drinks and snacks at the Revel Bistro.

Rachel MacLeod

The World Remembers

Social studies teachers looking for a powerful way to engage their students with remembrance and international understanding are invited to visit the website The World Remembers (www.theworldremembers.ca).

Created by one of Canada’s most renowned actors and directors, R H Thomson, The World Remembers displays the names of millions of soldiers killed in World War I. Each fallen soldier’s name is programmed to appear at an exact hour and minute, so that anyone can see a relative’s name memorialized on the site.



What makes this memorial particularly powerful, as well as reminding viewers of the futility of war, is the inclusion of the names of soldiers from both sides of the fighting.

I hope you will find this project to be as educationally powerful as we do.

*Barbara Linds
Locations Manager
The World Remembers*

Alberta Education Update on Curriculum Redesign

Alberta's provincial K–12 curriculum, or programs of study, outlines what students are expected to know, understand and be able to do in each subject and grade. Alberta Education is currently developing future provincial curriculum in the following subject areas: language arts, mathematics, science, social studies, arts and wellness education.

To assist teachers in their planning, future curriculum will include changes to design and content. In addition, common principles and standards are guiding what will be addressed in future curriculum. This includes a common design for how curriculum will look, with a focus on competencies, literacy and numeracy grounded in subject content. These common elements are outlined in *The Guiding Framework for the Design and Development of Kindergarten to Grade 12 Provincial Curriculum (Programs of Study)* (Alberta Education 2016).

Future provincial curriculum will include some common elements:

- Subject introductions that describe the spirit and nature of each subject and explain why the subject is learned
- Scope and sequences that outline what students will learn (scope) and when they will learn it (sequence)
- Essential understandings, or big ideas, that are broad statements that frame what students will learn
- Guiding questions that help create engaging and challenging learning opportunities for students
- Learning outcomes that state what students are expected to

know, understand and be able to do in each subject and grade, incorporating competencies and built on a foundation of literacy and numeracy

Alberta's curriculum development process includes three interconnected phases: shaping, developing and implementing. We are currently in the developing phase. To help in this phase of the process, Alberta Education established curriculum working groups (CWGs) in the six subject areas—made up of ministry staff, K–12 teachers, postsecondary professors and instructors, and inclusive education and early learning specialists—to begin development of draft K–12 subject introductions and scope and sequences that align with the guiding framework.

After the CWGs developed draft subject introductions and scope and sequences, the next step was sharing them with Albertans for review. The feedback collected from the Spring 2017 Provincial Curriculum Survey will help refine the draft subject introductions and scope and sequences and inform the drafting of kindergarten to Grade 4 learning outcomes, which began in fall 2017. The cycle of developing and reviewing will continue through to December 2022, when development of the future K–12 curriculum is targeted for completion.¹ Timelines for implementation of future provincial curriculum have yet to be determined, and current curriculum remains in effect until new curriculum is approved and implementation timelines have been set.

Alberta Education will continue to analyze current curriculum; review up-to-date research on teaching and learning; examine what other jurisdictions are doing; address government commitments to include First Nations, Métis and Inuit and francophone perspectives; and review current and previous work with stakeholders. Over the next six years, we will also continue to gather input from stakeholders, partners and the broader community as an integral part of the K–12 provincial curriculum development process. Information on additional opportunities to be involved in curriculum development will be posted on the Alberta Education website.

For more information, contact Nathalie Langstaedtler, senior manager, Social Studies 10–12 (English), at nathalie.langstaedtler@gov.ab.ca or 780-422-3255, or Keith Millions, senior manager, Social Studies (French), at keith.millions@gov.ab.ca or 780-422-1899.

Note

1. See https://education.alberta.ca/media/3576178/abed_curriculum-development-pathway-may-3-2017.pdf (accessed May 30, 2018).

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Alberta Education. 2016. *The Guiding Framework for the Design and Development of Kindergarten to Grade 12 Provincial Curriculum (Programs of Study)*. Edmonton, Alta: Alberta Education. Also available at <https://education.alberta.ca/media/3575996/curriculum-development-guiding-framework.pdf> (accessed May 30, 2018).

The Constitution Express and Wizards: New Elections Canada Resources

What do the Constitution Express and wizards have in common? They are both part of Elections Canada's new suite of learning resources for secondary school students. Each lesson is designed to fit in one class period and to spark questions and engagement. Inquiry learning, historical thinking and conversations about elections and democracy are the beating heart of these free activities.

The Constitution Express is part of a case study—Aboriginal and Treaty Rights in Canada's Constitution—that comes with the lesson Civic Action: Then and Now (<https://electionsanddemocracy.ca/civic-action-then-and-now/>). Students watch a short video overview of the actions taken by Indigenous people and groups in 1981 and 1982 with regard to the Constitution talks. One highlighted action is the Constitution Express. George Manuel and the Union of BC Indian Chiefs rented two trains that brought 1,000 Indigenous people from Vancouver to Ottawa in order to lobby parliamentarians and participate in demonstrations and other actions that helped to bring about the inclusion of section 35 (Aboriginal and Treaty Rights) in Canada's Constitution.

In the activity, students examine a variety of civic actions taken by individuals and groups, and they sort those actions into various



categories in the model of civic action provided. Based on the work of Alan Sears, the model has four sections: participating as an individual, working together as a group, building public support and working through the political system. While the teacher's guide provides suggested placements, the conversations that students have are the most important part of the activity. Suggested discussion questions and an exit card are provided to expand student thinking and provide opportunities for feedback. Students can also examine the other case study (Women and the Vote) or use the

model to start planning their own civic action.

This activity, like all of the Elections Canada resources, is available in French and English, as well as in language-learner versions for both languages. French immersion students and English-language learners benefit from the reduced and simplified text, which allows them to spend more time talking about the issues that matter to them. The Elections Canada resources are available at <https://electionsanddemocracy.ca/your-classroom/>.

*Rachel Collishaw
Elections Canada*

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The Alberta Teachers' Association

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