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## President's Message



2017 is upon us and with it comes Canada's 150th birthday. While affording a reason to celebrate, this occasion also provides much for social studies teachers to explore. Prime Minister Justin Trudeau recently said that Canada has no core national identity (Malcolm 2016). If this is so, is Canada, as a recent article from the *Guardian* asserted, the first "postnational" country in the world? Canada's 150th birthday also leads to questions about the origins of the country. Was the country really founded in 1867, when the Dominion of Canada was created or, perhaps, was it in 1931, when the Statute of Westminster removed the right of the British parliament to legislate in the dominions? People like Canadian Brigadier-General A E

Ross argue that it was during the battle of Vimy Ridge that Canada became a nation. Still others will insist that Canada did not really become a country until 1982, when an amending formula was agreed upon to patriate the constitution. Given all these possibilities, is Canada really 150 years old? As we celebrate what it means to be a Canadian this year, if you haven't already done so, I encourage you to explore these questions with your students.

2017 also marks a new year for our council, following a successful conference in the fall that saw social studies teachers from across the province gather at the River Cree Hotel, on the Enoch Reserve, just west of Edmonton. The conference featured an exciting lineup of speakers, presenters, excursions, videos and vendors. It began with a wine and cheese reception, followed by a screening of the documentary *Elder in the Making*, in which two young men—one Blackfoot and one Chinese-Canadian—rediscover their shared heritage. The film and the

discussion with the producer afterwards explored individual and collective identity, the history of Southern Alberta and Treaty 7, and the role of elders and how cultures interact. These themes were also taken up by one of the keynote speakers, Dwayne Donald, from the University of Alberta, who challenged participants to think about curriculum, citizenship and schooling in ways that promote Indigenous understandings of what it means to be a "real person," including the need to acknowledge and honour the

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more-than-human entities that give us life. The second keynote, Dennis Edney, spoke about the importance of maintaining international law; he recounted many personal stories, including speaking of his work with Canadian citizen Omar Khadr, who was held in Guantanamo Bay for many years. The conference also featured an awards banquet, some excellent breakout sessions and an annual general meeting. Many thanks to Joy Wicks and her crew, who put on this excellent event.

The Social Studies Council is looking forward to the new year and is excited about the curriculum redesign process that is under way; the social studies community in Alberta has strong and varied opinions about this process. To date, Alberta

Education has established expert working groups who have been tasked with collaborating on writing draft K–12 programs of study. We are expecting to see drafts of the scope and sequence emerge from this process by the spring, at which time focus groups and community engagement will take place to review the proposed documents.

Look for opportunities to participate in these sessions to ensure that you are playing a role in shaping the future of social studies education in Alberta. You may also want to get involved with your regional council this spring. The regionals are organizing events and are looking for participation from you. Get out and get to know other social studies teachers in your community and explore

ways you can support each other. More information will be coming your way about our annual general meeting, in the fall of 2017, and our next full conference, in 2018. Best in this new year to everyone.

*John Tidswell*

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Social Studies QR Code—check out the latest information on the conference and other social studies information.



# Editor's Note



Reflecting on the fall social studies conference at the River Cree Casino, I was struck by a number of themes that

Dwayne Donald spoke to during his keynote address. One phrase in particular has really stuck with me. Dwayne claimed that we suffer from a “relational psychosis.” This phrase points to what Dwayne sees as one of the significant problems we have with Canadian identity in terms of bringing about reconciliation among Canadians and Indigenous peoples. The vast majority of stories that inform Canadian identity are colonial stories. As a result, we have very few stories that can connect us and teach us how to treat each other. If I think about my own social studies classes growing up in rural town in the interior of BC, this was certainly the case. In lectures and textbooks, Indigenous people were generally frozen in the past as if we were studying a museum exhibit of people who were no longer with us. Alternatively, Indigenous people and communities were often storied as unfortunate, but necessary, victims of the civilizing process of building the Canadian nation.

Next year my daughter will be entering kindergarten, and I wonder whether the stories she hears about Canada will be any different from the ones I learned

as a student; or will she learn different stories—stories that can connect us and teach us how to relate to one another? Will she have the ability to learn from the story of the Treaty of Niagara of 1764, for instance?<sup>1</sup> At the conclusion of this historic treaty, leaders from 22 Indigenous nations, including the Anishinaabe, the Wendat (Huron) and the Cree, as well as British representatives, touched the wampum belt of peace as a symbol of friendship and as a pledge to become united. For Indigenous legal scholar John Borrows, this treaty marked the birth of a new political community that bound the new settlers and the established Indigenous peoples together through a philosophy of noninterference mediated by peace, friendship and respect.

Dwayne’s insight points to the responsibilities of social studies teachers to ensure that the next generation of young people hears the histories of our country that have been largely silenced and gone untold in social studies classrooms. Such stories, reflective of Cree and Blackfoot understandings of the original spirit and intent of the treaties, according to Dwayne, call us to see treaties not as anachronistic 19th-century business deals, but rather as “holistic and ethical philosophies” that underlie how First Nations peoples understand “the Treaties as sacred covenants through which newcomers were adopted as relatives” (Donald

2014, 4). Inspired by this understanding of the treaties, we see the potential for a new story that can be told in social studies classrooms, which can foster new, more ethical ways for Canadians and Indigenous people to live together. The need for such stories is well articulated by Kainai elder Andy Blackwater, who asserted that the first peoples and the newcomers all now “live together in the same place and their tipis are held down by the same peg. Neither is going anywhere” (Chambers and Blood 2012, 50).

David Scott

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<sup>1</sup> For more on the Treaty of Niagara, see Borrows (2000) and Gehl (2015).

# Social Studies Council Awards

## Sharon Richter Receives the Life Membership Award

During the fall Social Studies Conference at the River Cree Hotel, a number of long-time members were presented with awards for their meritorious service to the Alberta Social Studies Council. Aaron Stout received the Award of Excellence, which is awarded to a council member who has performed distinguished, meritorious and special service as a leader in the ATA Social Studies Council. In addition, Nicole Court received the Certificate of Outstanding Service, which is awarded to a council member who has made significant contributions to a regional council, including promoting social studies education in the region.



Aaron Stout

Nicole Court

The Social Studies Conference also offered an opportunity to present the Life Membership Award, which is given to an individual who has made exceptional contributions over an extended period of time to the Social Studies Council and to the practice of social studies in

Alberta. Prior recipients of this award include

- Jim Campbell (1994),
  - Tony Burley (1995),
  - Phyllis Arnold (1998),
  - Dr. Ted Aoki (2001),
  - Larry Booi (2003),
  - Lola Major (2004),
  - Lois Gluck (2006),
  - Tom Smith (2007),
  - Elizabeth Fargey (2008),
  - Tim Johnston (2009),
  - Ron Jeffery (2010),
  - Wally Diefenthaler (2012)
- and
- Glyn Hughes (2014).

This year the Life Membership Award was presented to Sharon Richter for her many years of service to the social studies community in Alberta. What follows is a copy of the speech Bryan Burley gave prior to the presentation to Sharon.



Bryan Burley and Sharon Richter

Sharon may have gotten her desire for teaching social studies from being in Larry Booi's class at Old Strathcona some years ago. Since then she has gone on to work for Wolf Creek School division, mainly at École Lacombe Junior High, where she was known to have many furry creatures in her classroom, including a cute hamster named Boris.

One colleague at École Lacombe Junior High, Sonia Hiebert, shared with me a great summary of who Sharon is:

Sharon is a person who can look at content and connect it to important learning. Her knowledge and understanding of curricula coupled with her deep connection to how kids think and learn made her classes fun and important. She can take any idea and connect it to the skills and outcomes we as teachers are responsible for bringing out in our kids. Collaborating with Sharon was always easy and always an opportunity to become a better teacher. When she played games in her class, Queen Richter would always rule with clear expectations and an iron shot put ...! The work she did on our staff as a lead social studies teacher made us better teachers and assessors of students and their learning.

Through the years, Sharon shared her love of the environment and all things cute and furry with her classes, encouraging them year after year



to collect recycling and donating the refunded money to the SPCA. She connected kids to the community and made our school a better place all around. Though she has stepped away from the classroom at École Lacombe Junior High School, her presence is still felt and missed by those who know and love her.

Sharon was also seconded to Central Alberta Regional Consortium (CARC) as the social studies lead. It was at this time that I first met her, about 10 years ago, when I would go to sessions put on by Sharon and

CARC. She has been highly involved with our ATA Social Studies Council at the regional level, supporting and organizing workshops, museum events and many other PD opportunities. This included assisting with the organization of the 2011 conference. I know I have personally benefited from your service to our council. Thank you.

Whichever way your journey takes you, I want you to know that the ATA Social Studies Council recognizes you for all of your efforts over the past many years of service to the council,

your dedication to promoting social studies, and leading colleagues and students towards a lifelong love for education and personal improvement.

Tonight we honour you with this framed certificate, and an art piece from Leo Arcand, who is well known for his drawings and soapstone carvings. In fact, I believe that President Obama was recently gifted a piece of his work by Prime Minister Trudeau.

Again, on behalf of the ATA Social Studies Council, thank you, Sharon.

## Teaching for Diversity

One of the key curricular outcomes of the K–12 Alberta social studies program involves teaching about Canada's rich cultural diversity. However, at times it can be difficult to engage topics of diversity in meaningful and impactful ways. In addition, some topics, such as racism, discrimination and privilege, can be challenging for educators to take up with their students.

Seeking to support K–12 educators to address these challenges, Carla Peck, from the University of Alberta, and a team of professors from across Canada have created the Teaching for Diversity resource site: [http://](http://teach4diversity.ca)

[teach4diversity.ca](http://teach4diversity.ca). This site provides resources and strategies to teach for and about diversity, with a specific focus on ethnic and cultural diversity. Providing a framework of diversity education, the site outlines some of the myths and misconceptions

surrounding diversity, along with examples of multicultural children's literature for all grade levels. Please visit the site to discover an array of practical ways you can take up this important topic with your students.



# Exploring Possibilities for the Flipped Classroom

There has been a lot of discussion surrounding the “flipped classroom” and you can find a plethora of effective books and websites for anyone looking at trying this style of teaching.<sup>1</sup> While this model is often seen as being a good fit for math or science, beginning in 2012 I decided to try this method of teaching in my high school social studies classroom. What attracted me to the idea was an interview I saw that declared a flipped classroom means less passive lecturing and more student-teacher interaction. This was exactly what I was wrestling with in my classroom—a few students who loved social studies would be engaged in class discussions, but too many others were passively waiting for the bell to ring.

So what is the flipped classroom? I would describe it as taking the lecture out of the classroom and putting it onto the students’ electronic devices, which in turn frees up time in class for students to

work on what traditionally would be homework—hence a “flipped” approach to the classroom. What I really love about this technique is that I have time to help students with their projects to ensure they are being done correctly. In addition, students have access to essential course concepts through 10-minute YouTube videos they can access at any time. Over the course of the past few years, I have created videos on my WilliamsSocial YouTube site that cover themes from economic systems to ultranationalism: [www.youtube.com/user/WilliamsSocial/videos](http://www.youtube.com/user/WilliamsSocial/videos).

The start-up for a flipped classroom can be a lengthy process, because you need to either find or make the videos for students to watch. Through discussions with other colleagues who were considering the process, I chose to make my own videos (the argument being that the students will recognize your voice and will trust it). In addition, you need to have



Jennifer Williams

meaningful inquiry activities that will encourage students to use the videos as a tool. It was very interesting to see how often students would approach the first project by Googling the necessary information instead of relying on the information on the videos, only to learn that it would have been much faster to trust the teacher-created resource.

<sup>1</sup> One book I found especially effective was *Flip Your Classroom: Reach Every Student in Every Class Every Day*, by Jonathan Bergmann and Aaron Sams (International Society for Technology in Education 2012).

One thing I want to emphasize is this is not a one-size-fits-all approach; in fact, I am constantly adjusting the way I use the various tools in order to maximize student success. While motivated students thrive in the flipped classroom, less-motivated students can really struggle with this more independent approach. Every semester I have students just begging me to do traditional notes, so I have some units where I use this approach without the supplementary videos. Of course, during those units other students are begging for a video to review, which I haven't created due to time constraints. When using the flipped classroom approach, I have short notes to review the video at the beginning of class. However, I have to be very careful not to let these "Top Ten" notes—which are only supposed to take 10 minutes—turn into a full lecture, thus negating the need to watch the videos and taking time away from student work.

It can also be difficult to ensure that students are, in fact, watching the videos. I give occasional quizzes to check comprehension. A really effective way to evaluate understanding are true/false quizzes that include instructions to change the false statement using information from the video to make the statement correct. I explain to my students that they cannot just passively watch the videos, which is why I have various worksheets to help them focus; there are times when I will require a reluctant student to hand in these sheets as proof they are watching the videos. But there are always students who refuse to take the time to watch the videos.

I also struggle with using project-based learning in my classes, because motivated students will have work for me to evaluate throughout the unit, while less-motivated students procrastinate and promise to bring work in for formative assessment, but end up having minimal work done. The

point of the flipped classroom is to have the time to provide that formative feedback, and some students who most need it are not always getting the help they need. In addition, it can become a lot more work for a teacher to chase down projects; but on the other hand, the work that motivated students create can be amazing.

So, if someone asked me today if they should flip their classroom, I would whole-heartedly say yes, give it a try. But don't feel you can do it only one way. Be flexible and try a variety of teaching techniques, with the flipped approach being just one tool in your basket. You are welcome to browse my Social Studies 30 resource page (<http://studiosocial30.weebly.com>) to get an idea of what I have created for my classroom. Feel free to e-mail me at [jwilliams@rvschools.ab.ca](mailto:jwilliams@rvschools.ab.ca) if you have any further questions.

*Jennifer Williams*

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