



FOCUS NEWSLETTER

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President's Message



Summer has come and gone. Classes are under way. A new government is in the legislature, bringing considerable anticipation and hope that long-standing concerns about the future of Alberta's education system will be addressed. While obvious systemic challenges—such as teaching and learning conditions and support for students with special needs—are at the forefront for Alberta teachers, there is also a need to look at curriculum and assessment issues and to support the role of the profession in this important work.

As well as supporting exemplary social studies instruction, the Social Studies Council continues to take a leadership role in advancing the views of its members on the future of social studies in the province. To this end, the executive met on March 21 to re-examine the council's long-term priorities and current service to members. The meeting began with a brief review of the Alberta Teachers' Association's strategic plan and the critical influences shaping the current context for social studies teachers in Alberta. Included in this discussion was a review of the Association's 2012 roadmap for developing the education system, *A Great School for All—Transforming Education in Alberta*. The executive then produced a four-point strategic plan that will inform the council's work in the coming years.

To support the strategic plan, the council initiated a major research study, in collaboration

with the provincial Association, aimed at determining the state of social studies programming and instruction in Alberta schools. A research team led by Larry Booi and Hans Smits developed and administered a survey of social studies teachers across the province. The survey had 496 respondents, representing a broad cross-section of teachers. The council is looking forward to the analysis of the data and the publication of highlights from

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the survey, which will contribute to a final report to be published early in 2016.

Your council is looking for your support in sustaining this important work. K–12 social studies teachers are invited to join the council executive and the research team at a workshop to review the survey findings and discuss the implications for moving forward. The workshop will take place on Friday, November 6, at the Black Knight Inn, in Red Deer, from 9 AM to 3 PM. Further details and registration information will be e-mailed to members in the coming weeks. Special thanks go to the Central Alberta Regional Consortium for facilitating this session.

In addition to this opportunity to share your views on the future of social studies in Alberta, you are invited to attend a public lecture being held the previous evening. Joel Westheimer's "What Kind of Citizen in the Next Alberta?" is sponsored by the Red Deer public and Catholic ATA locals and will feature the launch of his latest book, *What Kind of Citizen? Educating Our Children for the Common Good*. A reception will follow. There is no cost to attend, but registration is

required. Not only will this event be an important opportunity to connect with colleagues and community leaders, but it will also feature one of Canada's leading experts on citizenship development and community engagement. You are also invited to attend the council's annual general meeting, to be held prior to the evening lecture, from 5 to 6 PM.

The Social Studies Council is committed to supporting the work of social studies teachers across the province. Your active involvement in the council will further guarantee that the collective leadership of Alberta teachers will positively shape the future of teaching and learning in the province.

I look forward to seeing you in Red Deer at these important professional learning opportunities. If you would like to get involved in any capacity, please contact me at rolandhz@me.com.

References

Alberta Teachers' Association (ATA). 2012. *A Great School for All – Transforming Education in Alberta*. Edmonton, Alta: ATA.

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Roland Zimmermann

Contribute to One World in Dialogue

Have you done a project with your students that can serve as an inspiring model of how we could enhance social studies practice in Alberta? Would you like to explore a particular issue facing social studies teachers in a more in-depth way?

One World in Dialogue is a professional journal for social studies teachers that may have a place for your work. Seeking to promote professional development for teachers and to explore new ideas in the field, the journal is specifically interested in submissions in the following categories:

- Discussions of trends, issues or policies in social studies education today
- Examinations of learning, teaching and assessment in the social studies classroom
- Descriptions of innovative classroom and school practices
- Personal explorations of significant classroom experiences
- Explorations and expansions of curricular topics
- Extended reviews or evaluations of instructional and curricular methods, programs, or materials

For those undertaking graduate studies, *One World in Dialogue* provides an opportunity for new scholars to have their research published in a peer-reviewed forum. Teachers who do not want their article peer reviewed can request an editor-only review. One such article will be accepted for each issue.

If you are interested in submitting to *One World in Dialogue*, please visit the Social Studies Council website (<http://ssc.teachers.ab.ca>) and look under Our Publications. You can also contact the editor, Craig Harding, at jcharding@shaw.ca.

Effective IMMEDIATELY, your annual no-cost specialist council membership will no longer expire in August. Instead, it will continue year after year until you change it. To register or change your council membership, log in at www.teachers.ab.ca with your ATA website username and password.

Specialist councils are your source for conferences, networking, publications, resources, workshops, online communities and professional development.

From the Editor



In Search of “Good” Citizens

In his article “In Search of Good Citizens: Citizenship Education and Social Studies in Canada,” Alan Sears (2004) describes an activity he often leads, wherein he asks participants to work in small groups to design a job advertisement for the “ideal Canadian citizen.” As part of this advertisement, they must outline the ideal candidate’s educational background, personal qualities, skills and experience. Noting that many responses include the belief that good citizens obey the law, Sears pushes participants to think beyond the surface by then asking,

Was Mahatma Gandhi a good citizen of India? . . . Or Nelson Mandela, a convicted terrorist, is he a good citizen of South Africa? . . . Closer to home, how about Louis Riel, leader of

the Métis Rebellion in Western Canada . . .? Or protesters arrested at the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit in Vancouver in 1997, or at the Summit of the Americas in Québec City in 2001, are they good citizens? (p 92)

After this discussion, most people acknowledge that it is not always right for a good citizen to obey the law. However, the question then becomes, When is it appropriate, or even necessary, to break or challenge an unjust law? This is where general agreement about what it means to be a good citizen breaks down, as there are many different and conflicting viewpoints.

The point here, I think, is twofold. First, while it is easy to say that our central goal in social studies is to promote good citizenship, the term *good citizen* has no single agreed-upon meaning. Further, differing understandings of what it means to be a good citizen can lead to radically different curriculum engagements in the social studies classroom.

As Joel Westheimer and Joseph Kahne (2004) outline in their landmark study on citizenship, if one’s understanding of a good citizen primarily involves acting responsibly in one’s community, it is unlikely that students will be asked to critically analyze pressing issues facing our democracy. One such issue is the forces at work that make it possible for Alberta, one of the

richest jurisdictions in the world, to allow 143,200 children (16.2 per cent of all children in the province) to live below the low-income line (CBC News 2014).

On Thursday, November 5, at the Black Knight Inn in Red Deer, Joel Westheimer’s lecture “What Kind of Citizen in the Next Alberta?” will allow the social studies community to envision the kind of society we would like to live in and how this will, in turn, shape the curricular engagements we promote in our social studies classrooms. I look forward to seeing everyone at this important event as we work to positively shape and influence the future of social studies education in Alberta.

References

- CBC News. 2014. “Alberta’s Child Poverty Rate Remains Almost Unchanged 25 Years Later, Says Report.” *CBC News*, November 24. www.cbc.ca/news/canada/calgary/alberta-s-child-poverty-rate-remains-almost-unchanged-25-years-later-says-report-1.2848502 (accessed October 7, 2015).
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David Scott

In Memory of Glyn Hughes

On September 1, Alberta's social studies community lost a prolific member with the passing of Glyn Hughes.

For over 20 years, Glyn made a difference in the lives of his students and his community. He developed and supervised Students 4 Change, a social justice program at George McDougall High School, in Airdrie, for which he received numerous accolades. He was also recognized with the Social Studies Council's Certificate of Outstanding Service, Award of Excellence and, most recently, Honorary Life Membership, as

well as the Global, Environmental and Outdoor Education Council's Award of Merit. As well, he was awarded the YMCA Calgary Peace Medal (in the International Youth Group category) and was nominated twice for the Peace Medal as an individual. In 2011, he was honoured with Alberta Education's Excellence in Teaching Award.

However, awards alone cannot account for why Glyn was such an admired teacher. An active member since 1984 of the Social Studies Council, both regionally and provincially, Glyn worked on the current social studies curriculum in a variety of capacities, including acting as textbook reviewer, sitting on the diploma examination working committee and acting as a pilot teacher for the 30-1 program.

A firm believer in teacher professional development, he travelled around the province and the continent, engaging teachers in a variety of PD events, including sessions for the Palliser District and Calgary City teachers' conventions and for the Population Education Training Institute in Washington, DC. He also participated in international conferences, where he had the chance to interact with the Dalai Lama, F W de Klerk, Roméo Dallaire, Lewis MacKenzie, Stephen Lewis and Arthur Kent. If all this wasn't enough, he also presented for the UNESCO Associated Schools Project Network (ASPnet), a community of 9,900 schools in 180 countries.

Following Gandhi's mantra to be the change we want to see in the world, Glyn actively tried to make life better for those less fortunate. He worked for Global Habitat for Humanity in El Salvador and developed educational resources related to Afghanistan and human rights as part of the Students 4 Change action manual. In addition, he was an active member of Amnesty International and Canadian Women for Women in Afghanistan.

Glyn's body of work is an inspiration to teachers and students alike. As we mourn his loss, we thank him for the impact he had on the lives of a vast community of people who carry his legacy with them.

Craig Harding



LearnAlberta.ca: A Wealth of Resources for Social Studies Educators

Did you know that LearnAlberta.ca (www.learnalberta.ca) offers hundreds of resources designed to support Alberta's K–12 social studies curriculum? These include a wide range of Critical Challenges (www.learnalberta.ca/content/ssocirm/html/summariesoftheccs/index.htm), which provide classroom activities (in English and French) aligned with thematic topics at every grade level. Many of the Critical Challenges include links to a Modelling the Tools component (www.learnalberta.ca/content/ssocirm/html/mtchartsummary/), which offers detailed teaching suggestions and support materials that illustrate how teachers might develop the critical-thinking skills and competencies that have wide applicability in the social studies curriculum.

Further helping to develop the competencies required for living and working in the 21st century,

specific Modelling the Tools lessons include how to build consensus, how to interpret images and how to assess a website's credibility. To aid teachers in developing critical thinking in social studies, LearnAlberta.ca also provides Support Materials (www.learnalberta.ca/content/ssocirm/html/smchartsummary/), online and ready-to-use instruction and assessment materials on topics such as developing effective arguments or comparing significant events.

For those working in French immersion or francophone classrooms, *Résumés des défis d'analyse critique* can be found at www.learnalberta.ca/content/esrm/html/summariesoftheccs/index.htm.

In addition to the above resources, Alberta Education consulted and collaborated with over 500 First Nations, Métis and Inuit (FNMI) community leaders and elders to create the

instructional resource *Walking Together: First Nations, Métis and Inuit Perspectives in Curriculum* (www.learnalberta.ca/content/aswt/). Through videos, images, documents and oral sources, this incredibly rich digital resource hopes to

- increase teachers' understanding of the expertise and knowledge within the rich and diverse FNMI cultures in Canada,
- strengthen teachers' confidence in helping students learn from FNMI perspectives and
- encourage teachers to explore instructional approaches that honour Indigenous perspectives.

For information about Alberta's social studies program, please contact Michael Skoreyko, team leader, Social Studies K–9, at michael.skoreyko@gov.ab.ca, or Keith Millions, team leader, Social Studies (français), at keith.millions@gov.ab.ca.

Teaching Diversity in the K-12 Social Studies Classroom: A Conversation with Carla Peck

The following is the transcript of an interview with Dr Carla Peck, an associate professor in the Faculty of Elementary Education, University of Alberta.



FOCUS NEWSLETTER. I think many educators are sometimes afraid of misrepresenting groups of people or offending someone when considering whether they should take up issues of diversity in their classroom. Do you have any insights on how educators can get over some of these fears?

CARLA PECK. Recently, I have been involved in a research study where we are looking at how educators from across Canada understand diversity and engage with diversity in their classroom practice. From the interviews we had with teachers, we certainly found that many people—not just here in Alberta but in Ontario and the Maritimes, as well—are really afraid about making a mistake or offending someone. I think this is true for all teachers but perhaps for elementary teachers,

in particular, in terms of the amount of care, concern and nurturing they have for these young children they have been entrusted with. So you can understand that they are nervous about this kind of thing. But I think we have to recognize that students are already coming to school with ideas about difference. They notice that students look different from them, or wear something on their head that is different from them. So I think the answer is not to shy away from it, but actually have conversations about it—even with children that are six years old or eleven years old or whatever age we happen to be teaching.

When I taught Grade 3, we did a whole unit of study around children’s rights and human rights. And these kids were seven and eight years old, and we were able to have a conversation about the need for equal rights, regardless if people are living in places that have fewer economic resources versus countries like Canada that are very rich. They understood the connection between resources and money and access to equal rights. So these are seven- and eight-year-olds, and they can get this stuff.

FOCUS NEWSLETTER. What specific things should educators be attuned to when they take up issues of diversity?

CARLA PECK. We have to, as teachers, find resources—which, of course, is the biggest challenge—to inform ourselves. We can bring community members for professional development for teachers but also as guest speakers into the classroom. We can diversify our resources, children’s books and so on, that we actually use in the classroom. This is especially important in places where there may not be as much apparent diversity in the population. Our children, no matter where they live, are interacting with the world through TV, through Internet, through coming into the city to go to malls and so on. So diversity is everywhere, even if it seems like it is not there in our immediate circle. So everywhere we need to be making sure we have ample resources, diverse resources.

I also think it’s important to not ignore differences when students bring differences up in the classroom. Teachers report this to us in our research time and time again. *Difference* comes up all the time for teachers and in a lot of different ways. For example, in a science unit, conversations can emerge about the creation of the earth. So we have to really equip ourselves to not push that conversation under the carpet but to actually find a way to engage in it. I think that is crucial.

FOCUS NEWSLETTER. I know that white educators, such as myself, sometimes think that we have no culture or ethnicity and somehow we are neutral, while people who look different from us are “cultural.” How can educators who are part of what has been the dominant group in Canada better own our identity or realize how it shapes our practice in terms of the issues we focus on and perspectives we are willing to entertain in our classroom?

CARLA PECK. As educators, we really need to also reflect on our own identity. As part of our research, we had teachers reflect on their own ethnic identity and how this shapes their practice and ways they relate to difference. Some teachers told us they had never thought about how their own (ethnic, cultural) identity might shape the way they think about the curriculum, their students, the parents/guardians of students and so on. Who gets positioned as “the other” in the curriculum? In the classroom? “The other” as compared to whom?

And we actually had students do this, as well. These were students in Grade 6, and they had been thinking about these issues, and when asked, they could write three to five sentences about their cultural and ethnic identity. So this can be a starting place. “This is how I understand who I am. This is what it means when I have to go pray at this time of day. This is what this means to me—it is a part of who I am.” When we have those conversations, we gain more knowledge, which can lead to more understanding and,

hopefully, less ignorance and stereotypes. So I think the key is to have the conversation—with ourselves and with our students. Difference exists. It doesn’t go away just because we decide not to talk about it. Talking through our differences can, I believe, lead to greater understanding and empathy.

FOCUS NEWSLETTER. Can you think of some ways educators sometimes unconsciously take up diversity in problematic ways?

CARLA PECK. I think that the most classic example of that are things like multicultural days at school—what I call the “foods, fairs and festivals” approach to multiculturalism. Which, on one level, is not a bad idea. It is good to be aware of what cultures are out there. It is good to foster acceptance. But these kinds of things, if not done carefully, end up being very surface level. So the child whose background is from India brings samosas to the school. Beyond this being very shallow, it doesn’t get into any depth around what his or her identity means for that child.

Another thing to be aware of is to really think about what particular lessons or activities are really teaching about diversity. A few years ago, an activity used by a teacher in New Brunswick made the news. The teacher had used a worksheet where she was trying to help students make decisions about their beliefs and values. The worksheet said, “A meteor from outer space is going to crash into your planet and the whole planet is going to be destroyed. But there is a rocket ship that can save you and you have the power to decide who gets to go

in the rocket ship. Who do you take with you: an African Canadian, a Chinese Canadian, a First Nations person” and it went on like that.

These were young children, and it so happened that one student brought the worksheet home, and a parent had the courage to speak up and ask, “What the heck is going on here?” When the teacher was interviewed, she said that she had been using the worksheet for 20 years to teach about the values of different cultures and how it is hard to make a decision about whom to save. This is an example of someone who thinks they are teaching about diversity but who is, in fact, having students make judgments based on who knows what kind of information and stereotypes. Now, I want to be clear that I am not blaming the teacher here—what was sorely needed, long before the parent became involved, was a conversation with the teacher about how she understood *diversity* and what she thought this particular lesson actually taught about it. We should all be asking similar questions about any lesson that focuses on questions of identity and diversity: What is it we hope students will learn from this, and is that what the lesson or activity is actually teaching?

So, when teaching for and about diversity, we have to be mindful of the “foods, fairs and festivals” approaches, which stay at a real surface level and don’t go into any depth, and then these kinds of activities, which one thinks are teaching about diversity but are, in fact, teaching very different lessons.

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