
A Message from the Editor

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After a lengthy delay, the latest edition of *One World in Dialogue* is finally available. The articles in this edition are certain to be, at a minimum, conversation starters, if not the subject of rich conversations among social studies teachers. They will compel all teachers

to reflect on some of their deeply held beliefs and assumptions—and take action as we head into a tumultuous time in education in Alberta. Some of you may have followed the heated exchanges in the *Edmonton Journal* between University of Alberta professors Carla Peck and Lindsay Gibson and journalist David Staples that continued in a Twitter exchange wherein Jason Kenney contributed with the tweet, “What happens when new-age fads and political ideology supplant critical skills and tried and true teaching methods. Exactly why we need to scrutinize pending curriculum changes, which have stated goal of turning students into ‘effective agents of change.’”

The articles in this edition provide readers with ideas for considering the veracity of Kenney’s comments. We would do well to consider American author Aberjhani’s comment in *Splendid Literarium*, “Discourse and critical thinking are essential tools when it comes to securing progress in a democratic society, But in the end, unity and engaged participation are what make it happen.”¹ Let’s use these articles as a way to engage in critical thought and

conversations about social studies with our colleagues. Let us not abdicate our civic responsibility, but seek to ensure that social studies remains the moral and intellectual compass for all active and engaged citizens in a vibrant, thriving democracy.

Kent den Heyer, a professor of curriculum and social studies in the Department of Secondary Education, University of Alberta, challenges us to think critically about the impetus for curriculum change and the subsequent challenges to the changes suggested. Den Heyer, a passionate social studies educator, reminds us that controversy is a good thing—in fact, he notes, “If there is nothing about which to disagree, we are likely being fed pabulum.” He challenges the focus on competencies and the notion that these competencies will make us globally competitive in the 21st-century economy. All citizens, not just teachers, are challenged by den Heyer to ask more questions about the “international competency order” as it seeks to simply reinforce educational inequality in Alberta. Imploring action of civil society, not abdicating responsibility to politicians, is the message adroitly presented in this persuasive commentary.

Margie Patrick, an associate professor at King’s University, begins her article by pointing out that 68 per cent of Canadians think that high school students need some basic understanding of world religions. This is especially important in an era of difficult citizenship, as many current events have direct ties to religion. She argues that the study of world religions should be explicitly addressed in the curriculum, because “understanding religion is too important to citizenship education to be left to the sole discretion of individual teachers.” The benefits of this

study are vast: greater understanding of our neighbours, stronger public policies that benefit the common good, understanding the nature of global conflicts and the challenge of peace building. In fact, Alan Sears and Lindsay Herriot have noted that religion is a “critical friend” of social studies (Sears and Herriot 2016). Patrick provides a thought-provoking consideration of including the study of religion as a way to enhance our collective understanding of what is necessary for a thriving democracy.

This edition concludes with two articles that encourage teachers to rethink the way they teach history. Cathryn van Kessel and Rebeka Plots (University of Alberta) investigate evil and villainification. As a bit of a primer on the idea, *the banality of evil* is a term coined by Hannah Arendt, who explained that many of the evils of the past were perpetrated by ordinary people who accepted state assertions as normal and willingly participated in acts now considered evil. They may have even done so with good intentions. In this fascinating excerpt from her recently published book, van Kessel uses a textbook analysis to explore how we create and depict villains and the consequent understanding of these actors by students. While students are enthralled with the study of villains and evil, she questions why students are never asked to reflect on their own complicity in acts that may, in the future, be considered evil. Van Kessel’s article takes us on a journey that investigates villainification—the act of creating a single villain instead of understanding the broader, systemic nature of an act of evil. And, she notes, social studies textbooks can play a role in this process. I’m halfway through her book, and it has given me pause to reflect on my complicity in villainification throughout my teaching career; I’m sure this article will encourage the same in readers.

This edition of the journal concludes with Calgary teacher David Weisgerber reflecting on his actions that sought to engage high school students in inquiry using historical thinking concepts. Set within the context of high school redesign, Weisgerber sought to embark on a pedagogical paradigm shift that incorporated into his practice the ways of thinking used by experts in the field. To do so, he designed a

self-study research project to better understand if a reformed learning experience, based on the principles of mastery learning, is conducive to the development of historical thinking in students. His research utilized a reflective journal to record his observations of moving to an inquiry-based learning environment in which his role was that of a facilitator as his students engaged in historical thinking. Weisgerber provides strong insights into what is important to ensure that engagement and learning are effectively connected.

The hope of the ATA Social Studies Council is that this journal continues to be one to reach for when social studies teachers are looking to engage with latest scholarship related to curriculum, pedagogy and deep understanding of how to support students’ learning in the multiple dimensions of our very progressive social studies curriculum. As well, we seek to ensure that the journal will be a source of articles that creatively and critically take up important pedagogical issues and events in local, national and international contexts. As the guidelines for manuscripts say,

One World in Dialogue is a professional journal for social studies teachers in Alberta. It is published to promote the professional development of social studies educators and stimulate thinking, explore new ideas and offer various viewpoints. Submissions are requested that have a classroom as well as a scholarly focus. They may include

- descriptions of innovative classroom and school practices;
- discussions of trends, issues or policies;
- explorations of significant classroom experiences; and
- extended evaluations of instructional and curricular methods, programs or materials.

We welcome articles that take up all aspects of social studies: learning in any of the social sciences that weave together to form social studies, including citizenship education, Aboriginal issues and education, peace education, global education, economic education, history education, social justice, immigration issues, multicultural education, intercultural issues in second language

teaching, comparative education, intercultural communication and education, innovative uses of educational technologies to promote learning in social studies, and environmental ethics, environmental education and/or ecological teaching or teaching for sustainability.

Authors can choose to have their article peer reviewed by prominent social studies scholars in Alberta or, if a teacher, have it reviewed by just the editor. The quality of articles submitted under this new format is impressive, as is apparent in the current edition.

Fifteen colleagues who specialize in one or more aspects of social studies have volunteered to act as blind reviewers. They are listed, with their brief biographies, at the end of this issue. Reviewers hail from the University of Alberta, the University of Calgary, the University of Lethbridge and Mount Royal University. The ATA Social Studies Council thanks them all for their support and expertise.

Note

1. Aberjhani was born Jeffery Lloyd, in 1957, in Savannah, Georgia; he took the name Aberjhani as an adult. He is a poet, historian, columnist, novelist, artist and editor. He writes on literature and politics, and is perhaps best known as coauthor of *Encyclopedia of the Harlem Renaissance* and author of *The River of Winged Dreams*.

References

- Aberjhani. 2015. *Splendid Literarium: A Treasury of Stories, Aphorisms, Poems, and Essays*. np.
- Sears, A, and L Herriot. 2016. "The Place of Religion in Education for Citizenship and Social Justice." In *The Palgrave International Handbook of Education for Citizenship and Social Justice*, ed A Peterson, R Hattam, M Zambylas and J Arthur, 285–304. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Van Kessel, C. 2019. *An Education in "Evil": Implications for Curriculum, Pedagogy, and Beyond*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.