



Social Studies Explorations

– A Professional Journey



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Guiding Question:
What implications does the new Social Studies Program of Studies have for classroom assessment practices?

Abstract:
Assessment is more than a test, more than a grade, and more than a report card. Assessment embraces a range of formal and informal strategies and employs a variety of tools as it provides the link between teaching and learning. Looking at learner outcomes through assessment eyes highlights new possibilities for student learning and new responsibilities for teachers.

Zone 1

Year One Social Studies Project Report Submitted to Alberta Education

The results are in and according to all the data, year one of our project has had many successes. Here are a few highlights taken from the report – and a few questions that we welcome your response to!

Sessions, Satisfaction

Year one of our project saw NRLC offer 64 sessions with over 1500 registrations of teachers, administrators, and central office personnel. Here are a few statistics.

In the NRLC session surveys:

- 99% of you stated that you would be able to apply what you had learned in your sessions in your classroom, school or district.
- 96.5% of you indicated that overall, you were satisfied with your sessions.

Grade 4 and 7 teachers were surveyed in October 2005, and then again in June 2006.

- October results: 48% of teachers indicated that they had “some” or “a lot” of knowledge about the new Social Studies Curriculum in October;

- this increased to 82% by June of 2006.

Teachers indicated that they felt the need for on-going professional development in Social Studies.

In June, most teachers felt comfortable with the program overview and foundations (76.8%), however these numbers continued to decline as we asked about specific aspects of the program:

- 56.5% felt comfortable with the topic “Dealing with Diversity”
- 49.3% felt comfortable with the topic “Aboriginal Perspectives in Social Studies”
- 40.6% felt comfortable with the topic “Critical Thinking Skills”
- 26.2% felt comfortable with the topic “Using the Online Guide for Social Studies”

This data is encouraging because it shows us that the areas that have received the most focus are the ones that teachers are feeling comfortable with. Teachers recognize areas that they are not as familiar with and these areas correlate to the amount of PD that has been provided.

Questions for teachers and administrators

We are constantly revising the best times/locations/workshop formats/ways to offer you the PD that will assist you

with your classroom work – let us know what works for you!

We also need to know how to best provide you with information on sessions and events. “Any ideas?”

We are also seeking your advice on the best way to get the provincial newsletters (with excellent articles for professional growth) into your hands?

Comments? Suggestions? Please contact Leslie Snyder (contact info on Page 4).

Advisory Committee encourages new members to join

The zone advisory committee will meet again on Tuesday, May 15 at 10 am in Peace River at the Catholic Conference Centre. At that time we encourage districts to have teacher and admin representation (including grades 5, 8 & 10, and grades 6, 9 and 11 for pre-implementation next year). Interested? Contact your district curriculum officer

Leslie Snyder, Project Coordinator

Ph: (780) 836-3660

Email: snyderl@prsd.ab.ca



www.nrlc.net

Assessment — Linking Teaching and Learning in Alberta Social Studies

Submitted Robert Hogg and Sherry Bennett
Alberta Assessment Consortium

Assessment is the process of gathering information about student learning. It embraces a range of formal and informal strategies and employs a variety of tools where evaluations of learning are recorded and shared. It is more than a test, more than a grade, and more than a report card. Assessment spans the breadth of teaching and learning.

Alberta curriculum is based on learner outcomes that identify what students need to do in order to demonstrate their attainment of these outcomes. Until we engage in assessment to gather this evidence, we cannot say with assurance that learning has taken place. Assessment is the process that links teaching and learning.

The Alberta Assessment Consortium visual incorporates research based and promising classroom assessment practices. Six key questions emerge from this visual to guide the discussion of social studies assessment in Alberta.

#1 What will students learn?

The program of studies forms the basis for instruction and assessment. Unique

characteristics of specific outcome categories have implications for assessment.

Values and Attitudes outcomes challenge traditional notions of assessment. How do we see appreciation? How will we know if students value ____? Alternative assessment strategies must be used for these outcomes.

Knowledge and Understanding outcomes ask students to investigate, examine, analyze, evaluate, and assess critically. The bulleted items are phrased as inquiry questions to shape the specific outcomes. Assessment experiences, however, must reflect the cognitive processes identified in the specific outcomes and not simply the content of the bulleted items.

Skills and Processes outcomes have consistent categories among all grades, providing a continuum of skill development.

Looking at learner outcomes through assessment eyes highlights new possibilities for student learning and new responsibilities for teachers.

#2 How will we know learning has occurred?

Teachers must be clear about what the outcomes ask of students. It is no longer necessary or desirable for students to simply provide facts and details. Rather, students might be asked to evaluate the impact of various people on each other and on subsequent events. To do this, they must access the necessary background information, consider multiple perspectives, filter for bias, and draw and support conclusions. These processes, rather than content, become the criteria for evaluation.

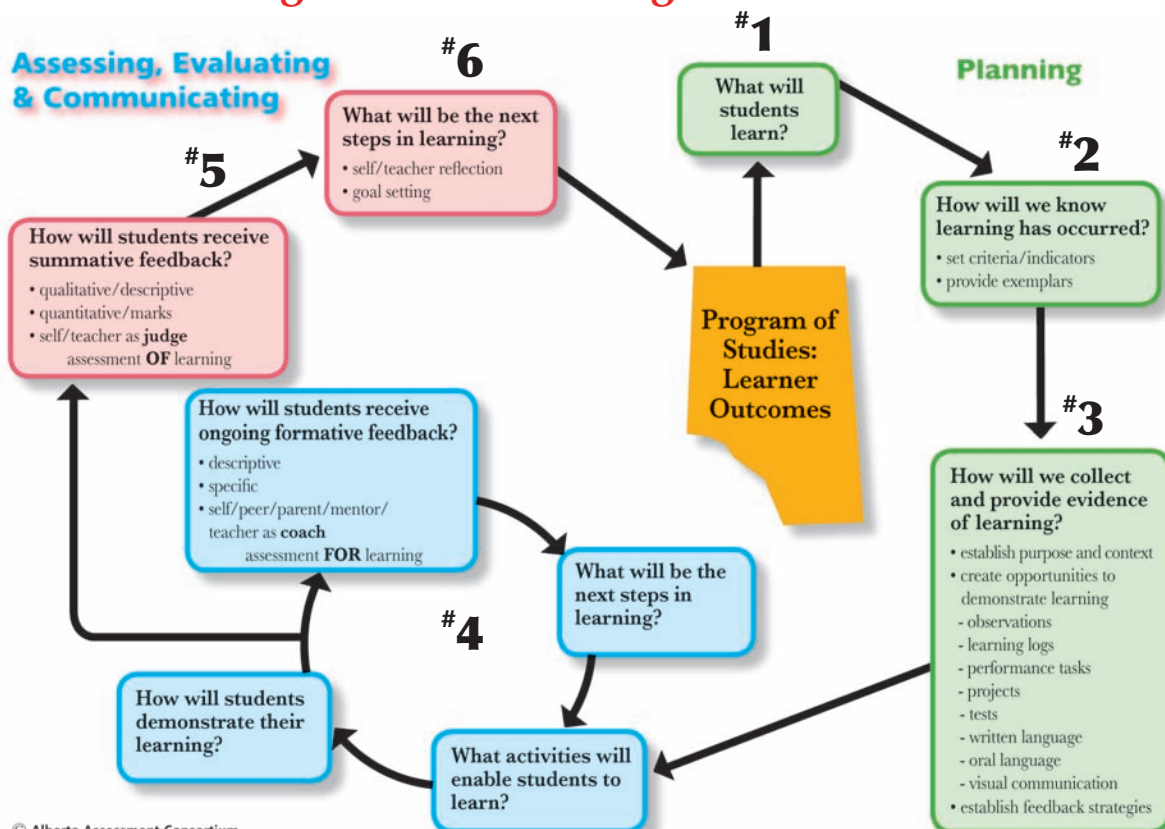
As teachers achieve clarity with the outcomes, the next step is to help students understand the language of the outcomes. This is the process of sharing criteria with students, or helping students know 'what counts' (Gregory, Cameron & Davies, 1997). As we share criteria with students, we empower them to succeed.

#3 How will we collect and provide evidence of learning?

As our curriculum shifts from content to process-based, we must rely on a wider variety of strategies to gather evidence of the full range of learning. Many learner outcomes cannot be measured with traditional pencil paper tests.

Teacher observation, long considered simply an intuitive skill, now finds its place as an effective strategy for many social studies skills and processes. When teachers are clear about criteria and plan for observation opportunities, highly relevant evidence can be obtained. When further combined with student reflection and accompanying student products, the triangulation of evidence (Davies, 2000) provides teachers with evidence for making informed decisions regarding student learning.

Assessing Student Learning in the Classroom



#4 How does formative assessment (assessment FOR learning) prepare students for success?

Formative assessment gives students permission to be learners. If learning is to be constructivist and inquiry-based, students need a risk-free environment in which to explore their thinking.

Carefully constructed checklists, rating scales and rubrics identify criteria for evaluation and describe the required standard of performance. The use of these tools in conjunction with specific and descriptive feedback from teachers, peers and self provide data that students use to improve their learning.

#5 How can summative assessment (assessment OF learning) enrich the learning process?

Students who use formative assessment purposefully to guide their learning find that culminating assessments can be "occasions of pleasure" (Gardner,

2000). Confidence replaces test anxiety as students believe that success is within reach. Performance assessment tasks engage students and provide them with the opportunity to demonstrate their learning in authentic contexts. Summative assessment becomes a natural extension of the learning process.

#6 What is the role of student reflection and goal setting?

Reflective processes are essential in order to maximize student learning. Metacognition is the step that moves students purposefully towards becoming self-evaluating.

An exciting, vibrant program of studies combined with quality classroom instruction and assessment practices provides the rich environment needed to prepare our students to become active, responsible, contributing citizens.

Highlights

Changes in teaching and learning require changes to our classroom assessment practices.

As our curriculum shifts from content to process based, we must rely on a wider variety of strategies to gather evidence of the full range of learning. Many learner outcomes cannot be measured with traditional pencil paper tests.

As we share criteria with students, we empower them to succeed.

Formative assessment gives students permission to be learners. If learning is to be constructivist and inquiry based, students need a risk-free environment in which to explore their thinking.

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Annotated Resources, Web Sites, Books, etc.

Alberta Assessment Consortium. The web site is a classroom assessment resource centre. Quality classroom assessment materials and professional publications are available for teachers looking for practical ideas and strategies. Access to these materials and other world-class resources are at your fingertips including numerous links to assessment-related web sites- <http://www.aac.ab.ca/assesslinks.html>. Performance assessment tasks, based on the new Social Studies Program of Studies, are available to support implementation. www.aac.ab.ca

Absolum, M. Clarity in the Classroom: Using Formative Assessment – Building Learning-focused Relationships. A Hodder Education Book: Auckland, NZ. 2006.

Using practical examples, this resource describes an evidence-based, reflective approach that enables teachers to help students achieve higher levels of performance. Key strategies and easy-to-use techniques provide support for meaningful engagement of students in their learning and assessment. Student confidence and enthusiasm are positively affected.

Alberta Assessment Consortium. How to Develop and Use Performance Assessments in the Classroom (revised edition). AAC: Edmonton, AB. 2003.

This is one in a series of five professional resources that provide teachers with practical approaches for assessing, evaluating and communicating student learning. Gain insights into the rationale for and use of performance assessments; learn to apply five steps in their development complemented by a practical tool box of implementation ideas.

Arter, J.A. & Chappius, J. Creating and Recognizing Quality Rubrics. Educational Testing Service: Portland, OR. 2006.

This book enables teachers to choose and develop sound instructional rubrics, use them effectively with students to maximize learning, convert rubric scores to grades, and communicate to parents about the use of rubrics in the classroom. It will provide a description of quality performance tasks with effective rubrics to produce the desired results.

Davies, A. Making Classroom Assessment Work. Connections Publishing: Merville, BC. 2000.

This resource provides a thoughtful and thought provoking framework teachers and administrators can use to reconsider how assessment is working in the classroom. Ideas range from building a foundation for student involvement through ways to report student performance. Bridge the findings in research with what teachers do in the classroom.

Stiggins, R. Student-Involved Assessment FOR Learning (4th Edition). Merrill Prentice Hall: Columbus, OH. 2004.

This resource shows teachers how to create high-quality classroom assessments and use them to build student confidence thereby maximizing (not just documenting) student performance and achievement. Features: how to manage day-to-day classroom assessment effectively and efficiently, offers a practical guideline on how to select and use all types of assessments- matching learner outcomes to assessment methods, and provides energy and time-saving ideas for classroom teachers.

Wiggins, G. and McTighe, J. Understanding by Design (Expanded 2nd Edition). ASCD: Alexandria, VA. 2005.

This resource demonstrates how understanding differs from knowledge, how to identify the big ideas in the program of studies, the importance of learner outcomes and how to know when students have attained them, and how to improve student performance. Educators will learn why familiar coverage- and activity-based approaches to instruction fall short of attaining the intents (big ideas, enduring understandings) of the program of studies. Research-based principles are applied through an array of practical tools, strategies, tools and examples from various subject areas.

Biographies

Sherry Bennett is the Division AISI Lead Teacher with Greater St.

Albert Catholic Schools. For the past several years, Sherry has been involved with the Alberta Assessment Consortium as a developer, reviewer, writer and workshop facilitator. She has recently been involved as an assessment consultant with a Canadian publisher, developing resources to support the new Alberta social studies curriculum. She is currently on secondment with the Edmonton Regional Learning Consortium and the Southern Alberta Professional Development Consortium providing assessment support for social studies implementation.

Robert Hogg (hoggr@shaw.ca) is the Executive Director of the Alberta Assessment Consortium (AAC) - a not-for-profit partnership of educational organizations dedicated to enhancing student learning through classroom assessment that increases student confidence as learners and enables students to reveal what they know and demonstrate what they can do. His teaching career has embraced every division level in public education and stretches from chalkboard to technology, and all points in between. He is a published co-author of highly practical assessment for learning professional resources for classroom teachers, and presenter and assessment consultant to international schools and organizations.

News from the Social Studies' Fall Conference Chair:

The 2007 Social Studies Council Conference will be held at the **Fairmont Jasper Park Lodge** from *October 19-21, 2007*

The annual conference will host as its theme: "Curriculum Crossword: Decipher the Puzzle." As Alberta teachers are implementing the new Social Studies' curriculum, there will be an excellent opportunity for colleagues as well as interested educators to present their interpretations and expertise, share their experiences, and be involved in the ongoing dialogue and networking that confirms the Alberta Social Studies community as a vibrant place where best practices of teaching and learning are regularly utilized.

In addition to sessions presented by our Social Studies colleagues and other interested educators, we are pleased to announce that **Avi Lewis** and ***The Arrogant Worms*** will be featured keynote speakers. **Avi Lewis** is becoming a strong and well respected Canadian voice with regards to globalization and ***The Arrogant Worms*** will remind us why Canada is more than just rocks and trees and water!

The registrations forms, presenter forms, and additional information can be retrieved from the Social Studies specialist council web site at www.ssc.teachers.ab.ca or by contacting Les Champ [Conference Director] at lechamp@shaw.ca. Additional information regarding the following areas can be obtained through:

Registration: Sharyn Dickson sdickson@cbe.ab.ca • **Displays:** Barb Nagel abnagel@telusplanet.net
Sessions: Meghan Coole mdcoole@cbe.ab.ca • **Facility:** Jessica Bates jl Bates@cbe.ab.ca

Northwest Regional Learning Consortium's Social Studies Project

With the support of Alberta Education funding, NRLC's Social Studies Project offers support to social studies teachers and administrators who are either implementing or preparing to implement the new program of studies. An exceptional variety of opportunities for professional development and involvement with projects exists for NRLC social studies educators.

Exciting workshop for School Based Staff Developers – Joellen Killion, NSDC

If you are a teacher leader, attend a one day session on **Wednesday, May 9 in Grande Prairie**. Joellen Killion (Director of Special Projects for the National Staff Development Council) will be working with teacher leaders helping them to understand their roles/responsibilities, determining which roles are most appropriate for their school/district, and helping them to acquire the skills to work collaboratively with principals and teachers in their districts. Joellen is a fabulous presenter and this is sure to be a worthwhile day. **Further details at www.nrlc.net**

Anne Davies in Zone One for Six Days in 2007-2008

NRLC is pleased to announce that Anne Davies will be in our zone for six days in the next school year. Anne is well known for her work in assessment and many teachers will be familiar with her book "*Making Classroom Assessment Work.*"

Teachers from all areas of the zone will have the opportunity to work with Anne at a variety of levels. There will be introductory and intermediate/advanced level sessions for large groups as well as capacity building sessions, department specific sessions (including Social Socials) and a focus on different grade levels.

Anne will be hosted in both Grande Prairie and Peace River. Watch the NRLC website for updates on session descriptors. Anne is scheduled for 2007 – September 27, 28; 2008 – February 21, 22 and April 24, 25. These will be phenomenal PD opportunities to be included in your professional growth plans for next year!

Summer Workshops

Gr. 6, 9 & 11: Provincial Summer Conference August 14-17, 2007 in Edmonton
Gr. K-5, 8, 10: Zone One Summer Conference August 20 – 22 in Grande Prairie

Please go to our regularly updated website for all the latest updates – session additions, changes, and important information. www.nrlc.net

You can access all the issues of our Social Studies newsletter at www.nrlc.net

Newsletters can be printed from the website or emailed in pdf format. Watch for a new issue each month.



Leslie Snyder, Project Coordinator
Ph: (780) 836-3660
Email: snyderl@prsd.ab.ca

