

SUPPORTING THE IMPLEMENTATION NEW ALBERTA HIGH SCHOOL SOCIAL STUDIES PROGRAM



IMPLEMENTATION SUPPORT

Craig Findlay will be serving in the role of High School Social Studies Implementation Support Teacher for the Zone Six Social Studies Implementation Project, effective January 29, 2009. In this capacity, Craig will collaborate with jurisdiction leaders and teachers throughout southern Alberta to identify specific needs with respect to the high school social studies implementation process and to provide subsequent support to high school teachers throughout the region.

Craig has been actively involved in Alberta social studies since entering the teaching profession. He has held leadership positions with the Alberta Teachers Association (ATA) Social Studies Specialist Council at the local level as well as serving on the executive of the Provincial Council from 2003 – 2005, including one year as President. He was involved in the consultations at various stages in the development process of the new social studies curriculum. Craig has worked with Alberta Education in a variety of other capacities including the creation of diploma examination questions and marking diploma examinations. Prior to his secondment Craig served as Curriculum Leader/Department Head at Lethbridge Collegiate Institute.

The following list may provide your district or school with some ideas about how you might use Craig. He will be able to travel to schools to work with teachers and district leaders in the following areas:

- Vision and philosophy of the new social studies program
- Planning and the new program (making learning problematic; focusing on the 'big questions')
- Assessment and the new program (outcomes-based authentic assessment tasks; test design; new diploma exams)
- Working the skills (critical and creative thinking; historical thinking, geographic thinking)
- Integrating technology (blogs; wikis; podcasts; vodcasts; MovieMaker; learning management systems ie. Moodle)
- Writing skills and the new program (new diploma exam design and expectation; work with sources)
- Teaching and learning strategies (debates; journaling; youtube; using visuals; resource development)

This is not a definitive list; it is a starting point for teachers, schools and districts with respect to their implementation plans. The needs of teachers will drive the work that needs to be done – don't be afraid to think outside the box with respect to professional development.

BACKGROUND – THE NEW HIGH SCHOOL SOCIAL STUDIES PROGRAM

The high school social studies program is designed with an umbrella-like structure. The two main themes of the whole K-12 social studies program are citizenship and identity. The identity theme is an important element of the new program because it asks a student to connect everything they do back to

themselves. The personalization of the educational experience fosters the development of a key facet of understanding (using Understanding by Design language), that of self-knowledge. Within the structure of the high school program there is a key issue which serves as the epicentre of the entire course. Beneath the key issue there are four related issues that are connected to four corresponding general learner outcomes. Embedded within the general outcomes are specific learner outcomes that serve to scaffold a student's understanding, while developing the essential knowledge and skills to engage the related issues and, ultimately, to construct an informed position on the overarching issue. The specific outcomes are separated into sections categorized as *values and attitudes*, and *knowledge and understanding*. Many of the skills students will be asked to develop are embedded within the specific learner outcomes, a sign of the importance placed on the skills piece of the new program.

The general layout of the new program looks very different from the current program. Most notably, the skills section of the curriculum has been moved from the back to the front of the document, highlighting the new emphasis on skills and outcomes rather than on content. The benchmark skills and processes have been divided into four main categories, each with sub-categories of more specific skill-sets. The new skills and processes are explained in the following chart (adapted from the Alberta Education High School Social Studies 10-1 Program):

Chart 1. *Alberta Education High School Social Studies Benchmark Skills and Processes*

- **Dimensions of Thinking**
 - critical and creative thinking
 - historical thinking
 - geographic thinking
 - decision making and problem solving
- **Social Participation as a Democratic Practice**
 - cooperation, conflict resolution, and consensus building
 - age-appropriate behaviour for social involvement
- **Research for Deliberative Inquiry**
 - research and information
- **Communication**
 - oral, written and visual literacy
 - media literacy

Another feature of the new program, similar to that of new programs of study coming online in other subject areas, is the infusion of (ICT) outcomes. The marriage between important skills related to technology and more traditional skill sets, is recognition of the influence technology (particularly internet technology) is having on our rapidly changing educational and mainstream cultures.

The following chart explains the most significant differences between our current program and the new program. The information has been adapted from notes taken at several professional development activities hosted by Warren Woytuk, a lead writer of the new program from Alberta Education.

Chart 2. *Significant differences between current and new high school social studies curricula*

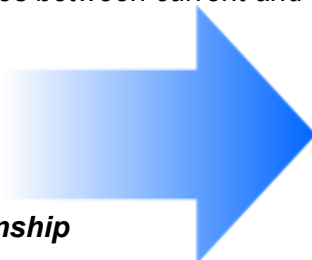
Current Program

Inquiry strategies

Focus on content

Responsible citizenship

Eurocentric emphasis



New Program

Issues focused and inquiry based

Outcomes and skills based

Active and responsible citizenship

Multiple perspectives approach

One final area of note with respect to the significance of the curricular change is uncovered in the prescribed multiple perspectives approach to teaching and learning. Employing a multiple perspectives approach will encourage the acquisition of additional components of understanding (using UbD language). It seems to me that both perspective and empathy, as facets of understanding, are nurtured within the multiple perspective mandate of the new program. Students will be asked to view the world well beyond the Eurocentric lens our current program limits them with and, as a result, they will develop a much more complex picture of the issues they are asked to engage.

Teachers will be asked to use the program structure to lead students in building understanding, with the big questions providing meaning to the essential knowledge and applicable content. The so-called 'content', found within brackets linked to specific outcomes, is largely at the conceptual level, and therefore does not mandate the use of specific case studies, examples and narratives. Educators, those who know their students and their teaching and learning context best, are liberated by the new program to select the most meaningful 'content' to build understanding.

The new Alberta high school social studies program represents a significant curricular change. The extent to which the transition in program will impact classroom teachers has been debated, but the evidence is starting to become clear. The first of a three year implementation process is complete and it is now obvious that the program has forced educators to ask serious questions around matters of pedagogy and assessment. If there are teachers who would herald the argument that the new curriculum is simply a re-packaging of information, then they would be seriously mistaken. The new program is serving as an agent of change: empowering students as active and responsible citizens and championing the cause for teacher edification with that which research is calling for in terms authentic student assessment.

The outcomes based nature of the program facilitates a more amiable format for implementing what research is revealing about meaningful student assessment. The program moves away from a focus on delivering factual content, to a model that asks students to construct their own learning within the parameters of powerful issue questions. The new reality for social studies teachers will necessitate more formative assessment, as well as more skill and outcomes based performance measures in order to authentically assess and evaluate student learning. I believe that debate can serve as an important tool for teachers in providing students with authentic opportunities to reveal their understanding of key concepts and it can serve as a platform for students to practice and display their social studies skills.

ALBERTA REGIONAL PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT CONSORTIUM

Beliefs about Curriculum Implementation

Overarching Understanding

Effective curriculum implementation leads to a change in practice that enhances student learning.

Our pillars:

Effective Collaboration (process)
Effective Practice (content)
Effective Adult learning (context)

Enduring Understandings

We have come to understand:

- Effective curriculum implementation is a shared responsibility for all stakeholders
- Effective curriculum implementation is developmental and contextual

- Effective curriculum implementation must be systemic, systematically planned and sustained.
- Collaboration leads to deeper understanding and shared commitment
- PD is interactive, continuous and reflective
- Effective adult learning is meaningful, purposeful and provided through a variety of learning opportunities for all stakeholders.

Essential Questions

- What strategies lead to change in professional practice for enhanced student learning?
- What are the measures of effective implementation?
- What does shared responsibility of all stakeholders look like?
- What does meaningful and purposeful stakeholder collaboration look like?
- How do you address the developmental and contextual variables of communities to achieve effective implementation?

CONTACT INFORMATION

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NOTE: Craig is in the process of creating a Moodle site that area teachers will be able to join and login into in order to collaborate and share. The site will offer the ability to post ideas and resources and it will serve as an ongoing forum for those embarked upon the implementation journey.