

**TRANSFORMATIVE CURRICULUM:  
CHANGING PEDAGOGY AND PRACTICE**

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I would like to dedicate this work to my wonderful  
family who are an inspiration in all that I do.

## Abstract

The new Alberta high school social studies curriculum has reached its final year of implementation. Many have characterized the new curriculum as transformative and this study presents qualitative research that begins to uncover the degree to which the new Alberta high school social studies program has promoted change in pedagogy and teaching practice. A semi-structured interview process was used to collect data from ten teachers from across Southern Alberta. In an attempt to build a sample representative of the learning environments of the region, six male and four female teachers with a range of teaching experience were selected. Six teachers came from large urban schools and four from small rural schools. This study provides evidence to support the contention that a new curriculum can be a catalyst for educational reform. As a result of the implementation of the new high school social studies curriculum, teacher participants reported a significant shift from a teacher-centered to a student-centered classroom. In doing so, they confirmed that a move from content-laden programs to an issues-based curriculum demands critical thinking and student engagement in the pursuit of active and responsible citizenship in ways that more readily address the demands of twenty-first century teaching and learning. Teacher participants revealed the need for more authentic performance-based student assessment as a result of the skills-focus of the new curriculum. They also acknowledged the multiple perspectives approach embedded in the new curriculum was a departure from the predominantly Eurocentric narrative found in previous curricula.

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## Chapter1: Introduction

*A mind is a fire to be kindled, not a vessel to be filled.*

*Plutarch*

Following the completion of a province-wide needs assessment survey administered by Alberta Learning in the fall of 2001, teachers and curriculum specialists flushed out the initial framework of what would become the new high school social studies curriculum (Alberta Learning, 2002). From this, lead writers began to build general and specific learner outcomes and craft the skill sets central to the vision of the new program. The development and implementation of a new high school social studies curriculum has served as impetus for reflection with respect to pedagogy and practice and, now that teachers are entering the final year of the formal implementation process, it is an opportune time to examine changes wrought by the new curricular framework.

The extent to which this curricular change has had a preliminary impact on classroom teachers is open to discussion; however, there is some limited evidence available to inform the debate. Initial informal feedback suggests that the new curriculum has several characteristics that have forced educators to ask serious questions around matters of pedagogy and teaching practice. As one example, the issues-based structure demands student engagement in the pursuit of active and responsible citizenship in ways that more readily address the demands of twenty-first century teaching and learning. In addition, a transformative curriculum such as this promotes more authentic performance-based student assessment. The skills-focus of the programs requires teachers to ensure that students living in the digital and information ages—with instantaneous access to immense amounts of information—are not mired in antiquated content-laden curricula.

Lastly, the multiple perspectives approach provides a vehicle to move teachers and students away from the largely Eurocentric narrative found in previous documents, toward recognition of the importance of promoting pluralistic values, as they are situated in a diverse yet interconnected globalizing world.

Some contend that the grade level Programs of Study—within the broader framework of the curriculum—are simply a re-packaging of information that requires little change to existing pedagogy and practice. The allegation that the new curriculum is transformative demands evidence and calls for research that will substantiate the type or extent of impact it is having on teachers and learners.

The general purpose of this study was to review the development and implementation of the new high school social studies curriculum and assess the influence it has had on the pedagogy and teaching practice of a group of southern Alberta educators. The research began by exploring the personal context that I bring to the study and to the role of researcher. It then describes the methodology, including an exploration of the research question along with a description of the participant selection, data collection and data analysis processes. The study outlines the key terms of reference within the research question and includes a review of the literature framing each of the defined parameters. Finally, the study concludes with a discussion of the research findings and the corresponding learning journey I have undertaken.

### *Personal Context*

The past eight years of my professional life have been consumed by both the development and implementation of the new high school social studies curriculum; I feel fortunate to have had the opportunity to take part in such an important process. Through

my engagement at various stages in the evolution of the new programs, I have had the privilege to collaborate with hard working and talented people whose expertise has had a lasting impact on my professional life.

This journey began for me as a classroom teacher completing an online province-wide needs assessment survey. The survey results subsequently became the blueprint for the new curriculum. I was contracted by Alberta Education (Alberta Learning at that time) to work with other social studies specialists from across the province to begin construction on the initial framework of the programs. Lead writers used these parameters to build general and specific learner outcomes, including the skill-sets that would become central to the vision of the new curriculum. Over the past eight years I have taken part in many small and large group consultation sessions, including an *ad hoc* committee struck at the height of the politically charged atmosphere of the 2002 province-wide teacher strike. This ‘think tank’ was a particularly fascinating experience that forced me to balance my personal dissent against the Alberta Teachers’ Association’s (ATA) position on the new curriculum with the political realities of my position as president of the ATA Provincial Social Studies Specialist Council. Taking part in the construction of a document as complex as a provincial curriculum was a fascinating and rewarding experience.

The social studies department to which I have belonged for the past ten years has worked hard to be well-positioned to cope with the challenges associated with a significant curricular change. During the past five years I served as curriculum leader at the school with a primary goal of establishing professional development opportunities through the design of a curriculum implementation plan. A portion of our collective work

came as a result of a Collaborative Inquiry Project sponsored by the Southern Alberta Professional Development Consortium. Our focus was to learn the Critical Thinking Consortium's (TC<sup>2</sup>) approach to infusing critical thinking into teaching practice and to develop critical challenges that were similar in layout to those found in the new *Social Studies Program Online Guide for Implementation* (Alberta Education, 2009). We worked together to develop a deeper understanding of the new curriculum as we identified ways to bring it to life for our students. The collaborative process was certainly as valuable as the products of our labour. I have also had the opportunity to work with a group of teachers from across Southern Alberta, along-side members of TC<sup>2</sup>, in developing critical thinking strategies through online collaboration using various social networking mediums. As a result of these experiences, I have been forced to spend a great deal of time reflecting on best practices while preparing for the implementation of exciting new Programs of Study.

Clearly, I have been fortunate to work with colleagues who are motivated, exceptionally passionate about social studies education, and more than willing to engage the challenges presented by the implementation of a new curriculum. Several sources have served as important references for our work because they outline vital elements of the new social studies program, as well as the direction of recent professional development initiatives within our school district.

Wiggins and McTighe's (2005) *Understanding by Design* is a book that has afforded me continuing opportunity for personal reflection on the structure and function of curriculum, and on the nature of learning. To engage in a book study, our department secured funding from monies derived from the Alberta Initiative for School Improvement

to purchase a copy of *Understanding by Design* (2005) and the *Understanding by Design Workbook* (2005) for each department member. The team had a number of informal lunch meetings to discuss readings and we set up an online discussion group within the school's learning management system known as *Moodle*.

Wiggin and McTighe's work has been an important part of my professional life in a number of key ways. First, I have come to realize that their work represents a vision of the learning process that is not only intuitive, it is effective. Second, the new high school social studies curriculum incorporates many of the big ideas found within their work and I am excited about the pedagogical implications of this marriage. The new programs are outcomes-based, providing teachers with specific learner expectations to employ 'backward design' in planning learning experiences, while encouraging teachers to offer more authentic performance-based assessment of student learning (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005, p. 18). The new curriculum has an umbrella-like structure that is framed by overarching open-ended essential questions (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005, p. 115). The framework encourages inquiry-based learning and scaffolds student understanding through the interconnectedness of specific, general, and key learner outcomes. Finally, *Understanding by Design* reinforces many of the new ideas emerging around assessment. I believe our education system is in the early stages of a reformation in assessment practice that is going to be central to my professional life for the remainder of my teaching career.

My personal journey with the new high school social studies curriculum has also been influenced by my secondment with the Southern Alberta Professional Development Consortium (SAPDC). Serving in the role of *High School Social Studies Implementation*

*Support Teacher* for the past 18 months, I collaborated with jurisdiction leaders and teachers throughout southern Alberta. My job was to identify specific needs with respect to the new high school social studies curriculum and to provide subsequent support to high school teachers throughout the region.

In the second phase of the secondment I taught one social studies 30-1 course at the Lethbridge Collegiate Institute in each semester of the school year, during which time I shared my personal implementation experience with teachers from across the region, including my lessons, my successes, and my challenges. I continued the work begun with various teachers and district leaders and I expanded collaboration through a Moodle site that networked over one hundred and forty teachers from across Southern Alberta (and 24 educators from the North West Territories).

This experimental professional development model offered many unique opportunities including:

- sharing of lessons and assessment strategies online via Moodle
- collaboration and development of lessons and assessment strategies, also using Moodle
- video conferencing lessons, video sharing lessons – peer critique
- teacher group visits to my classroom - peer critique and follow-up sessions.

In addition, I offered full-day or half-day workshops, and supper club meetings, in some of the following areas:

- *Understanding by Design* (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005) – planning and assessment model

- debate into the classroom – linking writing and debate and exploring writing skills in the new social studies curriculum
- multiple choice question and test design in the new social studies curriculum
- historical and geographical thinking and the new curriculum
- technology and the 21<sup>st</sup> century learner in the context of the new social studies curriculum
- formative and summative assessment in the high school social studies classroom
- differentiated instruction in the high school social studies classroom.

The implementation of the new high school social studies curriculum has initiated a process of change that has forced teachers to review pedagogy and teaching practice. This study chronicles the journey afforded by curricular and instructional change and investigates the subsequent reflection on teaching and learning that has transpired. It is an ideal time to ask teachers about the impact a significant curricular change has had on their professional reality and it is hoped that findings may serve to identify effective practice in a new era of social studies education in Alberta.

## Chapter 2: Methodology

*Education is the ability to listen to almost anything without losing your temper.*

*Robert Frost*

In order to investigate the impact of the new high school social studies curriculum, specific teacher feedback was needed. A semi-structured interview process was employed to extract the qualitative data needed to answer the research question. The teacher participant sample was chosen to represent a cross-section of teachers based on three main criteria: experience, gender and location.

### *Research Question*

The general purpose of the study was to explore the impact of curricular changes in the area of high school social studies. The project gathered data to answer the question: *In what ways does a transformative curriculum, such as the new Alberta high school social studies programs, promote change in pedagogy and teaching practice?*

An inquiry such as this is grounded in a researcher's subjective experiences and interpretations of the world. A research question emanates from this context and seeks to explore a phenomenon with which the researcher is invested personally and professionally (van Manen, 1997, p. 30). Glesne (2006) explains "qualitative researchers seek to understand and interpret how the various participants in a social setting construct the world around them" (p. 4). Van Manen (1997) describes the visceral connection between research questions and methods of inquiry:

The questions themselves and the way one understands the questions are the important starting points, not the methods as such. But of course it is true as well that the way in which one articulates certain questions has something to do with the research method that one tends to identify with. So there exists a certain dialectic between question and method. (p. 1-2)

The phenomenological nature of the research serves to uncover the direct experience of participants, creating a foundation of qualitative data for more broadly based research surrounding the impact the new high school social studies curriculum is having on pedagogy and teaching practice.

### *Participants*

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with ten high school social studies teachers from across Southern Alberta. The geographic region of Southern Alberta is defined as the area serviced by SAPDC, which includes:

- Grasslands Regional Division
- Horizon School Division
- Lethbridge School District
- Medicine Hat School District
- Medicine Hat Catholic Schools
- Palliser Regional Division
- Prairie Rose Regional Division
- Holy Spirit Catholic Schools
- Livingstone Range School Division
- Westwind School Division
- Kainai Board of Education
- Peigan Board of Education
- Calvin Christian School
- Immanuel Christian Elementary School
- Immanuel Christian High School

- Medicine Hat Christian School
- Taber Christian School
- Cornerstone Christian School
- Newell Christian School

Participants were selected in an attempt to reflect the following layers of stratification: gender, experience, school district, school size, school location (urban-rural). Participants had to have taught one of the new programs (social studies 10-1, 10-2, 20-1 and/or 20-2) at least two times and they must have had at least one year experience teaching the old social studies programs (social studies 10, 13, 20, 23, 30 and/or 33).

The study sample is comprised of one teacher fitting each of the general criteria below:

- female from a rural high school
- female from an urban high school
- male from a rural high school
- male from an urban high school
- male with less than five years of experience
- male with more than five years of experience
- female with less than five years of experience
- female with more than five years of experience
- teacher in isolation (only high school social studies teacher)
- teacher as a member of a large social studies department

Prospective participants were recruited through email contact (Appendix B) and a follow-up contact (Appendix D). The goals, objectives, and project method were clearly

outlined and an explanation of the interview process was shared (Appendix E). The semi-structured interview process included:

- initial participant contacts (Appendix B, Appendix C)
- participant agreement and interview date selection (Appendix E)
- follow-up contact (Appendix D)
- initial video-taped interview of approximately 45 minutes (Appendix A)
- transcription of interview (Appendix G)
- field notes and analytic commentary (Appendix H, Appendix I)
- validation of transcription – ensuring original intent of interviewee was captured (Appendix F)

It was made clear that the interviews, both in location and time, would accommodate participants' schedules. The follow-up contact reviewed the goals, objectives and project methodology, as well as an explanation of the semi-structured interview process. Participants were provided with a written overview of the entire process and researcher contact information (Appendix B, Appendix E). Interested individuals were invited to contact me with any questions and concerns that may have emerged throughout their engagement in the study. Before any interviews began each participant was given the opportunity to sign the project consent form in my presence only (Appendix E).

### *Data Collection*

The goal of this research project was to uncover change in pedagogy and practice amongst high school social studies teachers. Phenomenology as a type of “pedagogical reflection” (van Manen, 1982, p. 283) was at the centre of methodology. A semi-

structured interview process (captured on digital video camera) created an effective window through which to explore individual experiences. As participants described their context and their experiences in the interview process, their responses yielded evidence, ideas, and insights that might otherwise have remained unexplored if they had been asked to fill out a questionnaire or other similar type of data collection tool. The digital video camera captured body language, voice tone and pitch, facial expression, and word choice, aspects which speak to the phenomenological nature of this study. As a backup tool in the event of technological problems, a digital audio device was also used to capture the interview.

The researcher kept a copy of the transcripts and video with the records of the project while another copy was kept by the participant. During the semi-structured interviews, participants were asked to respond to questions designed to bring to the surface their personal stories related to their implementation journey (appendix A). The questions guided the conversation while also allowing participants to share that which they deemed as important to their narrative. The open-ended design allowed participants to determine where, and for how long, to pause and reflect before sharing. The interviewer requested elaboration where necessary, always being careful not to guide the conversation in any specific direction.

Throughout the interview process, the researcher kept detailed field notes to track emerging themes, patterns, and relationships which were used to inform the subsequent data analysis (Appendix H). Anonymity was protected with the use of pseudonyms throughout the investigation, in the transcripts, and in the final text. Any portion of participants' responses that may have identified actual individuals was replaced with

pseudonyms. When chronicling information related to participants, no individual identifying information will be disclosed.

The primary researcher interviews, with the permission of each participant, were transcribed into text (Appendix G). Transcripts were then sent to each individual to review and to ensure the transcript accurately captured the intent of their answers. The triangulation method is designed to increase the reliability and the validity of the participant responses (Campbell & Fiske, 1959). With the exception of participant validation of the transcript and analysis particular to each individual, the coding and analysis of the text was the sole responsibility of the primary researcher. Only the researcher has access to the raw data (digital video and audio clips, and interview notes) and the transcripts in electronic form. All of the electronic data and interview notes will be stored on an external memory device and will be preserved in a secure location. In five years they will be destroyed. Once the interview, transcription, and verification process was completed, the data was coded using the three review practices: open, axial, and selective coding as described by Neuman (1997, pp. 422 – 423).

#### *Data Analysis Method*

Participant responses were digitally video-taped, digital audio-taped and then transcribed for analysis. The responses were analyzed by looking for common themes, as well as anomalies, in participant answers. Interpretation of the interview material yielded some preliminary answers to the research question. The results are being offered with the caveat that the implementation journey will continue to unfold and, accordingly, teacher impressions of the new curriculum may change over time. The study will offer a snap-

shot of teacher perceptions of the degree to which a transformative curriculum, like the new Alberta high school social studies program, changes pedagogy and practice.

The data analysis included making note of commonalities, contrasts, anomalies, and perceptions that warrant discussion (Neuman, 1997, pp. 422-426). During open coding, the data, in the form of interview transcripts and field notes, was examined for recurring themes and concepts. These umbrella topics were used as the basis for categorical labels for subsequent reviews. A second reading of the data, the axial coding process, was used to determine the appropriateness of the code labels developed during the open coding process. This served to uncover any necessary adjustments to the existing labels and indicated if new ones were needed. In the selective coding process, the third pass of the transcripts and field notes, the data was probed for illustrative examples and non-examples to support the themes and concepts determined by the categorizing labels. These labels directed the organization of information into comparative and contrasting examples which guided the final analysis and conclusions (Neuman, 1997, pp. 422-426). Throughout this process, words, sentences, and clusters of ideas in the data were underlined and colour-coded to correspond to the determined labels as a means of highlighting their interconnectedness, as well as their similarities and differences. At the same time, notes of insights and understanding were compiled and later infused into the final product in an attempt to capture all pertinent data (Appendix H, Appendix I).

### Chapter 3: Review of the Literature

*Any genuine teaching will result, if successful, in someone's knowing  
how to bring about a better condition of things than existed earlier.*

*John Dewey*

The area of curriculum studies contains no shortage of commentary and perspective. Even a modest inquiry into the field quickly uncovers a huge diversity and complexity of assumptions about ontology, purposes and optimum delivery of curricula. The research question central to this study requires the clarification and definition of four key phrases: transformative curriculum, the new Alberta high school social studies curriculum, pedagogy, and teaching practice.

The concept of transformative curriculum, in its most simplistic understanding, can be described as a new curriculum that has initiated change in teaching and learning; the new Alberta high school social studies program is such a document. Pedagogy is defined as the principles and values underlying an educator's philosophy of teaching, while teaching practice is considered as the implementation of said pedagogy. A transformative curriculum, such as the new high school social studies program, is serving as a catalyst in bringing about varying degrees of change for teachers. Some teachers may be in early stages of reflecting upon and questioning pedagogy grounded in the old curriculum, while others may be in the process of making significant change to their teaching practice. If indeed there is change unfolding, there will likely be a spectrum on which teachers, with their varied experiences and unique environments, will find themselves.

### *Transformative Curriculum*

While this section does not attempt to provide a complete review of the modern history of curriculum, important works in this area will be referenced throughout (Firth & Kimpston, 1973; Hlebowitsh, 2005; Ornstein, 1982; Ornstein, Behar-Horenstein & Pajak, 2003; Pinar, 2007; Pinar et al., 1995; Pratt, 1980; Scott, 2008; Taba, 1962).

I have come to understand the complexity surrounding the concept of *curriculum* and realize I have used it rather simplistically for most of my professional career. Curriculum, in the context of this study, has at its core the program of studies that contains the knowledge, skill and attitudinal outcomes, but is broadened to encompass support resources for teachers, student resources, assessment, and instructional strategies (Alberta Education, 2008, p. 56). From this perspective, ‘curriculum’ is holistic in nature, embracing the main elements of teacher pedagogy and practice; in this study curriculum will represent this conglomerate, unless otherwise stated. The concept of transformative curriculum, in its most rudimentary form, can be described as a new curriculum causing change in teaching and learning. The new high school social studies program has initiated such a process, but the journey is far from finished.

The new Alberta high school social studies curriculum has been influenced by the discourse emerging from the field of critical pedagogy. It can be fairly claimed that the vision of the new program constructs a framework to promote a central tenet of critical pedagogy—social change.

### *Critical Pedagogy and the Transformative Curriculum*

The field of critical pedagogy endorses the notion of thinking critically about one’s place in society, as well as one’s place within societal structures (such as an

education system), in an attempt to foster understanding of how to transform that which is deemed oppressive. Giroux (2004) suggests that “At the very least, critical pedagogy proposes that education is a form of political intervention in the world that is capable of creating possibilities for social transformation” (p. 34). The new high school social studies curriculum certainly endeavors to engage students in critical thought and challenge them with significant issues of our time. Apple (2003) contends context determines those who self-identify with oppression. As an example, he notes that many evangelical Christians in the United States see themselves as oppressed and seek to be liberated through reform of curriculum and control of education. “The authoritarian populist Right has reappropriated the discourse and strategies of the civil rights movement. For many members of the Christian Right, they are the new oppressed” (Apple, 2003, p. 522).

It should be noted that critical pedagogy grew out of the need to liberate poor people victimized by the oppressive forces of colonization. However, despite the disparity between the Alberta of today and the original contextual scaffolding of critical pedagogy, it remains useful to uncover the roots of ideas that are fundamental to the new curriculum. Richardson’s (2002) thoughts, stemming from an interesting dialogue about postmodernism, resonate:

The core of postmodernism is the *doubt* that any method or theory, discourse or genre, tradition or novelty, has a universal and general claim as the “right” or privileged form of authoritative knowledge. Postmodernism *suspects* all truth claims of masking and serving particular interests and local, cultural, and political struggles. But it does not automatically reject conventional methods of knowing or telling as faults or archaic. Rather, it opens those standard methods to inquiry and introduces new methods which are also, then subject to critique. (p. 928)

Paulo Freire is arguably one of the most influential educators of the twentieth century and his works, including *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, *Pedagogy of Hope* and *Pedagogy of Freedom*, are foundational to critical pedagogy (Giroux, 2004). An element of Freire's writing that is particularly relevant in the context of the new curriculum is his metaphor of banking. Freire (2007) states that, "Education thus becomes an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor. Instead of communicating, the teacher issues communiqués and makes deposits which the students patiently receive, memorize, and repeat" (p. 208). The metaphor equates students to an empty bank account that should remain open to deposits made by the teacher. Freire rejects this methodology, admonishing it for the dehumanization of both the students and the teacher, and for perpetuating oppressive attitudes and practices in society.

The new social studies curriculum is promoting a pedagogical shift away from a focus on delivering factual content to a framework that asks students to construct their own learning through a process of inquiry. The personalization of the educational experience fosters the development of self-knowledge as a key facet of understanding (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005). Freire (2007) argues for a more authentic approach to education that would allow people to be aware of their incompleteness and strive to be more fully human; the term *conscientization* is used to explain his vision of education as a means of constructing critical consciousness and a tool for shaping the person and the society (p. 159). According to Freire (2007), freedom will be the result of *praxis*—informed action—when balance between these theories and practice is ultimately realized (p. 45).

Giroux, a friend and contemporary of Freire, also offers much to the notion of critical pedagogy. Giroux (2008) takes aim at neoliberal forces in the modern world and attacks them for their oppressive role in undermining education systems and the societies they serve. Giroux (2005) argues that the public good has been devalued, calling into question the very role of citizenship in democratic societies (p. 214). He contends that the traditional social contract has been eroded by the unyielding power of corporations and their push for the commercialization and privatization of almost everything, including our education systems and our schools. Giroux (2008) offers the following explanation of the importance of education in combating the neoliberal forces at play within our society:

If educators are to counter global capitalism's increased power to both depoliticize and disempower, it is crucial to develop educational approaches that reject a collapse of the distinction between market liberties and civil liberties, a market economy and a market society. This suggests developing forms of critical pedagogy capable of appropriating from a variety of radical theories-feminism, postmodernism, critical theory, post-structuralism, neo-Marxism etc., and those progressive elements that might be useful in challenging neoliberalism on many fronts while resurrecting a militant democratic socialism that provides the basis for imagining a life beyond the "dream world" of capitalism. (Giroux, 2004, p. 32)

Others have offered work that stems from the roots of critical pedagogy. Apple (2004) and Kohn (2002), using England and Wales as case studies, critique the growing power of neoliberal forces challenging that which is public, particularly education, an important guardian of the values and attitudes that support the collective good. Apple

(2003) argues, paradoxically, that national curricula, and especially national testing programs, are the first and most essential step toward more marketization. Noddings (2005) agrees with the notion that standardization is a process that serves to move education systems away from liberation pedagogy to a model of conformity. Kohn (2002) posits that chronically underfunded public schools have no other recourse than to look to private companies eager to give them money; tantamount to being bullied by the economic power of the 500 pound corporate gorilla. He observes:

...what business wants, it usually gets. It doesn't take a degree in political science to figure out why politicians (and sometimes even educators) so often capitulate to business. For that matter, it isn't much of a mystery why a 500 pound gorilla is invited to sleep anywhere it wishes. But that doesn't make the practice any less dangerous. (p. 119)

The new Alberta high school social studies curriculum aspires to create active and responsible citizens, armed with the critical and creative thinking skills to stave off the forces that work to suppress and oppress. The goal is to create learners who readily embrace multiple perspectives as an obvious, and necessary, component of any meaningful discourse surrounding important issues. This element of the new program clearly connects with the vision of luminaries such as Hilda Taba. In writing about the legacy of Hilda Taba, Fraenkel (1992) states: "Above all, Hilda believed that the social studies should be about people-what people are like, how they are similar and different, what they have accomplished, their problems, their customs, their ways of life, and their culture" (p. 177). If these goals can be achieved, then society may become more

empathetic and caring, a result that could be celebrated as a success emerging from what would have to be considered a transformative curriculum (Noddings, 2008).

### *New Alberta High School Social Studies Curriculum*

Development of a new high school social studies curriculum began in earnest with the online needs assessment survey administered by Alberta Learning in the fall of 2001. The resultant findings became the foundation for the new programs. However, the new curriculum is merely the most contemporary piece of the broad mosaic of social studies curricula in Alberta's past.

The 1963 Alberta social studies curriculum was a value-laden curriculum with an emphasis on the transmission of the "desired values and ideas" deemed important by curriculum designers and political forces that governed them (Department of Education, 1963, p. 15). The curriculum was very Eurocentric, with little exploration of other perspectives and world views (Diefenthaler, 2005).

The 1970 Alberta social studies curriculum unveiled a transition to the exploration and identification of values; asking students to create a "defensible system of values" for themselves (Alberta Education, 1970, p. 131; Diefenthaler, 2005). The apparent freedom to explore and create may have been influenced by the curriculum discourse of the late 1960s and early 1970s. Scott (2008) describes the differences between educators such as W. J. Popham, who advocated behavioural objectives being central to curriculum design, with theorists like Lawrence Stenhouse, who argued for a curriculum built around process. The 1970 curriculum remained largely Eurocentric. However, in the expectation that students would develop their own system of values, the curriculum opened the door to more inquiry-based learning.

Curriculum changes first initiated in 1978 culminated in the 1981 social studies curriculum, which was much more prescriptive with respect to the factual content it mandated (Alberta Education, 1981). The specificity of the curriculum became the foundation for a standardized province-wide social studies 30 diploma examination worth 50% of a student's final grade. Although the program remained focused on the Western European experience, some would argue the program gained some breadth, now looking at Canadian citizenship in relation to the world community through the exploration of global issues (Deifenthaler, 2005).

The 1990 Alberta social studies curriculum expanded the focus on global issues, set out to explore and define of responsible citizenship, and established critical thinking as a foundational social studies skill. Diefenthaler (2005) contends that the curriculum became very Eurocentric again, with a return to the philosophy of studying the past to understand the present. A three column structure for the curriculum was established; a similar framework endorsed by educators such as Hilda Taba who called for a three layered curriculum framed by key concepts, organizing ideas and specific facts (Costa & Loveall, 2002; Fraenkel, 1992). The 1990 program's three layers included generalizations and key understandings, concepts, and related facts and content; somewhat different from the nomenclature of Taba (1962), but with clear similarities. Quite quickly, teachers came to focus on the third and final layer, or column, as it was laid out in the program of studies. The third column became a de facto checklist of items they would need to *cover* during the course of a semester. This was especially true in social studies 6, 9, 30 and 33 because of the provincial examination looming at the end of a term. Questions arose as to how much sustained learning unfolded in classrooms with such emphasis being placed on

*covering* content, as opposed to what Wiggins and McTighe (2005) would call *uncoverage* for true understanding. These evolving realities of the 1990 curriculum (including the revisions that were made in 2000) provided the greatest impetus for the development of the new Alberta social studies curriculum, including the high school programs central to this paper (Alberta Learning, 1990; Alberta Learning, 2000).

The Western Canadian Protocol (WCP) had an important role to play in the development of the new social studies curriculum. The *Foundation Document for the Development of Common Curriculum Framework for Social Studies, Kindergarten to Grade 12* (Alberta Learning, 2000) and *The Western Canadian Protocol Common Curriculum Framework for Social Studies, Kindergarten to Grade 9 Consultation Draft* (Alberta Learning, 2001) reveal the vision of a common social studies curriculum for western Canadian provinces, and uncover an interesting chapter in the story of curriculum development in Canadian education history. Many of the original ideas emerging from the social studies portion of the WCP, even though the initiative was eventually rejected by Alberta Learning, are captured within the new Alberta social studies curriculum. Clearly, the original intent of the WCP vision has remained foundational in the new Alberta social studies program:

The Alberta Social Studies Kindergarten to Grade 12 Program of Studies meets the needs and reflects the nature of 21st century learners. It has at its heart the concepts of citizenship and identity in the Canadian context. The program reflects multiple perspectives, including Aboriginal and Francophone, that contribute to Canada's evolving realities. It fosters the building of a society that is pluralistic, bilingual, multicultural, inclusive and democratic. The program emphasizes the importance of diversity and respect for differences as well as the need for social cohesion and the effective functioning of society. It promotes a sense of belonging and acceptance in students as they engage in active and responsible citizenship at the local, community, provincial, national and global level. (Alberta Learning, 2004, p. 1)

With the development of the new Kindergarten to grade 9 Alberta social studies program well underway, Alberta Learning embarked on gathering the information they would need to develop a new grade 10-12 high school curriculum. In the fall of 2001 a province-wide needs assessment survey was administered with the purpose of gathering data to guide the development of the new high school curriculum. The needs assessment process accumulated 1526 questionnaires via direct consultations sessions, mail, fax, and online submissions (Alberta Learning, 2002). The areas of concern with respect to the revised in 2000 program included: the Eurocentric nature of the content; the lack of Francophone perspective; the lack of aboriginal perspective; the repetition and overlap of content from grade to grade; the quantity of content (especially at the grade 12 level); breadth of content discouraged depth of study and understanding; content heavy courses discourage important skill development (Alberta Learning, 2002, pp. 1-2). Noddings (2008) shares a similar criticism of curricula she has worked with in the United States, calling them “a mile wide and an inch deep” (p. 13).

The needs assessment process called on teacher input for suggestions to guide the direction of the new programs. Several themes emerged from the consultations, including the following (Alberta Learning, 2002, pp. 3-4):

- it should have fewer topics of study and the limited breadth should be preserved over time
- it should provide curricular space for current events
- it should provide for in-depth study of topics so higher order skills and depth of understanding can be nurtured

- the exploration of issues should be emphasized and students should explore diverse perspectives in an attempt to formulate and defend their own position on the issues
- it should be organized into thematic units with a central unifying theme and sub-themes, with the overarching themes being significant, relevant and multifaceted, such that student interest can be sustained throughout the course
- it should examine highly rated themes such as democracy, nationalism, globalization, World War I, World War II, and Canadian studies/Canadian history
- it should have high-level outcomes involving higher-order competencies, such as critical thinking, creative thinking and judgment
- it should emphasize skill development more than content coverage.

The needs assessment also called for the maintenance of two distinct course sequences, as found in the 1990/2000 programs with the 10-20-30 and 13-23-33 streams. This recommendation came amidst preliminary discussions of a common grade 10 social studies program. Finally, the voices of teachers called for teaching and learning resources to be developed specifically for the new curriculum that included diverse perspectives supported by primary and secondary resources (Alberta Learning, 2002, p. 4).

The infancy of the new high school social studies program leaves teachers with few exemplars to define standards of student achievement with respect to general and specific learner outcomes. It would be difficult to move towards some of the changes suggested by assessment specialists until high school teachers of the new social studies

programs have more time to craft effective assessment tools that are clearly connected to consistent standards (Black et al., 2004; Brindley, 2001; Guskey, 2006; Guskey, 2007; O'Connor, 2002; Wiggins, 1989; Wiggins, 1994). Herein lies a major problem with the development and implementation process: many teachers are basing their assessment and evaluation on targets they are setting in isolation.

To date, there has been some collaboration amongst large school-based departments, and through sporadic networking opportunities but, across the province, there are no consistent standards or measures teachers can employ to assess whether or not a student has met a general or specific learner outcome. It appears as if many teachers are waiting for the large-scale provincial standardized assessments for guidance.

Province-wide consultations have been orchestrated by the Assessment Branch of Alberta Education and teachers now have a clear vision of what the diploma exams will look (Girard, Romyn, Roy, & Wicks, 2008). The high school social studies curriculum is forcing teachers to ask serious questions about their assessment practices and initiating a much needed transformation of assessment and evaluation in secondary education (Case, 2008; Fischman, DiBara & Gardner, 2006; Guskey, 2006; Marzano, Pickering & Pollock, 2001; Myers, 2004; Nunley, 2006; O'Connor, 2002; Shepard, 2007; Stiggins, 2007; Tomlinson & McTighe, 2006; Wiggins, 1997; Wiggins & McTighe, 2005; Wormeli, 2006).

The process of developing and implementing the new Alberta social studies curriculum, including the high school programs, has taken close to a decade. Despite some tense and foreboding times, the process has been characterized by, above all else, a passion for social studies education. The development of the curriculum, especially in a

subject area filled with teachers who love to debate, has been a challenging process. Evans (2004) corroborates this when he speaks of the American experience in developing social studies curricula. Even a cursory look at the broader history of education reveals a pattern of very slow change, and the sub-text of curriculum would seem to support this proposition. The process of curriculum change will find it difficult to keep pace with the rapidity with which our world and our society are changing.

### *Pedagogy*

*Pedagogy* is a complex term that requires exploration and definition. Best (1988) describes Henri Marion's (1897) understanding of pedagogy this way:

Pedagogy is . . . both the science and the art of education. But as we must choose one or the other—the [French] language being usually reluctant to allow the same word to denote both an art and its corresponding science—I would quite simply define pedagogy as the science of education. Why a science rather than an art? Because . . . the substance of pedagogy lies much less in the processes that it brings into play than in the theoretical reasoning through which it discovers, evaluates and co-ordinates these processes. (p. 9)

Giroux (2004) describes pedagogy as a “moral and political practice” (p. 33). “Pedagogy must be understood as a cultural politics that offers both a particular version and vision of civic life, the future, and how we might construct representations of ourselves, others, and our physical and social environment” (Giroux, 2004, p. 33). Simon (1987) proposes that any discussion of pedagogy must “...begin with a discussion of educational practices as a form of cultural politics, as a particular way in which a sense of identity, place, worth, and above all value is informed by practices which organize knowledge and

meaning” (p. 372). Best (1988) explores the evolution of the term *pedagogy*, concluding that “...general pedagogy has now become the philosophy, the sociology or the social psychology of education. On the other hand, specialized pedagogy has become didactics” (p. 161). Didactics, in this context, is defined as the study of the transmission of information.

This study will use the term pedagogy in its most inclusive form to encompass the duality described above. Best (1988) explains:

We can speak of pedagogical research if, on one hand, through this we arrive at a synthesis of questions duly analyzed and turned into research projects, or if, on the other hand, the results of this research can clarify action taken by decision-makers, teaching staff, and those responsible for the education system at all levels. (p. 163)

The impact of a significant curricular change for high school social studies teachers in Alberta is at varying stages of realization as teachers grapple with the transformation. The magnitude of change—for some veteran teachers a move away from seventeen years of teaching the same curriculum in the same way—has yet to be realized amidst the chaos of reworking lesson and long-range plans, building new assessment tools, and exploring new resources. Some teachers appear to be in a transitional phase of curriculum change and find themselves at different stages of self-reflection with respect to the process (Butt, 1981). Some are well-aware of the depth of change and are altering pedagogy and practice, while others are in survival mode; struggling to implement a new curriculum within the confines of traditional pedagogy (Butt, 1984; Perkins, 1993).

### *Curriculum Structure and Pedagogy*

The old curriculum ran its course last year with the final province wide administration of the social studies 30 diploma examination. The fundamental differences between the new and the old programs of study can be captured in four key ways that reflect the mandate set out by the 2001 Alberta Learning needs assessment survey (Alberta Learning, 2002).

First, the new curriculum moves from exposing students to inquiry strategies to making the programs inquiry-based and, at the high school level, issues-centered. The curricular change serves to empower educators by providing them with a framework to uncover more contextually meaningful ways to engage learners (Evans & Brodkey, 1996; Evans, Newman & Saxe, 1996; Ferguson, 1996; Hughes & Sears, 2004; McKay & Gibson, 1999). The curriculum compels teachers to make learning problematic through the exploration of issues; often serving to set forth more questions than answers. In an issues-centered curriculum students become engaged when their perspective and their voice are invited to the learning environment and when they are expected to take and defend a reasoned position on issues at hand. A large body of research supports issues-based curricula. (See, for example, Case, 2008; Cherryholmes, 1996; Evans, 2004; Evans, & Brodkey, 1996; Evans, Newman & Saxe, 1996; Ferguson, 1996; Fernekes, 1996; Gibson, 2004; Gini-Newman & Gini-Newman, 2008; Giroux, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1996; McKay & Gibson, 1999; Merryfield & White, 1996; Noddings, 2008; Nunley, 2004; Ochoa-Becker, 1996; Parker, 2001; Pugh & Garcia, 1996; Wright & Sears, 1997).

Second, the old program had a strong grounding in factual content, especially in those grades (6, 9, and 12) in which student achievement was assessed by a province-

wide standardized test. The new program is outcomes and skills-based, with much more flexibility for teachers to engage students with *content* that has meaning and application to their lives (Chambers, 1999; Hughes & Sears, 2004; McKay & Gibson, 1999). This can be achieved because the outcomes remain largely at the conceptual level, leaving room for teachers to select the stories and perspectives that best illuminate the concept. In this way, Giroux (2004) contends “Pedagogy must always be contextually defined, allowing it to respond specifically to the conditions, formation, and problems that arise in various sites in which education takes place” (p. 37). The new curriculum leaves ample room for teachers to be inclusive of narratives and perspectives unique to their teaching and learning context. Learning occurs best when students are active constructing their own understandings, with teachers serving to scaffold the process (Gini-Newman & Gini-Newman, 2008; McKay & Gibson, 1999; Shepard, 2005).

Third, the program moves from merely exploring what responsible citizenship looks like, to calling on students to become *active* and responsible citizens (Darling, 2002). Although there is ambiguity in terms of what this might look like in our classrooms and schools, the attempt to move beyond a simple exploration of what it means to be a citizen in the twenty-first century is an important step forward (Booi, 2002; Clark & Case, 1999; Clark, 2008; Evans, 2006; Gibson & McKay, 2007; Giroux, 2004; Noddings, 2008; Osborne, 2005; Parker, 2001; Richardson, 2004; Sahlberg, 2006; Sears, 2004).

Finally, the new curriculum abandons the Eurocentric focus of the old programs. A multiple perspective approach to the inquiry and issues-based teaching and learning

process is at the core of the new curriculum. The front matter of the document describes social studies education this way:

The Alberta Social Studies Kindergarten to Grade 12 Program of Studies meets the needs and reflects the nature of 21st century learners. It has at its heart the concepts of citizenship and identity in the Canadian context. The program reflects multiple perspectives, including Aboriginal and Francophone, that contribute to Canada's evolving realities. It fosters the building of a society that is pluralistic, bilingual, multicultural, inclusive and democratic. The program emphasizes the importance of diversity and respect for differences as well as the need for social cohesion and the effective functioning of society. It promotes a sense of belonging and acceptance in students as they engage in active and responsible citizenship at the local, community, provincial, national and global level. Central to the vision of the Alberta social studies program is the recognition of the diversity of experiences and perspectives and the pluralistic nature of Canadian society. Pluralism builds upon Canada's historical and constitutional foundations, which reflect the country's Aboriginal heritage, bilingual nature and multicultural realities. A pluralistic view recognizes that citizenship and identity are shaped by multiple factors such as culture, language, environment, gender, ideology, religion, spirituality and philosophy. (Alberta Education, 2005, p. 1)

### *Technology and Pedagogy*

A skills-based program is well-served by technology, especially since it is often the desired learning medium for our students (Alexander, 2006; Gibson, 2008; Prensky, 2007; Small & Vorgan, 2008). The digital world empowers educators and students as

active citizens; many teachers are using Web 2.0 technology to move teaching and learning beyond the bricks and mortar classroom (Alexander, 2006; Baumgartner, 2006). Understanding of the brain and the learning process has changed dramatically. Prensky (2007) uses the terms *digital natives* and *digital immigrants* to examine the reality many of us are faced with in our classrooms. Digital natives are individuals that have grown up in the modern digital world (most of our students), whereas digital immigrants are individuals who are trying to adapt to the modern digital age (most of our teachers). Prensky (2007) makes a forceful argument in favour of embracing the technology of the digital natives and using it to engage learners. He argues for the value in video games, digital media and even cell phone usage; that which is so often maligned by adults whose technology growing up, at home and in school, was far removed from our young people today (Findlay, 2009). Small & Vorgan (2008) and Wolfe (2007) describe the neurology of the brain and call for our new understandings of the brain to be central in all that we do in reforming our education systems—including the development and implementation of new curricula. Small and Vorgan (2008) explain the pedagogical challenge represented by our new technological reality:

Today's young people in their teens and twenties, who have been dubbed Digital Natives, have never known a world without computers, twenty-four-hour TV news, Internet, and cell phones—with their video, music, cameras, and text messaging. Many of these Natives rarely enter a library, let alone look something up in a traditional encyclopedia; they use Google, Yahoo and other online search engines. The neural networks in the brains of these Digital Natives differ dramatically from those of the Digital Immigrants: people—including all baby boomers—who came to the digital/computer age as adults but whose basic brain wiring was laid down during a time when direct social interaction was the norm. The extent of their early technological communication and entertainment involved the radio, telephone, and TV. As a consequence of this overwhelming and early high-tech stimulation of the Digital Native's brain, we are witnessing the beginning of a deeply divided brain gap between younger and older minds—in just one generation. (p. 3)

### *Multiple Perspectives and Pedagogy*

The inclusion of multiple perspectives to engage issues transforms the new curriculum by offering a multitude of conduits for students to explore. Research reaffirms what social studies educators in Alberta clearly identified in the needs assessment survey—our curricula need to be open to diverse perspectives, they must be multicultural in nature, and they must be inclusive so as to promote a pluralistic society (Battiste & Youngblood, 2000; Boise-Baise, 1996; Case, Sensoy & Ling, 2008; Ladson-Billings, 1996; Newbery, Morgan & Eadie, 2008; Steinhauer, 1997). Gardner (2007), in his chapter on the synthesizing mind, speaks of the need for *multiperspectivalism*: “A multiperspectival approach recognizes that different analytic perspectives can contribute to the education of an issue or problem” (p.71).

The Alberta social studies curriculum was designed to allow all students to see themselves within it. The minimized focus on specific factual content affords teachers the flexibility to explore curricular concepts from perspectives that are unique to context: the time and the place of the student. Case (2008), in arguing against content driven curricula, supports the need for critical thinking as a means of developing understanding when he says:

I have argued that knowledge acquisition is not a matter of transmitting bits of information, but of developing student understanding of the ideas behind the facts. Superficial coverage of information or acquisition or acquisition of facts for their own sake is of marginal value—if for no other reason than it appears that much of it is forgotten almost as soon as it is taught. (p. 52)

Furthermore, the issues-based nature of the program demands a journey of inquiry as a student moves towards the development of a personal position on the issues at hand – there are few mandated, or *correct*, answers. The aforementioned attributes of the new program resonate with the intriguing question posited by Chambers (1999). Asking “where is here?” facilitates inquiry within which students and teachers are able to construct a deeper appreciation and understanding of their own place in the world. Students are not only trying to understand “where is here?” (Chambers, 1999, p. 138) for themselves, they are attempting to empathize with others’ perspectives on the very same question.

#### *A Skills-based Curriculum and Pedagogy*

The skill outcomes in the new high school programs were moved to the front of the curriculum document; some would suggest that the move is symbolic, while others might see it as a clear message to those implementing the program. The curriculum sets out benchmark skills (although in rather vague terms) and defines four main skill categories that are subdivided into more specific skill groups. There is a great deal of research to support the emphasis on the *dimensions of thinking* as they are organized in the programs; especially with respect to the importance of creative, critical, geographic and historical thinking (Bahbahani & Case, 2008; Bahbahani & Huynh, 2008; Case, Denos, Clark & Seixas, 2006; Case, 2008; Case & Balcaen, 2008; Case & Daniels, 2008; Denos, 2008; Marzano, Pickering & Pollock 2001; McKay & Gibson, 2009; Myers & Case, 2008; Noddings, 2008; Nunley, 2004; Seixas, 1999). Critical and creative thinking are certainly at the core of the new social studies curriculum, particularly within the issues-based high school programs. Cherryholmes (1996) argues that critical pedagogy

encourages teachers and students to expose and critically inquire into the values, beliefs, ideologies, and points of view represented in the factual claims of their textbooks, curricula, and courses of study.

With citizenship and identity as foundational elements of the new social studies program, the personalization of the educational experience fosters the development of a key facet of understanding, that of self-knowledge (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005). General and specific learner outcomes have been designed to scaffold a student's understanding of key concepts. The issues-based structure of the curriculum will shift the teaching and learning process from teacher as deliverer of content to teacher as architect of learning; and from learner as receiver of knowledge to learner as empowered problem-solver (Evans, 2004; Evans, & Brodkey, 1996; Evans, Newman & Saxe, 1996; Ferguson, 1996). Pugh & Garcia (1996) state the reality this way:

It is here, in its emphasis on critical thinking and problem-solving, that the issues-centered approach stands out from other models that may claim to address "issues" as topics or content. The issues-centered approach fuses process and content, so that they are always mutually reinforcing. Critical thinking entails the ability to comprehend and evaluate arguments. An argument is a basic form of reasoning utilized in problem solving and the development of knowledge in all fields. (p. 124)

#### *Critical and Creative Thinking and Pedagogy*

In order to develop effective critical thinkers and problem-solvers, Gardner (2007) argues that the process of education must change and he calls on educators, as well as society as a whole, to re-focus our efforts to develop citizens that have what he

calls “five minds for the future”. The first of the five minds include what Gardner calls the *disciplined mind* in which distinctive ways of thinking form the underlying processes of a discipline. This includes critical thinking through not accepting orthodoxy, but seeking to understand for ones’ self. Secondly, in explaining the *synthesizing mind*, he calls for developing the capacity to uncover linkages, connections and synergies—traveling across the parameters of his “disciplines” to develop more comprehensive understanding. Third, Gardner refers to the *respectful mind*; crucially important in our shrinking world as a result of the bridges technology and the rapid advancement in transportation have created. As a result of globalization, societies are becoming increasingly interconnected and interdependent and the need to respect each other is paramount amidst the diversity of our new reality. Fourth, Gardner’s *ethical mind* calls for the development of emotional intelligence that enables management of ethical choices; here the importance of understanding the consequences of one’s actions and choices, amidst the atmosphere created by the respectful mind, are emphasized. Finally, Gardner proposes the *creative mind*, highlighting the need for cultivating creativity so that imagination and design will become the core of our skill sets. Contemporaries of Gardner, such as Dr. Ken Robinson (2008), would go so far as to say that our current educational institutions are stifling the creativity necessary to sustain our quality of life, move society forward and narrow the widening disparities we can see in the early twenty first century.

The new social studies curriculum certainly does not go as far as educational reformers such as Gardner and Robinson would likely advocate. However, the programs do move us away from a structure that breeds conformity and standardization, to a

curriculum which liberates teachers and learners to develop critical and creative thinking skills that help students construct understanding in a more meaningful way.

*Assessment and Pedagogy*

There is a growing body of research calling for more authentic student assessment within our education systems. A new high school social studies curriculum focusing far less on *content* and much more on skills, values, and attitudes, would appear to be a useful instrument for teachers to use to explore possible changes in assessment and reporting practices. Many authors (Case, 2008; Guskey, 2006; Marzano, Pickering & Pollock, 2001; Myers, 2004; Nunley, 2006; O'Connor, 2002; Shepard, 2007; Stiggins, 2007; Tomlinson & McTighe, 2006; Wiggins, 1997; Wiggins & McTighe, 2005; Wormeli, 2006) have written extensively on this topic.

The new curriculum structure much more readily supports a constructivist approach to teaching and learning which, in turn, demands more complex assessment of student learning. The foundations of the new curriculum will support a process whereby students and teachers can engage in more formative assessment as students climb the scaffolding created by their teachers (Elwood, 2006; O'Connor, 2002; Wiggins & McTighe, 2005). Burke (2000 as cited in O'Connor, 2002) underscores this notion:

Learners should be able to construct meaning, reflect on the significance of the meaning, and self assess to determine their own strengths and weaknesses.

Integrated curricula, cooperative learning, problem-based learning...help students construct knowledge for themselves. (p. 4)

The new curriculum encourages teachers to question traditional pedagogy grounded in the practice of teacher as lecturer and imparter of factual content. The high

school programs encourage teachers to take on the role of facilitator of inquiry-based learning as students grapple with engaging issues (Evans & Brodkey, 1996; Evans, Newman & Saxe, 1996; Wiggins & McTighe, 2005). Ornstein (1982) describes the transition as a move from a subject-centered curriculum to a student-centered curriculum.

Noddings (2004) believes that many teachers are burdened with too much to *cover*, leading to superficial exploration of topics and concepts, ending with little enduring understanding for students. It is important to note the new curriculum does not propose a complete rejection of factual knowledge, rather it calls for the development of a meaningful context for the factual knowledge with the intent of manufacturing more internalized understanding. Noddings (2008) explains, "...I consider thinking as the sort of mental activity that uses facts to plan, order, and work towards an end; seeks meaning or an explanation; is self-reflective; and uses reason to question claims and make judgments" (p. 9).

According to Wiggins (1991) "Our schools must no longer accept token efforts judged by variable criteria. We must expect quality from every student based on models of outstanding performance" (p. 18). The new curriculum makes a compelling case in the name of implementing authentic assessment as a means to measure and report student learning. The value of performance-based assessment is an important cause to forward in our current educational paradigm, which is too often influenced by policy makers and politicians who embrace large-scale standardized assessment. They are often bound by short-term political goals and, as a result, call for accountability measures that are easily quantifiable—as limited as the data often within an educational context. Gardner (2007) explains:

Here, in brief, is why most standardized measures of learning are of little use; they do not reveal whether the student can actually make use of the classroom material—the subject matter—once she steps outside the door. And here is why traditional training in the crafts requires a culminating masterpiece before the journeyman can rise to the level of master. (p. 35)

Sahlberg (2008) echoes Gardner's sentiments with respect to concern over the move towards standardization, making the accusation that increased stress on standardization and accountability has forced teachers, above all else, to teach to the test (p. 118).

In speaking at a symposium co-sponsored by the Alberta Assessment Consortium and the Alberta Teacher's Association, Parsons (2009) stated that "Dewey would have loved this curriculum". He went on to say that he felt many teachers would need to re-tool in order to adapt to the new curriculum. Parsons felt that because the new curriculum called for problem-based pedagogy it would force teachers to focus on helping students develop the skills that would empower them to construct their own understanding and the skills necessary to become active and responsible citizens. Dewey (1897) said of education:

I believe that education is the fundamental method of social progress and reform. I believe that all reforms which rest simply upon the enactment of law, or the threatening of certain penalties, or upon changes in mechanical or outward arrangements, are transitory and futile. I believe that education is a regulation of the process of coming to share in the social consciousness; and that the adjustment of individual activity on the basis of this social consciousness is the only sure method of social reconstruction. (p. 5)

### *Teaching Practice*

Although *teaching practice* is closely linked to *pedagogy*, for the purposes of this study the terms will be defined separately. The practice of teaching in Alberta is influenced by several important dynamics that are worth identifying within a research question that seeks to understand the impact of a transformative curriculum. Social studies teachers in Alberta have been presented with the difficult task of implementing a new curriculum; one that has been classified as a “major change” on Alberta Education’s (2009) spectrum of curricular change (p. 4). The array of expectations and demands for effective and efficient implementation can leave educators with little time for one of the most important elements of teaching—professional development. There is a full range of teacher responses to the onset of the new curriculum. There are those who leap at any and all professional development opportunities related to the new curriculum and those who participate only in selected opportunities mandated by their school or school district. The disparity revealed by these very different experiences raises an interesting question: where does the responsibility lie with respect to teachers becoming involved in curricular development and implementation?

To be sure, initial teacher involvement in the development of the new high school social studies curriculum was limited to completing surveys and attending consultation sessions (unless a teacher was invited to participate in specific phases of the construction process) (Diefenthaler, 2005). However, the preparation period for implementation, a time-frame that started two years before the first grade 10 programs were unleashed, was well-funded by government in an attempt to support teachers with professional development opportunities. The professional development connected to the new

curriculum, planned and orchestrated by regional professional development consortia such as the Southern Alberta Professional Development Consortium (SAPDC), was offered at little or no personal cost to teachers.

With so many professional development opportunities, the responsibility was clearly on the shoulders of teachers charged with implementing the new curriculum as part of their teaching assignment; to ignore the opportunities was to ignore professional responsibility (Alberta Education, 2008). Many commend Alberta Education for the unprecedented funding to support the new social studies curriculum. The funding included monies to support the development of dedicated textbooks and online resources, as well as significant monetary grants for the member organizations of the Alberta Regional Professional Development Consortia (ARPDC) whose mandate is to deliver regional professional development opportunities.

Although most teachers feel quite autonomous in the day-to-day operation of their classrooms and in the ownership of pedagogy, teaching practice in Alberta is beset with specific mandates as directed by a number of key documents. An educator in Alberta adhering to these directives would be hard pressed to take issue with the aforementioned responsibilities (presented in detail below).

### *Teaching Quality Standard*

The first document governing teaching practice in Alberta emerges from ministerial order #016/97 *Teaching Quality Standard Applicable to the Provision of Basic Education in Alberta*, approved May 14, 1997 (Alberta Education, 1997). The order provides teachers with a standard to maintain as a professional operating with the public sphere. The document outlines the necessary knowledge, skills and attributes

(KSAs) of teachers with interim teaching certification and for teachers holding permanent certification. The KSAs are organized into the following areas:

a) Teachers' application of pedagogical knowledge, skills and attributes is based in their ongoing analysis of contextual variables. b) Teachers understand the legislated, moral and ethical frameworks within which they work. c) Teachers understand the subject disciplines they teach. d) Teachers know there are many approaches to teaching and learning. e) Teachers engage in a range of planning activities. f) Teachers create and maintain environments that are conducive to student learning. g) Teachers translate curriculum content and objectives into meaningful learning activities. h) Teachers apply a variety of technologies to meet students' learning needs. i) Teachers gather and use information about students' learning needs and progress. j) Teachers establish and maintain partnerships among school, home and community, and within their own schools. k) Teachers are career-long learners. (Alberta Education, 1997, pp. 4-7)

The KSAs clearly outline the responsibilities of teachers with respect to curriculum, pedagogy and practice. The standards, although difficult to assess and measure within the profession proper, serve as a guideline for teachers in their professional life. All of the KSAs resonate with the discussion of curriculum and curriculum implementation outlined in the study. If any new curriculum is to be considered transformative with respect to pedagogy and practice, it must do so within the framework defined by the KSAs.

A few key KSAs standards connect directly to the curriculum implementation process. First, with respect to the discipline of social studies as a subject area, the standard calls for:

Teachers understand the knowledge, concepts, methodologies and assumptions of the subject disciplines they teach. This includes an understanding of how knowledge in each discipline is created and organized, and that subject disciplines are more than bodies of static facts and techniques - they are complex and evolving. Their understanding extends to relevant technologies, the linkages among subject disciplines, and their relevance and importance in everyday life at the personal, local, national and international levels. (Alberta Education, 1997, p. 4)

Second, technology can be a difficult challenge for teachers trying to narrow the digital divide (Prensky, 2007; Small & Vorgan, 2008). The steadfast rejection of technology in favour of *traditional* teaching pedagogy and practice would certainly not meet key elements of the KSAs. When speaking of teachers' application of technology as a strategy in meeting student needs the standard says of teachers:

They keep abreast of advances in teaching/learning technologies and how they can be incorporated into instruction and learning. As new technologies prove useful and become available in schools, teachers develop their own and their students' proficiencies in using the technologies purposefully, which may include content presentation, delivery and research applications, as well as word processing, information management and record keeping. Teachers use electronic networks and other telecommunication media to enhance their own knowledge and abilities, and to communicate more effectively with others (Alberta Education, 1997, p. 6).

Third, if teachers are not comfortable with portions of a new curriculum it is their responsibility to remedy this, particularly if an incompetency emerges with respect to a

skill set. Teachers are mandated to model the very skills they are required to teach. The Quality Standard expresses this expectation when it says of teachers: “They model the beliefs, principles, values, and intellectual characteristics outlined in the Guide to Education and programs of study, and guide students to do the same (Alberta Education, 1997, p. 5). There is perhaps no more important subject area with respect to this standard than social studies. How can students be expected to think critically, creatively, geographically and/or historically, if teachers cannot model it?

Fourth, the new social studies curriculum has been a catalyst for change with respect to student assessment. Evidence of this can be found in the significant shift in the design of provincial standardized tests. The new grade twelve diploma tests (social studies 30-1 and 30-2) now leave fifty percent of the exam to an open-ended and a source interpretation written response question. This is a clear indication that a skills-based curriculum necessitates performance-based assessment. The KSAs again are quite clear when it comes to the changes:

Teachers select and develop a variety of classroom assessment strategies and instruments to assess the full range of learning objectives. They differentiate between classroom and large-scale instruments such as provincial achievement tests, administer both and use the results for the ultimate benefit of students. They record, interpret and use the results of their assessments to modify their teaching practices and students’ learning activities. Teachers help students, parents and other educators interpret and understand the results of diagnoses and assessments, and the implications for students. They also help students develop the ability to diagnose their own learning needs and to assess their progress toward learning goals. (Alberta Education, 1997, p. 7)

If teachers are going to instill a value of life-long learning to their students, then they must model it. At times in my career professional development has been a source of great fulfillment, while on other occasions it has left me with feelings of frustration and

distress. For me, effective professional development has occurred when my existing pedagogy and practice were challenged, which was often followed by some sort of revelation about how to refine and enhance my teaching. In my experience, impactful professional development has been realized through thought-provoking and reflective experiences. When professional development has been presented in a way that asks participants to engage with controversial subject matter—that which asks them to reflect on their values and their beliefs about teaching—it can have a lasting impact.

True professional development can occur when teachers are encouraged to evaluate themselves and their practices. It may seem to be a simple criterion, but professional development that does not serve to challenge teachers is often not worthwhile. The KSAs are clear on the matter of professional development. The Standard states:

Teachers engage in ongoing professional development to enhance their: understanding of and ability to analyze the context of teaching; ability to make reasoned judgments and decisions; and, pedagogical knowledge and abilities. They recognize their own professional needs and work with others to meet those needs. They share their professional expertise to the benefit of others in their schools, communities and profession. Teachers guide their actions by their overall visions of the purpose of teaching. They actively refine and redefine their visions in light of the ever-changing context, new knowledge and understandings, and their experiences. While these visions are dynamic and grow in depth and breadth over teachers' careers, the visions maintain at their core a commitment to teaching practices through which students can achieve optimum learning. (Alberta Education, 1997, p. 7)

The development and implementation of a transformative social studies curriculum has provided an opportunity for many teachers to meet and exceed this standard.

### *Teacher Growth, Supervision and Evaluation Policy*

As a result of Alberta Education's *Teacher Growth, Supervision and Evaluation Policy 2.1.5.*, teachers are expected to build a *teacher professional growth plan* each year (Alberta Education, 2008). The plan is a tool to define professional growth that, in general terms, should align with the KSAs. Notwithstanding the sometimes strained relationship between the Alberta Teacher's Association (ATA) and the Government of Alberta, the intent of the KSAs and teacher professional growth plan is generally supported by both parties. The ATA governs itself through a *Code of Professional Conduct* which serves to promote and protect the integrity of the teaching profession (Alberta Teachers' Association, 2008). The *Code of Professional Conduct*, partnered with the KSAs and teacher professional growth plans, provides a clear set of guidelines for teachers to follow with respect to their practice.

One of the most challenging areas of professional development for the modern teacher is technology. To live in a market-oriented, consumer-driven, materialistic Western society is to be bombarded with technological change. Unfortunately, educators operating in the realm of public education often experience a digital divide with mainstream society. Public schools have limited funding to meet myriad demands and, often, technology is viewed as a luxury item. This is especially true when you consider that many decision-makers in administrative positions are digital natives, themselves disconnected from the reality of many of our 21<sup>st</sup> century learners (Prensky, 2007; Small & Vorgan, 2008). Technology can be harnessed by teachers to enhance learning opportunities for their students, but it can also be used in the same way by teachers engaged with colleagues in online communities (DuFour, 2001; Findlay, 2009).

Increasingly teachers are incorporating technological goals into their teacher professional growth plans as they begin to see the potential support it can offer to the challenges they face (Alexander, 2006; Gardner, 2007; Sahlberg, 2008; Small & Vorgan, 2008). This is certainly true for teachers involved in the implementation of a transformative curriculum such as the new Alberta high school social studies program.

The term “Web 2.0”, credited to Tim O’Reilly of Reilly Media (Alexander, 2006), is a somewhat controversial expression used to explain the new generation of technologies that support web-based communities, social networking sites and various web-based applications. The term is relatively new to my vocabulary, but it serves to explain my vision of how the online world is impacting both my personal and my professional life. Web 2.0 describes the much more interactive, collaborative and creative environment that has evolved on the internet. Web 2.0 goes far beyond the posting and the retrieval of information; it invites users to create and to share. It offers a clear parallel with the shift our curriculum is making by moving from being content-based to skills-based.

Beyond the instantaneous access to information that Web 1.0 afforded us, the next generation of technologies encourages the individual to interact and engage with the world (Alexander, 2006; Gardner, 2007; Prensky, 2007; Robinson, 2008; Sahlberg, 2008; Small & Vorgan, 2008). That world can be a small network of friends in a personal and intimate setting, it can be in the context of a shared educational or professional community, or it can be a connection to like-minded people in a network spanning the globe. With access to relatively simple technology that provides a conduit to the world, an individual is empowered as never before. Many teachers’ professional experiences

with the internet have been confined to the Web 1.0 domain, but most are coming to the realization that it is time for an upgrade (Prensky, 2007; Small & Vorgan, 2008).

### *Technology and Teaching Practice*

The issues and skills-based nature of the new high school curriculum can allow teachers to take advantage of Web 2.0 technology as an instrument to collaborate, construct, create, discuss and debate. Our students have added new layers to their individual and collective identities because of the Web 2.0 world and we need to be aware of this reality. Individuals, whether they are a teacher or a student, are empowered to express themselves and their ideas in unprecedented ways. The ability to share and to publish is exceedingly easy, a reality that both threatens and excites the traditional *holders* of knowledge (Alexander 2006). A new social studies curriculum that asks teachers to explore multiple perspectives, coupled with Web 2.0 technology in the hands of our students (digital natives), creates exciting opportunities for collaboration and interaction (Gardner, 2007; Prensky, 2007; Robinson, 2008; Sahlberg, 2008; Small & Vorgan, 2008).

There is great potential for the use of emergent technologies throughout our education systems and this is especially true within the new high school social studies curriculum. Web 2.0 has not only empowered teachers in new and exciting ways, but it has created a forum for the *active* citizenship component of the new program to come to life (Alexander, 2006; Gardner, 2007; Prensky, 2007; Robinson, 2008; Sahlberg, 2008; Small & Vorgan, 2008). Online communities, and the communication tools that support them, establish tremendous opportunities for students to network and to engage with issues. The networking possibilities (local, national, and even global) are restricted only

by connectivity limitations of potential community members. If students and teachers embrace these opportunities to create, collaborate, and interact with each other, then one of the mandates of the new program has certainly been met.

## Chapter 4: Findings

*It's not what is poured into a student that counts, but what is planted.*

*Linda Conway*

Teacher participant responses were gathered in semi-structured interview process, with the use of digital video and digital audio recording devices. Responses were transcribed and analysis of the data revealed a number of themes and sub-themes related to the research question. Each participant's teaching context was outlined and their responses were coded. All of the findings were discussed within the parameters defined by the review of the literature.

### *Description of Participant's Context*

The research sample of ten teachers included four female and six male participants. Four of the teachers were from rural schools and six teachers were from urban schools. Participants were given pseudonyms according to gender and the chronological order of their interview. For example, the first participant was ascribed the pseudonym: Mr. A. A brief description the teaching context of each participant will be provided by summarizing the first interview question, which asked participants to describe the following elements of their teaching environment (Appendix A):

- school size (student population)
- average class size and department size
- years of teaching experience and high school social studies course taught

In addition to the teaching context derived from interview responses (summarized in Table 1), pertinent information gathered through the researcher's field notes will also be shared.

Table 1.

## Participant Teaching Contexts

<b>Participant</b>	<b>School Size (# students)</b>	<b>Avg. Class Size</b>	<b>Dept. Size</b>	<b>Years Teaching</b>	<b>Courses Taught</b>
Mr. A.	1500	30-35	7	8	10, 13, 10-1, 20, 23, 20-1, 30, 33, 30-1
Ms. B.	475	25-30	2	3	10-1, 10-2, 20, 23, 20-1, 30, 33, 30-1
Ms. C.	300	25-30	2	20	10, 13, 10-1, 10-2, 20, 23, 20-1, 20-2, 30, 33, 30-1, 30-2
Mr. D.	950	30-35	4	5	13, 10-2, 20, 23, 20-1, 30-2
Ms. E.	775	30-35	4	16	10, 13, 10-1, 10-2, 20, 23, 20-1, 20-2, 30, 33, 30-1, 30-2
Mr. F.	180	20-25	1	12	10, 13, 10-1, 10-2, 20, 23, 20-1, 20-2, 30, 33, 30-1, 30-2
Mr. G.	1000	30-35	5	7	10, 13, 10-1, 10-2, 20, 23, 20-1, 20-2, 33, 30-2
Mr. H.	1500	30-35	7	3	10, 10-1, 20, 23, 20-1, 30, 30AP, 30-1, 30-1AP
Mr. I.	500	25-30	3	31	10, 13, 10-1, 10-2, 20, 23, 20-1, 20-2, 30, 33, 30-1, 30-2
Ms. J.	1500	30-35	7	19	13, 10-2, 20, 23, 20-2, 33, 30-2

*Mr. A*

Mr. A teaches in an urban high school with approximately 1500 students and reported having average class sizes of approximately 30-35 students. He is part of a large social studies department composed of seven full-time teachers, as well as three colleagues who teach at least one social studies course. Mr. A has been teaching for eight

years and has experienced teaching all high school social studies courses in the new and the old curricula. The interview was conducted in the researcher's classroom at the conclusion of a regular school day. Mr. A was comfortable with the interview process and expressed excitement about the implementation process in which he has been engaged. He was open about the professional challenges the curriculum has created, but has embraced the opportunities they have presented for reflection on matters of pedagogy and practice. Mr. A clearly indicated that the new curriculum has been a force for change in his teaching and in the learning he has witnessed in his students.

*Ms. B*

Ms. B teaches in a rural high school with approximately 475 students and reported having average class sizes of approximately 25-30 students. She is part of a social studies department composed of two full-time social studies teachers. Ms. B has been teaching for three years and has taught the following high school social studies courses: 10-1, 10-2, 20, 23, 20-1, 30, 33, and 30-1. The interview was conducted in Ms. B's classroom at the conclusion of a regular school day. The interview was interrupted on two occasions; once by a student seeking assistance and once by a colleague who did not realize the interview was underway. The interruptions were not distracting and may have served to relax Ms. B, who appeared nervous during the beginning of the interview. She seemed to be somewhat reluctant to share her thoughts and ideas, citing her teaching inexperience. I tried to re-assure her by referencing the fact that we were all *new* with respect to the curriculum. Nonetheless, Ms. B's responses to the research questions were shorter than most, perhaps reflecting her lack of confidence in her teaching experience.

*Ms. C*

Ms. C teaches in a rural high school with nearly 300 students and reported having average class sizes of approximately 25-30 students. She is part of a social studies department composed of two full-time social studies teachers. Ms. C has been teaching for twenty years and has experience teaching all of the high school social studies courses in the new and the old curricula. The interview was conducted in Ms. C's classroom at the conclusion of a regular school day. Ms. C was at ease during the course of the interview and was eager to take part in the research project. She admitted to being spread thin as a result of her dual role of being a specialist in high school english, as well as in social studies. Ms. C did make some interesting comments about the growing similarity between the two subject areas, especially with the increased focus on skill development. She mentioned that the provincial standardized tests in social studies and english are starting to become more alike, both in the written and multiple-choice component.

*Mr. D*

Mr. D teaches in an urban high school with approximately 950 students and reported having average class sizes of approximately 30-35 students. He is part of a social studies department composed of four full-time social studies teachers. Mr. D has been teaching for five years and has taught the following high school social studies courses: 13, 10-2, 20, 23, 20-1 and 30-2. The interview was conducted in Mr. D's classroom in the middle of the school day during preparation time. Mr. D was nervous during the course of the interview and on a few occasions needed to be reassured that his responses were adequate. Despite coming from a relatively large school, in the context of the research study, he left me with a feeling of isolation. Mr. D has not taken part in

many of the professional development opportunities presented by SAPDC and within his school he has been held solely responsible for the implementation of specific programs with the new curriculum framework.

*Ms. E*

Ms. E teaches in an urban high school with approximately 775 students and reported having average class sizes of approximately 30-35 students. She is part of a social studies department composed of four full-time social studies teachers. Ms. E has been teaching for sixteen years and has experience teaching all of the high school social studies courses in the new and the old curricula. The interview was conducted in the middle of the school day during preparation time. Ms. E was at ease during the course of the interview and showed little hesitation in responding to the questions posed to her. She was very reflective about the implementation process because she, too, has been working on her Masters of Education degree, with a focus on professional development. Ms. E was very complimentary towards the work I have been doing with SAPDC and was thankful for the collaboration and sharing that has occurred with respect to the new curriculum.

*Mr. F*

Mr. F teaches in a rural high school with approximately 180 students and reported having average class sizes of approximately 20-25 students. He is the only full-time social studies teacher in his school, with one other colleague teaching one course at the high school level. Mr. F has been teaching for twelve years and has experience teaching all of the high school social studies courses in the new and the old curricula. The interview was conducted in the researcher's classroom at the conclusion of a regular

school day. Mr. F confidently answered all of the questions and did not reveal signs of nervousness. He expressed some concern about the move away from teaching specific historical content, but acknowledged that such trepidation may stem from his own background as a history major in his post-secondary education. Mr. F was genuinely excited about the new curriculum and the manner in which the issued-based nature of the program served to engage students in his classroom. He was also enthusiastic about the infusion of technology into the teaching and learning within his classroom and he clearly acknowledged the important role technology was playing in the implementation of the new curriculum.

*Mr. G*

Mr. G teaches in a rural high school with approximately 1000 students and reported having average class sizes of approximately 30-35 students. He is part of a large social studies department composed of five full-time teachers. Mr. G has been teaching for seven years and has experience teaching the following high school social studies courses: 10, 13, 10-1, 10-2, 20, 23, 20-1, 20-2, 33, and 30-2. The interview was conducted in the staffroom of Mr. G's school in the middle of the school day during preparation time. He was comfortable with the interview process and revealed no signs of nervousness. Mr. G has had limited connection with the sharing and collaboration done through SAPDC, but has developed provincial connections as a result of his work with the Alberta Teachers' Association Social Studies Specialist Council. Despite feeling somewhat isolated from the regional professional development community, he communicated a sense of comfort with his school-based support and the aforementioned provincial collaboration. He expressed concern about the implementation process with

respect to the second academic stream (10-2, 20-2, 30-2, as well as the Knowledge and Employability programs), which he felt has been lacking in comparison to the time and commitment given to the main stream programs (10-1, 20-1, and 30-1).

*Mr. H*

Mr. H teaches in an urban high school with approximately 1500 students and reported having average class sizes of approximately 30-35 students. He is part of a large social studies department composed of seven full-time teachers, as well as three colleagues who teach at least one social studies course. Mr. H has been teaching for three years and has experience teaching the following high school social studies course: 10, 10-1, 20, 23, 20-1, 30, 30AP, 30-1, and 30-1AP. The interview was conducted in the researcher's classroom at the conclusion of a regular school day. Despite being interrupted by a phone call which suspended the interview for approximately three minutes, Mr. H was comfortable with the interview process and revealed no signs of nervousness. He expressed gratitude for the supports he has been given with respect to the implementation process, at the school, district and regional levels. Mr. H earned a history degree prior to his foray into teaching and described the challenges he has faced in transitioning to a curriculum that is skills and issues focused.

*Mr. I*

Mr. I teaches in a rural high school with approximately 500 students and reported having average class sizes of approximately 25-30 students. He is part of a social studies department composed of three full-time teachers. Mr. I has been teaching for thirty one years and has experience teaching all of the high school social studies courses in the new and the old curricula. The interview was conducted at Mr. I's school board office at the

conclusion of a professional development session. He was eager to take part in the research project and was at ease during the course of the interview. Mr. I was somewhat of an anomaly in the interview cohort. He felt the new curriculum was not much of a catalyst for change in his pedagogy and teaching practice; rather, it affirmed and formalized the way he had been teaching for most of his career. Mr. I expressed a sense of relief that the new curriculum was moving in a direction that might encourage other educators to transform their teaching.

*Ms. J*

Ms. J teaches in an urban high school with approximately 1500 students and reported having average class sizes of approximately 30-35 students. She is part of a large social studies department composed of seven full-time teachers, as well as three colleagues who teach at least one social studies course. Ms. J has been teaching for 19 years and has experience teaching the following high school social studies courses: 13, 10-2, 20, 23, 20-2, 33, and 30-2. The interview was conducted in the researcher's classroom at the conclusion of a regular school day. Despite being interrupted on three occasions by school announcements emanating from the public announcement system, Ms. J was comfortable with the interview process and revealed no signs of nervousness. She is a self-proclaimed specialist in the second stream (10-2, 20-2, and 30-2) of the curriculum and explained that she gladly accepted this role within her school. Ms. J raised an interesting concern about the student-centered nature of the new curriculum, wondering if the issues-based structure that personalizes student learning, fuels what she views as an increasingly individualistic perspective amongst younger generations. She

embraced the new attention to skill-development, but seemed to be struggling with the lack of specific content prescribed by the curriculum.

### *Data Analysis*

Using Neuman's (1997) thematic coding process, all interview transcripts and filed notes were examined through open, selective, and axial coding. In addition, researcher field notes were thematically categorized. All participant comments have been edited only to remove hesitations and other habits of speech or grammar that might detract from the overall clarity of the intended meaning. Five recurring themes emerged in the data analysis (refer to Figure. 1): instructional practice, student learning, assessment, technology and professional development.

### *Instructional Practice*

The first interview question asked teachers to reflect on the extent to which the new high school social studies program changed their teaching (instructional) practice? All participants (10/10) indicated they had experienced some degree of change to their instructional practice as a result of the new curriculum, and three clear sub-themes emerged that identified specific shifts in instructional strategies: student-centered classrooms, focus on skill development as opposed to content memorization, and the need for more teacher flexibility. The following excerpt from Mr. A. explores the transformation:

...when I was doing my history degree and we thought back on high school social studies you thought more about memorization, more lecture-based classes. I think with me, with the new curriculum, I more embrace the idea of like, collaborative learning and more critical thinking, and so I kind of veer away from more direct lecturing and me talking, and more, collaborative group work where the kids will discuss stuff and then from there they formulate their own opinions.

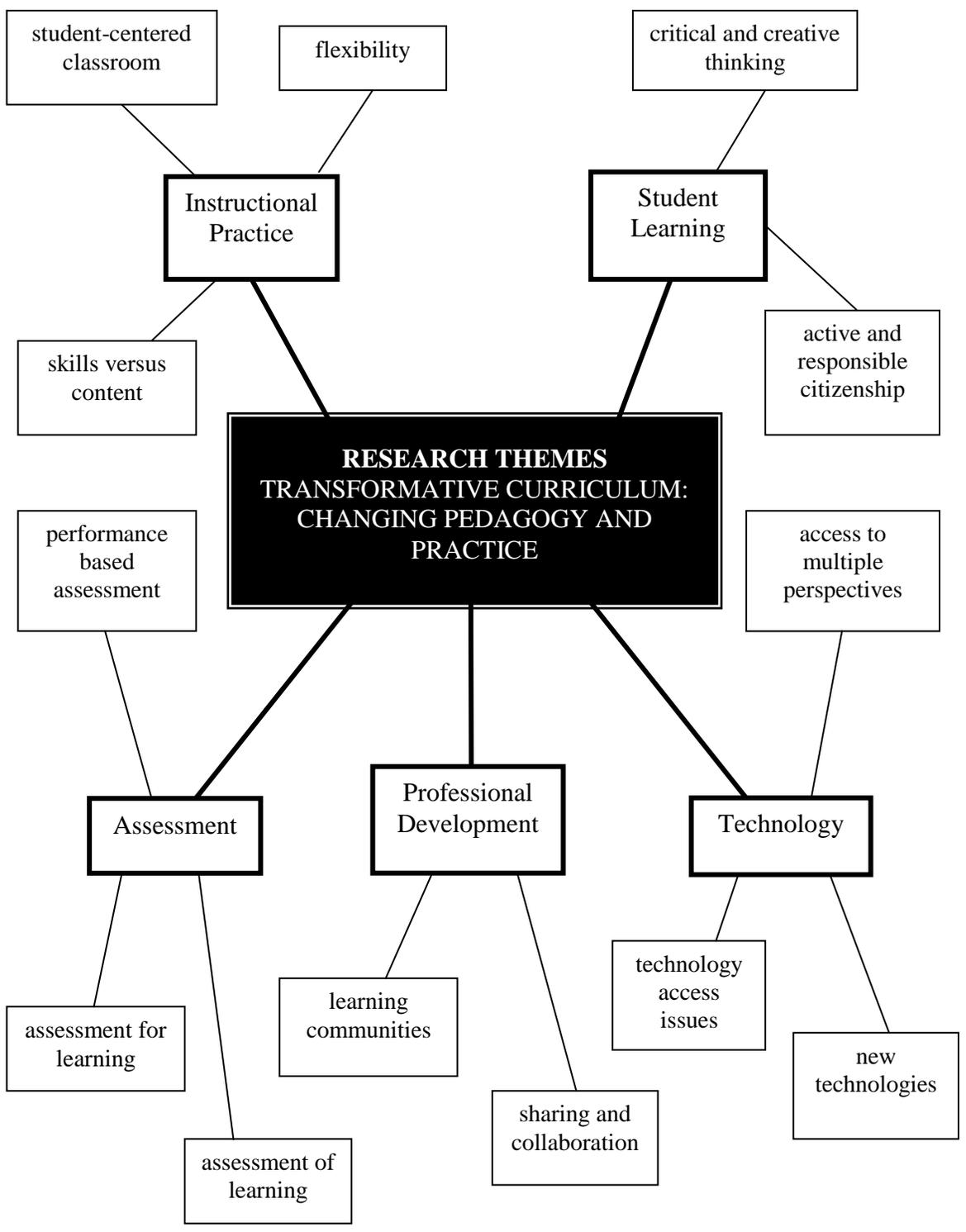


Figure 1. Research Themes

*Student-centered classroom.* All participants made reference to the new curriculum forcing them to shift from a teacher-centered teaching and learning environment towards a more student-centered teaching and learning classroom. As one example, Mr. F said:

Well, it has changed me; it is transformed me from a teacher orientated instructor to a student centered instructor so now, of course, I look more at the student outcomes, what do I want the kids to learn or what do I feel as though the enduring understandings are in the course that I really want them to get out it or the curriculum wants them to get out of it.

In addition, participants (10/10) indicated that the structure of the new high school social studies curriculum appears to be forcing students to construct their own learning through the engagement of issues. They feel that the issue questions that frame the curriculum, as well as the general and specific learner outcomes that provide the scaffolding of student learning, lead students towards the development of personal positions on the issues presented. Mr. H's comments are reflective of this perspective:

It's just the new curriculum is structured in a way that gives you more of a focus so that differentiation is not only possible, it is almost mandated within the curriculum, and so that gives you different understanding of how your classroom is structured, how it is run. As a result of the new curriculum though, I have done much more with talking *to* my students or *with* my students than talking *at* my students.

Mr. H implies that the delivery of specific factual content is not as important as allowing students to explore concepts with teacher guidance. The skills to access,

scrutinize, and sort information become more important than the information itself.

Living in the digital age, students do not have difficulty finding information, but they must have the skills to manage it and use it appropriately. All participants supported the importance developing the skills (outlined in the curriculum) needed to lead students to their own conclusions through the development of an informed position on the issues they explore. Mr. F reinforced the theme:

I think it has been good for them though because it has really shown that they are in charge of their own learning and that is really what the post-secondary world is all about. When they get out of high school, they are really in charge of what they do, they have choices of what direction they go in life, what school they go to, they have a choice of what occupation they are going to do, and it is really self-directed learning, so we are really giving them a foundation for that.

*Skill development versus content memorization.* Some participants (4/10) referenced a struggle they had with moving from a curriculum focused on content to a curriculum that placed skill development as its primary mandate. The new curriculum, in what might seem like a subtle re-structuring, places the skills at the beginning of the curriculum document. The move is a clear indication of one of the most important elements of the new programs. Despite presenting some challenges, all participants agree that the new curriculum, with its skills and issues focus, empowers students with respect to their learning.

The interviews, although clearly recognizing the shift from a teacher-centered classroom to a student centered classroom, yielded a concern that the new curriculum was

difficult for students who had been successful in a more traditional teaching and learning context. Ms. B explained that:

I feel like some of the students did really well in junior high because, you know, they kind of had learning down-pat, like they knew that if they studied harder, if they worked really hard, they would do well in class, and so they may have the basics of it, but then to come into this new curriculum and not necessarily be able to, you know, critically think or think beyond what's just in the textbook. They are getting really frustrated because they cannot just sit and memorize everything and then come in and do really well, and so I think that is the biggest frustration for them.

In addition, Mr. C commented that:

...the ones who struggled the most in changing from, "I know what the teacher wants and I know what is safe to say or give.", versus the new process, those who struggled and disliked the process most were the students who had traditionally been your highest scoring students and so, some of them have expressed frustration and down-right anger that we had to change this while they are still in school, but I feel if they opened up to it they would find growth.

There was concern from a few participants (3/10) that the new curriculum did not allow enough in-depth study of certain historical narratives. The need to explore a concept or a piece of history in sufficient depth, so as to create enough contextual background to construct an informed position, was a concern clearly raised by Mr. I:

I think I am also perhaps a little frustrated by the focus on high end learning without enough time for the low end learning, because you cannot discuss

something intelligently until you have learned the basics, and I think the course will miss the basics and sometimes just go to the big, complicated stuff...nobody has ever said it, but memorization has fallen out of vogue as a way of learning, it is just really condemned as a terrible learning strategy and if I want my kids to be able to discuss an electoral system, there is a whole bunch of vocabulary that they simply have to know, but they have never been exposed to it before, they do not even know what an electoral system is. They really have to first learn the basic terms of politics before they can talk about electoral systems, so memorizing, that is really not bad, it is a good learning tool, they have to do it. You cannot get to the next level without doing that basic work, and I do not know how to get there in a few months without doing the memorization.

The notion is corroborated by Mr. G when he said that:

...some of the kids get frustrated some of the time because they wish they could stop and really get some pretty significant depth to an issue when a lot of times there is such a breath of topics of time and of history that we cover that they're not able to stop and appreciate it.

All participants, despite some concern with a lack of depth in portions of the curriculum, acknowledged the freedom created from moving away from a curriculum burdened with large lists of factual content to be covered. Mr. C described the old curriculum as:

...a checklist of things and people you had to talk about and it gave you the impression that you were going to be asked to simply know them versus the specific outcomes start with examining background information but then it [new

curriculum] takes you up the blooms taxonomy of analysis and evaluation so that you can see the earlier outcomes in an issue.

All participants acknowledged the importance of skill development in their classrooms. However, some (4/10) clearly noted that a focus on skill development was not new to the high school social studies classroom, but the new curriculum now mandated its importance. Mr. F noted “What we have done is taken the best practices from the old curriculum and made them the focus of the new social studies curriculum.” Mr. I explained “Probably the first thing that comes to mind as being the most significant is the shift from learning things to learning how to. It is not a bad thing, but that is the most significant.” Ms. C commented “The most significant change has to do with the fact that it’s a process rather than just information based.” Ms. B explained that teachers today, in a society where students have access to vast quantities of information, are almost forced to concentrate on skills development in an attempt to help students assess the information:

I mean, if you think even ten, twenty years ago students did not have the world at their fingertips like we do now, and so education has changed in a sense that we don’t need kids to memorize as many facts because they just have to go on to a computer or on to their iPod and get it right there. It is more the matter of getting them to critically assess what they are looking at Wikipedia or on Google and how that is going to influence their decision making.

Finally, to reinforce, and to summarize this point, Ms. J. comments “In so many ways, what we teach is insignificant, in so many ways, it is who we teach and how”, while Mr. F explained:

...a big shift in mindset for me because I had always been directed in my U of L experience and my experience just being immersed in the old curriculum, focusing on content and how I am going to deliver that content, what my classes are going to look like, instead of really focusing on what the students are going to get out of it. Mr. F (p. 3)

*Flexibility.* Participants indicated that a benefit and a drawback of the new high school social studies curriculum can be found in its structure. Content is mandated within the bracketed portions of many of the specific learner outcomes, but this content is outlined at the conceptual level, leaving room for teacher choice in terms of the case studies and examples used to construct student understanding. Several participants (6/10) linked this to the demands placed on them for increased creativity and flexibility. Mr. A stated “But the new program, there’s so much flexibility I guess, that you can do the same concept four different ways, and it’s promoted collaboration because you want to try new different ways and new things all the time.” Participants (6/10) reported that teachers must be increasingly willing to follow the paths uncovered by, for example, the study of current events, embracing opportunities to connect students to the curriculum with the issues and events of the day. Teachers reported that current events would often dictate the content they would use in concept attainment. Mr. F explained that:

...I find that the new curriculum at all levels is more flexible. You really can choose to bring in whatever case studies, whatever inquiry you want, it is not as rigid as previous curriculums... So, it is nice that it has that flexibility in comparison to the old curriculum, but at the same time, there is still part of me

that would like the logical, sequential, “We are doing this, this, this, and this,” because it makes more sense to some students.

Participants communicated that the new curriculum also encouraged more flexibility with respect to the way students shared their understanding of concepts and their ability to meet curricular outcomes. Ms. B contended “You could probably argue that with the new curriculum there is more interactive and different ways to display their learning rather than just a formal essay or just a written assignment.” In addition, Mr. F stated “I am evaluating a wide range of things like graphic organizers or Movie Maker videos, kids will want to be creative that way; diary entries, journal entries, stuff that I would never even dare to do in the old program.”

### *Student Learning*

The third interview question asked teachers to reflect on the extent to which the new high school social studies program has had an influence on student learning. All participants referenced an impact on student learning as a result of the new curriculum, and two themes emerged: (1) critical and creative thinking (2) active and responsible citizenship. Participants described an increased focus on critical and creative thinking skills as students are asked to attend to a variety of perspectives when dealing with the issues outlined in the curriculum. Furthermore, participants reported that their students were taking discussions surrounding curricular issues outside of the classroom and engaging others in the debate. Mr. A captured the impact on student learning:

When young people ask you “why did you become a teacher?” my response was always “well I thought I could do a better job than some of the teachers I had.” I now feel like, from the old curriculum to the new curriculum, I am making a

difference. I feel like the students are actually walking away taking something valuable from their social studies education. I feel there is much more growth in the students and I feel that largely it is because it's more hands on, it is more student-driven, it is more flexible for them. I just feel like from day one in the semester to the last day the growth is huge, it is immense and you know, the students realize it and do walk away with a positive experience.

*Critical and creative thinking.* The new curriculum was designed to mandate a multiple perspectives approach when dealing with the issues that frame each program. Participants agreed that students were being forced to think critically as a result of being asked to empathize and grapple with perspectives different from their own. Mr. H explained "...I think for our average to low-end students, the strengths of the course really push them to consider different things, and I think that is undeniably a positive direction in what is happening with the new curriculum." In addition, Mr. H further commented that:

I think the response in the teacher is to never stop encouraging students to think what is the perspective, what is the perspective of somebody from this background, what is the perspective of somebody from that background, who are stake holders. And I think when you start to do that, you find that students, if nothing else, start to at least empathize for positions other than their own. And I think if the new curriculum can do that, I think it's quite strong, and a fair bit stronger than what the old curriculum was able to do.

In speaking about the most significant change the new high school social studies program has unleashed, Mr. D reported:

I think it is critical thinking. I think it is giving the kids the power to evaluate the world around them and to be able to make more informed decisions, and their decisions will be...they will be able to hopefully filter through all the bias and mixed messages that they are getting to make the best decisions they can make. I believe that is what the new curriculum will be able to do. I think that we probably need to spend a little bit more time developing what we are doing, but I see it as being very beneficial.

Mr. G's response pursued a link between critical thinking and the previous subtheme (refer to page 67).

But I do think, you know, the over-arching goal of getting kids to be critical thinkers, I think I can start to see how a lot of kids are becoming better at doing that, being better consumers of information and being able to kind of digest that and make sense of it rather than just regurgitate...

*Active and responsible citizenship.* As a result of the new high school social studies curriculum, participants (6/10) reported students feeling empowered by the fact that they can share and defend their own position. Ms. A's response is representative of this theme:

I think overall, in general, with this whole program studies you can see much more growth in the students. It might be in a period, but usually it is in a week or a unit or across the semester, the growth is outstanding, and again, if you give them the overall issue from day one and have them write on it they sit there and look at you with blank eyes. When you hand that same—you know, their response

from day one back to them at the end of the semester they laugh at themselves, because they start to realize how much they have actually learned.

The new curriculum seeks to move from exploring the concept of responsible citizenship to developing active and responsible citizens and participants reported seeing such a difference between the two curriculums. Ms. C explains:

So, there was this citizenship that came out, this caring, this wanting to talk about it, this interest, this, “Social studies has something to do with my life, school has something to do with my life” attitude, which of course, I feel is very different from some of the kids I have taught in 20 years...

In addition, Ms. E commented:

I think that sometimes people give service to the idea of what social studies is, ultimately, I think a long time ago they thought it was promoting how to be a good citizen and responsible citizen. I think the curriculum now has gone closer to that.

Participants (4/10) commented that students were taking issues and concepts beyond the classroom and often brought them home to discuss with their parents. Ms. E reported:

I have had parents phone me because kids got on their cases to make sure they go vote. I think it is making a difference, when you hear parents coming to interviews, and the kids come home at night, the ones that you do not expect, and they are talking about something...the kids will come in and say, “Oh I told my mom about something and she watched it with her friends,” and so I lend them now to the parents. And even when *Capitalism: A Love Story* came out my kids on their own time met me at the mall to go see the movie. So who would ever expect that they would do that?

One participant raised an interesting concern regarding the empowerment of individuals and the new curriculum. Ms. J wondered if the new curriculum, with the student-centered focus, is in a negative way fueling what she perceives as an increasingly selfish society:

...you know what, the world is not a game and part of our job for social studies is to teach them to become contributing citizens and as much as possible, self-reliant and if everything is a game and they are never held accountable or rarely held accountable in an authentic method, then I would be worried about how our society will evolve. Especially, one of the things I see is that the “Me, me, me, me, me”, individualist perspective ignoring all other perspectives makes for...well, it is a little bit frightening and I wonder if some of this is going to do the opposite of what the intent was.

#### *Assessment*

The second interview question asked teachers to reflect on the extent to which the new high school social studies program has changed their assessment practices? Many participants commented on the new curriculum acting as a catalyst for change in assessment practice and in making assessment a focus of teacher professional development. Three key themes emerged from the interviews, including assessment for learning, assessment of learning, and performance-based assessment. Mr. A. captured the essence of the theme:

So, working with the end in mind is a huge difference. Rather than simply taking a curriculum and going start to finish, checklist, checklist, checklist, I am looking at the last point in the curriculum which seems to always be the big question, the big outcome and then going, ok, where is all the rest going to fit in.

*Assessment for learning.* Many participants spoke about an increased focus on formative assessment connected to the new high school social studies curriculum. The new curriculum, being skills focused, necessitates the ongoing assessment of skill development and corresponding scaffolding to support students. The issues-based nature of the high school programs, each framed by an overarching issue, requires ongoing assessment as students grapple with their position. There is not a series of correct answers to memorize and regurgitate, students must constantly assess their understanding and their position as they are introduced to new historical and contemporary contexts. Mr. A explained:

I think as far as student learning goes, the students are more responsible for their learning in the sense that, again, without the sort of stress of all this taking things in and giving formative assessment. There is a lot more room for them to reflect on their own learning, which allows for them a kind of a double feedback; they can reflect themselves, and you can reflect on their learning and give them that feedback.

Participants communicated that students are both understanding and appreciating the ongoing assessment for learning. Instead of seeing assessment as a one-time summative evaluation of learning and understanding, students are beginning to connect the formative assessment to their own personal growth. Commenting from a student perspective, Ms. C said:

I am not giving out as many things to assess or mark but there is a lot of feedback and a lot of discussion where I have kids, when I give them something back or we go through something that is formative, that are starting to understand the

terminology. Because there is not a mark that they feel is set in stone, they seem to be more willing to ask questions...I have had more students, especially at the 30 level, come back to me and say, "If you can help me figure out why I am at a mid-level instead of the high-level, I would like to try it again." I have had more re-writes and I have had more upward progression in that respect because it is not simply, you did it or you did not, it was that you knew what you were doing but there was more to be thought of, more to be said and a lot of my students are wanting to climb up that ladder.

*Assessment of learning.* The majority of participants (7/10) said that their summative assessments have changed as a result the high school social studies curriculum. Because of the skills-based nature of the curriculum many participants reported moving away from multiple-choice style summative tests to more written response style questions. Mr. G commented:

...whereas [now] virtually every single one of our assessments, or formal assessments, would be both multiple choice and written, but fewer multiple choice items, of course more of the being source-based, and then more written or asking kids to write more and more frequently.

All participants referenced the importance of teaching and assessing skills. Students are presented with large amounts of information from textbooks and the internet and teachers recognize the need to help students analyze and evaluate this information so it can be used in a variety of contexts. Teacher participants (5/10) discussed the need for student skill development with respect to the analysis source material (political cartoons, images, charts, graphs, quotations, and text). Mr. D said:

Well, I would say, obviously with the changing of how the written response questions are constructed in the new curriculum, obviously, analyzing sources has become more important in my opinion. So in everyday planning, just getting kids to, just focusing more on that kind of analysis of sources has become that much more important, and trying to build those types of responses into my assessment so that kids are ready for the written response [reference to the diploma exam]...

*Performance-based assessment.* Many participants (8/10) cited a need for a shift in assessment practice as a result to the skills-based nature of the new high school social studies curriculum. An issues-based curriculum, grounded less in content and more in skills, requires a different approach to assessing student learning. Participants discussed an increase in performance-based assessment practices that create flexibility in evaluating students in an outcomes-based curriculum. Participants described a move towards more inquiry and project-based assessment. Ms. B stated:

I really do not like using, you know, multiple choice tests because I cannot assess everything that the kids can do. I find more project-based learning, like a project where they have to use more than one skill is a lot easier.

While Mr. F explained:

Well, I think the new curriculum has sort of compelled us in the direction of authentic assessment now so I really do look at formative versus summative assessment which I have never really done before. So what it has essentially done is sort of steered me in a direction where we are doing inquiry style activities, you know, the kids are really exploring.

Mr. A explained that he felt compelled to allow students to find new ways to express their understanding and their ability to meet curricular outcomes:

...there seems to be a big push for allowing them a lot more—with differentiation of instruction—allowing them to express their learning in a lot of different ways, and technology is a great way to do that, but they don't have to use technology either, that is kind of the great thing about it, but they can use things like movie maker to make movies, they can use PowerPoint although personally I am trying to move away from PowerPoint.

Participants (5/10) made connections between the use of new technologies and performance-based assessment. New technologies have facilitated the search for new and engaging ways to have students share their understanding. Mr. F indicated:

The other big thing has been the use of Flip cameras and other technology like that which was, perhaps, the biggest challenge for me because learning Movie Maker was intimidating even though it is a relatively simple program, but incorporating Flips and Movie Maker has been, I think, something that has livened the classes, it has gotten them excited about it because they are growing up with a lot of this stuff, but I found that the kids are actually quite self-directed...

Participants (4/10) acknowledged the influence of Alberta Education's new diploma examination structure on assessment practices. The new diploma has an increased reliance on student written responses and is now comprised of two main tasks, each with a distinct skill-set. The first written assignment is a source analysis questions whereby students are asked to interpret three sources of information independently

(political cartoons, images, charts, graphs, quotations, and text) and then discuss relationships that exist amongst the sources. The second written assignment is a defense of position essay where students must analyze a source to determine an ideological perspective and then write a paper defending a position on the extent to which we should embrace the perspective outlined in the source. Teacher participants (4/10) reported that their classroom assessments mimic the performance assessments created by Alberta Educations diploma examinations. Ms. J explained:

We are trying to model the diploma exam and so we are creating reading exams as well and whether we like it or not, we can do all the formative assessment we like, but in the end they are facing that summative exam or those summative exams and I do not think they have the skills, especially the literary skills.

### *Technology*

All participants spoke of the importance of technology with respect to implementation of the new high school social studies curriculum. Participants identified the importance of technology in supporting the inquiry and skill-development mandated by the new curriculum. Mr. F explained:

Another big, big impact has been technology. I am using technology more and having the kids use it more and so by doing that, again, I am really giving up a lot of control that I used to have in the classroom, really having them now take charge of their learning and take charge of the technology on their own and that's been a little bit scary, it has been a tough adjustment for me.

Furthermore, Mr. G stated:

I think this curriculum would be difficult to teach without technology. I think the ability to bring in news clips off the internet or even posting links for kids to access on something like Moodle or wherever kids are going to access information. I think it would have been near impossible to deliver this curriculum had we not had technology at our fingertips.

Although participants universally acknowledged the importance of technology in the context of the new curriculum, many conceded that there was a weak correlation between their use of technology and the implementation of the new curriculum. Ms. B said “I do not know if there’s a connection between the two, I think it is just convenient that the new program studies kind of came out at the same time that technology is really kind of making a surge.” In addition, Mr. H explained:

Now that being said, some of the things we want to access with the new curriculum, with students being able to collaborate with each other, with different perspectives being able to be presented. Video-conferencing, different Moodle forums, I think are important tools to access in order to hit at those things, but I do not think it is because of the new curriculum that we’re going that direction.

Mr. F summarized the main point of technology use and the new curriculum when he said:

So I think the use of technology is just part of good teaching, I think the new curriculum give us avenues to apply technology as far as looking at different ways to express student learning, but you can do the same thing in English, you can do the same thing in drama, you can do the same thing in science for crying out loud.

*Technology access issues.* Although participants unanimously agreed on the important role of technology in the effective delivery of the new curriculum, there was variance among participants with respect to their ability to use technology with students. A number of participants expressed frustration with both access to technology and access to professional development related to technology. Mr. I explained:

Well, last semester I taught a course with zero access to computers and the year before I taught a course, same thing, zero access to computers, so that's frustrating and then the next sort of level of that is my skills with technology are hurting and I am so busy learning the curriculum and trying to sort of be ready for my classes that my skills there are way more behind than what they should be. The frustration is also, there is zero support, so the technology is put into place, but there is no though given to helping people learn how to use it, they just assume we will do it in the summer or weekends or whatever.

*The internet and multiple perspectives.* The new high school social studies curriculum mandates a multiple perspectives approach to teaching and learning. Participants (8/10) clearly expressed their appreciation for the ability technology afforded them in accessing multiple perspectives on topics and issues explored throughout the curriculum. Mr. D commented, "I do think that the new program studies does have a use for technology in terms of taking a look at an issue and being able to find real current events and perspectives." Mr. A explained:

You can find a three minute little clip, you can let the news tell the story, but again, because of the emphasis on multiple perspectives and identifying media bias, you can show them a media source and that leads into these skills that the program is out for. Rather than me simply discuss it with them, we can give them a source and analyze it and work on our skills all the time. So we can use technology to do that.

*New technologies.* Many participants (8/10) made note of the ease with which technology allows students to access information and collaborate with each other. The issues-based nature of the new curriculum encourages discourse and debate throughout the inquiry process. New technologies enable the extension of learning beyond the traditional classroom and the new curriculum seems to support this. Mr. F stated:

I have incorporated Moodle quite successfully, and the nice part about having the smart board with the laptops is the kids and I can work through the Moodle activities together. Forums have been a huge boom for me... Moodle forums have allowed everyone to participate.

Mr. F commented on new technologies being used as an inquiry tool and as a way to engage students in the learning process:

The other big thing has been the use of Flip cameras and other technology like that which was, perhaps, the biggest challenge for me because learning Movie Maker was intimidating even though it is a relatively simple program, but incorporating Flips and Movie Maker has been, I think, something that has livened the classes, it's gotten them excited about it because they are growing up with a lot of this stuff, but I found that the kids are actually quite self-directed.

### *Professional Development*

New curriculum implementation places demands on teachers. In this context professional development can become a critical support mechanism. Participants unanimously agreed that the implementation of the new high school social studies curriculum created many professional development opportunities, as well as a need for professional collaboration. Ms. E explained:

You know what, I think the new curriculum was a catalyst, and it is not the nature of the new curriculum but it is just the fact that it was a new curriculum because I think people have been in teaching assignments for many, many, many, many years and then we have had quite a turnover all of a sudden so everyone is pretty much starting their own thing from scratch.

As participants described their professional development experiences, two primary sub-themes were mentioned frequently: (1) the creation of professional learning communities (2) the need for collaboration.

*Learning communities.* The last several years have presented social studies educators with the challenge of implementing what many called a transformative curriculum. The curriculum forced many educators to change that which they had been doing for a long time. The challenge was substantial and many participants (8/10) commented on the emergence of professional learning communities as a collaborative strategy to meet the challenge. Ms. G, when speaking about the new curriculum, explained "...it has definitely brought our department into a position where we work more closely together..."

In addition, Mr. F commented on the collegiality emerging from the implementation process:

We were encouraged to have a group of us in our district meet and collaborate and share some ideas and develop resources and tests. So, without the new curriculum that would never have happened, and unfortunately what was happening in our district with the old curriculum was we did not know one another, our schools are spread out...and it is almost like we were competing institutions...

Furthermore, Mr. F stated:

...we have all pulled together as a social studies staff, and we start feeling like a social studies department and we have gotten to know each other and now we see each other as colleagues and want to help each other out and collaborate instead of getting protective over our stuff and this is my stuff and I'm getting these results. I think a lot of that has been thanks to the PD development as a result of the new high school social studies program.

*Sharing and collaboration.* The needs arising from the implementation of the new curriculum seem to have eroded barriers that prevented professional collaboration and sharing. Ms. E explained:

I would say that the new curriculum has done wonders for a lot of schools...so many of us were in our own little places and nobody shared anything and it's not because they don't want to, it is because you're so worried that someone else will criticize what you're doing and say I cannot believe they're doing it.

A few of the participants (reported working in isolated teaching contexts and the implementation of the new curriculum, and the opportunities arising from it, have served conduit to other professionals. Mr. F stated:

I really am essentially the only social studies teacher at my school so I am really an island under myself and so I have had to rely a lot on PD and fortunately now with Moodle I have been able to network with other teachers...

Many participants spoke of the importance of extending collaboration beyond their most intimate professional learning environments. Mr. G explained:

...and surely collaboration with you and your project [SAPDC high school implementation support teacher role] and being a part of some of the sharing groups out of Calgary and some of the list share groups and again, if you did not have those connections, you would lose your mind.

The implementation of a new curriculum, at the very least, forces educators to alter the subject matter which they teach and, depending on the degree of change, teachers may also be forced to transform their pedagogy and program. Regardless of the intensity of the curricular change, teachers rely on professional development opportunities to guide the implementation process.

## Chapter 5: Summary of Findings

*It's the death of education, but it's the dawn of learning.*

*Stephen Heppell*

It is clear the new Alberta high school social studies curriculum has had an impact on the pedagogy and teaching practice of educators participating in this study. Furthermore, the findings support many of the themes highlighted in the research discussed in the review of the literature. The changes emerging from the data gathered in this study have been organized into a number of categories, each of which was uncovered as a strand woven through participant responses.

### *Curriculum as a Catalyst for Educational Reform*

The creation and implementation of the new curriculum, from its conception following the province-wide needs assessment survey to the introduction of the grade twelve program this past year, has presented challenges and opportunities. On the surface the curriculum document has an unfamiliar appearance, but it is in its composition that we find the most fundamental departure from the intent and content of the old program. The new curriculum mandates a focus on skill development through an inquiry process (O'Connor, 2002; Wiggins & McTighe, 2005). The new programs (10-1, 1-2, 20-1, 20-2, 30-1, and 30-2) move away from a focus on delivering factual content to asking students to construct their own learning within the parameters of powerful issue questions (Evans & Brodkey, 1996; Evans, Newman & Saxe, 1996; Wiggins & McTighe, 2005). The individualization of the educational experience encourages the development of self-knowledge, an important facet of understanding (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005).

The general and specific learner outcomes have been designed to scaffold a student's understanding within the framework of a key issue and four related issue questions (Shepard, 2005). The issues-based structure of the new program will shift the learning process from teacher as deliverer of content to teacher as architect of learning; and from learner as recipient of knowledge to learner as empowered problem-solver (Evans & Brodkey, 1996; Evans et al, 1996). The curriculum structure supports a constructivist approach to teaching and learning, which demands more complex assessment of student learning. These new realities for social studies teachers will necessitate more skill and outcome based performance measures to authentically assess and evaluate student learning (Black et al., 2004; Reedy, 1995; Wiggins, 1991).

Analysis of the interview data has uncovered evidence to support the change that has long been anticipated with the implementation of the new high school social studies curriculum in Alberta.

#### *Student-Centered Learning*

Interview participants unanimously agreed the new high school social studies curriculum necessitates a more student-centered approach to instruction. The issues-based nature of the curriculum creates problem-based learning that makes inquiry central to teaching and learning. Students must explore their perspective in relation to others and work towards constructing a position on the issues that frame the various grade-level programs. A primary role of the teacher is to offer lessons in which students develop skills essential to the inquiry process. Participants discussed the need to provide opportunities for students to meet curricular outcomes, to communicate their

understanding of the curricular concepts, and to provide opportunities for students to engage the issues that frame the curriculum.

Although the curriculum prescribes the values and attitudes of the pluralistic and democratic traditions of Canada, students can explore and engage issues from their perspective. Participants of this study concurred with a large body of research that supports the effectiveness of an issues-based curriculum and teachers participating in the study seem to concur. (Case, 2008; Cherryholmes, 1996; Evans, 2004; Evans, & Brodkey, 1996; Evans et al, 1996; Ferguson, 1996; Fernekes, 1996; Gibson, 2004; Gini-Newman & Gini-Newman, 2008; Giroux, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1996; McKay & Gibson, 1999; Merryfield & White, 1996; Noddings, 2008; Nunley, 2004; Ochoa-Becker, 1996; Parker, 2001; Pugh & Garcia, 1996; Wright & Sears, 1997).

*Multiple perspectives approach.* Participants clearly reported that the new program affords flexibility to allow educators to find the most meaningful narratives and perspectives to engage students. The programs are organized into themes with a central issue question which unifies the entire course. The main theme is then sub-divided into four related issues and four general outcomes which students engage through a series of specific learner outcomes that create the scaffolding for student learning. Within the specific learner outcomes the ‘content’ is largely defined at a ‘conceptual’ level, creating timelessness to the curriculum structure. For example, if the program asks teachers to lead exploration of a concept today, the example or case study used can easily be different from what a colleague might use a decade later. Participants recognized that specific content will change in relation to time and place, while the concepts will remain unchanged.

Participants acknowledged the importance of the multiple perspectives approach embedded in the curriculum acting as a catalyst for students to examine others' views in relation to their own. The process creates an ongoing student-centered exploration of their individual and collective identity. (Battiste & Youngblood, 2000; Boise-Baise, 1996; Case, et al, 2008; Darling, 2002; Giroux, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 1996; Newbery et al, 2008; Steinhauer, 1997). Some stories and perspectives will be common to all because of their national and international significance, but the new curriculum encourages diversity and provides important opportunities for teachers and learners to find their own unique place within it (Battiste & Youngblood, 2000; Boise-Baise, 1996; Case et al, 2008; Ladson-Billings, 1996; Newbery et al, 2008; Raulston Saul, 2008; Steinhauer, 1997). Participants unanimously embraced the flexibility and creativity the new curriculum bestows.

*The study of history.* Although all participants acknowledged that the new curriculum appears to be causing a shift from a teacher-centered to a student-centered learning environment, the more experienced teachers seemed to express some concerns about that point. A central area of concern was born of the move away from a content-based curriculum, in which specific factual content and historical narratives are examined in more depth. In the early stages of implementation several of the participants were concerned students were not being allowed to explore narratives in sufficient depth as to create meaningful understanding of history. Participants were not rejecting the new curriculum structure, they were simply raising concerns about the uncertainty surrounding the change it represents. Most participants acknowledged their proclivity towards history and recognized they may have some bias in this regard.

The Dominion Institute of Canada recently published a report entitled *The Canadian History Report Card: Curriculum Analysis of High Schools in Canada*, assigning Alberta a grade of ‘F’ with respect to our teaching of Canadian history. Marc Chalifoux (2009), Executive Director of the Dominion Institute, said “Too many provinces and territories do not take seriously the teaching of Canadian history. It is little wonder that so many students graduate from high school without a basic knowledge of our country’s past” (p. 1). Although there are some valid concerns raised by the Dominion Institute—similar to the concerns raised by a few of the participants (3/10) of this study—the jury is out with respect to the final verdict regarding student understanding of history. Chalifoux references a “basic knowledge of our country’s past”, but his commentary begs the following questions: who determines that basic knowledge? Whose perspectives should be shared? Whose stories should be told?

The new curriculum endeavours to nurture thinking skills, such as critical thinking, creative thinking, historical thinking, as opposed to asking students to memorize historical facts at the lowest level of Bloom’s taxonomy. Foundational research for the new curriculum supports the shift it is trying to create (Bahbahani & Case, 2008; Bahbahani & Huynh, 2008; Case et al, 2006; Case, 2008; Case & Balcaen, 2008; Case & Daniels, 2008; Denos, 2008; Marzano et al, 2001; McKay & Gibson, 2009; Myers & Case, 2008; Noddings, 2008; Nunley, 2004; Seixas, 1999). In the context of the digital and information age, it would appear the Dominion Institute’s assessment of history education in Alberta (as well as in other jurisdictions within Canada) represents an antiquated view to teaching and learning. As more curricula similar to that of the Alberta high school social studies program are implemented, and the evidence of their impact is

gathered, perhaps the Dominion Institute will re-consider its position—as with all matters in history, only time will tell.

### *Assessment Practices*

All of the participants in this study have experienced, to some degree, professional careers stewarded by the neo-conservative agenda of the Progressive Conservative Party of Alberta, with accountability and measurability as recurring themes within the public sector. It may prove to be remarkably ironic that the Alberta government has facilitated the construction of a curriculum that will demand more complex assessment which I believe will invariably challenge the emphasis placed on large-scale multiple-choice standardized tests (Apple, 2004; Giroux, 2004; Kohn, 2002; Sahlberg, 2006, Sahlberg, 2008). With a new high school social studies curriculum which focuses far less on factual content and much more on skills and attitudes, some point out the incongruence in continuing with the overly simplistic grading and reporting practices we currently employ (Kohn, 2002; Noddings, 2008; O'Connor, 2002; Sahlberg, 2006; Sahlberg, 2008).

The disproportionate emphasis placed on large-scale standardized assessments in the province of Alberta impedes teacher and school-based movement away from restrictive traditional grading and reporting systems. Many participants (6/10) in this study referenced the diploma exam as a major area of concern during the implementation process. Teachers expressed trepidation about the format of the diploma exam and the unknowns surrounding the standards that are being set.

The Assessment Branch of Alberta Education is toiling with the implications of a new program for which it is far more difficult to build standardized tests due to the

decreased emphasis on objective content (Girard et al, 2008). Most post-secondary institutions in Canada and the United States rely on some sort of large scale standardized assessment as an indicator of academic proficiency when selecting student candidates for admission (Ohlhausen & Others, 1994). The use of standardized tests for this purpose has further reinforced the importance placed upon them. Although the provincial standardized tests in Alberta are recognized as a limited summative assessment tool because they assess only a portion of mandated curricula, they remain a strong influence on classroom assessment practice and school-based decision making (McDonald, 2002; Webber et al, 2008). Many secondary schools, in the context of Western society's positivist outlook and corporate expectations for competence and accountability, use achievement and diploma exam results as the most important statistical tool when building department and school level improvement plans (Apple, 2004; Giroux, 2004; Kohn, 2002; Sahlberg, 2006, Sahlberg, 2008).

Perhaps the challenges the Assessment Branch is now facing with the development of large-scale standardized tests to evaluate the new curriculum is indicative of the change described by participants in this study. The challenges facing the exam managers and bureaucrats within Alberta Education provide convincing evidence of the transformative nature of the new curriculum. By definition, it is incongruent to assess an issues-based curriculum with a large-scale standardized test; it appears, at least in the early going, this is indeed the case with this and other curricula (Evans, & Brodkey, 1996; Evans, Newman & Saxe, 1996; Ferguson, 1996; Fernekes, 1996; Gibson, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 1996; McKay & Gibson, 1999). This realization is further evidenced by a recent discussion surrounding a posting by the Minister of Education whereby he

affirmed the role and function of diploma exams. In response to the Minister's comments, the Alberta Teacher's Association responded:

There is a lot of confusion about the difference between norms-based assessment and standards-based (criterion referenced) assessment. Criterion referenced assessment looks at the knowledge, skills and competencies that a student is expected to know and compares the progress of the student to those standards. With a criterion referenced assessment, it is possible for every single student who writes the exam to receive 100 per cent, so long as every student demonstrates competency. A norms based assessment is designed to compare each student with his or her peers (often referred to as "The Curve"). In this case the mark tells more about how the student deviates from the normal student as opposed to how much of the curriculum they have mastered. The Diploma examinations are highly engineered and designed, when the developers get it right, to have an average of 65 per cent and to discriminate the weaker students from the stronger students. In actuality they are highly effective norm-based assessments, but they are not "a tool for identifying attainment of standards" as the minister purports.

There is ample research to support the premise that most teachers lack the formal training necessary to empower them as effective assessors and evaluators of student learning (McDonald, 2002; Guskey, 2006; Webber et al, 2008). Furthermore, the lack of understanding around assessment issues, as a result of the training deficit, serves to perpetuate such concerns. As Guskey (2006) reported:

Few educators receive any formal training in assigning marks to students' work or in grading students' performance and achievement. As a result, when required to

do so, most simply reflect back on what was done to them and then, based on those experiences, try to develop policies and practices that they believe are fair, equitable, defensible, and educationally sound. Their personal experiences as students, therefore, may have significant influence on the policies and practices they choose to employ. (p. 1)

Guskey's (2006) commentary aligns with participants' perceptions in this study. There is a definitive need for more pre-service and in-service training and professional development that will build the capacity for meaningful change in assessment practices (McDonald, 2002; Guskey, 2006; Webber et al., 2008). We cannot expect other stakeholders in the education system to commit to change until educators acknowledge the need and take a leadership role in trumpeting the cause. The new curriculum, as evidenced by the testimony of participants in this study, is forcing teachers to ask questions about the effectiveness of traditional assessment practices (Case, 2008; Guskey, 2006; Marzano, Pickering & Pollock, 2001; Myers, 2004; Nunley, 2006; O'Connor, 2002; Shepard, 2007; Stiggins, 2007; Tomlinson & McTighe, 2006; Wiggins, 1997; Wiggins & McTighe, 2005; Wormeli, 2006). Ms. C provided evidence of this transition when she commented "But it is the level that they get to and when that assessment changes and the students are no longer looking for right or wrong, but they are looking for the personal challenge in the learning."

### *21<sup>st</sup> Century Learners*

Although study participants did not draw a direct correlation between technology use and the implementation of the new curriculum, it was clear that emerging technologies are supporting the mandates presented by the new curriculum. The new

curriculum's attempt at infusing multiple perspectives is sustained by the plethora of primary and secondary source information that can be accessed so easily via the internet. One wonders if curricula that stipulates the study of specific content actually serves to limit students living in a digital age where they have almost instantaneous access to huge reserves of information? Why would we want to narrow a student's engagement with the world when there are tools that can serve to expand it?

The vast majority of high school students have continuous access to the internet (via their cell phones or laptops) with which to engage the world and nurture their curiosity (Small & Vorgan, 2008). It is somewhat ironic that one of the organizations seeking to limit access to such information is the public school system. Many schools and school districts are struggling to come up with policies to *control* access to the outside world via cell phones and the internet, instead of finding ways to embrace and utilize the tools of the digital age (Prensky, 2007; Small & Vorgan, 2008). The new high school social studies curriculum is built around themes having historical significance, as well as resonance today. Participants agree the structure of the curriculum, most notably the conceptual nature of the specific learner outcomes, empowers teachers with the flexibility to choose engaging and timely topics with which to explore the program issues.

### *Professional Development*

The importance of professional development has been underscored in broad strokes through the course of this research. Participants unanimously agreed that the implementation of a new curriculum fostered a more intimate connection with professional development. Not only was there a need to understand the scope and vision

of the new curriculum, there was a need to collaborate and share with teachers placed on the same implementation journey.

Professional development opportunities resulting from the implementation of the new curriculum became a mechanism for establishing professional learning communities (Baumgartner, 2006; Costa & Loveall, 2002; DuFour, 2001). The SAPDC, in conjunction with school districts throughout southern Alberta, created many professional development options for teachers to collaborate and share. Participants in this study expressed gratitude for these opportunities and hoped the professional learning will continue. There was unanimous agreement about the important role professional collaboration and professional development played in the implementation of the new curriculum.

#### *Active and Responsible Citizenship*

We live in a world that is increasingly interconnected and interdependent and, as a result, the concept of citizenship is in flux. As we learn about other perspectives and world views we must reconcile them with our own. Our roles and responsibilities as citizens become more complex as we become increasingly intertwined with the fate of others. Citizenship is about more than just municipal, provincial and national interests; it now includes global concerns—global citizenship (Boise-Baise, 1996; Booi, 2002; Cherryholmes, 1996; Darling, 2002; Fraenkel, 1992; Ladson-Billings, 1996; Noddings, 2008; Sahlberg, 2006; Sahlberg, 2008; Sears, 2004). I believe that our new social studies curriculum embodies the attitudes and values that can be foundational to a sustainable global society.

The new curriculum moves beyond a simple exploration of citizenship and what it means to be a 'good' citizen; it pushes students towards action and engagement in their world. The curriculum transforms the word citizenship from a noun to a verb. The new curriculum is being viewed by many as an instrument not only of educational change, but of broader social reform. The new high school social studies curriculum is attempting to create active and responsible citizens who are creative and critical thinkers. The new curriculum has clearly been influenced by critical pedagogy and it will be interesting to watch its impact over time (Freire, 1999; Freire, 2006; Freire, 2007; Fraenkel, 1992; Giroux, 2002; Giroux, 2004; Giroux, 2005; Giroux, 2008).

## Chapter 6: Conclusion

*Sixty years ago I knew everything; now I know nothing; education  
is a progressive discovery of our own ignorance.*

*Will Durant*

Beginning with the completion of a province-wide needs assessment survey administered by Alberta Learning in the fall of 2001, the development and implementation of a new high school social studies curriculum has inspired teachers to reflect upon pedagogy and practice. This study endeavoured to seize an opportunity to investigate the changes unleashed by the new curricular framework.

The extent to which the implementation of a transformative curriculum has had an impact on classroom teachers remains open to discussion; however, this study unveils some evidence to support it as a catalyst of change. The findings of this study suggest that the new high school social studies curriculum not only has forced educators to ask serious questions around matters of pedagogy and teaching practice, but has initiated meaningful change for a group of southern Alberta educators.

### *Limitations and Recommendations*

This study involved participants with previous professional relationships, some with each other, and some with the researcher. This often prompts concerns of bias or lack of objectivity, but the semi-structured interview process attempted to mitigate these concerns by gathering data in a formal, yet flexible, manner. The phenomenological nature of the research captured the direct experience of participants, creating qualitative data that was easy to work with. Furthermore, the triangulation method was employed to

increase the reliability and the validity of the participant responses (Campbell & Fiske, 1959).

The interview times were chosen by the participants in an attempt to accommodate busy professional schedules. However, some participants were forced to book interview times during the school day, making it more difficult for them to engage in an interview calling for critical reflection on pedagogy and practice. Despite these modest limitations, participants conducted themselves in a professional manner and answered questions thoughtfully and thoroughly.

Several recommendations arise from the findings of this study. First, more study is needed with respect to the change the curriculum is having on the pedagogy and practice of teachers. The grade ten, grade eleven and grade twelve programs (in both streams: 10-1, 20-1, 30-1 and 10-2, 20-2, 30-2), have been implemented one at a time over the course of the past three years. In each successive year teachers have become increasingly familiar and comfortable with the scope and vision of the curriculum. However, it would be safe to say that the changes unleashed by the new curriculum will continue to unfold over many years to come.

This study is a preliminary investigation into the impact of a transformative curriculum and provides a foundation for further exploration of the central research question. The research question is open-ended and timeless with respect to the answers it seeks to find. As long as the curriculum continues so too does the need to seek answers to the fundamental questions surrounding the impact it brings to the teachers and the students it serves. Further investigation surrounding the research question will be needed when teachers have had more time to reflect on the curriculum in its entirety. Only time

can afford teachers what they need to deeply contemplate the changes the programs have created in their classrooms.

Second, teachers need to sustain the learning communities that have emerged as a result of the implementation process. Teacher participants unanimously agreed that the implementation of a transformative curriculum re-engaged them in professional learning and collaboration. There are many demands placed on teachers when preparing for significant curricular change and this study shows that teachers' greatest resource is each other. Although funding to support the implementation of the new high school social studies curriculum will dry up at the end of the current school year, teachers should endeavour to maintain the collaboration—via technology or other means—they reported in this study as being so valuable to their professional realities. A new curriculum document can be the face of change; the transformative substance of the written text can only be realized through the actions of an educator. Whitaker (2004) aptly warns that “...effective teachers focus on the people, not the programs. They see programs as solutions only when the programs bring out the best in their teachers” (p. 13).

Third, current educational research is calling for reform in our education systems and this study reveals that the vision of the new high school social studies curriculum is grounded in such research. A carefully crafted curriculum, a mandated legal document, can act a vehicle for teacher exploration of current educational research themes. This study revealed that a transformative curriculum can lead to significant change in key areas of teaching and learning. These areas include assessment for learning, student-centered classrooms, creative and critical thinking skill development, and problem-based learning.

Finally, transformative curricula, such as the new high school social studies programs, can serve as a catalyst for broader educational reform. This study reveals that the implementation of a new curriculum can act as a foundation for self-reflection and change with respect to pedagogy and practice. All teacher participants in this study, although in varying degrees, attributed pedagogical reflection and change in teaching practice to the implementation of the Alberta high school social studies curriculum.

### *Personal Learning Experience*

Playing an active role in the design and the implementation of a new curriculum has been both challenging and rewarding. The process has forced me to critically assess my pedagogy and practice. I have come to realize that although I had become skilled at what I did as an educator, I had to question whether or not what I did was indeed that good. I recognized that I had grown apart from what current educational research demands for effective teaching and learning. I have been caught in a traditional paradigm of education, one that I inherited from what many would call an antiquated industrial model of education (Sahlberg, 2006; Sahlberg, 2008; Robinson, 2008). Ken Robinson (2009), speaking at the Technology, Entertainment and Design (TED) Conference, said it this way:

So I think we have to change metaphors. We have to go from what is essentially an industrial model of education, a manufacturing model, which is based on linearity and conformity and batching people. We have to move to a model that is based more on principles of agriculture. We have to recognize that human flourishing is not a mechanical process, it's an organic process. And you cannot predict the outcome of human development; all you can do, like a farmer, is create the conditions under which they will begin to flourish.

I am fortunate to have been the recipient of many compliments and accolades from gracious people in my life—students, parents, administrators, colleagues, my

professional association—but I have come to recognize that if I am to remain as an asset to my profession, and to the students I am charged to teach, I must bravely follow the new paths that have been revealed to me. I must re-tool as a teacher and embrace the change we are facing as educators.

Such an epiphany is difficult to endure as a confident young teacher but I am excited about the challenges and opportunities I have uncovered. A transformative curriculum creates both excitement and trepidation as a result of the uncharted territory it reveals. To venture down such a path requires deep pedagogical reflection and a willingness to challenge, and perhaps dismiss, assumptions about the teaching and learning process.

As a high school social studies teacher I have come to believe that too much importance is placed on knowledge (the factual content students are required to learn), while teachers and students spend disproportionately less time dealing with the broader significance of process (the how and why students learn). Educational research, including the findings of this study, underscores the value of challenging young people by making learning problematic and by engaging students with the big ideas rather than the minutia of selected bodies of knowledge (Case, 2008; Gini-Newman & Gini-Newman, 2008; McKay & Gibson, 1999; Myers & Case, 2008; Shepard, 2007; Stiggins, 2007; Tomlinson & McTighe, 2006; Wiggins, 1997; Wiggins & McTighe, 2005). This study reveals the importance of developing the skills and attitudes that allow students to become active and responsible citizens within our pluralistic society. All of these elements of learning may seem more obvious to educators at lower levels but, as a high school teacher, I have felt shackled with curricula that was laden with factual content. I now understand the

shortcomings of my previously held assumptions. Wiggins and McTighe (2005) had this to say:

No matter what our good intentions, we end up unable to accomplish in-depth understanding (or even lasting recall) when everything is leveled into a superficial and breathless march through often sketchy and isolated facts, activities and skills. Educators typically justify coverage in this sense by say it's required by external standards, obligated by textbooks, or required by standardized testing. (p.229)

For most of my career, too much of my teaching has been focused on attempting to cover material in an attempt to prepare students for standardized tests, abandoning time that could have been spent nurturing the learning process by facilitating opportunities for the “uncoverage” that results in an increased depth of understanding (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005, p. 228). Although I am confident the latter happened in my classroom, I am now embarrassed to say the instances were often peripheral as opposed to central, and serendipitous as opposed to purposefully designed.

I am undergoing a significant shift in my personal educational paradigm and the process continues to raise many questions about classroom assessment, grading, and reporting. As my thinking and pedagogy continue to evolve, the obstacles impeding the path of change are exposed at many different levels. The structure and function of our educational institutions, the enormous bureaucracy of government, and the misguided importance placed on province-wide standardized tests, all serve to buoy simplistic grading and reporting practices in secondary schools and act to reinforce the apprehension many high school teachers have towards changing their assessment

practices. Although the educational context of Alberta provides a fertile ground for the growth of such impediments, the importance placed on accountability through large scale standardized tests is certainly not unique to the Alberta experience (Brindley, 2001; Guskey, 2007). I would posit that the new social studies curriculum in our province can serve as an agent of change that will lead educators to explore alternative assessment and to move towards more meaningful grading and reporting methodology (Case, 2008; Guskey, 2006; Marzano, Pickering & Pollock, 2001; Myers, 2004; Nunely, 2006; O'Connor, 2002; Shepard, 2007; Stiggins, 2007; Tomlinson & McTighe, 2006; Wiggins, 1997; Wiggins & McTighe, 2005; Wormeli, 2006).

Although the new high school social studies curriculum has been a catalyst for change, there are institutional structures that create significant barriers to the refinement of assessment and grading practices. Government mandated school administration software limits the information collection capacity of schools, thereby discouraging a move towards more complex templates that would allow for the distribution of more meaningful assessment information. High schools in Alberta are funded through credit equivalency units (CEUs) that are distributed based on number grades that are awarded to students; if a student does not achieve a defined minimum grade, then the school does not receive funding. It would seem that market-based principles are at play in our education system (Apple, 2004; Freire, 1999; Giroux, 2004; Giroux, 2008; Kohn, 2002; Noddings, 2005; Sahlberg, 2006; Sahlberg, 2008). Students have been commoditized by linking their performance to funding dollars and, instead of being guided by pedagogy, schools and school districts are disproportionately influenced by financial concerns.

School-based administrators are bound by budgets that are dependent upon student grades, which can reinforce simplistic reporting practices. School timetables are based on funding allocations and larger class sizes are often part of a recipe for fiscal frugality, which creates increased stress on the ability of teachers to purposefully assess their students' learning. The reality of hundreds of students flowing through the doorway of a teacher's classroom each day serves to push teachers towards the most time-efficient (not the most meaningful) grading and reporting practices (Reedy, 1995).

Analysis of most present-day secondary schools will uncover structures that are at odds with many of the messages supported by modern educational research. Secondary students are asked to arrive at school far earlier than research is telling us is optimal for adolescent and young adult physiology (Wolfson & Carskadon, 2005). Schools strictly define time parameters around teaching and learning blocks that are not amicable to promoting teaching and learning continuity. When bells ring, learning in one area is supposed to abruptly end and students are shuffled to a new—and often completely disconnected—teaching and learning environment. We segregate learning into subjects that often have natural overlap, but strict bureaucratic structures inhibit the inherent connections that exist (Robinson, 2008). The vast majority of secondary schools in Alberta are organized into semesters that discourage continuity and create the possibility of a student not re-engaging a subject area for more than a year, making it extremely difficult to establish the progression necessary for meaningful learning (Kohn, 2002; Noddings, 2008; Robinson, 2008). Education at the secondary level is a very lethargic endeavour; most students are asked to sit in their desks for lengthy sessions of inactivity. Secondary schools are highly competitive environments and, despite the negative impact

such an environment can have on adolescents, they have been crafted as a means to sort students. Guskey (2007) reported that parents and students have come to expect simplistic norm-referenced grading and reporting where:

...learning becomes a game of winners and losers, and because teachers keep the number of rewards arbitrarily small, most students must be losers. Strong evidence shows that 'grading on the curve' is detrimental to relationships—both among students and among students and teachers. (p. 20)

Despite the optimism shared by many social studies educators regarding the new curriculum, there are many institutional factors that remain externally controlled and act as significant obstacles to meaningful change in grading and assessment practice (Apple, 2004; Brindley, 2001; Freire, 1999; Giroux, 2004; Giroux, 2008; Guskey, 2007; Kohn, 2002; Noddings, 2005; Reedy, 1995). As an eternal optimist, I am hopeful the transformative nature of the high school social studies curriculum can serve as a spearhead for more broad-based educational reform.

### *Summary*

Although this study is framed within the context of the social studies community in Alberta, its findings may have some resonance beyond those limits. Despite the best intentions of a well-designed curriculum, there must be recognition and acceptance that some of the most meaningful learning may unfold outside of the parameters it attempts to create. Effective teachers recognize when to stray from the path set forth by a curriculum in order to seize a learning opportunity; while exceptional teachers can return to the journey and help students find connections between the two seemingly disparate paths.

Educators strive to build curricula in an attempt to set boundaries around what is taught, despite the likelihood that many of the important variables that influence the educational process are not fully within the control of one teacher, one subject, or one classroom. “The main thrusts in curriculum development and reform over the years have been directed at microcurricular problems to the neglect of the macrocurricular problems” (Pinar, 1988, p .1).

Pinar’s observation highlights a recurring question regarding the factual minutia embedded within some curricula. Why do teachers ask students to know certain things and not others? Paradoxically, curriculum is often designed to introduce learners to specific knowledge, skills and attitudes, while ignoring and therefore limiting students from others. This becomes a growing problem in light of the vast diversity our increasingly interconnected and interdependent world has to offer. Technology has served to shrink the world and education is moving beyond the simple transmission of the values and attitudes of provincial or national collectives; students today are being asked to see themselves as global citizens. The new high school social studies curriculum minimizes the importance placed on the simple facts (the microcurricular) and attempts to move towards the acquisition of skills and attitudes for a broader purpose.

Perhaps the very core of social studies curricula across Canada, and even the world, needs to dedicate as much time to uncovering a global identity as it does on other elements of one’s intellect or creativity. Marshall McLuhan spoke of an emerging “global village”; is it time to begin exploring the notion of a curriculum that could transcend national borders? Is it time to discuss the future of education on a much larger scale? Could this be viewed as the ultimate macrocurriculum?

Building a curriculum that could be offered on a global scale is an interesting vision. Certainly current technology could facilitate the delivery of a set of common values, attitudes and skills designed to foster the development of a global consciousness—planting the seeds of global citizenship. This may be difficult considering the western provinces could not agree to a common curriculum thread through the failed Western Canada Protocol (WCP). The overwhelming magnitude of constructing and the implementing a global curriculum is indeed daunting, yet the possibilities are intriguing. The Alberta high school social studies program was not created with a global audience in mind, but other educational jurisdictions in the Western world would be well-served to adopt elements of its design.

Over a century ago, Dewey (1897) described education as the instrument of social progress and reform. In his description, he implies that change in a society needs to have the support of its citizens, which is a fundamental principle of democracy. Schools must work towards the education of the individual, but always within the broader context of society. Our education systems, with democratic and pluralistic values at the core of curricula, serve as an important instrument for minding the collective good. Social studies education is at the heart of the matter; in fact, the new Alberta curriculum states:

Social studies provides opportunities for students to develop the attitudes, skills and knowledge that will enable them to become engaged, active, informed and responsible citizens. Recognition and respect for individual and collective identity is essential in a pluralistic and democratic society. Social studies helps students develop their sense of self and community, encouraging them to affirm their place as citizens in an inclusive, democratic society. (p. 1, Alberta Education)

The need to create active and responsible citizens is a central goal of all modern liberal democracies. Education systems, a central pillar of modern society, should be

leaders in working toward this goal but, unfortunately, this is not always the case. Education systems have not kept pace with the immense change that has unfolded over the last century. Much of the Western world has remained anchored in an industrial model of education, whose role was designed for a very different time and place. Some would contend that such perseverance is a sign of the success and virility of the education systems we have crafted but, with growing rapidity, voices of dissent are questioning this assumption (Apple, 2003; Giroux, 2002; Giroux, 2008; Kohn, 2002; Noddings, 2008; Robinson, 2008; Sahlberg, 2006; Small & Vorgan, 2008). In order to meet the needs of 21<sup>st</sup> century learners, education systems, and the teachers that serve as their stewards, must engage in purposeful dialogue surrounding pedagogy and practice. It would appear from the findings of this research, the implementation of a transformative curriculum can be a powerful instrument for such a process.

A new curriculum brings with it obvious adjustments with respect to the ‘what’ of teaching, but a truly transformative curriculum, such as the new high school social studies curriculum, can engage teachers in meaningful self-reflection and change with respect to the ‘how’ and ‘why’ of teaching. A transformative curriculum can serve as a catalyst for the metamorphosis of teaching and learning within an education system. Sahlberg (2006) shares more famous examples of the impact of transformative curricular change that can be found in places like Finland but, perhaps, with further study, the implementation of the new high school social studies curriculum in Alberta can serve as another exemplar.

Being part of the design and the implementation of a new curriculum has been a fascinating experience for me; the journey has been both challenging and rewarding. I

have found myself questioning pedagogy, pondering the purpose and function of curricula and critiquing the role of education. We live in an increasingly complex world and we are charged with the daunting task of imparting the skills and attributes our children need to navigate the challenges they will inevitably face during the course of their lives. As a parent and a professional educator, I take pride in saying I am comforted by the work being done by social studies educators in Alberta towards this end.

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## Appendix A

### Semi-structured Interview Questions

Each participant will be asked the following interview questions:

- 1) Please briefly explain your teaching context, including school size, average class size, and department size and teaching experience (years teaching, social studies course taught).
- 2) How has the implementation of the new high school social studies program changed your teaching (instructional) practice?
- 3) How has the implementation of the new high school social studies program changed your assessment practices?
- 4) What impact has the implementation of the new high school social studies program had on student learning?
- 5) How has the implementation of the new high school social studies program changed the way you use technology in your teaching practice?
- 6) How has the implementation of the new high school social studies program changed your engagement in professional development and professional collaboration?
- 7) What do you see as the most significant change between the old social studies curriculum and the new social studies curriculum?

## Appendix B

### Initial Email Invitation to Participants

Good morning \_\_\_\_\_.

I hope this email finds you well. I am conducting educational research as part of my final project toward completion of a Master of Education degree. The University of Lethbridge Faculty of Education Human Subject Committee granted approval of my application on \_\_\_\_\_ and this email is my first invitation to teachers who might be interested in taking part in my study.

The general purpose of my study is to explore the impact of curricular changes in the area of high school social studies. The project will gather data that will answer the question: *In what ways does a transformative curriculum, such as the new Alberta high school social studies program, promote change in pedagogy and teaching practice?*

The implementation of the new high school social studies curriculum has initiated a process of change that has forced teachers to review pedagogy and teaching practice. A project chronicling the journey afforded by curricular change is necessary as a means to reflect on teaching and learning, and to serve as a tool to identify effective practice in a new era of social studies education in Alberta. Now is an ideal time to ask teachers about the impact a significant curricular change has had on their professional reality.

Participants will be asked to:

- share their experiences with the implementation of the new high school social studies curriculum.
- take part in an initial, conversational interview of about 45 minutes in length that will be video-taped for transcription purposes. All interviews will take place at a time and location convenient to the participant.
- verify the transcript for accuracy.
- offer clarification or elaboration of comments made in the initial interview in a second phone interview, if necessary. The secondary conversation may be initiated by either the researcher or participant.

Your participation in this research project will be confidential. If you choose to withdraw from this inquiry prior to data analysis and the writing of the final report the data will not be used in the analysis. The validation of the interview transcripts will assume ongoing consent to participate.

All interviews will be conducted in private at a time and location that meets the needs of the participant. The researcher is the only person who will have access to the raw data (audio-tapes, interview notes) and the transcripts in electric form. Your anonymity will be completely protected by the use of pseudonyms throughout the research project both in the transcripts and in the culminating qualitative text. Any

portions of your responses that may identify actual individuals will be replaced by pseudonyms.

The results of this inquiry are not intended for commercial purposes. This research project is, however, part of the course work required in fulfillment of a Master of Education degree and, as such, will be shared in a written report. Aggregate results may be published in journals or offered as part of conference presentations. You will receive a copy of the final project report summarizing and interpreting the research findings.

If you are interested in taking part in the research I have described please respond to this email in a timely fashion. If you have any questions regarding this initial contact please feel free to contact me.

Thank you for taking the time to consider my request,



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## Appendix C

### Participant Invitation Phone Call Transcript

Outline/Telephone Script for phone conversation subsequent to follow-up email

#### **I. Thank You**

Extend appreciation for the initial indication of their willingness to participate by responding to the email.

#### **II. Review of purpose of study**

To explore the impact of the new high school social studies curriculum has had on the pedagogy and practice of educators in southern Alberta.

#### **III. Review of details regarding participation**

Participants will be selected from those who continue to demonstrate a willingness to participate following this telephone conversation intended for clarification purposes. From this group I will select a final group of ten to twelve individuals that will attempt to balance age, gender, location and experience. Those selected to participate will be contacted to arrange a convenient time to conduct the interview. Those not selected will be contacted and thanked for their willingness to participate.

Participants will be asked to:

- Share their experiences with the implementation of the new high school social studies curriculum.
- Take part in an initial, conversational interview of about 45 minutes in length that will be video-taped for transcription purposes. All interviews will take place at a time and location convenient to the participant.
- Verify the transcript for accuracy.
- Offer clarification or elaboration of comments made in the initial interview in a second phone interview, if necessary. The secondary conversation may be initiated by either the researcher or participant.

#### **IV. Review of Information Regarding Confidentiality, Anonymity, Use of Data, and Consent**

- Their participation in this research project will be confidential and the subsequent signing of the consent form will take place in the presence of the researcher only.
- If an individual chooses to withdraw from this inquiry prior to data analysis and the writing of the final report his or her data will not be used in the analysis. The validation of the interview transcripts will assume ongoing consent to participate.

- All interviews will be conducted in private at a time and location that meets the needs of the participant.
- There are no potential risks anticipated within this research project. In the event of a participant disclosing something he or she may later regret, opportunity will be provided to review the interview transcript, to verify its content for accuracy, and to request that specific comments to be removed for personal reasons.
- The researcher is the only person who will have access to the raw data (audio-tapes, interview notes) and the transcripts in electric form. Video-tapes, interview notes and electronic data stored on an external memory device will be preserved in a secure filing cabinet for five years and then destroyed.
- Their anonymity will be completely protected by the use of pseudonyms throughout the research project both in the transcripts and in the culminating qualitative text. Any portions of participants' responses that may identify actual individuals will be replaced by pseudonyms.
- The results of this inquiry are not intended for commercial purposes. This research project is, however, part of the course work required in fulfillment of a Master of Education degree and, as such, will be shared in a written report. Aggregate results may be published in journals or offered as part of conference presentations.
- They will receive a copy of the final project report summarizing and interpreting the research findings.

#### **V. The Interview**

- Arrange a time convenient to the participant for the initial interview.

## Appendix D

## Follow-up Participant Contact – Confirmation (email and letter)

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

Thank you very much for agreeing to take part in the educational research I am conducting as part of my final project toward completion of a Master of Education degree at the University of Lethbridge.

I would like to confirm the time and date we agreed to. Our interview will take place on \_\_\_\_\_ (date) at \_\_\_\_\_ (time) at \_\_\_\_\_ (location).

I would like to remind you that the interview will take approximately 45 minutes. You will be asked to sign a consent form prior to the beginning of the interview. Your participation in this research project will be confidential. If you choose to withdraw from this inquiry prior to data analysis and the writing of the final report the data will not be used in the analysis. The validation of the interview transcripts will assume ongoing consent to participate.

The researcher is the only person who will have access to the raw data (audio-tapes, interview notes) and the transcripts in electric form. Your anonymity will be completely protected by the use of pseudonyms throughout the research project both in the transcripts and in the culminating qualitative text. Any portions of your responses that may identify actual individuals will be replaced by pseudonyms.

The results of this inquiry are not intended for commercial purposes. This research project is, however, part of the course work required in fulfillment of a Master of Education degree and, as such, will be shared in a written report. Aggregate results may be published in journals or offered as part of conference presentations. You will receive a copy of the final project report summarizing and interpreting the research findings.

Thank you in advance for your participation in my study,



Craig Findlay  
Social Studies Teacher and Curriculum Leader  
*Lethbridge Collegiate Institute*  
High School Social Studies Implementation Support  
*Southern Alberta Professional Development Consortium (SAPDC)*  
School 403-328-9606 Ext. 206  
Home 403-328-4002  
Cell 403-331-0918



## Appendix E Participant Consent Form

### **PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM**

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#### Transformative Curriculum: Changing Pedagogy and Practice

You are being invited to participate in a study entitled Transformative Curriculum: Changing Pedagogy and Practice that is being conducted by Craig Findlay. I am a graduate student in the Faculty of Education at the University of Lethbridge and if you have further questions please contact me by email or telephone: craig.findlay@lethsd.ab.ca or 403.328.9606 or 403.331.0918.

As a graduate student, I am required to conduct research as part of the requirements for a Master of Education degree. It is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Pamela Adams. You may contact my supervisor at 403.329.2468. You may verify the ethical approval of this study, or raise any concerns you might have, by contacting Dr. Richard Butt (Chair of the Faculty of Education Human Subject Research Committee at the University of Lethbridge): 403.329.2434.

The general purpose of my study is to explore the impact of curricular changes in the area of high school social studies. The project will gather data that will answer the question: *In what ways does a transformative curriculum, such as the new Alberta high school social studies program, promote change in pedagogy and teaching practice?*

The implementation of the new high school social studies curriculum has initiated a process of change that has forced teachers to review pedagogy and teaching practice. A project chronicling the journey afforded by curricular change is necessary as a means to reflect on teaching and learning, and to serve as a tool to identify effective practice in a new era of social studies education in Alberta. Now is an ideal time to ask teachers about the impact significant curricular change on their professional reality.

Your participation in this research project will be confidential. If you choose to withdraw from this inquiry prior to data analysis and the writing of the final report, the data will not be used in the analysis. The validation of the interview transcripts will assume ongoing consent to participate.

All interviews will be conducted in private at a time and location that meets the needs of the participant. The researcher is the only person who will have access to the raw data (audio-tapes, interview notes) and the transcripts in electric form. Your anonymity will be completely protected by the use of pseudonyms throughout the research project both in the transcripts and in the culminating text. Any portions of your responses that may identify actual individuals will be replaced by pseudonyms.

The results of this inquiry are not intended for commercial purposes. This research project is, however, part of the course work required in fulfillment of a Master of Education degree and, as such, will be shared in a written report. Aggregate results may be published in journals or offered as part of conference presentations. You will receive a copy of the final project report summarizing and interpreting the research findings.

If you agree to voluntarily participate in this research, your participation will include sharing your experiences with the implementation of the new high school social studies curriculum. You will take part in an initial, semi-structured conversational interview of about 45 minutes in length that will be video-taped for transcription purposes. The interview will take place at a time and location convenient to the participant. You will be asked to verify the transcript for accuracy and offer clarification or elaboration of comments made in the initial interview in a second phone interview, if necessary. The secondary conversation may be initiated by either the researcher or participant.

There are no known or anticipated risks to you by participating in this research. Participation in this study may cause some inconvenience to you, including a total time commitment of three to four hours. In the event of a participant disclosing something he or she may later regret, an opportunity will be provided to review the interview transcript, to verify its content for accuracy, and to request that specific comments be removed for personal reasons.

The potential benefits of your participation in this research are associated with becoming a more reflective practitioner. Opportunities to talk about the implementation of the new Alberta high school social studies curriculum, to have your perspective shared and supporting other educators sharing the implementation journey.

Your participation in this research must be completely voluntary. If you do decide to participate, you may withdraw at any time without any consequences or any explanation. If you do withdraw from the study your data will not be used in the analysis. The validation of the interview transcripts will assume ongoing consent to participate.

Your anonymity will be completely protected by the use of pseudonyms throughout the inquiry both in the transcripts and in the final qualitative text. In addition, any portions of participants' responses that may identify actual individuals will be replaced by pseudonyms. Confidentiality of the data will be protected by ensuring that only the researcher has access to the raw data (video-tapes, interview notes) and the transcripts. Data from this study (video-tapes, interview notes, electronic transcripts saved on external computer storage devices) will be preserved in a secure filing cabinet for five years and then destroyed. Only the researcher will have access to the raw data (video-tapes and interview notes) and the transcripts.

The data collected in the course of this research project will be used as part of the work required in fulfillment of a Master of Education degree. As such, results will be shared in a written report and a full copy of this final report given to each participant. Aggregate results may be published in journals or offered as part of conference presentations.

Your signature below indicates that you understand the above conditions of participation in this study and that you have had the opportunity to have your questions answered by the researchers.

---

*Name of Participant*

---

*Signature*

---

*Date*

***A copy of this consent will be left with you, and a copy will be taken by the researcher.***

## Appendix F

## Transcript Approval Participant Email Contact

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

Thank you again for agreeing to take part in the educational research I am conducting as part of my final project toward completion of a Master of Education degree at the University of Lethbridge.

I am attaching a copy of the transcript created from the interview conducted a few weeks ago. I committed to sending you a copy of the interview in order to verify its contents and to give you an opportunity to strike from the record any information you do not feel comfortable with.

I will remind you that if I use part of your transcript in the final qualitative text your anonymity will be completely protected by the use of pseudonyms. Confidentiality of the data will be protected by ensuring that only the researcher has access to the raw data (video-tapes, interview notes) and the transcripts. Data from this study (video-tapes, interview notes, electronic transcripts saved on external computer storage devices) will be preserved in a secure location for five years and then destroyed. Only the researcher will have access to the raw data (video-tapes and interview notes) and the transcripts.

Please find time to review the transcript and contact me immediately if you have any questions and/or concerns regarding its content. If I do not hear from you I will assume you verify and release the contents of the transcript.

Thanks,



Craig Findlay  
Social Studies Teacher and Curriculum Leader  
*Lethbridge Collegiate Institute*  
High School Social Studies Implementation Support  
*Southern Alberta Professional Development Consortium (SAPDC)*  
School 403-328-9606 Ext. 206  
Home 403-328-4002  
Cell 403-331-0918

## Appendix G

## Sample Participant Interview Transcript: Mr. A

## Transformative Curriculum: Changing Pedagogy and Practice

## Mr. A Interview

Craig: So, if you could explain your teaching context, including your school size, average class size, department size, teaching experience, all that kind of stuff.

Mr. A.: Well, I teach at Lethbridge Collegiate Institute, I've taught here for eight years, about 1550 students, um, we have a pretty big social department of about anywhere from 7 to 8 teachers teaching social studies, 6 probably permanent social—like full time social studies teachers. I have taught all of the old social studies curriculum and all of the new curriculum at the dash-one level, as well as the grade nine level.

Craig: Alright, excellent. So how has the implementation of the new high school social studies curriculum changed your teaching, your instructional practice?

Mr. A.: I think it's allowed me to be a lot more creative in my instructional practice because there's less of a focus on content. There's less pressure to pay attention to the smallest little details that really, ultimately, as reflected in the new program, are they really significant? So it's allowed me to pedagogically kind of look at, different approaches to source analysis which I think is a powerful tool, like primary source analysis, but allowing the students to explore what they know and allowing the students

to draw information from the sources which, again, it makes that experience more powerful for them because I'm not sitting there telling them, and it allows them to kind of observe the world around them, so it's more student-based learning that way, and then with me of course facilitating and pointing [them] in the right direction. But I think it's a lot more—by changing those sorts of things a lot of the students will be a lot more engaged in the classroom and so, you know, the time flies in my class kind of thing.

Craig: Alright., what would you say then is the biggest difference between let's say a class five years ago in the old program and a class today?

Mr. A.: I guess five years ago if two years ago even, sometimes even this year I feel this way but there's less lecture-style happening, it's a lot more student exploration with me just, again, pointing them in the right direction. Far less lecturing happening and there's far less sort of worksheet activities, and worksheet—I mean there's still, you know, worksheet activities but even they have changed in their nature in a sense they're less factual-based. You can almost see in some of the activities sort of a transition from “Ok here's the fundamental knowledge and then take that into the higher levels of thinking.”, but at the same time, there's more, again, this might link to later on but the technology's also allowed us to get away from worksheets and still have valuable assessments of student learning.

Craig: So that leads into the next question so same beginning, how has the implementation of the new high school social studies program changed assessment practices for you? Or has it changed assessment practices for you?

Mr. A.: It's definitely changed assessment practices, in the sense that you have to think more holistically I think in your assessment because again there's less focus on content, so the students are really capturing the big picture and you have to look at the big picture when you're assessing the project. I think it does allow for more creativity in your assessment practice um, in the sense that the students can be more creative in the way they present the material to you. The new curriculum really supports the new shift in assessment, assessment for learning, so the students, I think are more willing to take risks because there's not necessarily a mark based on it and if you relay that like, through your assessment you say "Listen, I'm going to take this in, I'm going to look at it and give you feedback but it's not for marks.", I think the students are just more willing to take those risks. Also mastery become more of a key sort of assessment focus, the idea that, for example, with essay writing they can do a first attempt at an essay and you can give them both formative feedback, but also give them a summative grade because they like to know where they're at and gives them sort of some direction but they can redo that essay, um, and hand in a second attempt and you can see more growth. I think overall, in general, with this whole program studies you can see much more growth in the students. It might be in a period, but usually it's in a week or a unit or across the semester, the growth is outstanding, and again, if you give them the overall issue from day one and have them write on it they sit there and look at you with blank eyes. When you hand that

same—you know, their response from day one back to them at the end of the semester they laugh at themselves, because they start to realize how much they've actually learned. I hope that answers that question.

Craig: Maybe you've addressed this a little bit, in terms of your discussion of summative assessment, but are those any different from two or three or five years ago to today? Have the changes you mentioned in the program impacted what summative assessment looks like?

Mr. A.: Yeah, there's less summative assessment in the sense that—for some reason I felt like there was a lot of pressure to always be taking things in and I think for whatever reason it felt like if you took it in, you had to mark it for a summative grade; you had to have a grade on it. you can still take lots of things in but you don't have as many grades in your mark book, and some say that's not as good but I would argue that if you're giving them formative assessment, you know, the marks actually will improve, their performance and knowledge and understanding will improve, and you don't need—you're still getting feedback by looking over the work, you don't need to have a summative mark.

Craig: Thank you. The next question, again, the beginning is the same, what impact has the implementation of the new program had on student learning? So now looking at, if you can, a student perspective, you already kind of touched on some of that but...

Mr. A.: Yeah, I think—well I think it also allows for a lot more student reflection. Again, you could do an assignment, take it in... [camera beeps, interruption] Um, you can take an assignment in and you can give them formative assessment—

Craig: Actually sorry, it's the batteries. Sorry man, now you can think about your answer!

Mr. A.: There's a lot of overlap though hey?

Craig: Yeah, there will be in a lot of these questions.

Mr. A.: Where'd you get that tripod?

[Talking about tripod...]

I had a good answer, now I forget!

Craig: [laughs] There's no such thing as a bad answer.

Mr. A.: I think as far as student learning goes, the students are more responsible for their learning in the sense that, again, without the sort of stress of all this taking things in and giving formative assessment. There's a lot more room for them to reflect on their own learning, which allows for them, like kind of a double feedback; they can reflect themselves, and you can reflect on their learning and give them that feedback. And I think they also see a lot more growth within themselves because you know, you can do an assignment, let it sit, you can introduce some new concepts, they can explore those,

and they can go back and look at what they've done previously and have new ideas, new insights and they can actually go, "Oh you know what, I was kind of off on that.", and make changes and that kind of thing, and I think that's extremely valuable. Even pedagogically, you know, I used to try and kind of keep things like sort of—not a secret, but I wanted to surprise them with like, I'd have an introduction to a lesson and, with the idea that I would lead them into the bulk of a lesson and it would kind of shock them. Pedagogically now, if you introduce a concept right away, you know, "This is what we're going to talk about.", and they kind of...it allows them to explore that concept before you really push them in the right direction or give them a source to look at or whatever it is, um, and explore what they know, then you do your lesson and at the end of the lesson they can almost see how far they've come personally that way, so pedagogically, that pedagogical shift, that influence has allowed them, again, to see their own growth and reflect more on what they've done. I think they personally feel like they're learning.

Craig: Alright, thank you. Again, the next question, the implementation of the new program, how has it changed the way you use technology in your teaching practice? I know you alluded to this already too, but if you could comment on that.

Mr. A.: Well, again, the idea of allowing them to use sources to...you know draw information from sources has allowed us to use, I mean, the internet a lot more in classes, video technology, more so than we used to but it's not so much put a movie in and watch the movie, we can show them little clips and little bits and pieces of things and have them analyze it, and again, from this perspective, from that perspective and you know, so

video technology is...it's, I mean, you can use a video clip as a source of information but not necessarily information that the clip is supposed to be delivering.

Craig: So how are you accessing those video clips? You keep mentioning video clips.

Mr. A.: YouTube, Discovery learning websites, or it could be just a video clip from a DVD or a chapter of a movie or something like that. Online streaming or whatever website stream. Again, like, today I just showed a news clip on the two conservative MLA's that jumped to the wild rose, you know, CBC. You can find like a three minute little clip, you can let the news tell the story, but again, because of the emphasis on multiple perspectives and identifying media bias, you can show them a media source and that leads into these skills that the program is out for. Rather than me sit there and discuss it with them, we can give them a source and analyze it and work on our skills all the time. So we can use technology to do that. At the same time, there seems to be a big push for allowing them a lot more—with differentiation of instruction—allowing them to express their learning in a lot of different ways, and technology is a great way to do that, but they don't have to use technology either, that's kind of the great thing about it, but they can use things like movie maker to make movies, they can use PowerPoint although personally I'm trying to move away from PowerPoint. Students can explore different ways to use media technology that are on the internet like, ...what's the website where they can make movies really simply? I forget what it's called.

Craig: I can't remember either. I know the one you're talking about though

Mr. A.: The other thing though, we can use technology for written sources, again, to analyze for media bias, but also to create functional literacy in the students. It doesn't even have to be written text though, like, can they watch a media clip and really understand what its saying? That's a big thing that I think as students become more involved with the internet, are they really fully comprehending what these pages are about or what they're saying? There's so much information out there. You know, are they just scanning over things? Do they really have research skills? Can they really summarize what its saying? If you give them a webpage, could they really surf it properly? You know... do they even use the word surf anymore? [laughs] Or, if you give them an assignment and give them freedom on the internet, do they even know where to start? And if they look at a webpage and look at and say I can't find anything, do they understand that they need to look at more than one source? And how to fully explore that? So technology allows you to do that, make them functionally literate, but it's not a functional literacy that I would understand when I was a kid like, "Can you read?", it's, "Can you fully survive the twenty-first century?"

Craig: Alright.

Mr. A.: Hope that answers the question.

Craig: Definitely.

Mr. A.: And flip cams. Flip cams for formative assessment during class. You know if you can't—if a group is doing—sorry, if students are doing group work, and you can't be with every group to see how they're doing, you know, one of the students can video record whatever the groups producing and after class you can just watch these little segments and you know, get a sense of where they're at. Are they understanding the concepts? Do I need to re-address, you know... wow that's amazing how they presented that, I would never have even thought about that. It's a great way for them to express themselves and allows you to get some formative assessment.

Craig: There are two more questions left. The second to last one is how has the implementation of the new program changed your engagement in professional development and professional collaboration? So has the new program, I guess, afforded any new opportunities with respect to that? Either of those two things.

Mr. A.: Absolutely. Well, I've been lucky enough to work in a big department so we have lots of ideas out there. I think even pedagogically, the new program really supports multiple perspectives, so because we have such a large department, we can collaborate a lot more in a sense that I can have an idea on this but I get stuck and someone else can look at it and take it a new direction or someone can give me an assignment and if I disagree, I could approach it differently. But the new program, there's so much flexibility I guess, that you can do the same concept four different ways, and it's promoted collaboration because you want to try new different ways and new things all the time. So that in itself is PD. The new program is...because it's issue-based, your whole approach

is a lot different as well, in a sense that even in your planning you're almost...you know, you know where you want it, you know they should be able to address this issue question, you know, the overlaying issue question or each of the you know, the smaller related issues and you can plan accordingly. We've had an opportunity to work with you and an opportunity to work with the understanding by design work books and—what would you call it?

Craig: It's approach.

Mr. A.: It's approach in general and that's allowed us to I guess be more comfortable with the program studies. So that would be something I would recommend to anybody is looking into the understanding by design or backwards design sort of model. Working with technology, how can we—you know, there's a big push in our district for us to develop ourselves professionally as far as how do we engage the 21<sup>st</sup> century learner? And so technology is obviously one of those things. How can we use technology that's meaningful to these students? How can we engage them by using the technology that they know? So for example, this might come back to the other question but it's possible for us to do a class survey anonymously by using text messaging, you know, by using—I forget the name of the website—but you can post the question and you give them the text number, they punch it in and you get instant results. You know, and it's kind of a fun way to—the kids love doing it because you're reaching out to their world, right, and so developing yourselves with technology and finding new ways to tap into technology, not just like computer labs but things that they use everyday has allowed us to engage

students that way. I can't think of all the other ones off the top of my head. There are more things I just...

Craig: What is the most significant change between the new and old program, so where you are now as a social studies teacher to where you were just a few years ago on the old curriculum? What do you see as the most significant change that's happened as a result of the new program?

Mr. A.: When young people ask you "why did you become a teacher?" my response was always "well I thought I could do a better job than some of the teachers I had." I now feel like, like from the old curriculum to the new curriculum, I'm making a difference. I feel like the students are actually walking away taking something valuable from their social studies education. I feel there's much more growth in the students and I feel that largely it's because it's more hands on, it's more student-driven, um, it's more flexible for them. I just feel like from day one in the semester to the last day the growth is huge, it's immense and you know, the students realize it and do walk away with a positive experience.

Craig: Alright, any final things to add before we wrap up the interview?

Mr. A.: I don't know...social studies rules! Woo!

Craig: Alright, thanks.

## Appendix H

## Interview Field Notes Sample

Transformative Curriculum: Changing Pedagogy and Practice

Interview Field notes

Mr.A

Mr. A. was very comfortable with the interview process. I believe this is related to a couple of key factors. First, we are quite close friends and long time colleagues. Our friendship made Mr. A. a good choice for the first interview. Stress levels were likely lowered for both of us. Second, the interview environment was familiar to both of us – it was conducted at the back of my room. My room serves as the social studies department gathering point and of course is where I teach on a daily basis.

Mr. A's answers would have been similar to many things that would have come to my mind if I was answering the questions. Again, I think I can reconcile this with some of the aforementioned factors, in addition to the fact that Mr. A. and I have taken part in many of the same professional development activities—at school and outside of school—leaving us with similar experiences over the last few years.

I have some concerns with respect to my research connected to the fact that Mr. A. is a colleague, but I am confident that his answers were honest and genuine. My concerns will be reflected in the limitations discussion of my final paper. The concern will undoubtedly rear itself again as I have worked with most high school social studies teachers in Southern Alberta, either through my work with the Southern Alberta

Professional Development Consortium or other collaborative endeavors. The fact is the Southern Alberta high school social studies community is not that large and if you have been teaching for seventeen years—like I have—you are likely to have interacted with most teachers in your subject area.

## Appendix I

## Interview Transcript with Analytic Notes (scanned)

Transformative Curriculum: Changing Pedagogy and Project Practice

Billy Baum interview Mr. A

Craig: So, if you could explain your teaching context, including your school size, average class size, department size, teaching experience, all that kind of stuff.

Bill: Well, I teach at Lethbridge Collegiate Institute, I've taught here or eight years, about 1550 students, um, we have a pretty big social department of about anywhere from 7 to 8 teachers teaching social studies, 6 probably permanent social—like full time social studies teachers. I've taught all of the old social studies curriculum and all of the new curriculum at the dash-one level and as well as the grade nine level.

Craig: Alright, excellent. So how has the implementation of the new high school social studies curriculum changed your teaching, your instructional practice?

Bill: I think it's allowed me to be a lot more creative in my instructional practice because there's less of a focus on content. There's less pressure to pay attention to the smallest little details that really, ultimately, as reflected in the new program, are they really significant? So it's allowed me to pedagogically kind of look at, um, different approaches to source analysis which I think is a powerful tool, like primary source analysis, but allowing the students to explore what they know and allowing the students to draw information from the sources which, again, it makes that experience more powerful for them because I'm not sitting there telling them, and it allows them to kind of observe the

Schools 1550

8 yrs. exp.

\*taught all new and all old programs

Student centered

1

world around them, so it's more student-based learning that way, and then with me of course facilitating and pointing [them] in the right direction. But I think it's a lot more—by changing those sorts of things a lot of the students will be a lot more engaged in the classroom and so, you know, the time flies in my class kind of thing.

Craig: Alright., what would you say then is the biggest difference between let's say a class five years ago in the old program and a class today?

Bill: I guess five years ago if two years ago even, sometimes even this year I feel this way but, um, there's less lecture-style happening, it's a lot more student exploration with me just, again, pointing them in the right direction. Far less lecturing happening and there's far less sort of worksheet activities, and worksheet—I mean there's still, you know, worksheet activities but even they have changed in their nature in a sense they're less factual-based. You can almost see in some of the activities, um, sort of a transition from “Ok here's the fundamental knowledge and then take that into the higher levels of thinking.”, but at the same time, there's more, again, this might link to later on but the technology's also allowed us to get away from worksheets and still have valuable assessments of student learning.

Craig: So that leads into the next question so same beginning, how has the implementation of the new high school social studies program changed assessment practices for you? Or has it changed assessment practices for you?

Bill: It's definitely changed assessment practices, in the sense that, um, you have to think more holistically I think in your assessment because, um, again there's less focus on content, so the students are really capturing the big picture and you have to look at the big picture when you're assessing the project. I think it does allow for more creativity in your assessment practice um, in the sense that the students can be more creative in the way they present the material to you. The new curriculum really supports the new shift in assessment, assessment for learning, so the students, I think are more willing to take risks because there's not necessarily a mark based on it, um, and if you relay that like, through your assessment you say "Listen, I'm going to take this in, I'm going to look at it and give you feedback but it's not for marks.", I think the students are just more willing to take those risks. Also mastery become more of a key sort of assessment focus, the idea that, for example, with essay writing they can do a first attempt at an essay and you can give them both formative feedback, but also give them a summative grade because they like to know where they're at and gives them sort of some direction but they can redo that essay, um, and hand in a second attempt and you can see more growth. I think overall, in general, with this whole program studies you can see much more growth in the students. It might be in a period, but usually it's in a week or a unit or across the semester, the growth is outstanding, and again, if you give them the overall issue from day one and have them write on it they sit there and look at you with blank eyes. When you hand that same—you know, their response from day one back to them at the end of the semester they laugh at themselves, because they start to realize how much they've actually learned. I hope that answers that question.

less content

more creative assessment

UoP  
big picture

student risk taking  
summative assess mastery

more growth in students

A  
Q?

Craig: Maybe you've addressed this a little bit, in terms of your discussion of summative assessment, but are those any different from two or three or five years ago to today? Have the changes you mentioned in the program impacted what summative assessment looks like?

Bill: Yeah, there's less summit of assessment in the sense that—for some reason I felt like there was a lot of pressure to always be taking things in and I think for whatever reason it felt like if you took it in, you had to mark it for a summative grade; you had to have a grade on it. Now there's—you can still take lots of things in but you don't have as many grades in your mark book, and some say that's not as good but I would argue that if you're giving them formative assessment, you know, the marks actually will improve, their performance and knowledge and understanding will improve, and you don't need— you're still getting feedback by looking over the work, you don't need to have a summative mark.

Craig: Thank you. The next question, again, the beginning is the same, what impact has the implementation of the new program had on student learning? So now looking at, if you can, a student perspective, you already kind of touched on some of that but...

Bill: Yeah, I think—well I think it also allows for a lot more student reflection. Again, you could do an assignment, take it in... [camera beeps, interruption] Um, you can take an assignment in and you can give them formative assessment—

Craig: Actually sorry Bill, it's the batteries. Sorry man, now you can think about your answer!

Bill: There's a lot of overlap though hey?

Craig: Yeah, there will be in a lot of these questions.

Bill: Where'd you get that tripod?

[Talking about tripod...]

I had a good answer, now I forget!

Craig: [laughs] There's no such thing as a bad answer.



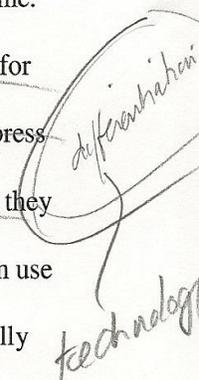
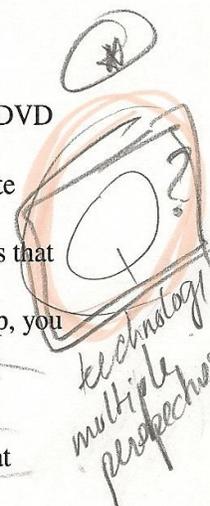
Bill: I think as far as student learning goes, the students are more responsible for their learning in the sense that, again, without the sort of stress of all this taking things in and giving formative assessment. There's a lot more room for them to reflect on their own learning, um, which allows for them, like kind of a double feedback; they can reflect themselves, and you can reflect on their learning and give them that feedback. And I think they also see a lot more growth within themselves, um, because you know, you can do an assignment, let it sit, you can introduce some new concepts, they can explore those, and they can go back and look at what they've done previously and have new ideas, new insights and they can actually go, "Oh you know what, I was kind of off on that.", and make changes and that kind of thing, and I think that's extremely valuable. Even

Craig: So how are you accessing those video clips? You keep mentioning video clips.

Bill: YouTube, Discovery learning websites, or it could be just a video clip from a DVD or a chapter of a movie or something like that. Online streaming or whatever website stream. Again, like, today I just showed a news clip on the two conservative MLA's that jumped to the wild rose, you know, CBC. You can find like a three minute little clip, you can let the news tell the story, but again, because of the emphasis on multiple perspectives and identifying media bias, you can show them a media source and that leads into these skills that the program is out for. Rather than me sit there and discuss it with them, we can give them a source and analyze it and work on our skills all the time. So we can use technology to do that. At the same time, there seems to be a big push for allowing them a lot more—with differentiation of instruction—allowing them to express their learning in a lot of different ways, and technology is a great way to do that, but they don't have to use technology either, that's kind of the great thing about it, but the can use things like movie maker to make movies, they can use PowerPoint although personally I'm trying to move away from PowerPoint. Students can explore different ways to use media technology that are on the internet like, ...what's the website where they can make movies really simply? I forget what it's called.

Craig: I can't remember either. I know the one you're talking about though

Bill: The other thing though, we can use technology for written sources, again, to analyze for media bias, but also to create functional literacy in the students. It doesn't even have



to be written text though, like, can they watch a media clip and really understand what its saying? That's a big thing that I think as students become more involved with the internet, are they really fully comprehending what these pages are about or what they're saying? There's so much information out there. You know, are they just scanning over things? Do they really have research skills? Can they really summarize what its saying? If you give them a webpage, could they really surf it properly? You know... do they even use the word surf anymore? [laughs] Or, if you give them an assignment and give them freedom on the internet, do they even know where to start? And if they look at a webpage and look at and say I can't find anything, do they understand that they need to look at more than one source? And how to fully explore that? So technology allows you to do that, make them functionally literate, but it's not a functional literacy that I would understand when I was a kid like, "Can you read?", it's, "Can you fully survive the twenty-first century?"

research skills

critical thinking

21st Century learner

Craig: Alright.

Bill: Hope that answers the question.

Craig: Definitely.

Bill: And flip cams. Flip cams for formative assessment during class. You know if you can't—if a group is doing—sorry, if students are doing group work, and you can't be with every group to see how they're doing, you know, one of the students can video



Flip Cameras for formative assessment

record whatever the groups producing and after class you can just watch these little segments and you know, get a sense of where they're at. Are they understanding the concepts? Do I need to re-address, you know...wow that's amazing how they presented that, I would never have even thought about that. It's a great way for them to express themselves and allows you to get some formative assessment.

Craig: There are two more questions left. The second to last one is how has the implementation of the new program changed your engagement in professional development and professional collaboration? So has the new program, I guess, afforded any new opportunities with respect to that? Either of those two things.

Bill: Absolutely. Well, I've been lucky enough to work in a big department so we have lots of um, ideas out there. I think even pedagogically, the new program really supports multiple perspectives, so because we have such a large department, we can collaborate a lot more in a sense that I can have an idea on this but I get stuck and someone else can look at it and take it a new direction or someone can give me an assignment and if I disagree, I could approach it differently. But the new program, there's so much flexibility I guess, that you can do the same concept four different ways, and it's promoted collaboration because you want to try new different ways and new things all the time. So that in itself is PD. Um, the new program is...because it's issue-based, your whole approach is a lot different as well, um, in a sense that even in your planning you're almost...you know, you know where you want it, you know they should be able to address this issue question, you know, the overlaying issue question or each of the you

large dept.  
- collaborate



know, the smaller related issues and you can plan accordingly. We've had an opportunity to work with you and an opportunity to work with, um, the understanding by designing work books and—what would you call it?

Craig: It's approach.

Bill: It's approach in general and that's allowed us to I guess be more comfortable with the program studies. So that would be something I would recommend to anybody is looking into the understanding by design or backwards design sort of model. Working with technology, how can we—you know, there's a big push in our district for us to develop ourselves professionally as far as how do we engage the 21<sup>st</sup> century learner? And so technology is obviously one of those things. How can we use technology that's meaningful to these students? How can we engage them by using the technology that they know? So for example, this might come back to the other question but it's possible for us to do a class survey anonymously by using text messaging, you know, by using—I forget the name of the website—but you can post the question and you give them the text number, they punch it in and you get instant results. You know, and it's kind of a fun way to—the kids love doing it because you're reaching out to their world, right, and so developing yourselves with technology and finding new ways to tap into technology, not just like computer labs but things that they use everyday has allowed us to engage students that way. I can't think of all the other ones off the top of my head. There are more things I just...

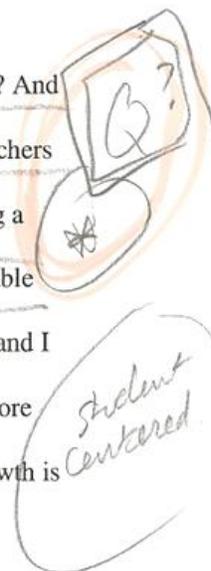
UbD

backwards  
design  
model

technology

Craig: No, that's good, so the final question is I guess reflecting on all that you've given in terms of your answers. What is the most significant change between the new and old program, so where you are now as a social studies teacher to where you were just a few years ago on the old curriculum? What do you see as the most significant change that's happened as a result of the new program?

Bill: When you're young people ask you, you know, why did you become a teacher? And my response was always "well I thought I could do a better job than some of the teachers I had." I, you know, like from the old curriculum to the new curriculum, I'm making a difference. I feel like the students are actually walking away taking something valuable from their social studies education. I feel there's much more growth in the students and I feel that largely it's because it's more hands on, it's more student-driven, um, it's more flexible for them. I just feel like from day one in the semester to the last day the growth is huge, it's immense and you know, the students realize it and do walk away with a positive experience.



Craig: Alright, any final things to add before we wrap up the interview?

Bill: I don't know...social studies rules! Woo!

Craig: Alright, thanks buddy!

Bill: That's hard!