

Curricula Issues

by Dale Martelli, BCSSTA President

Social Studies Curricula Issues:

In the process of placing inquiry in front of content and in the realignment of grade-content itself in the new Social Studies curriculum, there has been many issues raised. With respect to what some see as a loss of content, how to read the new curriculum needs to be reinforced. The new curriculum is not the standard checklist that the old curriculum was. Teachers need to really start with the competencies. One example of a content issue is the apparent omission of the Seven Years War. French-British relations during this period will be taught. Using cause and consequence, it would be near impossible not to look at the Seven Years War. Without this event, it would be difficult to explain the nature and development of both the international relations of the two empires and of the history of invasion, colonization, and political development of Canada. It is further an ideal case on many fronts for the new curriculum in that it is both "domestic" and "global". And the event itself is rife with multiple interpretations and perspectives ranging from indigenous to American perspectives.

Some ask why the American Revolution is listed. It is listed only as a sample topic; this is not to diminish its significance. From my perspective and interests, I could lament the lack of history devoted to slavery or the Ottoman History. I could make the argument that the latter has more of a contemporary impact on our daily lives than the spice war (not really the first global conflict since one, the term "global" needs to be carefully defined and two, see, for example, the Battle of Lepanto).

Since the days of Ranke, historians continue to debate what it means to be historically educated and what a historical methodology should look like. In 1961, Carr argued that the only worthy history to study is social history. In 1968, Elton argued that political history is the only route. More recently, Jenkins argues that we never really study history just the views of historians on their interpretations of the past (Carr, 1964; Elton, 2002; Evans, 1999; Jenkins, 1991). This is another layer to the debate over the nature and application of inquiry that has been in

discourse since at least the time of Dewey (Dewey, 1910, 1938, 2009). But the point is people have argued for more geography, more political science, more indigenous studies...all arguing that these things are all necessary conditions of being educated. We need to clarify what inquiry can look like in the classroom and recognize, I think, that the issues around content are secondary. Again, I would argue, that if we take a careful look at the "core competencies", many of the issues might be sorted out.

Two things. I believe in the ability of teachers to design their own curricula that can reflect the nature and issues of historical thinking while I may not always agree with their content choices, strategies, or interpretations. As it is in chemistry or physics, I do not agree that people should be teaching social studies with having the necessary expertise but unfortunately we have little control over that world. If people really believe that particular content of history, geography, political science, et al should be taught, then we should be encouraging them to post lessons. For instance, I think labour history needs more attention and at this point in the process, lessons, resources, and unit plans, posted on the TeachBC portal should be posted in order to address this perceived weakness. This should also occur if people feel events, persons, issues, et al, like the Seven Years War, may be missing. I tentatively think that we are not reading the competencies correctly or seeing how they connect, inform, and shape the content. This is not a Granatstein approach (somewhat unfair characterization but more in keeping with his public rather than his actual intellectual profile).

While I am not a fan of education for some fiction of Canadian-ness, Canadian consciousness, or some notion of what constitutes being an obliging citizen of this fictional nation state (lots of loaded assumptions in there), I did a straw poll today among my grade 12s. Other than being able to tell me that the war was 7 years long, they no recall of the war and its impact on the world and Canada. Perhaps if we start with cause and significance, there might be a better stick. I would also argue that this memory issue may be in fact who we are as Canadians. For further reference, there are studies, like Reisman's "The 'Document-Based Lesson': Bringing disciplinary inquiry into high school history classrooms with adolescent struggling readers" (Reisman, 2012) seem to show that inquiry based learning, using primary documents in

conjunction with secondary sources, makes for better student retention.

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Reader Feedback



For those interested in responding to Dale's article, to developments with the new Social Studies curriculum, or anything else in *Dimensions*, please feel free to email me at reid_chad@surreyschools.ca

Conference Recap: Opening Remarks

by Dale Martelli

Welcome,

I would like to thank all of you for making your way here and I do hope you all have a rewarding day. I would like to thank the BCSSTA executive for all their hard work putting together this conference and we applaud their efforts.

We are trying something a bit new or at least a few new twists to the day. Our conference's theme is "Media and Truth in the 21st Century." This was in part shaped by our keynote speakers. Our keynote speakers are first Mohamed Fahmy, an award-winning journalist, war correspondent and author, followed by Althia Raj, the Huffington Post Canada's Ottawa bureau chief, and ending with a discussion panel.

As for the BCSSTA, this has continued to be a busy year. We have developed new partnerships, extended our representation to the Island, enhanced our newsletter, "Dimensions", kept up our news feed...and the list goes on. One of our most important goals is to try to boost the relevance of the BCSSTA beyond the one-off annual conference.

To this end, we have formed a partnership with the British Columbia Librarians Association to develop a peer-reviewed academic journal with the intent to build bridges between practice and research. We will be working closely with Simon Fraser University, Dr. Mark Leier from the History Department and Dr. Kevin O'Neill from the Education Faculty will be on our editorial board.

We have also partnered with MyPITA, the Provincial Intermediate Teachers Association, and the BCAMT, the association of Math Teachers, to put on a joint conference, May 12th in Whistler. We invite you to attend this exciting new conference in the Spring!

We have also supported the expansion of Local Specialist Associations in the Central

Okanagan and Peace River. We are hoping to see the development of one on the island. We have continued to advocate for Social Studies concerns with the BCTF and PSAC and with the Ministry. This brings me to a few comments about the new curriculum. The following may be a tad politically contentious and mostly reflects my thoughts.

The Curriculum:

From the field and within our own executive, there are issues. These are the attachment of grade levels to grad courses and the implementation process.

Attaching grades mocks the intent of the course writers and is purely arbitrary, necessary because the infrastructure seems to require it. We would like a solution that leads to an even playing field for course delivery. What bothers me about the whole process is how we moved from trying to create a curricular environment that allowed for teacher, school, and community autonomy, creative management of delivery, et al., to this, where "system" or structural requirements restrict all these things, with the very weak homily that somehow the public discourse is the arbitrator. We have had discussions with the Ministry and we are hopeful that changes will be made.

I have two outstanding concerns:

1. Social Studies 11: We repeatedly asked for a gradual implementation. I could care less about politics so if this is the driver, what can I say? It was asked that supporting arguments should be provided. I have provided them. And if we were all classroom teachers, I think the conversation would be short. We keep referring to how "skills" drive the curricula. At least with respect to Social Studies, the vacuous appellation of "competencies" are not skills.

The historical thinking concepts embrace a meta-cognitive approach to our discipline and when adapted for all disciplines with Social Studies, represent a discipline-specific literacy. In my mind, these literacy concepts are not skills. And working from literacy concepts does not in any

way preclude content or diminish the significance of content.

If we do not have the SS11 model, thousands of BC students will graduate without ever exploring 20th century history. This is not trivial, to be brushed under the carpet of "well, you know, we are all about the skills" claim. I can't imagine what the [Ellen] Hisdals and [Jack] Granatsteins in op-eds will do with this. But, for us, as passionate Social Studies teachers, however we may feel about the new curriculum, this is wrong. The grad curriculum was supposed to be in draft so the commitment to teach the new SS10 was the teacher's choice. Many of us chose to keep with the old on the presumption that we would have one more year to offer SS11 to keep the implementation process logical and gradual. I am not sure what to say to someone who does not see this.

2. Open Course Development: I don't understand why course development may be closed or relegated to the "BAA" process [ed. Note – "Board Authority Authorized"]. Why do we not opt for a process of open course development is beyond me. The process could involve school, district, and ministry vetting and this would allow for the development of courses that would meet the needs of students looking for a less academic course, like "Outdoor Geography" or "Humanities 11".

These are just some of what we do at the BCSSTA. I really hope your day is rewarding.

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