

Alberta. And this fundamental shift captured in the second pair of questions – *how* and *why* we teach social studies. The new direction will require more profound reflection and professional learning, particularly in terms of embedding critical thinking as a central part of social studies teaching.

Among the many elements in the new curriculum that have implications for *how* social studies is taught, three features seems especially significant: a focus on inquiry and issues, consideration of multiple perspectives, and the use of diverse resources.

These features were emphasized in the former curriculum. Consequently, for many students, social studies was largely a matter of finding factual information on a topic from a single textbook written from a presumably “objective” point of view. **The new curriculum seeks to make social studies a genuine inquiry where the task is not predominantly to find out what others know (students must, of**

course, do this) but to reach their own conclusions using information drawn from various sources and by considering differing perspectives.

Thus, inquiry requires that students make reasoned judgments about the most justifiable conclusions about the topic. In short, it requires that students think critically.

The most significant aspect of the new curriculum in addressing *why* we teach social studies in the attempt to make the aims of promoting citizenship and individual and collective identity more than a platitude. Embedded strongly throughout the curriculum is the view that social studies is not to be taught for its own sake, but must speak to all students (not simply so-called “mainstream” students) about who they are (identity) and what it means to live and act in a pluralist world (citizenship). Thus the rationale for studying topics ranging from “community” to “Confederation” is no longer because “student should know this.” The new curricu-

lum asks us to help students see how the study of these topics informs their understanding and appreciation of who they are and how they should act in the world. But we can’t simply dictate to students these conclusions; here again we need to invite and support students in thinking critically about the implications for themselves and others.

The differences in the new *how* and *why* of the program of studies are readily observed by contrasting typical factual questions from those involving critical inquiry. Significantly, the information required to answer the questions in the left-hand column is subsumed in the critical inquiry tasks listed in the right-hand column. The difference is that the critical inquiries require students to use this information to reach broadly informed judgments and that the questions are intended to develop students’ sense of citizenship and of collective and individual identity.

Annotated Resources, Web Sites, Books, etc.

Resources

Online Guide to Implementation, Alberta Education. This government website offers excellent support material for the new program of studies. Included are hundreds of lesson ideas, assessment tools and student resources using the critical thinking approach discussed in this feature article.

<http://new.onlineguide.learnalberta.ca>

Social Studies Program of Studies Kindergarten to Grade 12, Alberta Education. This government website contains the Social Studies Kindergarten to Grade 12 program of studies, the implementation schedule, updates on student and teacher resources as well as other information pertaining to the new Social Studies curriculum.

http://www.education.gov.ab.ca/k_12/curriculum/bySubject/social/default.asp

The Critical Thinking Consortium. The website for this non-profit group contains various articles on critical thinking and describes award winning teacher resources in social studies with sample downloadable lessons. www.tc2.ca

The Canadian Anthology of Social Studies: Issue and Strategies for Teachers. R. Case and Penney Clark (editors). Pacific Educational Press, Vancouver. This comprehensive collection of 41 articles by Canadian educators provides valuable insights and practical ideas for implementing many of the innovations in the new program of studies. A second edition of this collection, *The Anthology of Social Studies: Issue and Strategies for Elementary Teachers*, is scheduled for release in January 2007. www.pep.educ.ubc.ca

The Alberta Teachers’ Association Social Studies Specialist Council Website can be found at <http://ssc.teachers.ab.ca/>. For links to a world of pertinent information, spend some time browsing this very useful website. Planning for next year’s conference? The Specialist Council’s conference will be held at Jasper Park Lodge, reserve early.

Biographies

Dr. Roland Case is executive director of TC², The Critical Thinking Consortium, an association of 55 school districts, post-secondary institutions and teacher organizations. In addition to his teaching career as an elementary school teacher and as a university professor, Roland has worked with over 15,000 classroom teachers to support the infusion of critical thinking. Roland is senior editor of *Critical Challenges Across the Curriculum* – an award winning series of teaching resources for critical thinking. Roland is this year’s recipient of CUFA’s Distinguished Academics Career Achievement Award.

Wally Diefenthaler is regional director of TC² in Alberta and an experienced educator and facilitator. He is currently writing and editing materials for the Social Studies On-line Guide which supports the new Social Studies program in Alberta. Previously, he was seconded to Alberta Education as the 10-12 Social Studies Curriculum Manager to lead the development and writing of the new Social Studies high school curriculum. He has also worked extensively with K-9 Social Studies teachers and curriculum developers. Wally has extensive speaking experience on Social Studies related topics to a wide range of audiences; he has organized and led numerous consultations on Social Studies curriculum and assessment related activities.