

Artifact #3

Authentic Voices from St. Thomas Aquinas Roman Catholic Schools



## Authentic Voices Part 1: Social Studies Implementation Perspectives from Staff and Students

### BACKGROUND

2009-2010 marks the fifth and final year in the implementation of the new Social Studies Curriculum. The Edmonton Regional Consortium is now gathering “qualitative data” about the effectiveness of the implementation. With this in mind, I have spent the past two weeks in our schools, interviewing staff and students on their perspective of the implementation. Below are “snapshots” of Social Studies in STAR Catholic Schools.

### TEACHER VOICES

After five years of social studies implementation, what would you say have been the biggest changes to student learning? Where have you seen the biggest successes?

*The grade nines have really gravitated to the new curriculum. It is more sophisticated, and they enjoy the challenge to their thinking. They make contemporary connections to their world. I've seen a big movement in terms of responses to questions and issues.*

*Students are also really responding to making active change in their world. For us at Holy Trinity, social justice and social change are central to our vision and mission. The social studies curriculum allows our students to make the connections to justice.*

*The use of technology has been central to implementing the new curriculum as well. For example, through our B.I.T. project, our students have “skyped” with a lobbyist for aboriginal rights, and an editor of a Francophone newspaper in Quebec. I've also used Skype as a collaborative tool for planning.*

R. Olson, Holy Trinity Academy, Drayton Valley

*I would say that we have definitely become more activity and performance- based in our classrooms. There is a lot more creative thinking through role play and group work- there are so many more opportunities for creativity. I also like the emphasis we placed on literature with the story bins- the students are really making connections. Assessment is still the developing piece, as we look to find the best ways to find out how students are doing.*

Sharon Rushton, St. Anthony School, Drayton Valley

*This is my second year teaching the new social studies program to grade 6 students. Since its implementation I have seen a lot of success with the students understanding and connection to the*

*overall “government” theme. Beginning the unit with group cooperation and decision making teaches the students to work together and to know and understand what is needed to complete group work. The new curriculum calls for a lot of group work and decision making so it has been vital to begin with this topic. Leading into why we need governments to how governments work has also been successful through the use of group discussions, internet research and connecting with current events. I have found that connecting the “text book” or “objectives” with current events help the students to understand how and why governments are needed. Connecting with personal stories and information has also led to the students understanding.*

*The only difficulty I have found up to this point is how to get through the entire curriculum. It is difficult to manage the literature connections, the personal connections, and the current event connections with the program. Of course the material has to be integrated into other subject material otherwise you would never get through it.*

Shawna Callies, Gr. 6 teacher, Notre Dame, Leduc.

### Differentiating Instruction

*I’ve created a number of posters with pictures of the community. We have them around the classroom for students to use for reference, discussion, and leading into a lesson. I use lots of visuals that are specific, to increase their experiential background.*

*I’ve taught the new curriculum since it came out and of course every year is different since every group is different. Overall, if the students have average or above average abilities, they are quite successful. For the low-average student, I change the expectation of the amount they can successfully attain.*

Zoria Verhegge, Grade One, Sacred Heart School, Wetaskiwin

### Integrating Technology

*We skyped with Mr. Frank Garcia, of the Frank Garcia Foundation, on Jan. 29, 2009, to learn about each other's cultures and about the Aztec (Unit 2 in SS8). We Skyped for 45 minutes, learned things that weren't in the textbook, and also about their daily lives. A Spanish speaking student in my class served as ambassador and interpreter, and afterwards my students asked if we they could contact other cultures, like Greece and the Philippines. Two students even said that they did not know they could contact other cultures in this way.*

*So, a very positive experience all around!*

Ray Suchow, Grade Eight Social Studies teacher, Christ the King Jr Sr High, Leduc.

## STUDENT VOICES

### Grade Two

#### St. Augustine School, Ponoka



What do you know about the Acadians?

*They had to move; They speak French; They use to live in Acadia; A lot live in Meteghan today*

How did you learn that?

*We read books; Saw things that they had*

*We heard a story about a Grandma*

*We looked at pictures*

What do you know about the Ukrainians?

*They have been in Canada for 100 years; They had to move; They speak two languages; They have food like pyroghies and cabbage rolls*

How did you learn that?

*We read different books; We found out what others know about them; We looked at pictures*

What did you learn about the Inuit?

*That the ground is frozen, and you can only dig down about a foot; Some speak Cree and English, and they speak their own language; Sometimes it gets colder than -50 degrees in Iqaluit*

What are some of the differences between the Acadians, the Inuit and the Ukrainians?

*They have different languages; They live in different types of houses*

What are some of the things that are the same between the three groups?

*They all play sports; they all play hockey; They all swim; They all build their own houses; They all go to Church.*

From Mrs. McLaughlin's grade two class

### Grade Four:

#### St. Augustine School, Ponoka

What do you like best about grade four social studies?



*We like that we work on computers, and that we projects.*

*I liked learning about the Interior Plains where we live. Would you like to see the we did?*



*do group*

*because that's brochure that*

Shae and Lauren

#### Father Lacombe Catholic School, Lacombe.

What are the most important things you learned in social studies this year? (18 students responded in writing)

- **Natural resources (4)**

- **The 1880's and the 1900's (3)**
- **The regions in Alberta**
- **We got to learn how many changes happened in the 1900's**
- **Back in the day, they charged women to leave their farms and work**
- **When the Great Depression happened and people lost jobs, homes, dry crops. Food prices went high because of dry land (2)**
- **We learned that over the years the towns have changed**
- **When Mrs. M was using the time machine and said important things and we wrote notes**
- **The most important to me is when the fur trade came to Alberta**
- **That in the 1900's the crops burnt up from the sun was so hot in the summer**
- **The National and Provincial Parks**
- **The Aborigines**
- **Geography about the land (2)**
- **The first Nations used every part of the buffalo**
- **I think it was when we did the homesteading or when we did a PowerPoint about someone like Chief Crowfoot**
- **About the land over the years and how it changed**
- **The men going to war. The women went to the factories.**
- **I learned about Banff**
- **The Métis**

What were the many ways you learned in Social Studies? (Whole class discussion)

- **Role playing –our 1880's day**
- **Media art (like PowerPoint)**
- **Posters – when we created a tour booth**
- **Research**
- **Websites – especially 2learn (interactive)**
- **History – the Edukit**
- **Puppetry to learn about the fur trading days**
- **Homesteading – having an economy in the classroom, having the experience**
- **Gathered information when the teacher did a role play**
- **Group work**
- **Art and drawings on the “scroll TV” (students would create images of what they learned and connect their ideas on a paper scroll, which would be displayed inside a cardboard “TV”)**

### **St. Benedict School, Leduc**

*What are the most important things you learned in social studies this year? (15 students responded in writing)*

- **Métis and First Nations (15)**
- **Famous Canadians (Louis Riel; Maria Anne Gaboury, Anthony Henday etc.) (11)**
- **Fur trading (5)**
- **Aboriginal culture (Dream catchers, tepees, pemmican etc) (9)**
- **The Blackfoot people (8)**
- **The York Boat(5)**

- The Voyageurs (6)
- Different kinds of other foods (First Nations) (7)
- Alberta
- The dinosaurs (7)
- First Nations dislike that museums take their stuff.
- The buffalo
- Royal Tyrell Museum
- How Canada was started and explorers that came to Alberta

What were the many ways you learned in Social Studies? (Whole class discussion)

- Making and building (example – building a tepee)
- Internet research
- Reading material and having group discussion (“jigsaw”)
- Review



- Tasting food
- Field trip ( to Fort Edmonton and Ukrainian village)
- Guest Speaker (a Métis teacher came and spoke to us)
- Writing stories that put you in the character of someone who lived on the 1900’s
- Video conferencing with people and other classes

Mrs. H’s Grade Four Class

## Grade Six:

### Father Lacombe Catholic School, Lacombe:

Why do you learn about democracy in grade six? Why is it important?

*“So we know what to do when we are older.”*

*“We do a lot of projects. We compare types of democracies. It is important to learn social skills.”*

### Sacred Heart School, Wetaskiwin



What are the important ideas you have discovered in grade six social?  
*“Politics, the Legislative Assembly, Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Pierre Trudeau, laws, taxes, how a bill becomes law, democracy.”*

Why do you think you have learned this in grade six?

*“It’s a good time to start to understand...”*

*“You might want to learn more when you go to college...”*

*“You can start thinking about careers in politics.”*

*“To have a better life, a better career.”*

*“To know what is happening in the world now.”*

*“To know about our democratic government.”*

Mrs. J's Grade Six class, Sacred Heart School, Wetaskiwin.

## **Grade Nine**

### **St. Augustine School, Ponoka**

What do you like best about grade nine social studies?

*I like the change from just history to things like government.  
There is a lot more stuff that you can relate to.*

What do you do in social studies that you don't do in any other class?

*We do lots of debate...*

*Yeah, it's good to try looking at different points of view...*

*And we try to learn is what we can use in the future (for example learning about mixed economies)*

*We look at stuff in the past so we don't do that in the future....*

How important is technology in your social studies class?

*We do a lot of skypeing – we meet people and get their perspective on things like immigration and government...*

Colton, Celeste and Shayna, grade nine, St. Augustine School Ponoka.

## **Grade Twelve**

When you look at Social 30, what are the key concepts that you come away with?

*"We have learned about various ideologies. Lately we have been studying liberalism and liberal democracies."*

*"I like how history is not taught on its own, but it's part of the issues that we are studying."*

*"Current events too. The course deals with current issues, so we're always talking about current events."*

*"I also like how everything is about what is happening now. Even the text is current- it has a picture of Barrack Obama in it!!!"*

Of course, that text will become dated in three or four years...

*"Yeah, the education system has to keep progressing..."*

Every course has skills that we want students to attain. What skills do you come away with?

*"You learn to see things from different points of view. You get a different perspective when you are forming your own opinion"*

*"Another skill we've worked on is analyzing cartoons. Mr. G gets them right out of the newspaper and we discuss them*

*"I think it has really prepared us for adult life. We have become informed and we'll be informed adults"*

*"Before, I liked a particular party because of the party's colours (others laugh), Now I know what each party stands for..."*

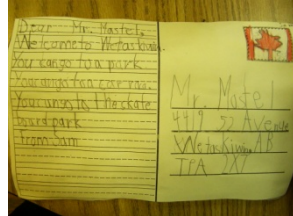
*"Many of my friends don't care about voting. I'm now old enough to vote, and it is important for me to understand my responsibility."*

*Italia, Lorina and Ben – grade 12 students, Christ The King Jr Sr High, Leduc.*

## **Classroom visits and projects**

### **Grade One: Sacred Heart School, Wetaskiwin**

The grade one's combined Language Arts and Social Studies, by creating postcards. They "sent" them to the principal, inviting him to come and see the sights of their community. The postcards explained three key locations to see in Wetaskiwin. They even created a "stamp" in the corner!



### **Grade Five: (Father Lacombe Catholic School, Lacombe)**

At the beginning of the class, the students wanted to share with me their previous days' work. They had completed a project to the rest of the school on the how the fight for women's right to vote affected Canadians. They combined a class PowerPoint with mini role play "vignettes" to enhance the concepts. They explained that in the past, there were not many rights for women. The "Famous Five" were leaders helped women be known as people, and helped get women the right to vote.



Ms. Williams then did an interactive read aloud of the book "A Bear at War" Along with student responses; Ms. Williams supported the book with other images from the Internet.

### **Grade Seven: (Father Lacombe Catholic School, Lacombe)**

Prior to my visit, the students had examined some Canadian immigration posters from the 1890's and 1910's. Once they identified the key messages and images in each, they created their own. The students presented the ideas to me. The students were able to orally explain why certain images and words in their posters would be attractive to prospective immigrants.



### **Grade One: Notre Dame School, Leduc**

In 2009, Mrs. Blackburn’s Grade One class explored their community, to find where important services could be found. They then created a PowerPoint with a “Who Am I? Riddle” to check their understanding.

Here is a slide from the PowerPoint:



The grain elevator is important because farmers used it to move grain a long time ago. It is now a historical landmark. It is near the train tracks.

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