Message from the Editor

The articles that are published in *The MERN Journal* bridge the gaps between research and practice in a variety of educational settings: K-12 and adult/post-secondary schools, classrooms, and administrative offices; government and other community service agencies; etc. The MERN partners listed on page 2 represent different languages and cultures that we are blessed to serve in our province. *The MERN Journal* is dedicated to promoting best practices in education by sharing the expertise and experiences of forum presenters with various experiential backgrounds.

*The MERN Journal* features articles based on MERN forum presentations, both past and current. All forum presenters are welcome to contribute manuscripts. The submissions are vetted through Heather Hunter, MERN director (heather.hunter@mern.ca). Our editor, Marion Terry, then works with the successful authors to polish their manuscripts for publication.

We publish annual “all-inclusive” volumes and periodic “special issue” volumes based on specific forums. Volume 9 is a special issue volume dedicated to the spring 2014 forum on social studies education. Volume 10 will be our annual volume dedicated to MERN forums held during the 2014-15 academic year.

Our annual volumes may include manuscripts from prior forums. If you presented in a previous year and did not contribute to that year’s volume, do not despair. We invite you to revisit your presentation notes and write a manuscript for consideration by Heather Hunter at any time.

For more information about MERN and its other publications and services to the field of research and education in Manitoba, visit the following website: www.mern.ca

~ Marion Terry, Editor

MANUSCRIPT SPECIFICATIONS

One-inch (2.54 cm.) margins all around

Times New Roman 12-point font

Double-line spacing

Essay style = indented paragraphs

APA style (6th edition) for the in-text citations and the list of references

Page 1 = Include the MERN forum (month, year) and your title, name, institutional affiliation, email address, and a short biography (maximum 100 words). We print the biographies and email addresses only when space permits at the end of a volume.

Page 2 = Start the page with your abstract (maximum 150 words). Then repeat the title and start your article.
The Manitoba Education Research Network, supported by Manitoba Education and Advanced Education, involves the department of education, university faculties, school divisions, and provincial education partner organizations. Now in its tenth year, the Network has an established agenda of annual events and research activities that respond to educational priorities in the context of continuous school improvement, professional development, and student learning.

Manitoba-based MERN initiatives contribute in practical ways and to the field of knowledge by

1. building local capacity through partner research activities, and
2. sharing local knowledge through dissemination events and publications.

Partner Institutions and Organizations

Brandon University
Université de Saint-Boniface
University College of the North
University of Manitoba
University of Winnipeg
Aboriginal Education Directorate
Council of School Leaders of the Manitoba Teachers’ Society
Manitoba Association of Parent Councils
Manitoba Association of School Business Officials
Manitoba Association of School Superintendents
Manitoba Education and Advanced Education
Manitoba First Nations Education Resource Centre
Manitoba Metis Federation
Manitoba School Boards Association
Manitoba School Improvement Program
Manitoba Teachers’ Society
Treaty Relations Commission of Manitoba

EDITING for volume 9 by Marion Terry, Professor, Brandon University

COVER DESIGN for volume 9 by Michael Nantais, Assistant Professor, Brandon University, with thanks to K.P. Binda for providing some of the photographed items

INTRODUCTION to volume 9 by Lloyd Kornelsen, Assistant Professor, University of Winnipeg

We wish especially to recognize the MANITOBA TEACHERS’ SOCIETY for financially supporting the printing of this special issue of The MERN Journal.
Introduction to Volume 9

At a Manitoba Education Research Network forum on March 22, 2013, several hundred educators gathered at the University of Manitoba to commemorate and discuss recent research in social studies education. One of the expressed purposes of the forum was to hear from members of the Grade Twelve Inquiry Project (GTIP). The GTIP consisted of nine high school teachers (along with several research/discussion facilitators) who met on six occasions in the fall/winter of 2013-14 to discuss their experiences piloting the new grade 12 social studies course, “Global Issues: Citizenship and Sustainability.” The teachers represented a range of teaching experience (early, mid, late career) and a diversity of schools from across the province. The meetings’ purpose was for classroom practitioners to share their impressions, observations, and insights on teaching the new course, with a view to making recommendations for curriculum implementation and teaching practice.

This MERN initiative began as a series of meetings between representatives of Manitoba School Improvement Program, Manitoba Education and Advanced Education Curriculum Branch (Social Studies), University of Winnipeg and University of Manitoba education faculties with the raison d’être to discuss implementation challenges with the new social studies course. A critical first step in addressing these challenges was to get input from teachers piloting the Global Issues course and what followed was a series of one-day workshops, set up for and by Global Issues teachers to (re)search their practice.

Implicit in structuring the meetings and analyzing the discussions were three interweaving research sensibilities: phenomenology, narrative inquiry, and participatory action research.

Phenomenology: The research sought to understand the essence of teachers’ common experiences and their recollections of those experiences in order to develop practices and policies.

Narrative Inquiry: Teaching experiences were often evoked and conveyed through stories. Thinking narratively served as a portal to experience – as a way of thinking about and understanding phenomenon.

Participatory Action Research: The participating teachers used research to inform and transform their practice. Participants shaped the research questions and determined their individual and workshop agendas.

In the end, every teacher presented his/her own research findings, which evolved from cycling back and forth between group discussion and individual reflection. The papers that resulted, the written artifacts, are published in this special issue of The MERN Journal dedicated to social studies.

— Lloyd Kornelsen
## Special Forum
### Inquiry into Social Studies Education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Achieving Transformation Online: Changing Attitudes and Behaviour in the 21st Century Classroom</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– Matt Henderson</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engaging Discomfort: Consciousness-Raising as Teacher Development</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– D. Lark Gamey</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engaging Students to Care Beyond the Credit: Encouraging Citizenship in the Grade 12 Global Issues Course</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– John Thompson and Kara Wickstrom-Street</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Game Changer: How the New “Global Issues: Citizenship and Sustainability” Course Has Empowered Students to Become Empathic and Dialogical Global Citizens</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– Kevin Lopuck</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Grade 12 Inquiry Project: A Facilitator’s Impressions</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– Lloyd Kornelsen</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate School Teachers-Administrators’ and Student Teachers’ Perceptions of the Revised Manitoba (WNCP) Social Studies Curricula</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– K.P. Binda and Nadia Binda-Moir</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Impact of Using Systems Thinking as a Core Strategy for Student Learning in a “Global Issues: Citizenship and Sustainability” Classroom</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– Larry Paetkau</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inquiry in the Grade 12 Global Issues Classroom</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– Dennis Kiazyk</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inquiry Instruction Through Critical Theory in the New “Global Issues: Citizenship and Sustainability” Course</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– Jennifer Chapman</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introducing Inquiry Pedagogy during Teacher Pre-Service</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– Gary Babiuk</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My First Impressions of Teaching “Global Issues: Citizenship and Sustainability”</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– Brenda Neuhofer</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An Organic Process for Curriculum Development in Grade 12 Social Studies</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– Renée Gillis and Linda Connor</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Author Biographies and Contact Information

Page 94
Manitoba Education Research Network

Special Forum

“Inquiry into Social Studies Education”

Friday, March 21, 2014

University of Manitoba
Faculty of Education

Hosted by

Faculty of Education, University of Manitoba
ACHIEVING TRANSFORMATION ONLINE:
CHANGING ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIOUR IN THE 21ST CENTURY CLASSROOM

Matt Henderson
St. John’s-Ravenscourt School

Abstract

The problem identified speaks to a general gulf between the fact that at the end of the “Global Issues: Citizenship and Sustainability” course, students are certainly aware of a myriad of issues affecting the planet, but this awareness does not necessarily translate into transformation, citizenship education, and/or changed behaviour. Given the online nature of the Global Issues course that I teach, how do we bridge this gap and provide experiences that provide for this transformation and action? By reviewing the experiences of students who participated in two separate classes of Global Issues through an online platform, this paper discusses the limits and possibilities in developing ecologically literate and global citizens in non-traditional classroom environments wherein connectivity with the instructor and peers is limited.

Achieving Transformation Online:
Changing Attitudes and Behaviour in the 21st Century Classroom

Recently, I was a participant at a forum attended by historians and history teachers wherein the major theme was history education and technology. The principal research question for the session revolved around the idea of whether technology, 21st century technologies specifically, enhanced or detracted from history education – or from the teaching and learning of history. Many presenters discussed how technology has enabled our society to link archives and make them more accessible by the general public. Others discussed gaming as a platform for teaching history through dilemmas, while some made the case for what has become known as MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses).

The term MOOC, coined by Dave Cormier out of the University of Prince Edward Island, has become a fad over the course of the last few years. Institutions such as Stanford University, Harvard, and San Jose State University decided that MOOCs were the wave of the future and were an avenue for the democratization of education (Lewin, 2013). In Canada, the idea of the MOOC came to the forefront of popular culture, as even Michael Enright (2012) devoted an entire “Sunday Edition” CBC program to this mystical learning environment. Even the BBC is offering MOOCs this fall on using its WW1 archives.

Unfortunately, the MOOC has seen some setbacks. According to Lewin (2013), their success was not realized. In fact, “on average, only about half of those who registered for a course ever viewed a lecture, and only about 4 percent completed the courses.” At the previously mentioned forum that I attended, I asked Dave Cormier, the self-proclaimed inventor of the term MOOC, “How does one assess learning within a MOOC? How do people connect when there are 10 000 participants?” He responded by suggesting that this was one of the drawbacks of the platform.

Online or distance-based learning experiences are somewhat ubiquitous in the 21st century. Most post-secondary institutions in Canada and the United States offer a significant amount of
programming in online learning environments, and this trend has begun to trickle down into secondary schools. The “Global Issues: Citizenship and Sustainability” course in Manitoba is currently offered at St. John’s-Ravenscourt as an online course. Like many online environments, students can have difficulty with this platform and, as Ng and Nicholas (2010) suggested, [APA = past tense for authors, researchers, and research participants] K-12 virtual programs have quite high dropout and failure rates, similar to adult online learning programs. Such has been and is the experience of my online course.

Not only is the Global Issues course new for students and teachers, but the online platform creates an added novelty that must be negotiated. This has meant massive dropout rates and a failure to produce the transformative results demanded and designed by the curriculum. The course was designed to change students’ attitudes and behaviours, based on the current state of society, the environment, and the connections between all systems. The curriculum suggests,

If we are to improve the human condition and sustain the Earth for future generations, more work must be done. We cannot continue along the path we are on – we need to change the way we live, reconnect to the natural world, develop an ethos based on ecological thinking and global concern, and teach our children to do the same.

(Manitoba Education, 2011, “State of the Planet,” para. 4)

The question, then, is how do we not only create and foster learning environments wherein this transformation can occur within traditional classrooms, but also create online and/or digital communities wherein this change is witnessed? How do we provide space for the transformation of learners into ecologically literate and global citizens, as suggested by the title of the course, “Citizenship and Sustainability”?

What I would argue is that for online learning communities to foster this transformative experience, we need to rethink traditional pedagogies, both offline and online, and revisit Socratic methods of pedagogy. In order to foster the transformation required to develop ecologically literate and global citizens, teachers need to create online learning communities (as opposed to environments) devoted to the notions of an experience of ecology and to what Nussbaum (1993) referred to the three capacities of global citizenship: critical self-examination, rigorous knowledge acquisition, and ultimately empathy, or the “narrative imagination” (p. 10). By focusing on these elements, teachers can begin to design learning experiences that can then lead to powerful individual and collective transformation, and the formation of online learning communities as opposed to simply environments. These communities, based on my own practice and experience, must incorporate periodic, deliberate, and designed face-to-face interactions so that learners build on each other’s experience and knowledge. These interactions, from what I have observed, is difficult to do simply through a virtual platform.

As part of this exploration, however, we need to analyse two key concepts: transformation and global citizenship. These concepts are critical to the delivery of a rigorous online program whereby a community of learners can develop the skills and seek the transformation as identified in the curriculum. I begin with transformation.

Transformation and Meaning

In education, we often speak of meaning and making learning really meaningful for learners. Unfortunately, the intended meaning is often prescribed by governments, curricula developers, school boards, principals, and teachers. Rarely do learners get to think about their meaning or
what is meaningful to them. Yes, we ask them to journal “stuff” at the end of a week on lessons of To Kill a Mockingbird, but do they come any closer to identifying what their purpose is? Why do they even exist? Illich (1986) famously exposed how we as educators attach meaning to our learners in his famous speech to the Conference on InterAmerican Student Power:

All you will do in a Mexican village is create disorder. At best, you can try to convince Mexican girls that they should marry a young man who is self-made, rich, a consumer, and as disrespectful of tradition as one of you. At worst, in your "community development" spirit you might create just enough problems to get someone shot after your vacation ends and you rush back to your middleclass neighbourhoods where your friends make jokes about "spits" and "wetbacks.

Here, Illich (1986) demonstrated that even with the best intentions (through service work, bake sales, Kiva donations, etc.), we often do not make space for purpose for those whom we are trying to educate. Ronell even suggested that there is too much emphasis placed on meaning, and that “very often the emergency supplies of meaning brought to a given incident, structure or theme in one’s life are cover-ups, are ways of addressing the wounds of non meaning” (as cited in Taylor, 2009, p. 35). Do we not conjure meaning with bake sales, organic apple purchases, or blue boxes? Do we not perform these frantic activities to provide meaning to our classrooms and to our learners? I know that I am guilty of this, but how I have found success is through the inclusion of critical questions from the learning community.

I have realized that, for me, meaning and subsequent transformation are about learners changing their perspectives on how they see the world and how they situate themselves within it. This is a question of morality because there is a moral imperative, I believe, associated with everything we do as educators. As Orr (1992) suggested, “We must kindle the moral energy that will ignite the actions necessary to build that future” (p. 80). That future, presumably, is one wherein humans and all other species can exist. Creating learning environments and communities wherein students can develop empathy for other people and species while identifying that we can do with less is my job. Many people might well accuse me of turning students into socialists, of brainwashing them, or of failing to bring a balanced approach to my teaching. Perhaps I am guilty of all three, but it would be highly more controversial to teach the same way that we have been teaching for the past 100 years, because this practice clearly has not worked. The education of the past century has brought on our current ecological catastrophe.

Roberts (2012), a contemporary thinker and writer on experiential education, recently shared some electronic communications with me. Within these communications, he characterized transformation as follows:

Transformative learning is not just thinking though – it is holistic process and includes self awareness, social embededness, and behaviour change. I suppose to me transformative learning is the ability to imagine things otherwise and then go about actualizing that not-yet reality. In many ways, this ought to be a central aim of education more broadly (Roberts, personal communication, March 25, 2014).

Roberts suggested that students need to make meaning of their lives and situate themselves within the world for behaviour to change. Transformation requires an alteration to how we act and how we will act. This transformation seems to be a requisite for the societal change needed to save our world. Learning for transformation and learning as transformation “refers to the
process by which we transform our taken-for-granted frames of reference,” so that we can come closer to the truth and more informed action (Mezirow, 2000, p. 7). This, presumably, is the quest and challenge that we signed up for when we all became educators.

But how can transformation be achieved within online learning communities? Is citizenship education, encompassing notions of ecological literacy, sustainability, equity, etc., possible within electronic platforms? This is a question that I have struggled with throughout my experience with the online Global Issues course and one that is firmly positioned within an critical analysis of global citizenship itself.

**Global Citizenship**

Like transformation, the notion of Global Citizenship is somewhat nebulous, not unlike closely akin concepts such as globalization. Throughout curriculum documents in Canada, the term is thrown around and often is watered down by neoliberal concepts such as the knowledge economy, global community, and internationalization. The idea of globalization is an economic imperative. It does not refer to traveling, social economic development, or empathy. It is, as Appiah posited, used “to talk about economic processes” (as cited in Taylor, 2009, p. 89).

If we want to look closely at what we mean by global citizenship and our collective purposes for teaching young people how to become global citizens, we must look beyond the industrial and economic underpinnings. Appiah referred to this notion of global citizenship in a very classical way by characterizing it as cosmopolitanism, or rather the “general feeling that we have to take moral responsibility for one another the way fellow members of a city-state, a polis, did, not by imposing some global megastate or monarch on top of us” (as cited in Taylor, 2009, p. 90).

In a global state, Ruitnberg (2005) moved the notion of global citizenship as cosmopolitanism to a point where we are fundamentally still nomads – not linked by geographic or national borders, but by our relationship with each other. She suggested that “if one wishes to educate students to have a commitment to their social and ecological environment, one needs to start with an emphasis on commitment rather than on locality or community” (Ruitnberg, p. 219). As such, global citizenship begins as a relationship of responsibility toward each other and other species, regardless of nationalistic, economic, class-based, or other barriers. Citizenship education is based on the idea that we are, in fact, “nomads who have learned the ethical gestures of hospitality and openness to a community-to-come will bring nourishment to any place in which they land” (Ruitnberg, p. 219). However, within a learning community – particularly in a digital example – the realization of the relationships and responsibilities that we have with one another can seem somewhat conceptual and abstract for the learners (and often the educator, in my case). What is required is a pathway for self-exploration and knowledge acquisition of the “other.” This is where the humanities come into play.

The ideas of cosmopolitanism and self-examination, or the Socratic method, have been essential pillars to western thought over the past 2000 years. Nussbaum (1997) positioned the Humanities, a key field embedded in the Global Issues course, as an essential means for global citizenship education. She identified three key components to enable learners to understand the relationship of responsibility that they have with other humans and species. Nussbaum referred to this nomadic cosmopolitanism as “humanity” and posited three capacities to be developed in this type of education.
The first capacity is for “critical self-examination of oneself and one’s tradition,” in the Socratic manner (Nussbaum, 1997, p. 9), by questioning not only oneself, but also one’s beliefs and the beliefs of others concerning how knowledge is constructed. This type of self-examination and deconstruction requires the ability to construct meaningful arguments using sound logic.

The second capacity required for citizenship education is a knowledge of global affairs and how other people live, in order to understand the “ways in which common needs and aims are differently realized in different circumstances” (Nussbaum, 1997, p. 10). This capacity requires a tremendous amount of rigour and critical research, elements that can often evade some project-based and inquiry-based learning experiences.

The third capacity refers to our ability to imagine the plight of someone else, another species, or system. Nussbaum (1997) referred to this ability as the “narrative imagination” – or simply the ability to empathize with the situation of others. This capacity certainly takes practice, but is fundamentally dependent on the first two capacities, as we need to analyze our common assumptions and engage in an investigation of our relationship with our co-inhabitants on this planet. Without these, the notions of cosmopolitanism and nomadic citizenship are too abstract for our imaginations.

Later on, in reaction to the commodification of education, Nussbaum (2009) envisioned the role of the humanities even further in terms of citizenship education. Specifically, she maintained that the “ability to recognize fellow citizens,” which could most certainly be attributed to other species and systems, “as people with equal rights . . . to look at them with respect, not just tools to be manipulated for one’s own profit” (p. 25), is fundamental to citizenship and citizenship education. As such, global citizenship can be conceptualized as our capacity to imagine and mitigate the plight of others (including people, other species, and ecosystems) based on our capacity for critical examination, our ability to acquire and generate significant knowledge about the world, and our willingness to engage in imaginative compassion that surpasses all boundaries of race, ethnicity, gender, nationality, and class.

If my understanding of global citizenship is based on any semblance of logic, then we need to question whether these capacities can be fuelled through an online learning environment. What follows is my journey over the last two years and my findings.

Learning Communities

Two years ago I was asked to deliver the Global Issues course as an online option at my school. As I suspect is true of many educators who are thrown into this situation, I had little experience with the design of online learning experiences except the research methodology course that I had to take as part of my graduate studies. The research methodology course, however, amounted to weekly readings from a text and a subsequent “1994 pick-up-and-drop-off” type of assignment. There was little interaction with the other participants and next to no feedback from the facilitator. With this experience relatively fresh in my mind, I was determined that my online course would look like something else. Unfortunately, my utopian vision was somewhat lacking and I really had no model on which to rely – a classic situation for a classroom teacher, no doubt.

In the first year of the course, I designed our interactions virtually to take place on the learning platform called Edmodo. This social media-type platform enables educators to design online classrooms whereby students can submit assignments, chat with one another, and embed files
as you might find with Facebook. I also managed to schedule one meeting per eight-day cycle when we would meet as a group and discuss the topic and readings set out before us. Each new cycle, I would post new assignments in Edmodo. Looking at the ten themes outlined in the curriculum, I asked the students to do some heavy lifting and some serious self-examination.

To many, this might seem like a logical design, but it became apparent, especially when the class size grew to over 25 students, that meeting face-to-face 20 times over the year simply would not be enough to develop the empathy, critical analysis, and content knowledge required to become global citizens.

In fact, when I asked students later in this class to send me their feedback, most students did not describe brilliant movements of transformation, examination, or awakenings in terms of empathy. What they said was most beneficial about the course was the amount of writing that they had to do in terms of the weekly assignments, as these exercises really taught them about APA formatting and basic argumentation. How deflating!

Like any educator, however, I was determined to change things up in order to cultivate transformation and citizenship education. To my horror, though, my student numbers declined to 5 from the prior year’s 25. The feedback that I received from many students who decided to take another course was that they had heard the course was way too hard and too much work. Students, I was told, just wanted a course where they were given the information – traditional understandings of knowledge – so that they could simply sell it back to the teacher in exchange for a credential. (I suspect that my poor teaching had a great deal to do with the drop in numbers, as well.) This seems to be a common theme within the humanities, because science and social science-based courses often are far more attractive due to their basic structure, perceived utility, and quantifiable outcomes.

Undaunted, I re-planned the course as an attempt to create a learning community online, as opposed to simply a collection of subscribers who carried out a variety of tasks each week. My initial step was to do as educators have done for thousands of years: replicate what has been successful for others. I began to investigate what scholars were suggesting about online learning and I stole ideas from other educators, a well-established practice! Schweir (2002) provided me with a great deal of insight. Schweir differentiated between online learning communities and online learning environments:

> Virtual learning communities do not just happen; but neither are they created – at least not exactly. What we are attempting to do as educators is promote the development of virtual learning communities by nurturing the conditions under which they can arise. We can try to seduce learners to become involved, but ultimately it is the learners who will determine whether a virtual learning community emerges. Learners have control over the quality of collaboration that happens online, and if they reject the invitation to elevate their engagement with each other, we will be left with something less – a cohort, not a community. (p. 3)

Although Schweir suggested that the responsibility rests with the learners in terms of truly creating a powerful learning community, he also argued that educators can still design experiences intended to stimulate the right conditions for community building. These conditions can vary from rules and ringers to notions of autonomy, real learning, and technology. From my observations, developing the right conditions for a learning community, that is, a community wherein ecological literacy and global citizenship can be fostered, depends on the experience of
the individual learners, their collective and individual identities, and their goals for the future of the course.

My second step was to increase the meeting times to two or three times per cycle, depending on the nature of the topic and how much scaffolding and face-to-face discussion were required. These meetings, which we often held outside, in the staff lounge, in the dining hall, and various other cozy places throughout the school, enabled us to check in on the readings (as many were quite new and complex), begin to formulate questions, and then experiment with arguments. The face time was essential for our learning, because the online discussions did not necessarily lead to instant critique of our ideas or responses to questions about what we had read, watched, or listened to. At times, we attempted to have these meetings over Google Hangout, but we realized the importance of seeing each other’s reactions or the scratchy notes and questions that lined our articles. The in-person meetings were invaluable for honing our ability for self-examination and for developing our ability not only to deconstruct sticky arguments, but also to generate meaningful ones of our own for the purpose of questioning preconceived notions related to how and why we live on this planet.

The awkwardness of the online interaction begs the question “Why even bother with the online component at all?” The virtual learning platform was essential this year, as it enabled our learning community to play around with ideas (as individuals and as a group) before coming together face to face. When students were assigned one of ten central themes from the curriculum – sustainability, human rights, social justice, poverty, indigenous peoples, biotechnology, etc. – we were able to struggle on our own with the ideas, ask questions virtually to the group, and then begin to shape our questions and arguments. The online environment is also a highly effective way to have conversations with learners and give them meaningful feedback. Through the digitization of my feedback, I can encode audio or written comments and questions into the work of the students, asking them deeper questions before they begin to write final drafts. The digital platform enabled or us to “jam,” if you will, with our ideas, questions, and publishing.

My third step was to institute what we as a learning community called “ringers.” These semi-monthly events involved us getting out of the confines of the school and/or inviting experts into our school as a means to engage actively with the community at large and to develop what Illich (1971) described as an informal rolodex of elders who are engaged in transforming our communities and societies. We spent a day Lake Winnipeg on the Namao Research vessel; we had coffee with Cy Gonick and the folks at Canadian Dimension; we took the bus downtown to listen to a lecture on optimal taxation; we attended talks at the Human Rights Museum; we learned about Manitoba’s food charter and food security through an informal conversation with Food Matters Manitoba. These ringers provided each learner, myself included, with an opportunity to connect with other learners and then digest the ideas and actions of those in the field. We often speak of “learning by doing” as experiential education, but I suggest, and more notably as Dewey (1938) would suggest, that experiences need to be educative, that they produce further educative experiences, and that growth, or transformation perhaps, takes place.

Through this hybridization, attacking issues online, reflecting together, and then venturing out into the community, I saw not only greater skill in self-examination and argumentation, but a change in attitudes and behaviours. Students began to question issues and events based on systems, and they began to assess the consequences of human actions while they demonstrated empathy, vast global knowledge, and ideas that were based on sound research and progressive change. Thus, we created learning communities, as opposed to learning
environments, through the use of technology, through our developing relationships as learners, and through our connections with the community.

Findings

The pay-off from this hybridization was a collection of learners who not only became fantastic writers and researchers (in my opinion), but also transformed their understanding of the world and their role within it. This was evidenced through their praxis work, whereby they inquired into the fate of First Nations based on the declining seasons of winter ice roads, where they held public forums on missing and murdered Indigenous women in this province, and where they researched the effects of social media use on our collective wellbeing. These learners tore down the barriers of the school and between themselves and their planetary cohabitants, in order to ask meaningful questions that strike at our very existence. Through this model of hybridization, our learning community was fundamentally able to transform not only the way that we thought in terms of self-examination, but also the manner by which we could imagine the plight of our fellow humans, species, and systems.

References


ENGAGING DISCOMFORT: CONSCIOUSNESS-RAISING AS TEACHER DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

There is much about the Manitoba K to 12 social studies curriculum that encourages teachers and students to grapple with complex and often controversial issues. Despite the progressive position espoused by the curriculum documents, educational research and personal experience indicate that translation into practice often falls short of the stated vision and desired goals. As with many educational innovations, teacher development is often a neglected link, receiving the least attention and resources of the entire reform project. With this thought in mind, the article focuses on teacher development rather than the curriculum itself.

Engaging Discomfort: Consciousness-Raising as Teacher Development

As a course of study that brings together anthropology, civics, sociology, geography, and history, social studies is an ideal content area to examine questions related to identity, citizenship, nation-building and the concomitant history of colonialism, all of which involve diverse perspectives, beliefs and values. There is much about the Manitoba K to 12 social studies curriculum that encourages teachers and students to grapple with the complex and often controversial issues related to such diversity. Despite the progressive position espoused by the curriculum documents, educational research and personal experience indicate that translation into practice often falls short of the stated vision and desired goals found in curricula. There are at least two reasons for the gap between intent and practice. First, emotional labour generated by this work is often dismissed, mollified, or ignored altogether. Second, teacher development, especially beyond the pilot stage, is often neglected, receiving the least attention and resources of the entire reform project.

With these thoughts in mind, the article focuses on teacher development rather than the curriculum itself. I begin by making the case that successful implementation of curricular intentions heavily depends on teacher decision-making, followed by a brief discussion related to where many change efforts are focused. Next, I share recent research findings on educational practice within the Canadian context and the conceptual frameworks that matter when teaching and learning about controversial issues. The last section advocates ongoing pre-and in-service teacher development that takes into consideration the interconnectivity of identity politics, historical context, and emotional labour required to engage students in meaningful learning experiences related to the controversial issues that arise within the context of social studies.

Teachers are Key

Many have said the teacher is the most important person in the curriculum implementation process. Some consider teachers to be gatekeepers, deciding what aspects of the curriculum receive attention and what to overlook. Others see the teacher as the linchpin of school reform, making sense of the new and coordinating it with life in the classroom. It is widely accepted that curriculum documents can and will be interpreted and enacted in numerous different ways. Teacher confidence, content knowledge, and competency in controversial topics help to
determine which aspects are emphasized and how the formal curriculum is enacted. Given such pivotal positioning, it is critical that teacher development be included as an ongoing component of all curriculum initiatives, especially those related to complex and controversial issues.

While some maintain that schools and faculties of teacher education are democratic sites of equal opportunity, the case is clearly the opposite. When viewed through a critical lens, educational institutions are more about social reproduction than about transformation of either the personal or the systemic “ensuring the possibility of social mobility for everyone while simultaneously maintaining a small probability that those in lower strata will achieve significant social mobility” (Labaree, as cited in Henze, Lucas, & Scott, 1998, p. 207). This discrepancy lies, in part, in the grand narrative of Canadians as neutral, generous, peacekeepers, making it difficult to see an educational system at odds with itself.

Early attempts to address the problem of inequity focused on appreciating differences rather than examining inequality based on the difference (Giroux & McLaren, 1986). In Canada, as in other Western nations, equity initiatives grew up under the banner of multiculturalism. While teachers attempted to respond to needs of diverse learners by affirming ethnic, cultural, and/or language background, other dimensions related to inequality, such as racialized identity and sexual orientation, were ignored.

Among the first to express dissatisfaction with multicultural education and argue for a more critical perspective in education were scholars of colour (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Later, white scholars and educators (Apple, 2009; Applebaum, 2006, 2007; Giroux, 1997) also began to call for approaches that would foreground race and interrogate the power differential in the lived experience of individuals from different populations. These modifications shifted the focus and became known under various banners such as anti-racist education (Sefa Dei, 1996; Thompson, 1997; Troyna, 1987), culturally relevant education (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Maina, 1997; Osborne, 1996), and anti-oppressive education (Kumashiro, 2002, 2004). Despite the intent to create more equitable educational experiences for all students, Levine-Rasky (2000a) argued that these attempts, however conceptualized, “have had limited success in meliorating inequitable educational outcomes . . . for racialized groups of children in Canada” (p. 271).

Clearly, the efforts of teachers and teacher educators to provide meaningful learning experiences for all students have not produced the desired results. In the spirit of the commonsensical belief that if what you are doing is not working, try something else, I believe it is time that we turned our attention to ourselves and what we as teachers and teacher educators expect to change.

**Misidentification of the Change Object**

Levine-Rasky (2000b) attributed the failure of equity education, at least in part, to “a misidentification of [the] change object” (p. 272) and advocated “framing whiteness as the appropriate locus for understanding educational inequity as a systemic problem” (p. 272). Multicultural education and its various permutations continue to be inadequate in addressing educational inequities. It is time to reorient our gaze away from those deemed to be others in need of change and toward the systemic inconsistencies of the unacknowledged norm.

A change object refers to person(s) or thing(s) in need of some improvement, modification, or transformation. The eye on what needs changing was, and to a great extent continues to be, trained on others, those deemed to be different from the unexamined standard norm. The teacher education that I received predisposed me to take an open, respectful, and understanding perspective on diversity, whether that meant Aboriginal students, women, or...
immigrant populations. I did not recognize the implicit normative perspective that kept the others separate from the privileged or that these good intentions maintained notions of otherness. It never occurred to me that I or other white folks might need to change, too. Since developing a deeper and more personal understanding of the troubling connections between certain social positions such as whiteness and the Canadian colonial experience, I am convinced that school and university curricula need to take an intentional critical stance that opens up a space to interrogate how our racialized positioning shapes our thoughts and actions individually and collectively. We as teachers and teacher educators must learn what it means to be unanesthetized by privilege, able to build authentic relationships and to act in decolonizing ways.

Although experience and the literature suggest that some acknowledge the importance of interrogating systemic inequities, too few teacher educators or teachers include an examination of dominant white colonial discourses in their practice. When the discourse of social power is taken up, the gaze is directed “down in the power structure [focused] upon racially oppressed groups . . . [and] averted away from [the white dominant group]” (Aveling, 2004). We need to unpack the advantages created and maintained by our policies, practices, and institutions – as well as the resulting oppression – and not simply focus on changing those who are disadvantaged. Our approach to addressing educational inequities needs to expand, challenging systems that result in both oppression and privilege.

My intention is not to project blame or shame on individual teachers or educators, but to advocate for both pre-service and in-service teacher development that encourages and supports consciousness-raising work. I suspect that the educational experience of my formative years is not unlike many in the teaching profession today. We live homogeneous lives. Our communities, friends, and neighbours all look like us. Our schooling was characterized more by the stories that were left out than what was included. The curriculum was silent on matters of power and privilege. The narrative of Canadian nation building omitted the nasty stories, such as those of land theft, internment camps, and power over legislation. We were told that we could be anything we wanted to be if we just worked hard enough. We were not helped to see the many invisible and not-so-invisible ways that institutions, policies, and practices are created to favor white or light-skinned people. The ideals of meritocracy appear as strong now as they were over four decades ago, and continue to be invisible barriers to equity and sustainable relationships across difference.

Research on Current Practice

Hopeful indicators are emerging. The current social studies curriculum encourages teachers and students to grapple with the complex and often controversial issues related to diversity, identity, and citizenship. It is clear from those who participated in the “Inquiry into Social Studies Education” MERN Forum earlier this year that many teachers are willing to take up critical conversations regarding a range of inequities and to engage students in meaningful action. Despite the positive strides that have been made in both public schools and teacher-education programs and the progressive position espoused by the curriculum documents, research suggests than the enacted curriculum of what students actually experience today falls short of the stated goals and desired visions of the formal curriculum. In a study done in Ontario, Mujawamariya and Mahrouse (2004) found that many teachers did not feel adequately prepared to work effectively with students from populations different from their own. Research in Saskatchewan also revealed significant resistance to multicultural and/or ant-racist initiatives on the part of white pre-service teachers (Schick, 2000). In yet another Canadian study, Solomon and others from York, OSIE, and Ryerson (Solomon, Portelli, Daniel, & Campbell, 2005) noted considerable discomfort on the part of teacher candidates with such topics as oppression,
marginalization, colonization, and racism. More recently, Block (2011) noted that when researching equity issues, teacher candidates enrolled in a university in Manitoba focused on “others who suffered the inequities . . . How they might be implicated in others’ experiences of loss and deprivation was not often present in their texts or presentations” (p. 64). Collectively, these findings expose our Canadian inclination to avoid and/or deny difficult conversations that are discomforting; moreover, they lend support to the notion of a gaze on others or, as Levine-Rasky (2000b) argued, a misidentification of what is in need of change.

The insufficient preparation and confidence to dig deeply into controversial conversations that was reflected in my own practice working with teacher candidates and supervising teachers is further evidence that leads me to advocate racialized consciousness work. For me, this work means becoming more aware of how we are positioned in relation to others and the world we live in. For our pedagogy to become more equitable requires that we engage deeply with matters of diversity and difference, which can be uncomfortable or discomforting.

Making Sense – What Matters

Theoretical perspectives and conceptual understandings are tools that help us to represent and interpret the world. These tools, first framed by experience, become the lens through which we later see. Within this framework, the views I hold and the positions I take are grounded in biocultural systems theory and critical race theory. The details of this overarching theoretical lens are further shaped by (a) work on racial identity and consciousness, (b) the role of emotions in transformative change, and (c) historical narratives of colonization, decolonization, and reconciliation.

Race Matters!

Critical race theorists Bell (1988) and Delgado (2002) argued that race is an endemic part of society and advocated a reexamination of the historical consciousness and ideological choices that lead to race-based inequities. Acknowledging the prevalence of racial elements in society and linking them with historical dimensions, while also seeking more equitable alternatives to race-based interactions, makes critical race theory a useful lens with which to interrogate the Canadian colonial context of the relationships between settlers and Aboriginal peoples. While helpful, it must be noted that “race” is a social construction with no solid foundation in biology, hence one needs to also consider the social process of constructing race.

Racialized Consciousness Matters!

The teacher candidate relationships between Aboriginal students and white mainstream students that surprised and confused me during my career began to make some sense when viewed through the lens of racial/cultural identity development. I could see how unresolved conflicts within and between groups had a deeper and unacknowledged foundation that defied solutions. The dance of interest, disinterest, and aversion took on a much more nuanced meaning when I took the statuses or stages of racial/ethnic/culture identity development into account (Helms, 1984; Phinney, 1996; Sue & Sue, 1990). My interest in how individuals and groups come to understand themselves as racialized beings, and in facilitating understandings that promote sustainable just social relationships, led me to work on racialized consciousness by Wayne Rowe and his colleagues (LaFleur, Rowe, & Leach, 2002; Rowe, Bennett and Atkinson, 1994). As a concept, consciousness is more pliable and open to transformation than the concrete nounal stages or statuses of identity development, and is therefore more appropriate for the work that I believe is needed in teacher development.
Discomforting Emotions Matter!

Ambiguity and discomfort litter the trail leading to the transformation of attitudes and actions that comprise equitable education for all rather than privilege for some and oppression for others. In my experience as a teacher educator, difficult conversations related to diversity – especially of a cultural or racial nature – were difficult to initiate. When we did manage to begin a dialogue centered on cultural or racial issues, it began tentatively with measured caution, often followed by more intense feelings that either shut down the discussion or degenerated into reductive binaries of personal experience and negative emotion. Boler (1999) offered educators and students a way through “this murky minefield” (p. 177) of conflicting and confusing emotions by offering a pedagogy of discomfort as an approach to recognize how emotions define how and what one chooses to see, and conversely, not to see. Rather than viewing emotions as unfortunate byproducts that shut down or derail dialogue, emotions need to be taken up and investigated as a constitutive component of our thoughts and actions.

Historical Relationships Matter!

I believe that the troubled relationships between Aboriginal and settler peoples in Canada have roots in our colonial history, much as profiled by Memmi (1965). He wove both colonizer and colonized tightly together in a symbiotic relationship that is harmful to both, destroying one while rotting the other. LaRocque (2010), a Metis scholar, clarified that “the onus to decolonize and to rebuild cannot fall solely on the colonized. The responsibility to clean up colonial debris, whether in popular culture, historiography or in matters literary, lies first with the colonizer” (p. 162). Both scholars acknowledge that the consequences experienced by both colonizer and colonized are in need of repair, but it is LaRocque who places the responsibility to repair damages foremost in the hands of the colonizer. Voices such as Memmi and LaRocque call us to problematize our historical relationships and find ways to mitigate or eliminate the inequities created and maintained through settler colonialism.

People and Contexts Matter!

The bio-ecological systems theory is an attractive perspective for examining consciousness work because it is expansive yet focused: one eye trained on the complex layers of interconnections and the other eye centered on individual characteristics (Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000). It is the interconnectedness of individuals with environments close and personal as well as those more detached in both space and time that suggests to me a means to unpack the layers of racial injustice and interrogate the role of racialized consciousness. Although context was initially privileged Bronfenbrenner’s earlier work, it is the processes of persons in contexts over time that have become the essence of the bio-ecological systems theory and that provide a means to unpack our complicity in colonial systems of inequity. I wish to acknowledge that a much older indigenous understanding of these relationships exists (Hart, 2002) which I suspect offers a deeper more nuanced perspective of human relationships are intertwined with other beings and their environments.

Teacher Development: Consciousness-Raising by Engaging Discomfort

Raising consciousness, which by nature must evoke uncomfortable emotions, is a continuing process. The answers we seek in our attempt to deconstruct our racialized social positions, to interrogate our emotional investments, and to uncover our colonial past must be contextualized but will never be complete, neither in the sense of comprehensiveness nor completion. When we are faced with difficult and troubling knowledge that stands in opposition to what we have
come to know as truths, we experience conflicting and opposing emotions. It can be scary and leave us uncertain of how to proceed. These can be moments of great learning if we reflect on them critically. In their call to act, Boler and Zembylas (2003) clearly stated that “a pedagogy of discomfort is not a demand to take one particular road of action”; rather it is an invitation to (re)shape, “habits, knowledges & emotions” (p. 133). Such wisdom is the basis for curricula that set out goals and objectives rather than prescriptive strategies. Furthermore, teachers have known for a long time the power of engaging the whole learner – affective, cognitive, and bodily kinesthetic – or put simply, heart, mind, and body. However, the affect is often discounted as less important. Cases in point are the loss of art and music programs in many of Manitoba schools. Moreover, teachers are more inclined towards niceness than controversy. The desire not to upset anyone drives us away from strong emotional engagement. This does not fit well with racial consciousness work.

In closing, I wish to acknowledge that the way to a more equitable and just society is a continuing work, not a destination. Ongoing teacher development must be considered together with curriculum initiatives that encourage teachers and students to grapple with the complex and often controversial issues related to diversity. Our role as teachers and learners will always be under construction as we learn to create and maintain authentic connections with others as well as ourselves. We must make our own way in the circumstances in which we find ourselves. Taking up controversial issues related to diversity, identity, and citizenship is challenging work – work that includes thinking critically about cognitive beliefs, re-story-ing our collective history, acknowledging emotions, and encouraging action. We should not be expected to do this work alone or without support.

References


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Abstract

One of the key components of the grade 12 “Global Issues: Citizenship and Sustainability” course is to encourage our students to be empathetic and informed citizens who are engaged in taking action to facilitate social change. As educators, how do we know whether we have succeeded in empowering our students to be agents of change for a sustainable and equitable future? Is this a realistic goal, considering the diverse learners in a typical grade 12 classroom? Upon completing the course, our students may have obtained a credit, but do they actually care about their world? These were the questions that guided our MERN Research Project described below. As practicing Global Issues teachers, as well as members of the Grade Twelve Global Issues Inquiry Project, we have reviewed our practice in order to gauge how taking this course has influenced our students’ engagement to care about the world around them and become active citizens.

Engaging Students to Care Beyond the Credit: Encouraging Citizenship in the Grade 12 Global Issues Course

After creating a narrative based upon our initial experiences teaching the course and reflecting upon our own practice, we developed three main strategies to implement in our classrooms in order to measure whether this course has been effective in achieving our goal of influencing our students’ engagement to care about the world around them and become active citizens. These strategies included –

- implementing student entrance and exit surveys
- developing a comprehensive template for our Inquiry and Take Action Projects
- implementing a whole-class Take Action Project

Our article focuses on the effectiveness of these strategies in engaging students to care, as well as discussion of the course itself.

Background

The Grade 12 Global Issues: Citizenship and Sustainability Research Project was developed by Manitoba Education, MERN (Manitoba Education Research Network), MSIP (Manitoba School Improvement Project), the University of Manitoba, and the University of Winnipeg, with the purpose of determining whether the new Global Issues course is changing the way that students think and act in relation to citizenship and sustainability issues. As outlined by the course description in the Manitoba Global Issues curriculum, the Global Issues course requires that –

Students conduct inquiry into the social political, environmental, and economic impact of a variety of contemporary and emerging global issues. Through their inquiry, students focus on questions of quality of life locally, nationally and globally. This course is based on the principles of active democratic citizenship, ecological literacy, critical media literacy, and ethical decision-making, and consolidates learning across the disciplines to empower
students as agents of change for a sustainable and equitable future. As a mandatory component of the course, students plan and implement a community-based action-research project. (Manitoba Education, 2014)

As practising teachers and members of this team, we sought to develop an action research project that would delve deeper into the course as outlined, in order to gauge the transformative nature of this course in a classroom setting.

Reflective practice is a professional development method which enables individual practitioners to become more skilful and more effective. While reflection is certainly essential to the process, reflective practice is a dialectic process in which thought is integrally linked with action. (Osterman, 1990, p. 135)

In our analysis of the “Global Issues: Citizenship and Sustainability” course, we began by writing personal narratives describing our experiences of teaching the course in the past and reflecting upon the areas wherein our current practices could be more effective. Because the core focus of the course is on Inquiry and Take Action Projects (TAP), and both of these strategies are relatively new and differ from traditional classroom practices, we decided to formulate two specific teaching strategies: a template to guide inquiry and guided whole-class TAP projects. Additionally, we developed entrance and exit surveys for our students, to determine whether there were changes in the attitudes and values of our students pertaining to the core concepts of the course both before and after taking the course. These surveys would provide anecdotal data to measure whether the course met the goal of engaging students to care and become empathetic, global citizens. There were two main underlying goals of our research. First, we wanted to find answers to two complex questions: what does it mean to be a global citizen in today’s ever changing society, and how do we effectively educate students to become more globally, mindful, active and engaged? Second, we wanted to provide resources and insights for other teachers implementing this course.

Personal Narratives

We determined that the most effective place to begin our MERN Research Project would be through reflecting on our own experiences of teaching the Global Issues course prior to working with this team. Personal narratives are extremely powerful tools because they enable reflection upon one’s practice, which classroom teachers rarely have the opportunity to do because of all the demands of the profession. Ultimately, our goal was to use our reflections to inform our practice so that we can determine which areas we need to focus on in order to improve our teaching and learning strategies.

The concept of reflective practice assumes that the learning process is purposeful and that it is a search not merely for knowledge, but for understanding and meaning which lead to change. Through their experience, practitioners have developed knowledge and can therefore play a key role in the construction of new knowledge, and in the development of a knowledge base that can advance professional practice. (Osterman, 1990, p. 142)

In addition to developing our personal narratives, we felt that it would be useful to approach other practicing Global Issues teachers outside of the research team, to see whether they would be willing to reflect on their experiences with the course as well. The goal of these reflections was to step back and consider how effective our current teaching and learning strategies were
in addressing our fundamental research question, “How do we engage students to care?” – and thus ultimately develop specific strategies to improve our current practice.

We approached this task by developing seven reflection questions related to our action research question that we administered to ourselves as well as two other practising Global Issues teachers. These standard reflection questions follow:

1. How long have you been teaching the new Global Issues course? Did you teach the old World Issues course? For how long?
2. Describe your course demographics. What are the demographics of your school? How many students enrol in this course each year? Do you have more or fewer students since switching from World Issues to Global Issues? Describe the demographics of your students. What “types” of students take this course? Why do students choose to take this course?
3. Provide a basic outline of how you delivered this course: teaching strategies, topics, timelines, etc.
4. Describe your approach to the using the Inquiry model in this course. How do you encourage student inquiry? How do students respond to this model (positives and negatives)? How might you improve using this model in this course?
5. Describe how you have implemented and assessed the Take Action Project in this course. Provide some examples of Take Action Projects that your students have produced. How have students responded to this project (positives and negatives)? What suggestions do you have to improve this project and increase student engagement in the future?
6. Overall, how effective do you think this course is in engaging students to care about the world around them and be active citizens? What suggestions do you have to make this course more effective in terms of engaging students to care?
7. What is your overall impression of the new “Global Issues: Citizenship and Sustainability” course? What do you like about it? What do you dislike? How can it be improved?

Despite the fact that the four narratives that we collected represent a diverse range of schools, student demographics, and classroom experiences, there were several commonalities that provided us with tremendous insight in determining the course of our action research. First, the narratives suggested that a diverse range of students decide to take this course: students who are already very socially aware and active in the community, students who enrol in the course because they think it will be an easy credit, and students who have been placed in the course by a guidance or resource teacher as a necessity for them to graduate. Second, all of the teachers incorporated current events and discussion into the course, implemented a Take Action Project (TAP) with their students (with varying degrees of success), and delivered the course using a hybrid of teacher-centred instruction and student-centred inquiry. The two components of the course that differentiate it from the old World Issues course are the inquiry method and the TAP, and not surprisingly they were what the teachers struggled with the most. In terms of the inquiry method, the teachers found that although students were motivated by the prospect of being able to pursue topics that they were interested in, they were often overwhelmed with the scope of the topics, which in turn caused difficulties for the teachers regarding what the students should focus on. Additionally, the teachers found that the students were not accustomed to the inquiry approach, and thus it was difficult for them to adjust to the concept of self-directing their learning and formulating questions. As a result, unfortunately student inquiries tended to be quite superficial. In regards to the TAP, the narratives suggested that although many students were empowered and motivated by the opportunity to go out and make a difference and accomplish something in the community, they often struggled with the
logistics of implementing large-scale project. They would come up with great ideas that they appeared to be excited about; however, these ideas often faltered due to a variety of reasons, such as time constraints, demands from other classes, not being familiar with the various logistical and administrative issues that come with executing large projects, not using time effectively, and accountability issues when working in groups.

All of the teachers reflected upon how important they feel that this course is and how it has the potential to be transformative for students. However, they also stressed the fact that there are still several issues that teachers struggle with: tremendous responsibility in terms of open structure, finding appropriate course resources, effectively implementing the inquiry model and TAP project, "selling" this course to stakeholders, and providing more opportunities for students to connect with the local and global community.

After careful analysis of the teacher reflections, the next step in our process was to look at the attitudes of students toward the core concepts of the course. Students were given entrance and exit surveys, respectively, before and after the course.

**Entrance and Exit Surveys**

The entrance and exit surveys proved to be valuable for analyzing the effectiveness of the Global Issues course for the students. In the past, we were never sure why students were taking the course. We sometimes became frustrated that students would stop coming to class and/or stop submitting their assignments. This year, we decided to survey our students to discover their motivations for taking the course, and to gauge their initial attitudes toward global issues, citizenship, and sustainability. We used an anonymous “Entrance Survey” at the beginning of the course and then an anonymous “Exit Survey” at the end to collect data for our action research.

Students were given the Entrance Survey on their second day of class. Between our two classes, we had a total of 46 students. We asked 20 questions, which ranged from general interest to more focused questions about their existing underlying attitudes and values prior to taking the course. Some of the interesting findings were as follows (students were allowed to check more than one reason):

- 83% (38/46) were interested in current events.
- 43% (20/46) enrolled in the course for credit. (However, we found that this question could have been misinterpreted – students could be taking it just for the credit, or they might have read the question as "I want to get my credit.")
- 70% (32/46) were interested in social justice.
- 61% (28/46) were interested in sustainability and the environment.
- 63% (29/46) were interested in making a difference.
- 41% (19/46) were interested in taking a Global Issues course after high school.
- 74% (34/46) were interested in getting involved and taking action on an issue.

We were excited to see these statistics, as they gave us an idea of where our students were coming from and their initial interests in the course.

We were equally interested in the results from the Exit Survey at the end of the course, to gauge whether attitudes and values shifted as a result of the Global Issues course. Fewer students took the Exit Survey than those who took the Entrance Survey: some decided to drop the
course along the way for various reasons, and some were not present on the day that we administered the surveys.

- One of the first questions we asked the students was whether they enjoyed the class: 15% strongly agreed (5/33), 36% agreed (12/33), 27% (9/33) were neutral, and 21% didn’t enjoy the class.
- The majority (57%, 19/33) enjoyed the topics discussed in class, while 27% (9/33) were neutral to the idea.
- When we asked whether this course should be a required course, 27% (9/33) agreed, 42% (14/33) were neutral to the idea, 27% (9/33) disagreed, and 3% (1/33) didn’t know.
- When we asked about the inquiry approach to the course 42% (14/33) were in favour of the approach, 30% (10/33) were neutral to it, while 27% (9/33) were against it.
- We surveyed their reaction to the Take Action Project and found that 48% (16/33) enjoyed it, 18% (6/33) were neutral to the idea, and 30% (10/33) disliked it.
- In terms of awareness, 85% (28/33) of students said that they were more aware of what is going on in the world after taking this course, 73% (24/33) were more aware of human rights and social justice issues, and 82% (27/33) were more aware of issues related to poverty, wealth, and power.
- Other areas of interest found in our survey were that 18% (6/33) were considering taking courses related to global issues beyond high school, 18% (6/33) were considering working on their specific Take Action Project after high school, 88% (29/33) planned to volunteer in their communities after high school, and 84% (28/33) believed that good citizenship is necessary to improve our society.

Our survey results provided us with mixed impressions of how effective the course actually was in engaging our students to care about the world around them and become active citizens. On one hand, the majority of students did find that the course increased their awareness of pertinent global issues. However, it should be noted that their awareness of global issues did not necessarily translate into wanting to take action to facilitate change. Although only 48% of the students enjoyed the Take Action project and only 18% planned to continue pursuing their particular projects upon graduation, 88% planned to continue volunteering in the community after high school – which indicates that the course did motivate them to be interested in being engaged citizens. Additionally, at the end of the course the students were given the opportunity to provide anonymous anecdotal impressions of the course, and several of them reflected upon how it opened their eyes to topics and ideas that they were unaware of before taking the course, and how they enjoyed the freedom of being able to learn about and get involved in issues that are important to them. The following is a sample of some of these anecdotal comments:

- “I liked being able to get involved in the community, learning about conflicts I didn’t know about, discussing my opinion, giving and receiving feedback, field trips and having the freedom to choose a project about what you believe in.”
- “I liked all of the volunteering and work that we did to help others. I can as much fun in this course as school allows you to have.”
- “I liked all of the choices that we had and I liked learning about issues that are currently happening.”
- “Instead of just sitting in a classroom all of the time we went to different places and took action.”
- “This course should be taught to students at a lower grade in order to raise them with a different state of mind to be involved in volunteering and making a difference.”
According to the survey results, the course was transformative for the majority of our students in terms of their awareness of and engagement in global issues. There were only two questions on the survey in which the course did not necessarily change their attitudes in a positive manner: one was the number of students who planned to take courses related to global issues and sustainability after high school (18%), and the other was the number of students who enjoyed the inquiry method of learning (42%)

Inquiry

A good portion of this course is inquiry based. As defined in the Global Issues curriculum document, inquiry is –

a complex process and grows out of constructivist pedagogy. It begins with the selection of a topic and the design of powerful questions that guide students as they select resources, gather and interpret information, build relevant knowledge and understanding, and share their findings and conclusions. Inquiry relies upon critical and divergent thinking. During the inquiry process, the role of a teacher shifts from covering content to becoming a guide and facilitator. Students are given the opportunity to generate their own questions, to set learning goals, to acquire and share enduring understandings, and to develop the decision-making skills that are part of active citizenship. (Manitoba Education, 2011b, p. 1)

As outlined in the curriculum, there are eleven possible Areas of Inquiry that can be explored in the course: Media, Consumerism, Environment, Poverty, Wealth and Power, Indigenous Peoples, Oppression and Genocide, Health and Biotechnology, Gender Politics, Social Justice and Human Rights, and Peace and Conflict. The areas of inquiry are left up to the discretion of the teacher as long as a minimum of three areas are covered. Sometimes, we had the students vote on choices of study, sometimes we would pick them, and sometimes we did a combination of both.

When it comes to the inquiry piece, we have found that, for the most part, our students did not have much experience developing inquiry questions. When students were asked what they wanted to learn, most generally responded, "Whatever you want to teach me, or whatever is on the test." Up against this wall, we decided to develop a template that we could use to facilitate the process of inquiry for our students. In our past experiences with introducing inquiry, we found that some of our students worked very quickly and seamlessly through the process and were ready for that next step, while others were intimidated by the prospect of guiding their own learning. A template enabled students to stay on task and on time, and to complete their final product. We did this for a couple of reasons: we wanted our students to delve into deeper research and, as educators, we wanted to move into the role of the "guide at the side" rather than merely the "sage on the stage." We recognized that students would still need some structure to facilitate the inquiry process.

To begin the inquiry process, we asked students to pick a topic that they were interested in and wanted to know more about, because we felt this would not only deepen their understanding of something that they care about, but would also make them more motivated to complete the inquiry. Next, the students were to determine their essential learning questions, "What did they want to know?" We reminded them that this was to be a question that could not be easily answered by doing a Google search. Delving into such a simple yet deep question would involve not only searching out answers through a variety of sources, but also considering their own thoughts, opinions, and experiences. After formulating their essential questions, the
students were to go out and find a minimum of five resources related to their topic (articles, webpages, or documentaries) and read/view them, keeping track of the sources and summarizing what they found. Next, we asked students to develop a list of actions that could be taken on this topic. The last two steps required them to create an assessment piece that demonstrated the knowledge and awareness that they gained through the inquiry process, and then communicate their findings to the class. The students were afforded a great deal of freedom in terms of the final assessment piece. Their assessment could take the form of a PowerPoint, a formal report, or even a video. The only requirement was that it must demonstrate what they discovered about their topic.

We have found that the template was very helpful in keeping our students on task and it also helped students to delve deeper into their topic and research. Furthermore, we observed an increase in completion rates of research assignments, compared to the years previous when we did not have the template. In the end, students went from resisting the idea of undertaking a inquiry project to acceptance, completion, and (for some) even more enjoyment.

**Take Action Project (TAP)**

If the main objective of the grade 12 “Global Issues: Citizenship and Sustainability” course is encouraging citizenship, it can be argued that the successful implementation of the Take Action Project (TAP) is integral to achieving this goal. As mandated by the curriculum, the TAP component of the course makes up 25% of student assessment. The TAP affords students the opportunity to get involved in hands-on practical experiences and is therefore central to encouraging students to be active and informed citizens who are engaged in taking action to facilitate social change. Additionally, the TAP project can be considered a form of service learning as it enables students to combine inquiry and academic goals with “real life” projects – which is not often seen within the parameters of our educational system. According to Eyler (2002), service-learning –

> provides opportunities for students to form bonds with each other, with faculty and with community members while undertaking worthwhile projects. In service-learning, students are encouraged also to connect their personal goals and values with academic study and to apply what they are learning to real-world situations. (p. 518)

As discussed in our personal reflections pertaining to the TAP component of the course, our past experiences illustrate that although students have responded quite positively to the concept of these projects, we have experienced some difficulties with timelines, accountability, and logistics. In order to address some of these concerns, we decided to develop and implement two specific strategies pertaining to the TAP. First, we embarked on a whole-class TAP project in order to work through and model the steps involved in implementing a project as a group, and second we developed a comprehensive template that students used to plan and follow their projects. The TAP template provided students with step-by-step objectives and timelines to follow, and enabled them to be assessed on both the process and product of their TAPs.

In accordance with the Poverty, Wealth and Power Area of Inquiry explored in the course, the students selected the topic of homelessness in Winnipeg as the focus for our whole-class TAPs. Both of our classes visited Siloam Mission where students volunteered in the drop-in centre, kitchen, food service area, and clothing service area – and then learned more about the issue of homelessness and what organizations such as Siloam Mission do to address this issue. After spending the day at Siloam Mission, students returned to the school where for the next two weeks, individually or in groups, they used a planning template to organize and implement a
TAP around the topic of homelessness. The majority of students embraced the project wholeheartedly. They organized a variety of projects in the school, such as fundraisers, clothing and food drives, scripting and filming videos to raise awareness about homelessness, and even a school-wide presentation on the topic at a pep rally. Several of the students commented on how visiting an organization and seeing the human side of this issue made it more real and therefore meaningful for them. This awareness motivated the students to want to take action.

The template that we put together beforehand provided students with a step-by-step process to find ways to take action on the issue of homelessness. There were still instances when some groups did not use their allotted time effectively or not all group members contributed equally to the process. However, as whole, most students were highly engaged and had developed a sense of pride in their TAPs. Additionally, the TAPs facilitated a sense of pride and cohesion in the classroom, as students had a common reason for taking action. A requirement of the TAP template was for groups to regularly share and discuss their progress and insights with the class. This enabled students to become more comfortable with each other and ultimately created a sense of pride and community within the classroom itself. In the spirit of working together toward a common action, we ended the year with a one-day class TAP in which students volunteered their time beautifying a non-profit agency in the community as a part of the United Way Day of Caring. Both of these endeavours solicited a great deal of positive feedback in the classroom, and many students commented that they would never have taken the initiative to become involved in these types of community actions if they were not a part of the Global Issues course. They also stated that they would like to pursue more TAPs in the future.

The only drawback to this type of whole-class TAP is that students do not necessarily get to choose a topic for their action that they are truly passionate about, because the TAP project was selected by the majority. In order to address this issue, the second component of our action research was to have students choose another individual TAP. For this component of the course, the students were given the same step-by-step template to follow. However, instead of working on the project daily for two weeks as was the case with the whole-class TAP, students were given every Wednesday for a two-and-a-half month period to work on their individual TAPs. Some students were extremely eager and excited to have the opportunity to take action on another issue of interest to them; others were less enthusiastic either because they did not want to complete yet another large-scale project or because they struggled with finding a cause and/or action that they were passionate about. Additionally, because these projects take a lot of time and planning, implementing a second project detracted from the current events discussion, inquiry, and content elements of the course. Also, many students found it difficult to transition back and forth between the TAP, inquiry, and course content. Although the overall quality of the individual TAP projects and level of engagement was not as high as it was for the whole-class TAPs, students pursued a variety of topics and actions with these projects. Examples follow:

- making speeches and presentations on environmental issues
- holding a raffle for the Humane Society
- creating awareness videos on topics such as bullying and the acceptance of immigrants and refugees
- assisting with the organization of a blood drive
- planning and preparing a fair trade and locally sourced meal in the school cafeteria
- holding a car wash and fundraiser for the “I am a Girl” foundation.

Upon further reflection, our MERN Research Project has demonstrated that having the step-by-step templates for students to follow is extremely beneficial because the template assists with
the planning and organization of large-scale TAPs. However, attempting to implement two TAP projects over the course of the semester is far too ambitious. It takes away from the overall objective of engaging students to care, and detracts from some of the other essential parts of the course. As a result, some suggestions that we have considered would be to have the students complete only one large-scale TAP project on an issue that is of interest to them, and to do so in one block of time instead of spreading it out throughout the semester. However, because the whole-class TAP was so instrumental in building community and exposing students to pertinent global issues, perhaps it would still be useful to do something as a group at the beginning of the course – but on a much smaller scale than what we attempted.

Course Concerns

A few changes are needed to make this course more successful. One change is the perception that some students have towards the delivery of this course. While some would prefer the teacher to tell them what to learn, this course does not do that; it makes the students think for themselves, which can be a difficult adjustment for some learners. The second problem is motivating students to take a more active role in improving world conditions; students would rather hit “like” on Facebook or put up posters around the school, than try to get to the root of an issue or problem and tackle it head on by taking action. Another issue that we came across is that some students struggle with self-directed learning, particularly with time management issues. This becomes a bigger issue around the TAP project, as certain deadlines have to be met, not to mention that the TAP cannot be completed in a few days. The TAP requires a good deal of time. Furthermore, TAPs can be a logistical and administrative nightmare because the projects that students want to take on might take them out of the school. In terms of time, we both gave our students Wednesdays to work on their projects. This started at the beginning of April and went to the end of May. In the end, some students required more time, which brings us back to time management issue. Additionally, many students found it difficult to switch back and forth between the TAP project, inquiry, and course content. They struggled with having to focus on too many things at once. Another minor issue we saw was that not all would do their fair share in group work. This led to resentment in some groups and also to the breakup of the group, which can be a problem with the TAP project, especially when it is worth 25% of the final mark. The last issue we had with the course was around assessment. We have pondered whether there should be tests and a final exam, or whether their course work should be able to stand alone to measure their progress as global citizens.

“Global Issues: Citizenship and Sustainability” Successes

After engaging in this MERN Research Project and reflecting on our own experiences, we feel that overall the “Global Issues: Citizenship and Sustainability” course does an excellent job of engaging students to care and is truly transformative for most students. The majority of the students that we taught would never undertake a TAP on their own. Global Issues plants a seed in the minds and hearts of students to become more active and engaged citizens. If only one student in every section of this course offered throughout the province decides to continue to volunteer, or continue to take action after graduation, this course will have made a huge impact.

Many students really enjoy the option of working with a group in order to plan and implement a large-scale project. Students also enjoy the freedom to leave the classroom or building in order to work on their projects. Different students bring different strengths and perspectives to the group, and many of them really value being part of a team. Additionally, through the inquiry process students learn to be more independent thinkers and develop a critical awareness of the world around them. Despite having some issues with adjusting to this new style of teaching and

The MERN Journal, Volume 9, 2014 29
learning, students have responded positively to the idea of directing their own learning by selecting topics that are of a personal interest to them. Students of Global Issues tend to be more engaged in the process and usually choose an area to which they are personally connected.

Recommendations for “Global Issues: Citizenship and Sustainability”

The freedom and openness of Global Issues requires new professional development in understanding current issues, embracing inquiry, and planning Take Action Projects. Teachers need a base of historical and political knowledge in order to engage in effective inquiry. A large component of citizenship is being aware of the way that society operates and having the knowledge and understanding of current issues for which many teachers do not have the training or background understanding. There are no specific outcomes in the curriculum document stipulating content necessary to help the students to become engaged, caring citizens. Additionally, the way that this course is designed, teachers can forgo the inquiry method and resort solely to direct instruction. Student-directed learning is extremely beneficial, but if it is not done properly it could lead to students gaining limited knowledge and understanding of current topics. Therefore, we recommend that the curriculum document provide more supports and guidelines regarding the content component of the course.

Another issue that has arisen is how to “sell” this course to students. It can be argued that the course should be mandatory (with changes that would ensure that students receive a sufficient knowledge base along with student-directed inquiry and taking action). It is the responsibility of social studies educators to ensure that all graduating students receive the proper skills to be engaged citizens in our society. However, since the Global Issues course is not mandatory at this point, we need to find ways to encourage more students to take it, and not be afraid of the inquiry approach and the action project. An educational awareness campaign aimed at students, parents, administrators, counsellors needs to be established to highlight the long-term value of the Global Issues course. Students may be leery of issue-based courses for a number of reasons, such as the daunting ideas and topics that are explored, the potential of a “doom and gloom” perspective of dealing with issues, having to learn in a way that is different than what they are typically accustomed to with the inquiry method, and apprehension over completing a large-scale TAP. As outlined the “Global Issues: Citizenship and Sustainability” rationale,

The overall purpose of this study is not to instil fear in the next generation, nor to make students feel guilty for problems which are the cumulative legacy of many generations of mistakes, recklessness, and, in some cases, deliberate neglect or exploitation. Rather, the intent is to help students understand that human societies and institutions can and should be renewed, beginning with matters of personal lifestyle, and extending through to collective, large-scale social change. The role of education in this change is vital, hence the importance of this course both as an instrument of critical understanding – seeking the truth – and as an instrument of hope – seeking to create a better future. (Manitoba Education, 2011a, pp. 1-2)

As a result of our action research, we have determined that the resources we created – such as the Entrance and Exit Surveys and the Take Action template – assisted teachers with the organizational elements of both the inquiry and TAP aspects of the course. However, we did find that implementing two separate TAP projects (whole-class and individual) was overwhelming and time consuming for students. Therefore, we recommend having just one TAP project that is done during a set time period as opposed to throughout the semester.
Conclusion

“Global Issues: Citizenship and Sustainability” is the capstone and gemstone of social studies curricula. It is a course that we wish had been offered when we were in high school! It requires students not only to think, but to move outside the walls of the school and take action on an issue that is important to them, thus giving students skills not only in social studies, but in life. We believe that every student in Manitoba should take this course, as it will change not only their lives, but also our communities, and the world for better. That being said, as demonstrated by our action research, there are still issues with the form and the delivery of the course in order to ensure that it achieves its potential of being transformative for students. Perhaps the most valuable part of this entire process has been the opportunity to discuss and dialogue with other Global Issues teachers as part of this Inquiry Project. Our hope is that even more Global Issues teachers can join us in this dialogue, and hopefully gain some insights for their own practices from our experiences as well as our MERN Research Project. Ultimately, this research for us is by no means finished. In some respects, it has encouraged us to make even more changes to our practices and motivated us to continue our search to find the best way to build active and engaged citizens who care about their world and who are motivated to take action for a more sustainable future.

Teachrers who love teaching, teach children to love learning.

References


GAME CHANGER: HOW THE NEW
“GLOBAL ISSUES: CITIZENSHIP AND SUSTAINABILITY” COURSE
HAS EMPOWERED STUDENTS TO BECOME
EMPATHIC AND DIALOGICAL GLOBAL CITIZENS

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Abstract

The introduction of the new grade 12 “Global Issues: Citizenship and Sustainability” curriculum in the province of Manitoba is ushering in profound change for both high school social studies teachers and students. Teachers need no longer be seen as depositors of information who stand up at the front of the class to lecture their students. Instead, they become guides for students who are encouraged to engage in dialogue and inquiry to foster a sense of curiosity and empathy for the world around them. The result is that the new curriculum is creating students who become empowered agents of change in their schools and communities, and thus become truly dynamic, social justice-oriented, responsible citizens.

Empowerment

Perhaps the biggest challenge to teaching the Global Issues curriculum is also potentially its greatest reward. The advice that I remember most vividly from the first meeting of the Global Issues pilot team in August 2011 was that, in this course, teachers would no longer be the sage on the stage, but more of the guide on the side. The implication was that when teachers use classic “old-school,” direct, front-of-the-class teaching methods, students might not be engaged and empowered in their learning.
Brazilian educational theorist Paulo Freire (1970/2000) offered that education has, in fact, been suffering from “narration sickness” (p. 71). The teacher-student relationship is expressed in a narrative form between the teacher, who is the narrator, and the students, who are the listening objects. The teacher’s role is to fill or deposit information into the students, who quickly become receptacles or containers of information. This he termed the “banking concept of education,” a concept that limits students to “receive, memorize, and repeat” (Freire, p. 72). Freire contended that in this system it is the students themselves “who are filled away through the lack of creativity, transformation, and knowledge” (p. 72). The practice of knowledge being conferred onto those considered to be lacking knowledge, by those who believe they are knowledgeable projects, is “an absolute ignorance onto others, a characteristic of the ideology of oppression (that) negates education and knowledge as processes of inquiry” (Freire, p. 72).

Global Citizenship

One of the documents that has had the most influence on my practice is Joel Westheimer and Joseph Kahne’s (2004) article on citizenship education, wherein they laid out the results of their two-year study of ten programs that sought to advance democratic education. What emerged were three conceptions of citizenship: personally responsible, participatory, and justice oriented (p. 1). The personally responsible citizen “contributes to food or clothing drives when asked and volunteers to help those less fortunate whether in a soup kitchen or a senior center” (Westheimer & Kahne, p. 3). The participatory citizen not only contributes to a food drive (as would the personally responsible citizen), but might also organize the food drive. Finally, justice-oriented citizens not only contribute to and organize a food drive, but ask “why people are hungry and [act] on what they discover” (Westheimer & Kahne, p. 4). I believe that it is my goal, as an educator, to move students along this continuum to as close as possible to the justice-oriented citizen. I also believe that not only is this goal what is asked by the Global Issues curriculum, but what should be asked by other curriculum designers in all subject areas.

Empathy

As many of the issues dealt with in the Global Issues classroom are of great social concern (the crisis in Syria, human rights struggles, questions of equality, etc.) one of the most important roles of the Global Issues teacher must be to approach these issues with a desire to promote understanding and develop a sense of empathy. The Global Issues curriculum documents state this fact precisely: “The course is intended not only to enrich learners’ awareness of significant global issues, but to develop an ethos of concern as they come to understand their own capacities as contributing members of their local, national and global communities” (Manitoba Education, 2011a, p. 1).

The idea of empathic response has received a lot of attention lately in the social studies realm. During my time on the Global Issues pilot team last year, we were introduced to author Jeremy Rifkin’s (2009) book, wherein he argued that biologists and cognitive scientists are now making the case that humans are actually wired for empathy. Historically, according to Rifkin, humans have moved from empathy extended to blood ties through religious ties and ties to the nation state. Therefore, is it really that difficult to see us extending that empathy to a single race of human beings and to the environment that we inhabit (The Royal Society for the Arts, Manufactures and Commerce, n.d.)?

Another of Rifkin’s (2009) considerations deals specifically with students and their education. Compared to a hundred years ago, when people either did not or found it very hard to probe their own feelings or those of others, today “young people are thoroughly immersed in
therapeutic consciousness and comfortable with thinking about, getting in touch with and analyzing their own innermost feelings, emotions, and thoughts—as well as those of their fellows” (Rifkin, p.11). Many curricula, including the new Global Issues curriculum in Manitoba, are beginning to tap into this idea. As Rifkin stated,

New teaching models designed to transform education from a competitive contest to a collaborative learning experience are emerging as schools attempt to catch up to a generation that has grown up on the Internet and is used to interacting and learning in open social networks where they share information rather than hoard it. (p. 15)

Reflection on Change

My foray into teaching the new Global Issues curriculum has meant that my personal educational philosophy has undergone somewhat of a transformation. While I believe that, since beginning my teaching career some 13 years ago, I have always considered myself a child-centred educator, I do not think it was until I started piloting the Global Issues course that I truly began to see what this philosophy looked like in practice. When I started my teaching career, I took a great interest in the principles of Howard Gardner’s theory of multiple intelligences; as such, my craft was also guided by the principles of differentiated instruction. However, as I progressed in my career and faced new challenges and commitments, I found that my student-centred teaching began to wane. I fell back into a style of teaching consistent with the scholar-academic ideology, or Friere’s banking concept of education. It was easier, and safer, for me to be up in front of the class, Power Point up on the screen, using lecture or story-telling to deposit content into the minds of my students. I want to be clear that I am not necessarily saying that these methods should be avoided, but the problem was that I became reliant on them. The piloting of the Global Issues curriculum led to a reawakening of my teaching and philosophy. The design of the Global Issues course forced me begin to reassess the way that I was doing things in my classroom.

At the same time, the new design of the Global Issues curriculum forced my students to change their approach to their education. Instead of relying on “What’s going to be on the test?” students were guided into using inquiry, a concept that many of them were unfamiliar with and unsure about. Instead of an exam, they had to develop projects to effect positive change in the community. Students also had to deal with a great deal more independence. Without significant day-to-day work (such as worksheets), students found themselves with several larger projects but with plenty of time and resources to complete them.

My Global Issues Classroom

My Global Issues course is divided into three main parts. First, because the province has provided ten areas of suggested inquiry for the course, I use current affairs to access all of these areas. In order that the students have some idea of each area, I make sure that I use a wide gamut of current affairs, ranging through all inquiry areas and obtained from diverse sources. The great advantage is that most students can identify an interest in at least one, if not many, of the areas.

The group dialogue on these current affairs can range from five minutes up to an entire hour-long class, depending on how many issues we look at and the level of interest shown by students. I make it a priority to engage the students in these discussions by sitting down with the students instead of standing at the head of the class. I believe that I therefore visually appear less like Freire’s depositor of information and more like a partner in the learning process.
Second, the students complete three inquiry projects. Each project follows, on average, a three-week process. Their first task is to submit a proposal for the project. This proposal includes what area of inquiry they are pursuing, why they chose that area, how they plan on presenting their inquiry to the class, and whether they plan to work in a group or on their own. Additionally, and most importantly, students decide upon an essential or guiding question for their inquiry. I also provide a guide to inquiry for students, created by the designers of the Global Issues curriculum. Some of the completed inquiry projects have included the following questions:

- “How do we create more sustainable societies?”
- “Was the Arab Spring a success?”
- “How does the quality of life differ between Canada and Syria?”
- “What is the connection between social media and bullying?”

Planning and executing the inquiry projects helps to prepare the students for the third and final part of the course that is their Take Action Project.

Third, the Take Action Project is, in my opinion, the single most important task that the students in the Global Issues course undertake. The curriculum designers described the Take Action component of the course thusly:

Take Action shifts learning from the theoretical to the experiential by providing an opportunity for students to engage in practical, community-based projects. The goal is to move students from awareness through questioning, inquiry and dialogue, to critical consciousness and, ultimately, to praxis – engagement in informed reflective action for positive change. (Manitoba Education, 2011b, p. 1)

In my three years of piloting this new curriculum, I can attest to the success of this description.

Because the Take Action Project is worth 25% of a student’s final mark in the course, I give the students ample opportunity to work on it. Every Wednesday is “Take Action Day,” and the students have that hour to accomplish whatever they need for their projects. That is not to say that the time is completely unstructured; students must progress through a series of initial proposals, action plans, and development of inquiry questions to guide or inspire their action. Also, as their projects begin to take shape, students are granted the time to secure resources, contact people and organizations to help in their action, record video, or even conduct surveys.

While the results of these projects have varied over the past three years, overall I believe the implementation of these projects has seen great results. Many of these projects have had major impacts on their authors, on our school, and on the community.

**Student Experiences**

I would like to highlight two student Take Action Projects in particular. The first, “Ping Pong Positive,” was a campaign started by a student in the first year of my piloting the new curriculum. The student, who had battled mental health issues, had been helped during a very dark time in his life by someone with whom he had no prior relationship. Because of the selfless act by this person who helped him out of his dark times, the student believed that it was up to him to pay this kindness forward. He seized upon the idea of creating a website called Ping Pong Positive, and applied and received grant money from the Canadian Teachers’ Federation to purchase ping pong balls with his website logo printed on them. His idea was simple: pass
out the 500 hundred ping pong balls along with a compliment to 500 people, who would then pass it on to 500 more, and so on. Each time the ping pong ball was passed on, the receiver of the ball was asked to visit the website to share the story of how he/she had received it, thus promoting a culture of positivity. The website also contained links to information on mental health issues and organizations that provide support for those dealing with them. This student received high praise for his initiative, was featured in several local media, and has gone on to talk about his project at several youth conferences.

In the second example of a student project, the student utilized a skill that he had to guide his project. This particular student was very talented at photography and thus decided to use his skill for the betterment of the community. He organized his project under the international banner of “Help-Portrait”: photographers around the world who find people in need, take their pictures, and print them for them. The student organized a Help-Portrait event for our community just before Christmas. He gathered student and staff volunteers to help, and then organized two photo shoots – one for family portraits and one for kids with Santa Clause – and partnered with local businesses to print the pictures. Prints were delivered to those in-need community members who had participated in the shoot just days before Christmas. The project had such an impact that it has now become a legacy project, with the former student coming back to the school to lead current students in organizing the annual event.

**Conclusion**

This is just a sampling of the power of this course. When we as teachers empower students by engaging them in dialogue, fostering empathy and stirring their curiosity in the world around them, we create students who are willing and earnest to take steps for the betterment of society. The Take Action projects demonstrate the power that I have outlined in Freire’s ideology. The students, while relating to life experiences, use inquiry to drive them to question what can be done to make a positive change in their world. Then, reflecting on their own experience, they take action. This is done not only to bring awareness to some of the issues of concern to the students (such as the detrimental ways that society views mental health issues or the effects of poverty on members of our society), but also to take action to effect change. If the students mentioned above were able to effect that amount of change, just imagine what could happen if all Manitoba students took the course!

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THE GRADE 12 INQUIRY PROJECT: A FACILITATOR’S IMPRESSIONS

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Abstract

In his role as a former social studies teacher co-facilitating the Grade 12 Inquiry Research Project (GTIP), the author makes several critical observations of the GTIP and discusses implications for teacher-led participatory action research. (1) One of the most valued aspects of the GTIP for participants was the opportunity to get together to talk about their teaching lives and to participate in a professional community of fellow GI teachers. (2) Research participants favoured inquiry over instructor-directed teaching for the new Global Issues course, in spite of the pedagogical/ethical contentions at the core of inquiry-based learning. (3) To do action research well – for practitioners to access, recall, and represent their understandings – the research facilitator needs to be open, attentive, and adaptive to the chaotic fluidity of the research group.

The Grade 12 Inquiry Project: A Facilitator’s Impressions

As outlined in the introductory article, in the fall and winter of 2013-14 a group of high school teachers met on five separate occasions to discuss their experiences piloting the new grade 12 social studies course, “Global Issues: Citizenship and Sustainability” (GI). As co-research lead and a workshop facilitator, I was fully engaged in planning, participating, and debriefing these meetings. In this article, I discuss several critical impressions of these gatherings and of my colleagues’ work, along with implications for inquiry-based social studies pedagogy and teacher-led participatory action research.

Personal Perspective

Being one of the facilitators of the Grade Twelve Inquiry Project (GTIP) and the researcher designate from the University of Winnipeg, this series of workshops came at a propitious time. I had been a high school social studies teacher for 25 years, teaching mostly World Issues. I had recently moved into an academic position at the University of Winnipeg, and would now be expected to do “formal” research. At the same time, many of my social studies teaching friends and colleagues, master teachers, were beginning to retire, taking with them rich insight about what it is to educate youth for democratic and global citizenship – insight and wisdom that comes from years of seeking to engage students in conversations (dialogue?) about their world, political responsibilities, and shared obligations. Unveiling work, Hannah Arendt (1968) called it. It is hard work and emotionally exhausting. Authentic dialogue requires teachers to remake the subject every time, with every class and every student (Freire, 1970; Vercoe, 1998). As Walck (1997) wrote, it takes a lifetime to learn to become a true teacher – not because it takes years to master poses and techniques, but because it is an unending process of building a frame of mind – one of freedom and openness to all that can and will happen – and moving beyond the boundaries of the classroom to write the text of students’ lives. It is why Kincheloe, McLaren, and Steinberg (2011) could claim that “teachers themselves have access to understandings that can go far beyond what ‘outsiders’ have produced” (p. 166), understandings that come from a place only teachers have traversed. And so it seemed something of a waste, my colleagues leaving for Home Depot, Tim Hortons and Phoenix – a lifetime of energy expended and
inimitable understandings acquired – taking their educating acumen and teaching wisdom with them.

My research responsibility became clear: Before they leave, seek out social studies teachers – those teachers charged with educating for global awareness and engagement – and ask them about their teaching insights and understandings. Investigate what their interpretations unveil, their reflections reveal, and their stories illumine, and examine how their offerings broaden our horizons of teaching practice and of social studies education. It was with this perspective and motivation that I became involved with the GTIP group – and which inspired and shaped my workshop impressions.

**Impressions – Or What I Learned From and About My Colleagues**

Each of the day-long workshops was designed to include three activities: group discussion on teaching issues and challenges, generally and specific to GI; individual work on research projects, as related to GI; and group feedback on individual research projects. Through the discussions (often lively and combative, but always supportive), the stories (usually told with gale, gusto, and emotion) and personal revelations (spoken with honesty and candour, and more frequently as time unfolded), critical aspects of teaching social studies, teacher research, the GI curriculum, and the GTIP itself became apparent. For me, there were three revelations in particular that stood out. One spoke to the research process, one informed of the GI curriculum, and one pointed to a critical responsibility for action research facilitators.

**Community**

In March of 2013, six months before the research workshops series began, GTIP organized a one-day meeting with interested social studies teachers to get a sense of the “lay of the land” vis à vis GI: How was GI perceived in the schools, what were seen as some of its strengths and weaknesses, and what were potential barriers to implementation? Twenty-five teachers showed up. At the conclusion of the day, participants were asked what they needed to improve the delivery of the GI course – what would be most helpful? There was overwhelming consensus: more days like the one they had just experienced, where they had opportunities for face-to-face dialogue with colleagues who were struggling with similar issues and challenges, and ultimately to “just feel less alone.”

In the initial design of the fall-winter 2013-14 workshops, 30 minutes was slotted at the beginning of the day for check-in, to talk about anything going on in participants’ teaching/educating lives, and 15 to 30 minutes was given to the session’s debrief at the end of the day, to talk about any new insights or learnings. By the last meeting in March, we had changed the agenda to 90 minutes for the morning check-in and 30-60 minutes for the debrief discussion in the afternoon. The reason was that at the beginning of the day there was never enough time to talk about the issues that were animating people’s social studies teaching lives, and the open free-wheeling discussion invariably led to a richer “research” discussions about GI – and it built trust. At the end of the day, we needed more time for meta-talk about the day and what it had meant for people’s teaching lives. Participants consistently and frequently expressed gratitude for the opportunity to meet: “This day has changed my week,” “I have more hope and confidence now,” “It is too bad more teachers don’t have the opportunity for this type of community,” “I feel less alone.” At our last gathering, several weeks following the MERN forum, participants agreed that the best part of the project had been the opportunity to meet and talk with fellow GI teachers. They hoped that the meetings could continue in one form or another,
and they committed themselves to finding ways to share the opportunity with other GI teaching colleagues.

In short, based on participant response, the greatest benefit of the GTIP workshops lay in teachers’ being able to meet with their fellows. The comeback from others has been wholly supportive. Following the forum on March 22, professors and university administrators in the audience expressed animated approval of the project, Manitoba Social Science Teacher Association awarded GTIP a grant in May 2014 to extend the GTIP community-building research model to other social studies teacher groups, and currently the Manitoba Education Research Network is planning similar research formats for teachers in other disciplines. In short, there is growing recognition of, and support for, participatory research opportunities patterned after the Grade 12 Participatory Research Project.

Aulls and Shore (2008) argued that the social conditions of teachers’ work may ultimately undermine the confidence and devalue the knowledge, credibility, and wisdom of the best teacher’s efforts in action research. Furthermore, they warned that the situation is not going to change anytime soon, given the social/political pressures of teaching privatism and the bureaucratic structure of school systems, which can diametrically oppose teacher involvement in action research. The GTIP represents a hopeful counter-narrative. Not only is it an example of bureaucratic support for teacher-led research; but it is a model for how to build a community of support, one that honours teachers, trusts their ability to do research, and provides opportunity for teachers to feel less alone.

Inquiry-based Pedagogy

One of the key objectives in organizing the research workshops was to seek teacher input on the inquiry-based components of GI. Inquiry-based pedagogy, including an the end-of-course take-action student project (TAP) is central to the new course. This approach is grounded in Deweyian constructivism and Freirian critical pedagogy. The curriculum document (Manitoba Education, 2014) expounds,

> Inquiry relies upon critical and divergent thinking. During the inquiry process, the role of a teacher shifts from covering content to becoming a guide and facilitator. Students are given the opportunity to generate their own questions, to set learning goals, to acquire and share enduring understandings, and to develop the decision-making skills that are part of active citizenship. (“Inquiry Approach,” p. 1)

> Take Action is the experiential learning, or praxis component of this course. In the context of this Global Issues course, the take action projects shift learning from the theoretical to the experiential by providing an opportunity for students to engage in practical, community-based projects. The goal is to move students from awareness through questioning, inquiry and dialogue, to critical consciousness and, ultimately, to praxis – engagement in informed reflective action for positive change. (“Take Action,” p. 1)

The teachers were unequivocal in their support of both Inquiry and the TAP. This was somewhat surprising, given the sometimes contentious and spirited debates about inquiry-based pedagogy during curriculum development meetings two years earlier. However participant teachers did acknowledge and name several critical challenges to inquiry approaches to teaching. They talked about students wanting to be told what to do and think (“Just tell me what I need to know for the test”), misgivings about not having the enough
knowledge or the tools to help students explore topics on their own, challenges in giving up “sage on the stage” stances, and the question of whether some indispensable course content could be delivered only through instructor-centred modalities. There was also much talk of the ethical implications for the teacher-student relationship, and the related age-old issue of balancing teacher guidance with student-led learning — echoing some of the discussion during the initial curriculum development meetings. It was agreed that even though students may learn most in circumstances of independence and autonomy, and in inter-subjective relationships with the teachers, the inevitable reality of teacher power, guidance, and prescription must be acknowledged and attended to.

Teacher-facilitators, wittingly or not, set tone, make decisions about power and power sharing, and shape the learning environment. Freirian pedagogy envisions students and teachers freely, in a spirit of mutuality, uncovering and unveiling the world together (Freire, 1970). Still, there are times when teachers are called upon to intervene and to prescribe for the sake of balancing the capacity and challenge for those taught to have worthwhile experiences (Dewey, 1997). It was an issue with which Freire became concerned later in his career, reminding those people operating in his name that teachers cannot deny their authority in the classroom. To do so is insincere, dishonest, and at worst manipulative (Kinchele, McLaren, & Steinberg, 2011). Thus, the question becomes “How can teachers best navigate their teacher-ly concerns and responsibilities within inter-subjective and dialogic relationships – between respecting freedom and autonomy, and intervening and prescribing?” According to the participating teachers, it is an ongoing struggle that can be traversed only in the context of specific GI classrooms and student-teacher relationships,1 and for which they expressed a need for professional guidance, support, and learning.

In the end, however, while acknowledging some of the critical issues (moral and pedagogic) inherent in inquiry approaches to teaching/learning (discussed in one form or another at all of the sessions), everyone agreed that inquiry-based pedagogy, including GI’s TAP, should be kept. Reasons included that it can be critical to developing the confidence and agency necessary for democratic citizenship, and that student-driven and inspired projects can exceed the scope and impact of that imagined by classroom teachers — and often lead to transformative learning. Global citizenship cannot be imposed; it must come from a place of informed and independent reflection. As Dewey (1997) contended, real learning only ever happens through critical reflection on real-life experience.

On the Facilitator’s Role

As a former social studies teacher facilitating research practice with practising teachers, I relearned a truism from my high school teaching days: Chaos often precedes order. My social studies classroom management approach was shaped by the epistemological musings of Capra (1982), Bohm (1996), and Schön (1987), philosophers and educators who argued that chaos is a necessary precursor for order (meaning-making) and an essential catalyst for learning. Writing about the necessary chaotic element of the classroom, they claimed that since teachers/facilitators cannot talk people into their version of reality – learners must create it

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1 A few years ago, in a study looking to understand the qualities of exemplary classroom teacher (Kornelsen, 2006), findings showed that exemplary teachers have an instinctive sensibility for knowing when to do what, and how. It comes from experience, intuition, and training, but most significantly it is rooted in an abiding care for students and a deep respect for the course material.
themselves – a critical role of teachers/facilitators is to ensure the free generation, communication, and interpretation of information. Bohm (1996) described it as “a stream of meaning flowing among and through us and between us” (p. 3), declaring that facilitating a free flow of meaning requires attention, awareness, and openness. Truth, he asserted, comes not from opinions but emerges from shared meaning.

As referenced earlier, in the case of the GTIP meetings, the extent of the knowledge and understandings that were recalled, clarified, represented, and collected (i.e., the meanings that were made) corresponded with the level of openness with which we approached the beginning of the day – not unlike my of most inspired social studies classes. In other words, the more free-ranging the discussions were at the outset (the more the facilitators respected the freedom for participants to talk about what they needed to), the richer and more meaningful were the research-focused discussions that followed. Often times, it meant abandoning or adapting a prescribed workshop agenda, and “going where people wanted to go.” Therefore, if what Saltmarsh (1996) says is true that the most trustworthy knowledge comes from experience, and if Kincheloe, McLaren, & Steinberg (2011) are correct that teachers have access to understandings far beyond what non-practising educational researchers have, then it follows that only practising teachers, those with that knowledge and those understandings, will know how to access, re-call, and represent it – i.e., do (re)search. And if that is the case, then when facilitator(s) of action research meetings follow teacher participants’ lead and respect their discussion interests, their knowledge and understandings will more likely be revealed in ways that are deeper, richer, and more trustworthy. To put it another way, the way that action research meetings are conducted should derive from teachers, because their deepest insights come from experiences only they can know how to access. That is why Kemmis and McTaggart (2005) wrote that teacher participants should control and determine the machinery of research techniques when researching their own practice, and why facilitators of action research workshops need to embrace the chaos that emerges when research groups search for meaning – and go where they are called, as only they can.

Conclusion

The GTIP research project asked a group of nine teachers over a period of eight months to reflect on their GI teaching experiences, and to share their impressions, observations and insights collectively, with a view to making recommendations for curriculum, curriculum implementation, and teaching practice. Through discussions held, stories told, and revelations shared, important aspects of teaching social studies, teacher research, the GI curriculum, and the GTIP itself were revealed. This former social studies teacher took special note of three. First, for the participants one of the most valued aspects of the research project was the occasion for them to get together to talk about their teaching lives and to participate in a professional community of fellow GI teachers – sharing stories, discussing philosophy, debating pedagogy, and feeling supported. Second, there was much discussion about the pedagogical dilemma at the core of inquiry-based learning, an issue that has been around since Plato introduced Meno. In the end, all participants assertively, but eloquently and with one voice, embraced inquiry over instructor-based teaching. Finally, to do action research well and for practitioners to access, recall, and represent their understandings, the research facilitator needs to be open, attentive, and adaptive to the chaotic fluidity of the research group.
References


Graduate School Teachers-Administrators’ and Student Teachers’ Perceptions of the Revised Manitoba (WNCP) Social Studies Curricula

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Abstract

Curriculum development and implementation are dilemma-ridden processes. To comprehend these intricate documents, it is necessary to dissect their anatomies. This paper is based on two groups’ analyses of the WNCP – Manitoba Social Studies Curricula. The research participants were 25 teachers and administrators pursuing their M.Ed. degrees and approximately 100 student teachers completing their B.Ed. degrees at a Manitoba university. The graduate group was given Posner’s conceptual model for analyzing curriculum. The B.Ed. group used a researcher-made instrument developed from the social studies curriculum. Both groups felt that the curricula were well developed for implementation. The M.Ed. teacher-administrators felt that unpacking the curricula should be required by all educators and administrators as a policy process. The B.Ed. student teachers were impressed with the teaching options and resources. Their positive comments on the available resources contrast the findings reported by Gibson (2012) in Alberta, where lack of resources hindered curriculum implementation.

Over the decades, curriculum as a pedagogic concept has produced emotive dissensions that reflected the moral, social-political economic ideologies of its proponents. Ontologically, the term defies precise definition. From an epistemological perspective, it even seems to advocate methodologies that also reflect its proponents’ ideologies and philosophies. An examination of the field, as defined by some noted curricularists, reveals a pattern of confusion in definitions and a similar lack of precision in methodologies, and yet curriculum as a field of study continues to flourish (Armento, 1993; Bohan, 2003; Carpenter, 2004; Crocco, 2004; Mohammed & Keller, 2009; Mraz, 2004; Shudak & Helfenbein, 2005). This is evident by the wide array of texts on the subject.

Fullan (1982), a Canadian educator and former President of the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) views curriculum as being complex, dilemma ridden, technical, and socio-political. Ornstein and Hunkins (2013) stated that “curriculum as a field of study has been characterized as elusive, fragmentary, and confusing . . . [but] crucial to the health of schools and society” (p. 1). These observations reveal that the field of curriculum is very problematic and complex. This point is illustrated very succinctly in the examination of textbooks on curriculum.

McNeil (2009), for example, identified four conceptions of curriculum:

1. humanistic
2. social reconstructionism
3. systemic, and,
4. academic
Ornstein and Hunkins went further than McNeil. They identified six curriculum approaches, as follows:

1. behavioural
2. managerial
3. systems
4. academic
5. humanistic
6. reconceptualist

Ornstein and Hunkins then identified five definitions of the concept:

1. Plan for achieving goals
2. Learners’ experiences (based on Dewey)
3. System for dealing with people
4. A field of study
5. Subject matter

Educators can imagine how this cacophony of approaches, conceptions, and definitions can create misconceptions and confusion in the live world of professional practice. Numerous studies have documented the failures of curricula that were incongruent with their implementers’ use at the building and divisional levels (Binda, 1993, 1989). Some failures come to mind: the MACOS Social Studies in the US in the 1970s, and the Alberta social studies in 1975 (Downey Research Associates, 1975). Even in science, as revealed in the recent legal (2005) battles in the US on Intelligent Design on Trial, differences in beliefs can jettison a curriculum and stop implementation dead in its track. In a Manitoba study, Binda (1993) also found that factors such as complexity, observability, resource availability, administrative support and leadership can have serious impacts on curriculum implementation at the building and divisional levels.

In a recent study on social studies in Alberta, Gibson (2012) found significant changes in curriculum content and pedagogy. She noted that teachers found the content to be overwhelming – a problem of complexity – and therefore relied on the text, focusing on the big picture of citizenship which is the main focus of social studies in the WNCP. Students felt that they were learning content about history and geography, a point noted by Marsden (2001). This chasm between intent, practice, and achievement illustrates the problem inherent in any curriculum, hence the necessity for in-depth analyses of curricula.

**Purpose of the Study and Rationale**

This paper examines how two groups of educators – practising teachers-administrators and student teachers at a Manitoba university – perceived the nuances of the revised WNCP – Manitoba Social Studies Curricula, through in-depth structured analyses of the curricula.

A rationale for curriculum analysis is obvious from the varying assumptions and philosophical viewpoints inherent in the curriculum. In order for educators to comprehend fully what a curriculum is about, it is necessary to dig deep and “unpack” the curriculum. Whether the curriculum is for a particular grade, school, division, province, or region – as in the case of the Western and Northern Curriculum Protocol (WNCP) – it is important to determine its appropriateness for the given environment or context.

Curriculum analysis, therefore, is a sine qua non for effective educational attainment. Such factors as content accuracy, relevance, reading difficulty, sequencing, concepts, skills and so forth are crucial to learning and teaching. Assumptions underlying the curriculum must be valid,
appropriate and understood, as are values, beliefs, purposes, how students learn, how teachers teach and organize subject matter, what resources are provided, and so forth. Uncovering and unpacking the above noted factors requires probing beneath the surface of the curriculum, much like forensic detective work. Once this type of analysis is done, educators will have internalized the essence of the curriculum qua the educational enterprise. Zais (1976) described this process as understanding the anatomy of a curriculum. Johnson (1967), Tyler (1950), and Posner (1992), for example, have developed models and posed a set of questions that may be used by the curriculum analyst to tease a curriculum apart into its component parts. Posner’s model is used in this study to make an analysis of the social studies curriculum.

This process of unpacking the curriculum to understand what it entails is best described by the French philosopher Jacques Derrida as deconstruction. Using the process of rational reasoning or logos first developed by ancient Greek philosophers, Derrida devised his method of deconstruction to get inside the logos, text, or curriculum. This method to trace the origin and development of the meanings therein determines how knowledge claims, meanings, and interpretations in the text affect our interpretations and usage (Gutek, 2004). As noted above, this method of deconstructing and unpacking is the approach used in analysing the WNCP – Manitoba Social Studies Curricula.

**Method**

This qualitative study utilized the conceptual framework as described by Posner (1992) and philosophical rationalization outlined by Derrida. Posner’s analytical model was used with one cohort of 25 practising teachers and school administrators. The teacher-administrator cohort was involved in a graduate curriculum course as part of the M.Ed. program. Another model developed by the author was used by approximately 100 student teachers. The student teacher cohort undertook the analysis as part of their Social Studies Methods course in the B.Ed. program. Both analytical models are attached as appendices A and B.

Posner’s model was modified for use and consists of four key sets of questions. Each question set was expanded further with sub-questions to tease out required details. Participants were directed to use their knowledge, training, and professional background in responding to the sub-questions. The social studies curricula that were analyzed included early, middle, and senior years grade levels. Participants for the most part worked in groups to analyse their selected curricula. The researcher provided clarity to the questions when asked for assistance. Each analysis consisted of about 15-20 typed pages; therefore, only the summarized findings are given in this report.

The student teacher cohort worked in groups of four, but used the analytical framework developed by the author, based on the conceptual organization structure of the Manitoba Social Studies Curricula. Responses in this cohort were more textual and content oriented, whereas those of the teacher-administrator group were more analytical in focus. Nevertheless, both groups had more or less similar aims as much as possible to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the intents and meaning of the social studies curriculum as outlined by the developers.
Findings

The following findings are divided into the two cohort groups that participated in the study: 25 teacher-administrator M.Ed. students and approximately 100 B.Ed. student teachers from a Manitoba university.

Teacher-Administrator Cohort

The qualitative findings from the teacher-administrator cohort are reported in alignment with Posner’s model of curriculum analysis and Derrida’s conceptualization of deconstruction. Deconstruction is the process of unpacking the components of curriculum to get into its nuances and internal meanings. Participants’ responses and analyses were examined and clustered in accordance with the four curriculum sets identified by Posner and the ten questions from the sets.

Set 1 – Curriculum Documentation and Origins. This set of question necessitated an examination of the underlying social, philosophical, and cognitive reasons for the curriculum change. Responses to the question posed in Set One generally reflected the foundational principles highlighted in the WNCP Protocol. In addition, diverse perspectives are examined – e.g. Aboriginal and Francophone – cultural diversity, social and political issues, [and] democratic citizenship in the context of Canadian history.

Positive observations were identified in the way [that] the new social studies curriculum was created through a culturally collaborative process with diverse voices in the community. One group noted, “The result is a social studies curriculum that better reflects the cultural reality of Canada.” Another participant stated emphatically, “I had never really considered how curriculum can be used as a tool to drive home the dominant cultures, ideals and philosophies. Overall, I learned a lot.”

Set 2 – The Curriculum Proper. This section focused on content of the curriculum with four sub-questions. The first two questions focused on training, education [c-6] and subject matter. The last two focused on the hidden curriculum and hegemony.

Generally, the participants were in agreement in their findings. One group stated that the curriculum is exemplary in the way that it separates the content clusters, skills, and values. The group felt that the skills and values component reflects a training aspect of learning that will stay with students. Others felt that the spiral nature of the concepts, scope, and sequence can enhance learning as students mature, but they also cautioned about the potential boredom of repetition. Nevertheless, this curricular organization was found to be consistent with accepted classroom practice.

The core concepts and enduring understandings were particularly viewed as innovative ideas that facilitate learning. The cohort felt that this is an important aspect of the new curriculum. In reflection of this aspect of the curriculum, one participant wrote, “I thought that I had a good handle on what the grade nine curriculum was about, but after this analysis, I realize how little I actually knew. I enjoyed the challenge.” This statement perhaps sums up the general sentiment of this cohort.

The last two questions in this set examined the hidden aspect of the curriculum and the concept of hegemony. There was a general feeling that every curriculum is somewhat hegemonic and entails hidden aspects that may be reflected by the views and dispositions of the implementers.
The focus of the social studies curriculum on diverse perspectives, diverse worldviews, inclusiveness, etc., would help to mitigate inherent dangers in the hidden curriculum and lessen hegemonic tendencies. Nevertheless, some participants still felt that “the shared national identity envisioned by the WNCP continues to reflect western perspectives and belief systems” – which was not the view shared by most participants.

This statement clearly puts the onus on teachers in the classroom to be conscious of their own identity and values and those of the students, and how these interact with the curriculum, in order to avoid bias (if this is possible). The curriculum does offer suggestions and strategies to avert this pitfall. The Jim Keegstra case in Alberta, however, remains a cautionary tale.

Set 3 – The Curriculum in Use. This set focused on the implementation of the curriculum and how teachers – the live frontline agents – interpret and use the curriculum. This is where numerous studies have identified curricular failures, already noted earlier in the paper.

In terms of the cost to implement, there was a feeling that schools already have technological equipment and the web provides wide access to resources. In addition, the curriculum itself has a wide array of BLMs and suggested resources. The resource availability was a major problem identified in the old curriculum (Binda, 1993).

The values component of diverse perspectives accommodates inclusion and participation of differing worldviews. One group clearly stated that “citizenship is a value that is relevant for everyone, everywhere in Canada.” For example, in rural communities, citizenship can be viewed as an understanding of environmentally responsible agricultural practices. In urban centers, students can practise environmental citizenship by participating in school recycling programs.

Some issues about new immigrants were raised, given the recent increase in immigration to Manitoba. There was a feeling that more flexibility should be included in the curriculum clusters to accommodate the newcomers. For example, there is a large group of Hispanic immigrants in Brandon. Consequently, Spanish is now the second language in the city, yet this group of citizens feels left out in curricular issues surrounding diversity.

Another factor observed was one of complexity. One group in this cohort questioned the ability of grade six students to comprehend “the complexities and intricacies of the political creation of a country.” Complexity as a concept that impacts implementation has been found in numerous studies, for example, Gibson (2012) and Binda (1993).

One group of teacher-administrators felt that there were some incongruencies in the curriculum, which was developed from a technical-scientific perspective but advocates non-technical/nonscientific methods of teaching that are more humanistic and reconstructivistic. However, the majority of the respondents felt that the curriculum can incorporate a mixture of teaching approaches in a pragmatic-eclectic manner.

Set 4 – Curriculum Critique. Some of the problems associated with the old curriculum were the paucity of specific implementation directions and lack of available resources. It was felt that the new curriculum is rich in resources and offers numerous suggestions and directions for implementing the learning outcomes (SLOs). This cohort felt that the curriculum is comprehensive in terms of planning and implementation. The document was viewed as relevant for students today, and useful and easy for new teachers to navigate with a myriad of strategies.
These factors are consonant with concepts of observability and triability as described in the implementation literature.

There were some different viewpoints on curricular integration. Some felt that integration would be easy, others more difficult. This difference of opinions likely reflects working with different grades in the analytical exercises.

Various groups noticed a number of shortcomings. For example, web technology was not easily available in northern Manitoba at the time of the study, and it was felt that this can affect curriculum usage. Teachers who actually taught the curriculum felt that not enough time was devoted to teaching the social studies – a subject that is considered the Cinderella of the core curricula or “big four.” One group suggested that there should be more directions in making enduring understandings applicable to everyday life. Overall, however, the analyses revealed positive responses about the social studies curriculum.

**Student Teacher Cohort**

This cohort of student teachers consisted of approximately 100 B.Ed. students who were required to select a social studies curriculum grade level and carry out a detailed analysis using a developed instrument (see Appendix B).

This instrument was tested and revised for use as part of the training program of the student teachers. The analysis of the grade level curriculum focused mainly on the textual matter in each grade level, but also included the introductory section found in the front piece of each curriculum at grade level. The rationale for this exercise was to enable student teachers to gain a good handle on all aspects of the curriculum because they could be required to teach it when employed as teachers.

Due to the complexity and detailed nature of the curriculum, the B.Ed. students were placed in groups of four to engender discussion. Students found that this collaborative strategy greatly facilitated discussion and understanding. When necessary, assistance was provided to the students.

1. **Introduction and Overview.** The student teachers had previously done an exercise on the history of social studies. This facilitated their understanding of social studies as well as the history and work of the WNCP.

   Definitional issues led to a better clarity of the rationale inherent in the social studies curriculum. Students demonstrated an understanding that not only content, but the development of citizenship of a Canadian and global context, was a crucial component. Examination of the essential elements elicited viewpoints on the theoretical-philosophical underpinnings inherent in the curriculum. A majority of students experienced some difficulty in this area of the analysis. Nevertheless, students appeared to acquire a good grasp of how the social studies relate to people, the environment, and their interactions.

2. **Conceptual Map and Content.** Like the previous social studies curriculum, the new curriculum has a conceptual map that clarifies the definition and structure of social studies. The student teachers utilized the conceptual map and related it in the analysis to the different components in the curriculum. For example, key philosophical curricular content such as equity or social justice was identified with the concepts of power in the conceptual map from both
political and economic perspectives. Other concepts inherent in the learning outcomes (SLOs) were similarly matched with those in the conceptual map.

3. Teaching Strategies and Learning Experiences. This section focused on the stages of instruction and teaching strategies. The student teachers followed the suggestions in the curriculum guides and were quite proficient in their descriptions and analyses. However, they had considerable difficulty in separating the individual SLOs in the sub-clusters and tended to include all the SLOs in one lesson. This was identified as a weak point in the manner in which the curriculum suggested lesson implementation. In later practice, this problem arose again as students attempted to include different concepts from the SLOs into a single lesson that had to be extended into two or three class periods. Nevertheless, in the implementation, the outline of skills, resources (BLMs), tips, etc., proved to be very helpful.

4. Assessment Protocols. Because the B.Ed. students had completed a course in assessment, they found this part of the curriculum analysis easy to follow. The structured outline of assessment procedures in the guide facilitated the analysis, and students later were noticed to be quite proficient in relating assessment to their student teaching in all three stages of their lesson: activating, acquiring, and applying. Students were able to reflect and self-assess in accordance with suggestions from the guide.

5. Personal Commentary and Reflection. Unlike the teacher-administrator cohort, which identified numerous shortcomings in the social studies curricula based on its members’ previous training and experience, the much larger student teacher cohort made no negative comments. The B.Ed. students were very impressed with the curriculum and the detailed manner in which it had been planned and developed. They commented on how easy it was to follow the guide in developing lessons. They believed that their analyses of the social studies curriculum would put them in good standing for implementing the curriculum when they become fully trained teachers.

Discussion

Teachers and administrators were asked to analyze the Manitoba Social Studies Curricula, using a modified model initially developed by Posner. The rationalization for this exercise was based on Derrida’s concept of deconstruction, whereby the detailed meanings of a curriculum is revealed.

The analysis consisted of four key sets of questions with subsidiary questions ferreting out details in the curriculum. Responses to the question sets were generally positive. The curriculum was viewed as relevant, well planned and developed, easy to follow – even for novice teachers – and easy to use. However, there were some shortcomings that were identified, and these were noted in previous research in the implementation literature. It was felt that these problems can be overcome with training and dedication by users.

Conclusion

In this research, two groups of educators used separate framework models to analyse the revised WNCP – Manitoba Social Studies Curricula. The group of 25 teacher-administrators used the model originally developed for such analyses by Posner. The participants responded to the questions and commented on strengths and weaknesses of the curriculum. They were, on the whole, very impressed with the manner in which the curriculum was planned and developed. Their observations matched findings from the research literature.
The cohort of 100 student teachers differed from the teacher-administrator group, but had similar goals regarding the utility of the curriculum in educating future citizens. This cohort was generally quite impressed with the development of the curriculum. The respondents were very pleased with the analysis exercise and strongly felt that it was a valuable learning experience that would bode well for them in their future careers as teachers.

References


Appendix A
CURRICULUM ANALYSIS GUIDE

Set 1 – Curriculum Documentation and Origins
Focus: What situation resulted in the development of the curriculum?
1. To what social, economic, political or educational problem was the curriculum attempting to respond?

Set 2 – The Curriculum Proper
Focus: What are the purposes and content of the curriculum?
2. What aspects of the curriculum are intended for training, and what aspects are intended for educational contexts?
3. What conception of subject matter is apparent in the curriculum? What evidence is there for interdisciplinary content and teaching?
4. What aspects of a hidden curriculum are likely to accompany the conceptions and perspectives underlying the curriculum?
5. To what extent is the curriculum likely to play a hegemonic role in its purposes or content?

Set 3 – The Curriculum in Use
Focus: How should the curriculum be implemented?
6. What are the probable costs and benefits associated with the curriculum change?
7. What values are embedded in the curriculum, and how well are these values likely to be suited to the community?
8. What are your concerns about the curriculum that could be clarified by evaluation methods and data? Consider short-term outcomes, long-term outcomes.

Set 4 Curriculum Critique
Focus: What is your judgment about the curriculum?
9. What are its strengths and weaknesses?
10. How would you adapt it to maximize its benefits and to minimize its limitations?

Appendix B
SOCIAL STUDIES GRADE ANALYSIS GUIDE

1. Introduction and Overview –
   - Definition
   - Historical Evolution
   - Rationale & Purpose
   - Theoretical Issues, Epistemology
   - Child Psychology

2. Conceptual Map & Content –
   - Conceptual Map and Framework
   - GLOs and SLOs (general description)
   - Essential Elements
   - Cluster Descriptions with Enduring Learning Experiences
   - Outline the Required: Knowledge, Skills
   - Values, Attitudes, Predispositions
   - Resources – Student (BLMs), Teacher (brief statement on each set)

3. Teaching Strategies & Learning Experiences –
   - Stages of Instruction (activate, acquire, apply)
   - Brief Description of Teaching Strategies
   - Group Work, Student Project, Field Trips, Inquiry

4. Assessment Protocols –
   - Classroom Assessment – stages of assessment associated with teaching
   - Formative & Summative (as, for, of)
   - Various Strategies of Assessments
   - Self-Assessment & Reflection

5. Personal Commentary and Reflection (your analysis)
Abstract

This paper relies on anecdotal observations and does not review the literature on Systems Thinking (ST). Having taught the earlier “World Issues” course with its emphasis on the Cold War and social, political, and economic theories for fourteen years, and now having switched to the new course “Global Issues: Citizenship and Sustainability” for these past two years, I explored the potential that ST would have on student attitudes, inquiries, and action projects.

The Impact of Using Systems Thinking as a Core Strategy for Student Learning in a “Global Issues: Citizenship and Sustainability” Classroom

I began with the question, “How does focusing on Systems Thinking (ST) change the classroom ‘conversation’ vis-à-vis global issues and sustainability and what impact, if any, does it appear to have on the students’ perception of what it means to be a transformative citizen?” My goal was to provide students with strategies and tools to take on the intractable issues that threaten to overwhelm them, thereby helping them take that important step from being concerned citizens to becoming transformative citizens.

I wondered whether a focus on ST would mean that inquiry projects would be more solution oriented and less a list of information. Students would demonstrate their understanding of issues by creating a narrative in their own voice, charting long-term consequences, understanding causality, and identifying mental models that needed to be changed in order for change to happen. Changing their minds, they would change the world. Consequently, their Take Action Projects would indicate an understanding of the macrocosm, but would identify leverage points in the microcosm.

With the shift from World Issues and its focus on the Cold War and why things are they way they are, to Global Issues and its focus on how do we change the way things are, students require effective strategies to address the issues of sustainability and citizenship.

Strategies

In the first four weeks of class, I introduced two core concepts, the first being eco-literacy, which segues nicely into the second, systems thinking. To get the students thinking about sustainability in a new way, I introduced the nested diagram of planet, people, and profit to replace the Venn diagram that gives equal weight to each of the three. Because students read the Venn diagram as suggesting that the economy has an equal value to the environment, they often do not grasp the urgency of the situation in which there is no economy without an environment.

We began the year with an inquiry project in the area of Peace and Conflict with Syria as the focus. At the beginning of the semester, the news was full of reports out of the Middle East, and it captured the interest of the majority of the class. Keeping the nested diagram in the centre of...
our discussion, we started to examine the issues. Students made multiple connections to other areas of inquiry, and we occasionally needed a class to explore sidebar issues such as the correlation between food security and civil unrest.

Process

We used this first group inquiry to model what the future inquiries, which would be self-directed, would look like. Students prepared a proposal, followed by a detailed plan, with an annotated works cited, and concluded with the final inquiry. The first presentation was submitted in a paper format, with later ones being submitted in a lesson, a power point, a discussion, or a Prezi. At various points in the process, students discussed their research with the class.

While students began their inquiry on Syria, I taught a series of mini-lessons on ST. We applied these strategies to our case study, and in general this is what happened:

1. We first had to tell the story. I asked them to tell the story in their own voice. If they could discuss the issue without using extensive quotes from the news sources, I hoped that they would have a better understanding of the big picture. The story became increasingly complex during our discussions, with students bringing in news clips about –

   a. regional allies and enemies
   b. internal groups and power distribution
   c. ideological and economic links
   d. international actions or non-actions
   e. refugees and the international response or non-response
   f. further degradation of an already stressed environment

Some students relished this kind of complexity, but for others Syria was a reality that they could not get their heads around. Their world was just not big enough yet. Therefore, the challenge became to show how the Syrian conflict is part of a system that is linked to our lives. One way of doing that is showing how decisions made by our government, or past governments, have ramifications for Syrians. Most students started with the question “How does that affect me?” We turned that on its head to “How does what I do affect what happens in Syria?” Instead of being reactive, we learned to be proactive. In this way, various issues arose such as food security, arms sales, and geopolitical posturing.

2. We then identified concrete and abstract variables. Alawites, Shia, Sunni, Hezbollah, and other groups were concrete variables, as were alliances with Russia and Iran. Other variables such as oppression and food security were more abstract and challenging for students. Once students began to see the parts of the system, they also began to take a big step toward asking important questions. Nuance is hard for most people, and young people especially tend to see the world in binary ways.

3. I then spent some time showing students how to plot Behaviour Over Time Graphs (BOTGs) using four archetypal patterns:

   a. Tragedy of the Commons. This is a good example for showing how a civil war is, for the planet, a tragedy of the commons. However, it is also a tragedy of the commons vis-à-vis infrastructure, the future of the youth, the destruction of culture – see Aleppo for a devastating example.
b. Fixes that Fail. Foreign involvement, according to some perspectives, has provided opportunities for rebel forces such as Al Qaida to arm and to enter, all in the attempt to end the war, and has prolonged the war.

c. Eroding Goals. At the outset of the conflict, western nations had high expectations to end the conflict quickly, but failed to take the necessary steps to meet those expectations. As it became more obvious that the original goals were not going to be met, new goals were set, which were also not met, and so on. It became a zero sum game.

d. Shifting the Burden. Students followed the news and tracked how countries played the blame game, but more importantly, they saw that by treating symptoms and not the causes, the intensity of the problem increased and more and more refugees poured out into neighbouring countries, creating new sources of instability.

The main objective in using archetypes was to identify a trend, and whether or not that trend would be sustainable. If not, what would be the consequences of a “sustainability gap”?

4. Our next step, once we had started to see the causality of these sustainability gaps, was to learn how to create Causal Loop Diagrams (CLDs). These enabled the students to visualize the causal chain of two types of behaviours: the vicious cycle and the virtuous cycle. We then discussed reinforcing loops and balancing loops, and the impact of delayed reaction in a cycle. We “visualized” the vicious feedback loops, showing arms coming into a country and their impact on stability in the region. We examined the causality linking the Arab Spring, crop failure in Russia, rising wheat prices in the Middle East, and the growing civic frustration with corruption.

5. However, the most popular exercise for students was to visualize the issues using an Iceberg model. Here the premise is that what is visible are the events, to which we react. Just below the surface are patterns, to which we adapt. A bit deeper are structures that cause the patterns to form, and here we respond creatively by finding ways to make the structures work. It is, however, at the base, where our mental models rest, that we can generate real change. For many students, it was that epiphany that said, “Humans created these systems – they can be changed.” This model highlights the mental models that allow these structures to remain and create patterns that perpetuate events. If we can change these mental models – i.e., change minds – we can change the world.

An interesting discussion that came out of this group inquiry was a cynical observation concerning the existence of the nation state. Since this course focuses on global citizenship, we needed to understand what that meant. We discovered that weapons, resources, monies, and other goods, including the Internet, have little respect for borders, but at the same time that borders have little respect for people. The students noted that our borders are very porous when it comes to profit, but very tight when it comes to people. They asked, “Why does Sweden, a country of 9 million, take in more refugees from the camps than any other western nation?” All of this led to discussions of nationalism, exploitation, and finally the education system that, on one hand teaches us to be proud Canadians, and on the other hand wants to create global citizens. One student commented that “maybe the government just wants us to be good global citizens so that we are better equipped to go over there and take their stuff, while keeping them out of our country.”
My ultimate goal was to move students from cynicism to action, and to show them how they might leverage these issues. For example, one student returned from volunteering at Winnipeg Harvest with the observation that basically the poor were “screwed” because the Band-Aid was just getting bigger, which simply meant that the wound was getting bigger. She understood that we needed to heal the wound in order to get rid of the bandage, but that the bandage itself was not helping the healing process at all. She was not about to give up her volunteering, but she recognized that volunteering alone would not remedy the issue of food security in Winnipeg.

By the end of this first inquiry (4 weeks), the students had gone through the process several times. I found it useful to have this pattern of inquiry available to them because it could be used whenever we had a guest speaker, I showed a video, or I gave them an article to assess. If they could tell the story, chart the trends, visualize the problems, and identify the mindset that needed changing, they were well on their way to becoming transformative citizens (see Appendix).

Indicators of Success or Failure

One of the ironies of using ST as a focus was revealed in the Take Action Project (TAP) of a group of boys who explored the legalization of marijuana. When I jokingly told them that, of course, the government wants to legalize marijuana – what better way to keep young men sedated and unwilling and unable to change the status quo – they sulked and told the class that Mr. Paetkau thought that they were shallow and insignificant. However, they went to great lengths in their presentations to show how behaviour by law enforcement over time had led to the USA being one of the most punitive countries in the world, to demonstrate that the cultivation of hemp and marijuana (they had some trouble distinguishing between the two plants) would have positive effects on the planet, and to explain how the vicious feedback loop of restricted use and criminality was the result of a structure that kept these destructive patterns in perpetual motion. Thus, even if their response in the end was not generative, it certainly was creative.

This past year, 5 of the 22 students earned less than 35% in the course and did not get their credit. (They also failed in at least two other subjects that semester.) On the other hand, they participated in all classroom discussions with enthusiasm, and seemed to accept the fact that they did not earn a credit with great equanimity. My hope, of course, had been that with this new push toward engagement and inquiry-based learning, I would create a tidal wave that would sweep them all through the semester to success. After all, it is a citizenship course and it is one thing to fail a course, but to fail as a citizen is a harsh condemnation.

The last two months of the semester were largely spent on research, planning and executing the TAPs. I met with students individually to review their research, or have them do mini-presentations for me. At the end of the semester, I asked students to assess the following aspects, and some chose to use ST to break down some elements of the question. Here are the variables (drivers) that they came up with:

If you were the teacher of this class, how would you address the following elements?
  a. managing time
  b. motivating the learner
  c. communicating information
  d. evaluating the work
  e. choosing the areas of inquiry
  f. changing people’s attitudes towards the planet, people, and profit
Interestingly, the response showed that interest was high when I was “chalk talking” the students through the Syrian conflict. There was a great deal of anxiety when I did not give them questions to answer, but asked them to submit questions that they thought important enough to merit an answer. Therefore, step one, telling the story, was much harder if they had to look for the questions on their own, than if I showed them which questions they might ask.

**Impact of ST on TAPs**

I had a wide range of projects and attempted projects. When it came time to move from theory to implementation (praxis), the students found a myriad of obstacles awaiting them. School timetables, contacting the right people, and getting people to listen were all real-life experiences that led students to understand why fundraisers are so popular. They are quick, focused, and have an immediate “feel good” effect.

One student chose to work on her own. She wanted to work toward eliminating cultural discrimination, and her action was to create a “forum theatre” piece with some friends who were not in the class. She spent a good deal of time researching the topic and met with people from NEEDS (Newcomer Employment Education Development Services) to discuss community issues. In her final report, she used ST to try to address the mental models that she personally needed to change. She staged presentations of her workshop during lunch hours and later at a UNESCO-associated schools workshop. ST gave her a clear understanding of the mental models that form the structures that create the patterns that cause the effects we see every day in our city.

Another group of students worked with counsellors from Klinic, a downtown community health outreach service, on issues surrounding human trafficking and the sex trade. Using ST to look at the situation from beginning to end helped them to see the nuances: how poverty, addiction, powerlessness, gender identity issues, and legal systems all end up creating modern-day slavery. Their leverage point was to attempt to educate the young men and women of their community. They commented, “People just don’t know this exists, or they don’t believe it exists, but if we can show them it exists, then empathy will force them to join forces with those who are trying to change the situation.”

Overall, I noticed a correlation between their ST analysis of the issue that their TAP was addressing (I had required that they provide a 6-step analysis of the issue) and the action that they decided to take. In the past, many of the actions had revolved around fundraising – War Child, Ladybug Foundation, Siloam Mission – but this year there was not a single fundraising activity. There were sports equipment drives and Koats for Kids, but in each case it was the educational component of their praxis that came out on top. Awareness building linked to changing mental models. I believe that the tendency this year not to do fundraising and to do more awareness building in their community indicates a success. Education is not as sexy as raising a lot of money, but in Westheimer’s model of citizenship it is a more productive model (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004). Westheimer saw gradations of citizenship beginning with those citizens who pay their taxes and pick up litter, to those who donate and volunteer, to those active citizens who find ways to change the systems that are at the root of the problem. It is wonderful that a child’s fundraising could provide more beds for people in a homeless shelter, but it is even more wonderful if we can change the mindsets of our fellow citizens and our government whose policies have created the need for increasingly more shelters.
Impact of ST on Inquiry Projects

One student of Ukrainian heritage decided to do his final inquiry on the conflict in the Ukraine. By visualizing the problem, he was able to identify the impact of different variables. His discussion led to a conclusion that the language nation states are using to negotiate peace is the same language used during the Cold War conflict. However, global realities have changed and if we continue to use language that is no longer valid, we will only end up repeating the same patterns of behaviour that we engaged in during the Cold War. We need new language and new mental models; otherwise, old structures will repeat old patterns. The closer he got to the mental models in his ST analysis, the more generative his responses became.

What ST did this semester changed the nature of the discussion, and it enabled me to keep the nested model of planet, people, and profit clearly in focus throughout the semester. Students began to see that each of their areas of inquiry and their praxis projects were all, in one way or another, part of the same human system. Although with this class I did not see any of the type of projects that garner media attention and make me as a teacher “feel good,” I do think that a more profound “seed” has been sown, and I believe that many of these students will, as they move forward in life, be better equipped to address the needs of their community and world.

Reference


Appendix

The following “doodling” is representative of students’ notes during a presentation on food security given by a speaker from the Canadian Food Grains Bank.
INQUIRY IN THE GRADE 12 GLOBAL ISSUES CLASSROOM

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Abstract

The following is a reflection on the process and implementation of an inquiry-based approach in the Global Issues classroom. This reflection exists within a larger educational and societal context that makes the act of inquiry almost like visiting a foreign country. This foreign country – as an educational context – has few native inhabitants. Those that enter into this country are asked to think in ways that are not common in a larger part of the present educational “country” context.

The course “Global Issues: Citizenship and Sustainability” is about much more than a particular pedagogy. The course presents a vehicle – continuing with the “travel” allegory – that brings our students to a greater awareness of issues around our global citizenship and environmental context. The course also includes a call to action. Students are asked to develop practical action plans that they put into effect for transformation of their world. Ultimately, it is hoped that they will become “catalytic citizens” who will lead us to consider ways of being required if we are to survive sustainably as a species.

Inquiry in the Grade 12 Global Issues Classroom

A new social studies curriculum, “Global Issues: Citizenship and Sustainability,” is now in place in Manitoba. Much has been done in this new curriculum to address the needs of our present day students and the kind of learning that they now will need to consider to make a difference for the world. This course calls forth from students thoughtful action in an environmental context that now shows signs of limits.

Central to this new grade 12 social studies option is an approach to learning called “inquiry-based learning.” Given a series of inquiries into a set number of areas, students are encouraged to arrive at a number of enduring understandings. Also central to this new course is “praxis” – a type of thought-based action that reacts in an appropriate manner based not only on research but on assessed projects that have been put into effect.

This course wants to prepare students to learn from their own interests. It wants students not to be satisfied with just knowing more about the world but to make an effort to do something for that world and its challenges.

Understanding the Inquiry Approach

The Global Issues course has at its core a pedagogy that is not new. It does, however, require a shift in teaching paradigms. The paradigm that education has drifted into is, to a large extent, teacher directed. Global Issues asks that there be a shift to a more student-centered approach whereby the teacher assists students in the process of acquiring the experience and information to drive informed actions to transform their world.

Many of our students struggle when first exposed to inquiry. Therefore, what follows here is a differentiated and scaffolded approach developed to help students with inquiry. The approach
consisted of four strands. These strands were significant parts of equipping my students to develop their “enduring understandings” and “Take Action” components of the course.

“Inquiry” as proposed for Global Issues is a relevant fit for the diversity that teachers are now seeing in our their classrooms. Memorizing information as a basis for learning is not really as appropriate a goal for learning today. What is needed in students is an ability to use the massive amounts of data available to them to arrive at some kind of useful knowledge upon which they might act in an appropriate and relevant way with one another and their environment. Students in Global Issues, as result of an inquiry, construct responses to specific areas of inquiry: a knowledge of concepts related to a topic, essential questions that lead them to an investigation, and the promotion of “reflective action” that again might inspire further investigation and thoughtful action.

Inquiry as described is a very different approach to learning for most students. My efforts for Global issues has been to assist students with making their inquiries – as an approach to learning – much more meaningful.

**Beginnings – Supports for Inquiry a First Strand**

Almost from the beginning, the approach to inquiry used in my Global Issues class was to look at its implementation from a procedural point of view. It was easier at first to have an overarching approach to how each student could, on a first implementation, carry out an inquiry. Following a similar procedure meant students could see that their research and final projects could be different even though they followed a similar method for study of the same area for inquiry. It also meant that there was recognition of the value in having different responses from different students to the areas of inquiry being studied.

The process that was employed in my Global Issues classroom was drawn from three documents: the *Grade 12 Global Issues* document related to inquiry (Manitoba Education, 2014), the *Independent Together* document on inquiry learning (Manitoba Education and Youth, 2013), and Alberta’s *Focus on Inquiry* document (Alberta Education, 2004). I developed a hybridized model and integrated it into class to help students with the process that this course now encourages as central to its learning process.

The first part of the implementation process was to give students an overview of what an inquiry would look like. This would involve a good look at the areas that would serve as a springboard for their inquiries. The overall purpose here was at a minimum to get a view of the context or the narrative related to that area of inquiry.

To assist in the process of inquiry, the course aptly sets out guiding questions for the areas of inquiry. On many occasions, I would have those questions serve as a minimum to answer regarding an area of inquiry. There also exists the possibility that students may, as a result of the guiding questions, veer off into territory that was unexpected – something that I would allow if the result were an in-depth student-driven inquiry that still got at many of the essential points related to the enduring understandings and actions that are (or are not) taken to do something about issues that they may have discovered.

Also as a part of the inquiry process implemented was an effort to have students hypothesize potential answers to challenges related to the area of inquiry being studied. To some, this process seemed somewhat disingenuous. However, I explained that it would often serve to set out what they already knew – and what they did not know – about an area of inquiry. Their
hypothesis also served as a point from which we could measure whether any learning actually took place.

The research section that followed the hypothesis did challenge students. First, in many instances the questions asked by students did not have an immediate answer. This situation was especially frustrating for those students who wanted to find an answer to complete their assignment. Students were not willing to slow down to read the sources and take the time necessary to look for what might be suggested as potential responses to their questions. Students were not really looking deeply, but were only superficially looking for answers.

In light of the prior circumstance, there was a need to develop a response process that would promote a behaviour that encouraged more in-depth reading and analysis of text. To that end, included as a part of the students’ inquiry process I added a couple of “guiding question” sheets that would help individual students to reflect upon what they needed to do with materials being researched. The literacy ICT document BLM “Observing Checklist for Skimming and Scanning Skills” (Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth, 2006) became a regular feature to our inquiries in all social studies classes.

At this point, I also introduced the guiding questions for inquiry that are included as a part of the Global Issues curriculum. Both of these tools assisted students in slowing down to think more deeply on their questions and the actions that would follow. Apart from the particular questions that students might have had (and related to what was helping students), it also became apparent that there was a need for students to focus and clarify to some extent for themselves more about the story/narrative and actions taken by others related to the topics for inquiry being studied. Being acquainted with concepts and actions already developed and taken in connection with the story/context being studied did assist students with their inquiries. As teacher it was here that I would continue to give examples of how others had worked within the area of inquiry being studied and how they had responded in action to any challenges that had been identified. The curriculum was helpful at this point, as it sets out “backgrounder” information for students to have a better idea of what the area of inquiry includes and how others have responded to it (Manitoba Education, 2014).

A Second Strand – Tools for the Organization of Inquiry

Considering some of the challenges that were experienced during a first round of implementation of inquiry into Global Issues, I endeavoured to integrate a few more strategies to enhance the organization of the inquiry process.

There was a need to further deepen students’ capacity to ask relevant and appropriate questions. An overall effort for this particular implementation was to have students not feel that they were “stuck” with any questions that they may have asked. To allay this feeling, I suggested that students could change their questions at any time through the process that was being used. The whole idea of changing or improving questions was an effort to counteract the passivity that is a part of our present educational culture. To some extent, what students experience in their day-to-day classes “happens to them” and they are not always actively engaged in asking questions critically about what is around them and what can be done about an area related to their learning.

The questions asked needed to be more focussed and farther reaching. Norah Morgan’s book on Asking Better Questions suggests means by which we give students more tools to ask more accurate and more appropriate questions (Morgan & Saxton, 2006). Leaving students with a larger
question-asking tool kit at the end of this process is important for any inquiry. Part of the process of asking better questions, as described by Morgan, involves classifying questions in order to acquire different kinds of information. Too often, asking the same questions results in the same kind of learning and knowledge. Students need to ask a variety of questions to help them build an understanding that generates reflection and action.

To assist students in their research, I provided a variety of frames for understanding intelligibility in their area of inquiry in order to help students understand the mechanisms that might be at work within their area of inquiry. I invited students to look at the information that they were gathering from different sources, using a variety of conceptual frames (frames used at first were drawn from *Success for All Learners* (Manitoba Education and Training, 2000). These conceptual frameworks not only helped students to get the “story” down, but also directed them to different details necessary for a broader inquiry. As students moved more deeply into the inquiry process, they were able to consider even more complex frames for the analysis of their area of inquiry. For example, the systems analysis of Fritjof Capra (2004) and Linda B. Sweeney and Dennis Meadows (2010) were introduced to an area of inquiry. Systems analysis, as proposed by these authors and by the Global Issues curriculum, offers students an opportunity to look at the world in all of its far-reaching complexities. Being better able to describe the complexities operative in a area of inquiry gives students an opportunity to arrive at a more realistic view of challenges and what can be done with them.

Finally, as a means to further organize their inquiries, students were given options for how they wanted to collate their research for sharing. For example, students could use a portfolio to collect their information and experiences related to their research and the actions that they undertook in relation to an area of inquiry. In some instances, students attempted to produce a systems analysis with related analysis. Using the prior did not preclude students from using more common platforms for presentation and discussion. However, in all cases students were invited to consider how the process was not over but produced more complex and profound questions.

When students had a clearer idea on how to organize their inquiry – and were given tools to help in the process of developing their enduring understandings and Take Action projects – their own capacity to respond with their own ideas and actions became more genuine and meaningful.

**A Third Strand – Habits of Mind**

The next attempt to integrate inquiry into students’ learning in Global Issues was made with a view to sharing the process that students were going through – the habits of mind – when working on a particular area for inquiry. For this part of the implementation of inquiry, the subject for inquiry was not necessarily an area found in the Global Issues curriculum but had to do with what they might experience in themselves as a part of their inquiry. The area for study included those habits of mind that might apply to research and work done with a Global Issues inquiry.

The habits of mind that were considered to be of potential assistance to the inquiry process that I have been attempting to employ were inspired through the work of Arthur L. Costa and Bena Kallick in their book *Learning and Leading with Habits of Mind* (2008). Essentially, it is their contention that it is necessary to be aware of the state of mind that should be taken to any review of concepts and ideas and the questions that got us to them. Moreover, these same habits of mind can help to guide an inquiry in so far as it directs the learner to understand that in any given field of inquiry there is a specific and general set of processes for asking questions in
the learning process. The continued application of these basic processes, when infused in the inquiry process, can encourage procedures and actions to improve learning or mindfulness about learning and being/acting in the world.

At this stage, I presented the habits of mind and explained that they would be different for different types of inquiry. In the case of social studies, for example, it might be important for students to know that this approach can involve a particular way of thinking. Some of the ways my students have been taught to think (or the habit of mind that they have been asked to engender) has involved looking at evidence, historical significance, cause and consequence, continuity and change, ethical dimensions and a variety of perspectives – a historical habit of mind. When we looked at systems thinking, we could also see how it was now necessary to be multifaceted with our thinking in order not to arrive at the same kind of thinking that has produced some of our most vexing environmental and global citizenship challenges.

Part of the outcome for this aspect introduced to the inquiry process was to suggest to students that intelligence and the action that follows from it can be impacted by closer attention to the particular processes (be they social scientific, historical, philosophical, social scientific, systems thinking approaches) that we bring to a study of the areas of inquiry.

**Putting It All Together with a View to Action or Praxis – A Fourth Strand**

The final implementation of the inquiry process was to have students prepare an inquiry related to one of the areas of inquiry not covered to this point in class, and to submit/act on it to demonstrate that they could undertake an inquiry. They would also include as a part of this assignment not only a reflection on what had been researched but also what they did as an action project – a necessary result of their inquiry. The Aristotelian distinction between what we do as theoretical, productive, and practical is operative here. We are not simply interested in knowledge for its own sake or making something with our knowledge. Rather, the purpose of our study in Global Issues at this point is to develop practical knowledge and wisdom related to the areas of inquiry considered.

My instruction for this final step in Global Issues inquiry was that students were to integrate an element from each of the other strands introduced to them. They were to follow the process employed since the beginning of the year. The difference for this inquiry, however, was that their research was to lead them to a practical and thoughtful action outside the classroom, with a connected reflection on that action as a source of what could be learned from it.

Another difference with this final part of inquiry implementation was that students were required to put all their work (theoretical and practical) together into the form of a presentation to share with their teacher and their peers. In the end, what they would present was not simply information that they gleaned from their research but also an effort to act and reflect on their research and praxis. Questions that I invited the students to ask included “Why did they do what they did based on their research?” and “What did they conclude, as a result of their experience, was an element essential to this final part of the inquiry process?”

The inquiry produced at this point could be produced and presented with a partner or a larger group if an argument could be made for having more than two students prepare an inquiry. As a part of the partnership, students had to develop a process together by which they were going to develop their questions and suggest and carry out projects for action. Generally, as a part of group work, it has been my practice to require that students still be individually responsible for their parts of the group-developed project.
The results for this last implementation were richer and deeper than expected. That upward spiral of broader and more in-depth inclusion of data – and the exclusion of those elements that did not create intelligibility – provided perspective beyond what I originally thought possible for students at a grade 12 level. The actions taken, too, were thoughtful and decidedly produced a positive impact for the community. Many students felt that they could do much more with another implementation of the process undertaken.

**Assessment in Light of the Implementation of Inquiry**

Evaluation was another particularly interesting and challenging area that I encountered while integrating inquiry into the Global Studies classroom. The challenge here emanated from the different experiences of teacher-centered or student-driven pedagogies and how we measure the results of these approaches to teaching and learning.

Given a reflection on the “of,” “as,” and “for” nature of assessment, it soon becomes apparent that assessment is not just about the “test.” The process of assessment used for Global Issues looked at what the students were doing both in and out of class. After consulting a variety of sources for assessment, I realized that assessment would include an ever-expanding historical process with individual students as they became more comfortable with the inquiry process. Thus, when a student’s Take Action project failed, we asked questions such as “Was the research faulty?” and “Were the steps for implementation flawed?” I hoped that this process would lead a student to a tornado-like process that would generate further and broader considerations and deliberations.

I incorporated several components in an assessment of students’ inquiries:

- Students’ inquiries will develop over time, and there should be in that process an explicit attempt to develop a clear picture of the processes that students have included as a part of their inquiry. Students are also involved in assessing this process in themselves.
- The process of assessment is ongoing throughout the inquiry, with a view to emphasizing a qualitative analysis of the students’ thinking process rather than a quantitative analysis of what they might have gathered during the inquiry.
- Once the student has been introduced to the process, and there is evidence of emerging understanding, this assessment should also be open to various ways of learning that are operant with the variety of learners in our classrooms.
- Actions can (and will) fail, succeed, stall, or appear as irrelevant. The effort that we strive for will ultimately include a balance of information, research, and finally action that has a long-lasting and significant impact for the area of inquiry being considered.
- Feelings are imbued in what we do and, when managed appropriately, can further drive or be the impetus for more profound and impassioned work. Including this subjective component is required in the assessment process.

On the last point, there is a necessity for a teacher to differentiate instruction and adapt assessment in a manner that will help students to improve their learning and recognize how even feeling (e.g., “This feels right” or “I get it!”) is an important part of a student making even more effort to improve through this process.
Certainly, there is a need to collect a variety of examples of student learning. Tests and traditional teacher-driven projects are included in this process, but having a wider variety of samples will produce even greater reliability and validity.

Some not-so-traditional forms of assessment in my class have included the following:

- questions and the questions development process
- hypothesizing to get at what we already know, and maybe need or would like to know
- documented research processes or actions taken by students taken but maybe not followed through by a student
- collation of materials and actions taken in a folder, PowerPoint, or Prezi
- drawings of what it is that we want to know and do
- systems analysis – especially with a view to discovering an underpinning bias and what can be done about it. Is there a need to include different mechanisms when we do our research, so that we do not end up with the same result . . . a bake sale!
- Interviews, conferences, actions, teacher-led questions
- portfolios, posters
- group projects that reflect on the results of each group’s efforts/collaboration with local groups and the groups’ inputs

It is also important to pay attention to the duration of the process. Having a research process in place means that students can review, edit, subtract, and add to their learning. They may also discover through the process connections yet undiscovered. This other “historical” limit to assessment points to giving both the teacher and the student access to knowing what is known and what has been learned over a limited period of time.

Means for reporting results can take on a variety of shapes. Feedback is for all parties involved: school, parents, community, students, and teacher. In many of the rubrics that I have created for student inquiry, I have made an effort to include at minimum a consideration of the following:

- development of information-processing and problem-solving skills, and the degree to which that is developed
- recognition that there are habits of mind that we need to see applied within the actual inquiry made by students and the degree to which those habits are a part of the process of inquiry
- reflection upon the level of content knowledge that is organized according to some kind of conceptual framework.
- review of actions that have been undertaken to respond to circumstances by citizens who care about the sustainable potential with regards to the areas of inquiry studies and the potential action projects that students suggest might be undertaken after they have completed their action projects

**Reflection on Inquiry in the Global Issues Classroom**

For inquiry to be successful in the Global Issues classroom, there needs to be an effort to support students in the process of making an inquiry. The process needs to be both differentiated and scaffolded. The starting point for the process is a consideration of the students’ interests. Saying the prior does not mean that there is no opportunity to mediate meaning. It is still important that we immerse students into a view of concepts and responses already operative with the areas of inquiry. The shift suggested with inquiry is that there be an emphasis on the process of asking questions and getting to know the context. The teacher’s role is to direct students toward important
concepts and how they inform research into an area of inquiry. Systems analysis, as an example, provides a very opportune approach to look at areas of inquiry from a number of perspectives.

This prior discussion in its fullness becomes an exchange where there is an effort to engender the values of thought and active response already discussed on a group scale. If this discussion is practical and understood by students, when students develop an inquiry at a group level they will also touch upon values that are at the core of our democratic society: learning to know, learning to do, and being and living together – all in a transformative way.

Finally, a particularly important consideration for this course is that students “do” something thoughtfully or act upon their learning when working with an area for inquiry. The research/Take Action project is pivotal to this course and its research. Being able to act is important, but at the same time as praxis it as such not an end in itself. Rather, praxis as understood in this context provides another point of departure for further reflective practice.

The grade 12 Global Issues course is a fertile context in which inquiry can flourish. Students can be encouraged to tell a story with a view to recognizing and acting upon the components of that story in a transformative way, in order to create a better world for all of us. Issues of Citizenship and Ecology are at the heart of the challenge that now requires new ways of thinking and acting if we are to have a hope of a better world.

References


INQUIRY INSTRUCTION THROUGH CRITICAL THEORY IN THE NEW “GLOBAL ISSUES: CITIZENSHIP AND SUSTAINABILITY” COURSE

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Abstract

The “Global Issues: Citizenship and Sustainability” (GICS) course is in its third year as a pilot course in Manitoba high schools. With a required Take Action Project, ten broad Areas of Inquiry and a mandate to employ inquiry-based instruction, the new course is ambitious in its scope and potentially daunting for both teachers and students. In this paper, I explore the intersections between the content and design of the Global Issues course, my own experiences piloting the course in an adult high school setting and the expressed experiences of the adult learners who took this course. Furthermore, I discuss my own use of critical theory-based inquiry instruction wherein students were asked to consider issues related to the ten Areas of Inquiry through a variety of theoretical lenses. I suggest that such an approach offers an example of how teachers might frame the broad content of the course.

Inquiry Instruction Through Critical Theory in the New “Global Issues: Citizenship and Sustainability” Course

Only the experience of sharing a common human world with others who look at it from different perspectives can enable us to see reality in the round and to develop a shared common sense. Without it, we are each driven back on our own subjective experience, in which only our feelings, wants, and desires have reality.


I am a contract teacher for a small UNESCO-affiliated adult high school and literacy centre in the west end of Winnipeg. In the late summer of 2011, I attended my first meeting as a member of a group of teachers, curriculum developers, and academics who had come together to pilot a new grade 12 social studies course: Global Issues Citizenship and Sustainability (GICS). With 10 extensive Areas of Inquiry, a mandate for inquiry instruction and a required public action project, the course seemed both revolutionary and a bit daunting. I was initially concerned that adult students, who frequently express anxiety about feeling “out of the game,” might also feel overwhelmed. Still, I was hopeful. This course seemed to have been designed to awaken students and teachers, to broaden and deepen our understanding of the interconnectedness and complexity of the world and its many and diverse issues. In short, I felt that it was a course with the potential to create a space in which to see what Canovan (1998), following Hannah Arendt, called “reality in the round” (p. xiii).

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2 Areas of Inquiry: Media; Consumerism; Environment; Poverty, Wealth and Power; Indigenous Peoples; Peace and Conflict; Oppression and Genocide; Health and Biotechnology; Gender Politics; Social Justice and Human Rights.

3 Many adult students do not have a high school diploma. Some are attending for upgrading. In my experience, most of these students will identify feelings of inadequacy (personal, social, and academic) and experiences of exclusion (both social and systemic) as the cause. In the early days of a new course, they frequently express concern and anxiety about having been “out of the game” of learning.
In this paper, I examine my own experience piloting the GICS course for three semesters together with selected reflections from the adult learners who attended the classes. Following a brief description of the school environment and demographics, I discuss why I chose to use theory to create what Hmelo-Silver, Duncan and Chinn (2007) called the “cognitive scaffolding” necessary in inquiry-based learning so that students (and instructors) are not overwhelmed but may indeed flourish and “learn in complex domains” (p. 99). Finally, throughout the paper I explore some preliminary responses to a fundamental question that was asked several times in the pilot group meetings: What do teachers need to know in order to teach the “Global Issues: Citizenship and Sustainability” course?

Stevenson-Britannia Adult Literacy Centre (SBALC) is a small UNESCO-affiliated school that operates as both an adult literacy centre (offering basic and advanced literacy) and an adult high school program. Our students are all adults; many are new immigrants and some are refugees. Quite a few served in the Canadian military. Some of our students are Canadians who have come from remote communities or are simply new to Winnipeg. Others have lived in Winnipeg all of their lives. A few are former gang members. A few have been to jail.

Despite diverse life experiences, our students share common ground in the determination to be successful in a formal educational setting (most often in the face of past setbacks and both personal and social obstacles). Common to all is the need to balance their focus on academic success with their adult responsibilities outside of the school setting. For this reason, SBALC administration and instructors are committed to cultivating what Magro and Ghorayshi (2011) identified as a transformative learning philosophy. At SBALC, this means that we strive to help students to become aware of the meaningful connections between the school environment and their prior learning and life experiences.

Although the transformative learning approach is a whole-school commitment, I mention it here as it, in part, informed my own philosophical approach to piloting the GICS course. In that first late summer meeting, the pilot project teachers were asked to think about how we wanted to approach the material and inquiry-based instruction of the GICS course, and what might be our overarching philosophy. I thought first of Arendt’s (1971) concerns with our collective “absence of thinking – which is so ordinary an experience in our everyday life, where we have hardly the time, let alone the inclination to stop and think” (p. 4). Such “thoughtlessness,” I felt, was addressed by the strong mandate in the curriculum for students and teachers to think and to act with deliberation in the world. Inspired by such Arendtian ideas about the vital importance of thinking, and taken together with our school’s commitment to transformative learning, I decided to ground my teaching of this course from within an Arendtian phenomenological approach to theory/experience. Arendtian phenomenology argues that meaningful experience is contingent upon both public action and the corresponding observation of others who are “not like us.” Arendt posited that “thought itself arises out of incidents of living experience and must remain bound to them as the only guideposts by which to take its bearings” (Arendt, 1954/2006, p. 14).

In more concrete terms, I attempted to follow Goodman (2003), who described what she called “pedagogical moment(s) of awakening” wherein “flashes” of understanding (or a deeper awareness of an issue) occur through the “brush[ing] of theory, historical data against each

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5 Arendtian phenomenology argues that meaningful experience is contingent upon both public action and the corresponding observation of others who are “not like us.” Arendt posited that “thought itself arises out of incidents of living experience and must remain bound to them as the only guideposts by which to take its bearings” (Arendt, 1954/2006, p. 14).

other for the spark to ignite [her] understanding” (p. 159). In my classroom practice, this meant that I would deliberately juxtapose theory with images, text, videos, and personal experience in such a way as to awaken flashes of recognition, memory, and insight. The introduction of a variety of theoretical lenses provided the cognitive scaffolding for the inquiry process and framed the breadth and depth of information offered by the course within manageable, coherent boundaries.

Specifically, I initially introduced a theoretical concept and asked students to examine their own personal experiences using that particular lens. Then we worked as a group to apply the theoretical lens to a particular world issue or idea connected to the GICS areas of inquiry. I presented samples of work drawn from poetry, film, art, literature, and popular culture in relation to our topic. I asked students to consider a number of questions: Did the theory help us (or not) to reveal the complexity of an issue, idea or phenomenon? What remained unexplained from the perspective of a particular lens? We might ask, for example, does Arendt’s notion of thoughtlessness help us to understand why citizens of countries with strong labour laws might buy goods made in foreign factories that have proven to be unsafe for workers? What is missing from such an Arendtian analysis/explanation? Does another theoretical lens provide a better or additional analytical frame? If, for instance, we add Bourdieu’s (2000) concept of habitus to Arendt’s concept of thoughtlessness, are we able to expand our understanding? How does our expanded discussion of this topic link to the larger areas of inquiry set out in the course? Finally, I asked students to use the theoretical lens we were working with to analyse another topic of their choice. Over time, the students took on more of the responsibility to seek out and grapple with difficult topics, using theory as a way to expand understanding.

The following excerpt from a student journal entry shows some of the processes of our daily inquiries. The student begins his journal entry with a total rejection of the usefulness of Arendt’s notion of thoughtlessness and the banality of evil. After several pages, he grudgingly comes to analyse the usefulness, in some circumstances, of the Arendtian lens. What is notable here is not his change of mind but his demonstrated ability to grasp a theoretical concept, effectively critique its value, and then use it to expand his understanding of a global event occurring long after we had moved on to cover many other theoretical lenses:

This journal is basically about my general thoughts on the viewpoints of Hannah Arendt we have covered in class, mainly her theory on thoughtlessness. When it came to her theory on thoughtlessness, at first, to my understanding of what her theory was, I disagreed in part with it. That is to say that although I’m sure at times people can do or commit vile acts due to not thinking about what they are doing or being brainwashed into thinking it is the right thing to do, I don’t see it as the main reason someone would commit an ‘evil’ act. I think sometimes if not a lot of the times, people know what they are doing is evil, but do it anyways. They do it for their own gains, or because they are afraid or they are under orders or any number of reasons. I don’t know if being thoughtless really comes into play as often as it seems Hannah thought it did . . .

And that is what I thought at first, but then my opinion started to change very fast, the day we started to focus on the Kony 2012 video. I saw that thoughtlessness she was talking about in the way people online, especially the Facebook crowd, acted. So much of the way people re-acted to that video was done with absolute thoughtlessness, they saw something that tugged at their heart strings, or that their friends were going on about, and so they spread it, they ‘liked’ it they ‘shared’ it with everyone they could without doing an ounce of research into the organization, they liked what they saw and believed it outright,
how could it not be true, how could something so emotional be bad? Let's not do research, lets dive right into it and not ask questions.

And that's when I realized Hannah Arendt was right in a lot of ways. I was seeing thoughtlessness right before my very eyes. Now besides the Invisible Children organization, no one was outright doing anything that was considered bad, they weren't going around killing people, but they were not thinking either.

This student was not alone in his growing ability to use conceptual lenses to analyse global issues. In our class inquiries, theory provided a framework for observing and analysing the world from multiple perspectives.

On one occasion, the GICS class had decided to conduct a group inquiry into the ongoing public debate surrounding Canada's prostitution laws. During the first class discussion, one student strongly asserted that prostitution was a free choice. A few students agreed; others took the position that all prostitutes were forced and thus exercised no choice. An unproductive and emotional argument ensued. We decided to table the discussion until we had examined the concept of choice itself as a theoretical lens and could decide whether we were all agreed on the meaning and usefulness of the word choice in this circumstance. First, we examined a variety of (often conflicting) definitions for the concept of choice. We then read first-person accounts of experiences with prostitution, short newspaper articles, and then more thoroughly researched articles and books dealing with the topic together with the UNESCO Trafficking in Human Beings (Touzenis, 2010) and the UNODC Trafficking in Persons (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2006) documents. The next discussion centred on a more nuanced critique of the various solutions to the problem of human trafficking and prostitution offered by states around the world. One male student went on to explore issues related to women in history, including the long and complex history of prostitution. In this case, the use of theory helped to push the boundaries of the original discussion beyond a binary argument and so more wholly reflected the complexities of the issue itself.

There were times, however, when the inquiry process, the vast topic areas, and the use of theory as scaffolding created anxiety for students, particularly for those students who felt most comfortable within a traditional model of learning. One student wrote, “I really second guess myself in this course. I think I am picking at an issue the wrong way. . . . I do not feel like I answer [questions] correctly.” Another student expressed her deeply held conviction that as adults we ought to have (and keep to) “our opinion” and that to explore or examine or add complexity to such an opinion was to show a lack of conviction and to feel wrong or judged. She would often end a verbal contribution with a variation on the statement, “I’m sorry. That’s my opinion. It’s the way I was raised and it’s not going to change.”

This student was not alone among my adult students in feeling such discomfort. In the early weeks of each semester, students initially expressed similar sentiments. The challenge for me became how to provide a clear cognitive framework for exploring unfamiliar, and possibly emotionally laden, concepts and issues while helping students to forge meaningful connections to their own lived experiences. To that end, I began each semester by introducing Bourdieu’s (1998) very accessible criticisms of journalists, mass media, and the presentation of issues. Bourdieu argued that modern media exhort the public to “take sides on an issue” and to repeat (“reproduce”) stereotypes and prejudices that have come to feel “commonplace” or “self-evident” (pp. 7-9, 22-23). I asked students first to identify common stereotypes related to their particular gender, ethnicity, life circumstances, religion/faith and nationality, and then to note how such simplistic and deterministic descriptions in no way fully described their individual,
complex, and rich lives. The difference between a personal criticism and a critical look at our world gradually became clear. What this meant was that as a class we could, for example, identify systemic sexism or racism at work in a particular phenomenon without labeling all individuals who felt associated as racists or sexists.

Using critical theory to lift issues out of the personal and into a more public, academic space gave students the freedom to inquire, analyse, and examine without feeling the constricting emotions of guilt or judgment (of the self or others). Most students became adept at exploring their own default opinions without expressing feelings of guilt or shame (for “not knowing”). Each class group eventually became cheerfully suspicious of the sound bite, of the demand for individuals to take a side, and of their own individual prejudices and initial responses to ideas, images, and issues from around the world. Ultimately, I believe that using theoretical concepts as scaffolding for the broad topics covered by this course helped students to frame probing, relevant questions about complex issues that were also, importantly, meaningful to them.

Having said that, in no way do I believe that this is the only way to approach inquiry-based learning. The beauty of the GICS course is that it offers both teachers and students freedom from a tightly controlled, standard curriculum that might dictate such an approach. However, I follow Hmelo-Silver et al (2007) in suggesting that this freedom must exist within “extensive scaffolding and guidance to facilitate student learning” (p. 99). Within such scaffolding, in whatever form chosen by the instructor, thinking becomes deliberate, rigorous, and more comprehensive in the attempt to analyse a phenomenon from as many perspectives as possible.

When Hannah Arendt (American Memory Library of Congress, n.d.) decried the marked lack of thought in the world, the world had not yet seen the 24-hour news cycle or the inundation of information via the internet (with its potentially anesthetizing effect on the mind). Given her concerns about our collective inability and disinclination to stop and think, I often wonder what she might have had to say about the state of public thought in our current moment. What strikes me about GICS is its potential to be a sort of antidote to such thoughtlessness. It is often asked of social science courses, how will this serve me in the real world? The answer, I think, is that in a world where partisanship and hyper-individualism is nurtured in our public spaces, the GICS course goes a long way to teaching both students and instructors to be deliberate, analytical thinkers – to approach the complex issues and ideas in the world beyond a for-or-against mentality. A clear and deliberate approach to inquiry learning cultivates the skills necessary to navigate our complex, diverse, and often contradictory world in constructive and intelligent ways. Even those students who did not complete the course, or who completed with low grades, would make a point of telling me that they “had never thought so much in a class before” or were happy that they took the course because they had “learned things about the world [they] hadn’t known before.”

One student, who initially tried to drop the class because, in his own estimation, he had “never been smart enough to understand this kind of stuff,” became an engaged and enthusiastic contributor to class inquiry, discussion, and presentation. In one journal entry, he expressed his excitement at “learning things about the world for the first time.” He had engaged with topics that, in his own words, were “eye-opening” and even “disturbing”

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8 These phrases were pulled from student journal entries, emails, and conversations from all of the piloted semesters. Some students still send me the occasional email message to relate a story about how the GI course has helped them to “think better” in their daily lives.
and had him thinking about “human nature in different ways.” He began, and is still involved in, a public awareness campaign about a community issue [that] he cares about.

Like the student who carried on with his public action project long after he graduated, other students changed their future plans and attributed such changes to their experiences in the GICS course. Some changed their focus of post-secondary study, others their career aspirations, and still others decided to apply to a post-secondary institution (an option that had previously seemed impossible). This course is potentially transformative in many ways. It can forge a real and meaningful link between students’ lived experiences and complex, seemingly remote global issues. It offers students an opportunity to develop and hone critical thinking skills. Ultimately, it opens space to push the boundaries of what students and teachers think they know.

References


INTRODUCING INQUIRY PEDAGOGY DURING TEACHER PRE-SERVICE

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Abstract
This article outlines one educator’s journey toward an understanding and utilization of an inquiry stance in his pedagogy. It is a journey from teacher candidate, to classroom teacher and school administrator, to teacher educator. A brief review of the concept of inquiry is followed by an exploration of the use of questions during inquiry. The action research used to create a teaching process for developing a guided inquiry unit for teacher candidates is outlined, including a brief description of the step-by-step process. A synopsis of the successes, challenges, and next steps in refining the process concludes the article.

Introducing Inquiry Pedagogy During Teacher Pre-Service

During your schooling, were you ever taught how to approach questions that were complex and without one “right” answer? Were you allowed the time to explore complex and challenging issues? Were you encouraged to question the status quo? Look at multiple perspectives of that issue? Or were you given textbook answers? Discouraged from questioning and debating authoritative answers? Booth (1999) suggested,

We are answer-oriented everywhere, having been trained to this through schooling that is almost entirely right-answer driven. Scant notice is ever given to the quality of our questions. The rebellious anger of many young adults is (and perhaps always has been) fuelled by the inattention or weak answering they encounter to their good hard questions. No wonder some make habits out of their bad answers. (as cited in Morgan & Saxton, 2006, p. 13)

Why Inquiry?

This non-critical thinking stance is certainly not what we currently believe schooling for the 21st century should be like. We profess that our educational systems and schools are developing global citizens ready to live in the 21st century. But what are the attributes of a global citizen? Westheimer and Kahne (2004) suggested that we need “justice-oriented” citizens who move beyond being personally responsible and participatory, such that everyone “critically assesses social, political, and economic structures to see beyond surface causes” and “seeks out and addresses areas of injustice” and “knows about social movements and how to effect systemic change” (p. 240). Students will need to practise critical and creative thinking, including asking questions, in order to become justice-oriented citizens.

Are we really preparing our students to be these justice-oriented citizens, ready to deal with the complex and urgent issues of today? Ready to make decisions and take action about social justice and the environmental and social conflict issues facing humanity? Furthermore, if we decide that preparing our children to be 21st century citizens is a goal of education, how do we prepare our teachers to assist and guide our students for that role? Are we willing to revision our school organizations, curriculum, and pedagogy to teach and nurture an inquiry stance in not only students but educators as well? Aulls and Shore (2008) challenged,
Teachers who open their classrooms to an ethos of inquiry must inevitably open it to being comfortable with uncertainty in the form of alternative answers rather than one answer, in alternative representations of a problem, in alternative solution methods, and in emphasizing understanding as a learning goal rather than memorization of facts and concepts. (p. 197)

The above questions have guided my professional development through my 35 years of working in education as a teacher, school administrator, and now as a teacher educator.

How I Developed an Inquiry Stance

My personal professional education career started as a teacher candidate at the University of Alberta in 1975-76. At the time, Alberta Education’s social studies curriculum was based on “values” clarification, an inquiry process that students used to explore issues of social importance. Thus, in my first years of teaching middle years social studies I was challenged to find resources that could accommodate student inquiry. At the time, my understanding of inquiry was very broad and vague. It was about students going off to find resources that could inform their questions or topics of interest. My success was limited, but resources such as Kanata and Jackdaw kits helped to fill the resource void. Students were somewhat engaged, but the main missing ingredient besides lack of current resources (I taught in a small town with limited library resources) was that students did not have a voice in choosing the topics and asking the “big” questions.

My next experience with inquiry came as I completed my master’s thesis using interviews and grounded theory. This, of course, was an experience as a student not as a teacher. My doctoral dissertation was similar, as I had complete control over the inquiry process: asking research questions, finding resources, gathering and analysing the data, and finally reporting on my conclusions. I had 12 years as an administrator before my doctoral work and had limited classroom experience during this time except for three years as a grade 7 science teacher when I used discovery learning as part of the provincial curriculum. As a principal for eight years, we did work on integrated curriculum, which included inquiry learning. However, it was not until I became a teacher educator in 2000 that I again began to reflect on my own classroom pedagogy and how I could mirror or model to my teacher candidates how to use inquiry in their own classrooms.

In 2003, at the University of Minnesota in Duluth, I began team teaching with another teacher educator, Dan Corbett. We collaboratively developed a process that would introduce and

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9 This Alberta curriculum was introduced in 1971 and was to be organized around experiences, which would allow students to clarify their personal values and to understand the values of others, and “invites free and open inquiry into the definition and application of individual and social values” (Alberta Department of Education, 1971, p. 1).

10 The Kanata multi-media kits were introduced into the social studies curriculum by Alberta Education in 1980 to feature Canadian content and “to serve as high quality instructional materials which demonstrate ways in which the Alberta ‘process of social inquiry’ may be constructed” (1982-83 Update, “Kanata Kits,” para. 1).

11 Jackdaws were pre-internet resource kits that provided a selection of historical primary documents to develop students’ inquiry and historical research skills. It was an American company, but a number of Canadian kits were available. They first appeared in the 1980s and still exist today (see “Jackdaws,” 2014).
support our teacher candidates in developing an inquiry stance in their social studies teaching while in the midst of the standardized testing frenzy of the “No Child Left Behind” policies. We also had to take into account that most of students had very limited teaching experience in a public school classroom. This was the beginning of my ongoing action research process that continues in my social studies curriculum classes at the University of Manitoba.

What is Inquiry?

Before I outline this process of guided inquiry and some of the success and challenges of using this process in my curriculum classes, let’s take a brief look at what is inquiry and inquiry learning. Inquiry seems to be the more general term for an outlook to learning. In Alberta Learning (2004),

“inquiry is the dynamic process of being open to wonder and puzzlements and coming to know and understand the world,” while inquiry-based learning is cited as . . . a process where students are involved in their learning, formulate questions, investigate widely and then build new understandings, meanings and knowledge. That knowledge is new to students and may be used to answer a question, to develop a solution or to support a position or point of view. The knowledge is usually presented to others and may result in some sort of action. (p. 1)

In the Manitoba Education online curriculum guide for the grade 12 “Global Issues: Citizenship and Sustainability” course, inquiry is outlined as –

a complex process and grows out of constructivist pedagogy. It begins with the selection of a topic and the design of powerful questions that guide students as they select resources, gather and interpret information, build relevant knowledge and understanding, and share their findings and conclusions. Inquiry relies upon critical and divergent thinking. (Manitoba Education, 2011, p. 1).

There is also an understanding that –

inquiry-based learning has its roots in the educational reform movements that began in the early twentieth century and were guided by the work of Piaget, Vygotsky, Dewey and other constructivists who regard learning as an active process – a process where students construct understanding through problem solving and reflection. (Manitoba Education, 2011, p. 1)

The concept of inquiry learning and the attempts to implement it into classrooms have been around for over a century. Thus, it has a variety of meanings and processes. I do not have space in this paper to explore inquiry learning in depth, but I believe the following are some of its main characteristics. It has an essential or big question to frame the inquiry, cuts across subject disciplines, needs some student voice and choice, includes peer-to-peer teaching and learning, has an uncertain outcome, peeks student curiosity, is rigorous but fun, builds on previous knowledge, takes time, and allows students to present their findings or insights to an audience.

Questions: Developing Big or Essential Questions

I believe that the main aspect of engaging and critical inquiry is questioning. In fact, Postman (1979) suggested that “all our knowledge results from questions, which is another way of saying..."
that question-asking is our most important intellectual tool" (as cited in Morgan & Saxon, 2006, p. 18), and Booth (1999) stated that "posing questions is the central act of reading the world: it must become a habit" (as cited in Morgan & Saxon, 2006, p. 12). In fact, Morgan and Saxon outlined the urgent need for teachers and students to become proficient in using questions in their teaching and learning for the 21st century. Their book is dedicated to helping teachers and students ask better questions — not just one type of question, but “thin” and “thick” questions and questions that mirror the Bloom and Krathwohl (1965) taxonomy of higher level thinking skills.

Additionally, beyond the many different types of questions, which are important for an in-depth inquiry, it is the essential or big question that in my mind best propels the inquiry process. What is an essential question? According to Martin-Kniep (2000),

> Essential questions are compelling. They transcend cultural and age boundaries in ways that no other questions do. They are universal. They are never fully answerable. The more individuals grow and mature, the more they know about how much they have yet to learn about such questions. (p. 2)

McTighe and Wiggins (2013) suggested that essential has three connotations: first they are “important” and “timeless,” second they are “elemental” and “foundational,” and third they are “vital or necessary for personal understanding” (pp. 5-6). I believe that essential questions (I use the term big questions) are key to framing the inquiry process and providing the overall focus that guides the teacher’s decisions on what to teach and the students’ decisions on what to explore.

### My inquiry Process

The process that I currently utilize had its beginning in 2003 when I team taught an early years social studies curriculum course with Dan Corbett at the University of Minnesota in Duluth. I had been using the text Constructing a Powerful Approach to Teaching and Learning in Elementary Social Studies by Grant and Vansledright (2001) for the previous three years. The text is based on the following principles: a constructivist view, integrative subject matter, big ideas, and genuine classroom communities.

After three years, I had found that students could grasp the philosophical underpinnings of this constructivist approach but had little experience in teaching and developing unit plans to draw on and, in fact, at this stage of their teacher education lesson plans were their focus. The actual steps in the text did not have enough detail to guide the teacher candidates through the process of developing an inquiry unit. Therefore, Dan and I began to develop a step-by-step process to help our teacher candidates understand and practise a process that they could use to begin their journey of creating an inquiry approach in their own classrooms.

We created an approach that would enable our teacher candidates to develop a unit plan for their practicum and might be a useful process for their own future classrooms. It was more of a “guided” inquiry approach, because we felt that the teacher candidates had not experienced much inquiry learning in their own education and the students they were going to be teaching also had limited experience in inquiry.12

12 Many of my observations over the past 12 years have been outlined in research by Aulls and Shore (2008) in their chapter "Preparing Preservice Teachers to Be Inquirers" (pp. 45-68).
Our other main innovation was to utilize the concept of the big question to focus the learning of
the student and guide the teaching of the teacher. We collaboratively practised, reflected, and
refined the process for the next three years, and we accepted feedback from our teacher
candidates. Thus, when I moved to the University of Manitoba in 2006, I continued the process
of developing this method of inquiry planning. Because there is some teacher preplanning
before students begin, it may not be considered “true” inquiry learning, but it is a start, a
foundational step in creating an inquiry-learning environment in a classroom. It enables the
teacher and students to become comfortable with the process, and it gives room for students to
take more control of the direction of the inquiry, so that the teacher becomes more and more the
guide and facilitator. This does not mean that the teacher lets students loose to do whatever
they want; rather, the teacher works with students to help them create their questions of inquiry,
find resources, set goals, present their findings, and assess their learning. This process is
completed as a partnership between teacher and students.

Learning the process takes about 10 hours of class time to walk the teacher candidates through
six steps with examples and discussions as they develop a draft social studies unit framed with
a big question. At each step, two examples are provided. There is time provided for clarifying
questions, time outside of our classroom for teacher candidates to develop a draft, time in class
for them to discuss in small groups their ideas and concerns, and finally a large class discussion
to address any concerns. This process is repeated for each of the six steps.

Development Steps

**Step 1 – Develop the “Big” or Essential Question**

I find this is the most challenging step, as we are not well practised in asking questions that are
deep and broad (as outlined previously). Nevertheless, once students get a big question to
guide their inquiry unit, the next steps fall into place. The big question can be created out of the
overall concepts of the social studies curriculum, but it is not at this point connected to specific
curriculum outcomes. It is a question that will excite and engage students, and be relevant to
their lives. This step can be completed by the teacher if he/she finds a current issue or topic that
the students are interested in, or the students can help to develop the topic. The end goal is for
students to become proficient in developing their own big question through practice and with
guidance. The importance of using a big or essential question and supporting sub- or guiding
questions and not just a “big” idea has been the main innovation that Dan and I have had from
the process introduced by Grant and VanSledright (2001).

**Step 2 – Explore and List the Guiding or Sub-Questions**

In this step, the inquirer lists sub- or guiding questions that will need to be answered in order to
provide students with the background, facts, concepts, or ideas that enable them to answer the
big question as best they can at this time. This is an ongoing process. If the big question is an
essential one, it will be one that they will explore for a long time and adjust their answer to it as
they gain more information over time.

**Step 3 – Outline Your Goals/Outcomes/Objectives**

This is the step wherein the teacher looks back at the curriculum to identify possible skill,
knowledge, and value outcomes that may be addressed during the inquiry. These do not direct
the inquiry, but check that the students’ inquiry will fall generally in the curriculum. Also, the
outcomes tend to be spread across the smaller sub-units of the curriculum. In the Manitoba
social studies curriculum, they are called clusters and sub-clusters. Over the course of the inquiry, the teacher will track any of the knowledge, skills and value outcomes.

Step 4 – Search Out and Locate Possible Resources

This step is more of an exploration of the possible resources that exist in the immediate surroundings, in the teacher’s home and classroom, and in the school and community libraries. The internet is a remarkably in-depth and diverse source for student research, but a preview of the possibilities by the teacher can save some time and reduce frustration for students, as the sheer volume of information can be overwhelming. Of course, students will need to be guided into the safe use of the internet, including an evaluation of the accuracy of the information found on the world-wide Web, but this is something we should be helping students with anyway, because critical media literacy is a foundational 21st century skill. This step will build confidence in the teacher to know that there are easily accessible sources of information in the general topic area of the inquiry. Other sources will be found during the inquiry, especially as the students get into their own research.

Step 5 – Consider Possible Assessment of Knowledge/Skills/Values

This step may seem out of order, but I encourage the teacher candidates to consider how they might assess students during the process of their inquiry and what student learning demonstrations could be considered for formal and informal assessment. We also discuss assessment in general, its purposes, and whether they match our process. Finally, I have my university students consider a culminating activity and how it also could be used for the overall assessment of students. This is a challenging step, because teacher candidates usually have limited experience in student assessment. It therefore is more of a beginning conversation about assessment than a definitive step. They know that they will have to record their observations of student learning throughout the inquiry process and help students to record their own learning. Thus, this step will actually be conducted throughout the inquiry; it is just the beginning of a career-long exploration of student assessment.

Step 6 – Brainstorm Possible Lessons/Strategies/Activities

The final step of this preplanning process is to guide students in considering potential lessons and activities that might assist students in exploring the big question. These lesson ideas are not meant to be the only lessons used; they provide a jumping off point for teacher and students. I do have the teacher candidates focus in on the opener lesson, the one that introduces the big question and creates excitement, dissonance, or curiosity in students. Then we look at the possible culminating activity. How will the students be given an opportunity to answer the big question? Choice may be offered to the students, or a particular type of concluding demonstration might be expected from the whole class. It will depend on the confidence of the students and the skills that the teacher is asking them to practise. Culminating products can be of many types: essays, dramatic plays, posters, visual art, PowerPoint, poems, stories, movies, etc.

For the other lessons in between the opening and culminating ones, the teacher candidates consider lesson activities that will help students to answer the sub- or guiding questions, find information about the topic, practise skills needed to understand the information uncovered, and create a response to the big question. The expectation is that each teacher candidate will develop eight or more lesson ideas. The understanding is that these are just to ensure a
successful start. Many of the lessons ideas may, in fact, not be used and others will be developed as the inquiry unfolds, some of them initiated by the students.

**Successes**

I have completed this process over 50 times in the last 12 years with early, middle, and senior years teacher candidates. For the most part, they have indicated their appreciation of learning the process. It is sometimes the first time that they have completed any unit planning, and they indicate that it also provides a starting point for developing inquiry in their own classrooms in the future. I have also worked with school staffs using this process, and these experienced teachers have used it in developing inquiry units in both single-grade and cross-grade situations. The following is a summary of some of the successes that I have observed.

- In the anonymous course evaluation, teacher candidates indicate that they liked the process and see the possible use of it, especially for integrating subjects.
- Some cooperating teachers are interested and have worked with their teacher candidates to use inquiry during the practicum experience.
- Former students tell me that they have used the process after they have graduated and begun teaching in their own classrooms.
- I have facilitated school staffs in using this framework for inquiry to develop integrated school-wide projects.
- As a member of the Manitoba Education curriculum development team for the grade 12 “Global Issues: Citizenship and Sustainability” course, I introduced this process to the planning team. It informed and influenced the inquiry process outlined in the curriculum guide.
- The process also informs my ongoing involvement in the Grade Twelve Inquiry Project (GTIP) research group. For the complete story of both the curriculum development of the Global Issues course and the ongoing GTIP research project, see Babiuk, Conner, & Mlodzinski (2013).

**Challenges**

There have been challenges in developing the process, but more so in the implementation into classroom settings. The real indication of whether this planning process is helpful is whether it is evident in teachers’ classrooms. Here are some of the challenges that I continue to work on.

- There is never enough time in my curriculum course to spend deepening the understanding and development of the process with teacher candidates. We have only 36 hours of class time in nine weeks to gain an overview of the Manitoba social studies curriculum, explore the philosophical underpinnings of social studies in general, and also learn the inquiry process.
- I have had very little opportunity to make any connection between the development of the inquiry unit in the university curriculum course and the teacher candidates’ practicum teaching. In many cases, the teacher candidate is not even teaching social studies in that semester. Also, because I am not a university advisor who visits the practicum classroom, I have depended on the reflections of the teacher candidates after their practicum.
- Many cooperating teachers are reluctant or refuse to allow teacher candidates to try inquiry during a practicum. Some do, and invite the teacher candidates to explore inquiry with them. However, in the majority of cases, the cooperating teacher is more interested...
in having the teacher candidate complete a small unit or a group of lessons based on a topic in the curriculum. They expect teacher-led instruction.

- I need to develop more strategies to help teacher candidates ask better questions and refine their research skills. This is an area that I think would assist not only the TCs in developing good classroom questioning but also help them guide their students to be better questioners, which is key to in-depth and critical inquiry.

**Next Steps in My Inquiry Journey**

We need to transform our classrooms to engage our students. Currently, we are still stuck in the belief that we have to dump lots of information into our students, but this will not assist them in their future roles in society. We need citizens who are action oriented and use sound critical and creative thinking skills to make socially responsible decisions to address the immense and complex issues that we face as a global community, including social injustice, environmental degradation, and social unrest. As Kincheloe, McLaren, and Steinberg (2011) suggested,

> The school curriculum should in part be shaped by problems that face teachers and students in their effort to live just and ethical lives. Such a curriculum promotes students to be researchers who engage in critical analysis of the forces that shape their world. Such critical analysis engenders a healthy and creative skepticism on the part of students. It moves them to problem pose and to be suspicious of neutrality claims in textbooks; it induces them to look askance at, for example, oil companies’ claims in their TV commercials that they are and have always been environmentally friendly organizations. Students and teachers who are problem posers reject the traditional student request to the teacher: “just give us the facts, the truth, and we’ll give it back to you.” On the contrary, critical students and teachers ask in the spirit of Freire and Horton: “Please support us in our explorations of the world.” (p. 165)

Thus, I need to continue to self-reflect and research my own practice as a teacher educator so that I can teach and support other classroom teachers to create spaces in their classrooms for students to explore their world through questioning and inquiry. Langer (1997) stated,

> When we are mindful, we recognize that every inadequate answer is adequate in another context. In the perspective of every person lies a lens through which we may better understand ourselves. If we respect student’s abilities to define their own experiences, to generate their own hypotheses, and to discover new ways of categorizing the world, we might not be so quick to evaluate the adequacy of their answers. We might, instead, begin listening to their questions. Out of the questions of students come some of the most creative ideas and discoveries. (p. 135)

May we all begin to support our students’ exploration of their world and listen to their questions.

**References**


https://openlibrary.org/works/OL16721021W/Junior_high_school_curriculum_guide_for_social_studies


Abstract

My impressions of teaching “Global Issues: Citizenship and Sustainability” the first time focus primarily on three challenges that arose for me throughout the semester. The first challenge centered on defining my role and learning how and how much does a teacher help the student in inquiry-based learning? My second challenge was to help students ask meaningful questions that would lead them to a deeper, fuller understanding of an issue and help them to see the connection between the issues and their daily lives. As the class and I became somewhat more comfortable with inquiry-learning, I began to look for an answer to my greatest challenge: How do I fairly assess student learning and growth in the field of complex inquiry-learning? In a course that encourages an examination of personal and social values and a move toward active and democratic citizenship – ambitious and important goals in our world today – assessment remains a challenge.

My First Impressions of Teaching “Global Issues: Citizenship and Sustainability”

In the fall of 2012, after a two-year break from teaching, I not only entered the classroom again, but I began preparing for the new Global Issues course, which I would begin teaching in the second semester. Global Issues, with its inquiry-based learning focus, looked like something I had always longed to teach, and inquiry-learning seemed like an excellent way to engage the young learner of the 21st century. With a curriculum of amazing breadth and possibility, for both teacher and student, I looked forward to this new teaching experience.

Preparing to teach a new course always brings a mixture of challenge and excitement. This was also true as I began to prepare for the newly developed Global Issues. Although I had taught World Issues for several years, there were a couple of important differences in this course: it would be primarily a student-directed, inquiry-based course, and it would openly encourage and guide students toward active democratic citizenship.

My first impressions around teaching the course focus primarily on three challenges that arose for me throughout the semester. The first challenge centres on defining my role in the inquiry-based learning classroom. I knew that it meant I would be the guide in the classroom and, as such, I needed to let go of the regular structure that a lesson takes. My second challenge concerns the difficulties of helping students to reach a depth of understanding that inquiry-learning asks of the learner. This meant not only asking meaningful questions, but avoiding the quick and superficial information that students, and perhaps all of us, consider a good answer, given our media-filled world that provides quick answers to almost any question we have. Finally, this narrative focuses on my attempts to assess fairly student learning and growth in the field of complex inquiry-learning. For me, this meant finding an answer to the following question: Had the students discovered an understanding of the issue studied that added to their previous knowledge and understanding of the issue? Was there change or growth? Or even moments of ah hah!
Getting Started

The first challenge began with a question that I had never really had to ask myself before: How does one prepare for a course that should not be teacher led, or at least not in the traditional sense of teacher led? Teaching World Issues had certainly been good preparation and, although not using an inquiry-learning approach, even that course enabled teacher and student to ask big questions, and to some degree motivated students to assess the things happening in the world and find their own answers. I now needed to take this questioning a few steps further. I needed to be sure that I understood how one learns through inquiry and how one teaches in the inquiry-learning based classroom.

The *Global Issues: Citizenship and Sustainability Teacher Guide* speaks of inquiry as a “complex process” that “grows out of constructivist pedagogy” (Manitoba Education, 2011, p. 1). It seemed, then, that my role would be to make this complex process understandable for my students and through the process add to the knowledge that they had already acquired in their 16 or 17 years of life. This was easy to understand theoretically, but, as I would discover in the months to come, difficult to realize on a day-to-day basis. Some students, I knew, would be thrilled to charter their own path of learning and would naturally start with a topic relevant to themselves and then push themselves to find a meaningful answer. Others would need more help. As it turned out, most needed a fair bit of help, not just in the process of learning about and examining an issue, but right from the start in finding a meaningful question.

My class was not an easy one. I see that now even more clearly. I started with nineteen students and by the end I had lost six. Of the thirteen who stayed, four were EAL students and eight were in grade 11. However, my biggest challenge in terms of classroom environment was that it was a video conference class. I had just one student from another community, but it was my first time teaching via video conferencing. The students were not a cohesive group in any way, and there was only one real leader among them. Their past learning experiences were very different, and language would be a challenge for almost one third of the class.

To begin the class, I needed first to teach them about inquiry-based learning. In my school division, two other teachers were teaching Global Issues and we decided to teach the media issue first. I then used this the media issue as my focus to model the inquiry method of learning. During the next three weeks, I presented the class with several questions and together we set about looking for answers. We discussed the questions themselves, talked about other ways that we could ask them, and discussed how they were similar, broader, or weaker than the other questions. I introduced the students to websites. We read articles online and in print; we watched video clips and documentaries. We examined the news, and tried to make connections to other issues and our lives. Each day, I reminded them of the current big question we were examining and talked about different ways that we could have answered the question and how it never felt like our answer was complete. Although I felt like I was properly modeling inquiry-learning, I was still very much the traditional teacher, not yet the guide or facilitator of independent inquiry-learning. It felt much like my old World Issues classes. I think that for the students the real experience of inquiry was also not yet realized, although they may have acquired a sense of the big questions that this class would enable them to ask. What did make the class different from other classes for them, however, was the breadth of the issues and the various perspectives, resources, and places in the world that were examined. For a few, this was exciting, but for others it was mostly unsettling.

After a few weeks of walking through inquiry-learning together while focused on the media, I
made a brief presentation on each of the other nine areas of inquiry. My purpose was to give the students a basic understanding of each issue, and to show them the many different perspectives that they could take to study the issue and the varied paths that each topic could take them along.

Having done all the introductory activities that I felt were necessary, it was time to let go and see whether they were ready to learn more independently. I had decided that the first inquiry was to be done in groups that I would make completely randomly.

Inquiry One and Learning to Guide

Even after all of the introductory activities were completed, starting the first independent inquiry was still difficult for both me and the students. The students simply wondered how to start, essentially how to find the right question, and I struggled with how to best help them. How do you, as guide, help students to discover something that is supposed to have a personal connection, something that need not particularly matter to the others in the room? All of the great issues of the world stood before them and yet, even after an introduction to each topic and, more importantly, 10 or 11 years of school, many topics simply seemed strange to them. What was this topic of consumerism? or biotechnology? They knew about world poverty, but really did not know what to do with it besides feel sorry for hungry kids. The same was true with human rights, gender issues, indigenous peoples – it all seemed to scare them. They cared about the environment, as they had come to know they should, but did not really want to, care to, or know how to do anything personal and concrete in that area.

Here I had to work on a disconnect that I was feeling. As a teenager, I was interested in global and social justice issues, and was somewhat involved in such things. I always felt that students and adults alike had burning questions that they wanted answered, or projects that they would love to be involved in given the chance. Now, I felt like I was facing a bunch of students who really did not know what to do or what they cared about.

Clearly, the students were not feeling completely comfortable in this class, and I knew that before any good questions would be found and learning would begin, I simply had to continue to encourage and work on making the students feel comfortable with the areas of inquiry and with the freedom they had to formulate their own questions to answer. They needed to know that finding the right question takes time, and that it was okay to take a couple of days just to read and skim information until they landed upon something that led them to a question that intrigued them. Therefore, I spent those first few days wandering among the groups: listening to concerns, offering suggestions, and recommending resources that I knew were reputable.

At the same time that students were beginning their group inquiries, I attended the Global Issues meeting at Global College in March 2013. This meeting proved to be reassuring and inspiring. All over the province, there were colleagues speaking with passion, frustration, concern, excitement about what was going on in their new inquiry-learning based Global Issues classrooms. I clearly remember the words of one teacher who said, “I do not help my students find a Take Action Project (TAP) idea at all. They need to discover their topic and project themselves.” Although this was more about TAP, I remember feeling, “Oh dear, I have done too much for my students. Too much interference. Too much teacher leading. I am not practising inquiry-learning. How will my students ever survive in a course like this or take responsibility for their learning if I am always suggesting, questioning, encouraging, pushing, etc.? I truly admired this teacher response on the one hand, because I sensed that her students must also (not sure I need the word also here) agonize and grapple with issues themselves until they...
determined an issue of concern and a project that fit. However, I knew that I would not, and could not, do it that way.

That did not mean, however, that I was then firm and sturdy in my own approach to guiding students. I was still experimenting myself. Some days, it was easy to offer encouragement and positive coaching; on others, when my patience was thin, I offered criticism and challenges to dig deeper and walked away. Some days I fought great negativity and apathy, and on others I was impressed with sincere struggles to pursue something of meaning. Often, there seemed so little to praise. And yet I knew that they were in new territory and needed support. It was the age-old teacher struggle of finding a balance between challenging students to struggle with their own learning and offering more encouragement (perhaps making things a little easier), so that they could move forward. Slowly, each group came to find a common concern and developed a question to pursue. For many, the environment seemed to be the safest, most comfortable topic – probably due to science classes and the general talk in the world of things like climate change, global warming, and recycling. Somehow, it seemed the least overwhelming because at the very least they knew some of the vocabulary – ozone layer, fish depletion, greenhouse gases – as opposed to planned obsolescence, stem cell research, and Indigenous rights.

Throughout the first inquiry, communication in the group and with me was sparse. Although they had obviously worked in groups before, they previously had a more specific task outlined for them, often with specific individual roles assigned as well. Now, things were open ended. This, too, was a struggle.

Each group went about creating a PowerPoint presentation. Once again, this was a safe and familiar method of presenting what had been learned, and an easy way for three students to blend their work when they did not particularly collaborate along the way. It is also easy to create and lends itself to presenting small tidbits of information. These tidbits of information, the stats or outstanding little quotations, became the gist of many presentations. Perhaps this became the biggest hurdle of the implementation of the inquiry process. Sometimes, an entire presentation consisted of great pictures and amazing facts and figures. Although to me it felt like there had been no real thought and analysis of issues, it was clear to see that students not only felt that they had done a fairly good job in addressing their question, they were in many cases truly amazed, moved, or startled by the facts that they had gathered.

Was this, then, part of successful inquiry-learning? To me, it felt shallow. It looked elementary. It was too simple. However, it might be that this is a starting point in inquiry-learning. Before students could analyze an issue, they needed to collect facts and put them together in a neat little package, a PowerPoint with various fonts and colours that looked impressive. This is how they have learned to learn. This is how they have learned to show what they have learned, if they are not writing a test or an essay. This is perhaps also how the new brain has been programmed to learn. The list of tidy facts, amazing quotations and diagrams, does seem part of finding an answer for students. It encapsulates for them the broader issue, although they may not be able to explain the complexities of the issue. It does hold, in some part, hold meaning for them and an answer to their question.

Still, the issue of depth and real understanding of the issues remained. In many ways, the information presented was not thorough or deep. It was too brief, too superficial, like the tidbits of information that they find as they surf the net in the evenings or when they sit down at the computer before they start any assignment.
Inquiry Two and Meaningful Questions

The second inquiries were done individually, which seemed to come as relief to most (if not all) of my students. The class was not at all a cohesive group. Furthermore, some relief was felt knowing that the first inquiry had been completed and that the course was doable.

After some debriefing and discussion about the first presentations, we set off again. Most now had some idea of the broad topic that they wanted to pursue. Some spark in the issues had been ignited. However, I knew that to make them more successful at inquiry-learning, they needed help in asking better questions. They needed questions that would lead them beyond creating a list of facts in a tidy PowerPoint presentation.

Learning to ask better questions was not an easy task. Students were very used to having questions assigned, and asking questions about war and peace and human rights still did not always seem relevant to them in their social media rich world. They were used to quick answers – in school to some degree, and in the world to a large degree. Good inquiry questions provide anything but quick answers. And inquiry-learning certainly is not efficient, either, something the world holds in high regard. Students needed to know that it was okay if it took them one or two classes to refine their question.

All students with whom I spoke months after the course was over mentioned the challenge of beginning, the challenge of finding the right question. One student said, “It was hard to pick a topic,” while another lamented, “There were a lot of questions I wanted to ask. I always changed my mind. So many I wanted to know. Just finally picked one because it was getting late.” A third student commented, “It’s easier for me to memorize stuff.” In other classes, beginning an assignment or getting to work meant other things. In Global Issues, it meant designing the topic around which you would spend most of your class time for the next three weeks. Just getting started was a challenge.

The struggle to find the right question was even more difficult for my EAL students, who comprised one third of my class, and I struggled to help them with this. For me, it was not only a language issue, but I had the extra challenge of first understanding the world from which they came. I needed this understanding in order to help them find the right inquiry topic. Furthermore, inquiry-learning was even more of a stranger to them, especially those who had been in Canada for only one semester prior to taking the course. In the end, the top international student (who probably would have achieved the highest mark in the course) dropped the course with concern for her GPA. However, one other international student with strong English skills commented a few months later, “I have never done a course like this. It is interesting. They should start this course in grade one.”

However, for several students there seemed to be ambivalence about how “helpful” this class is in real life. This ambivalence seems to be closely connected to their current world, with its distractions and pressures. The biggest, in my view, is the adult life that many 16 to 18 year-old high school students live these days, in particular the part-time job that many students have. This is not a new problem, yet in my almost 25 years in the classroom it has changed. The increase in the number of students who have part-time jobs and the number of hours that they work is remarkable. In an inquiry-learning course, where the learning is not so prescribed, the tendency to let job responsibilities come before school responsibilities seems greater. A common opening comment in class from students was, “I cannot do anything tonight because I have to work.” For many, work is clearly a priority over high school and is therefore a distraction from learning. Students, in general, saw no connection between the Global Issues course and
their jobs. Global Issues did not provide them with that specific skill or specific knowledge base that they thought they needed for their evening job or for their future career. Here, inquiry-learning about global issues is doubly challenging. The issues seem far away from their immediate lives – their current jobs that hold so much meaning for them and the social priorities they have. Furthermore, the course does not lend itself to presenting the information that they feel will be useful in future jobs. In response to the question of a compulsory Global Issues course, a student responded, “Not really . . . math and English you need in everyday life. Every day you use both those skills. . . . It would be a good enlightenment course.” Even after one semester of university, this student did not see the importance of the Global Issues class.

It was probably also while evaluating the second inquiry that I began to reflect on student reading skills and how they connect to the complexity of inquiry-learning. For some students, the amount of reading required was certainly a hindrance to achieving a clear understanding of the issue that they were studying. As I sat at home checking the sources they had used, I found myself completely caught up in the places they wandered to in their searching. They had in fact, discovered some very good sources of information. However, the information that they presented to the class often contained only small bits of information from these sources, and it was easy to see where their information had come from: the first few paragraphs of each visited site. I came to see that this was partly responsible for the superficial reporting that some students had done. The information that they needed to bring completion and depth to their inquiries was often found further into the website, and they often did not read to this point. This was the place where one might see the complexity or even the controversy of an issue.

There were a couple of positive outcomes from the second round of inquiry presentations. The PowerPoint presentations encouraged students to become interested in the inquiries of others. One student commented on the many PowerPoint presentations, “I like to learn the interesting stuff others are doing. The topics were so different with different perspectives. It was nice to see how other people think. PowerPoint is easy to present. It makes others understand better.” Throughout the course, PowerPoint presentations remained the most common method of reporting what they had learned and connected to this was a second benefit. The follow-up discussions were also better than they had been after the first inquiries. Students were a bit more comfortable with each other and they felt they could ask questions, even critique, what they had seen and heard. There was even some admiration for the risks that some students had taken.

Inquiry Three and Assessment

The third challenge that I encountered during that first experience with inquiry-learning was my greatest. I discovered that, without a doubt, student inquiry is difficult to evaluate. Although within our division we had created rubrics, they were helpful only in that I had something ready made to give students. In many ways, I found them limiting and inadequate.

Most often, while sitting at home and writing out my final comments to the students, I simply found myself thinking of one of the enduring understandings from the Global Issues: Citizenship and Sustainability document: “There is no them or over there; our concerns are interdependent, and we are of the natural world” (Manitoba Education and Advanced Learning, “Global Issues 3”). But how do you measure an enduring understanding? How do you assess an enduring understanding like that? This is just one of the main enduring understandings given in the curriculum. With this question in mind, in all of my assessment, I began to look for some glimpse that the students had acquired a sense of the interdependence of all global concerns and their place in it.
My assessment thinking also took me back to the whole idea of constructivist pedagogy. I think this is the only way to evaluate the complexity that comes with inquiry-learning. The teacher does not so much measure the final destination of the student alone, as assess some growth in the students that shows a greater understanding of an issue than they had before. I needed to look for some articulation of “Before I saw it this way and now I see it this way.” I had to take into consideration the learning environment from which the students came, especially with my international students. I needed to have a good understanding of their world so that I could see the personal and intellectual growth that they had experienced.

A significant benefit of inquiry-learning, and the evaluation of it, is also that it accommodates differentiation. Early on in the course, I had spoken to my students about the heaviness of the course, the heaviness of the issues. In my modelling, I always tried to end the lesson with a “This is what we can do” comment, or “This is what is being done to solve the problem.” Generally, all of my students picked up on this style of conclusion, and were able to end their presentations by suggesting something that they could do to work toward a solution. Sometimes, they referred to something quite small and simple; other times, they concluded with a grander vision of what could be done to work on a problem. While this is not a clear measure of growth, it does point to a sense of “I am in this world and am part of a possible solution.”

A second conclusion that I arrived at in the evaluation of inquiry-learning is that intentions, hopes, and vision count for something. When students became more aware of global issues and their own connection to them, it is natural that they will want to dream of ways to solve the problems they see. Their desire for positive change was plain to see, even if not easy to achieve. What my students were reaching for came through in the teacher-student dialogues and in their written reflections. Although their ideas and hopes were sometimes rather lofty, they were also often admirable. These, although not answered completely, must be given some consideration when measuring the final product, as well.

Six months after completing the course, I interviewed four students and asked them to reflect on how much they enjoyed their first inquiry-learning based class. Here is a sampling of some things they said:

“I actually liked it a lot . . . This is cool . . . got to the part where I just did not want to do it . . . A lot of responsibility . . . It makes you think . . . Made me want to learn more . . . it affected me personally.”

“If we started earlier, kids would grow and be able to solve problems on their own. I was reading about this the other day. When kids are only told what they need to know, they . . . don't solve problems. With inquiry learning, they can think for themselves more.”

“Doing research got me ready for university where the teacher does not teach everything. The teacher is just there to help you research . . . It helped me read in depth.”

“I liked it better than tests.”

My first time teaching Global Issues using inquiry-learning was definitely a challenge, but a worthwhile one. Although I was certain that inquiry-learning was the right method for the course, students seemed uncertain and, at times, I think all of us felt that there was a more efficient way to arrive at some understanding of the issues we needed to study. My first responsibility, then, was to encourage students and eliminate some of the fear and uncertainty that they were feeling. The fear to learn and engage deeply in an issue is always to some degree present.
regardless of the method of instruction. However, in inquiry-learning, the fear might be greater for two reasons. First, there is an open-endedness to the exploration of the topic. The teacher does not assign the topic, nor does the teacher necessarily expect a concrete and succinct answer at the end of the inquiry. This is unsettling to many students. Second, inquiry-learning requires a personal investment from the student. Even bright students are anxious about this personal commitment to a topic of their own choosing, because much more is at stake for them. When students learn something that they have chosen to learn, they feel more responsible to do something with the new knowledge acquired. *Global Issues* has this effect more than many other courses because its goal is growth, and awareness of what each individual can do. It is no wonder that the course is somewhat daunting to teachers and students alike. However, the teacher’s role is crucial, not only in providing information, but in helping every student to feel comfortable with inquiry-learning as the primary method of learning in Global Issues 40S: Citizenship and Sustainability. Furthermore, what Global Issues and inquiry-learning offer students is the chance to individualize learning, to help students find out what really matters to them and to their neighbors, and to begin the kind of learning that makes their own lives more meaningful.

**Post-Script**
(July 2014, after having taught Global Issues through inquiry-learning a second time)

Although I had a much easier class my second time teaching Global Issues, the three challenges that I wrote about after my first experience remained and, of those, evaluation was still most challenging. However, the difference was that my own confidence had grown, which freed me to enjoy watching my students search for questions and delve deeply into the issues to find their own answers.

**References**


AN ORGANIC PROCESS FOR CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT
IN GRADE 12 SOCIAL STUDIES

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Abstract

This paper presents the rationale for the renewal of the grade 12 social studies “World Issues” course, describes the interactive process followed for the development of the new course, and presents an overview of the course components and structure. The new grade 12 course, now called “Global Issues: Citizenship and Sustainability,” is based on inquiry pedagogy and proposes some innovative approaches to teaching and learning in high school social studies, such as the inclusion of action-research projects linked to the community as part of the course requirements.

An Organic Process for Curriculum Development
in Grade 12 Social Studies

Rationale

The “knowledge society” in which we now live in requires new thinking about what constitutes effective and engaging teaching and learning. Teachers are now faced with the challenge that “former conceptions of knowledge, minds and learning no longer serve a world where what we know is less important than what we are able to do with knowledge in different contexts.” – Dr. Sharon Friesen (2009)

In February 2009, having completed the renewal of the grade 11 “History of Canada” course, social studies consultants with Manitoba Education set to the task of revising the optional courses offered in social studies in grade 12. The decision was made – partly in view of limited time and resources – to begin by focusing attention on the existing “World Issues” course, which has remained over the years the most popular of the grade 12 social studies options, in spite of the fact that the curriculum for the course had not been updated since 1990. This sustained support was seen not only as an indication of the degree of commitment of high school teachers to the course, but also as evidence of increasing concerns about pressing social, political, environmental, and economic challenges faced by citizens of Manitoba as members of a highly interdependent global community.

With this priority in mind, consultants drew up an initial draft course outline that built upon the new social studies curriculum’s core focus on active and responsible citizenship. The draft outline placed increased emphasis on global interdependence, the inclusion of more current and emerging issues, and the departmental priority of integrating Education for Sustainable Development as a significant element across the curriculum. From the beginning, it was envisaged that the course should remain issues based, that it should offer a flexible approach to topic selection, and that it should be designed in such a way as to support teaching for understanding, as based on the work of Wiggins and McTighe (2005). Like the recently designed grade 11 “History of Canada” course, this new grade 12 course was conceptualized as being based on inquiry, and structured on a limited number of “Enduring Understandings” rather than on discrete and often disconnected Specific Learning Outcomes.
Following the approval of the draft course outline by Deputy Minister Gerald Farthing, a development team consisting of departmental consultants, academic advisers, and a team of six World Issues teachers was set in place in September 2009 to collaborate in the development of the new course. Throughout the school years 2009-10 and 2010-11, the committee met regularly to exchange ideas and resources, to propose teaching approaches and course structure, and to discuss appropriate ways to present the new course. In between meetings, the consultants pursued writing and revising tasks, conducted research to support the course, and consulted with experts in pertinent areas, including Chuck Hopkins, UNESCO Chair in Education for Sustainable Development from York University (in January 2010).

During the development phase of the course, it became increasingly evident to all contributors that a course focusing primarily on global issues is an extremely important component of a comprehensive and rigorous social studies education. By its very nature, an inquiry-based social studies course invites the inclusion of urgent questions such as climate change, global health, economic sustainability, social justice, and the myriad interdependent components required to sustain quality of life for all, now and in the future. This vision was seen to be very much in keeping with the overall goal of the UN Decade for Education for Sustainable Development (2009-2014). Further research into 21st century global issues led the team to develop a set of themes (Areas of Inquiry) to function as content organizers for the course. The development team also decided to use as a foundation for the course UNESCO’s four “pillars” of learning for the future as described in the Delors Report (1996). As a result, the course approach and structure were conceived and designed with these four competencies in mind: Learning to Be, Learning to Know, Learning to Do, and Learning to Live Together.

The development team, and Deputy Minister Farthing, saw the need to include community members in the process of developing and refining the course overview. As a result, in March 2011 a community consultation was held with a number of Manitoba organizations with an interest in world issues, including the International Institute for Sustainable Development, the Manitoba Education for Sustainable Development Working Group, the Manitoba Council for International Cooperation, the International Red Cross, and other community groups and educators. The individuals and groups who participated in the consultation were overall highly supportive of the proposed approach to the course, and offered many recommendations and supports to further its development.

As a result of this ongoing collaboration, and with the unflagging commitment and support of Deputy Minister Farthing, course development and supporting research continued in 2011-12. The course title evolved to its current name, “Global Issues: Citizenship and Sustainability,” and the teacher development team became increasingly supportive of the focus on ecological literacy as an essential meaningful component of the course. Teachers offered recommendations regarding course content, evaluation, and the idea of an action project as a culminating element of the inquiry process. Among their suggestions was the recommendation that students focus on making a meaningful link between their research into a selected global issue and their potential to take action for positive change in their local communities. Over the course of the development of the course, a number of teachers and researchers worked on providing up-to-date background content summaries for many of the ten proposed Areas of Inquiry. (For example, a backgrounder on global citizenship and international humanitarian law was offered by Global College as a resource for the course.)

By the beginning of school year 2011-12, most of the draft documents required to commence a pilot of the course were in place. Many of the suggested course components have undergone some initial testing in the classrooms of the teacher members of the development team, who
were eager to bring in some new and invigorating elements to teaching their World Issues courses. The pilot project team consisted initially of a group of 22 teachers working in a variety of contexts, including français and French immersion schools, private schools, adult education centres and alternative programs, rural and urban schools, small and large schools, several UNESCO schools, and one on-reserve school. The team met first in August 2011 for an orientation to review the course overview and to plan their teaching in the fall or the winter semester using the newly developed course materials. Over the course of the school year, the pilot team met regularly to share information about their successes and challenges, and to make recommendations about implementation of the new course. Much of the discussion focused on the active citizenship component of the course, the transformation of teaching habits in an approach based on student-generated inquiry, and the management of content decisions related to the ten areas of inquiry.

In spite of some of the challenges that offering the new course presented, the team was highly enthusiastic about maintaining flexibility and choice as elements of course design. The pilot team agreed that it was reasonable to expect that students should conduct inquiry, either collectively or individually, into at least three of the ten proposed areas of inquiry, and that one of these studies form the basis for each student’s Take Action Project (TAP). Most of the pilot teachers chose to begin the course by undertaking a collective class inquiry in one of the areas of inquiry, using the proposed inquiry template as a model for subsequent research projects done by individual students or same groups. For the most part, teachers found that with a certain amount of preparation and guidance, students readily engaged in choosing and pursuing their own research topics from the proposed areas of inquiry. In general, the teachers found that students remained very motivated by their inquiry topics, and that they developed greater autonomy in thinking about issues and in pursuing possibilities for significant community action projects. Pilot teachers also enjoyed participating in an ongoing and fruitful exchange of ideas, resources, and articles related to new and emerging global issues that concerned the students.

As a part of the pilot project, the pilot teachers were invited to bring along a representative group of students to participate in a half-day student consultation (in March 2012). Students were given the opportunity to share ideas about their action projects and their inquiry topics, to express their opinions about the course to the Deputy Minister, and to discuss their opinions of their grade 12 social studies learning experience in response to these questions:

- In your opinion, what is the most important global issue today?
- Which topics engaged you the most, and why?
- Are there any topics you would have liked to learn more about but did not have the chance to study?

Overall, the students who had taken the course were wholehearted in their endorsement of the course. They agreed that their class discussions about global issues were engaging and helped to sharpen their awareness of the current state of the world. Furthermore, the students said that the course motivated them to learn and to think about contemporary global issues in relation to their local communities. Most of the students were greatly appreciative of the flexible topic selection afforded by the course, and agreed that their learning was enriched by using an inquiry approach to questions that preoccupied them or that dominated the media. In general, the students’ responses appeared to be further evidence not only of the appeal of the course, but also of the crucial need for a global issues course that promotes critical thinking, global-local connections, self-directed inquiry, and constructive student response to complex contemporary problems. See Figure 1 for the Course Overview Chart in both English and French, which the
department intends to refine in order to create an illustrated poster as a visual representation of the course synopsis at a glance.

References


Figure 1: Course Overview Chart
Apprendre à connaître
Acquérir les connaissances et les pensées critiques requises afin de comprendre, un monde complexe et variable

- Développer la littératie écologique et une compréhension de l'interdépendance de la société, de l'environnement et de l'individu
- Être ouvert aux idées nouvelles et à la pensée critique
- Pouvoir transmettre les connaissances aux diverses formes et perspectives
- Cultiver la pensée critique, critique et systématique pour utiliser ses compétences critiques
- Interpréter des approches alternatives, à la question sans crainte de changement ou de statu quo
- Mesurer à long terme et évaluer une vision pour un avenir viable

Connaissances fondamentales

- Comprendre le fonctionnement de la Terre en termes de biodiversité et de la vie humaine
- Comprendre les relations entre les êtres humains et les systèmes écologiques
- Comprendre les impacts de l'exploitation et de l'exploitation des ressources naturelles
- Comprendre l'importance des ressources naturelles pour le développement durable

Passer à l'action

- Mobiliser notre engagement écologique, un acte indéniable et une responsabilité de chacun, pour travailler en concert pour la sauvegarde des ressources naturelles et l'avenir de notre planète
- Connaître les conséquences des actions humaines sur l'environnement
- Évaluer les conséquences des actions humaines sur l'environnement
- Évaluer les conséquences des actions humaines sur l'environnement
- Évaluer les conséquences des actions humaines sur l'environnement

Apprendre à faire
Participer de façon efficace à la communauté locale, nationale et mondiale

- Agir en tant que citoyen responsable envers soi, les autres et l'environnement
- Se montrer prêt à communiquer, à donner et à faire des changements pour adopter un mode de vie durable
- Développer un sens du changement, s'engager à prendre position et à agir pour un avenir viable
- Cultiver et partager nos talents, nos habitudes et nos droits personnels
- Protéger et promouvoir la santé et la bien-être de nos parents et de nos enfants
- Participer à la politique provinciale et fédérale et à nos institutions

Apprendre à être
Développer la connaissance de soi et la conscience de ses liens à la nature et à la société

- Avoir et savoir être dans le monde naturel, vivre selon des principes écologiques
- Être en mesure de contribuer au bien-être collectif actuel et futur
- Évaluer l'intégration, la révision et le développement durable de la Terre
- Être à l'écoute et construire son identité personnelle
- Développer et explorer des aspects de son identité
- Développer ses aptitudes et enrichir
- Savoir comment être avec les autres et comment vivre ensemble dans un espace partagé

Apprendre à vivre ensemble
Vivre avec les autres de manière pacifique et estimer la Terre comme notre foyer commun

- Avoir et savoir être dans le monde naturel, vivre selon des principes écologiques
- Être en mesure de contribuer au bien-être collectif actuel et futur
- Évaluer l'intégration, la révision et le développement durable de la Terre
- Être à l'écoute et construire son identité personnelle
- Développer et explorer des aspects de son identité
- Développer ses aptitudes et enrichir
- Savoir comment être avec les autres et comment vivre ensemble dans un espace partagé

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Matt Henderson teaches senior years social studies at St. John's-Ravenscourt School in Winnipeg. He has a passion for creating educative experiences for students and using their experiences as a means for transformation. With the understanding that education is meant to create agents for social change, Matt is fascinated by the relationship between experience, ecological literacy, and systems thinking. Matt is a recipient of the Governor General's Award in History for Excellence in Teaching, is a graduate student at the University of Manitoba, a sessional instructor at the University of Winnipeg, and a regular contributor to the Winnipeg Free Press.

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Donna Lark Gamey identifies as a white settler Canadian, a descendent of Irish immigrants dating back to the 1700s and a granddaughter of first-generation Ukrainian immigrants. She has over 35 years of experience as a teacher and teacher educator in public school, adult education, and university contexts within Manitoba. Lark is currently a doctoral candidate. Her research focuses on white racial consciousness work for those teaching and those being taught. She is motivated to decolonize her perceptions and actions by a sincere desire for more authentic relationships between Aboriginal peoples and settler groups.

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For the past twenty-seven years, Dr. Lloyd Kornelsen has worked in the field of education, mostly as a high school and university teacher. Upon completing his Ph.D. last year, he was awarded the Manitoba Education Research Network award for outstanding achievement in educational research in Manitoba. His soon-to-be-published book, *Stories of Transformation: Memories of a Global Citizenship Practicum*, examines the meaning of global citizenship and its most affecting pedagogies.

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Dr. K.P. Binda is a professor at Brandon University. He received his education in England, Caribbean, United States, and Canada. He has served on national and international organizations and has numerous publications in the educational field. He has taught in Africa, the Caribbean, and Canada. He has also taught geography in Brandon University’s Faculty of Science and currently teaches in the Faculty of Education.

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Dave Anderson has been with the Kenanow Faculty of Education at the University College of the North in The Pas, Manitoba, since it began in 2008. His primary responsibility is coordinating the community-based programs currently being delivered in six Manitoba communities. In addition, Dave teaches Math Methods and Aboriginal Perspectives for Teachers. His focus is to help all teachers honour all students and provide learning opportunities for students to learn and live Mino Bimadiziwin (a Good Life).

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Larry Paetkau teaches Les enjeux mondiaux: citoyenneté et durabilité and English Language Arts at Collège Pierre-Elliott-Trudeau. He was a member of the curriculum team that worked on the new Global Issues course and is also actively involved in the UNESCO Associated Schools Project.

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Daniel Kiazyk is a senior years teacher at Rivers Collegiate. He teaches a variety of subjects, including social studies (grades 9-12) and a number of outdoor education courses. At school this year, he is actively involved in the development of a “Wetland Center of Excellence” in cooperation with Ducks Unlimited Canada. Daniel also writes often about his outdoor experiences as a guide and outfitter – cateyeoutfitter.com/intro.php

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Gary Babiuk has been an assistant professor in the Faculty of Education at the University of Manitoba for the past eight years. He has over 35 years combined experience as a classroom teacher, school administrator, and teacher educator. In the Faculty, he teaches mainly social studies curriculum courses in the B.Ed. program. Gary’s research interests include holistic education, education for sustainability and well-being, integrated curriculum, and inquiry learning. His most recent research has involved the Grade 12 Inquiry Project (GTIP). It is a collaborative action research project that involves a team of grade 12 teachers who currently teach the Manitoba Education grade 12 “Global Issues, Citizenship and Sustainability” course. He also is a team teacher of the University of Manitoba Summer Institute course, “Education for Sustainability.”

Brenda Neuhofer has been teaching since 1986, with several breaks to stay at home with her children and to travel. She is convinced that “Global Issues: Citizenship and Sustainability” is an important course that provides students an opportunity to explore the issues that really matter to the well-being of the planet, their communities, and their individual lives. She lives with her husband and two children on an acreage south of Roblin.

Renée has been a social studies consultant at the Bureau de l’éducation française for the past fourteen years, working on the development of a renewed social studies curriculum for Manitoba from kindergarten to grade 12. Her work has included writing curriculum documents, collaborating in the Western and Northern Canadian Protocol project, coordinating teacher committees, and consulting with educational partners. She offers ongoing curriculum implementation workshops to teachers working in Français and French Immersion programs in Manitoba. Renée has worked as a French Immersion teacher in Manitoba and Saskatchewan, and has taught courses in social studies curriculum in Faculties of Education at the University of Winnipeg, the University of Manitoba, and l’Université de Saint-Boniface.

In addition to co-authoring the newly approved grade 11 Canadian history textbook *Shaping Canada*, Linda Connor contributed to the grade 7 social studies textbook *The World Today* and the grade 9 civics textbook *Canada in the Contemporary World*. Linda was on the Manitoba Social Studies Steering Committee and curriculum development teams for grades 7, 9 and 11 social studies. She is also the Provincial Coordinator for UNESCO schools, is on the Speaker’s Bureau for the Treaty Relations Commission of Manitoba, and is the editor of the MSSTA journal for Manitoba social studies teachers. Linda is one of the coordinators of the MERN research team for Manitoba’s new grade 12 course Global Issues: Citizenship and Sustainability. In her “spare” time, Linda is a member of the “Hot Splashes” Dragon Boat team, performs with “Women of Note,” and volunteers for The Dream Factory, which helps makes dreams come true for children with life-threatening illnesses.