

Assessment – Linking Teaching and Learning in Alberta Social Studies

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Guiding Question:

What implications does the new Social Studies Program of Studies have for classroom assessment practices?

Abstract:

Assessment is more than a test, more than a grade, and more than a report card. Assessment embraces a range of formal and informal strategies and employs a variety of tools as it provides the link between teaching and learning. Looking at learner outcomes through assessment eyes highlights new possibilities for student learning and new responsibilities for teachers.

Assessment is the process of gathering information about student learning. It embraces a range of formal and informal strategies and employs a variety of tools where evaluations of learning are recorded and shared. It is more than a test, more than a grade, and more than a report card. Assessment spans the breadth of teaching and learning.

Alberta curriculum is based on learner outcomes that identify what students need to do in order to demonstrate their attainment of these outcomes. Until we engage in assessment to gather this evidence, we cannot say

with assurance that learning has taken place. Assessment is the process that links teaching and learning.

The Alberta Assessment Consortium visual incorporates research based and promising classroom assessment practices. Six key questions emerge from this visual to guide the discussion of social studies assessment in Alberta.

#1 What will students learn?

The program of studies forms the basis for instruction and assessment. Unique characteristics of specific outcome categories have implications for assessment.

Values and Attitudes outcomes challenge traditional notions of assessment. How do we see appreciation? How will we know if students value ____? Alternative assessment strategies must be used for these outcomes.

Knowledge and Understanding outcomes ask students to investigate, examine, analyze, evaluate, and assess critically. The bulleted items are phrased as inquiry questions to shape the specific outcomes. Assessment experiences, however, must reflect the cognitive processes identified in the specific outcomes and not simply the content of the bulleted items.

Skills and Processes outcomes have consistent categories among all grades, providing a continuum of skill development.

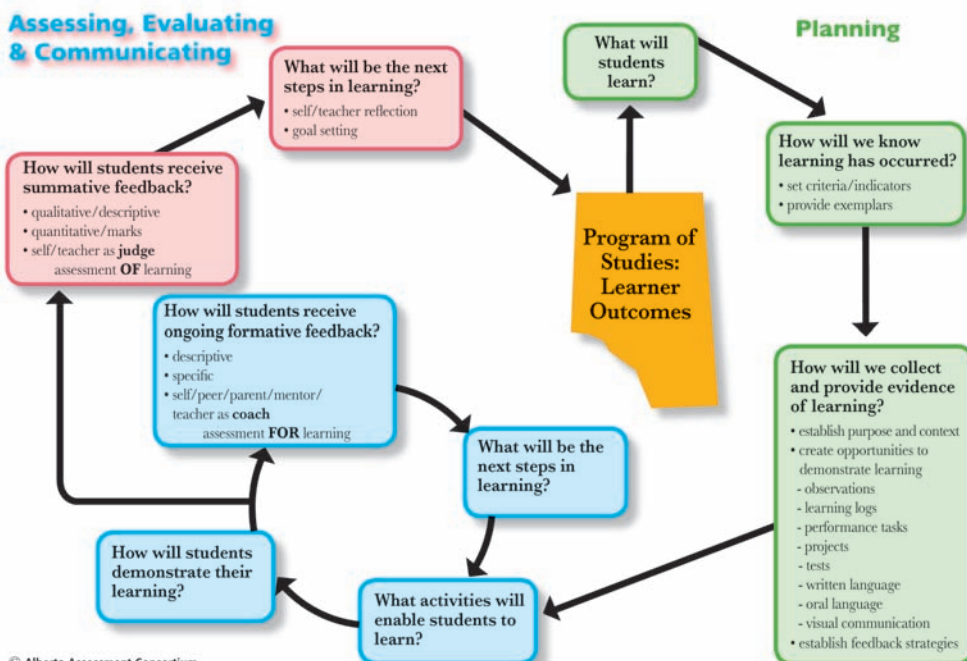
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#2 How will we know learning has occurred?

Teachers must be clear about what the outcomes ask of students. It is no longer necessary or desirable for students to simply provide facts and details. Rather, students might be asked to evaluate the impact of various peoples on each other and on subsequent events. To do this, they must access the necessary background information, consider multiple perspectives, filter for bias, and draw and support conclusions. These processes, rather than content, become the criteria for evaluation.

As teachers achieve clarity with the outcomes, the next step is to help students understand the language of the outcomes. This is the process of sharing criteria with students, or helping students know 'what counts' (Gregory, Cameron & Davies, 1997). As we share criteria with students, we empower them to succeed.

Assessing Student Learning in the Classroom



#3 How will we collect and provide evidence of learning?

As our curriculum shifts from content to process-based, we must rely on a wider variety of strategies to gather evidence of the full range of learning. Many learner outcomes cannot be measured with traditional pencil paper tests.

Teacher observation, long considered simply an intuitive skill, now finds its place as an effective strategy for many social studies skills and processes. When teachers are clear about criteria and plan for observation opportunities, highly relevant evidence can be obtained. When further combined with student reflection and accompanying student products, the triangulation of evidence (Davies, 2000) provides teachers with evidence for making informed decisions regarding student learning.

#4 How does formative assessment (assessment FOR learning) prepare students for success?

Formative assessment gives students permission to be learners. If learning is to be constructivist and inquiry-based, students need a risk-free environment in which to explore their thinking.

Carefully constructed checklists, rating scales and rubrics identify criteria for evaluation and describe the required standard of performance. The use of these tools in conjunction with specific and descriptive feedback from teachers, peers and self provide data that students use to improve their learning.

#5 How can summative assessment (assessment OF learning) enrich the learning process?

Students who use formative assessment purposefully to guide their learning find that culminating assessments can be "occasions of pleasure" (Gardner, 2000). Confidence replaces test anxiety as students believe that success is within reach. Performance assessment tasks engage students and provide them with the opportunity to demonstrate their learning in authentic contexts. Summative assessment becomes a natural extension of the learning process.

#6 What is the role of student reflection and goal setting?

Reflective processes are essential in order to maximize student learning. Metacognition is the step that moves students purposefully towards becoming self-evaluating.

An exciting, vibrant program of studies combined with quality classroom instruction and assessment practices provides the rich environment needed to prepare our students to become active, responsible, contributing citizens.

Highlights

Changes in teaching and learning require changes to our classroom assessment practices.

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Annotated Resources, Web Sites, Books, etc.

Alberta Assessment Consortium. The web site is a classroom assessment resource centre. Quality classroom assessment materials and professional publications are available for teachers looking for practical ideas and strategies. Access to these materials and other world-class resources are at your fingertips including numerous links to assessment-related web sites- <http://www.aac.ab.ca/assesslinks.html>. Performance assessment tasks, based on the new Social Studies Program of Studies, are available to support implementation. www.aac.ab.ca

Absolum, M. Clarity in the Classroom: Using Formative Assessment – Building Learning-focused Relationships. A Hodder Education Book: Auckland, NZ. 2006.

Using practical examples, this resource describes an evidence-based, reflective approach that enables teachers to help students achieve higher levels of performance. Key strategies and easy-to-use techniques provide support for meaningful engagement of students in their learning and assessment. Student confidence and enthusiasm are positively affected.

Alberta Assessment Consortium. How to Develop and Use Performance Assessments in the Classroom (revised edition). AAC: Edmonton, AB. 2003.

This is one in a series of five professional resources that provide teachers with practical approaches for assessing, evaluating and communicating student learning. Gain insights into the rationale for and use of performance assessments; learn to apply five steps in their development complemented by a practical tool box of implementation ideas.

Arter, J.A. & Chappius, J. Creating and Recognizing Quality Rubrics. Educational Testing Service: Portland, OR. 2006.

This book enables teachers to choose and develop sound instructional rubrics, use them effectively with students to maximize learning, convert rubric scores to grades, and communicate to parents about the use of rubrics in the classroom. It will provide a description of quality performance tasks with effective rubrics to produce the desired results.

Davies, A. Making Classroom Assessment Work. Connections Publishing: Merville, BC. 2000.

This resource provides a thoughtful and thought provoking framework teachers and administrators can use to reconsider how assessment is working in the classroom. Ideas range from building a foundation for student involvement through ways to report student performance. Bridge the findings in research with what teachers do in the classroom.

Stiggins, R. Student-Involved Assessment FOR Learning (4th Edition). Merrill Prentice Hall: Columbus, OH. 2004.

This resource shows teachers how to create high-quality classroom assessments and use them to build student confidence thereby maximizing (not just documenting) student performance and achievement. Features: how to manage day-to-day classroom assessment effectively and efficiently, offers a practical guideline on how to select and use all types of assessments- matching learner outcomes to assessment methods, and provides energy and time-saving ideas for classroom teachers.

Wiggins, G. and McTighe, J. Understanding by Design (Expanded 2nd Edition). ASCD: Alexandria, VA. 2005.

This resource demonstrates how understanding differs from knowledge, how to identify the big ideas in the program of studies, the importance of learner outcomes and how to know when students have attained them, and how to improve student performance. Educators will learn why familiar coverage- and activity-based approaches to instruction fall short of attaining the intents (big ideas, enduring understandings) of the program of studies. Research-based principles are applied through an array of practical tools, strategies, tools and examples from various subject areas.

Biographies

Sherry Bennett is the Division AISI Lead Teacher with Greater St. Albert Catholic Schools. For the past several years, Sherry has been involved with the Alberta Assessment Consortium as a developer, reviewer, writer and workshop facilitator. She has recently been involved as an assessment consultant with a Canadian publisher, developing resources to support the new Alberta social studies curriculum. She is currently on secondment with the Edmonton Regional Learning Consortium and the Southern Alberta Professional Development Consortium providing assessment support for social studies implementation.

Robert Hogg (hoggr@shaw.ca) is the Executive Director of the Alberta Assessment Consortium (AAC) - a not-for-profit partnership of educational organizations dedicated to enhancing student learning through classroom assessment that increases student confidence as learners and enables students to reveal what they know and demonstrate what they can do. His teaching career has embraced every division level in public education and stretches from chalkboard to technology, and all points in between. He is a published co-author of highly practical assessment for learning professional resources for classroom teachers, and presenter and assessment consultant to international schools and organizations.