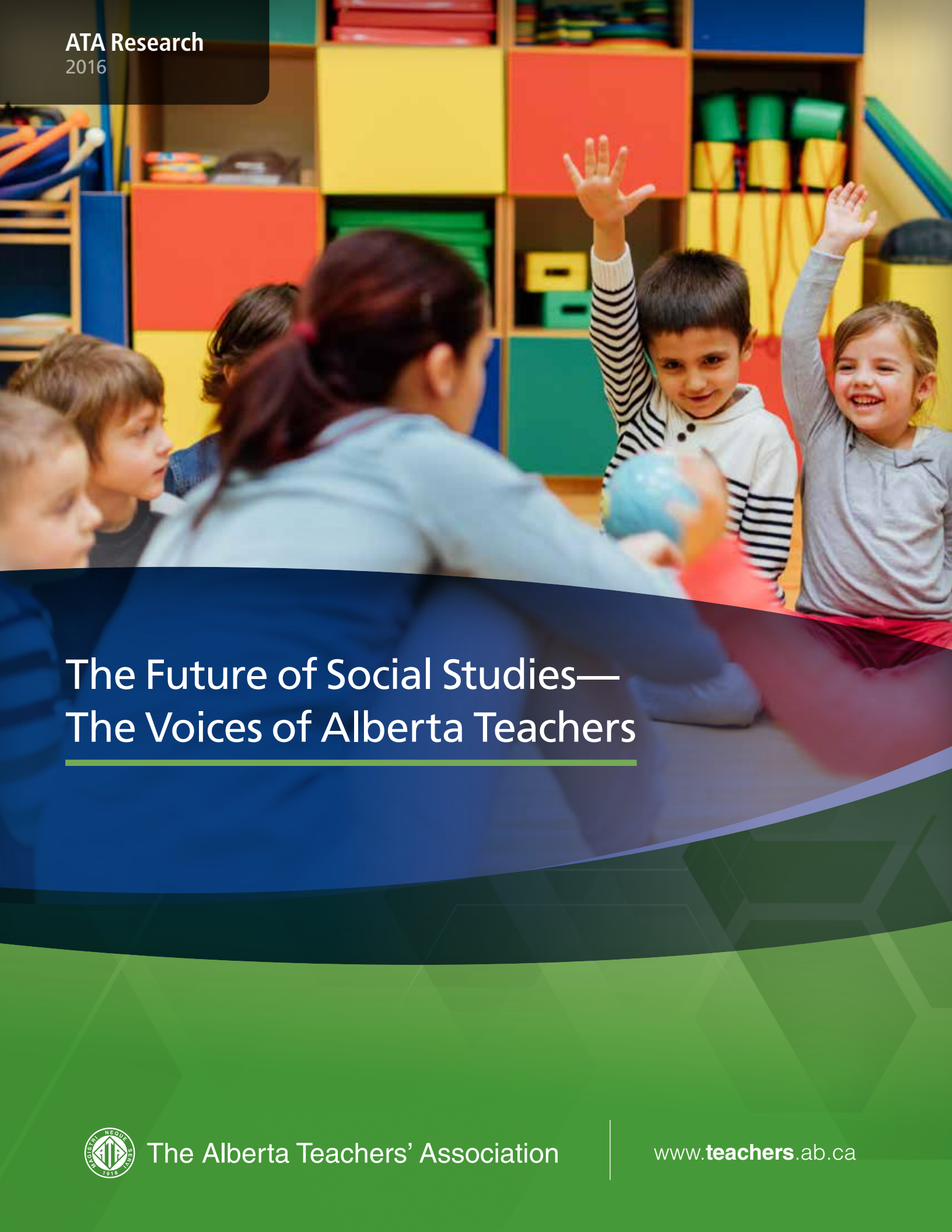




The Future of Social Studies— The Voices of Alberta Teachers





The Alberta Teachers' Association

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Foreword

An official from a provincial ministry of education once told me that many of her colleagues had lost faith in the idea that they could influence the kind of change in schools that would make any difference for students. This was not, she clarified, because she and her colleagues thought meaningful education reform could not come from above. Rather, she lamented, provincial officials further up in the hierarchy were making it increasingly difficult for them to hear the voices of those best positioned to know how to leverage change—classroom teachers. Of course, they were not forbidden to talk to teachers. But teachers’ on-the-job expertise, she said, was being drowned out by the din of so-called accountability and standardization efforts so popular with politicians and their superiors in the ministry.

The Alberta Teachers’ Association (ATA) has long taken an ambitious and refreshing stance among teachers’ associations continentwide when it comes to public education. As the professional organization of teachers in the province, one of the ATA’s central missions has been to support teachers in improving educational practice through curricular leadership. This report is a prime example of the importance the Association places on that goal. At a time when efforts across Canada to over-prescribe and standardize curriculum and assessment have tied the hands of classroom teachers, this report makes crystal clear the path to meaningful curricular renewal and improvement: listen to the profession. In this sense, the concerns of social studies teachers presented in this report represent to some degree the concerns of all teachers.

The magnitude of the professional engagement of Alberta teachers is evident in the impressive response to the survey described in the pages that follow. Almost 500 Alberta teachers contributed closed-ended survey responses as well as more than 1,600 open-ended written comments. These responses represent the “lived practice” (p 16) of teachers in the province. If the intended, official curriculum can be seen in the social studies curriculum document, the lessons to be learned from the taught curriculum (or what Ted Aoki calls the “lived” curriculum) are found in this report.

Alberta social studies teachers almost universally endorse the broad-ranging goals for social studies represented in the front matter of the curriculum—goals that embrace a rich and deep exploration of social issues that encourage critical thinking, and that privilege depth of inquiry over breadth of facts and bits of information. Teachers also take issue with the failure of the government to respond to calls for reducing the number of learning outcomes, which results in a false sense of accountability and rigour. That kind of reductionism, the report shows, makes a mockery of those very goals, even in the face of what teachers agree is a mostly good curriculum. Ironically the government, charged with

putting forward the “big picture,” with communicating a theory of change that moves from goals to outcomes, is creating a disconnect between theory (as represented in the excellent front matter of the curriculum) and practice (as seen in the detailed list of objectives).

The useful theory of change belongs to the teachers who responded to the survey. Teachers suggest goals for social studies education (p 33 and elsewhere) and, in the rest of the report, convey, implicitly, the means to achieving those goals—the very theory of change the curriculum document lacks. Standardization, growth in testing, growth in student reporting technology and the overall “datafication” of the teaching and learning process have supplanted good teaching. The curriculum document, as one teacher observed, wants students to learn how to “think like a historian,” but, in the face of the myriad goals, there’s “no time.”

This report comes at a significant time that is both symbolic and practical. One hundred years ago this year, John Dewey published his influential volume *Democracy and Education*. Dewey argued that social studies—far from being a marginal area of study—should constitute the centre of any educational program. The study of social issues and the role of citizens in helping to improve society was, for Dewey and others, the frame within which the other disciplines gain meaning. Without a connection to social goals, mathematics, reading and writing are merely technical skills drained of meaning and purpose and, as such, contribute to a view of schooling as unrelated to the “real” world.

This report indicates that many social studies teachers want to return schooling to its rightful place as an engine of progress in democratic societies. The symbolism of Dewey’s anniversary is matched by the practical need for ministries of education to listen to teachers. The Alberta social studies curriculum mentions inquiry, but leaves little room for inquiry, notes one survey respondent (p 23). The front matter talks about “big ideas” but ends up mired in small and reductively itemized lists of “objectives,” says another (p 31). Social studies simply does not follow a simplistic path from plan to implementation to assessment, says a third (p 37).

As Alberta stands poised to review and renew its K–12 curriculum, the implications of this report are clear. The collective message expressed by teachers’ constitutes a clarion call to reformers at all levels of the system: focus on the foundational goals expressed in the front matter of the current social studies program of studies (goals such as educating a democratic citizenry, nurturing inquiry and historical thinking); create the best possible conditions for social studies teachers to work towards those goals by creating rich and localized lessons, both in- and out-of school experiences, and meaningful assessments; and then, most important, get out of their way.

Joel Westheimer
University of Ottawa

Preface

In March 2015, the Social Studies Council of the Alberta Teachers' Association initiated the development of a comprehensive research project aimed at gathering teachers' perspectives on the current state of social studies in Alberta classrooms. The study examined the complex inter-relationships between curriculum and instruction, assessment, teachers' capacity to achieve the goals of the program, and the influence of ongoing changes in teaching and learning conditions.

With the support of the Association, this final report, titled *The Future of Social Studies—The Voices of Alberta Teachers*, represents the culmination of a year-long effort undertaken by a research team led by Hans Smits and Larry Booi—two widely acknowledged experts in Alberta's social studies community. Carla Peck (University of Alberta), David Scott (University of Calgary) and Joel Westheimer (University of Ottawa) provided important critical advice and support, as did the Evaluation and Research Services of the University of Alberta through Jason Daniels and his team. Project oversight and management for this study was provided by J-C Couture, associate coordinator of research, with the assistance of Jordan Kardosh.

As with all Association research efforts, completion of studies such as this is only a first step. In the months and years ahead, this report will contribute to our ongoing efforts to advance progressive reform in curriculum and assessment so that Alberta continues to be a world leader in meeting the learning needs of all students. In this respect the study contributes to the broader policy conversation presented in *Renewing Alberta's Promise—A Great School for All* (2015b), which outlines a comprehensive framework for educational development in Alberta.

I encourage you to review this report not only as an analysis of the state of social studies teaching in Alberta, but also in terms of the broader contexts of teaching and learning across the province. This study has already generated national interest. In May 2016, the Association cohosted, along with the Canadian Association of Foundations of Education (CAFE), a pan-Canadian expert panel of researchers who reviewed the findings from this report in the context of social studies across the country.

In my early years as a teacher of social studies, I appreciated time and again that Alberta's curriculum is simply one of the best in the world. That was nearly forty years ago. But I am reminded as I read this report that what has dramatically changed since then is the growing complexity of classrooms and the challenges to what ought to be the playful but hard work of teaching and learning in a social studies classroom. As the report concludes, we must address these realities to support the exemplary teaching practices that will continue to make social studies come alive for Alberta students.

Gordon R Thomas
Executive Secretary

Executive Summary

The survey of social studies teachers in Alberta was initiated on the basis of two assumptions. First, given the length of time the current program has been in place, it is necessary to make changes to Alberta's program of studies in social studies, changes that would take into account historical, cultural and demographic changes in the province and address substantively the important issues identified in this study. Second, it is essential to take into account the insights and suggestions of Alberta's social studies teachers in making decisions about how to change the curriculum and the context of teaching and learning in Alberta's K–12 classrooms. The study provides ample testimony to the principle that changing curriculum should start from “the ground up” (Evers and Kneyber 2016).

The responses and comments of the nearly 500 teachers who completed the survey indicate clearly that it is indeed time for change. The broad range of teachers' generous responses to the survey questions provides a rich source of insights into the important questions and issues that will guide curriculum and classroom changes.

While there is clear disagreement among these teachers on some issues, there is also a strong sense of agreement on many important aspects of how to improve curriculum and instruction in our classrooms, including what to keep and to change in our current program of studies, as well as what needs to happen in

our classrooms and schools in order to create the conditions where the goals of the social studies curriculum are fulfilled and teaching and learning can flourish for all.

The following points summarize the major insights, conclusions and recommendations that emerge from the report. They are offered as key points of focus for the necessary discussion about the future of social studies curriculum in Alberta, and for including in that discussion the critical link between the possibilities for good social studies learning and the conditions in classrooms and schools that impact the achievement of teaching and learning.

1. There is broad support from teachers regarding the need for curriculum change in social studies.

Survey participants were clear that the time has come for change and improvement, with 40 per cent of respondents even calling for “a major transformation.” In addition, they collectively made hundreds of suggestions about how to improve the Program of Study, ranging across grades and levels including elementary, junior high and senior high schools. The recognition of the need for curriculum change reflects many years of experience that teachers at all grade levels have with the current program and therefore offers a legitimate and necessary perspective on the directions and possibilities for change.

2. There is a high level of support for fundamental elements of Alberta's current program of studies in social studies.

While teachers were in favour of making improvements to the curriculum, they also made it clear that major elements of the current curriculum's approach to social studies are highly valued and should be preserved and enhanced, including the following:

- The central focus on the development of active and engaged citizens of a democratic society in local, national and global contexts
- The emphasis on multiple perspectives in all components of social studies courses, including a special focus on Aboriginal perspectives and experiences
- The issue-centred and inquiry-based approach
- The importance of the role of skills, values and critical thinking
- The interdisciplinary approach, drawing on history, geography and a wide range of social science disciplines
- The emphasis on helping students to become more adept at dealing with complexity, ambiguity and uncertainty
- The important role played by current affairs and controversial issues

3. There are significant concerns with some aspects of the curriculum.

A number of areas of concern emerged with a range of aspects, some related to specific grades, others ranging across grades and levels. It is worth repeating that the central

concerns are not with the goals and purposes that are outlined in the "front matter" of the program of studies, but rather with the way the program supports or not the realization of those goals and purposes.

The following areas were often mentioned:

- There is "too much content to be covered," and too many knowledge outcomes specified, which limits the teacher's ability to focus on the broader and more important goals.
- There are concerns related to "developmental appropriateness" of some outcomes, especially at the elementary level.
- There are a range of concerns related to the negative impact of various aspects of assessment policies and practices.
- There were a significant number of concerns raised about issues of scope and sequence; for example the repetition across grade levels, the appropriateness of some content at the grade levels and the logic of how topics are distributed from grade to grade.
- Many respondents identified concerns about the adequacy, sufficiency and appropriateness of resources for teaching and learning.
- While there is support for use of technology in teaching and learning, many respondents identified problems with access and availability of technology.

4. Many of the strongest concerns of teachers were related to aspects of teaching and learning conditions.

Teachers expressed substantial frustrations with an array of conditions that prevented them from doing their best work with students and achieving the goals of social studies with all students, including the following:

- Class sizes are too large.
- Standardized testing gets in the way of learning.
- There is insufficient support for inclusion and diversity of learning.
- There is too much administration and too many administrative tasks.
- There is simply not enough time to properly deal with the many demands of being a social studies teacher.

5. There is a need for systematic, comprehensive and inclusive review and revision of the social studies curriculum consistent with the principles and evidence for creating great social studies teaching and learning.

Teachers believe strongly in the fundamental elements of Alberta's curriculum, but want to see changes to the content and structure of the program of studies to improve the curriculum that is at the core of their work with students. Such a process in social studies should be part of a broader process of review and renewal in curriculum, teaching and learning based on the principles articulated in the ATA's *Renewing Alberta's Promise: A Great School for All* (ATA 2015b).

6. There is a further need to systematically address improving the teaching and learning conditions in Alberta's social studies classrooms.

One of the important conclusions that can be drawn from this study is that the realization of curriculum goals and purposes and the conditions for teaching and learning are integrally related. Clearly, curriculum reform is a necessary but not sufficient condition for improving teaching and learning in social studies. Teachers have made it clear that it is equally important to address the many and growing concerns about the conditions under which social studies teachers try to meet the goals of the curriculum and develop the full potential of all of their students, and the implications for improvement. To do so will involve generating political will, cooperation and resources, and should focus on the following elements:

- Changes in the conditions of teaching related to class size, and support for inclusion and administrative tasks with which teachers can be burdened
- More adequate resources, including technology and support for the use of technology and resources
- Greater support for professional development and autonomy with a program of studies that supports teacher judgment
- More time to engage in the work of a professional teacher—to innovate, collaborate with colleagues and actively engage in curriculum development
- Minimizing the impact of standardized testing and creating opportunities to develop and implement assessment strategies consistent with the goals of social studies learning

Part A: Introduction

1. PURPOSES OF THE SURVEY

Alberta's current program of studies in K–12 social studies has been in place for over a decade. It is time for a systematic review of the strengths and weaknesses of the program, especially given that the subject area of social studies is so affected by changing times and circumstances.

As the professional association representing Alberta's teachers, the Alberta Teachers' Association (ATA) has a responsibility to ensure that teachers' voices and views play a key role in curriculum revision. To that end, the ATA's Social Studies Council has worked with ATA staff, researchers and academic advisors in designing and implementing a process to seek the advice of social studies teachers across the province and across all grade levels. Clearly, there was a need for a new study with a substantially broader scope.

Early in the process, the research team made the decision to consider a range of topics that went beyond a narrow focus on just the social studies program of studies. This expanded focus would include important issues about how social studies is currently taught in Alberta's schools, from teaching and learning conditions, professional practice concerns, and the perceived need for continuity and change in the prescribed curriculum and in how that curriculum is delivered in our social studies classrooms. It was also important to give teachers the opportunity to express their

views on the overall social studies curriculum, as well as on aspects specific to individual courses and grades at the elementary, junior high and senior high levels.

This approach is ultimately designed to ensure that the experiences and insights of practising social studies teachers inform both the process of curriculum revision and the efforts to put in place the kinds of conditions of practice that will allow teachers to do their best work in an important and challenging subject area.

2. ALBERTA SOCIAL STUDIES

Social studies curricula vary greatly across Canada. In order to determine the nature and extent of changes that may be needed in Alberta's social studies program of studies, it is necessary to first understand the nature and expectations of the social studies curriculum in the province. Alberta's social studies program is in many ways distinctive; it is a program that goes far beyond an emphasis on mere transmission of knowledge and skills.

In Alberta Education's "Program Rationale and Philosophy" statement for K–12 social studies, the overall focus of the program is provided in the opening sentence: "Social studies provides opportunities for students to develop the attitudes, skills and knowledge that will enable them to become engaged, active, informed and responsible citizens" (<https://education.alberta.ca/media/160200/program-of-study-grade-7.pdf>). There is a

continuous and well-developed emphasis on helping students to develop their sense of self and community, and on encouraging them to “affirm their place as citizens in an inclusive, democratic society.” The overall focus of the program is centred on the concepts of citizenship and identity.

Alberta Education goes on in its statement to describe active and responsible citizens as citizens who are “engaged in the democratic process and aware of their capacity to effect change in their communities, society and world” (p 1). The social studies program aims to foster the “building of a society that is pluralistic, bilingual, multicultural, inclusive and democratic” (p 1). The nature of the program is further defined by the following key elements:

- *Multiple perspectives.* The emphasis on the importance of pluralism and diversity results in the need to constantly consider multiple perspectives, including the perspectives and experiences of Aboriginals and francophones.
- *Interdisciplinary nature.* It “draws upon history, geography, ecology, economics, law, philosophy, political science and other social science disciplines” (p 1).
- *Issues-focused and inquiry-based approach.* “A focus on issues through deliberation is intrinsic to the multidisciplinary nature of social studies and to democratic life in a pluralistic society” (p 5).
- *Dimensions of thinking.* Six dimensions of thinking are identified as key components in social studies learning: critical thinking, creative thinking, historical thinking,

geographic thinking, decision making and problem solving, and metacognition.

- *Current affairs and controversial issues.* “Social studies fosters the development of citizens who are informed and engaged in current affairs. Accordingly, current affairs play a central role in learning and are integrated throughout the program.” Controversial issues “are an integral part of social studies education in Alberta” and “should be used by the teacher to promote critical inquiry and teach thinking skills” (p 6).

The program’s philosophy, rationale and key elements are reflected in the program of studies for each grade and course, with general and specific outcomes specified. Alberta’s social studies curriculum is clearly focused on developing active citizens of a democratic society and is ambitious in laying out the key elements of a program to accomplish the goals it sets out. Alberta teachers have been working with this program for over a decade, and it is important to determine their views on how this program is working in the real world of Alberta’s classrooms and how it can be strengthened in light of teachers’ experiences.

3. THE SURVEY

To accomplish the goals outlined above, the survey instrument was administered online in June 2015 and was open to all Alberta teachers currently teaching one or more social studies courses at any grade level in an Alberta classroom (see Appendix A). The survey included both scale-response and written-response components, as well as a section on demographic data. The scale-response

component included 37 items, divided into the following five sections:

- Overall views on social studies
- Views on the current program of studies
- Current state of social studies teaching
- Your professional practice
- Your teaching and learning conditions

The written-response section was designed to allow teachers to comment in depth on the two main areas of the study: the social studies curriculum and the teaching of social studies today. The first component of the written-response section, titled “Your observations on potential changes to social studies,” asked teachers to comment on “what to change and what to keep” in the current program of studies. Teachers were asked to reply to the following two questions:

- What are the two or three most important changes that should be made in Alberta’s current social studies curriculum?
- What are the two or three most important elements that should be kept in Alberta’s current social studies curriculum?

Teachers were asked to consider any of the following in their responses to the questions above:

- The K–12 social studies curriculum in general
- The elementary social studies curriculum (K–6)
- The junior high social studies curriculum (7–9)
- The senior high social studies curriculum (10–12)

The second component of the written-response section asked teachers to express their views “about instruction, teaching and learning in [their] social studies classroom(s).” This component posed the following two questions:

- What are the two or three most important things that “get in the way” of your ability to do your best work as a teacher in your social studies classroom(s)?
- What are the two or three most important changes that would make it more possible to do your best work as a teacher in your social studies classroom(s)?

4. RESPONSES

The research team made a systematic attempt to ensure that Alberta social studies teachers were aware of the opportunity to voice their views by participating in the online survey. The ATA’s Social Studies Council advertised the survey among its members, the *ATA News* published information and articles on the opportunity for social studies teachers to get involved, and a number of school systems promoted participation as well.

By the June 30, 2015, deadline, a total of 498 teachers had participated in the survey. Teachers were permitted to skip individual questions, but very few chose to do so. The lowest number of responses for any of the 37 scale items was 491. The number of responses to the four written questions was also substantial, ranging from 402 to 434 comments, which varied widely in terms of length.

The demographic items of the survey provided information on where teachers are teaching, their educational qualifications, where they obtained their teaching preparation, how many years of experience they have, which grade levels they are currently teaching, whether they are teaching social studies full-time or part-time, how old they are, and which gender they identify as (the complete analysis of the demographic data is available upon request). These items are particularly helpful in the detailed statistical analysis that followed.

5. UNDERSTANDING THE INPUT

The University of Alberta's Evaluation and Research Services provided a detailed analysis of the quantitative data, as well as a thematic analysis of a number of aspects of the written responses. (See Appendix B.)

In addition, on November 6, 2015, the ATA convened a day-long meeting, titled *Renewing the Promise of Social Studies in Alberta: A Dialogue*, with more than 50 Alberta social studies educators, in Red Deer. The purpose of this meeting was to help the research team better understand the responses and

observations of the teachers who participated in the survey, and to identify implications for further action. Meeting participants were given an overview of the data from the survey, as well as detailed information on the scale and written responses, followed by structured opportunities to discuss and make observations on the following two key survey pieces: what teachers said and the implications for action. At the end of the meeting, participants completed a detailed participant reflection on these key issues. Participants were invited to forward additional insights and observations in the weeks following the meeting. A summary of comments from the meeting participants is given in Appendix C, "*Renewing the Promise of Social Studies in Alberta—A Dialogue*".

The ATA also commissioned a literature review, written by David Scott of the University of Calgary and Carla Peck of the University of Alberta, intended to offer insights into the broader contexts of the survey, with particular emphasis on how other jurisdictions, specifically in Canada, deal with similar issues related to reviewing and improving social studies curriculum and instruction during changing times. This analysis will be published in the fall of 2016.

Part B: What We Heard

TEACHER RESPONSES TO THE QUANTITATIVE (SCALE) ITEMS

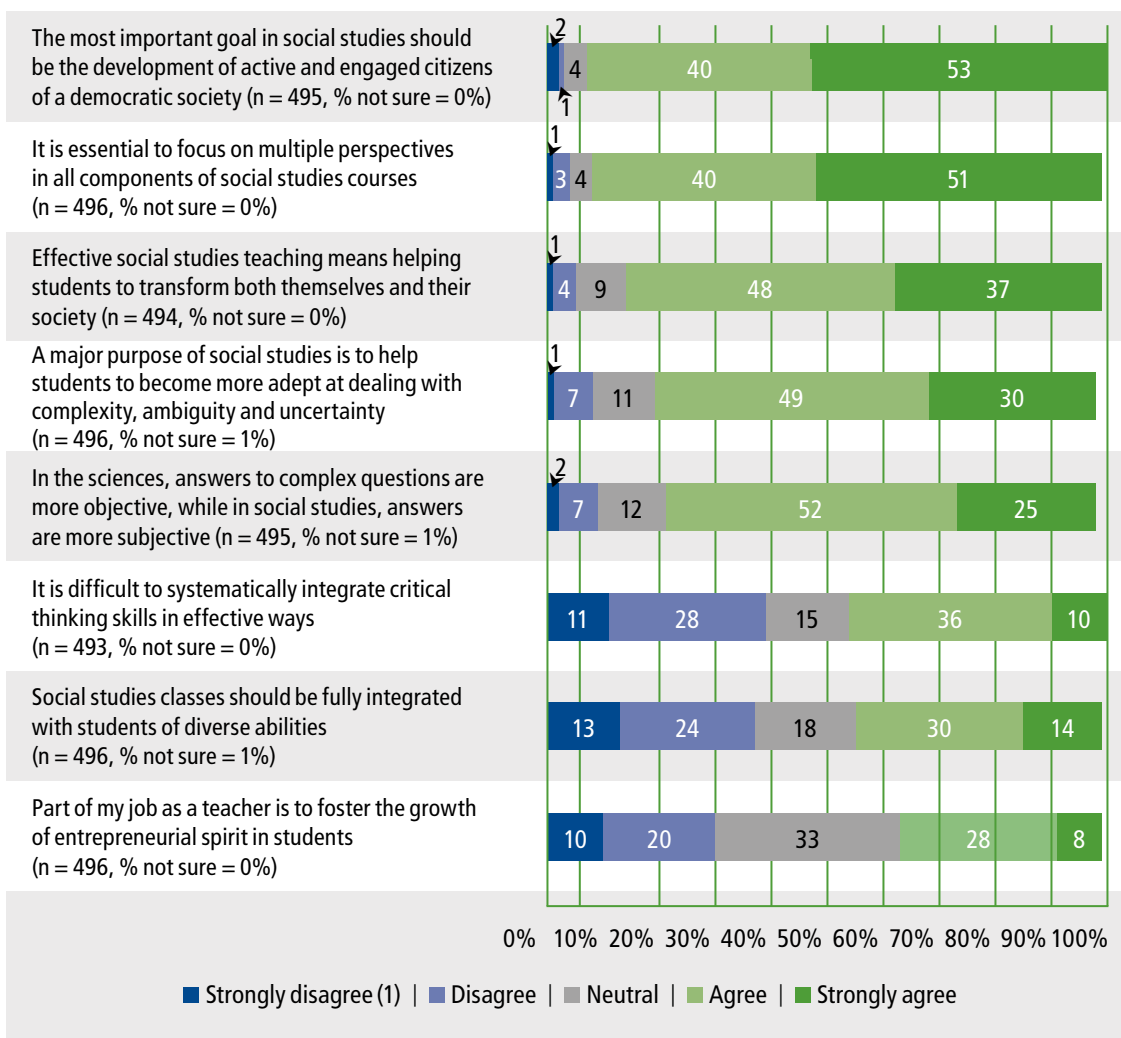
The scaled-response items gave teachers the opportunity to indicate the levels of their agreement or disagreement with 37 statements, arranged in five groups. The teachers' responses offered insights into their views on social studies in general, the current program of studies, the current state of social studies teaching, their professional practice, and their teaching and learning conditions.

Although participants were permitted to skip individual items, very few chose to do so; of

the 498 teachers who responded to the survey, the lowest number of responses on any of the 37 items was 491. The collective responses to these items indicate areas of both widespread agreement and considerable disagreement on a range of issues. The responses also offer important insights into how these social studies teachers view both the current Alberta program of studies and what it is like to teach students in social studies in K–12 classrooms in our province today.

Due to rounding, graphs in this document may not add up precisely to 100 per cent.

1. OVERALL VIEWS ON SOCIAL STUDIES



The first section of the scaled responses consisted of eight statements related to broad issues on the purposes of and approaches to social studies programs of study and teaching. The responses to five of the eight statements indicate a strong consensus on some key aspects of social studies, all of which show support for some fundamental aspects of Alberta's program.

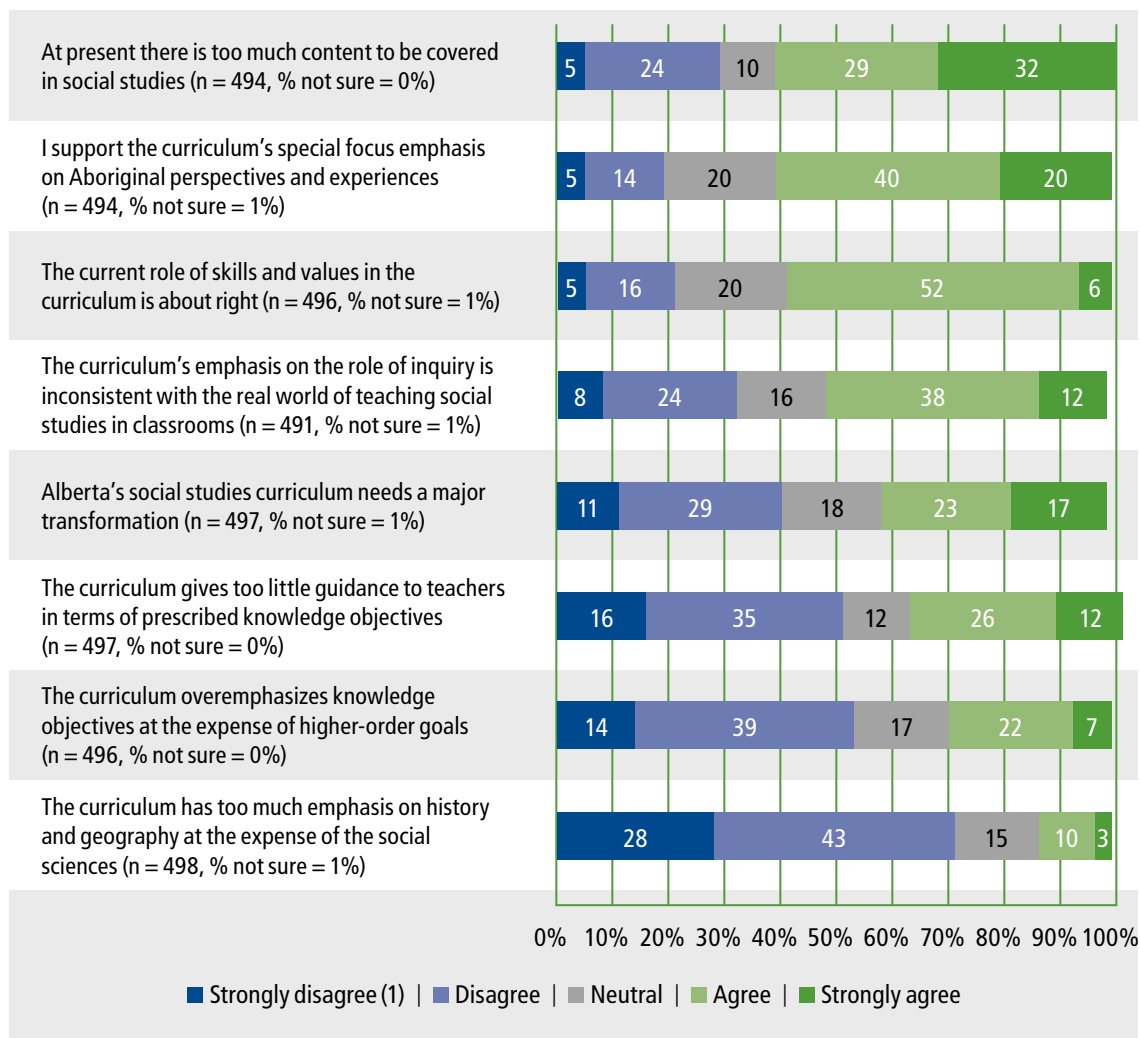
- There was overwhelming support for the central foundation of the approach to social studies in Alberta, indicated by a 93 per cent agreement (including 53 per cent who "strongly agree") with the statement "The most important goal in social studies should be the development of active and engaged citizens of a democratic society."

- There was a similar level of high support (91 per cent agreement, with 51 per cent who “strongly agree”) for the program’s “essential” focus on multiple perspectives in all components of social studies.
- There was a high level of agreement (85 per cent) on the importance of social studies teaching in “helping students to transform both themselves and their society.”
- Seventy-nine per cent of respondents agreed that a major purpose of social studies is “to help students to become more adept at dealing with complexity, ambiguity and uncertainty.” Seventy-seven per cent of respondents agreed on the challenges of the role of subjectivity in this area.

There was substantial disagreement among the respondents in the following three areas:

- While 46 per cent of respondents said that it is difficult to integrate critical thinking skills in effective ways, 39 per cent disagreed.
- When asked if students with diverse needs were being fully integrated in social studies classes, 44 per cent agreed, while 37 per cent disagreed.
- There was a particularly wide range of views on the issue of whether it was part of a teacher’s job to foster the growth of “entrepreneurial spirit” in students, with 36 per cent agreeing, 30 per cent disagreeing, and 33 per cent remaining neutral (this was the highest level of neutral response among all 38 items).

2. VIEWS ON THE CURRENT PROGRAM OF STUDY



The eight statements in this section of the scaled responses gave teachers the opportunity to focus directly on the curriculum of Alberta's social studies program of study for Grades K–12. Responses to several statements in this section showed a substantial degree of consensus; for instance

- A majority of respondents agreed (61 per cent, with 32 per cent indicating strong

agreement) that there is too much content to be covered in social studies.

- There was a similar level of support for the curriculum's special emphasis on Aboriginal perspectives and experiences, with 60 per cent agreeing, 20 per cent remaining neutral and 19 per cent disagreeing.
- On the question of the current role of skills and values in the curriculum, 58 per

cent said that it was “about right,” while 21 per cent disagreed and 20 per cent were neutral.

- There was substantial disagreement (71 per cent) with the assertion that the curriculum contains too much emphasis on history and geography at the expense of the social sciences.

Other statements revealed a lack of consensus:

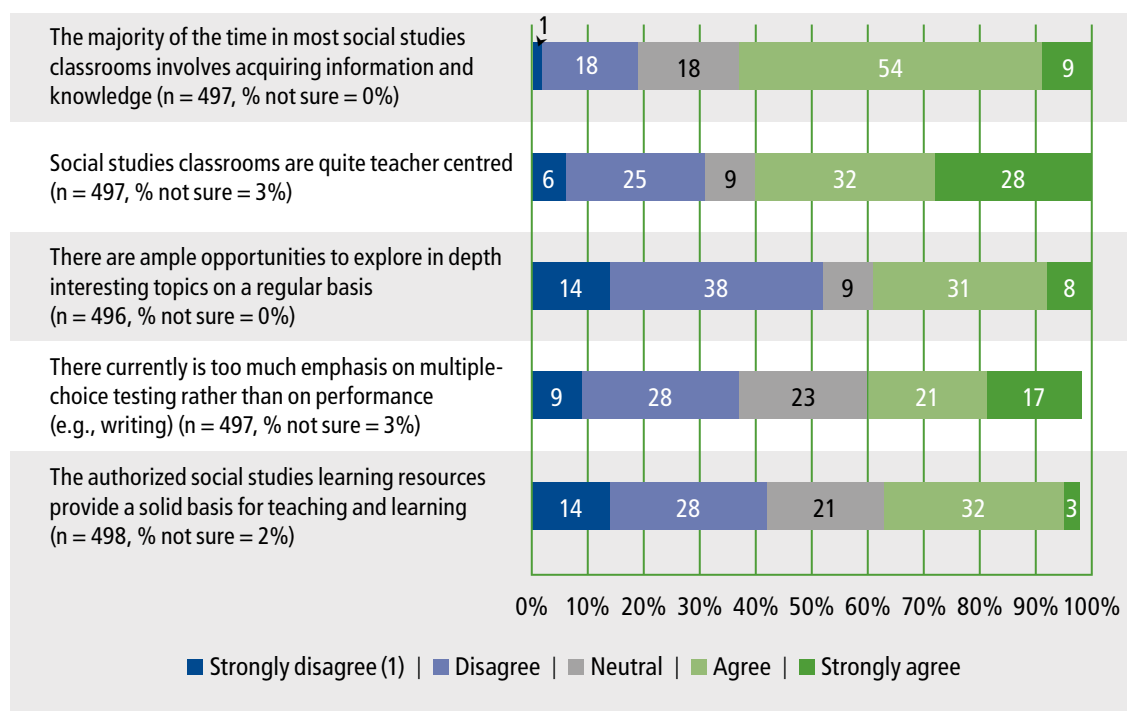
- While a slim majority (53 per cent) disagreed with the statement that the curriculum overemphasizes knowledge objectives at the expense of higher-order goals, 29 per cent agreed and 17 per cent were neutral.
- Similarly, while 51 per cent of respondents disagreed that the curriculum gives too

little guidance to teachers in terms of prescribed knowledge objectives, 38 per cent agreed and 12 per cent were neutral.

- With the statement “The curriculum’s emphasis on the role of inquiry is inconsistent with the real world of teaching social studies in classrooms,” 50 per cent agreed, while 32 per cent disagreed and 16 per cent were neutral.

It is important to note that the deepest split occurred on one of the most fundamental issues in the survey: “Alberta’s social studies curriculum needs a major transformation.” With 40 per cent in agreement, 40 per cent in disagreement, and 18 per cent neutral, the split among participants could hardly be more pronounced. These results should prompt substantial further investigation.

3. THE CURRENT STATE OF SOCIAL STUDIES TEACHING



Only three of the five statements in this section resulted in a majority of responses favouring one side of the statement.

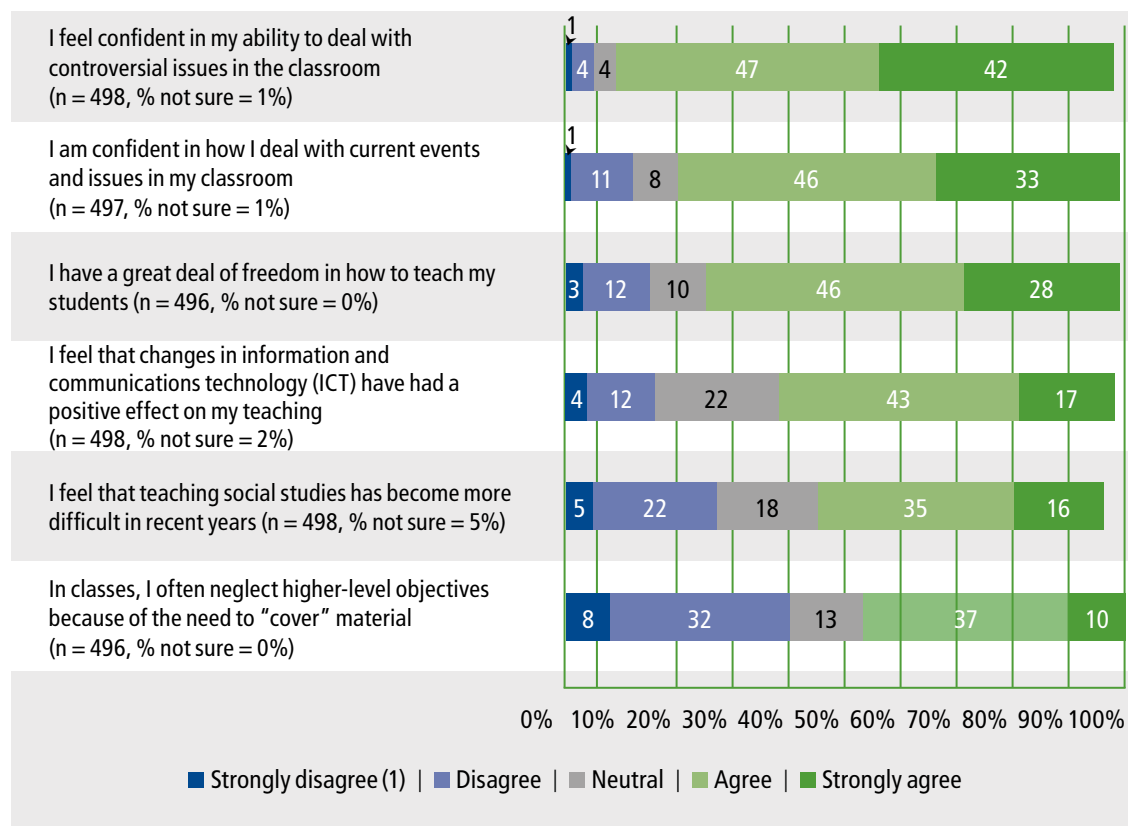
- A total of 63 per cent of the respondents agreed with the statement “The majority of the time in most social studies classrooms involves acquiring information and knowledge,” while 19 per cent disagreed and 18 per cent remained neutral.
- In regard to the statement, “Social Studies classrooms are quite teacher-centred,” 60 per cent agreed while 31 percent disagreed.
- In response to the statement “There are ample opportunities to explore in depth

interesting topics on a regular basis,” a majority (52 per cent) disagreed, while 39 per cent agreed.

The other two items in this section produced divided responses.

- In response to the statement “There currently is too much emphasis on multiple-choice testing rather than on performance testing (eg, writing),” 38 per cent agreed, 37 per cent disagreed and 23 per cent were neutral.
- On the issue of learning resources, 35 per cent of the teachers agreed that the authorized resources “provide a solid basis for teaching and learning,” while 42 per cent disagreed and 21 per cent were undecided.

4. PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE



The six statements in this section gave teachers the opportunity to express their thoughts about what it is like to teach social studies with the current program of studies.

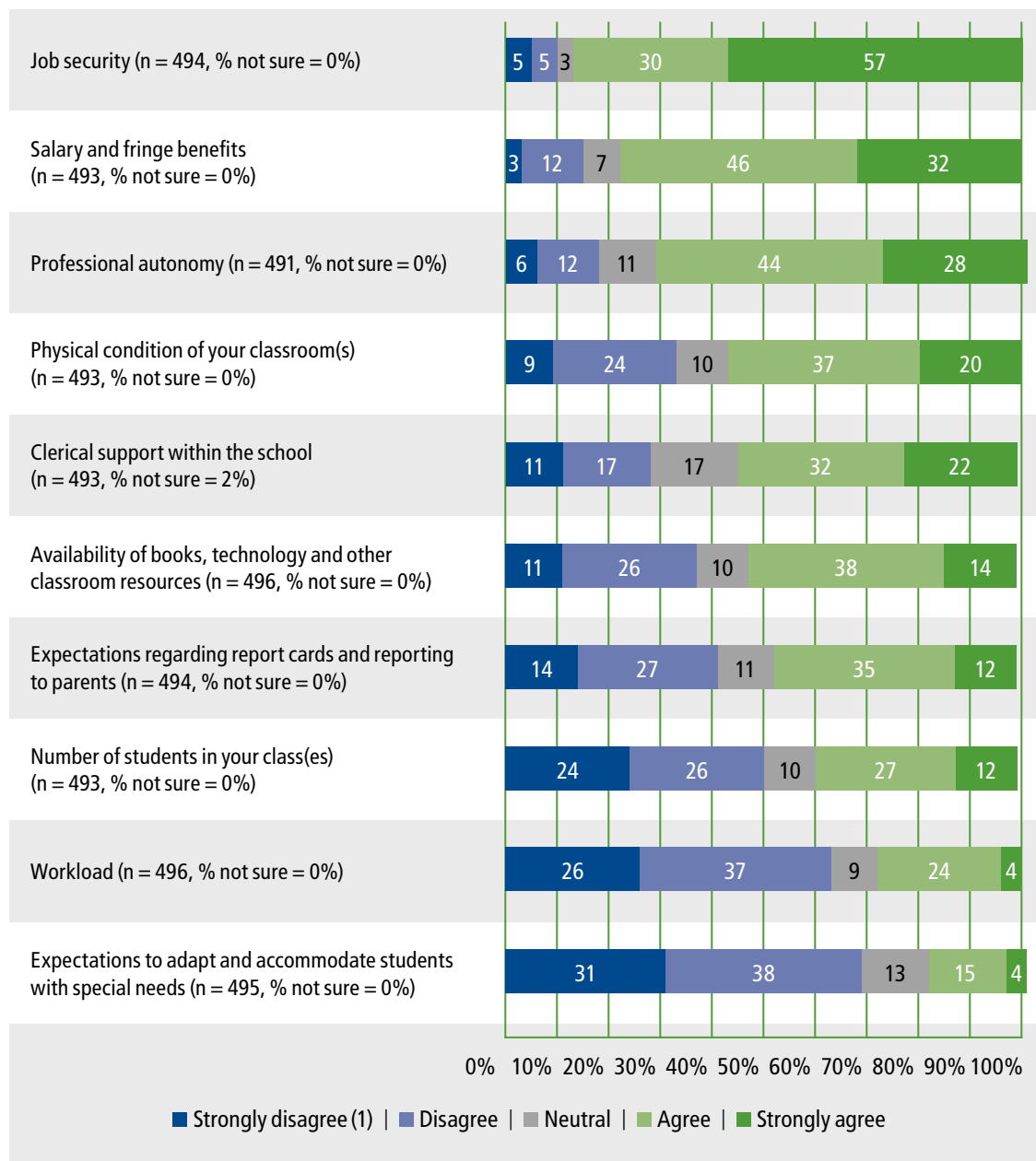
There was substantial agreement on positions regarding five of the six statements.

- An overwhelming number of respondents agreed (89 per cent, with 42 per cent strongly agreeing) with the statement “I feel confident in my ability to deal with controversial issues in the classroom.”
- Seventy-nine per cent of respondents agreed that they were “confident in how [to] deal with current events and issues in [the] classroom.”

- Seventy-four per cent of respondents agreed that they “have a great deal of freedom in how to teach [their] students.”
- Sixty per cent of respondents agreed that information and communications technology has had a positive effect on their teaching.
- Fifty-one per cent of respondents agreed that social studies teaching has become more difficult in recent years, while 27 per cent disagreed and 18 per cent were neutral.

There was a clear split, however, in the responses to the statement “In classes, I often neglect higher-level objectives because of the need to ‘cover’ material,” with 47 per cent agreeing, 40 per cent disagreeing and 13 per cent remaining neutral.

5. TEACHING AND LEARNING CONDITIONS



This section consisted of 10 questions that prompted teachers to communicate their views about the conditions of their practice as

social studies teachers and the degree to which they deem those conditions satisfactory or unsatisfactory.

In response to 6 of the 10 questions, a majority of respondents said that they were somewhat or very satisfied.

- The highest level of satisfaction was related to job security (87 per cent, with 57 per cent very satisfied) and salary and fringe benefits (78 per cent, with 32 per cent very satisfied).
- Responses on “Professional autonomy” also received a positive rating, with 72 per cent of respondents stating that they were satisfied (including 28 per cent very satisfied).
- With the “physical conditions of [their] classrooms,” 57 per cent of respondents were satisfied and 33 per cent were dissatisfied.
- With the “clerical support within the school,” 54 per cent of respondents were satisfied and 28 per cent were dissatisfied.
- With the “availability of books, technology and other classroom resources,” 52 per cent of respondents were satisfied and 37 per cent were dissatisfied.

Expectations regarding report cards and reporting to parents revealed a substantial split among respondents, with 47 per cent satisfied, 41 per cent dissatisfied and 11 per cent neutral.

In terms of levels of dissatisfaction, the greatest concerns were in three important areas.

- The highest level of dissatisfaction (69 per cent, with 31 per cent very dissatisfied) was with “expectations to adapt and accommodate students with special needs”;

only 19 per cent of respondents expressed satisfaction.

- Sixty-three per cent of respondents were dissatisfied with their workload, while 28 per cent were satisfied.
- Fifty per cent of respondents were dissatisfied with the “number of students in [their] class,” while 39 per cent were satisfied and 10 per cent were neutral.

6. SUMMARY

The scale-response items indicate how teachers view important issues in social studies, both in terms of the program of studies and how the curriculum is interpreted and implemented in classrooms under current conditions. There are areas of substantial agreement as well as areas of clear differences of opinion.

There was a substantial degree of support for a number of key elements of the Alberta program, including the following:

- The goal of developing active and engaged citizens of a democratic society
- The role of multiple perspectives in all components of social studies
- The role of social studies in helping students to “transform both themselves and their society”
- The goal of helping students to deal with complexity, ambiguity and uncertainty as well as subjectivity
- The curriculum’s special emphasis on Aboriginal perspectives and experience
- The current role of skills and values in the curriculum

In addition, there was considerable agreement that the current curriculum does not over-emphasize history and geography, and that there is “too much content” to be covered in social studies.

Opinions were divided, however, on a number of key areas related to curriculum, including

- the difficulty of integrating critical thinking skills,
- integrating students with diverse needs,
- fostering the growth of “entrepreneurial spirit,”
- the role of knowledge objectives versus higher-order goals,
- the degree of guidance given to teachers in terms of prescribed knowledge objectives,
- whether the emphasis on inquiry is consistent with “the real world of teaching” and
- whether Alberta’s social studies curriculum “needs a major transformation.”

In terms of the statements related to the current state of social studies teaching, professional practice, and teaching and learning conditions, substantial agreement was indicated in the following areas:

- The majority of time in classrooms is spent on “acquiring information and knowledge.”
- Social studies classrooms “are quite teacher centred.”
- There are not enough opportunities to explore interesting topics on a regular basis.

- The respondents have confidence in how they deal with controversial issues and with current events and issues.
- The respondents have “a great deal of freedom” in how to teach their students.
- Information and communications technology are having a positive effect on teaching.
- Social studies teaching has become more difficult in recent years.
- There are relatively high levels of satisfaction with job security, salary and fringe benefits, and professional autonomy.
- Respondents are most dissatisfied with “expectations to adapt and accommodate students with special needs,” “workload,” and the number of students in their classes.

The statements related to professional practice and teaching and learning conditions also produced considerable divisions of views in the following areas:

- Whether there was too much emphasis on multiple-choice testing
- The degree to which authorized resources provide a solid basis for teaching and learning
- Whether higher-level objectives are neglected due to the need to cover material
- The physical condition of classrooms, clerical support, and availability of books, technology and other classroom resources
- Expectations regarding report cards and reporting to parents

It is worth considering the possible explanations for and implications of why

teachers are split over some of these issues. For example, on the issue of “expectations regarding report cards and reporting to parents,” where 41 per cent expressed dissatisfaction and 47 per cent satisfaction, it may well be that teachers in different jurisdictions, schools or grade levels are faced with very different circumstances and more or less onerous levels of expectations. On the issue of support for fully integrating students of diverse abilities, was the split in opinion caused by diverging views on how to best meet the needs of higher- or lower-ability students, or was it caused by different approaches toward problems with differentiating instruction in the classroom? On the issue of whether teachers neglect

higher-level objectives because of the need to “cover” material, they may or may not be in schools that have pressure for common exams based on “objective” items, or perhaps they are teaching in grades where these pressures are more keenly felt.

A difficulty with the quantitative data is that, while the data is helpful for determining what teachers’ views are, it goes only so far to explain why they hold those views. For insights into why the respondents hold the views they do, and for their specific suggestions on improving social studies curriculum and practice, we need to turn to teachers’ responses to the four questions in the qualitative component of the survey.

PART C: Discussion of the Results of the Qualitative Survey

INTRODUCTION

Rather than governance structures that represent an “ego-system” where individuals are held accountable within a hierarchy, we need to move to an “eco-system” that recognizes that the role of all those involved in the education sector is to support the work of schools as parts of a complex living system. *Central to this work is the role of teachers and school leaders as architects of change.* (ATA 2015a; italics added)

The qualitative component of the survey was designed to invite teachers to express their views and interpretations of the social studies curriculum in order to elucidate and exemplify the views that emerged from the quantitative results. The research team was interested in learning about teachers’ perspectives on the program of studies within the contexts of their particular classroom conditions. The invitation to provide written comments was intended, borrowing from the words of two Dutch teachers (Evers and Kneyber 2016), to contribute to “a process where the ‘voice’ of the teachers is given meaningful place” and not just background “noise” (p 7). The qualitative responses provide a rich sense of teachers’ voices as a fundamental contribution to the process of curriculum development and the recognition of teachers as “architects of change.”

The questions elicited more than 1,600 written comments from almost 500 practising teachers, comments that in their sheer number, eloquence and consistency of identified issues provide a valid and reliable view of social studies curriculum and teaching from the perspectives of teachers in Alberta. Significantly, the survey generated responses from teachers of elementary, junior and senior high classrooms, and from both social studies specialists and nonspecialists. As well, there was representation from teachers in urban and rural schools across the province, and respondents represented years of experience and background.

The purpose of the questionnaire was not simply to elicit opinions about the social studies program, nor to focus only on classroom conditions, but rather to explore and illustrate the complex relationships between curriculum understood as a document that mandates content and approaches to teaching and learning, and curriculum as the lived practices and experiences of teachers engaged in teaching social studies at all grade levels. The written responses to the questions provide thought-provoking insights into teachers’ views on issues of curriculum, as well as their beliefs about the aims of social studies as a subject, and the pedagogic and learning approaches and conditions for teaching and learning in social studies classrooms. While the

quantitative data discussed in the previous section affords a broad view of Alberta teachers' views on social studies curriculum and teaching, the qualitative material affords closer and more nuanced perspectives based on the actual experiences of teaching social studies.

The late curriculum scholar Ted Aoki (2005) referred to teaching as an “indwelling between two curriculum worlds.” The written responses illustrate qualities of what Aoki termed the “curriculum-as-plan” and the “curriculum-as-lived,” and how teachers “dwell” between those two conceptions of curriculum. “Two curriculum worlds” is an idea implicit in the four questions that framed the qualitative survey: teachers responded very much in terms of living between conceptions of social studies and the realities of teaching social studies. The program of studies for social studies (which we often refer to as the curriculum) can be understood as curriculum-as-plan. As a plan, it sets out goals, aims, intended outcomes, suggested teaching and learning approaches, forms of evaluation, resources and so forth. Aoki makes the important point that as a plan, the program of studies is an abstract frame for teaching, and it is conceived and developed largely by curriculum specialists and advisors, although teachers may have input at the developmental level. The program of studies carries legal authority and frames teachers as the “doers,” as “installers of the curriculum” (p 160), rather than those who actually create the curriculum as a working and viable plan for teaching and learning.

On the other hand, the idea of curriculum-as-lived evokes experiences of being in

classrooms. Aoki suggests that curriculum-as-lived suggests the life of the classroom, where a teacher is entrusted with the responsibility to teach social studies—engaging with children and students of diverse needs and backgrounds—and must decide how to best take up the requirements of the program. While the curriculum-as-plan is abstract and conceived in the absence of the actual relationships between teachers and their students, the curriculum-as-lived is very much about how a teacher must exercise judgment, an integral quality of teacher professionalism (Biesta 2016). In terms of the curriculum, judgment includes how to best interpret the program of studies in relation to the abilities and interests of students, with what teaching and learning resources, and within conditions and contexts that entail challenging decisions about how to best teach social studies. One of the respondents captures eloquently the disjuncture between what is expected of the program and a teacher's understanding of what is required to actually engage students in inquiry:

If all the specific knowledge and understanding outcomes were merely suggestions, and teachers and students could decide which ones were interesting, and which they would like to investigate further, my students would actually learn more. Dragging students through a curriculum with 50 specific outcomes, some of which are barely comprehensible to even someone with a degree in political science, is not effective learning. The curriculum mentions inquiry, but leaves little room for real inquiry.

The written comments excerpted from the survey offer further rich insights into Aoki's notion of dwelling between the curriculum-as-plan and curriculum-as-lived, and how teachers view the possibilities for achieving good practice in social studies classroom across grade levels.

The qualitative part of the survey posed four key questions about teachers' beliefs and experiences. The first two questions asked teachers not only what should be retained in the Alberta program, but also what changes they would like to see implemented. These are questions that address teachers' interpretation of both the program as it is currently written and the efficacy of the social studies program of studies as a frame for teaching and learning. A third question invited comments on the conditions and contexts for teaching social studies, asking what "gets in the way" of realizing good social studies teaching and learning. The fourth question invited suggestions for changes that would enable realization of best practices in social studies teaching and learning—"best" being understood as the desire to achieve aims of social studies such as citizenship, inquiry, and understanding self and others.

What follows is an overview of the main themes that emerged from an analysis of the 1,600 written comments submitted by the respondents. In terms of the purposes of the study, the authors committed to honour the words, insights and language of the respondents, and did not attempt an over-interpretation of the survey's results.

However, more than just a snapshot of a moment in time, as a whole and individually

the written comments from teachers create a significant portrait of social studies teaching and curriculum in Alberta. Furthermore, given the frequency of issues identified, it was possible to distinguish some key themes for each of the questions to which teachers responded. Individually and as a whole, the written comments, examples of which are included in the ensuing discussion and read in relation to the quantitative results presented earlier, provide convincing perspectives on current views on social studies and its purposes, as well as on the challenges of achieving good practice in diverse classrooms across the province.

Question 1: What are the two or three most important elements that should be kept in Alberta's current social studies curriculum?

The purpose of this first question was to explore the extent to which teachers, at all grade levels and both subject specialists and nonspecialists, view the aims of social studies in general and the congruence of their beliefs with the current program of studies. Consistent with the results from the quantitative survey, there were constructive and thoughtful comments about the program of studies as a whole from teachers across grade levels despite some specific concerns, which will be addressed further below. For the purpose of developing an overall perspective on social studies curriculum, however, it is important to emphasize that in general teachers at all grade levels expressed positive views of the program and what it offers for meaningful learning, as the following comments illustrate:

- *I think the high school curriculum is fantastic. It is interesting and allows for a lot of exploration. I like that each key issue ties together with so many things that are happening currently within Canada and the world. I would not like to see too many drastic changes.*
- *As a first-time Grade 7 teacher who typically teaches language arts, I was pleasantly surprised at the specific nature of the outcomes in the program of studies for social studies. I really like the outcomes, although I felt that it was difficult to cover them in the depth required with only four classes a week (which in reality ends up to be three classes most weeks).*
- *The Grade 9 social curriculum is one of the best curriculums to teach because it is issues based and focuses on real-life situations that students are going to encounter.*
- *I love the flexibility of the curriculum. At the junior high level I am able to make connections to current events and personal experiences quite easily. There are [a] few outcomes to meet, but using the project-based learning model allows for a teacher to hit most (if not all) outcomes quite easily over the course of a particular unit project.*
- *I like the openness and the ability to integrate current events into almost any related issue and specific outcome—creating some very critical thinking discussions.*

The responses can be categorized in terms of some overarching themes that provide a sense of the range of commitments teachers have to social studies curriculum. The idea of commitment captures teachers' dedication to the foundational goals and purposes of

social studies. As Peck and Herriot (2015) have written in their survey of the literature on teachers' beliefs, commitment to larger purposes is integral to decisions about approaches to teaching and learning. This study acknowledges a range of commitments in the written comments.

In terms of the current study, teachers' responses evinced a range of strong commitments to social studies as a subject. As both the quantitative results and the written comments indicate, there is a strong commitment to the goals of social studies, both in a general sense and in how these are expressed in the front matter of the Alberta program. There is also ample evidence that Alberta social studies teachers are committed to the importance of multiple perspectives and respect for diversity, including support for Aboriginal content in the curriculum. Moreover, respondents strongly supported pedagogical approaches central to social studies learning, including inquiry, historical thinking, and engaging with issues and values. Examples of each of these important areas of commitment are exemplified below with examples in teachers' words.

1. Commitment to the goals outlined in the front matter of the program, which includes active citizenship in local, national and global contexts and understanding social studies as a preparation for participation in society

Among the most striking results from the quantitative survey was the very high degree of support for the purposes of social studies as outlined in the Alberta program of studies. This was expressed eloquently in the written

responses; for example, in support of the goal of preparing active and engaged citizens and the broader goals of social studies which encourage interest and relevance to the issues that students will encounter in their lives,

- *At the high school level the clear focus on developing students who are educated citizens capable of understanding and responding to issues must not be lost.*
- *The big ideas in each junior high social course are great! They should be kept.*
- *The front matter of the curriculum clearly outlines the outcomes which NEED to be covered and this makes it quite achievable in the classroom.*

Citizenship was not simply a goal in itself; rather, in many of the respondents' words, citizenship is part of a broader sense of how social studies relates to a student's understandings of what it means to live well in the world, as the following quotes demonstrate:

- *The values and attitudes are the most important part of the entire curriculum. Regardless of what students learn in the form of content and critical thinking, if they are able to recognize and appreciate how our history has helped shape who we are today and appreciate the value of others and what it takes to make a society that people want to live in, they will be in a much better position to help improve our world and make it a better place for all of us to live in.*
- *Keep the citizenship component! Too often teachers approach social studies as a history class or a geography class! I am a department head and I am constantly reminded by teachers' gradebooks how*

much history is taught and how little citizenship.

- *Current events and world history must be kept within the social studies curriculum. I believe it is important to cultivate our students into globally aware citizens.*

Similar sentiments were expressed by an elementary social studies teacher:

- *I think that the emphasis on attaining basic needs (Grade 2) and good quality of life (Grade 3) is excellent, and I like the fact that it teaches the students that, although all people live in different conditions, the important thing is that they have a good quality of life (including comfort, safety, security, health and happiness), rather than how big their house is, or how much money they have. I think that these ideas speak to children about their own situations and lives.*

2. Commitment to diversity and multiple perspectives, including recognition of the importance of Aboriginal content and perspectives

Another key aspect of the social studies curriculum is the focus on understanding diversity, appreciating multiple perspectives and the relationships to students' own identities and understanding of self and others. The inclusion of FNMI perspectives is considered both necessary and a critical element of social studies learning. The following comments are illustrative of the commitment to various aspects of multiple perspectives:

- *I like the emphasis on our Aboriginal communities, and how we are able to link*

issues from other peoples and places to what is going on in those parts of our country. In the junior high program, the Grade 9 curriculum in particular, the emphasis on government and quality of life is well done.

- *I really liked the focus on multiple perspectives and Aboriginal issues, both of which are important in Alberta's multicultural classrooms.*
- *I think our perspective on First Nations history is really important. Students seem to really understand that many mistakes were made.*
- *A view of different perspectives from around the world, ie, discussions of other cultures and how they see the world. Students are curious about other places and express the most enjoyment and engagement when they can study other cultures and relate it back to their own.*
- *Focusing on multiple perspectives is useful as well. The emphasis on critical thinking is also very valuable; any changes must not lead back to an overemphasis on rote memorization.*

3. Commitment to engaging students through disciplinary approaches and pedagogic practices, such as historical thinking, inquiry-based learning, and understanding issues and values.

A central quality of the Alberta program has been its emphasis on forms of pedagogy that engage students in inquiry, understanding values and critical thinking. The comments express clearly an appreciation for the disciplines that are the basis of social studies as a subject in schools, and for the importance of engaging in interdisciplinary thinking

in the school curriculum. Howard Gardner (1999, 2006) has stressed the importance of learning disciplinary thinking in the school curriculum, which he identifies as the ability to understand and more substantively practise forms of inquiry that are offered by, for example, history. His argument is that to become educated in a discipline means not simply learning content (eg, learning about history), but understanding and practising historical thinking and applying it to events and phenomena that are the objects of study. As Gardner suggests, students need enriched experiences of disciplinary thinking to understand the content of the program, and this is something that is strongly identified in several respondents' comments. These comments also stress the importance of attending to issues that are the focuses of inquiry, ones that are structured through the experiences of, for example, historical and critical thinking. The comments also highlight the importance of learning and practising "skills," and that such skills are indeed defined in terms of learning to think, for example, historically:

- *The "issues-centred" approach in the high school program should be kept. The focus on skill development (particularly the dimension of thinking) should remain, with a renewed emphasis on critical inquiry and critical and historical thinking. Teachers who have embraced the spirit of the curriculum have created much more student-centred classrooms, with an emphasis on skill development as opposed to content memorization.*
- *We should keep the emphasis on students understanding the complexities of our*

contemporary world. This understanding takes some study of history so we can understand major events leading to the world we have today. It helps students not only understand the world they're living in, but also WHY it has become what it has. An equal amount of time should be spent understanding the past (so they can learn from mistakes and not repeat them), grasping the present (so they can be engaged citizens) and considering the future (so they can shape their world effectively). This is done well with the current curriculum and should continue.

- A sense of the past and a review each year as to how each student is unique (including their traditions and celebrations, groups and communities they belong to, and how their past and their community's past influences them today).
- Every part of it can be related back to the student, which is difficult to do in most social studies classes. Inquiry has to remain a focus but it has to relate to students for them to buy into it.
- The focus on skills is paramount. Knowledge outcomes should, however, not take a back seat. We need our kids to have a repertoire of information from which to draw to examine their world, discuss ideas and issues or simply make conversation intelligently. The transferability of skills should be emphasized to show how they fit into other core class areas as we move into less subject-specific classrooms (where numeracy and literacy are the focus in cross-curricular classroom scenarios).

- The emphasis on inquiry. I find the skills and their progression through the levels to be very pertinent to the development of critically thinking, engaged citizens. I have been teaching the Grade 9 program in particular since it was developed, and I find it very important in the development of engaged and informed Canadian students. I wouldn't change anything about it.

The written responses to question 1 provide rich illustrations of what teachers value in the current program of studies and what should be retained in any future revisions of the program. The responses show that teachers have a deep appreciation of and commitment to social studies as a subject that can nurture the experience of engaged citizenship and develop an appreciation of diversity and respect for multiple perspectives, and that social studies learning is and should be defined and practised as inquiry through disciplinary and critical forms of thinking.

Question 2: What are the two or three most important changes that should be made in Alberta's current social studies curriculum?

The written responses in our survey suggest that teachers are committed to the goals of social studies, but that the program, as a plan or document, does not necessarily help to resolve questions of practice or help to enable a realization of the broader goals of social studies. For example, despite what the program of studies mandates, there are still urgent questions about what to teach, how and when to teach it, to which students, and with which aims and purposes that depend greatly on the particular contexts where teaching

takes place. Such questions are not framed in the abstracted language of the program of studies, but rather in the more immediate challenges of classroom practice.

It is not simply a disjuncture between the aims of social studies and what transpires in classrooms. The qualitative results also illustrate a further tension between the program of studies as a plan for teaching, and the efforts of teachers attempting to implement the program. The program is organized in terms of a certain logic which assumes that teaching and learning will follow the pattern outlined in the program: prescribed outcomes and content based on assumptions about time, abilities of students and the efficacy of assessment and evaluation. The program as a plan still follows the Tylerian (2013) model of curriculum: a closed system that starts with purposes, identifies approaches to learning and then evaluates whether the purposes have been achieved, all within arbitrary limits of time and space.

The results of the survey suggest, however, that teaching social studies does not simply and neatly follow such a program template. As teachers' comments suggest, the demands and realities of teaching can be very different from what is assumed by the program of studies. For example, respondents at all grade levels commented that there are simply too many outcomes and too much content for the time allotted to social studies. Several primary and elementary teachers commented on the degree of developmental appropriateness of content and outcomes in their classrooms. Many respondents commented on issues of repetition across grade levels and questioned

the logic of how content is organized and prescribed. In short, the program of studies does not map neatly onto the realities of classrooms and the kinds of choices teachers are required to make.

The purpose of the second question was to elicit responses to certain issues teachers experience with the structure and content of the program of studies and what they would like to see as necessary changes to the program of studies. The anecdotes related by teachers provide important insights about the assumptions underlying the program of studies, about the nature and number of outcomes, about the selection of content, and about the scope and sequence of the program's organization. To reiterate the discussion from the introduction above, the suggestions for changes are not about the aims and purposes of social studies, nor its orientation to citizenship and diversity, but rather to what would make it possible to deal more fully with those goals in the practice of social studies teaching, as the following quote captures well.

- *If the high school social studies curriculum is going to seriously address issues from a multiple perspectives approach, then it needs to be prepared to accept controversy on VERY sensitive issues in the classroom: for example, Aboriginal history and government policy, multiculturalism, immigration policy, racism, religion, social issues around social progressivism versus conservatism and government policy, sex, sexuality, and gender rights and issues. All these issues are mentioned in the high school social studies textbooks, especially in the SS 30-1 approved resources, yet they are very often addressed in only the most*

superficial, politically correct or sanitized manner. Either truly robust multiple-perspectives resources for both students and teachers must be made available in basic-level resources, or teachers will be under-resourced and, potentially, vulnerable to professional conduct attacks. The current focus on issues and inquiry as well as the multiple perspectives are central to learning.

The many responses to question 2 can be encapsulated by three key areas of change expressed by respondents. First, a significant number of concerns were expressed about the amount of content and the number of outcomes and how that needs to be addressed in curriculum revision; second, there were a number of perceptive comments, particularly from teachers at the primary and elementary grades, about the developmental appropriateness of content and learning approaches; and third, across grade levels, teachers expressed the need for changes in approaches to assessment that would more aptly address social studies learning and goals.

1. Changes in the amount of content and number of outcomes and scope and sequence

- *I think the amount of content needs to be re-examined. For example, as a Grade 3 teacher, I am expected to teach students about four countries in the first unit and then about being a global citizen in the second unit. However, during the first part of the year, I need to spend time on geography and mapping as many students do not even know where we are in comparison. Also, instead of doing all four countries at once, I need to do one country at a time so that students do not get overwhelmed and*

confused. This takes time away from the inquiry and critical thinking process that could be so valuable. There is not enough time to teach everything that is expected. I also think that more emphasis needs to be on the skills and less on the knowledge. Do students really need to memorize the different aspects of culture in each community? They are only going to forget it! But how they get it is more important—through the inquiry process (research skills, asking questions etc).

- *The number of curricular outcomes, particularly the bracketed concept items at the high school levels, should be reduced, leaving teachers with the ability to take more time to follow paths of inquiry that unfold in their classrooms.*
- *The high school social studies curriculum (10–12) is so full of curricular outcomes that we have no time to go into depth when an issue really resonates with the students in my class. The emphasis on diploma exams has taken the true spirit of inquiry-based critical thinking out of the high school social studies curriculum (10–12), and instead has forced us to focus on preparing the students for an exam, instead of learning for the sake of improving understanding.*
- *The Grade 7 curriculum is bogged down with too many knowledge outcomes. I have to make the decision to teach them all poorly or to teach some of them well. Alternative: I would like to see fewer outcomes in the Grade 7 social program of studies, as the time allotted to the course is insufficient to cover them in the depth they deserve. With the amount of content that needs to be covered, it becomes difficult to work in*

as much critical thinking process work as should occur.

- *We should remove SOME of the knowledge objectives to allow more time for inquiry method of teaching/learning to be effective. We need more time to explore and work with (hands on) high-level concepts and events.*
- *The current curriculum is a hodgepodge of elements with a poorly designed focus on issues. As a result, there is a lack of flow and continuity. The curriculum should be redesigned in a way that would allow teachers to better engage students. Grade 10 needs to be completely changed as the students are not engaged; Grade 11 has excellent content but the curriculum gets in the way of teaching; and Grade 12 is okay but the organization of the curriculum makes it confusing for teachers to know exactly what is important or how to cover the content.*
- *For a teacher with predominantly Aboriginal students, it is a challenge to try to make it through all the outcomes in high school classes due to time constraints (frequent deaths in the community, busing problems and general poor attendance). Allowing for more focused study rather than generalist study would help to alleviate this concern.*
- *The high school social studies curriculum should be completely overhauled. The focus should be on the front matter and not on the content objectives. This would allow for more teacher choice in the content taught in classes, which offers a greater amount of teacher and student inspiration. Most social studies teachers are naturally inquisitive, and allowing teachers to embrace this side*

of themselves would help keep them satisfied in their jobs. For those concerned about the workload or the “lack of direction” associated with a content-agnostic curriculum, the existing curriculum can be kept in the program of studies as a guideline for how to cover all of the skills outlined in the front matter. The problem with this idea is the lack of standardization needed for the Grade 12 diploma exam, but this is easily remedied. Have a Grade 10 and 11 curriculum that gives local freedom and autonomy while maintaining the current (or some form of) standard Grade 12 curriculum that may be tested upon.

- *(1) The content needs to be reduced in courses to allow time to focus on the big ideas and higher-level thinking, as well as engaging students. When there is too much content to cover, we do not have the ability to dive into areas that students find interesting, which results in less engagement. (2) We need to work on a balance between knowledge, engagement, higher-level thinking and risk taking. Higher-level thinking and risk taking require a knowledge and skill base. Acquiring a knowledge and skill base requires engagement. To do this well, we need time to devote to each area. It cannot be done while the curriculum requires you to cruise through to complete, which is what my job is—to cover the curriculum. I love teaching social. Give me the autonomy and time to engage my students—this is the foundation for the knowledge, skills, risk taking and higher-level thinking attitudes and behaviours. (3) A student’s values should not be assessed! Who are we to judge?*

There were also many comments related to the order of topics and repetition across grade levels.

- *I would also like to see courses related to the fields of social studies, ie, history, geography, political science etc, instead of trying to put them all together in one course every year. There has been too much emphasis on Canada. The students learn the same thing about Canada over and over. They begin to resent learning about it. I would like to see, especially in senior high classes, more of an international focus.*
- *More continuity between elementary to junior high and then junior high to high school in terms of knowledge, skills and expectations. Less specific content outcomes so teachers have the ability to focus on higher-level skills and focus on issues. Change Grade 10 social studies to less specific outcomes related to economic globalization—too obtuse and difficult for students to grasp. Perhaps more general aspects of each related issue.*

2. Changes related to developmental appropriateness

- *I'm very frustrated that students are expected to learn about other Canadian communities in Grade 2 social studies when they don't have a firm understanding about being an Albertan or even a Calgarian. As it currently stands, the social studies curriculum in Grade 2 is way beyond where students are developmentally.*
- *I am a division I elementary teacher (Grade 2). It used to be that Grade 1 focused on themselves and their school community. Grade 2 focused on the community they live*

in and Grade 3 focused on other Canadian communities. This was developmentally appropriate to their egocentric view of the world. Now they have bumped everything back a year and I am finding that the curriculum topics are not engaging for them. My Grade 2s are most excited when they get to talk about their own community and things they understand than to learn about a community across the country that most of them have no concept of understanding. Grade 2 does not understand geography. Most of them think New York is in Canada and Banff is in the US. I would like to see a return to a more developmentally friendly progression.

- *Some of the curricular concepts in the Grade 1 and 2 social studies program are very tricky for the developmental level of the students (economy, natural resources/manufacturing). Grade 1 and kindergarten seem too similar ... just from my experience ... or maybe the program is being interpreted incorrectly. Regarding the multiple-choice question on the survey—I am a strong believer that if you want to assess social studies content, then you need to make sure that writing/reading isn't the actual skill being assessed, particularly for students on IPPs and those who have difficulty with reading/writing. Not sure how to totally eliminate that factor, but it is a tricky one.*
- *We are in a rural area and cannot afford the luxury of taking kids on a short visit to any sites for social studies, unlike those in the two big cities. Lack of resources—where does one get books on Tunisia? The Internet has far too much adult-orientated or focused*

material that makes hunting for Tunisian info hard.

3. Changes related to assessment

- *Multiple-choice tests and fill-in-the-blank worksheets, whether devised by government or by teachers, betray the spirit of this rich curriculum and cannot begin to assess what is most important in social studies.*
- *There is a need to get away from the source-based multiple-choice questions that are evident on diploma exams and more focused on research and critical analysis. Students do not, for the most part, do well on these multiple-choice exams and I do not believe they fairly assess their knowledge and understanding of social studies. I would prefer to see them studying and analyzing primary and secondary sources to gain understanding and knowledge.*
- *While it is commendable and reasonable to expect Alberta's students to have knowledge regarding different major historical events, the nature of the present curriculum limits their ability to explore topics within the confines of the classroom. An approach that allowed for general topics to be given as outcomes, along with suggested (but not all required) topics to be covered, would be ideal. This will, of course, make diploma exams messy as Alberta Education would be required to rewrite the multiple-choice exams to allow for optional questions, or shift to an entirely written performance-based assessment.*
- *More of a focus on "big ideas" rather than content. More of a focus on project-based demonstration of knowledge rather than multiple-choice testing.*

The preceding comments provide important perspectives on the lived experiences of curriculum in terms of the challenges of achieving the goals of social studies, which, as the previous section emphasized, finds tremendous support among practising social studies teachers. The examples from teachers' responses to question 2 offer perspectives on the complex challenges teachers face when attempting to implement the program of studies and realize its larger purposes but encounter what are seen as impediments created by the structure and content of the program itself: issues such as too much content, too many outcomes, repetition of topics, and the developmental appropriateness of certain parts of the program, especially at the primary levels, and the impacts of forms of assessment such as multiple-choice tests. Taken as a whole and read in relation to the previous section, which provided an overview of what is important to keep in the curriculum, the preferred changes that teachers identified have very much to do with devising a program that more judiciously links the prescribed content, the number and nature of outcomes, approaches to pedagogy, and approaches that are developmentally appropriate. From teachers' perspectives, such changes would enhance the ability to achieve the greater aims of social studies.

Question 3: What are the two or three most important things that "get in the way" of your ability to do your best work as a teacher in your social studies classroom(s)?

The previous section spoke to changes in the program of studies that would, from teachers' perspectives, allow a more workable

approach to teaching social studies in terms of its stated aims and goals. The focus of question 2 was very much on the program of studies as a plan for teaching. Question 3 was intended to delve further into the “curriculum-as-lived” in Aoki’s terms. The question invited respondents to identify their experiences with and interpretations of the conditions that hamper their abilities for their best work as social studies teachers—*best* referring to practice in terms of achieving the higher-order purposes of the program and engaging students in interesting and meaningful learning. The phrase *get in the way* is interesting because it refers to actual physical and material obstacles—for example, class size and the adequacy of and access to technology—and also to certain kinds of practices—such as standardized testing, including the diploma exams—that tend to enforce an authority over what and how content is taught, and, from the perspective of many respondents, undermine the important goals of social studies learning.

One of the recurring issues identified by teachers at all grade levels was that of time—that is, the experience of not having enough time. In part, the feeling of not having enough time and not being able to meet all the requirements of the program has its causes in the things that get in the way of good practice, such as class size, too much content, too many outcomes and a lack of support for students with special needs.

The feeling—and actual experience—of not having enough time is common in many professions and for many people who must carry diverse responsibilities in their lives. But

in terms of this study, it is important to see the expression about lack of time in the context of teaching social studies, and how, for example, class size, the complex diversity of students in classrooms and other demands made on teachers’ work interact to create challenges for practice. It is not just class size or the numbers and diversity of students in a classroom that is the issue; rather, the issues arise from the ways in which the needs of larger and more diverse groups of students impinge on the decisions that a teacher must make about curriculum and about how to realize approaches to teaching and learning. All those factors in relation to each other contribute to the feeling of lack of time.

In his study on how people make judgments, the psychologist Daniel Kahneman (2013) distinguishes between “fast” and “slow” thinking. In terms of our discussion of curriculum, slow thinking can be likened to the process of creating a curriculum that is envisioned by the program of studies—something that takes deliberation, careful thought, collaboration with others and time that is genuinely required for such work. On the other hand, much of what teachers do, especially as they become more experienced, is what Kahneman would describe as fast thinking: responding intuitively to the immediate demands of the situation, working individually as a teacher and working without the luxury of time for thinking things through. Although being able to “think on your feet” is considered a strong quality for being a teacher, a disadvantage of fast thinking is that it can become expedient and hurried. As Kahneman writes, “Like a juggler with several balls in the air, you cannot afford to

slow down ... Any task that requires you to keep several ideas in mind at the same time has the same hurried character” (p 37). The experience of hurriedness, and feeling that slowing down cannot be afforded, is a key insight offered by teachers as they identify things that get in the way of good practice, and is encapsulated in the main themes that emerged from question 3.

Things that get in the way of good teaching, as identified by teachers across grade levels, include overly large class sizes, the continued dominance of standardized and limited forms of assessment, insufficient support for inclusion, working with diverse student needs, too many administrative tasks, and the influence of top-down administrative approaches, combined with not enough time to adequately plan, develop curriculum and teaching approaches and collaborate with colleagues.

1. Classes are too large

- *Huge class sizes are making it more difficult to support each student in meaningful ways, as well as to manage the marking load, especially at the 30-1 level. Another impediment is trying to manage an increasingly diverse group of learners with few, if any, supports available.*
- *Too many students (I have four classes with 34 / 34 / 33 / 33 students in each).*
- *Size of class—next year my class will have approximately 30 students in Grade 3. The social studies curriculum for Grade 3 is centred around four foreign countries—if I want to give the students some background knowledge I have to take them to the Ukrainian village almost three hours away;*

the other three countries do not have any sites for field trips.

- *Class size and composition is first and foremost a problem. I can't teach well when I have 35 Grade 6s in a class and one or two of them can't speak English.*
- *38–42 students in my class is bullshit. I can't help the ones that fall through the cracks as well. More kids are failing due to large classrooms.*

2. Standardized testing gets in the way of learning

- *Diploma exam: teaching students to fill in a bubble sheet is useless and a waste of their and my time. Students should be creating knowledge, investigating and getting out in the community to learn about social studies.*
- *When I taught at the high school level, I found the pressure to do well on the diploma exams took away from my more creative ideas for curriculum delivery and assessment. For example, I would have happily taught the Grade 10 program without a final exam and done the majority of the summative evaluations as inquiry projects with much student voice and choice. However, my department head, who taught the 30-level course, insisted that the students work on the type of writing piece and multiple-choice exams they would have in Grade 12.*

3. Insufficient support for inclusion and diversity of students

- *Lack of EA support for students with special needs is my largest hurdle. There are many days where I cannot provide an effective environment for everyone because I have*

to decide to either allow a small handful of students to monopolize my time at the expense of the rest, or to teach to greater majority and allow high-needs students to flounder. There is not adequate support in classrooms to allow inclusive education to work effectively. The other major issue getting in my way is a lack of preparation and planning time during the school day. I make do with two 45-minute prep blocks per five-day cycle, and will often lose them to assemblies or other school events.

- *Inclusive education. Without support for these students and ESL students, 80 per cent of my time goes to 20 per cent of my students.*
- *The diversity in classrooms is almost unmanageable these days. Between the number of children with learning disabilities (and there are a lot, whether they are coded or not!!!) and the ELL children (which is an increasing number every year—many of whom are lacking the vocabulary and comprehension skills at the grade level they are in), every subject including social studies has become very difficult to teach. One teacher is supposed to meet the needs of all of the students as well as write IPPs and ELL benchmarks. That is a lot of extra paperwork, which takes away from the teaching and planning. Something needs to change.*

4. Too much top-down administration and too many administrative tasks

- *Too many expectations placed on me—reporting and grading are taking up too much of my focus. I don't have enough time to prepare engaging lessons. I see too many*

students in each class and so many of these students have many diverse needs.

- *Continually changing directives from administration, both at the school and district level. For example, we recently finished a three-year project on increasing cooperative learning. We are now moving into improving assessment. Add to this school expectations to modify the way grading is done, reporting is done, how achievement is measured, focus on students with learning disabilities etc, and it becomes increasingly difficult to focus on improved instruction, when there are a hundred other responsibilities that require my time and energy as well. And that's not including extracurricular responsibilities (I coach football and run the student council club and the Christian club).*
- *My instruction suffers when I am overloaded with directives and responsibilities that significantly reduce the time I have to focus on what I am doing with my students.*
- *The latest initiative from above, which often suggests what we've done in the classroom is wrong/antiquated/ineffective, but comes from some literature and/or administrator, which clearly doesn't take into account what we DO actually do in the class that ultimately amounts to the same thing. Case in point—PLCs: now we have a formalized, scheduled and more bureaucratic method of professional dialogue and share, which is actually more forced, arbitrary and time consuming than the natural professional conversations that once happened around the department office (which has been phased out ... perhaps in someone's mind*

necessitating the PLC structure in the first place). [Also], [t]he near obsessive focus on the SDP (school development plan), where we “discuss and formalize and write down and reflect and plan and present” what we intend to do in the classroom, IN PLACE of actually doing any of the kind of work the SDP is meant to inspire/account for.

5. Not enough time

- *I find I rush through interesting topics just so that I can cover everything. This forces my classes to be more teacher directed, leaving me less time to teach in an inquiry method. Also, many of the resources are print heavy, making differentiation difficult, again forcing a more teacher-directed model.*
- *TIME! CONTENT—KNOWLEDGE BASED OBJECTIVES. There is too much content and too little time! I LOVE how the social studies curriculum leaves room for the inquiry process and critical and creative thinking. However, this seems to be left out in order to get through all the content.*
- *The content-heavy curriculum seems focused on front-loading information into the students. This leaves little time to discuss current events or to focus on one or two important historical events and their effects on the future. Difficulty in differentiating the material to effectively engage those who struggle. Attempting to create more inquiry-based lessons with “sit-and-get” type material.*
- *Work load!!!! There is no time during the average day to reflect on pedagogy and practice, or meaningfully collaborate with colleagues. We need to teach less (increased prep time) so we can plan and assess in ways that much more meaningfully support student learning. Ultimately, we need to move towards [the] Finnish paradox that “less is more” when it comes to student learning.*

- *(1) Workload and planning/preparation time. There are many opportunities within the curriculum to explore and engage students, but these types of lesson plans take a lot of “front time” to plan, as well as “back time” to review, reflect and edit. Finding the time to design, research, prepare materials for and implement these engaging lessons is a major challenge and obstacle. (2) Lack of meaningful, collaborative professional development. The most valuable PD I have ever attended was a 10-session, two-year cohort to meet with a small group of social studies teachers and discuss, plan, organize and create lesson plans for the implementation of Social 30-1/30-2. These were not theoretical sessions or training sessions, but productive, meaningful PD sessions that helped make my lessons more engaging for students. I am pushed to participate in too much PD that claims to be student centred, but is not practical to implement or has major time constraints to it.*

The purposes of emphasizing the above statements is to illustrate the multiplicity of conditions and contextual factors that get in the way of good social studies teaching and learning. It is important to emphasize the complexity of things that get in the way: that it is not just class size, administrative edicts, assessment and so forth that get in the way as separate conditions; it is not simply a lack of time, but rather the ways in which the

various conditions interact that challenges teachers to achieve best practices in social studies. The following comments from two teachers capture this sense of complexity and how things can get in the way of the hopes of achieving good practice:

- *More than anything, I would like to be able to take all the amazing things I've learned through PD and district training in recent years, and focus on how to implement these in meaningful and effective ways into my classroom. My practice improves when I can take what I've learned and practise it and improve it in my classroom. Before I'm able to master a new strategy, I have new objectives and training that I feel actually hinders my ability to do any one of them well.*
- *The curriculum is too large to cover in terms of trying to get through all of the content; the big ideas can get missed. If we want students to be thoughtful and reflective and make meaningful connections with the "big ideas" we are trying to teach them, then we need to have less content to get through and greater control to present outcomes in a way that is most meaningful to our students.*

Keeping in mind what gets in the way of doing the best work possible, we now turn to the final question that asked teachers what changes would make it more likely to achieve their best work in the classroom.

Question 4: What are the two or three most important changes that would make it more possible to do your best work as a teacher in your social studies classroom(s)?

The significance of question 4 and the comments that it provoked is that the changes suggested by teachers correspond well with what teachers value about the goals and aims of social studies and what prevents a fuller realization of those goals. Following the discussion in the introduction, the changes identified by teachers speak to the curriculum-as-plan: identification of substantive changes in the program of studies so that it would correspond more fluidly and meaningfully with the decisions teachers must make in practice. In terms of the curriculum-as-lived, teachers identified concrete changes that would make it more possible to practise social studies teaching in ways that the front matter offers as a vision for purposes and approaches to learning. The third major theme that emerged strongly in the responses is the need to have more time and space within the school day for collaboration with colleagues in developing curriculum in terms of identified needs and interests of students.

The comments regarding approaches to professional development suggest teachers' desire for greater professional autonomy. As the term is used by several respondents, autonomy is not an expression of a desire to have more individual freedom or control, but rather to realize the capacity to make curricular and pedagogic decisions in terms of what is entailed in being a professional. Such a view of autonomy, as further discussed below, is a recognition that the possibilities for good

professional practice depend on productive relationships with others who share those same responsibilities.

In response to the question on what would make best work possible, a number of key themes capture the insights teachers offered. Teachers expressed the need for changes in the conditions of teaching, including class size and support for inclusion. They identified the need for changes in the structure and content of the program of studies, which includes issues of scope, of sequence, and of the amount of content and number of outcomes. Many respondents commented on the need for changes in terms of better support for use of technology and other resources; and many respondents articulated clearly the need for meaningful opportunities to cultivate autonomy and professional development.

1. Changes in the conditions of teaching—class size and inclusion

- *Smaller class sizes (my current social studies classes in high school are 38, 41 and 40), better access to technology, fewer knowledge items to cover in curriculum (25 per cent fewer) so we can spend more time on inquiry with the remaining objectives.*
- *Class sizes also limit the abilities to be effective to student learning and to try new things. With an overwhelming amount of students to support, all of them suffer simultaneously through a teacher who can't cater to individual needs because of the sheer volume of class sizes. Often lessons result in "stand and deliver" approaches that many teachers are trying to get away from. Creativity takes a back seat to meeting the needs of such a large group—more time*

contacting parents and updating marks results in much less time improving teaching practice.

- *Supporting inclusion would be an important addition. If we are to have the greatest level of student diversity in our classrooms then those students should be supported.*
- *Too many extreme behavioural issues from students who need smaller classes and individualized instruction. Inclusion limits my ability to effectively manage and teach my students because they are so diverse in their learning. I am one person expected to teach too many students coming from too many ability levels and learning styles. It is incredibly stressful and frustrating for teachers and students alike ... Less curricular outcomes. There is way too much in there to cover in any real, meaningful way. I have never gotten through it all as it was.*
- *More support staff—I used to have an assistant in my classroom if I had just a few kids with IPPs. This semester I had a 30-2 with 38 kids, 7 IPPs, one so severe that she needed a scribe and reader, but still did not have an assistant in my classroom at any time (have to send students to the resource room, which is not as effective).*

2. Changes in the structure and content of the program of studies

- *There is a need to get away from the source-based multiple-choice questions that are evident on diploma exams and more focused on research and critical analysis. Students do not, for the most part, do well on these multiple-choice exams and I not believe they fairly assess their knowledge*

and understanding of social studies. I would prefer to see them studying and analyzing primary and secondary sources to gain understanding and knowledge.

- *A curriculum that has variety, but focuses on only a few themes per year so that we can really go in depth.*
- *Increase understanding of inquiry as it applies to social studies—increase in freedom to explore relevant topics—elimination of standardized testing to allow for increased diversity in social studies curriculum from community to community.*
- *I would like to focus on a particular area that students will research and analyze themselves. I want to see students taking ownership of their learning. This semester, I have endeavoured to get my Social 20-1 students to look especially at primary sources and draw their own conclusions as opposed to me just telling them “what happened.” I also partnered with the university to have students learn about what a historian does and actually use their library to conduct their own research. I would like to do more of this but, as I feel that I have to cover all the knowledge and understanding outcomes, I have had to limit these opportunities.*
- *Allow us to build skill development into authentic student-driven, issue-based, action-oriented learning opportunities. And yes, I have stated these things before if this seems rather canned but it is something that I have believed in for quite some time and have worked toward in my own practice on a daily basis.*
- *More time for social studies at the elementary grades.*

3. Support for use of technology and resources

- *Access to technology—physically getting computers or Chromebooks, and if we are using the school’s Wi-Fi, it is often slow. With so much of the course encouraging research and perspectives, it can be hard to do without adequate technology.*
- *I have created and/or purchased many resources for the three communities in Canada (I went to Meteghan, Nova Scotia and interviewed a villager on the land, weather and water of his community and went around the village taking videos and pictures of businesses to provide some sort of context for my students). I would hate to be unable to use resources that I have gathered or created over the years. Now that the contract is up with the publishers, I would like to see the basic resources improved.*

There were many other comments related to the issue of resources. For example, several respondents mentioned a lack of access to computer labs, or simply not having enough computers, or inadequate Wi-Fi connections. There were a significant number of comments about the quality and quantity of textbooks and other written materials, including such issues as out-of-date materials and materials that could be more appropriate for different levels of learning.

4. Greater opportunities for professional development and autonomy

A significant number of the responses indicate that in order for social studies teachers to achieve their best work, more time needs to be allocated for them to consider and inform

what the social studies curriculum should look like in practice. Hence the comments on time suggest not simply having more hours, but time to fully engage in reflection, to innovate and create curriculum and to work with other teachers in creative curriculum development. The remarks about the desire for more freedom can also be understood in the context of commitment to achieving best practice: it is not an expression of simply choosing how to teach, but the freedom that implies more authentic agency in terms of curriculum design and inquiry into how to best teach in ways that respect the overall aims of social studies as a subject.

- *More time to work and collaborate with other social teachers. Being able to focus on social, and not be “shoe-horned” into teaching other courses that do not allow me to instruct from a position of strength.*
- *Time—to reflect, innovate, collaborate, develop and be plugged into educational trends. Social studies teachers deal with the least static curriculum out there on top of ever-changing pedagogical approaches. We thrive on making those appropriate changes, but this is impossible to do without time.*
- *Time! Time! Time! to reflect, collaborate, plan and assess. Class sizes are an issue, but not nearly as crucial as the prep time issue—many teachers have entire semesters with no prep time in the day—ridiculous. Minimal class size improvements are being achieved by robbing teachers of prep time. If you ask teachers which scenario they would rather have: (1) 120 students, 40 students per class, 1 prep or (2) 120 students, 30 students per class, no prep, then it’s a no-brainer! I would*

contend that the vast majority of teachers would take the prep time because the overall number of students does not change!!!!

- *More freedom in the curricular document. This would allow the time for meaningful projects, which I find are the kind of assignment students really flourish with in social studies.*
- *Reduce the specific outcomes, or give me the autonomy and flexibility to choose what specific outcomes I cover so they can be done in detail.*
- *More freedom to evaluate your class’s interests and explore content they are engaged in. As a result, more general outcomes could give teachers the freedom to teach more motivational topics.*

This last set of comments serves to focus the results of the previous three questions on the purpose of the survey as a whole, which, as emphasized at the outset of the discussion on the qualitative results, is to support the legitimate perspectives of social studies teachers on curriculum, understood both as what is represented in the program of studies and how social studies can be more fully achieved in classrooms. The expression of the need for freedom in the comments above points to an understanding of teacher professionalism that entails the capacities and opportunities to exercise appropriate judgment in the context of classroom practice. The references to freedom and autonomy, then, can be interpreted as an integral quality of being a teacher.

As Andy Hargreaves (2016) emphasizes, autonomy does not simply mean freedom

from legitimate structures of authority and obligation, nor can authority only be understood in individual terms. As the comments from the respondents illustrate, freedom is cast very much in terms of collaboration with others who share responsibilities for teaching social studies, suggesting that doing one's best work also requires opportunities to develop what is best in collaboration with colleagues. In a very thoughtful and insightful exploration of the meaning of autonomy in teachers' lives, Pitt and Phelan (2008) note that autonomy can be a "paradox": while on the one hand teachers as professionals are expected to demonstrate their knowledge and can be judged individually on the success of their work, they are also subject to the constraints placed on the profession as a whole on the other hand (p 190). As well, instead of being recognized as those with the responsibility to create best practice, from the perspective of those in authority, teachers may be reduced to being "passive onlookers" rather than "individuals with professional credentials, [who] can make use of their status, knowledge and experience in ways that interrogate educational dilemmas and participate in public debate about the nature of these dilemmas and the crafting of solutions to them" (p 194).

"What would make it more possible to do your best work as a teacher in your social studies classroom(s)?" The responses to this fourth question certainly point to the need to address conditions such as class size, the difficult challenges of inclusion, the adequacy of resources and technology, and the content and structure of the program of studies. The respondents to the question also stressed

the need for meaningful allocation of time and, as part of their professional autonomy, a collective and individual influence about how to best to teach social studies. As Pitt and Phelan suggest, such a definition of autonomy includes "thinking for oneself in uncertain and complex situations in which judgment is more important than routine" (p 194). Exercising professional autonomy understood as the ability and opportunity to exercise good judgment and to engage in productive collaboration with colleagues is thus integral to achieving "best work," to which the words of teachers included above give ample testimony.

WHAT WE LEARNED: IMPLICATIONS AND PRINCIPLES FOR IMPROVING SOCIAL STUDIES CURRICULUM, TEACHING AND LEARNING

The results of the survey, both quantitative and qualitative, contribute to the important and necessary conversation about social studies curriculum, a conversation in which teachers can and should take the lead. The results of the survey provide a compelling view of social studies in Alberta from "the ground up" (Evers and Kneyber 2016), a perspective that enables appreciating the beliefs teachers hold about social studies and the complex conditions that enable or compromise the fuller realization of the goals of social studies curriculum.

Aoki's notion of two curriculum worlds was not intended to suggest a dualism: that there is on the one hand a mandated program for social studies and on the other hand social studies as it is taught in classrooms.

In terms of the language of the program of studies, the “curriculum-as-plan,” a majority of respondents expressed strong support for the goals of social studies as outlined in the front matter of the Alberta program: active citizenship, appreciating diversity and identity, the importance of attending to Aboriginal perspectives and history, and a commitment to inquiry and disciplinary approaches in teaching and learning. The responses to the questions in the survey provide credible evidence that social studies teachers in Alberta have a strong appreciation of the purposes of social studies and approaches to teaching and learning. In a sense, then, teachers also have as part of their identities a “curriculum-as-plan” that guides their pedagogical approaches and actions (Peck and Herriot 2015).

The critical point is that classroom contexts and conditions for teaching do not necessarily compromise the commitment to the goals of social studies, but the conditions for teaching and learning can limit the fuller realization of those goals. The results of the study thus point to tensions between the formal program of studies and its prescribed outcomes, and the realities and complexities of classrooms where teachers attempt to realize good practices. The many thoughtful comments from teachers offer a constructive and necessary critique of the social studies program and at the same time suggest meaningful possibilities and directions for program change that, referring to one of the survey questions, would make it more possible for teachers to do their best work in social studies classrooms.

Paraphrasing the title of the Alberta Teachers’ Association (2015b) document, *Renewing Alberta’s Promise: A Great School for All*, we might well identify the purpose of this study as “Renewing the promise of social studies: great social studies for all.”

Renewing Alberta’s Promise offers a comprehensive template for understanding what is required for realizing “great schools” and emphasizing great schools as essential to a vibrant democracy and sustaining social equity. As mentioned in the foreword, “No democracy can maintain itself unless it makes equity in terms of readiness to learn, access and classroom conditions the cornerstone of its educational system” (p 5).

The present study on the state of social studies in Alberta took as its impetus the critical importance of “great schools” to a democratic, equitable and inclusive society, but more specifically the central importance of social studies as a subject that is most oriented by the imperative to help students become citizens who appreciate diversity, that welcomes multiple perspectives and that can engage in critical inquiry and democratic deliberation. The results of the study, both in quantitative and qualitative terms, were encouraging in the overwhelming positive support for the goals of social studies, and they affirm the commitment of teachers to great social studies teaching and learning.

Much of what these social studies teachers have told us is consistent with concerns raised by Alberta’s teaching profession about broader issues related to curriculum change, teaching and learning conditions, and school improvement. Of course, social

studies teaching does not exist in a vacuum; social studies is affected by many school and school system factors, including provision of resources and supports for learning, assessment and accountability practices, class size and complexity, administrative policies and practices, professional development, parent and community relationships, approaches to innovation and improvement, and overall workload.

Social studies teachers used their comments to express considerably more dissatisfaction with these other factors that affected teaching and learning than they did with the social studies curriculum, whose fundamental elements received relatively solid support from most respondents. Their frustrations are reflected in the Alberta Teachers' Association's characterization of the widespread and negative impact of a series of "misguided" policies, as expressed in *A Great School for All: Moving Forward Together* (ATA 2015a):

Ignoring the research and often driven by the growing influence of corporate interests, these policies place an excessive focus on standardization and control that includes the growth in testing and student reporting technologies. In this context it is little wonder that the most significant contributors to teachers' workload in Alberta schools is the growth of the "datafication" of school life alongside ill-conceived technology acquisitions accompanied by declining support for inclusion and the growing number of students with special needs.

The Alberta Teachers' Association's *Renewing Alberta's Promise* (2015b) suggests several

important ideas that are critical and foundational to developing great schools, curriculum, and teaching and learning. Implicit in the questions posed by this research on social studies is the overall question of what would make for great social studies curriculum, teaching and learning. The results of the social studies survey as a whole are consistent with the conclusions and directions advocated in *Renewing Alberta's Promise*. More specifically, there are some key principles that can be inferred from the survey that frame a discussion about what works well in the current social studies program, what needs to be changed and what would make for a "great" social studies curriculum.

1. ***A social studies curriculum should be focused and organized by strong aims and purposes.*** The results of the survey support emphatically the idea of a curriculum that "moves beyond a strict Tylerian instrumental concern for predetermined outcomes and compliance" (ATA 2015b, 13), and instead emphasizes the "big" ideas oriented by the deeper purposes for learning. Such a curriculum would identify key competencies (or capabilities) that would foster meaningful, engaged and developmentally appropriate learning. From the perspectives of social studies teachers the goals and purposes of the social studies program in Alberta is not the problem. The problem is that the structure of the program and the conditions for implementing it fully in classrooms deflect fuller realization of the important goals of social studies.
2. ***The social studies program should serve as a guide for promoting good learning***

and teacher judgment. Rather than a program of studies that is a “prescription” for learning, the program should offer possibilities for a lived curriculum that allows risk, innovation and adaptation at the classroom level. A program of studies assumes certainty and sameness across diverse contexts. But each classroom represents a unique “event” and, as such, necessarily entails risk and the need for the exercise of judgment about what might work best in achieving important and defensible goals of learning (Biesta 2014). As the results of the study indicate, teachers feel hampered by the imposition of too many outcomes, which fragments learning, and too much content, which tends to discourage inquiry and leads to the pressure for “coverage” rather than deeper inquiry. The results of the survey support the idea that there should be “less focus on content and more focus on the processes of learning” (ATA 2015b, 19). Many of the respondents to the study identified issues as well with repetition in the program and inconsistencies in scope and sequence, qualities of the current program that interfere with possibilities for creating more interesting, age-appropriate learning, and flexibility in choice of content.

3. **Good social studies learning requires authentic assessment oriented by sound principles of learning and achievement of purposes.** Teachers identified how current forms of assessment, including diploma exams and other standardized tests, and certain forms of testing, such as multiple choice, actually work to negate the possibilities for deeper

learning and undermine the purposes of social studies. As suggested in *Renewing Alberta’s Promise*, assessment should be *for* learning, focus on evaluating students’ competencies and enable teachers to use professional judgment (ATA 2015b, 19; italics in original). The program of studies should provide leadership and support for exemplary and learning-oriented assessment strategies that can be implemented as part of classroom practice.

4. **Curriculum revisions require commitment to understanding and improving the conditions of teaching and learning.** The responses of social studies teachers illustrate how adverse conditions in classrooms serve to undermine the achievement of the larger goals of social studies and discourage engagement in inquiry, critical thinking and more creative forms of social studies learning. As discussed above, it is important to see classroom conditions as a complex interweaving of class sizes, diversity of students, adequacy of resources, and time for meaningful reflection and collaboration. It is not simply that class sizes are too large in too many instances, but rather the impact of class size on a teacher’s practice, and the potential for good social studies learning is compromised when there are other multiple challenges to achieving the goals of social studies to which teachers are nonetheless committed.
5. **A social studies curriculum takes learners and learning seriously.** Among the salient results of the study is that social studies teachers are committed to forms

of learning guided by the principles of inquiry and disciplinary forms of thinking, but that classroom conditions deter a full realization of those approaches. As *Renewing Alberta's Promise* suggests, curriculum should focus on the processes of learning rather than content, a principle affirmed by teachers who responded to the survey. Taking learners seriously also means recognition of inclusivity—that classrooms and schools be “more inclusive of multiple cultural and social perspectives,” including “First Nations and Métis communities ...” (ATA 2015b, 19). Related as well to the imperative to take learners and learning seriously, adequate and sustained support for inclusion for diverse learners is an ongoing and urgent issue as identified by many social studies teachers.

- 6. A social studies curriculum recognizes the importance of teaching and supports teacher judgment and autonomy.** The centrality of good teaching and the indispensable work of the teacher in interpreting programs of study and making sound pedagogical judgments in practice are key attributes articulated in *Renewing Alberta's Promise* and convincingly affirmed in the survey of social studies teachers in Alberta. In the responses to the question about “what makes your best work possible,” teachers identified issues of time, the need for greater “freedom” to make decisions and plan good learning, and the need for opportunities for professional development based on meaningful collaboration with colleagues.

The language with regard to teachers' work in *Renewing Alberta's Promise* captures what emerged in the study—that is, teachers' work should entail “building the professional capital and practical wisdom of teachers to ensure exemplary instructional practices” (ATA 2015b, 15). Making the professional autonomy of teachers a reality requires an enhanced view of the teacher; not as one who only implements the program of studies, but one who, working closely with others, is also a researcher and innovator and is comfortable with taking necessary risks. As many writers have argued, teaching is not simply a technical profession. Social studies teachers are not just “implementers” of curriculum, but on a daily basis they are immersed in the “rough ground” of practice—practice that is best understood as practical judgment or wisdom (Dunne 1993). Biesta (2014) expresses aptly the quality of judgment that was evident in teachers' responses in the survey. With regard to how judgment is experienced, he writes

Exerting such judgments is not something that is done at the level of school policy documents, but lies at the very heart of what goes on in the classroom and in the relationships between teachers and students—and this goes on again, and again, and again. (p 130)

It is also essential to recognize that improving social studies curriculum, teaching and learning must be part of a broader commitment to taking a whole-system approach to achieving a great school for all, and should be based on the key elements of such an approach as outlined in *Renewing Alberta's Promise*:

- | | |
|---|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Use equity as a driver of reform and renewal.2. Focus for learning and teaching rather than excessive prescription.3. Develop and articulate a coherent research-informed theory of whole-system change. | <ol style="list-style-type: none">4. Develop the professional capital of teachers and school leaders to enable them to lead the change.5. Support teachers' professional responsibility for sound assessment as a path to public assurance. |
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APPENDIX A

 **UNIVERSITY OF
ALBERTA**

 **The Alberta
Teachers' Association**



 **UNIVERSITY OF
ALBERTA**

Page 1

Social Studies Survey - 2015

The Social Studies Council of the Alberta Teachers' Association is interested in your views regarding the current social studies curriculum and your current experiences regarding teaching and learning in your social studies classes. We would like to hear from if you **are currently teaching one or more social studies courses at any grade level (elementary, junior high and/or senior high) in an Alberta classroom.**

Your responses to this survey will assist the Council in determining how to most effectively advocate on your behalf in order to insure that potential future changes to the Social Studies Program of Study meet the needs of teachers and students.

Please take the time to complete this survey, including the opportunity to make written comments. **ALL RESPONSES WILL BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL.**

A. YOUR OVERALL VIEWS ON SOCIAL STUDIES

Using the scale below, indicate your level of agreement with each of the following statements:

	Strongly agree (1)	Agree (2)	Neutral (3)	Disagree (4)	Strongly disagree (5)	Not sure
The most important goal in social studies should be the development of active and engaged citizens of a democratic society	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
It is essential to focus on multiple perspectives in all components of social studies courses	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Part of my job as a teacher is to foster the growth of entrepreneurial spirit in students	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
In the sciences, answers to complex questions are more objective, while in social studies, answers are more subjective	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Effective social studies teaching means helping students to transform both themselves and their society	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
It is difficult to systematically integrate critical thinking skills in effective ways	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
A major purpose of social studies is to help students to become more adept at dealing with with complexity, ambiguity and uncertainty	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Social studies classes should be fully integrated with students of diverse abilities	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

B. YOUR VIEWS ON THE CURRENT PROGRAM OF STUDY

Using the scale below, indicate your level of agreement with each of the following statements:

[illegible]

Using the scale below, indicate your level of agreement with each of the following statements:

	Strongly agree (1)	Agree (2)	Neutral (3)	Disagree (4)	Strongly disagree (5)	Not sure
At present there is too much content to be covered in social studies	☐	☐	☒	☐	☐	☐
The authorized social studies learning resources provide a solid basis for teaching and learning	☐	☐	☒	☐	☐	☐
Social studies classrooms are quite teacher-centred	☐	☐	☒	☐	☐	☐
There are ample opportunities to explore in depth interesting topics on a regular basis	☐	☐	☒	☐	☐	☐
The majority of the time in most social studies classrooms involves acquiring information and knowledge	☐	☐	☒	☐	☐	☐
There currently is too much emphasis on multiple choice testing rather than on performance testing (e.g., writing)	☐	☐	☒	☐	☐	☐

Using the scale below, indicate your level of agreement with each of the following statements:

[illegible]

E. YOUR TEACHING AND LEARNING CONDITIONS

Following are several elements related to your current conditions. Use the scale below to indicate your degree of satisfaction with each element.

	Very satisfied (1)	Somewhat satisfied (2)	Neutral (3)	Somewhat dissatisfied (4)	Very dissatisfied (5)	Not sure
Job security	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Salary and fringe benefits	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Physical condition of your classroom(s)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Number of students in your class(es)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Expectations to adapt and accommodate students with special needs	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Availability of books, technology and other classroom resources	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Clerical support within the school	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Professional autonomy	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Expectations regarding report cards and reporting to parents	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Workload	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

F. YOUR OBSERVATIONS ON POTENTIAL CHANGES TO SOCIAL STUDIES

The purpose of the following section is to enable you to comment on “what to change and what to keep” with regard to the current program of studies for social studies. In the space below please use this opportunity to comment about the curriculum in general, and about specific levels (e.g., elementary) or courses (e.g., Grade 7 Social Studies).

Please consider any or all of the following in your responses:

- The K-12 social studies curriculum in general
- The Elementary social studies curriculum (K-6)
- The Junior High social studies curriculum (7-9)
- The High School social studies curriculum (10-12)

What are the two or three most important changes that should be made in Alberta's current social studies curriculum?

Type here

What are the two or three most important elements that should be kept in Alberta's current social studies curriculum?

Type here

G. YOUR OBSERVATIONS ON TEACHING SOCIAL STUDIES TODAY

The purpose of this section is to enable you to offer your views about instruction, teaching and learning in your social studies classroom(s).

What are the two or three most important things that 'get in the way' of your ability to do your best work as a teacher in your social studies classroom(s)?

Type here

What are the two or three most important changes that would make it more possible to do your best work as a teacher in your social studies classroom(s)?

Type here

H. DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

The following information does not identify you. Select only one response to each of the following questions.

Teachers' convention that you attend:

- ☐ Mighty Peace
- ☐ Northeast
- ☐ North Central
- ☐ Greater Edmonton
- ☐ Central East
- ☐ Central Alberta
- ☐ Palliser
- ☐ Calgary City
- ☐ South West
- ☐ Southeast

Highest degree held:

- ☐ Bachelor
- ☐ Masters
- ☐ Doctorate

Years of university education for salary purposes:

- ☐ Four
- ☐ Five
- ☐ Six
- ☐ Seven

Institution from which you obtained your bachelor of education degree:

- ☐ University of Alberta
- ☐ Campus Saint-Jean
- ☐ University of Calgary
- ☐ Concordia University College
- ☐ The King's University College
- ☐ University of Lethbridge
- ☐ Other (please specify below)

Please specify institution:

Your teaching experience, including current year:

- ☐ 1 year
- ☐ 2 to 4 years
- ☐ 5 to 9 years
- ☐ 10 to 14 years
- ☐ 15 to 19 years
- ☐ 20 to 30 years
- ☐ Over 30 years

Your current assignment is related exclusively or mainly to students in:

- ☐ ECS/Kindergarten
- ☐ Grades 1 to 6
- ☐ Grades 7 to 9
- ☐ Grades 10 to 12
- ☐ Combinations (please specify)

Indicate which ONE of the following best describes your current assignment:

- ☐ Teaching social studies in an elementary classroom
- ☐ Teaching full-time social studies in junior high
- ☐ Teaching full-time social studies in senior high
- ☐ Teaching some social studies classes in junior high
- ☐ Teaching some social studies classes in senior high

You are employed:

☐ Full-time ☐ Part-time

Your age:

- ☐ 25 and younger
☐ 26–30 years old
☐ 31–35 years old
☐ 36–40 years old
☐ 41–45 years old
☐ 46–50 years old
☐ 51–55 years old
☐ 56–60 years old
☐ 61–65 years old
☐ Over 65

Your gender:

☐ Female ☐ Male

Thank you for completing this survey. If you would be willing to participate in a follow-up interview or focus group please contact Hans Smits: hsmits@ucalgary.ca

APPENDIX B

COMMENTS ABOUT ELEMENTARY/JR HIGH/ HIGH SCHOOL

Level	Frequency	Exemplary Comments
Elementary	134	Grade 6 social studies needs a MAJOR overhaul (so boring for teachers and students), Grade 5 social studies is TOO MUCH! Too many objectives to cover. Students should be learning more about Canada in early elementary.
Junior High	110	The Grade 9 social studies program is boring for students. Grade 7—content needs major overhaul.
High School	115	The actual events of World War II (which used to be taught under the 20th-century history part of the old Social 30/33) are not specifically covered anywhere in the [Grades] 10–12 curriculum. We need to understand that as there are different branches of science (physics, chem, bio), which all need individual attention and differentiation, there are different branches of social studies (history, civics, geopolitics, law, psychology, sociology).

Level	Frequency	Exemplary Comments
Elementary	48	Division 2, Grade 5's emphasis on Canada—add more content. Grade 4—natural resources, past, present, future—Alberta's historical periods (fur trade, settlement, etc).
Junior High	47	The Grade 8 curriculum is what I call the last of the “old” great curriculums of case studies on other cultures. As a first-time Grade 7 social teacher who typically teaches language arts, I was pleasantly surprised at the specific nature of the outcomes in the program of studies for social studies.
High School	51	I like the overarching themes that cover [Grades] 10–12. Aboriginal perspectives, the Grade 11 and 12 topics are very good for that age level.

Level	Frequency	Exemplary Comments
Elementary	52	It can be challenging to find resources in French for the Grade 3 curriculum, at the Grade 3 level. Too much reading for Grade 2s.
Junior High	17	I make time to have these conversations with my students, but I don't have the freedom the way the existing Grade 8 curriculum works. Grade 7—amount of objectives to cover, access to technologies, lack of follow-up resources from publishers once textbooks have been sold to districts.
High School	45	Diploma exam—teaching students to fill in a bubble sheet is useless and a waste of their and my time. At the Grade 12 level the students still need to be taught how to create written responses that fulfill the criteria that will be evaluated, particularly if they have not had English 30 prior to the social course.

Level	Frequency	Exemplary Comments
Elementary	43	[Fewer] objectives to cover—it needs to be more relevant to elementary students. Align the curriculum so that topics match the interests of students at various ages. Have curriculum objectives that focus on Division I students learning about their own community and their role in their community (geography, history, responsibilities and rights).
Junior High	9	Less curriculum to be covered. No PATs for Grade 9s! It is VERY dry and could stand one or two pieces of “meat” infused in it. Think about it—expecting the average Grade 9 student (age 14) to be enthralled by federal government, YCJA, immigration, Charter of Rights or USA/Canada economics is a bit much without some kind of bone to chew on. The Grade 8 is a wonderful curriculum to teach and the students enjoy it—how about some topic exchanging?

High School	22	Thrilled that diploma exam will only be worth 30 per cent of the final grade! Reduce the number of and specificity of technology outcomes—rather, give suggestions of ways to use technology as a tool to enhance learning. Related Issue 4 at the 10, 20, and 30 levels is redundant in all three cases.
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COMMENTS ABOUT SPECIFIC GRADES

Questions	Frequency	Exemplary Comment
Q6	166/422	Grade 6—democracy overload. We need to teach students more about the world—not just democracy. What about China—how their government is different but also learn about its culture. Ancient Athens—why not learn more about their culture, rather than just their democracy. Less information to cover so we can have time to explore more issues/current events. Grade 10 level course should deal with ideology, then nationalism in Grade 11, moving on to a more global perspective in Grade 12—more focus on global citizenship, more critical analysis of contemporary systems.
Q7	73/419	I appreciate that Grade 8 includes a lot of stories. There should be more of a focus on teaching history, but forming opinions on things based on that knowledge. For Grade 6, absolutely keep government. There is almost always an election, there are always multiple resources to relate it to current events, field trips to the Leg and City Hall are free, local MLAs will usually come visit, so it makes it real and relevant for the students. Keep current events—but make it even more a part of the curriculum.
Q8	51/432	Critical thinking is really hard for most of the students in Grade 6. They are not just there yet. Also, there is a lot of complex vocabulary and concepts and the kids have a hard time to connect these words to something they know. Too many concepts to juggle with at the same time: the kids with average or poor working memory tend to fail social studies. Class size—it is hard to accommodate for 29 at a Grade 6 level when a quarter have reading difficulties and levels range from Grades 3 to 7.

Q9	32/415	Changing to curriculum in Grade 9 to stuff 14-year-olds care about—not language rights or pensions—economy yes, government, totally! More interesting Grade 6 curriculum. Less content in Grade 6 curriculum.
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THEMATIC ANALYSIS QUESTION 6

Theme	Frequency	Exemplary Comment
Critical thinking	59	The content needs to be reduced in courses to allow time to focus on the big ideas and higher-level thinking, as well as engaging students. We need to work on a balance between knowledge, engagement, higher-level thinking and risk taking.
Less focus on Canada	55	Stop beating students about the head and neck with Canada, and specifically with FNMI issues. I am in support of teaching Canada, but other interesting topics such as Japan, Brazil and other countries have been taken out.
Role of inquiry	53	Move away from multiple choice and toward constructive inquiry, especially Grades 11 and 12. More discussion-based inquiries about current events in the elementary divisions.
Exams	52	HATE HATE HATE the multiple-choice questions—many students who know the material and can express their deeper understanding of major concepts in writing will totally melt down on multiple-choice tests—the real world does not give us multiple-choice tests, why do we use them in classrooms? The Social Studies 30-1 and 30-2 diploma exams are terrible; the whole approach to diploma exam testing needs reworking.
Appropriateness	51	Align topics with interests of students at certain ages. Students hate it, and frankly, don't care when they are 14 or 15.
Resources	46	Provide a greater variety of resources to meet the needs of a diverse group of learners. I struggle to find relevant and meaningful resources for students.

Theme	Frequency	Exemplary Comment
Role of geography	46	A geography component needs to be added. Grade 2 does not understand geography.
Aboriginal/ FNMI	43	In terms of Aboriginal perspectives, I believe it is extremely important to incorporate FNMI perspectives in social studies but find that it is inauthentic and awkwardly fit into the current curriculum. Aboriginal perspectives are very important and as a beginning teacher interested in the area I have taken extra courses specifically on the topic, but the classrooms I have been in during my last practicum have put very little emphasis on them.
Global perspective	43	Permit teachers the freedom to address course themes (world views, globalization etc) using any historical or contemporary content they feel will engage their students in the required thinking and analysis. Globalization is a VERY complex topic for the Grade 10 level and is almost always watered down as a result.
Too much content	42	Less content to “cover”; more teacher independence in deciding what is relevant at which grades; increase in real-world and inquiry-based teaching opportunities; completely change Grade 3 curriculum; add something besides democracy to Grade 6 curriculum. I think that there is a bit too much content in the 10, 20, 30 courses and could be cut down some to allow for more in-depth look at some topics.
Too many outcomes	41	I would like to see fewer outcomes in the Grade 7 social program of studies, as the time allotted to the course is insufficient to cover them in the depth they deserve. Reconsider outcomes—fewer but essential outcomes.
Current events	37	Less information to cover so we can have time to explore more issues/current events. Textbooks should be replaced with dynamic online resources that are current and relevant (this will also eliminate many teachers’ concerns with “covering all the content” as many teachers who use the textbook seem to think they need to teach it page by page, rather than follow the actual curriculum and select content knowledge based on the students’ interest, current events and the teacher’s expertise).

Theme	Frequency	Exemplary Comment
History	37	For high school—more history regarding the world wars. I would like to see more world history brought into our curricula.
Repetition	36	Far too much repetition of content in Grades 10, 11 and 12. While topics such as Japanese internment and FLQ crisis have a different focus in all grades, they appear in all three years. The content is too repetitive and students get bored learning about the same issue over and over.
Too much focus on knowledge objectives	33	Fewer objectives, allowing more depth. Removing some knowledge-based content in favour of more inquiry-based and skill objectives.
Diversity	8	Provide a greater variety of resources to meet the needs of a diverse group of learners. Less emphasis on First Nations, more emphasis on cultural diversity.
Flow	8	I have had a lot of positive feedback from the Social 8 and Social 20 programs with how content, skills and values “flow” between topics. The current curriculum is a hodgepodge of elements with a poorly designed focus on issues.

THEMATIC ANALYSIS QUESTION 7

Theme	Frequency	Exemplary Comment
Multiple perspectives	75	Emphasis on examining multiple perspectives on topics and issues. Examining multiple perspectives.
Critical thinking	70	A focus on critical thinking and effective communication. Critical thinking is a must, an ability to investigate a broad (broader than currently done due to exam requirements) variety of world, national and local events as fits the students in the classroom.
Skills	60	All the skills and processes are very important, and should be kept. Focus on skills.
Globalization	54	Developing global citizens that are active and engaged members of a community. Globalization- and citizenship-related concepts are very valuable.
Current events	53	Focus on current events to be used to develop higher-order thinking skills. Current events/affairs—but we need more time to cover these.
Aboriginal	42	Focus on FNMI experiences and perspectives. I really liked the focus on multiple perspectives and Aboriginal issues, both of which are important in Alberta's multicultural classrooms.
Nationalism	39	Canadian nationalism. The unit on nationalism needs to start prior to WW1.
Role of inquiry	39	Continue inquiry, as project-based learning fits with this. If the decision is to teach "issues," inquiry, multiple perspectives and critical thinking skills, then adequately resource those issues in basic student and teacher materials, so that a mature investigation of these issues is possible.
Role of geography	32	Basic geography and map work. Geography of our country.
Economics	29	Economic globalization. History, economics, democracy.

Theme	Frequency	Exemplary Comment
Ideologies	28	The focus on democracy and ideology. Examination of ideological perspectives and a concern with the link between ideas—philosophy—and actions.
History	27	Canadian history. History leading up to events (WWI into Roaring 20s, Great Depression, WWII, development into Cold War), Canadian government and how it functions/party platforms, Imperialism and rise of British Empire with legacies as well as advancements that spawned from this.
Citizenship	26	Emphasis on citizenship roles. Focus on citizenship in Grade 12.
Exams	23	Continue to have a written component on the diploma exam for social studies; continue to stress the importance of inquiry in the social studies program; continue to stress the importance of teacher choice in case studies utilized and content delivery. These exams were highly respected during the 1984–2000 era, but are widely criticized now by Alberta teachers, students and parents.
Writing	19	Writing assessments. Writing is very important—while dealing with sources can be challenging for some students, it is an important life skill.
Alberta	15	History and background of why Alberta is the way it is today, what are the issues that Albertans must deal with, why do we have two school systems, why was Alberta settled, why did the pioneers pick our area to settle, where did they come from? These are the types of things Division I students can learn, not that our quality of life differs from others in countries our students have never been to—how can they relate? History of our province, geography, map reading.
Government	14	For Grade 6, absolutely keep government. The study on governments and history approached in a more exciting way and at the students' level.
War	14	Canada in conflict is important, WWI, WWII, Korean War, Afghanistan, peacekeeping. History—World War I, World War II.

Theme	Frequency	Exemplary Comment
Themes	12	I like the overarching themes that cover [Grades] 10–12. The themes for each year—this creates a much better connection for the overall course for students and allows them to see how the content connects (Social 10–12).
Values and attitudes	10	The values and attitudes are the most important part of the entire curriculum. Skills and processes and values and attitudes are the most important elements in the curriculum.
Diversity	9	Any outcomes dealing with citizenship and diversity—emphasis on FNMI issues. Learning about diversity/multiculturalism/acceptance; learning about other countries (India, Tunisia etc); learning about our history (though maybe not so in depth).
ICT outcomes	4	Having ICT outcomes is also important; however, I feel like they need to be modified for the way technology is changing. Integration with ICT outcomes that are current and relevant.

THEMATIC ANALYSIS QUESTION 8

Theme	Frequency	Exemplary comments
Class size	75	Class size—40+ students in my class has become a regular thing. Class size—too many students to adequately address the needs of all.
Lack of technology	74	Access to technology—physically getting computers or Chromebooks, and if we are using the school's Wi-Fi, it's often slow. I need more access to computer technology for the students.
Class diversity	72	The diversity in classrooms is almost unmanageable these days. The diversity of learning levels in the classroom, due to inclusive education.

Theme	Frequency	Exemplary comments
Curricular issues	72	Inflexibility of the curriculum to adapt to unique and creative approaches. Content-heavy curriculum makes less time for exploration of a topic or extending a concept into current events or alternative case studies.
Time to prepare	56	The amount of preparation time needed to create large-scale and in-depth projects for students to tackle. Finding the time to design, research, prepare materials for and implement these engaging lessons is a major challenge and obstacle.
Too much content	37	Amount of content is difficult to cover while meeting all other skill goals. Excessive content to cover at the expense of real-world activities, experiences etc.
Inclusion	34	Dealing with inclusion and trying to meet the needs of very diverse learners in one classroom. Full inclusion and lack of proper support.
Marking load	29	The other thing is having the time to mark all the written work I would like my students to do. Marking load for written work.
Assessment	29	Provincial Achievement Tests are assessment malpractice. Too much over-assessment and reporting.
Administrative issues	21	Board administrators with always-expanding expectations of performance, communication with parents and “innovation.” The “latest” initiative from above, which often suggests what we’ve done in the classroom is wrong/antiquated/ineffective, but comes from some literature and/or administrator, which clearly doesn’t take into account what we DO actually do in the class that ultimately amounts to the same thing.
Extracurricular	19	Extracurricular expectations sometimes become a significant distraction at times during the school year when I would like [my] focus to be on teaching and learning. All the “extra” stuff that is a part of the job but not necessarily in our job descriptions.

Theme	Frequency	Exemplary comments
Overall expectations	16	Increased teacher expectations. Too many expectations placed on me—reporting and grading are taking up too much of my focus.
Overall workload	14	Excessive workload that senior high humanities teachers are faced with. Little time to spend with students because workload has increased SO much.
Student behaviour/ attitudes	12	It can be so difficult to get kids to be engaged and do the research that could make class discussions/inquiry learning so much more engaging (the highly motivated kids get it, but I spend so much time chasing the kids who aren't!). Student apathy—have to be very creative as students no longer take notes so getting kids to learn in other ways, student attendance, the amount of knowledge—too much breadth, not enough depth
Parents	11	Reporting to parents; dealing with all the “out-of-classroom” interruptions is a distraction. Especially parent e-mails—ugh! Also struggling with student apathy/sense of entitlement.

THEMATIC ANALYSIS QUESTION 9

Theme	Frequency	Exemplary comments
Resources	63	More resources available that promote critical thinking, decision making, innovative thinking etc. Continued help with locating resources (having people who are knowledgeable in the curriculum develop and update online files and resources).
Technology	51	There's an enormous push on technology, which is positive; however, there is little time and training on the various programs that we can use. Improved access to technology.

Theme	Frequency	Exemplary comments
Class size	47	Smaller class sizes to be able to make a stronger connection with the students; prepared materials that are relevant to the curriculum and easily available online, which would challenge students to strengthen their research and organizational skills. Class sizes that actually meet the targets (not an average among the district).
More support	32	Extra supports—even just with writing IPPs, anything that makes it easier and restricts the workload just a bit. More opportunities for collaboration with colleagues around the province. Support for special ed students and ESL students.
Streaming by ability	28	I am one person expected to teach too many students coming from too many ability levels and learning styles. Streaming by ability or more aides.
Too much content	27	Decrease content to allow more current event discussions. Less content to cover so we could look more in depth at topics that the students are interested in.
Time to prepare	26	Social studies is an ever-changing discipline, and more time to prepare materials and keep current is key to being a good teacher. The province needs to provide adequate funding to support planning and preparation time during the day, especially when you compare the quality of our education to that of places like Finland, where each professional spends more time during their day planning, and therefore sees superior results.
Professional development	24	I also think there needs to be more PD directed specifically toward social studies at the junior high and high school levels. PD that is practical and collaborative in order to create lessons that are more engaging for students and can be implemented immediately.
Too many outcomes	24	Fewer knowledge outcomes to allow for longer projects. Reduce the sheer number of outcomes in the program of studies, allowing for more in-depth learning to take place.

Theme	Frequency	Exemplary comments
Collaboration	23	I think it would be nice to have more collaboration among social teachers. Built in collaborative time to meet with colleagues (both intraschool and interschool).
Autonomy	20	More autonomy as to what elements of the curriculum to teach and to emphasize. Professional autonomy to tweak courses to provide opportunities for more in-depth study in some areas and skim others that are questionable in their relevancy.
Curricular issues	19	A less prescriptive curriculum that allows teachers to have the freedom and creativity to create meaningful learning with their students. A curriculum that would allow for a shift in pedagogy would be excellent so that we can effectively teach the content by giving students the skills to uncover what they need to learn.
Project-based learning	18	Allow for more project based learning environments (a cross-curricular approach to all classes), increasing student engagement; making other teachers raise their expectations of what students are capable of achieving. More project-based learning materials.
Assessment	17	Assessments that allow students who are not verbal-linguistic to show what they know. They treat them like nuclear secrets ... enough of that already—stop treating teachers as an enemy force from which valuable assessment materials are withheld.
Current events	17	A framework for including current events into the classroom. Some sort of framework or template for integrating interesting current events into the curriculum. Database of news stories—human interest, sports or other Canadian-centred issues—to draw upon as “hooks” for inquiry-based lessons.
Extra demands	11	Address workload issues (C2 committees DON’T WORK). Class size—limit and address or support class composition issues. Less demands on a teacher.

Theme	Frequency	Exemplary comments
Diversity	10	Inclusion limits my ability to effectively manage and teach my students because they are so diverse in their learning. If we are to have the greatest levels of student diversity in our classrooms then those students should be supported.
Reporting	7	Different reporting expectations and smaller class sizes. Less emphasis on achievement reports/reporting, more opportunity for summative assessment.

APPENDIX C

Highlights from Renewing the Promise of Social Studies in Alberta – A Dialogue

More than 50 social studies educators participated in an invitational dialogue held in Red Deer on Friday, November 6, 2015. The purpose of the meeting was to consider the collective responses to the Social Studies Survey, and to generate insights into the nature of the survey responses (“what we heard”) and the possible implications for future action in light of the survey results.

At the end of the day-long session, participants were asked to complete a “participant reflection” to summarize their views. The following excerpts are drawn from comments written by the 42 participants who responded to the reflection questions.

What We Heard

- Teachers believe in the purpose and potential of social studies to promote citizenship and engagement in our communities. However, there are significant obstacles, evidenced by the survey, to achieving this purpose/potential. The obstacles that stand out to me relate to the tension between knowledge vs in-depth exploration, the challenge of standardized testing, the issue of PD resources, and classroom composition.
- There is strong support for the philosophy of the program.
- There may not be a consistent understanding of key terminology in the social studies program of studies.
- If you want to do multiple perspectives justice, you must be careful to limit the specific objectives presented in the program of studies.
- Repetition and redundancy will hurt engagement as the levels of social studies progress.
- Time: This is the element that represents the ability of teachers to focus on critical thinking skills and multiple perspectives.
- The struggle with finding relevant and engaging resources and finding the time to develop these outside of the textbook.
- Reduce the number of outcomes in order to provide for teacher autonomy/flexibility to respond to students’ interests.
- Too much content, [lack of] time to do richer inquiry, rich tasks, alternative forms of assessment.
- Discrepancies between too much content vs not enough content.
- More access to resources (including technology).
- Teachers need more support in the form of time, resources and PD.
- Current assessment practices impede authentic learning that comes through the inquiry process, historical/critical/creative skills.

- The most important feedback is the data insight we found about the 69 per cent concerned for adapting for special needs.
- Teachers often feel ill-equipped to deal with diverse needs, or all ends of the spectra—skills and technology for support for diverse needs is necessary.
- Integration of technology needs a much more focused approach: teachers need time to learn, too.
- Teachers seem comfortable with aspects of pedagogy that are the most controversial or as sites of resistance.
- Assessment: need to move away from multiple choice.
- Common exams getting in the way of richer inquiries, going deeper.
- More autonomy for teachers to teach from a passion or align with students' interests and passions.
- What is “major transformation”? Who is happy? What is the split within divisions (elementary, junior high, senior high)?
- Disagreement over whether major transformation is necessary or not.

Implications and Action

- The density of the content has to be somehow reduced, so that there is an opportunity to delve into topics. And we must place greater emphasis on skills in our assessments.
- I also need to teach less so that I can teach more. Full time is a huge workload, partly due to some of the issues highlighted in the survey with respect to class size and composition. But mostly, I need to build

time into my timetable to make the changes to my instructional practice to do what I dream of.

- Curriculum revision is necessary to focus on a skills-based program (critical thinking, geographic thinking, historical thinking).
- Revise/rewrite the program of studies to allow for more opportunities to engage in inquiry, research, social action and skill development (ie, less content, fewer outcomes).
- Curriculum design that uses broader outcomes that allow teacher autonomy and student relevance/connect them to their identity and active citizenship.
- The integration of diverse student needs is one of those difficulties that affects all subjects; in social studies it is particularly difficult as a concept- and skills-based subject.
- We can't just change the social studies curriculum—we have to also change school structures. We teach democracy, but we don't practise it in schools.
- Social studies should be the practice of democracy. How can we support and educate teachers to create more just, equitable and democratic classrooms?
- We need to create models/exemplars of active engaged citizenship.
- Professional development/collaboration opportunities should be promoted and enhanced.
- Creation of a nonstatic curriculum: needs to be able to change with more fluidity rather than a “rewrite” every 5 to 10 years.

- Workload restructuring: need for time to create assessments/assignments that truly measure not only content, but skills.
- Investigate the value of the repetition of material from grade to grade.
- Focus on goals like inquiry from a young age so the students are on board and have

the foundational skills by the time they arrive in junior/senior high school.

- Develop digital resources for teachers that promote best practices.
- Assessment needs to reflect priorities (multiple choice diploma vs inquiry etc).



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