

Part 3: Social Studies, History and Geography – What’s New?

This presentation will focus on the specific changes to the Social Studies, Grades 1 to 6; History and Geography, Grades 7 and 8 curriculum.

On June 6, 2013, the revised social studies, history and geography curriculum document was released. It was posted on the Ministry of Education website.

The changes that were made are all based on the recommendations found in the recommendation report.

We have divided social studies by grade, not strand; we have created overview pages for every grade and course in social studies, history and geography; and we have also changed the order of the overall expectations for every strand.

So...what’s new? Overview pages. For each grade in social studies, there is an overview page that outlines how both strands work together. In history and geography there is an overview page for each subject in each grade. It allows for clarity and the big picture of what the content and intent of the social studies, history and geography program is for that grade. It provides teachers with a usable framework and shows paths for integration.

Please refer to the [sample overview page for Grade 4](#) that can be found on page 96 of the document or that you can download from this site.

These charts are meant to present an overview of the grade specific curriculum, and is meant to provide a starting point for planning and instruction. For each overall expectation, which are listed in the first column, it identifies a related concept, or concepts, of thinking.

We have included big ideas on the overview page. The big ideas provide context for the overall expectations and the concepts of disciplinary thinking that are related to them. The big ideas reflect the enduring understandings that students retain from their learning, transfer to other subjects, and draw upon throughout their lives.

There are also framing questions that are overarching questions related to the overall expectations and big ideas. They are intended to stimulate students’ critical thinking and to encourage them to consider the broader relevance of what they are studying.

The last column is on sample spatial skills. Students use spatial skills and tools to analyse and construct various types of maps and graphs. By developing these skills, students will be able to understand and analyses visual data and information, contributing to their ability to solve problems. This highlights the shift to a skill-based learning to focus the learning on helping students acquire and practice the skills needed to be a spatially literate person. There is also a Map and Globe, and Graphing Continuum in Appendix C and it covers the learning of these skills from grades 1 to 12.

We have changed the order of the overall expectations. This chart highlights the changes made to the order of expectations. The order follows a backward design model. Overall expectation number one is about the application of the students' learning; overall expectation number two is about the use of the inquiry process; and overall expectation number three is about understanding context of the specific topic.

For each overall expectation there is a related group of specific expectations. These appear under an expanded subheading. For example, based on the Grade 3 strand, Heritage and Identity: Communities in Canada, 1780-1850, the subheading for application reads "A1. Application: Life in Canada – Then and Now." Following that subheading are three related specific expectations.

With the specific expectations we have included examples, sample questions and, in Grades 1 to 3, "student talk."

Examples are updated and made more inclusive of diverse perspectives and experiences.

Sample questions are included to illustrate the kinds of questions teachers might pose in relation to the requirement specified in the expectation.

In the section "student talk," student responses are included to demonstrate some of the content and scope of the intended learning. "Student talk" also demonstrates how a student may discuss the topic or issue of the specific expectation in a way that makes it personally relevant to them.

All three of these items are included to align with the government policies and directives such as *Realizing the Promise of Diversity: Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy*, *The Ontario First Nation, Métis and Inuit Education Policy Framework*, the policy framework for

environmental education: *Acting Today, Shaping Tomorrow*, and *A Sound Investment: Financial Literacy Education in Ontario School*.

The examples, sample question, and student talk are included in the document as supports, but they are optional. Teachers will use their professional judgement to determine the most effective way of supporting student learning by developing lessons that meet their students' needs.

Topics have been updated to address identified gaps including diverse perspectives and student relevance. This also aids in the alignment of this curriculum to support other policy initiatives around equity and inclusive education, First Nation, Métis and Inuit perspectives and 21st century learning.

Critical thinking is embedded within the social studies, history, and geography and Canadian and world studies curriculum through use of the Concepts of Disciplinary Thinking and the Inquiry Process.

This highlights the shift in the curriculum from being more content-focused towards being a thinking and inquiry-based curriculum in order to focus the learning on the processing of the content in ways best suited to each subject.

Curriculum focuses on developing students' ability to apply concepts of disciplinary thinking, which are inherent to "doing" each subject. This was done to allow for the application of a coherent approach to learning for Grades 1 to 12. It is a comprehensive, research-based approach addressing the needs of students in the 21st century.

These changes were made based on extensive research and consultation with experts in Canada and other jurisdictions and in other Ontario government ministries.

So what's new in elementary social studies? There has been a change in the title of the strand. It is now called Heritage and Identity. In this strand, students are provided with opportunities to explore various topics that will enable them to develop an understanding of the connections between the past and present, of interactions within and between diverse communities, and of rights and responsibilities associated with citizenship.

As mentioned before, the topics have been updated to address identified gaps including

diverse perspectives and student relevance.

The key changes are in Grades 4, 5, and 6. The topic change in Grade 4, Early Societies (3000 B.C.E. – 1500 C.E.), and the creation of a new topic in Grade 6, Communities in Canada, Past and Present, was done to be more inclusive of a broader variety of First Nations perspectives. It also improves the flow of content to provide a better context and more background for subsequent grades. It also provides a better opportunity for success as students without background knowledge and exposure to topics can be prepared by classroom experience.

Something important to note about the revised curriculum is the emphasis on inquiry. Due to that emphasis, the focus is on the curriculum expectations related to the skills developed within each grade. Students, for example, can be applying these inquiry or discipline skills using a variety of different content. What students need by the end of a grade is to have learned and developed the same skills.

So when you are looking at the 4500 year time spread for the revised Grade 4 Early Societies strand, there is no expectation that a teacher is to teach all of the content, from all societies, from all regions of the world that ever existed during those 4500 years. Instead, individual students may choose to become experts on one or two societies from that time period and then compare and contrast their learning with that of other students who are experts on different societies. So all students in a class have learned and developed the skills associated with studying early societies but not all have studied the same society. The specific expectations have been developed to be broader in nature, whereas the examples, which are optional, list a variety of societies that students could choose to study.

The second strand in social studies has also had a title change. It is now People and Environments. This strand focuses on natural and built environments and the connections between the two. Students explore geographic, social, political, economic, and environmental issues in the context of local, regional, national, and global communities. They also develop an understanding of the social and environmental responsibilities of citizens and of various levels of government.

The shift in some of the topics were done so that the realities of students' lives could be reflected in the curriculum. It is important to give students the skills to reflect on the ways in

which they interact within their own community.

The changes throughout the two strands of social studies were done to align with *the Ontario Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy, Shaping a Culture of Respect in Our Schools*, and *Learning for All, K to 12*. It was also done to align with recommended goals in *Acting Today, Shaping Tomorrow*, to highlight the inclusion of Aboriginal perspectives that is consistent with *Ontario's First Nation, Métis and Inuit Education Policy Framework*.

So what's new in history? There were strong recommendations from consultations to reduce the number of strands and for a reduction in number of specific expectations.

In both history and geography, we have gone down from three strands to two strands. This is also tied to evaluation and assessment for the two reporting periods. The strands for history are organized chronologically across the two grades. Students learn how to apply concepts of historical thinking and develop their understanding of how we study the past. The history strands help prepare students for the compulsory history course in Grade 10, which focuses on Canada from 1914 to the present.

There are stronger connections to social history and the inclusion of diverse perspectives. The realities of students' lives needed to be reflected in the curriculum.

As mentioned before, there are now only two strands in geography. These strands focus on world physical and human geography. Students develop their spatial skills and learn how to apply concepts of geographic thinking and the geographic inquiry process.

In order to support teachers, we have included expanded examples and sample questions that show world examples and do not refer to Canada to avoid duplication with Grade 9, *Issues in Canadian Geography*.

There is also an added emphasis on sustainability as it relates to natural resources and global settlement.

In Grade 7, students will examine the relationships between Earth's physical features and the distribution and use of natural resources while exploring ways of preserving global resources. While in Grade 8, they will explore issues related to human settlement and sustainability.

These changes also are aligned with *Ontario's First Nation, Métis and Inuit Education Policy*

