

# The Instructional Environment

## Resource-based Learning

The Department of Education for Newfoundland and Labrador endorses the philosophy for resource-based learning described in *Learning to Learn: Policies and Guidelines for the Implementation for Resource-based Learning in Newfoundland and Labrador Schools* (1991). It is a “philosophy of education which places the student at the centre, which advocates the provision of learning experiences that meet the needs of individual students and which actively involves them in the learning process” (*Learning to Learn*). In keeping with this philosophy, it is necessary to develop learning experiences which employ a variety of instructional strategies and use an expanded array of resources. Resource-based learning, as outlined in the *Learning to Learn* document, provides the framework for this kind of learning.

Resource-based learning has the following features:

- students actively participate in their learning
- a wide variety of resources is used
- teachers employ many different instructional techniques

Resource-based learning has many advantages. By placing students at the centre of the instructional process they:

- acquire skills and attitudes necessary for independent, lifelong learning. They learn how to learn, one of the fundamental aims of education; interact in group work, sharing and participating in a variety of situations;
- think critically and creatively, experimenting and taking risks as they become independent problem-solvers and decision-makers;
- make choices and accept responsibility for these choices, thereby making learning more relevant and personal. (*Learning to Learn*, p. 3-4).

## Instructional Strategies

Effective instruction in World History 3201 builds on the general pedagogical approaches and teacher practices outlined in *A Framework for Social Studies: Navigating the Future* (1993). The Framework advocates the position that the most effective instructional approaches are resource based and eclectic in nature.

The classroom teacher chooses those instructional strategies and methods deemed most appropriate given the needs of the learner, the outcomes and the resources available.

The suggested approaches require balance between the teacher-centred transmission orientation and the more student-centred transaction and transformation orientations. Transmission approaches involve direct instruction such as lectures, didactic questions, structured overviews, and explicit teaching. The addition of transactional and transformation strategies will make for more effective instruction. For example, the instructional approaches of role play, debates, brain storming, co-operative learning groups, interviewing, and problem-solving can be employed. Other strategies such as research projects, case studies, reflective discussion and concept mapping can vary the ways in which students can learn. Information technologies such as video, CD-ROM and the Internet can bring the history of the 20th century into sharp focus with the actual recordings of events and personalities. Students can observe, for example, trench warfare, Hitler's oratory techniques, the social conditions of the 1930s, the building of the Berlin Wall and its final destruction. Students should also examine, where possible, different sources used to record and analyze historical and current events. They should examine copies of primary documents and read news accounts demonstrating different perspectives and interpretations.

Within the framework of resource-based learning, teachers should use a variety of instructional strategies in designing meaningful learning experiences for students in World History, to meet the different learning needs and styles of the students and to develop the competencies and dispositions outlined in the curriculum outcomes. Some of the delineations have built-in competencies that lend themselves to specific strategies. For example:

- 1.1.2 identify on a map...
- 1.3.4 draw conclusions about...
- 2.1.5 compare the roles...
- 2.2.5 using documents explain...
- 3.1.4 analyze resources for...
- 3.2.8 judge whether or not...
- 4.1.4 evaluate the reaction...
- 4.2.4 use documents to show...
- 5.1.5 assess the methods...
- 6.1.2 analyze document...

World History 3201 must go beyond the exclusive use of mastery level, note taking and an emphasis on facts and dates. To do this and employ strategies which are more transactional and transformational will require resources in addition to those which are prescribed for the course. A well-stocked learning resource centre housing a variety of print, non-print and electronic materials is invaluable to supplement and complement the text and meet the learning needs of the students. Electronic links to the Internet, other schools and other libraries is also desirable as more and more information becomes available in those formats. Teachers who diversify their instructional strategies to include these kinds of resources will find the course more professionally rewarding and their student's learning will be significantly enhanced.

## Writing a Research Paper

### Identify a Topic

The first and very important step in writing a research paper is choosing a topic. It should be a topic which is of interest, is important enough to be worth the time and well defined enough to find appropriate resources.

Once a general topic is identified it is necessary to narrow it down to a more specific purpose. For example, if a student is interested in the topic World War I, it might be appropriate to examine the causes of World War I or the impact of World War I on a particular country rather than trying to look at the topic in a more general way.

### Develop a Thesis Statement

A thesis statement in a research paper expresses an opinion about the topic on which the whole paper is based. A research paper is not just the presentation of information, it is often a persuasion or argumentation paper which attempts to get a reader to accept a particular opinion or point of view. Everything in the paper depends on the thesis, for the entire purpose is to explain, clarify, define and illustrate it and thus persuade the reader of its truth.

Examples of thesis statements include:

- the change to a market economy in Russia has had a negative impact on the social welfare of many of the country's citizens.
- the Vietnam War is a "war that accomplished nothing".

- the policy of appeasement was responsible for the outbreak of World War II.
- the dropping of the A-Bomb on Hiroshima was a necessary action in World War II.

## Locate Sources of Information

Students need to identify the main ideas and key words in the thesis statement and use these as headings to search for information on the topic. There are various places in a Learning Resource Centre to search for information such as:

### **A. The Reference Section**

General information on many topics can be found in print encyclopedias, dictionaries, atlases, and yearbooks as well as a variety of other reference books. This is usually a good place to start research since it is possible to find a brief overview of the topic which provides a basis for making a more detailed search.

### **B. The General Collection (Fiction, Non-fiction, Audio-Visual Materials)**

The card catalog, often as part of an on-line public access catalog, is a listing of all the materials which are housed in the Learning Resource Centre - books, audio-visual materials, etc. Students can look here under the headings they have identified to see if there are materials they can use. They need to note the call number of each item; check to see if it is available; find the item and scan its contents to see if it has information relevant to their topic and thesis statement; and check this material out for further examination.

### **C. Periodicals**

Most resource centres have a fairly extensive collection of periodicals. Students can use the periodical indexes such as *The Canadian Index* and the *Abridged Guide to Periodical Literature* to find periodical articles relevant to the topic and thesis statement. They should make sure the periodicals identified are available in the resource centre.

### **D. Vertical File**

Vertical files contain a variety of materials such as pamphlets, posters, brochures, and newspaper clippings on many different topics. Students should check the alphabetical listing to see if it contains anything on their topics.

**E. CD-ROM**

Most resource centres have a number of items on CD-ROM which may be helpful in your research. There are programs such as electronic encyclopedias, Canadian daily newspapers, electronic full-text magazine indexes, time-lines, and history programs. Information from these programs can usually be printed or can be saved to disk and accessed through a word-processing program.

**E. Internet/World Wide Web**

There is information available on the Internet relevant to many topics. If students have access to this resource, they may want to do an electronic search using one of the powerful electronic search engines available. Information may be downloaded to disk and accessed through a word-processing program.

It is important to evaluate the source of the information students find on the Internet. Publishing on this medium is open to everyone and the information may not always be accurate. There are various criteria available for evaluating Internet/World Wide Web sites. A good site to check for evaluation criteria is KATHY SCHROCK'S GUIDE FOR EDUCATORS at <http://www.capecod.net/Wixon/eval.htm>. This site contains critical checklists for evaluating web sites and also has links to other sources for evaluation.

**G. Inter-library Loans**

Resource centres usually have catalogs of audio-visual materials from places such as the National Film Board, the Public Libraries and the School Board District Media Centres. Materials can sometimes be borrowed from these centres by checking with the Learning Resource Teacher. Materials can also be borrowed by inter-library loan from public libraries and university libraries.

**H. Human and Community Resources**

There may be people in the community who have some expertise or have personally experienced a topic that students may be researching and may be willing to share these experiences. Interviews with these people can prove to be a valuable source of information. Students should make sure that relevant questions are formulated prior to the interview and that notes are taken during the interview. There may also be a variety of resources in the community such as public libraries, museums, government departments, associations, etc. which often provide pertinent information.

### **Record Sources of Information**

It is important to make note of information sources. It may be necessary to go back to them in the course of the research and they will be needed for the bibliography. The following information should be recorded about each source - author, title, publisher, place of publication, copyright date, call number, and any other pertinent information.

### **Take Notes**

Note-taking is an important part of the research process. It should be emphasized for students to read carefully and make sure that the information being recorded is relevant, not only to the topic but to the thesis statement. It is also important to ensure that the sources of information are accurate and reliable.

When taking notes it is critical to record the source of the information and the page numbers. Notes should be written as briefly as possible- key words and phrases, not complete sentences. If an item is used as a direct quote in the paper it must be copied exactly as it is written in the original source and enclosed in quotation marks.

### **Prepare an Outline**

The outline is the framework for a research paper. It is the means by which students organize how the information in the paper will be presented beginning with the introduction and ending with the conclusion.

### **Write the First Draft of the Paper**

When students are satisfied that they have enough information, they should begin to write the first draft of their paper. At this time all they need is the outline, the notes and a dictionary or thesaurus.

A research paper should consist of an introductory paragraph in which the topic is introduced and the thesis statement is established. This should be followed by a number of middle paragraphs focussing on the main arguments of the paper and the supporting evidence which has been found to reinforce them. A concluding paragraph should summarize the findings and restate the thesis statement.

Teachers should ensure that students include the necessary front matter (title page and table of contents), citations and bibliography; and use the proper format (MLA, APA, etc.) for their citations and works cited. It is a good idea to double space the draft as this gives room to make changes as they proofread and edit their work.

**Edit and Proofread the Paper**

Students should proofread the draft for errors in structure, spelling, grammar, punctuation, organization of information, etc. The student may need to do some editing to add information, to reorganize it or to delete irrelevant or redundant items. They may want to get a friend, classmate or parent to read their paper and provide some feedback before they write their final copy. At this stage there may also be an opportunity to get feedback from the teacher.

**Prepare the Final Draft**

Based on the feedback from the first draft and any new information they acquired, students should prepare the final copy of their paper. Students should pay particular attention to content, format, spelling, punctuation, grammar, etc. to ensure that their paper is the best that it can be. The paper may be used as an English component as well as for World History. Rubrics for evaluation are available on the Internet, e.g., from the Staffroom for Ontario's Teachers website: <http://www.odyssey.on/~elaine.coxon/rubrics.htm> and also in the English curriculum guides.

