

This is an important communication skill outcome in the Manitoba social studies curriculum (S2-S-405). But what does it really mean?

To **articulate** means to express an idea or opinion clearly and coherently. This expression could be either verbal or in written format; however, many learning strategies involve group or class discussions, thus implying a verbal expression. If this is the case, students can only articulate their perspectives if they do, indeed, say something, coherently, in a discussion. In addition, it is obvious that participants would require a reasonable command of the language of discussion in order to articulate their views. Those who are shy, introverted, or from a different cultural background may be reluctant to speak up and express their views in a discussion. Teachers and fellow students should encourage involvement of all in the group by being sensitive, understanding and providing a safe and non-threatening environment.

A **perspective** is a point of view or an opinion on an issue or topic. For someone to have a perspective, they must have enough prior knowledge of that issue or topic to be able to develop and clarify their point of view. Thus, students must undertake adequate background study of an issue and make appropriate preparations before they can be expected to share their opinions. Furthermore, a perspective can be a personal viewpoint or one that is common to a specific cultural or minority group and may not be one that is familiar to most members of a discussion group. The uncertainty of having your culturally influenced view understood by the group can add to the reluctance to verbally articulate your perspective. It is critical for both students and teachers to understand that a personal or cultural perspective cannot be “wrong” and should not be minimized, criticized, or considered unimportant. It is fair, however, for group members to ask for clarification or a rationale, in an objective manner, of any and all perspectives that are expressed.

An **issue**, in this context, refers to an important subject of discussion and debate, and will usually be one that is identified as a knowledge or value outcome in the curriculum. The issue in question may not be one that is naturally of great interest to many young people; however, as part of the learning outcomes it is important to engage students, to expand their awareness, and to expose them to the realities of the world around them. It is the challenge of the teacher to establish a healthy learning environment, to present issues in an interesting and meaningful manner, and to empower students to clarify and share their perspectives and act on them if appropriate.

How does one **assess** students' skills in articulating perspectives on issues? Assuming that perspectives are articulated verbally, teachers should observe and monitor group discussion for evidence of specific items identified above. This can be done informally through observation only, or more formally through the use of a checklist (see BLM G-10). If students are expressing their views in writing, teachers would have to adapt the checklist to create an appropriate assessment tool. In any case, aside from exemplary modelling, most students will require understanding, encouragement, and positive feedback to assist them in developing the skill of articulating their perspectives on issues.