LEARNING DEMOCRACY IN A PLURALIST SOCIETY:
BUILDING A RESEARCH BASE FOR CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION IN CANADA[1]

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ABSTRACT

In this paper we propose a programme of research to: elaborate specific outcomes for citizenship education; assess and monitor student achievement in the area; describe the general features of a citizenship pedagogy that is consistent with current knowledge of teaching and learning; and assess the preparedness of new teachers to successfully engage and implement programmes of citizenship education. The aim of the research is to strengthen the knowledge base in the field of citizenship education and to improve citizenship education in our schools.

The specific research questions flow from our observations and analysis of current research and practice. We particularly draw attention to the following:

- All educational jurisdictions across Canada advocate citizenship education that contributes to the development of citizens who are informed, capable of active and productive participation in the affairs of society, and committed to the dispositions of democratic living. However, the aims are expressed at a high level of abstraction and there is a need to specify in detail the outcomes that are desired.

- There has been little systematic monitoring of student achievement in the field of citizenship education. The absence of information on student performance makes it difficult for curriculum developers and teachers to work systematically toward improvement; and there is no reliable indication of whether current levels of performance are improving or deteriorating.

- Suggestions for appropriate strategies of teaching and learning in citizenship education are vague and there has been little application of current knowledge to the development of a pedagogy of citizenship education.

- The development of good citizenship in the Universities and Faculties of Education has often been viewed as everyone's responsibility and therefore has become no-one's. It is not clear whether today's graduates, or indeed inservice teachers, have the necessary expertise to successfully implement the programmes of citizenship education being developed across the country.

Clearly, there is a significant knowledge deficit in areas that are central to the development and use of effective programmes of citizenship education. The specific research questions that we propose address the issues that are central to the implementation of successful citizenship education in schools.

1. INTRODUCTION

Recent years have seen an explosion of interest in the nature of citizenship and citizenship education in Canada and around the world. Increasing globalization, the move to a single European citizenship, the collapse of the Soviet empire, and the rise of xenophobic ethnic enclaves in many areas of the world are among the forces that have inspired both academic and popular interest in the topics. Important citizenship education initiatives can be witnessed in the research and development work that is taking place in The United States, Australia and Great Britain and several international organizations such as the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA), the OECD, the Council of Europe and UNESCO are also actively involved. All of the work exhibits a deep commitment to the development of democratic citizenship. Little, however, is based on a knowledge of what works and what does not work in citizenship education. In this paper, we review the current state of knowledge concerning citizenship education in Canada and suggest a programme of research that will strengthen the knowledge base and contribute to the improvement of educational practice.

In order to address the issues, we have developed the paper in four major sections; each with its own focus.

1. TOWARD CONCEPTUAL CLARITY

2.1 Citizenship as a Contested Concept

Elsewhere (Sears & Hughes, 1996; Sears, 1996a) we have argued that citizenship is a contested concept, both theoretically and practically. Often, agreement can be achieved in principle concerning the general features of citizenship but there may be wide variations in how they are manifested in practice. For example, liberal democracies may differ in their institutional structures while retaining a basic commitment to democratic principles, as in the differences between Canada and the United States. In developing the framework for its current international study of citizenship education, the IEA achieved consensus from the participating countries that the core components of citizenship are contained within the domains of democracy, national identity, and social cohesion/diversity (Torney-Purta, 1996) recognizing that how the domains are construed in any society may vary, giving rise to different manifestations of citizenship.

Varying conceptions of citizenship may exist not only between states but within them. A number of Canadian scholars have argued that groups of Canadians, particularly English speaking Canadians, Québécois, and Aboriginals, understand citizenship differently. Kymlicka (1995, 1998) refers to this as "differentiated citizenship."   Even within such groups there may be conflicting conceptions of citizenship (Sears, 1996a).

2.2   Toward Conceptual Consensus

Despite conceptual variation in the citizenship field, ministries/departments of education across the country have taken a remarkably similar approach to citizenship education. In an earlier examination of citizenship education in English Canada (Sears & Hughes, 1996) we pointed out that developing citizens was an important objective for education in general and the area of social studies in particular, in all jurisdictions. We noted at the time that in some provinces this goal was stated more explicitly than others. If anything, those provinces where citizenship goals were implicit are moving to more explicitly identify citizenship as a principal objective of education. The Maritime provinces are a good example of this. In our initial study for Heritage Canada (Sears & Hughes, 1994) we identified the Maritimes as jurisdictions where citizenship was not explicitly stated as a curricular goal. The new document, *Foundation for the Atlantic Canada Social Studies Curriculum* (Atlantic Provinces Education Foundation, n.d.), which is to provide a framework for social studies curriculum development in all four Atlantic Provinces is saturated with the language of citizenship education and has as its vision statement:

> The Atlantic provinces social studies curriculum will enable and
> encourage students to examine issues, respond critically and
> creatively, and make informed decisions as individuals and citizens
> of Canada and an increasingly interdependent world (p. v).

In Quebec, another province which has had largely implicit citizenship goals, both the Commission for the Estates General on Education (1996) and the Task Force on the Teaching of History (1996) have recently identified preparing students "for the exercise of citizenship...." (Commission for the Estates General on Education, 1996. p. 5) as an important educational goal.

A large measure of consensus exists across jurisdictions not only at the level of general educational goal statements but also at the level of the specific citizenship goals of the intended curriculum.   In all provinces and territories the goal of citizenship education is to create knowledgeable individuals committed to active participation in a pluralist society (Sears & Hughes, 1996; Sears, Clarke & Hughes, in press).   They key elements of citizenship around which there is consensus then are: knowledge, participation, and a commitment to pluralism.

The knowledge described in the documents is not the catalogue of factual information of the recent Dominion Institute surveys; rather, it is situated and conceptual. By situated we mean not knowledge for its own sake but knowledge intended to frame and enhance thoughtful participation in civic life. As one document from Newfoundland and Labrador puts it there is a "need for a shift in emphasis from passively learning knowledge in favour of an active acquisition and utilization of knowledge (Newfoundland and Labrador Department of Education, 1993). By conceptual we

mean having to do with developing significant understanding of the key ideas and concepts related to citizenship. A Delphi panel of Canadian academics, senior civil servants, Senators and members of the public identified the core organizing concepts of Canadian democracy as: freedom, justice, due process, dissent, the rule of law, equality, diversity and loyalty (Hughes, 1994). Similar lists of key concepts can be found in curricular and policy documents across the country (Sears & Hughes 1996; Commission for the Estates General on Education, 1996).

In a recent annual report to the provincial government in Quebec the Conseil Supérieur de l'Éducation (CSE) (1998) stressed that citizenship education programmes should focus on helping students develop the analytic and participation skills necessary for active involvement in civic life. This commitment to preparing citizens with the requisite skills necessary for active participation is present in all jurisdictions. These are variously described as: decision making skills, communication skills and conflict resolution skills. One Ontario document calls them inquiry skills which require the ability to: "focus, organize, locate, record, evaluate/assess, synthesize/conclude, apply and communicate" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 1991, p.6).

Although the terms used may differ (e.g. interculturalism in Quebec, multiculturalism elsewhere), the commitment to fostering a pluralist civic society with wide participation from many different individuals and groups is strong across the country. This commitment to pluralism constitutes the dispositional element of citizenship education as it requires some willingness to set aside private interest in favour of the common good. In his Delphi study, Hughes (1994) found general consensus that good citizenship is characterized by dispositions such as "open-mindedness, civic mindedness, respect, willingness to compromise, tolerance, compassion, generosity of spirit, and loyalty" (p.21). These kinds of altruistic dispositions appear consistently in documents from across the country and are seen as key in a country where "cultural pluralism" is viewed as a "positive force in society" (Manitoba Education and Training, 1992, pp. 1-2) and citizenship education is focussed on attaining "the pluralist ideal" (Sears, Clarke & Hughes, in press).

2.*3*   *The Research Question*

Citizenship education research consistently addresses issues of the appropriate knowledge, skills of participation, and dispositions of democratic living (Heater, 1990, Hughes 1994). All of the educational jurisdictions in Canada have used these general categories to frame their approach to citizenship education. They are, however, general categories, and curriculum developers and teachers need to know exactly what knowledge, what skills, and what dispositions. It might not be possible to achieve consensus on every detail that should be addressed in citizenship education programmes, but there can be no doubt that there is a common

core of knowledge, skills, and dispositions to which the vast majority of Canadians would subscribe as appropriate for our children to learn. However, they have not yet been articulated in the coherent fashion that would be helpful to planners, curriculum developers, teachers. Consequently, we would suggest the following research question:

- ***What are the specific knowledge, skills of participation and dispositions of democratic living that Canadian children ought to learn in the course of their public school experience?***

A possible model for the research process is to be found in the NAEP Civics Consensus Project (NAEP, 1998).

1. ASSESSING AND MONITORING STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

In broad strokes, the aims of citizenship education that prevail across Canada are consistent. But how well are we doing in achieving these aims? What do we know about how well students are doing? The answer to that question is, 'Almost nothing.' More than 30 years ago A.B. Hodgetts (1968) directed a nation-wide study of civic education in Canada which included, among other things, observations in hundreds of classrooms, surveys of thousands of students and teachers, and careful analysis of textbooks and other teaching materials. Hodgetts' report *What Culture? What Heritage?: A Study of Civic Education in Canada* examined student knowledge and attitudes, pedagogical practice, the quality of teaching materials, and teacher training. Although questions have been raised about the methods of data collection and analysis employed by Hodgetts and his team (Tomkins, 1969), the report became widely accepted as the baseline for social studies teaching and learning in Canada. The recommendations which were adopted, particularly the establishment of the Canada Studies Foundation, had a significant impact on social studies curricula, materials, and teaching (Grant, 1987, Osborne, 1987).

Since 1968, however, there has been no systematic, large scale effort to evaluate civic education in Canada either by academic researchers or through provincial or national testing programmes. Small scale, sporadic studies have been reported in the academic literature (for a full discussion of these see Sears, 1994 & 1996b) but by and large these have been uncoordinated and therefore fail to provide the basis for a reliable body of knowledge. Testing programmes, where they exist are largely focussed on the knowledge covered in particular courses or programmes and are only tangentially related to the situated knowledge of citizenship as described above. There is virtually no effort to assess the skills or dispositions of citizenship on a wide scale. In recent years the Dominion Institute has commissioned several surveys of Canadians' knowledge related to history and citizenship. The results of these surveys have been widely reported in the popular

press and have been used as part of a lobbying campaign for more and better history and social education in Canadian schools but, again, only factual information is being tested with little attention to context. It is certainly not consistent with the sort of citizenship knowledge described in curricula and policy across the country.

3.1 The Research Questions

In our view it is impossible to monitor student progress or the suitability of programmes without establishing the baseline from which progress can be measured. Phase 2 of the current IEA study contains instruments designed to assess the three dimensions of citizenship and by deciding not to participate Canada has forfeited an opportunity to find out where Canadian students currently are and how they relate to students from other nations. The National Assessment of Educational Progress in the United States has established a framework for a national civics assessment which also gives attention to knowledge, skills of democratic participation, and the dispositions of democratic living (NAEP, 1998). Similar work is being done in Britain and Australia. This body of international work is of interest to Canadians but our unique context demands attention. Consequently we would suggest the following research question:

- ***What levels of achievement are shown by Canadian students with regard to the three core elements of citizenship?***

Once baselines are established it is essential to monitor progress in a coordinated and systematic way. The Council of Ministers of Education, Canada currently makes use of a number of national and international student assessment programmes: for example, the School Achievement Indicators Programme (SAIP) and the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). To date, these programmes have given attention to mathematics, literacy, and science but not to citizenship. They could provide a framework for an assessment programme addressing citizenship. Consequently we would suggest the following research question:

- ***What general procedures should be employed to monitor progress in citizenship education at the national and provincial levels?***

2. THE PEDAGOGICAL DIMENSION OF CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION

In this section we address the teaching and learning strategies for citizenship education. In particular we are concerned with the pedagogical approaches recommended in ministry/department of education guidelines and whether they are well suited to the purposes of citizenship education. We identify gaps in the knowledge that directs the pedagogical aspects of citizenship education and suggest a line of investigation that might be productive in improving the teaching and learning of citizenship.

4.1   Current Pedagogical Approaches

We have previously indicated that the prevailing ideology of citizenship education found in contemporary Canadian curricula tends toward an activist or participatory conception of citizenship. What appears to be clearly associated with this activist/participatory ideology is a commitment to a pedagogy of active learning; that is, there is a tacit, if not always explicit, approval to those methods of teaching and learning that require a more active role on the part of the student.

Curriculum documents generally include suggestions for teachers on appropriate teaching and learning strategies. The range of suggested activities for teaching and learning found in ministry/department guidelines is extensive.   It straddles the full gamut of strategies from direct instruction through interactive and indirect instruction to independent study and experiential learning. Saskatchewan Education (1991) identified 46 specific instructional methods as elements in these general strategies (p.59). They are reproduced in Newfoundland and Labrador's 1993 *Curriculum Framework for Social Studies* and again in the 1998 curriculum guide *Atlantic Canada in the Global Community* (see New Brunswick Department of Education, 1998) which is a joint enterprise of the four Atlantic Provinces. None of the methods emphasizes the 'chalk and talk' and 'question and answer' methods that Hodgetts identified as the dominant instructional approaches. Of course, the methods identified here constitute a broad repertoire of teaching/learning activities which includes but is not limited to the interests and concerns of citizenship education. (See Table 1)

Table 1

Possible Teaching/Learning Approaches

Direct Instruction	Interactive Instruction	Indirect Instruction	Independent Study	Experiential Learning
Explicit teaching	*Debates*	*Problem solving*	*Essays*	*Field Trips*
Drill & Practice	*Role playing*	*Case Studies*	*Computer Assisted Instruction*	*Conducting Experiments*
Structured Overview	*Panels*	*Inquiry*	*Reports*	*Simulations*
Mastery Lecture	*Brainstorming*	*Reading for meaning*	*Learning Activity Packages*	*Games*
Compare and Contrast	*Peer Practice* *Discussion*	*Reflective Discussion*	*Correspondence Lessons*	*Focussed Imaging*
Didactic Questions	*Laboratory Groups*	*Concept Formation*		*Field Observations*
Demonstrations	*Cooperative Learning Groups*	*Concept Mapping*	*Learning Contracts*	*Role Playing*
Guides for reading, listening, viewing	*Problem Solving*	*Concept Attainment*	*Homework*	*Synectics* *Model Building*
	Circle of Knowledge	*Cloze Procedures*	*Research Projects*	*Surveys*
	Tutorial Groups		*Assigned Questions*	
	Interviewing		*Learning Centres*	

(Saskatchewan Education (1991) Instructional Approaches: A Framework for Professional Practice.)

The Newfoundland and Labrador (1993) *Curriculum Framework for Social Studies,* in addressing the issue of teaching/learning approaches, says that "there is no one best method, rather, there is a method which, in a particular situation, for a definite purpose, at a specific grade level, with certain resources available, will be effective" (p.61). No doubt this is so but there is little specific direction to the teacher concerning how to match the method with the situation, purpose, grade level and resources. Invariably, the teaching suggestions, or recommended activities, or sample teaching strategies, encountered by teachers in programme and curriculum

guidelines, are presented as choices from which they might select some or none, according to their professional judgment. Specific learning experiences are never mandated, nor is any particular learning strategy. Indeed very little is expressed by way of preferred methods except a vague commitment to support those that require more active learning on the part of students. No attempt is made to direct teachers toward any particular approaches. "These are only suggestions and ideas that can be adapted and modified for different situations and needs" (Saskatchewan, 1994, p.1-6). Certainly, the implication in all of the guidelines is that teachers should choose whether to employ a strategy, when to employ it and how to employ it. The assumption is that teachers possess in their professional repertoire both the teaching skill itself and the capacity to decide on its use.

In some guidelines, the matter of teaching and learning methods receives scant attention. For example, the 1991 British Columbia guide for Social Studies in grades 8-11 addresses goals and learning outcomes, philosophy and rationale, programme flow and evaluation; each major section of the course is organized according to focus, topic, understanding and skills, and sample key questions. There is very little attention to methods of teaching and learning beyond saying that "The 'Sample Key Questions' serve to assist the teacher to give direction to inquiry, to aid in problem solving, and to promote discussion and debate." (p.15)

What is abundantly clear is that the ministries/departments are reluctant to give firm direction on the matter of teaching and learning strategies in areas that are normally associated with citizenship education. An exception to this lies in the growing approval of learning activities that involved young people in direct participation in and experience of life in the community. Often this takes the form of voluntary work with social service agencies in the belief that such experience will contribute to the development of a commitment to voluntarism; and often to apprenticeship-like experiences in the realms of business and politics. Again, the presumption is that the direct experience of participation will help foster a commitment to participation in the life of the community, however defined. The recent report (1998) of the Conseil Superieur de l'Education (CSE) places special emphasis upon extra-curricular initiatives in Quebec such as student involvement in student councils, youth parliaments, community involvement and the work of international associations such as Solidarite Tiers Monde.

4.2 Issues and Concerns

At this point a policy maker must ask: Why is it that authorities are generally so vague in their directions concerning teaching and learning approaches for citizenship? Are there any teaching/learning approaches that appear to hold a special potential for citizenship education? Specifically, which approaches hold potential for helping students to learn the knowledge, skills

and dispositions of democracy determined to be central to the practice of citizenship in contemporary Canada?

Let's start by emphasizing that there is no need to reinvent the wheel. The issue here is to determine if we can apply to the field of citizenship education what is already known about how children learn and how we can help them learn it. Research and development specialists might frame the issues as follows:

1.. *What are the specific knowledge, skills of participation and dispositions of democratic living that Canadian children ought to learn in the course of their public school experience?*

2. *What levels of achievement are shown by Canadian students with regard to the three core elements of citizenship?*

3. *What general procedures should be employed to monitor progress in citizenship education at the national and provincial levels?*

4. *What would be the general features of a citizenship education programme that takes into account our current level of knowledge about children's learning and how it can be fostered through instruction, particularly from the fields of situated learning and constructivist pedagogy?* (This is a matter of establishing the design specifications for any curriculum development work in the field of citizenship education.)

5. *Do graduates from faculties of education in Canada possess the expertise necessary to successfully implement citizenship curricula?*

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