Civic Education and Youth Political Participation
CIVIC AND POLITICAL EDUCATION

Series Editor:
Murray Print, University of Sydney, Australia

This series of publications addresses a wide range of key issues in the increasingly important area of civic and political education. Fundamentally the series is concerned with the preparation of future citizens but that in itself raises issues. What role should civic education play in developing future citizens? What forms of civic and political education are needed to prepare citizens for the future? What curriculum is appropriate? What role does the informal curriculum play? How can civic and political education be assessed? There are cognate questions as well. What do young people understand as democracy? What interest do they have in politics? And are they concerned with civic participation?

In this series the key topic of civic and political education will be written from multidisciplinary perspectives by groups of international scholars, representing a range of disciplines from political science, to education, to sociology and youth studies. The publications will present new evidence as well as reflect and argue previous international research on civic and political education. They will present best practices and innovations that can inform nations as they consider how they educate their next generations of young citizens.

The publications will be of value to academics, researchers, students as well as policy makers and practitioners such as those engaged with electoral and intergovernmental agencies.
Civic Education and Youth Political Participation

Edited by:

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INTRODUCTION

Democracy depends on all of us: the price of liberty is not just ‘eternal vigilance’, as Abraham Lincoln said, but eternal activity.

Sir Bernard Crick (2008)

In the late twentieth century interest in the condition of democracy was becoming of increasing concern to many political scientists, international organizations, political commentators, political parties and governments. In addition to declining support for political processes by the public one more potentially significant issue had been identified – Why does it appear that many young people are disengaging from democracy and political participation?

This question raised many issues concerning the nature of disengagement, how it might be measured and what impact it is having upon political participation and democracy. Many of these issues are raised in the chapters within this book.

Nevertheless there remains a widespread interest in how young people may become more engaged in politics and democracy. Civic education has reemerged as a possible answer to this question, though not necessarily in the form in which it may be currently known. Civic education has a long history in many democracies where in some, such as the US, it was generally believed to be effective in building political engagement. These days we’d be more circumspect. Although the evidence from Niemi and Junn (1998) is comforting (that civic education makes a difference) and Putnam’s conclusion that education also makes a difference to social capital, there are multiple issues at play that require investigation. One of the strangest is that, as Putnam (2000) noted, as education has increased in the United States over the past three decades, so political participation has generally declined.

What can be done? An increasing body of research evidence indicates that providing specific civic education opportunities can produce more politically engaged young citizens with more active civic participation. Some of that research is presented in the chapters of this book.

This volume comprises a collection of essays on the topic of civic education, written from multidisciplinary perspectives by a group of international scholars, representing a range of disciplines from political science, to education, to sociology. The group came together in Montreal in June, 2008 as a result of efforts by Henry Milner to chart the scope of civic education internationally. The presentations made were on aspects of research undertaken in civic education by the participants to complement the earlier national data on civic education and were subsequently debated and refined.
Civic education is predicated on the notion that individuals in a democracy do not automatically become politically responsible, participating citizens, but rather must be educated for citizenship. It is the primary means by which citizens acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to participate in their democracies in an informed and engaged fashion. Incorporated into the public education curriculum, its primary object is to teach civic literacy, which can be defined as a knowledge and understanding of the basic principles of government, as well as a basic familiarity with dominant social values and norms within a country. In addition, civic education aims to improve citizens’ knowledge and understanding of fundamental rights and responsibilities. In short, civic education aspires to cultivate the virtues, knowledge, and skills necessary for meaningful citizen participation in public life.

The need to address issues of declining political participation was the task presented to a working group first established in 2002 at the European Consortium on Political Research conference in Turin. The ECPR joint workshop on political knowledge and political participation included 23 papers, drawing on individual-level data from more than a dozen countries. These assembled data confirmed that, regardless of the specific content of the questions, more knowledgeable citizens are significantly more likely to vote, even when controlling for variables such as education, age, political interest, associational participation, and trust. In the following years, further data confirmed that turnout decline was in large part a generational phenomenon coinciding with a decline in levels of political knowledge; perhaps most notably, the IEA Civics Study (Torney-Purta et al., 2001) drew wide attention to the relationship between civic education and voter turnout.

A common obstacle for scholars in the field was the dearth of multidisciplinary and comparative data available to those researching political knowledge and civic education. The consensus among the participants of the ECPR joint workshop was that it would be a significant improvement to the field if such multidisciplinary material was widely available and out of this, the concept of the IDEA civic education database was born. Scholars concluded that data regarding different national approaches to civic education needed to be collected and compiled in a comprehensive, accessible format. The resultant project, the IDEA database, was first presented at the ECPR conference in Pisa, Italy in 2007. The next year Henry, with Murray’s support, applied for a grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada to bring together a group of recognized scholars in the field to extend the research discussions raised earlier through an invited workshop in Montreal. The result, after debate and review, is this book.

The book has been divided into two sections: the first contains an overview of significant issues addressing youth participation in politics. The second section includes several approaches civic education from an education perspective.

Part I begins with Brenda O’Neill’s chapter on assessing the education in civic education which poses the question: What kind(s) of engagement, if any, should be encouraged in a democracy? O’Neill appeals to democratic theory in formulating a response to this question. She also assesses the citizen’s role within the democratic context and suggests that instead of attempting to provide cohesiveness of vision and ‘right’ answers in an attempt to create ‘model citizens’, civic education could
instead embrace the range of contradiction inherent to the conception of citizenship, and teach students to be think critically about politics. Ultimately, O’Neill contends that “while politics might be ‘messy’, its avoidance is impossible”.

Lewis contributes an argument, in the context of Canada, against civic education as a policy solution to political apathy. He contends that, in light of its fluctuating goals and relative unimportance to the state, civic education in Canada has become an increasingly esoteric field, generally ignored in the public political sphere. Lewis goes on to recommend a greater degree of cooperation between provinces, as well as more coordination between private actors and government agencies. Ultimately, however, Lewis argues for the necessity of an accepted Canadian civic education narrative and the adoption of a common national civic education curriculum. Such a narrative, he contends, would be free of the constraints imposed by shifting government interests and regional disagreements.

Andreas Ladner, with Jan Fivaz and Giorgo Nadig offers a detailed report on the use of e-tools for civic education in Switzerland. More specifically, Ladner et al. focus on the use of the “Parteienkompass” and “myVote” tools in the lead-up to the Swiss parliamentary election of 2007. The authors also discuss the use of similar e-tools in other Western European countries, and evaluate the efficacy of such methods, and their potential to improve voter engagement in Switzerland and internationally.

In his chapter on attitudes toward citizenship, political participation, and civic education, Vincent Tournier examines citizenship traditions and their influence on civic education. He describes in some detail three types of citizenship – political, social, and civil – identified by the 2004 ISSP citizenship survey and puts forth for consideration the notion that there is a link between the differing types of citizenship and political participation and engagement. Tournier contends that there is an increased likelihood of developing civic education in cases where political citizenship is strong and civic citizenship is weaker.

Marc Hooghe and Ellen Claes from the University of Leuven, Belgium have used data from the McGill Youth Survey (2006) to produce an in-depth analysis of the relationships between political interest and political knowledge, and political interest and civic education experiences. Claes and Hooghe examine the nature and significance of the impact of civic education on political interest, and contend that this impact, both direct and indirect, is significant.

Part II addresses different programs in civic education in a variety of contexts but set within the confines of examining the impact of such programs on political and democratic participation. In chapter six, Henry Milner, Chi Nguyen & Frances Boylston describe the IDEA database project and assess its potential for becoming an important resource for researchers, policy makers, educators and academics worldwide who attempt to address questions of citizenship and civic participation. They examine the IDEA CIVICED database for scholars who have been attempting to document and analyze the nature, effects, and value of civic education, particularly as it pertains to youth political behaviour and attitudes.

Murray Print of the University of Sydney presents a compelling argument in support of civic education in public schools as key in facilitating youth participation.
in democracy. He discusses the Australian Youth Electoral Study, an investigation into declining youth political participation and civic education in schools and argues that the viability and efficacy of civic education in schools could be improved through better teacher preparation, a greater focus on participatory approaches, and the inclusion of critical discussion with non-partisan teachers.

The University of New Brunswick’s Alan Sears is strongly in favour of a constructivist approach to civic education. He advocates more inclusion of education practitioners in the process of curriculum design, and stresses the importance of the civic education community incorporating complementary research done in the fields of pedagogy and cognition. Sears calls for civic education researchers to question entrenched assumptions and preconceptions, and to take into account the sophistication and complexity of children’s cognitive processes as well as the contribution of teachers themselves.

Joe Kahne and Susan Sporte report on a research study which examined developing citizens in terms of the impact of civic learning opportunities on student commitment to future civic participation. In a rigorous quantitative study they found that specific kinds of civic learning opportunities fostered improvements in student commitment to civic participation. In particular a set of classroom civic learning opportunities were able to meaningfully develop student commitment to civic participation in urban public schools. As with Print’s Youth Electoral Study the researchers found that a significant factor in engaging youth was discussing civic and political issues with parents.

To conclude the book Henry Milner reflects on an effort to increase political participation in Ontario through posing the question – does civic education boost turnout? In the context of Canadian turnout, and the extremely low levels of youth voting, he reviews the ‘experiment’ of Ontario where civic education was introduced as service learning it appears to have made negligible impact on young people’s political participation. This, Milner concludes, is due, in part, to a civic education program that placed great emphasis on service learning and insufficient on political dimensions both inside and outside the classroom.

Ultimately, this volume presents new evidence and collectively argues for the need for civic education throughout the globe. These comparative reflections demonstrate that there are best practices and innovations that can inform nations as they consider how they educate their next generations of young citizens.

REFERENCES

PART I: YOUTH POLITICAL PARTICIPATION
AND CIVIC EDUCATION
1. DEMOCRACY, MODELS OF CITIZENSHIP AND CIVIC EDUCATION

INTRODUCTION

The decline in turnout in a number of advanced Western democracies has led to significant attention being devoted to trends in political participation. For some, the changing nature of participation patterns signals fundamental changes in civil society that portend badly for the future of democratic states (Putnam, 2000). Not all are convinced, however, that the evidence points to a crisis in advanced democracies. Where some see the relative withdrawal from electoral politics as a test of the legitimacy of a democratic system, others argue that the decline in electoral politics signals a shift in political participation patterns towards non-electoral forms of participation (Norris, 2002). Others challenge the conclusion that turnout has declined to dramatically low levels, at least in the United States (McDonald & Popkin, 2001). Like the reading of tea leaves, drawing conclusions from the evidence is less than straightforward.

The political participation of young citizens has attracted significant research attention given evidence that changing participation patterns appear to be concentrated among this generational cohort. In Canada, for example, voter turnout and membership in political parties and interest groups is lower among younger than among older Canadians, gaps that appear to have widened in recent years (Gidengil et al., 2004; O’Neill, 2007). Additionally, younger Canadians are less knowledgeable about and less interested in politics, and pay less regular attention to the news than older Canadians. On the other hand, their rates of participation in non-traditional political acts such as signing a petition, demonstrating, and political consumerism are closer to, and in some cases, higher than older Canadians. They are also more likely to volunteer than other Canadians although this may be linked to an increased trend toward mandatory volunteering in high schools (Stolle & Cruz, 2005). Beyond high school, this increased tendency to volunteer is unlikely to “stick” (Ibid.). Conventional wisdom notwithstanding, the decline in electoral turnout among young Canadians has not been paralleled by an increase in political cynicism; rather the evidence suggests that they are less rather than more politically cynical than other Canadians (Gidengil et al., 2003). They do however reveal weaker levels of political efficacy overall (Archer & Wesley, 2006). Some of these differences are due to the life cycle; as young Canadians age and assume an increased set of responsibilities and stake in the political system, their political participation and engagement are likely to increase. Others, the decline in turnout...
especially, appear to be the result of more permanent generational changes, and as a result are unlikely to diminish in the near future (e.g. Norris, 2002). The increased attention to political participation among younger citizens has renewed interest in political socialization. The relative absence of contemporary political science research examining education’s role in shaping democratic impulses springs from research in the 1970s that found little evidence of its impact on the political attitudes and knowledge levels of the young (Jennings & Niemi, 1974; Langton & Jennings, 1968). The perception of an existing ‘democratic crisis’ by some, however, has provided an important spur for re-examining early political socialization processes and the teaching of citizenship and democratic values.

The importance of citizenship education for stemming the tide of disengagement has been reinforced by contemporary research that provides for optimism, such as Niemi and Junn’s finding that civics or citizenship education is strongly and positively correlated with political engagement (Niemi & Junn, 1998). Citizenship education or civic education is the “preparation of young people so that they possess the knowledge, skills, and values necessary for active participation in society” (Ross, 2004: 249). There are a number of important questions to ask regarding the inclusion of a civics component to the education of young citizens. One particularly important question is what the civics education curriculum ought to include in its attempt to prepare the young to be ‘good’ citizens. Democracy is a rather loaded and normative term without a single commonly accepted definition beyond perhaps ‘the rule of the many.’ To the extent that civic education has as one of its goals to impart a set of values and skills to young people that will equip them to become effective citizens, how one defines democracy and, indeed, how one defines a successful and well-performing democracy, have implications for what one includes in the curriculum, and by extension, for what students will come to see as ‘good’ citizenship.

The question of how a civic education curriculum frames norms and expectations follows directly from a set of questions raised in a number of papers included in the April 2004 issue of PS: Political Science and Politics on the “Politics of Civic Education.” In one of these articles, Westheimer and Kahne (2004) argued that the broad consensus in the US regarding the importance of developing student capacities and commitments to democracy largely disappeared when the discussion turned towards what democracy requires and how it ought to be taught. As they noted,

For some, a commitment to democracy is a promise to protect liberal notions of freedom, while for others democracy is primarily about equality or equality of opportunity. For some, civil society is the key, while for others, free markets are the great hope for a democratic society. For some, good citizens in a democracy volunteer, while for others they take active parts in political processes by voting, protesting, and working on political campaigns (241).

This paper addresses the politics of civic education, that is, the assumptions regarding democracy that are brought to bear on models of citizenship in civics education. In order to do so, I review the dominant conceptions of democracy and variation in prescriptions for civics education that stem from them. My goal is
neither to assess which conception is more appropriate nor to render a judgment on
how best to teach civics to young citizens. Instead, I hope simply to encourage
increased reflection on the norms and assumptions that inform civics education
programs. I extend the investigation to include a review of how to reconcile these
prescriptions with the realities of civics education. I agree with Galston when he
argues that “it is reasonably clear that good citizens are made, not born” (2001:
217). Citizen education instills a set of skills and a knowledge base which reduces
participation barriers. Moreover, it can prescribe a model of values, such as
tolerance and openness to new ideas, on which democracy rests. In short, citizen
education increases the effectiveness of political participation (Milligan, Moretti &
Oreopoulos, 2004). By the same token, there are real constraints on the teaching of
civics in contemporary classrooms which ought to be considered prior to a review
of the models of citizenship.

CIVIC EDUCATION

Formal education has long been understood to play an important role in
encouraging political engagement, for its capacity to increase both participatory
abilities and motivation (Dalton, 2006; Gidengil et al., 2004). The development
of general knowledge and skills that accrue broadly from education, in such areas
as mathematics, science, reading and writing, increase citizen capacity, perceived
efficacy and willingness to engage in political processes. Civic education, on the
other hand, provides a more pointed curriculum designed with the objective of
developing knowledge about, skills for and a commitment to citizenship in
democracies. Evidence suggests that where levels of formal education have
increased over time, civic knowledge has largely stalled.

According to Galston (2004), this seeming puzzle is explained in the United
States by a lack of congruence in a professed commitment to the goal of civic
education and a less structured commitment to its implementation in the classroom,
the limited civics training provided to history and social studies teachers, the
minimal time devoted to civics curricula in an average school day, and to a	
tendency to approach “politics as a distant subject-matter, often with little explicit
discussion of citizens’ rights and responsibilities” (2004: 264). Similarly, Hughes
and Sears (2006) find that while Canadian governments profess a commitment to
such practices, their implementation has received decidedly less support. A lack of
discussion on and setting of goals for citizenship education, little development and
distribution of supportive teaching and learning materials, little development of
teacher capacity in and the lack of establishment of a research base for civics
education have combine to effectively stall the practice of citizenship education
across the country. Government investment in curriculum resources and teacher
training does occur, such as the Discovering Democracy programme in Australia,
but even there results indicate that such commitments are necessary but not
sufficient for enhanced civic learning to place (Print, 2007).

According to Hughes and Sears, best practice in citizenship education must
“engage students in meaningful activities designed to help them make sense of,
and develop competence with, civic ideas and practices” (2006: 7). This requires a commitment to both its formal and informal elements. The formal aspect of learning requires the acquisition of knowledge, skills and a set of values that facilitate and encourage participatory culture among youth within the classroom through curriculum and activities. The informal element takes place outside the curriculum and includes such things as a school culture that reinforces democratic values and which provides hands-on opportunities for developing democratic skills and experience, such as student government (Print, 2007). The classroom context – the degree to which open discussion and the expression of opinions in class are encouraged – and the school context – the degree to which students are encouraged to voice opinions regarding school policies or to play a more formal role in shaping them – have been found to play a key role in reinforcing the democratic curriculum encountered in the classroom (Sears & Perry, 2000). Participation in activities that exposes youth to conflict allows them to appreciate its role in democratic governance and its inevitability (Hibbing & Theiss-Morse, 1996). A classroom that fosters “a free, open and respectful exchange of ideas is positively related to young people’s level of knowledge about democratic processes,” to their appreciation of conflict and to their expectation of voting in the future (Campbell, 2008: 450).

It is, then, clear that what happens in the classroom and in the school, especially that beyond learning how governments work and “how bills become law”, can have important consequences for how and whether youth participate in the democratic processes. The success of civic education programs requires a government commitment that extends beyond the symbolic, schools that devote significant time to civic education within the curriculum, and teaching staff that are provided with skills development, materials and a school environment genuinely committed to supporting real, effective engagement both in and out of the classroom. Yet what often happens in the classroom is citizenship education designed to “teach about democracy, not practice it” which risks increasing political alienation among the young rather than instilling a habit of participation (Sears & Perry, 2000: 28). Difficulty in putting a democratic curriculum into practice may stem in part from a desire to avoid any form of conflict; it may also stem from a lack of consensus on what democratic citizenship entails.

WHAT IS DEMOCRACY?

According to David Held, “Democracy, as an idea and as a political reality, is fundamentally contested” (1996: xi). One can nevertheless identify general agreement on the basic elements that are considered necessary for the existence of democratic government. At the outset, it ought to be emphasized that the term democracy has become synonymous with representative democracy; although elements of direct democracy have been advocated by many, their use is encouraged within the framework of representative democracy rather than as a stand-alone political system. Bearing this in mind, Diamond and Morlino (2004: 21) provide an overview of the essential elements of contemporary democracies. At a minimum, they suggest that democracy requires universal adult suffrage; recurring, free,
DEMOCRACY, MODELS OF CITIZENSHIP AND CIVIC EDUCATION

competitive and fair elections; more than one serious party; and alternative sources of information. Additionally, they outline the goals of a democracy as being political and civil freedom, popular sovereignty and political equality, and ultimately good governance (which includes transparency, legality and responsible rule). The former are mechanical requirements that relate to the selection of representatives designed to ensure that the results of elections are legitimate. The goals of democracy, on the other hand, are ideals that are often harder to meet but no less important to the quality of democracy. Freedom of expression and association, respect for the rule of law, accountability of government and the equality of citizens in political decision-making are but a few of the essential qualities that democracies hold as standards. Importantly, Diamond and Morlino note that these various elements of democracy overlap and sometimes work in tandem. Achieving success on one goal can indirectly improve results on another. Yet at the same time, “there can be trade-offs between the different dimensions of democratic quality, and it is impossible to maximize them all at once. In this sense at least, every democratic country must make an inherently value-laden choice about what kind of democracy it wishes to be” (2004: 21, italics in original).

One of the major and longstanding divisions in contemporary theories of democracy rests on the level of participation that is required of citizens. The pluralist or participatory democracy form of democracy accords a high degree of engagement from the population. In such a system, direct participation of citizens is encouraged in as many arenas as possible and explicit goals in this theory of democracy include “foster[ing] a sense of political efficacy, nurture[ing] a concern for collective problems and contribut[ing] to the formation of a knowledgeable citizenry capable of taking a sustained interest in the governing process” (Held, 1996: 271). John Stuart Mill, for example, argued that citizen participation in representative democracies provides the best mechanism for the articulation of interests but also serves as an end in itself for its educative role among citizens (Ibid.: 100). Contemporary arguments for increased citizen engagement are not hard to find. A Standing Committee of the American Political Science Association charged with investigating the perceived decline in civic engagement developed a number of arguments for the value of robust citizen engagement in the American (and presumably any Western) democracy (Macedo et al., 2005: 4-5). These included: providing a direct mechanism for the voicing of interests; the legitimacy of democratic government requires increased citizen engagement in that governments are likely to be more responsive to citizens as greater numbers of them participate; citizens’ skills and knowledge are developed with political participation; and civic engagement provides a mechanism for the provision of a number goods and services that might not otherwise be provided leading to improved lives and stronger communities.

Diamond and Morlino argue that the right and the ability to participate for all adult citizens are essential in democracies in that they provide the mechanism by which citizens influence decision-makers (2004: 23). The responsiveness of governments, they argue, is directly linked to the level of citizen participation. Moreover, they suggest that the quality of democracy is greater when citizen participation is extensive in “the life of political parties and civil society organizations, in the discussion of
public policy issues, in communicating with and demanding accountability from
elected representatives, in monitoring official conduct, and in direct engagement
with public issues at the local level” (Ibid: 23-24). Political participation, voter
interest, and turnout are all crucial to ensuring vertical accountability (25). Vertical
accountability involves the obligation of elected officials to account for their political
decisions to those who elected them. It is vertical in that the obligation runs from the
government to the citizenry, and the ability to act on this information with either
punishment or rewards rests in the hands of the citizenry.

Not all are equally convinced, however, that high levels of political engagement
ought to be encouraged within democracies. Schumpeter, for instance, argued that
the political engagement of citizens in a democracy ought to be restricted to voting
in general elections for the selection of political representatives and for ensuring
government accountability (Held, 1996: 179). Political elites, he argued, possessed
the skills and knowledge necessary for other types of decision-making. Writings in
this vein often focus on providing a version of democracy that is realistic in light of
the perceived limitations exhibited by a majority of citizens in democracies (see
Saward, 2003, esp. Chapter 2). In light of their findings indicating that Americans
failed to meet expectations regarding skills and knowledge for a successful
democracy, Berelson, Lazarsfeld and McPhee (1954) provide an explanation for
why the American democratic system nevertheless appeared to work successfully.
They argue that successful democracies require a balance of various types of
citizens in the aggregate: a balance of politically interested and uninterested
citizens, of politically engaged and disengaged, and so on. Too much of any one
property can lead, for example, to various forms of extremism which tend to
decrease the stores of much needed tolerance. Almond and Verba (1963) develop a
similar argument for limited political engagement by pointing out that the ability of
governments to be responsive to citizen demands requires that those demands be
relatively limited in number. For them, “the ordinary citizen ought to be relatively
passive, uninvolved, and deferential to elites” (343). The key is achieving a balance
of political types to avoid government overload. The legal democracy model links
to this argument in suggesting that the market provides the best mechanism for
collective choice; majority rule and the rule of law ensure that democratic impulses
and coercive power are constrained (Held, 1996: Chapter 7). A minimal role for the
state, particularly, in civil society, limits the necessity for citizen engagement
within the political sphere. Pluralists such as Robert Dahl (1961) and David B.
Truman (1951), on the other hand, emphasize the important role played by interest
groups in voicing interests, and in ensuring government responsiveness and
accountability. Others argue that the reality is such that most citizens hope to avoid
the conflict inherent in politics; even if provided with greater opportunities for
engagement, it is argued, citizens would not likely take advantage of them
(Hibbing & Theiss-Morse, 2002).
CIVIC EDUCATION AND THE ROLE OF THE CITIZEN

Thus, we have two very different accounts of the role and abilities of citizens in democracies: the participatory democracy model that advocates a strong citizen participatory dimension and the pluralist/elitist/legal democracy models that advocate a much more limited role for citizens. Given the lack of consensus on the roles of citizens in democracies, there is a concomitant lack of simple answers to questions that one might ask when thinking about the framing of civics courses. Among these many questions are the following:

– What are the responsibilities of democratic citizens?
– What kinds of engagement ought to be encouraged?
– What of protest and other forms of non-traditional political behaviour? Are they in the best interest of a successful democracy? Ought they to be encouraged?

The first question addresses the obligations that citizens have to others and to ensuring the success of the system. Citizenship norms are a “shared set of expectations about the citizen’s role in politics” (Dalton, 2008: 78). Expectations directly shape behaviour. As such, civics education shapes citizen behaviour in part by establishing the norms and expectations of citizenship.

The two models outlined above provide largely different responses to this question. For one, the responsiveness, accountability and overall quality of democracy rests squarely on the existence of a citizenry that is active, knowledgeable, interested and engaged in both the civil and political arenas. In the other, the role of citizens is more constrained, either due to limitations on the part of citizens, to an inability of government to respond to excessive demands, to the existence of a division of labour where interest groups perform the role of voicing interests and assisting in government responsiveness, the balancing of roles across publics, or to the realistic understanding that the majority of citizens do not wish to be highly engaged. An appeal to democratic theory provides multiple and competing responses to this question.

With a direct focus on this question, Dalton (2008) outlines the four broad principles that he argues can be found within the theoretical literature on democratic citizenship. First, a key principle of citizenship is political participation. Citizen participation in the selection of representatives, in influencing government decisions, and sometimes in the direct selection of policy choices is essential to the legitimacy of a democratic state and for meeting the goals of responsiveness and accountability. Democracy ought to reflect citizen values and demands. Second, individual autonomy is identified as an essential element to ‘good’ citizenship. Autonomy implies the ability to act on one’s own and in the case of citizenship it requires possession of information about government that allows one to effectively participate in politics. Thus knowledge of government and politics is essential for citizens’ ability to participate effectively. For Diamond and Morlino, “a modicum of knowledge about government and public affairs” is required for widespread participation (2004: 24).

Good citizenship additionally requires “a commitment to social order and the acceptance of state authority” (Dalton, 2008: 79). Accepting the process of government and the rule of law are key components of democratic citizenship.
A final component to good citizenship addresses responsibilities to other citizens. According to Dalton, this element of citizenship stems from the expansion of the welfare state and the creation of a welfare ‘safety net’ designed to ensure that few, if any, citizens fall below a minimum level of service provision. Described as social citizenship by T.H. Marshall (1950, cited in Dalton, 2008: 23), it involves the ethical and moral duty that citizens have to others. Thus this theory of citizenship incorporates knowledge, participation, agency and social citizenship.

What citizenship entails in theory, however, need not necessarily correspond with its practice, understanding or teaching. An additional contribution to the discussion regarding the norms of citizenship lies in Dalton’s mapping of the perceptions of Americans regarding good citizenship through the use of survey data (Ibid.). He identifies two overlapping and yet somewhat distinct frameworks: duty-based versus engaged citizenship. As shown in Table 1, a factor analysis of several citizenship norms included in the General Social Survey identifies two models, the first emphasizing doing one’s duty with only limited political participation and, the second, a more engaged model of citizenship that emphasizes collective activity and concern and tolerance for others. These two conceptions of citizenship reflect the different citizen roles emphasized in the two models of democracy outlined earlier. And while they include many of the elements found in the theory of citizenship, each distinct model includes only a more limited set of these requirements.

Table 1. Dalton’s Dimensions of Democratic Citizenship Based of 2004 GSS Data

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<th>Citizen Duty</th>
<th>Engaged Citizen</th>
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<td>Vote in elections</td>
<td>.65</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never evade taxes</td>
<td>.65</td>
<td>-.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serve in Military</td>
<td>.54</td>
<td>.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obey the law</td>
<td>.51</td>
<td>.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keep watch on government</td>
<td>.51</td>
<td>.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active in association</td>
<td>.39</td>
<td>.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understand others</td>
<td>.28</td>
<td>.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choose products</td>
<td>.22</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help worse off in the world</td>
<td>-.12</td>
<td>.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help worse off in America</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eigenvalue</td>
<td>1.95</td>
<td>2.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent Variance</td>
<td>19.5</td>
<td>23.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Thus where theory sees a set of elements that are essential for citizenship, the public breaks the set down into two more manageable sets of requirements. Some see citizenship as involving a set of duties that from a political decision-making
perspective includes voting and a duty to ‘keep a watch on government.’ This model includes little in the way of personal responsibility to bring about change. Others see citizenship as a more personally and individually driven set of requirements to act driven it appears by the demands of social citizenship. This latter conception includes little in the way of involvement with government decision-making. Together they provide for all the elements of citizenship outlined by Dalton; individually they fall short.

Using a very different approach, Westheimer and Kahne (2004) also attempt to model conceptions of citizenship but their approach looks at citizen education programs rather than survey data. Evaluating a selection of programs teaching democratic citizenship in the Surdna Foundations Democratic Values Initiative, they find three distinct models of citizenship: personally responsible, participatory, and justice-oriented (See Table 2). As such they reflect the assumptions that civics programs bring to bear in their teaching of ‘good citizenship.’ Each of the three models focuses on a different set of teachings: the first on character and personal responsibility; the second on knowledge of the mechanics of government and other public institutions, and planning and organizing community efforts to bring about social change; and the third, the least common of the three, on critically evaluating social, political and economic structures with the goal to eliminating existing shortcomings in each. The first two models parallel somewhat the citizen-duty and engaged citizen models of citizenship identified by Dalton (2008). The third, focused on critically evaluating social problems, is relatively distinct from the models examined to date.

Like the models identified in opinion surveys, these models of citizenship are more limited in scope than that suggested as necessary by either democratic theory or citizenship theory. The personally responsible citizen is ‘good’ in the sense of being law abiding and responsible, engaged during times of crises and exhibits elements of social citizenship in providing food for food banks and donating blood. Notably absent in this model, however, is any link between citizenship and governance, either in the form of interest articulation or government accountability. The second model provides a far more demanding vision of citizenship that requires active engagement in communities to achieve social and economic goals but here too the emphasis is on citizen-directed action with government and politics limited to only a secondary role (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004). In this model citizens identify problems and collectively organize to solve them. The final model emphasizes a role for citizens that focussed largely on the development of a critical lens that is more likely to advocate system change rather than modification at the margins. As in the previous two models, government and politics play a minor role and, moreover, are framed as a root cause of the problem rather than as an agent of change.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Personally Responsible Citizen</th>
<th>Participatory Citizen</th>
<th>Justice-oriented Citizen</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acts responsibly in his/her community</td>
<td>Active member of community organizations</td>
<td>Critically assesses social, political and economic structures</td>
<td>Seeks out and addresses areas of injustice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Works and pays taxes</td>
<td>Organizes community efforts to care for those in need, promote economic development, or clean up environment</td>
<td>Knows how government agencies work</td>
<td>Knows about social movements and how to effect systemic change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obeys laws</td>
<td>Knows how government agencies work</td>
<td>Knows strategies for accomplishing collective tasks</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recycles, gives blood</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteers to lend a hand in times of crisis</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sample action</td>
<td>Contributes food to a food drive</td>
<td>Helps organize a food drive</td>
<td>Explores why people are hungry to solve root causes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Core assumptions</td>
<td>To solve social problems and improve society, citizens must have good character; they must be honest, responsible, and law abiding members of the community</td>
<td>To solve social problems and improve society, citizens must actively participate and take leadership positions within established systems and community structures</td>
<td>To solve social problems and improve society, citizens must question and change established systems and structures when they reproduce patterns of injustice over time</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The IDEA Civic Education Database provides another avenue for assessing the content of civics education programs (Milner et al., 2008). Collecting information from 40 programs in various countries around the world on the various components of their civics education programs provides the means of assessing the relative importance placed on varying elements of the curriculum. The data is still largely in the development stage but in a preliminary review Milner et al. (2008) note a distinction between programs that focus on institutional knowledge versus those that emphasize values, including democratic values, ‘good’ citizenship, and civic
values. Unfortunately the data set does not provide definition for what is meant by each of these particular sets of values or for the ‘good’ citizen. A second distinction that they note is between countries that emphasize community involvement over voting procedures. Although how these two dimensions relate to one another is not yet known, this preliminary evidence seems to confirm a similar trend to that noted above, namely the distinction made between traditional forms of participation (voting) and more contemporary forms of participation commonly referred to as civic/community engagement. Without further information on how these various programs define ‘good’ citizenship, democratic values and civic values, it is difficult to speak confidently about how this second dimension relates to those identified above. But one could make an initial claim that the emphasis appears to be on either the obligations of citizenship (both duties and values) or the knowledge requirement.

At the risk of generalizing on the basis of a small sample, there exist two dominant models of citizenship in popular thinking and in civics curriculum: the individually responsible citizen and the collectively responsible citizen. A third model, the critical citizen, also exists but is less common and so will be given less attention here. Returning to the questions posed above, one can reflect on the prescriptions made in each.

The individually responsible citizen model emphasizes the personal character of the citizen, to be honest and law-abiding. Political engagement is limited to voting, in that it is required for the selection of government representatives and leaders and for maintaining government accountability. Civic engagement is encouraged but limited to donating and volunteering. Non-traditional political behaviour is notably absent in this model; citizens, to the extent that they are allowed to register unhappiness or disagreement, are limited to the use of the ballot. Good citizens are virtuous, honest and decent. They vote and obey the law. They donate to charities. One can speculate that this is a model that could easily form the basis of a civics curriculum in that it requires relatively little in the way of knowledge of governmental structures and processes, and adopts a model of behaviour that is likely to produce little controversy, in part by avoiding any mention of dissent as a politically acceptable form of engagement.

The collectively responsible citizen, on the other hand, emphasizes the responsibilities of citizens to the larger society. In this model, the expectation is that citizens will engage but the emphasis is on civil society rather than the political arena. By joining together with others, citizens can organize collectively to provide needed services and goods and/or to pressure governments to act in areas of perceived need. Non-traditional avenues of participation, protest, organizing petitions and boycotting, are seemingly potential forms of engagement but they are not to be encouraged as avenues of first resort. An understanding of how government works should allow the collectively responsible citizen to avoid such forms of engagement. In the end, good citizens get things done. As a normative model within a civics curriculum, it would present somewhat of a greater challenge than the individually responsible citizen in that it requires the development of an understanding of governmental structures and processes, the instilling of a
commitment to active and effective engagement, and a willingness to engage in an evaluation of the relative weight that ought to be accorded to competing societal demands and needs. Yet this model is also unlikely to generate much controversy since it fails to encourage the development of citizens that are critical of government or of societal structures and processes; instead, it encourages citizens to step in themselves to fill apparent needs.

THEORY AND PRACTICE

In much the same manner, the theory of citizenship and its modelling in the public and in civics education programs fail to identify a single normative prescription for the ideal citizen. Bearing in mind those differences identified in theory, we can assess the implications of the teaching of two models outlined above in practice for contemporary democracies.

The individually responsible citizen model fits in well with models of democracy that emphasize its representative over its participatory dimension. Citizens in this model are encouraged to vote, which emphasizes their role in selecting political representatives and in holding governments to account, and to be personally responsible. Beyond this, however, their political and civic roles are largely nonexistent reflecting Almond and Verba’s description of the model ordinary citizen as “relatively passive, uninvolved, and deferential to elites” (1963: 23-24). Conflict and deliberation are remarkably absent. Citizens are encouraged to influence decision-makers rather than to participate in decision-making, and to accept and monitor political authority rather than to challenge it outright. Responsibility involves abiding by the law rather than in actively participating in its drafting, passage or critique. Engagement is limited to one aspect of the political arena, elections, and to minimal participation in the civic arena, limited to donating and volunteering. The model corresponds with democracy theory that suggest too much participation can lead to government overload, that citizen abilities limit the participatory demands that should be made of them, that a limited state supplanted by market forces is ideal, and the citizens generally seek to avoid conflict.

The collectively responsible citizen model fits more comfortably with models of democracy that emphasize engagement, although with significant limits. Participatory models of democracy emphasize the importance of participation for the legitimacy of governments, holdings governments to account, the effective representation of interests, the development of knowledge, skills and capacity within the citizenry, and the provision of goods and services. The collectively responsible model emphasizes citizen participation but within the civic rather than political arena. The citizen in this model arguably never bowls alone a la Putnam but rather is active in a number of civically-oriented organizations and groups, has a well-developed social network and a high level of trust (Putnam, 2000). While participation in the civic arena has been argued to hold the potential for encouraging participation in the political arena, the two are nonetheless distinct:

[A]lthough equally important, activities directed at the formal political arena are not the same as those directed at the civic community either for the
reasons that lie behind that involvement or for the expectations tied to that participation (O’Neill, 2006: 4).

Citizens in this model are encouraged to engage in decision-making that will involve some conflict and deliberation but this is directed at the provision of goods and services not provided by the state rather than more collective decisions regarding state provision of goods and services. Citizens ought to possess a knowledge and understanding of government processes and structures but largely in order to be more effective and efficient themselves in the provision of goods and services in the civic arena rather than to critique and/or challenge the state for the choices it makes. And citizens ought to understand that the choices that they make as consumers in the marketplace have an impact on citizens around the world but they are not expected to challenge laws, regulations and trade agreements that are arguably far more important to such outcomes. This model of the citizen, while successful in encouraging a citizen that acts responsibly vis-à-vis other citizens, fails in the development of citizens that are sensitive to the fact that governments, in where and how they choose to act and, importantly, in where they choose not to act, actively shape the welfare state.

Importantly for civic education, the two models offer a fairly restricted and incomplete view of government as an organization that exists beyond and outside of citizens, that can be appealed to when needed to assist groups with their work in the volunteer sector, and that requires monitoring. In these models government appears at worst to be something that exists outside of and thus largely unconnected to citizenship, and at best a decision-making body that citizens must continually check. Government is not taught to constitute an integral element of citizenship. The model citizen does not, it appear, aspire to work inside government itself to help solve problems or to participate in any meaningful way in politics, which can be understood to consist of the “authoritative allocation of values” (Easton, 1957). Conflict and deliberation are largely limited to the work that goes on within civic organizations, ones one might underline are normally established on the basis of a common set of values and goals. To the extent that such models provide an avenue for developing a competence in ‘civic ideas and practices’ within civics education curriculum, these are largely limited to voting and volunteering.

Politics also fails to appear in the models in that the only organizations that appear are focussed on volunteer activities. Despite the key role that political parties and advocacy groups play in democracies, the model citizen is not expected to participate in them. Their function in articulating and aggregating interests, as instruments of mobilization, in candidate recruitment and selection, and in policy development notwithstanding, political parties and interest groups are largely invisible and outside of the realm of citizenship.

Additionally, the models offer little in the way of explicit discussion of non-traditional forms of participation, actions that have as their goal to pressure governments to affect a desired change, and which include legal and illegal demonstrations and protest and the development and signing of petitions. The one exception is found in the focus on consumer-driven forms of engagement (boycotting and buycotting) within the collectively responsible citizen model.
Political consumerism, the selection of specific consumer goods and services and avoidance of others, is, however, more focussed on corporate entities than it is on governments and as such, reinforces a consumer model of citizenship where purchasing power equals strength. The citizen who seeks action though more visible, collective, and controversial forms presumably hinders rather than helps in the goal of achieving a successful democracy. According to Westheimer, a review of the cases of American educators arrested for various anti-war acts in the classroom revealed that “dissent, rather than being an essential component of democratic deliberation, [was] seen as a threat to patriotism” (2004: 232). As an element of citizenship, freedom of expression must include the right to express both support and opposition to the state. Given that “protest is the domain of the young” (Dalton, 2006: 71), civic education programs that fail to include content on legitimate forms of opposition outside of elections for keeping governments to account fail in their duty to teach about all legitimate forms of engagement.

Existing norms and teachings of citizenship identify a more limited set of requirements for citizenship than that found in theory, either in emphasizing duties and obligations or individual responsibilities to civil society, but not both. The ideal citizen identified in participatory democratic theory, while important for modelling all of the elements that would seem to be required of citizens, may well impose an unrealistic set of requirements on citizens. As such, a balance of citizen types may well meet the needs of representative democracies; so long as sufficient numbers of each ‘type’ of citizen exist, democracies may be able to perform effectively. To this end, allowing for variation in curriculum content within a country would be advisable if content unnecessarily limits the type of citizenship that is advocated and if greater freedom to set content actually does result in variation in the form of citizenship that is advocated. But the models provide a relatively limited set of citizen models, too few to adequately address the range of actions, organizations and strategies required of citizens in modern democracies.

GENERATIONS AND CITIZENSHIP

Do we need to take into account “increasing education levels, political sophistication, and participation norms among younger generations” (Dalton, 2006: 71) when considering the content of civic education? Inglehart (1990) was one of the first to identify the link between increased education levels and shifts in the patterns of values identified in recent generations, what he termed the ‘post-material’ generation. A number of authors have taken up this line of argument and added that these shifts include a participatory component: younger citizens are moving away from voting towards more individualized and direct forms of participation (Dalton, 2007; Marsh, O’Toole & Jones, 2007; Norris, 2002). Importantly, not everyone agrees that this shift is away from traditional forms of participation towards more individualized forms. Gidengil et al. (2003), for example, argue that young Canadians have been tuning out rather than turning towards more participatory forms of engagement.
Dalton, however, provides convincing evidence that the two models of perceived norms of citizenship he outlines have a distinct generational component to them: older generations tend to emphasize the duty-based form of citizenship while more recent generations emphasize the engaged form (Dalton, 2007, 2008). Further, he argues that there are important positive implications to the shift towards more engaged forms of participation among youth. The more engaged form of citizenship provides greater political influence, allows individuals to select the issues over which they wish to involve themselves and allows them to decide when and how they will participate (2007). It reflects, then, greater individual agency. Additionally, he finds that these norms matter for the type of political participation engaged in by citizens. Norms of civic duty appear to encourage electoral participation but not other forms of participation and they discourage protest behaviour. Norms of engagement, on the other hand, encourage all forms of participation except voting (Dalton, 2008). These effects are large, and in some cases, outperform the impact of education on participation.

The norm of citizenship emphasized in civic education can, then, come up against a very different set of norms among the youth in these courses. The adoption of a duty-based model of citizenship is likely to clash with the norms and expectations of many of the students in those classes. The adoption of the engaged model of citizenship, while more in line with the norms of recent generations, risks overlooking important elements of the traditional political system and encouraging a form of engagement devoid of conflict and deliberation. There are consequences to teaching a model of citizenship that downplays voting as an important element of citizenship. Democratic government must be responsive to citizen demands and interests, and elections provide an important mechanism for responsiveness and vertical accountability. The legitimacy of the democratic state is diminished if increasingly fewer people feel it is a duty to render a retrospective judgment on the current government and a prospective evaluation on a future one.

A model of citizenship that emphasizes volunteering and community efforts presents a too-limited and somewhat distorted view of politics. Volunteering has direct and immediate consequences; politics is slow and often unsuccessful. Volunteers choose the organization and cause that is important to them; politics and governing involves decision-making in multiple policy arenas, not all of which are equally interesting to all those involved. Volunteering is praised; politics is denigrated. Volunteering involves little in the way of conflict. Politics is messy and there are both winners and losers. Instilling in youth an understanding that politics “involves the collective imposition of decisions, demands a complex communication process and generally produces messy compromises” is crucial to their willingness to engage in it (Stoker, 2006: 68) for “[d]emocracy is about competition and choice, and losers are bound to be dissatisfied, at least temporarily” (Diamond & Morlino, 2004: 30). Conflict and deliberation cannot be avoided. Tolerance, in this sense, ought not to be confused with an inability to challenge the opinions and views of others; instead, tolerance requires that such challenges occur within a climate of respect. And a model of citizenship that is silent on the importance of protest and dissent (beyond boycotting and buycotting) risks creating citizens that
see themselves as service providers rather than as government monitors, and importantly, as potential governors.

CONCLUSION

A review of the role of the citizen in democratic theory, in public understanding and within civic education programs raises several points. First, there is no single agreed upon model of the ‘good citizen.’ Theories of democracy that argue for less than the full participation of a majority of citizens raise that possibility that rather than requiring a single type of citizen, successful democracies may result from the proper mix of types of citizens. Moreover, a focus on a single model citizen risks placing too heavy a burden on young citizens who fail to meet this ideal, resulting in a potential withdrawal from political and civic engagement altogether.

Second, public and civic education programs elevate one dimension of citizen above others, creating one-dimensional citizens. The individually responsible citizen model risks the development of democracies where government accountability atrophies. By focussing on a version of citizenship that reinforces duty, citizens are unnecessarily limited in the degree to which they are required to hold and in the mechanisms available to them for holding governments accountable. The focus on voting to the neglect of other forms of participation limits their monitoring role as citizens. For Diamond and Morlino, “participatory citizens, voting at the polls and acting in various organized ways in civil society, are the last line of defense against potential executive efforts to subvert rule-of-law and good-governance institutions” (2004: 29 emphasis added).

The collectively responsible model, on the other hand, risks the development of creating democracies with parallel sets of institutions for dealing with social and economic concerns: the civic and the political. Creating a model of citizenship that focuses exclusively on volunteering and community problem-solving risks a downgrading of the importance of government structures as mechanisms for problem solving. Governments are not perfect solutions for collective decision-making but to divert attention and effort away from them risks increasing rather than decreasing their limitations. As Westheimer and Kahne (2004) argue, many civic education programs in the U.S. embrace a model of citizenship that is devoid of politics, fostering a commitment to service rather than democratic deliberation and decision-making. The focus is on being a ‘good’ person as much as it is on being a good citizen. This goal leads to a privileging of individual over collective action, and provides a rationale for avoiding politics by emphasizing volunteering.

Third, models of citizenship are surprisingly devoid of government and politics. The role of discussion and debate, of political parties, of protest and demonstration, and of political ideologies do not appear to form a central component of citizenship. Democracy is a system designed to allow for collective-decision making within a set of constraints. Collective-decision making in these citizenship models is often limited to voting, to a rather limited set of citizens deciding amongst themselves on how to meets the needs of the community. While these are all in themselves worthy, they do little to reinforce the difficulty of attempting to reach decisions within the reality of
competing interests, values and demands. Citizenship ought to include simple elements such as joining a party, attending debates, contacting officials and reading the newspaper. But it ought also to include running for office. To exclude the latter risks perpetuate the myth that politics and government is something for people other than responsible and ‘good’ citizens.

Fourth, the absence of politics from the models reinforces the perception that dissent and opposition are for those who are not ‘good’ citizens. Civic education should not devolve into state endorsed and sanctioned ‘participatory engineering’ designed to artificially inflate acceptable forms of participation and consensus beyond their ‘natural’ levels. Engagement requires more than simply support for the system to include close and careful monitoring of government and the voicing of opposition. It also requires more than engagement in civil society given that the formal political system is where collective decision-making power and legitimate authority lie. Citizenship ought to include an understanding that while politics might be ‘messy,’ its avoidance is impossible.

Fifth, the most successful civic education programs are those that foster an open climate, where opinions are freely expressed and deliberation practiced and encouraged. Such programs encourage the practice of democracy rather than simply learning about it in the abstract. The model of citizenship adopted within a civics programme is likely to shape the degree to which this occurs. The individually responsible citizen model discourages dissent, prioritizes obeying laws, encourages assuming responsibilities, and limits participation to voting, a relatively passive, individual and conflict-free act. The collectively responsible citizen model encourages civic action, collectively with like-minded others or individually through consumer action. Neither model adequately addresses nor encourages citizenship that includes openly and visibly challenging and critiquing governments. As such, such activity is unlikely to be encouraged or promoted in the classroom or school. If this is the case, young citizens will be neither prepared to voice dissent nor to work with those who do.

Finally, it is unlikely that the correspondence in the models of citizenship outlined by the public and those found to dominate in civics education programs is coincidental. Any number of possibilities exists for explaining it. One such possibility is that educators hope to avoid conflict by adopting programs that will be acceptable to the public. As public organizations, schools are ultimately accountable to the public that they serve. It is completely understandable that the programs they adopt are in line with public thinking. The irony is, however, that such a possibility only serves to underline the strength in the desire to avoid conflict and thus reinforces the importance of programs in schools designed to develop an appreciation for its role in politics.

NOTES

1 It ought to be noted that the results are to some extent shaped by the set of norms and expectations included in the survey. A set of questions tapping a wider set may have resulted in somewhat different results.
REFERENCES


DEMOCRACY, MODELS OF CITIZENSHIP AND CIVIC EDUCATION


2. IS CIVIC EDUCATION THE ANSWER?

The Futile Search for Policy Solutions to Youth Political Apathy in Canada

INTRODUCTION

In recent years there have been three occasions for mainstream media to sound the alarm on the civic illiteracy of young Canadians: Canada Day, Remembrance Day and any major election. On both national holidays, non-governmental organizations and history lobby groups such as the Dominion Institute, regularly release survey and poll results demonstrating how little young Canadians know about their country. Respondents normally cannot correctly answer when Canadian Confederation occurred or name the capitals of the ten provinces. The result of all the attention is a growing consensus on the existence of a political knowledge deficit. A related consensus has developed over the “democratic deficit” in political skills and actions, or more explicitly voting. During election campaigns, Elections Canada and non-governmental groups such as Student Vote and Apathy is Boring prod Canadians, especially young Canadians, to vote and in the aftermath of low turnout numbers, lament the perceived decline of the Canadian democracy.

Concern does not just rest with lobby groups and election administrators. Experts echo Richard Johnston’s blunt 2001 statement that “Electoral democracy in Canada is sick.” Johnston’s dramatic observation was not an exaggeration; the recent voting figures are discouraging. According to Elections Canada, the turnout for those between 18 and 24 years old in the 2004 election was 37 percent and 41 percent in 2006. Civic education advocate and Dominion Institute co-founder Rudyard Griffiths warns that Canada is becoming a nation of civic slackers whose focus is on consumption opposed to responsibility (Campbell, 2007). While the blame can shift from individual decision-making to the failure of government delivery of public education, whether approaching the issue from a conservative and knowledge-based frame or a progressive and participation-based lens, civic advocacy actors in Canada agree that young Canadians must become more politically engaged.

The dominant discourse has centred on the concept of “civic literacy”. Henry Milner (2002) has termed “civic literacy” as “the knowledge and ability of citizens to make sense of their political world.” Knowledge and skills are two parts of the pedagogical triangular model accepted by a majority of those involved in the study and delivery of education. The third tenet is attitudes. Regardless of
knowledge levels (understanding of political systems and institutions) or skill levels (comprehension and means of participation), attitudes may be the final and most challenging obstacle to recruiting young Canadians to participate in the political sphere. This paper stresses the effect of attitudes rather than knowledge or skills as the main obstacle preventing a significant increase in young Canadian civic engagement despite numerous policy attempts and government activity. Attitudes can be the most difficult to change. The current Canadian civic education regime does not appear to be adequately impacting the attitudes of young Canadians to boost the level of engagement. As the American-based Center for Civic Education puts it, the aim of civic education is “not just any kind of participation by any kinds of citizen; it is the participation of informed and responsible citizens, skilled in the arts of effective deliberation and action” (Keller, 1996). In this chapter I argue that we cannot assume civic education, though it has a legitimate place in the public school curriculum, to be a means of attaining such participation and overcoming youth political apathy. In attempting to make this argument I will cite historical and contemporary curriculum documents, previous political participation research and information acquired from interviews completed on the state of civic education in Canada.

THE NOTION OF CIVIC EDUCATION

Classic political theory is filled with references to, and notions of, the connection between education and a democratically healthy polity. Alexis de Tocqueville mused that if schools had existed in America before courts, social problems would have ended up in the public school rather than the courtroom (Postman, 1995). Due to its theoretical and normative nature, civic education is a highly fluid pedagogical product. Niemi and Junn (1998) contend, “Civics by its very nature is a controversial subject, and there is imperfect agreement on both its meaning and how to test whether students are well informed about it.” Difficulty arises with not only the competition for narrative within education but also the contestation of meaning over citizenship. Canada as a federated and conceptually contested state is particularly susceptible to questions of identity and citizenship. Since Confederation, the evolving narrative of imperial ties to the United Kingdom and economic links to the United States has been a trend mirrored in the history, civics and social studies curriculum. The question “What is Canada?” exists alongside the question “How do citizens act in Canada?”

While contemporary interest may suggest novel policy directions, civic education in Canada is not an incarnation of the 21st century. Provinces have a long tradition of including explicit civics courses or implicit moral education in their pedagogical delivery. While language and religion concerns in state schools have been at the peak of the politicization in the Canadian education regime, the meaning of civic education has become the fodder of academics and education experts more than the public or elected politicians. In this context we briefly revisit the policy discourse and curriculum narrative informing the civic education story in Canada since Confederation.
IS CIVIC EDUCATION THE ANSWER?

A CHANGING TRADITION OF CIVICS

In the early stages of Canadian public education development, Province of Canada-era educators supported the worth of schools as a catalyst for creating citizens even though Canadians officially remained British subjects until 1947. Egerton Ryerson (1847), Superintendent of Education from 1846 to 1876, argued education would help prepare individuals for “life as Christians, as persons of business and members of the civic community.” Following Confederation, Prime Minister John A. Macdonald emphasized education’s “potential to build support for the new political community” (McDonald, 1982). In the relatively young country, a program of civic education could aid in reconciling differences in language, religion and race. The early curriculum writers and education leaders stayed on a conservative course, framing citizenship in a colonial and Christian lens. In 1878, Manitoba Superintendent of Education Tasse argued,

Moral instruction forms the Christian, the devoted citizen, the steady soul, the grateful child, the good father; – almost the whole of man. It is in this direction that the teacher should bend the weight of his efforts. The religious sentiment is the foundation of all society; and the teacher should cultivate it in the hearts of his pupils with assiduous constancy (Gregor & Wilson, 1984).

The lessons taught in social studies and history textbooks such as the 1880s-era Gage’s Fourth Reader were dominated by colonial and British sentiments. The book argued for only one acceptable option for the new Canadian dominion, “to seek, in the consolidation of the empire, a common imperial citizenship, with common responsibilities and a common heritage” (Stanley, 1995). While contemporary civic textbooks and curricula attempt to empower the individual citizen, early Canadian civics stressed allegiance and identity built on the appreciation of certain historical and “heroic” figures. In 1884, Ontario’s Education Minister, George Ross stated,

The history of the community and nation to which we belong…shows the young the springs of public honour and dishonour; sets before them the national feelings, weaknesses and sins; warns them against future dangers by exhibiting the losses and suffering of the past; enshrines in their hearts the national heroes; and strengthens in them the precious love of country (Conley, 1989).

According to the Saskatchewan Annual Report of the Department of Education in 1901, the lives of great historical figures were studied “to form moral notions in children” and “to teach patriotism and civic duty” (McDonald, 1982). The early pedagogical efforts attempted to combine knowledge and skills but tended to stress political and civic responsibilities rather than political and civic involvement when discussing participation.

After the First World War, with increased attention on nation-building and sovereignty for Canada, civic education gradually emerged as more “Canadian”. In 1920, Manitoba’s Minister of Education, R.S. Thornton stated: “A teacher should be a teacher, not for one province but for all Canada. Our schools should not be Manitoba schools, but Canadian schools located in Manitoba” (Tomkins, 1986).
Slowly, the modern Canadian civic education narrative was emerging, as Ontario’s 1937 curriculum contended

The social virtues of the good citizen are not things merely to learn about. They are to be achieved by practicing them. The development of qualities of cooperation, respect for the rights and feelings of others, willingness to accept responsibility, and other attributes of the good citizen can be developed only by exercising them in situations that demand their practice. They are to be accepted willingly as desirable forms of conduct; they cannot be developed by coercion. The school must, therefore, be so organized as to permit of their growth and exercise in situations that require their practice.

As the country gradually became more concerned with questions of national identity and statehood, Canadian education as a whole was placed under greater scrutiny by a flurry of royal commissions on education in the provinces. The initial calls for reform primarily addressed organizational, administrative and financial questions but starting with Quebec’s Parent Commission in the early 1960s, the curriculum content, including civic education, came under focus. A relevant example is found in the 1967 report of the Newfoundland Royal Commission on Education which noted,

There are some who contend that no part of the curriculum has greater potential or importance than social studies. Social studies can help students understand the present through a study of the past, give them some understanding of the influence of the physical environment on human progress, and provide insights into the social, economic, and governmental systems now in operation. The overall objective is to promote good citizenship.

The 1970s Canadian social studies and civics policy scene was affected by a number of converging trends. The scrutiny to which the history curriculum was subjected by such critics as A.B. Hodgetts and a new philosophical approach that placed the student at the centre of the education system encouraged new directions for Canadian civics teaching. The national mood was one of collective naval-gazing around patriotic events such as the Centennial celebrations and the youth-enthused “Trudeaumania”. In conjunction with other factors, this context influenced the development of a new social science discipline termed “Canadian Studies”, and a more progressive and pluralist educational approach. The budding pluralist theme is found in Ontario’s 1973 History for the Intermediate Division: “Through study of the human experience in the Canadian setting both through time and in a global context, it is hoped that the student, as a citizen, will be able to understand the complexities of the nation of which he is a part and to develop some perception of the wider world, the community of nations of which he is also a part.”

The 1970s eventually gave way to a new education movement in the 1980s, responding to neo-conservative political trends and souring economic times, with calls for a return to the basic skills in education. However an approach focusing on civics gradually began a comeback. In the late 1980s, Canadian political scientists made one of their first comprehensive contributions to the field of citizenship
education with a collection of conference papers titled *Political Education in Canada*. In the past, Canadian political scientists had investigated political socialization, but did not take an active interest in political or citizenship education. Ronald Landes noted in 1988 that “it is still true to say that no full-length analysis of political learning in Canada has ever appeared in the pre-eminent journal of Canadian political scientists … of the five research notes which did appear, four were contributed by researchers at American universities.”

Empirical research in political participation and knowledge, and thus on civic education in the United States was stimulated in the 1960s at the intersection of new methodological enthusiasm for quantitative survey research and the subfield of political socialization, though that interest faded in the next two decades. By the 1990s, the field was revived as civics became a popular policy option for major Anglo-liberal democracies such as the United States, the United Kingdom and Australia. In 1991, the American government introduced a new framework for civic education called CIVITAS, followed in 1994 by the National Curriculum Standards for Civics and Government (Cogan, 1996). In the United Kingdom, compulsory citizenship education for students aged eleven to sixteen has been a part of the national curriculum since August 2002 (Davies, 2003), on the impetus of the 1999 British Crick Report, which sought “no less than a change in the political culture of this country both nationally and locally: for people to think of themselves as active citizens, willing, able and equipped to have an influence in public life and with the critical capacities to weigh evidence before speaking and acting” (Osler & Starkey, 2004). In Australia, civic education became a policy priority in 1993 under Prime Minister Paul Keating, who reasoned that a better-informed populace would lead to a more independent and unified national identity (Kennedy & Howard, 2004).

Thus a wealth of experience exists for Canadian education policy makers to consult. There has not, however, as we see from the divergent policy paths followed by Canada’s three largest English provinces, been any single influential model. It is worth briefly noting the differences between the three civic education approaches. British Columbia introduced a Grade Eleven civics course in 2005 that is not mandatory but can replace social studies or native studies as the student’s grade eleven social studies credit. In 2007, Alberta began phasing in a three-year mandatory social studies/civic education component into the high school curriculum with each year (grade ten through twelve) focusing on a grand societal and political theme. In 2000, Ontario introduced a mandatory half-year civics course for grade ten students. The students would complete the other half of their grade ten year with a mandatory course in career planning.

Although each path represents a brand of civic education that differs greatly from the early narrow, colonial and Christian programs from decades earlier, each represents varying levels of acceptance and commitment to civic education. Moreover, the organization and administrative intent of the courses demonstrate inconsistent governmental and political commitments to the pursuit of improved civic literacy and enhanced political participation. The following section looks at why a clear civic education policy has been so difficult to formulate.
FORMULATING A PUBLIC PROBLEM

Though election turnout rates and survey findings regularly portray a youth more concerned with consumer and material items than active and engaging citizenship, the issue does not have the visual impact of health care, the environment or national security. While most politicians express support for civic education, this support runs shallow. In interviews with four former Ontario education ministers questioned about the 2000 Grade Ten civics course, each showed little knowledge of its development, implementation, content or success, but nonetheless supported the notion of expanding civic education objectives in public schools.1

A major challenge for civic education actors has been the continuously contested notion of citizenship. As Langton and Jennings (1968) argued, “While most educators can agree that the development of good citizenship is important, the ‘good citizen’ is something of an ideal type whose attitudes and behaviour vary with the values of those defining the construct.” Voting is frequently identified as a quality of good citizenship; its absence as the most unequivocal evidence of declining engagement.

In addition, the school is accepted as an agent of change for the politically apathetic and uninterested, yet until the 1990s, most research suggested there was little correlation between the completion of a high school level civics course and political involvement. Langton and Jennings’ 1968 finding that high school social studies classes had little impact on the political participation of students was challenged by new findings including Niemi and Junn’s 1998 Civic Education: What Makes Students Learn, which suggested social studies classes did influence high school students. Overall, the research claims are contradictory.

The case for constructing youth engagement as a policy problem is fostered by contemporary non-governmental organizations involved in civic promotion. Conservative, more conventional groups, such as the Dominion Institute or Historica, frame the problem as a civic knowledge deficit. Surveys and polls are presented as empirical evidence that young Canadians are ignorant towards their country. Young, more progressive groups such as Apathy is Boring or Student Vote Canada construct their concern around a lack or under usage of civic skills. The Dominion Institute’s use of poor historical test survey results and the election agencies emphasis on the low turnout numbers both portray a deliberate attempt to gain support for their lobby industry.2

Therefore we can ask if governments’ pursuit of civic education programs is due more to policy path dependency than proven practical results. We know that the presence of federalism in Canada benefits education through the existence of pedagogical laboratories. Conversely, in the case of civic education more provincial policy options may work against the original intent of the programs by diluting national citizenship ideals. Each province is able to be the central arbiter in education policy formulation. Canadian elites have long been wary of the arrangement as Canada’s first Prime Minister, John A. Macdonald once admitted that having the federal government withdraw from control and supervision of education was “unwisely” (Johnson, 1968).
As mentioned earlier, Ontario and Alberta formulated different approaches to civic education policy. Ontario’s civic education curriculum stresses aspects of participation and activity while Alberta’s curriculum is framed around questions of identity and belonging. In Alberta, civic education is delivered through three years of mandatory courses based on ideological themes while in Ontario the course is packaged in a half-year program focusing on participatory ideals. Both Ontario and Alberta policy makers recognize the existence of civic apathy but have designed solutions that are much different. The recommendations for mandatory civics and career development in Ontario came from the Royal Commission in 1994, rather than in response to public pressure. Interviews with Alberta officials indicate that the policy process was much more organic in their province. Pedagogical interest in identity and citizenship had increased in 21st century Alberta. Development of citizenship-based education in Alberta was based more on identity and culture in relation to Aboriginal, immigrant and francophone perspectives than concerns with general youth political apathy.

As noted earlier in the chapter, issues of civic concern benefit from their general acceptability across ideological and political lines. Many agree with C.B. Macpherson’s (1977) notion, “Low participation and social inequality are so bound up with each other that a more equitable and humane society requires a more participatory political system.” Civics benefits from relative consensual acceptance. This type of status allows civic education to be viewed as a so-called “valence issue”. Valence issues are defined as “those in which only one side of the debate is legitimate”, for example there is little debate over whether drug use is bad or good (Baumgartner & Jones, 1993). Partisanship or ideology can have little influence over the support civic education enjoys. Nevertheless, the support for civics tends to be shallow. This situation results, on occasion, in a tendency to oversimplify problems and solutions concerning education (Sears & Hughes, 2005).

Possibly the most important call for greater citizenship education in Canada was A.B. Hodgetts’ 1968 publication *What Culture? What Heritage? A Study of Civic Education in Canada*. Three years prior, a $150,000 National History Project was initiated by the Board of Governors of Trinity College School. Out of this project arose the Canada Studies Foundation in 1970 and the publication of Hodgetts book in 1968 (Tomkins, 1977). The study was based on an examination of 951 classes in 247 schools across Canada (Bowd, 1978). Hodgetts (1968) complained “we are teaching a bland, unrealistic consensus version of our past: a dry-as-dust chronological story of uninterrupted political and economic progress told without the controversy that is an inherent part of history.” Ten years after the highly influential *What Culture? What Heritage?*, Hodgetts collaborated with Paul Gallagher on *Teaching Canada for the 80s*. While *What Culture?* evaluated the past, *Teaching Canada* (1978) looked to the future, calling for a different civic education, one unlike the old ‘civics’ courses, which dealt almost exclusively with a description, frequently an unrealistic one, of the structure of government. In the last decade many more have followed in Hodgetts and Gallagher’s footsteps but for different reasons. Today’s civic alarmist is more concerned with the output, the
level of political participation, than the input, the content of the policy or in this
case curriculum. It is now time for academics to return to the potential solution,
civic education policy, and whether or not the search for one is worthy at all.

FINDING A POLICY SOLUTION

Schools have been involved in citizenship education ever since it was accepted that
the school could play a role not just in preparation for vocation but also for
preparation of life within a democracy. Gradually, civic education received separate
billing as an individual course and would gain the attention of academics as a
solution to the policy problem of teaching deference and civic compliance. By 1915,
‘civics’ referred to the teaching of citizenship and politics in American high schools
(Langton & Jennings, 1968). The term “social studies” was first used in Canadian
curriculum documents in western Canada in the 1920s and Ontario in 1937 (Clark,
2004). During this time, American academics began to take note of the new
connections forming between the school and the state. Charles Merriam published
the influential Making of Citizens (1931) and Civic Education in the United States
(1934) and the Civic Training series that would inspire Gabriel Almond and Sidney
Verba’s The Civic Culture (1963) (Bennett, 1999). M. Kent Jennings was responsible
for a decades-long study of a 1965 high school class and the connection between
civic education and political socialization which produced such important books as

In 1965, Jennings and Niemi surveyed 1,669 senior students in 97 American
secondary schools in the United States and found little support for the notion that the
civics curriculum was a source of political socialization. The Torney et al. 1975
study, Civic Education in Ten Countries, based on research dating back to 1967 with
survey data from more than 30,000 students and teachers from Germany, Finland,
Iran, Ireland, Israel, Italy, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Sweden and the United
States. While a lull in the civic education literature followed, momentum for further
research returned by the mid-1990s.

In the last decade, each Canadian province has experienced civic education
curriculum reform, with new curricula in Newfoundland (1998), Nova Scotia
Ontario (2000), Manitoba (2007), Saskatchewan (1999), Alberta (2007) and British
Columbia (2005). A growing trend for education policy makers in the 2000s was to
expand citizenship beyond traditional civics classes with programs promoting
character and volunteerism. With the acceptance of pluralism in Canadian education,
the “citizen” becomes a much more complex concept than that of the good Christian
British subject idealized in early versions of Canadian civics courses. The following
table presents a current snapshot of civic education in Canada identifying when
recent reforms were made and how provinces have configured the delivery of civic
education. While almost all courses are compulsory or may serve as compulsory
courses, the units and themes differ from a focus on strands of citizenship (Ontario)
to contemporary political eras (Quebec) to variations on the role of Canada (Prince
Edward Island).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Province</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Course Title</th>
<th>Units/Themes</th>
<th>Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Nfld.    | 1998 | Canadian Issues (Grade 10) | 1. Cultural and Social Issues  
2. Political and Legal Issues  
3. Economic and Environmental Concerns  
4. Global Concerns | One of three options for compulsory social studies credit with: Canadian History Geography |
| NS       | 2002 | Canadian History (Grade 11) | 1. Globalization  
2. Development  
3. Governance  
4. Sovereignty  
5. Justice | One of three options for compulsory social studies credit with: Mik Maq Studies African Canadian Studies |
| PEI      | 2007 | Canadian Studies (Grade 10) | 1. Canada’s Place in the World  
2. Canada’s Voices of the Past  
3. Canada as a Democracy  
4. Canada’s Work and Worth  
5. Canada’s Global Connections  
6. Canada’s Cultural Mosaic | One of four options for two compulsory social studies credit: History Geography Social Studies |
| NB       | 2006 | Canadian Identity (Grade 9) | 1. Exploring Canadian Identity  
2. Geographic Influences  
3. Decades of Change  
4. Citizenship  
5. Challenges and Opportunities  
6. Reflections on Canadian Identity | Compulsory |
| Quebec   | 1998 | History of Quebec and Canada (Grade 10) | Economic, Social and Political Domains for following Eras:  
1. 1960 – 1970  
2. 1971 – 1980  
3. 1981 to present | Compulsory |
| Ontario  | 2000 | Civics (Grade 10) | (Strands – Informed, Purposeful and Active Citizenship)  
1. Democracy – Issues and Ideas  
2. Democracy – The Canadian Context  
3. Democracy – Global Perspectives | Compulsory |
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Province</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Course Title</th>
<th>Units/Themes</th>
<th>Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Manitoba  | 2007 | Social Studies (Grade 9) | 1. Active Democratic Citizenship in Canada  
2. Canadian Citizenship for the Future  
3. Citizenship in the Global Context  
4. Environmental Citizenship | Compulsory |
| Sask.     | 1999 | Social Studies (Grade 9) | 1. Time  
2. Change  
3. Causality  
4. Culture: First Nations Roots | Compulsory |
| Alberta   | 2007 | Social Studies (Grade 10 to Grade 12) | Grade 10  
– Perspectives on Globalization  
– Living in a Globalizing World  
Grade 11  
– Perspectives on Nationalism  
– Understanding of Nationalism  
Grade 12  
– Perspectives on Ideology  
– Understandings of Ideologies | Compulsory |
| BC        | 2005 | Civics (Grade 11) | 1. Skills and Processes of Civics Studies  
2. Informed Citizenship  
3. Civic Deliberation  
4. Civic Action | One of three options for compulsory social studies credit with:  
Social Studies 11  
Native Studies 11 |

My research has focused on British Columbia and, especially, Ontario. The British Columbia experience has been quite bleak. Out of the roughly 50,000 Grade 11 course students in British Columbia, only 645 students were enrolled in Civics grade 11 in 2005-2006 and 669 students in 2006-2007. With such a low number of students enrolled and completing the Civics 11 course it is difficult to describe the policy effort in any manner other than incomplete. Compared to the civics course in Ontario where all students are required to complete the course, in British Columbia barely 1 percent of eligible students are participating in the new course. Those involved in the course have suggested that the concept was not well received by social studies teachers across the province because the ministry decided Civics 11 could take the place of the traditional and popular Social Studies 11 course in the students’ diploma requirements.

The development of the Ontario Grade 10 Civics course dates back to early 1990s. The recommendations for mandatory civics and career development came in 1994 from the Royal Commission. Commission member Avis Glaze recalls, “I don’t remember many people coming up with it, it is safe to say the commission
IS CIVIC EDUCATION THE ANSWER?

recommended it….we wanted to focus on citizenship….we talked about creating communities of concern.”5 Former New Democratic Minister of Education David Cooke (1993-1995) remembers there being some talk of civic education but “in terms of real specifics or it being a top notch… (Civics) was overtaken by other priorities.” Between 1995 and 1996, during the eight or nine rounds needed to develop the new common curriculum, Grade 10 Civics was an early addition. Former Progressive Conservative Minister of Education John Snobelen (1995-1997) notes, “had there been another government committed to changing government, they probably would have pulled civics out of history as well.” The ministry’s backgrounder on the changes to civics stated, “For the first time under the new high school program, students will take Civics as a separate, compulsory course, rather than as only a unit of the Canadian History course” (Government of Ontario, 1999). Problems appeared in the early stages of policy implementation. When the course was introduced one teacher observed,

No advance preparation for the civics course…they just arrived on our doorstep…the documents came out the fall the course was introduced…no supporting resources…there was really nothing for them (the teachers) in 1999…the first time I taught the course I tried to work within the profile of the civics course but it wasn’t very good so I went back to old civics lessons from the law and government course (“Canadian History course”).

The Ontario Civics course was reviewed in 2003-04 as part of an ongoing curriculum review. When the civics course profile was reformed in 2004 the expectations were greatly reduced. One former civics teacher and member of the curriculum writing team was still very critical after the reforms had been completed,

Most kids really dread it (Civics)… The first few years were okay if you were experienced but the problem was they put any Tom, Dick or Harry in the classroom because of the scheduling…not only could you be a new teacher but you could also be a new phys ed teacher…that’s why it became a mess around the province, it depends on the school…Sometimes because it is a half course principals don’t take consideration into staffing…You could be a corpse and pass it, it’s not hard.

The sample of twenty teachers that I interviewed came from all around Ontario with a variety of experience, from second year-teachers to twenty-year veterans. The teachers also varied in their experience teaching the Grade 10 Civics course with some having taught the course only a few times and others having taught the course thirty or forty times since its implementation. Regrettably this could not be a representative sample since many boards denied approval for their employees to be interviewed, and among those where such permission was granted, a certain self-selectivity of keen teachers was unavoidable. As one respondent noted: “How can you have a student buy into what you are talking about if you aren’t passionate about it yourself?” Not surprisingly, then, the teachers interviewed generally supported the course’s existence, most believing it was having an impact, and that students demonstrate increased levels of civic knowledge at the end of the course.
than the beginning. Yet even the most ambitious teachers noted that at the beginning of the course many students were negatively predisposed with low to no civic knowledge; they were unfamiliar with current events and lacked any desire to participate politically. The students of one teacher had great difficulty identifying the prime minister.\(^6\) Another routinely started the semester with a simple political quiz that the classes regularly failed. A third teacher stated that most have no idea what civics is, while another estimated that one percent of the students at the beginning of the course show any interest at all in political involvement.

By placing mandatory status on the course Ontario’s Ministry of Education has symbolically stressed its importance without providing resources proper and conditions for success. Teaching ability was repeatedly raised in the interviews as the key to the success of the course:

So much hinges on the ability of the teacher that teaches the course. If they are interested in the course and are enthused about it then it can definitely do a good job of promoting civic knowledge. Often this course is one that gets dumped into a teacher’s lap that has no interest in the course. When that happens the students tune out and walk away from the course with distain and disinterest.

Overall, the interview responses present a number of concerns with Ontario’s Grade 10 Civics course. Most of the teacher critiques were related to the administration and organization of the course. Teachers expressed concern over the length of the course (too short), the age of the students (too young) and the composition of the classes (‘open’ to all levels of learning). The minor but multitude of problems reveals an ambiguous attitude from Ontario policy leaders. It does not appear the government actions have been malicious or deliberate but rather reflect the relative unimportance of civic education to the government. According to interview responses, principals administer civics as a timetable “dumping ground”, while assigning the course to new and unqualified (lacking social studies or history training) teachers. Secondly, there is little uniformity in curriculum delivery, as some teachers continue to stress institutions and others rarely mention the traditional lessons and focus on contemporary events and concerns. While the broad flexibility of curriculum interpretation allows the teachers choice over content, which can be useful in the hands of experienced teachers, in other cases, which seem more typical in Ontario, it leads to courses that may fail to integrate political institutions with current events and community level participation.

Despite their disappointment with the curriculum and textbooks, most teachers believed they could reach the students through engaging activities such as mock trials, parliaments and elections, as well as participation in their own community. Many agree with the observation of a veteran of thirty-five years of teaching who has taught the course more than a dozen times that “at the end of the course the students that do well in civics know more about their society than most of their parents.” This matters because, as a fifteen-year veteran of teaching asserted: “It reaches kids who come from non-voting families.”
The Ontario, British Columbia and Alberta cases all present considerably different approaches to civic education in Canada. All are education policies adopted in the post-material and post-Meech Lake and Charlottetown age of Canadian politics. Canadians are more educated and less engaged, enjoy more affluence and participate less. Civic apathy in Canada should be a puzzling problem. On the surface the Ontario, British Columbia and Alberta programs all appear to exist as policy solutions to the public problem of civic apathy. With a closer analysis it is suggested here that Alberta’s three-year program has been more based in identity politics, British Columbia’s pilot grade eleven course has been close to irrelevant and the Ontario Grade 10 course is a seemingly empty vessel always in need of keen pilots (effective teachers).

CONCLUSION

This chapter has not attempted to answer the question the title poses but rather present the rationale for asking the question. The historical record and recent political realities are clear. Civic education in Canada has gone through many variations over time and currently exists in many forms across the country. The current generation of young Canadians is recording historic lows in voting and participation. The inconsistency between policy inputs (more concentration on civic education) and outputs (less civic engagement) should create cause for more scrutiny not merely on the public problem but the proposed solutions. Moreover, there are a number of actors that may propel Canadian civic education to a more effective future. First, more cooperation between provinces may lead to better testing of course effectiveness. Curriculum collaboration has occurred in both Western and Atlantic provinces on subjects from math to science to social studies. In 1993, the Atlantic Provinces agreed on the development of a regional curriculum and four western provinces and the two territories endorsed the Western Canadian Protocol for Collaboration in Basic Education (Dunning, 1997). The formation of the Western Canadian Protocol Common Curriculum Framework for Social Studies in 2002 was the first inter-provincial/territorial curriculum endeavour to include both Aboriginal and francophone representatives in course development (Manitoba, 2007).

With the major advancements in information technology it would seem only appropriate for provinces to naturally drift towards a more collaborative spirit; yet still most claim the forces or programs uniting civic educators across the country are private initiatives. More coordination is needed between private actors such as the Dominion Institute and Historica and government agencies such as Elections Canada and the federal department of Canadian Heritage. These groups along with less permanent bodies such as Student Vote and Apathy is Boring need to pool resources to present a consistent message around civic participation. Finally and possibly most unlikely, civic educators across Canada need to work toward an accepted and authentic civic education narrative. While all provinces have accepted a modern version of Canadian citizenship that is inclusive, pluralist provincial
jurisdiction over education produces ten distinct approaches to civic education. This sentiment, while long accepted, may need to be reconsidered.

Unless governments seek new policy paths that are committed to successful and realistic models of civic education, Canadian civic education will remain compromised of arbitrary planning and ambiguous objectives. By adopting a common national civic education curriculum, provinces could pool resources for nation-wide implementation. Such a program could encourage more cooperation between non-governmental organizations, various levels of government and election administration agencies. Considering the major differences in civic education delivery between Canada’s three largest provinces, British Columbia, Alberta and Ontario, it would take an ambitious and historical policy effort to accept a national civics curriculum. If this cannot be achieved, more cooperation, coordination and consensus of pedagogical aims would at least begin to build a new policy path that is not dominated by fluctuating government and public interest and diverging educational goals. Without a cohesive plan, Canadians may have to look forward to more annual reminders on Canada and Remembrance Day of their declining civic knowledge and on Election Day of their decreasing civic participation.

NOTES


2 Some even within the political science profession are sceptical about civic education efforts. In response to the American Political Science Association’s 1998 Task Force on Civic Education in the Next Century, Stephen Leonard wrote, “I think most political scientists may be sympathetic to the ideal of civic education and thus with TFCE’s efforts…but sympathy and well-crafted plans will not carry the day in the absence of compelling reasons for acting on these sentiments and implementing these plans…unfortunately, the TFCE (does not) provide compelling reasons for action, mainly because they do not have a suitably robust account of why similar efforts have failed in the past, and why they are likely to fail today.” Stephen T. Leonard. “‘Pure Futility and Waste’: Academic Political Science and Civic Education” PS: Political Science and Politics. Vol. 32. No. 4. December 1999. Pg. 749.

3 A spokesperson for the Ministry of Education of Alberta in a phone interview, on March 4 2008 noted: “September 11th and a huge influx of immigrants coming into Alberta, not just into the cities but the small towns to work in the oil fields...a huge culture clash...Suddenly farm communities were dealing with Somalians and they didn’t know what to do.” In terms of curriculum development, the ministry official said, “A lot of tears shed and a lot of people have left these projects...when Aboriginal people tell you their stories it is heartbreaking.”

4 British Columbia Ministry of Education Official. Email Interview. 24 April 2008

5 Along with interviewing teachers, interviews were also completed with former bureaucrats and politicians including four former ministers of education (David Cooke, John Snobelen, Janet Ecker, Elizabeth Witmer)

6 All interviews were anonymous and conducted over the phone between November 2007 and March 2008. Boards and schools also remain anonymous in the research, the intent of the interviews was to emulate Hodgetts “fly-on-the-wall” type observations without actually setting foot in the classroom.
REFERENCES


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IS CIVIC EDUCATION THE ANSWER?


APPENDIX – CIVIC EDUCATION IN CANADA THROUGH THE YEARS

Ontario Grade 10 Canadian History and Citizenship Aims – 1938

1. To give an understanding of the importance of Canada’s past in relation to her present position and to study the progress made;
2. To show how Canada’s history is linked with that of the Empire and related to that of other parts of the world;
3. To promote tolerance, respect and goodwill towards other races and classes;
4. To foster a spirit of unity among the provinces of Canada;
5. To train the pupil to collect, organize, and use information for the purpose of thinking critically and forming conclusions;
6. To show the pupil that institutions are subject to change; that in seeking to effect changes methods of discussion and persuasion should be preferred to methods of force;
7. To lead the pupil to see that he has duties and responsibilities towards his family, his school, his community, his province, the Dominion of Canada and the British Empire.


Ontario History Intermediate Division Aims – 1977

1. To develop an understanding of the Canadian identity and societal goals;
2. To develop an understanding of the roots of Canada’s cultural heritage;
3. To develop a reasoned pride in Canada;
4. To develop an understanding of civic responsibility;
5. To develop an understanding of fundamental concepts central to the human experience, such as justice, change, diversity, order, individualism, the common good, worth of the individual, concern for others, dignity of labour, tradition, culture;
6. To develop the ability to imaginatively recreate the past;
7. To develop an awareness of the contributions of both women and men of all ages and groups to the development of our country.


Ontario Grade 9 or Grade 10 Contemporary Canada: Life in the Twentieth Century Aims – 1987

1. Develop an understanding of the Canadian political and legal systems;
2. Develop an appreciation of their rights and responsibilities as Canadian citizens;
3. Develop the ability to analyze, in historical perspective and in terms of future implications, contemporary issues of concern to Canadians as citizens of Canada and members of the world community;
4. Extend the cognitive skills needed to process and communicate information in a variety of contexts.

Three Strands of Ontario Grade 10 Civics Course

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Informed Citizenship</th>
<th>Purposeful Citizenship</th>
<th>Active Citizenship</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>An understanding of key civics questions, concepts, structures, and processes is fundamental to informed citizenship. In a diverse and rapidly changing society that invites political participation, the informed citizen should be able to demonstrate an understanding of contrasting views of citizenship within personal, community, national and global citizens. As well, they will learn the principles and practices of decision making.</td>
<td>It is important that students understand the role of the citizen, and the personal values and perspectives that guide citizen thinking and actions. Students need to reflect upon their personal sense of civic identity, moral purpose and legal responsibility – and to compare their views with those of others. They should examine important civic questions and consider the challenges of governing communities in which contrasting values, multiple perspectives, and differing purposes coexist.</td>
<td>Students need to learn basic civic literacy skills and have opportunities to apply those skills meaningfully by participating actively in the civic affairs of their community. Civic literacy skills include skills in the areas of research and inquiry, critical and creative thinking, decision-making, conflict resolution, and collaboration. Full participatory citizenship requires an understanding of practices used in civic affairs to influence public decision making.</td>
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