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Public Schooling and Citizenship Education in Canada

ABSTRACT/RÉSUMÉ

This article examines the role of public schools in Canada as agents of citizenship education. The historical development of citizenship education in Canada is outlined and the current neglect of citizenship education in favour of economic and vocational priorities is examined. The article describes seven elements of citizenship education and illustrates the ambiguities and contradictions of the concept of citizenship in a school setting. The article also presents some suggestions for the reinvigoration of citizenship education in the schools, in terms both of curriculum and pedagogy.

Cet article examine le rôle de l’instruction publique canadienne dans le cadre de l’éducation pour la citoyenneté. L’auteur offre un sommaire de l’histoire de l’éducation pour la citoyenneté au Canada et examine le fait que cette éducation soit négligée pendant les années récentes, car les écoles portent leur attention surtout à la préparation les jeunes pour le monde du travail. L’article décrit sept composantes de l’éducation pour la citoyenneté et examine les ambiguïtés et les contradictions de ce concept dans le contexte scolaire. L’article propose aussi quelques suggestions à propos du renouvellement de l’éducation pour la citoyenneté dans l’optique non seulement du curriculum, mais aussi de la pédagogie.

Introduction

From their very beginnings public schools in Canada, as in other countries, were expected to prepare the young for citizenship. That, in fact, was the very reason why the state compelled parents to send their children to school in the first place since in school they would be subject to an officially approved curriculum, taught by officially trained and certificated teachers, using officially authorized curricula and textbooks, and subject to officially appointed inspectors and officially organized examinations — all designed with the goal of producing citizens. It is true that, for pragmatic and political reasons, governments often had to make some allowance for private schooling, but they did so reluctantly and did their best to bring it under some degree of state control and supervision. Hence, for example, the sporadic quarrels between church and state over the years, in Canada and elsewhere, concerning the content and organization of schooling. Althusser oversimplified a complex reality and grossly underestimated the autonomy of schools when he described them as part of what he called the “ideological state apparatus,” but he had a point notwithstanding, for public schools are intended to teach those things that the state desires to be taught.¹

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Normal schools, for example, were so called because they were supposed to establish the officially approved norms that governed what and how teachers were required to teach.

By the end of the nineteenth century the combined pressures of industrialism, nationalism, and liberalism (in the sense of elected legislatures with more or less power depending on a given political regime) had made the idea of public schooling virtually irresistible in the industrialized world. Boys and girls were no longer to be left to their own devices or to do as their parents chose. They had to be turned into national citizens. As the historian Eugen Weber stated, “peasants” had to be turned into “Frenchmen” and Frenchwomen, presumably. In the well-known remark of an Italian nationalist after the unification of Italy in 1870, “We have made Italy; now we must make Italians.” In the world of the nation-state, children had to speak the national language, read the national literature, learn the national history and geography, and internalize the national values. And, if they were of working class or peasant background, as inevitably the majority were, they had to learn to know and keep their place in the social order. In Gramscian terms, schooling was designed as an instrument of ideological and cultural hegemony by which those in positions of power endeavoured, with more or less success, to shape the thinking of society at large.

This process of creating national citizens was and is subject to many different, and often conflicting, interpretations, and schooling has always been more than the imposition of ruling class hegemony. In The Communist Manifesto, Marx and Engels claimed free, compulsory schooling as a right, and it was a constant demand of socialists and trades unionists from the early nineteenth century onwards. On the political left, schooling was seen, at least potentially, as an instrument of emancipation, not of oppression. As British Columbia socialist Angus McInnis wrote in 1924: “Education, even present-day education, with all its defects tends to stimulate the imagination and sharpen the perceptions of those who receive it; and under adverse circumstances they begin to question the fitness of things.” McInnis went on: “The laborer or artisan when he has finished his day’s work should find pleasure in taking down from his shelf his Keats, Byron or Shakespeare, his Macaulay, Scott, Dickens, and spending an evening with them as that the banker, lawyer, doctor or professor should have access to and be able to appreciate them.” Knowledge, he concluded, was “essential for universal progress, but fatal to class privilege.” As this example illustrates, schooling was never a simple, top-down imposition of social control. Schooling was resisted, sabotaged, manipulated, and diverted as those who were supposed to be its object sought to blunt its impact or turn it to their own advantage. As has been often observed, hegemony is as much a process of negotiation as it is of imposition.

Moreover, even those people who hoped to impose their hegemony on others did not always agree on just what it was that they wanted to do. Most people, though not all, found it easy to agree on the importance of educating the young for citizenship, but they often disagreed fundamentally on just what citizenship was and how it should be taught and learned. Nonetheless, both their agreements and their disagreements ensured that, for much of the twentieth century, educationists paid conspicuous and continuing attention to the role of schooling in producing citizens.
The Decline of Citizenship Education

Beginning in the mid-1980s, however, Canadian policy-makers, like their counterparts in Western Europe and the United States, more or less abandoned citizenship, however defined, as a goal of general education in their haste to turn schools into training grounds for the new global economy. At the level of the individual school, teachers often engage students in activities that have implications for citizenship, notably environmental campaigns, intercultural awareness, human rights, social justice, and the like, but at the policy-making level the talk is increasingly of international competitiveness and entrepreneurialism. To the extent that citizenship continues to be discussed, it is largely confined to social studies and related subjects, though there are some recent signs that it is beginning to attract more general attention. In practice, however, citizenship education is now largely seen as the special territory of social studies and history teachers and tends to be equated with civics. It has become the province of enthusiasts and specialists, but not of the policy makers at large. Such, at least, is the conclusion to be drawn from the evidence collected by Sears and Hughes.  

In his 1987 report on Ontario drop-outs, George Radwanski described education, not as the training ground of citizens, but as “the paramount ingredient for success in the competitive world economy” and as essential to “our very survival as an economically competitive society.” In 1991 the Manitoba Department of Education and Training explained its new policy direction in these words: “The workforce will demand highly skilled and adaptable workers who have the ability to upgrade existing skills and develop new skills, who can help and participate in a climate that encourages entrepreneurship, innovation and economic growth, and who can understand the complex dynamics of a competitive global environment.”

These two examples reflect the sentiments of every department and ministry of education in Canada, regardless of political party, and now largely shape public debate over schooling. They are the visible tip of an agenda which seeks to convert education into career preparation, to turn schools into vocational training centres, to define students and parents as customers and clients. It is an agenda which says nothing about citizenship, and, in fact, seems to see citizenship as an obstacle to its plans and priorities for citizenship gets in the way of the imperatives of the global marketplace. Citizenship, after all, prizes imperatives other than those of economic rationality. Citizenship raises questions of identity, loyalty, tradition, heritage, and community that run counter to the corporate forces that are seeking to reshape the global economy. Canadian citizenship could well be dysfunctional in the north-south world of the North American Free Trade Agreement, in the global arena of the World Trade Organization, in a world where national governments find their sovereignty shrinking, or in a political climate where Canada’s provincial governments will accept Quebec’s distinctiveness only on condition that they receive whatever special powers might be needed by Quebec.

Historically, in Canada as elsewhere, schools have been expected to serve a triple function: to help students make the most of their lives and develop their individual talents, to prepare students for citizenship, and to train them for the world of work. Traditionally, the three were often described as the cultural, social, and vocational functions of schooling. Today, however, policy-makers seem to be neglecting the
first two in order to concentrate on the third. This is why we see moves around the
country to reduce the time devoted to such subjects as art, music, history, social
studies, and even physical education, in order to create more space for computers,
career preparation, so-called life skills, cooperative education, and job training. In
1995, for example, I was part of a small delegation lobbying the then Manitoba
Minister of Education to reconsider a decision to remove Canadian history from the
provincial Grade 11 program. In the course of the discussion the Minister told us that
he saw literacy as all-important. Our delegation agreed, and what better subject, we
asked, to promote literacy than history with its heavy emphasis on reading, writing,
and discussion? The Minister, however, told us that we had misunderstood him.
What he wanted was what he called “pure literacy,” which, as far as I could gather,
meant the ability to read and write reports, understand instructions, explain oneself
clearly, and so forth — all laudable objectives but, if stripped of context, opening up
a world where it does not matter what one reads provided that one reads something.
It is a world where education is sacrificed for training, where knowledge is seen as
disposable, and where values are displaced by skills.

There was a time when things were very different. In 1916, when introducing
compulsory school attendance, a decision which was not popular in all parts of the
province, Manitoba’s Minister of Education could not have been clearer. “Boys and
girls,” he said, “the citizens of the future must be qualified to discharge the duties of
citizenship.” In 1925 in British Columbia, an influential Royal Commission on
education voiced similar sentiments: “The development of a united and intelligent
citizenship should be accepted without question as the fundamental aim of our
schools.” At about the same time, the American historian Carl Becker, a man of
progressive and liberal views, said much the same thing, noting that “it is and must
remain a fundamental assumption that the chief purpose of free education in a
democratic society is to make good citizens, rather than good scholars.” It would
be easy to find many other similar quotations, all making the point that the primary
purpose of public education was the development of citizenship. Just about every
subject in the curriculum was defended in terms of its contribution to citizenship, not
only in the case of such obvious subjects as history, language, and literature, but also
gardening, art, music, nature study, physical education, health, science, and on and
on. Here are two typical examples: first, a statement from 1907: “The moral influence
of a properly conducted school garden cannot be estimated too highly.” Again, this
time from 1920: “music is going to do more for the nationalization of the country than
any other single agency.”

The Debate over Citizenship

Citizenship, though much used, is a deceptive word. Philosophers describe it as
a concept that is “essentially contested,” that is to say, one whose meaning can never
be once and for all decisively fixed, but which will always be the subject of debate
and disagreement.

Conservatives define citizenship largely in terms of loyalty, duty, respect,
tradition, and of accepting change slowly, even grudgingly, and only when absolutely
necessary. They put social stability and order ahead of individual rights, or, rather,
believe that these rights can only be properly secured when the social order is given
priority. Liberals, on the other hand, define citizenship above all in terms of civil liberties and individual rights. For them, to be a citizen is to be the bearer of rights, of freedom of belief and expression, of freedom from arbitrary arrest, and so on, and no one or no thing is to be allowed to abridge or infringe upon these rights except for the most compelling reasons and sometimes not even then. Socialists, for their part, following Marx’s dictum that the workers have no country, generally rejected citizenship entirely as a propaganda smokescreen behind which those in power cloak their real interests. More recently, socialists have begun to define citizenship in terms of social justice, equity, community, the redistribution of wealth and power, and they are, or were, perfectly prepared to accept, indeed to welcome, whatever social reforms are needed to achieve them. And beyond and around these three major divisions circle assorted feminists, communitarians, libertarians, anarchists, Marxists, neo-conservatives, neo-liberals, and others, all of whom have their own ideas about just what constitutes citizenship.

In the real world these distinctions are blurred. Few people are pure conservatives, liberals, socialists, or whatever. We combine, or try to, elements of each position in our definition of the social good and what has to be done to achieve it. And, no matter how pure our principles, when we come to deal with concrete problems in the real world, we find ourselves forced to come to terms with the messy reality of everyday life in which compromise and second-best are often unavoidable. I used to teach my high school history students what I called Osborne’s first law of politics. It ran as follows: to any political problems there are two solutions — one is bad, the other is worse. My point was simple enough: if a problem can be solved easily, it is unlikely to be a political problem. It will be administrative or technical or managerial, but it will not involve fundamental divisions of beliefs and values, which is the very essence of politics and which makes citizenship so important if we are to manage political problems reasonably.

In other words, citizenship is not only an essentially contested concept, it is also fundamentally political in the broad sense of being inextricably connected with questions of governance and social living, of identity, of equity and justice, especially in any society which aspires to be democratic, where citizens have a voice in deciding the shape of their society and how they are governed, where, ideally, they govern themselves. As Aristotle wrote over two thousand years ago, to be a citizen is to know both how to be ruled and how to rule — and how to do both in ways that are respectful and tolerant of all other citizens, even those with whom we fundamentally disagree.

The Evolution of Citizenship Education

This, in part, is why, when compulsory public education was instituted in Canada roughly a hundred years ago, citizenship was seen as so important. In a country where most men, and eventually women, had the vote, the very least that needed to be done was to ensure that they would vote intelligently, as the popular phrase went, especially when many of them were immigrants who were often ignorant of the values and traditions of the society to which they had moved. This required, for example, that voters could read and think well enough to understand the issues they faced, were independent enough not to allow their votes to be bought, were interested enough in public affairs to follow politics between elections and perhaps even
become involved in political life themselves, and to live with political disagreement, conflict, and ambiguity. A Harvard professor of government stated in 1924, in words that commanded assent in Canada as much as in the United States:

No sound system of government can be founded on illiteracy. What we spend for public education is in large measure an expenditure for the preservation of individual liberty. There is only one way in which the world can be made safe for democracy, and that is by making it unsafe for ignorance. Until men and women are able to read their ballots and understand what they are voting for, until they have at least a minimum of education, it is dangerous to place the suffrage in their hands. It is putting democracy in peril. The more political freedom you give a people, the greater is their opportunity for abusing it.\(^{16}\)

At one level, these remarks are uncontentious, even platitudinous, but it is not difficult to see in them the fear of the so-called respectable classes – the property-owners, the native-born, the middle-classes broadly defined – that their social inferiors – the workers, the immigrants, the property-less – might too easily be tempted by radical or subversive ideas. The theory and practice of citizenship education exist in a dialectical relationship with the exercise of hegemony. They pursue a double mission of control and emancipation, of socialization and education, sometimes emphasizing the one and sometimes the other. According to radical critics, citizenship education pays rhetorical lip-service to the one, speaking glowingly of autonomy, liberation, participation, and the like, while, in fact, devoting all its efforts to enforcing conformity, subordination, and acquiescence.\(^{17}\)

Since voting does not take place in a geographical vacuum, but in the defined territorial space of the nation-state, voters were, and are, expected to identify with their country, to see themselves not as citizens in the abstract or as citizens of the world, but as citizens of the state in which they live, willing and able to cast their votes and form their opinions in terms of what is best for their country, with more or less regard for the rights and interests of other countries and of the world as a whole. At the extreme, they have to be willing to lay down their lives for their country. In the words of the French historian and educationist Ernest Lavisse in 1912:

If the schoolboy does not carry within himself the living memory of our national glories; if he does not know that his ancestors have fought on a thousand battlefields for noble causes; if he has not learned how much it cost in blood and toil to forge our country’s unity and to draw out of the chaos of our outmoded institutions the laws that have made us free; if he has not become a citizen who is conscious of his duty and a soldier who loves his rifle, then the teacher will have wasted his time.\(^{18}\)

Not all educationists were this belligerent, though a significant number were in pre-World War I Europe and have been in various parts of the world ever since. Thus, one can see why H.G. Wells held schools generally, and history teachers in particular, responsible for creating the climate of opinion that made the First World War possible.\(^{19}\) It was in their history classes, said Wells, that young men learned the false lessons of nationalism and militarism, of the glory of war and the heroism of sacrifice. Even those who did not go as far as Lavisse and his counterparts in other
countries agreed that students needed to have a sense of national identity and, better yet, of patriotism, which meant knowing something of their country’s history and heritage, of visualizing its geography, of cherishing its culture.

In the years before and immediately after the First World War, citizenship was often seen in harsh and coercive terms and contained more than its share of racist, sexist, and social class motivations and assumptions. It was in the name of Canadian citizenship, for example, that First Nations children were sent to residential schools where the use of their native languages was forbidden and their indigenous cultures were brought under attack, for only in this way, it was argued, could they be turned into good Canadian citizens.20 Linguistic and religious minorities similarly found the school being used against them in the name of citizenship, as in the case of Mennonites, Hutterites, Doukhobors, Roman Catholics, Black Canadians in eastern Canada, Francophones, and most immigrant groups.21 For them, citizenship meant assimilation into the dominant culture which was defined largely in Anglo-Canadian terms, centering upon command of the English language, loyalty to Canada as a nation of British heritage, commitment to Canada’s British traditions, and pride in Canada’s membership in the British Empire.

Paradoxically, while policy-makers lauded the school as the great agent of Canadianization and citizenship, they simultaneously starved it of the resources it needed to do its job. Outside the big city school systems, with their reasonably adequate tax base and their growing professionalism, teachers were minimally trained and worse paid, faced with the task of teaching an overcrowded curriculum with minimal resources, and often hindered by the suspicions of small, rural communities which were not convinced that anything beyond the most basic schooling was all that useful anyway. A 1923 report on history teaching in Canada noted the “hopeless task” facing many teachers. It quoted the 1921 report of the Superintendent of Education for Prince Edward Island to the effect that “many schools are actually vacant, attendance is irregular, teachers are poorly qualified and immature girls in most cases, and that the public is apathetic to these conditions,” and concluded: “These conditions are not confined to any one province; in fact, it is only by means of the most heroic efforts that they are kept from invading all.”22 In the circumstances, it is easy to sympathize with the comment of a Manitoba observer who noted in 1923 that “the only wonder is that the young teacher in the little lonely school on the prairie does as well as she does.”23 Citizenship, it seems, like so much else in education, was more honoured in the breach than in the observance.

Despite all the talk of educating for Canadian citizenship, no province was willing to cede its control of education to the national government. In the 1890s, for example, there was considerable talk to the effect that Canada needed a national history curriculum. As Ontario’s Minister of Education stated in 1892:

I have perused with great care the various histories in use in all the provinces of the Dominion, and I have found them merely to be provincial histories, without reference to our common country ... Can’t we agree upon certain broad features common to the whole of this Dominion with which we can indoctrinate our pupils, so that when a child takes up the history of Canada, he feels that he is not simply
taking up the history of Canada, such as the old Canada was, but that he is taking up the history of a great country?24

In this spirit, the Dominion Education Association sponsored a competition to produce a truly national history textbook, but, even though a winner was declared, only half of the provinces adopted it. No matter how much they wanted a national citizenship, the provinces were not prepared to give up their control of education. Their solution was to pass the burden on to the teachers. As Manitoba’s Minister of Education stated in 1920: “A teacher should be a teacher, not for one province only but for all Canada. Our schools should not be Manitoba schools, but Canadian schools located in Manitoba.”25

A large part of the problem was deciding just what a national citizenship entailed. Most English-speaking educationists were convinced that Canada was one nation, or was well on the way to becoming one, and what made it such were its British heritage and English language. Citizenship, therefore, consisted of the imposition of what some historians describe, perhaps oversimply, as “Anglo-conformity.” This meant riding roughshod over the sensibilities of Aboriginal peoples and other minorities. Equally important, this concept was, for obvious reasons, unacceptable to Quebec, which, with considerable justification, saw all the talk of citizenship in English-speaking Canada as a threat to its distinct identity. Quebec had entered Confederation on the understanding that its language, culture, and heritage would be respected, indeed that Confederation would protect them better than would any other political arrangement. It was not, therefore, prepared to agree to a vision of citizenship that seemed predicated on the absorption of Quebec into a British Canada. In the 1904 words of a leading Quebecer, who saw no necessary contradiction between Quebec nationalism and a certain kind of federalism, Henri Bourassa:

The fatherland, for us, is the whole of Canada, that is to say, a federation of distinct races and autonomous provinces. The nation that we wish to see developed is the Canadian nation, composed of French Canadians and English Canadians, that is to say, two elements separated by language and religion and by the legal arrangements necessary for the conservation of their respective traditions, but united in an attachment of brotherhood, in a common attachment to a common fatherland.26

This was not, however, a position that appealed to most English-speaking educationists, who saw Canada as a nation-state along conventional American and European lines, united by a common language and a common culture.

This question of the nature of Canadian nationalism and what it means for citizenship education in the schools remains unanswered. It is part of the distinctiveness of Canada that any attempt to arrive at a definitive answer would be far more divisive than unifying. This is, after all, why we have commonly thought of Canada as a mosaic and not a melting-pot, why we have adopted the maxim of unity in diversity, and why since the 1970s we have made bilingualism and multiculturalism part of the official definition of Canada. In education, the debate has taken many twists and turns. We have spoken variously of appreciation of Canada, of patriotism, of the Canadian identity, of limited identities, of hyphenated Canadianism, of knowing
ourselves, of pan-Canadian understanding, and, most recently, of something called the Canadian spirit. It is this lack of agreement that has made the teaching of Canadian history a matter of public debate in recent years, with calls for a return to the tradition of using history to foster a sense of national identity and unity in the young.27

Perhaps the most fruitful solution to the question of dealing with the Canadian identity in the classroom is not to try to fix on one particular definition of it or on one authorized version of national history, but to introduce students to the debates surrounding it, both past and present.28 As citizens, they will, if they take any interest in public issues at all (and surely as citizens they should), constantly face questions such as these: What kind of country are we and do we want to be? Is government too big or too small? What should be the balance between the private and the public sector? What level of taxation is desirable? What should we do about medicare and the social services more generally? What should be done to correct the historical injustices inflicted upon the First Nations? What, if anything, should we do to change the constitution? Is the justice system too soft on crime? How do we reconcile multicultural diversity and provincial authority with national unity? Should we rethink our standard of living in order to protect the environment? These and a host of other questions confront Canadian citizens. The way they are answered defines the nature of Canada. They cannot be answered in the abstract, but only in the context of Canada’s past and present reality. They are not susceptible to definitive solution, but are matters of continuing dialogue, and so require a process of considerate, tolerant, and open public debate. Dialogue and discussion are the essence of democracy and, if we are serious about educating citizens, this is what we must prepare students to engage in.

Historically, citizenship education in Canada has included, as it must, more than this.29 From the 1890s through the 1920s, the dominant thrust of citizenship education was assimilation to a certain conception of Canada as a British nation, but after the First World War, and even more noticeably after the Second, this assimilative approach weakened. The First World War had demonstrated the consequences of unchecked nationalism, and by the late 1920s a certain anti-war sentiment had crept into Canadian education. The First War, after all, had been, in H.G. Wells’s phrase, the war to end war, and Canadian educators began to include the fostering of an international spirit in their vision of citizenship. Between the Wars, this took the form of explicit teaching about the League of Nations, a development which was officially endorsed by most provincial departments of education, and, for some years after 1945, about the United Nations, but more important than any particular institutions was the idea, now widely accepted, that any approach to Canadian citizenship had to see Canadians as citizens not only of their own country but of the world. As the Dean of Education at Queen’s University stated in 1919, the goal should be “to secure through our schools a patriotism in which national pride is fostered and national arrogance is discouraged, a patriotism which finds its meaning and its justification in the place which our nation can take along with all other nations in the common work to which people of all races and languages and colours are called.”30

Between the wars, citizenship education was also defined in terms of character and service, two words that were much used at the time. Men and women of good character, it was argued, would more or less automatically do the right thing, and the
right thing was defined in terms of “mutual service.” In the words of Manitoba’s Minister of Education in 1920, “Citizenship means service that we must do for the community — something over and above what one does for oneself.”

In part, this emphasis on service and character arose from the War. It was based on the conviction that the enormous sacrifices of the War could be justified only by building a better society for those who survived. The War had also shown what was possible when people worked together in a common cause. In the words of the popular novelist Ralph Connor, who, as the Reverend Charles Gordon, had served as a military chaplain: “I believe that here lies the solution of many of our present problems, that we should try to insert into our common everyday affairs that marvellous thing that held our men together on the front line, that life-bond that made them one — comradeship.”

In part, also, this emphasis on service and character and comradeship was seen as ensuring social stability. The post-war years saw a good deal of social turmoil and protest in Canada, of which the 1919 Winnipeg General Strike and its associated sympathy strikes across the country were only the tip of the iceberg. Moreover, the Russian Revolution of 1917, followed by Mussolini’s seizure of power in Italy in 1922, opened the prospect that foreign models might appeal to those who were dissatisfied with Canadian capitalism and parliamentary democracy. As a worried Canadian educationist stated in 1938, fearing that teachers would not be able to counter young people’s “preference for black or coloured shirt”: “In many cities of Canada children hear practical discussions of imported political philosophies in their homes. They are aware of suppressed enthusiasm for some foreign government system.”

Some years earlier, the President of the University of Toronto Sir Robert Falconer told a national audience: “Extremists among the manual toilers have got a taste of the fascination of power and are pressing for drastic measures such as the dethronement of the rich employer and director, who, in their judgment, arrogantly use their influence for their own selfish interests.” For Falconer and others like him, the solution was clear: “… to educate our people together into a community spirit beginning with the children, teaching them that they constitute one body and have reciprocal duties to one another.” As a Manitoba school trustee more candidly stated: “If Canada is a nation of intelligent and educated people, we need fear neither the Bolshevik nor the reactionary. Education is the best national insurance.” This became a regular theme in the inter-war years as Canadian educators, like their counterparts in the capitalist democracies generally, watched with increasing concern developments in the Soviet Union, Fascist Italy, and, after 1933, Nazi Germany. Here, to take another example, is the Putman-Weir Report on education in British Columbia in 1925: “From the viewpoint of self-preservation alone, society recognizes that the best form of state insurance against anarchy and bolshevism is an efficient system of public education.”

**Resistance to Citizenship Education**

These last quotations reveal another aspect of citizenship education. Not only is citizenship education essentially contested and fundamentally political, as officially
defined, it also tends to be conservative in nature. As a form of socialization to the status quo, it can hardly be otherwise. Citizenship is not designed to overthrow the existing order of things, but to preserve it. This is why, for example, citizenship education was subject to often fierce attack in the early decades of this century from critics on the left. Feminists saw it as perpetuating the subordinate status of women for, if the ideal of the good citizen was active participation in public affairs, this automatically worked against women as long as conventional sex-roles confined them to the home and as long as the home was defined as part of private life and was thus safe from public regulation. In a very real sense, the political activity of men depended on the behind-the-scenes and unacknowledged activity of women. Men's contribution to public life was contingent upon women's confinement to the private sphere. In their heyday, the farmers' movements, especially in Western Canada from the 1890s through the 1920s, were equally critical. Opposed to what they saw as the division of society into haves and have-nots and to the competitive principle of the capitalist marketplace, the farmers envisioned a society based on cooperation and equality. They called for the schools to emphasize the principle of cooperation, to show students the way the political system really worked as opposed to how it was supposed to work, to open their eyes to the evils of the world around them, for example, by teaching a more realistic version of history. Socialists and trade unionists agreed. They repeatedly condemned what they saw as the class bias of the schools and called for education to contribute to the building of a new and more just social order. Internationalists and pacifists, for their part, rejected what they saw as the militaristic tendencies of the schools. They called for the end of cadet training and the revision of curricula, especially in subjects such as history, literature, and music, to emphasize peace rather than war, or at the very least to de-romanticize war.

All these were more than paper arguments. Critics of citizenship education, as conventionally defined, won election to school boards. They obtained jobs as teachers. They organized pressure groups. They were active in political parties. The historian Norman Penner tells a revealing story about his school days in North-End Winnipeg in the 1930s. The son of a Communist city councillor, Penner found himself picked on by a teacher for his political views and complained to the principal. When the principal asked him what the problem was, Penner explained that he was being victimized because he was a Communist. On hearing this, the principal closed his office door and said, "So am I." The story might be apocryphal, but it is worth remembering that people like Agnes Macphail, Canada's first woman Member of Parliament and a left of centre activist; Dick Johns, one of the organizers of the 1919 Winnipeg General Strike and a militant socialist; M.J. Coldwell, the leader of the CCF after J.S. Woodsworth's death; William Aberhart, the Social Credit leader of Alberta; and others like them, were all teachers at one time or another. It seems unlikely that their political ideas did not in some way influence their teaching. W.L. Morton once noted that agrarian reform ideas were kept alive on the Prairies in the form of "the democratic dream that men might be free and independent," in part by "the young women who taught school in Ontario and the West," but we know next to nothing about them.

All of which is to say that though citizenship education is essentially conservative by definition, it is not monolithically so. If, on the one hand, it prepares people for the status quo; on the other, it offers a promise of democracy and change. If it once
threatened assimilation to a narrowly defined version of Canadian nationality, it also opened up the possibility of exploring alternative visions of what it meant to be Canadian. If, on the one hand, it taught conformity to conventional wisdom; on the other, it made it possible to question it. All the people who were excluded from the tent of citizenship at various times — Aboriginals, women, trade unionists, minorities of various sorts, political dissenters — have been able to use the language of citizenship to press their claims. Citizenship education has never totally been the stabilizing force that its more conservative advocates have hoped it would be. Like education itself, it was and is an arena in which competing beliefs and interests meet.

As historians remind us, the rights of citizenship have not just grown of their own volition, nor have they simply been handed down from on high. They are the result of struggle and conflict. What we now take for granted as our birthright as citizens had to be fought for in times past, sometimes literally. Indeed, the most important purpose citizenship education should serve is to introduce students to the questions that lie at the heart of Canadian citizenship, give students the knowledge to understand them, the skills to pursue them, and the values and dispositions to do so in ways that respect the processes and commitments of democracy.

The Elements of Citizenship Education

Whatever the disagreements over the nature and content of citizenship education, over the years it has come to consist in Canada of some seven elements. People can and do disagree over just what these elements contain and how they should be taught, but they generally agree that they comprise the program of citizenship education. They are: a sense of identity; an awareness of one’s rights and respect for the rights of others; the fulfilment of duties; a critical acceptance of social values; political literacy; a broad general knowledge and command of basic academic skills; and the capacity to reflect on the implications of all these components and to act appropriately.

All of these elements of citizenship education are open to interpretation and debate. In the case of national identity, for example, just what vision of Canada should education promote? Can we define our national identity in a way that would be acceptable to all citizens of Canada? Is Canada one nation, or two, or three, or even more? Is John Ralston Saul right when he says that we are not a nation-state in the conventional sense? Should we be content with the concept of “limited identities” in the spirit suggested by Cook and Careless some years ago? And is identity enough, or should citizenship education be explicitly organized to promote national unity and national pride, as Granatstein has recently suggested? Moreover, should schools not also be teaching students to identify not only with Canada, however defined, but with the whole human race and the planet so that citizenship education comes to include the promotion of a sense of global identity?

The elements of citizenship rights and duties raise similar questions, especially since the enactment of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. What are and should be our basic rights? Is health care a right? Or a job? Are rights best protected by the state or by the marketplace? Where should the balance be struck between individual and collective rights? Are political theorists like Guy LaForest right to see the Charter as a threat to the collective rights of Quebec? Is Richard Gwyn correct when he
suggests that we have fallen victim to a “rights frenzy”?’ Has our pursuit of rights outweighed our concern for the fulfilment of duties? And just what are and should be the duties of citizenship anyway? Are communitarians like Amitai Etzioni correct when they argue that we should think and act much more in terms of the good of the community than of the interests and rights of the individual?’

The element of social values is no less controversial. In any country citizenship is obviously an intensely value-laden concept, entailing not just knowledge and skills, but behaviour and action based on values. Such values will differ according to the political system in which they are rooted. In Canada, the Charter of Rights and Freedoms might well come to serve as the basis of a set of Canadian social values. Even without such written documents, citizens come to accept, often without realizing it, a set of values and beliefs that they see as characteristic of their society. In his work with the Citizens’ Commission, for example, which was set up in connection with the Charlottetown Accord, Keith Spicer identified the following as core Canadian values: equality and fairness; respect for minorities; consultation and dialogue; accommodation and tolerance; compassion and generosity; respect for Canada’s natural beauty; and respect for Canada’s world image of peace, freedom and non-violent change.

Some political theorists speak explicitly of “democratic values,” or “virtues,” and argue that they should be taught as part of citizenship education. To take only one example, the political philosopher Carol Gould has described the “democratic character,” which she sees as consisting of reliance on reason; reciprocity in dealing with other people; receptivity to diverse opinions and viewpoints; respect for human rights; mutuality; flexibility and open-mindedness; commitment and responsibility; cooperativeness and a concern for community.

The element of political literacy is these days defined in terms of participation in the political process, and is a relatively new arrival on the agenda of citizenship education. It has always been accepted that good citizens should play their part in the public affairs of their community, but this was usually seen as little more than casting an informed vote at election time. There were always a few teachers who went beyond this and who taught their students that it was their right and duty as citizens to participate directly in the political process, but only in the last twenty or thirty years has it become orthodoxy to say that citizenship education should prepare the young to participate directly in the political process in ways other than voting. In the classroom this has taken the form of teaching students about the real world of politics and not only about the ideals of civics, about how decisions are really made, about who holds power and who does not, about how public opinion is shaped, and so on. Outside the classroom it takes the form of engaging students directly in the political process as students, even in the elementary grades, and not treating politics as something that is reserved for adults only. Thus, students work in environmental campaigns, in elections, and on social issues of various kinds.

Any consideration of questions such as these, and many others like them, obviously demands both a good deal of general knowledge and the skills to use it. Thus, the sixth element of citizenship education consists precisely of knowledge and intellectual skills. To some extent, citizenship is a craft, like medicine, plumbing, carpentry, engineering, law, or any other such specialty, and, like them, it requires
that its practitioners carry in their heads and at their fingertips a body of knowledge and skills ready for immediate use. There is a good deal of talk in education these days to the effect that knowledge as such is not particularly important, that what matters is knowing how to access and process knowledge, to find it when it is needed, and to assess and apply it once found. The economic agenda of much of today’s schooling endorses this emphasis on content-free, generic skills which are seen as key ingredients of the flexibility and adaptability required of the modern workforce. In the words of one corporate executive:

Memorized facts ... are of little use in the age in which information is doubling every two or three years. We have expert systems in computing and the Internet that can provide the facts when we need them. Our workforce needs to utilize the facts to assist in developing solutions to problems. The worker needs to be able to utilize the systems that give him or her access to information when it’s required in the problem-solving process.\textsuperscript{54}

However true this is when applied to the labour force (and in this age of de-skilling and Mac-jobs there is good reason to doubt it), it most certainly does not apply to citizenship. One can see why employers might want workers with lots of skills but no knowledge, for their skills would help them follow instructions and their lack of knowledge would leave them with no basis on which to question what they were instructed to do. Such workers, like Adolf Eichmann, would make sure that the trains ran on time without ever caring that they were running to the extermination camps.

When confronted with questions of public policy and personal decision, citizens cannot forever be running to the nearest computer terminal or reference book, useful as these are. They must carry with them at least a basis of knowledge that helps them understand and assess the world in which they live. To function within their own societies they must possess what Hirsch has called “cultural literacy.”\textsuperscript{55} Indeed, as Hirsch points out, the very existence of a society depends upon its members sharing at least a minimum of common knowledge. This, for example, is why the teaching of history is so important in schools, not for creating a spirit of national unity or pride, but because, as Kymlicka writes, “it defines the shared context and framework within which we debate our differing values and priorities. ... It becomes the implicit background for our thinking, providing the symbols, precedents, and reference points by which we make sense of issues.”\textsuperscript{56}

Beyond this, citizens need that broad general knowledge that we have traditionally thought of as comprising a liberal education, for this, appropriately taught, serves as a source of those ideas which enable us to question, to challenge, to move beyond the conventional wisdom of our own times. We need in education a healthy dose of that belief in the emancipatory power of knowledge that was so strongly held by nineteenth century radicals like England’s William Lovett:

Education will cause every latent seed of the mind to germinate and spring up into useful life, which otherwise might have lain buried in ignorance, and died in the corruptions of its own nature; thousands of our countrymen, endowed with all the capabilities for becoming the
 guides and lights of society, from want of this glorious blessing, are
doomed to grovel in vice and ignorance, to pine in obscurity and want.
Give to a man knowledge, and you give him a light to perceive and
enjoy beauty, variety, surpassing ingenuity, and majestic grandeur,
which his mental darkness previously concealed from him — enrich
his mind and strengthen his understanding, and you give him powers
to render all art and nature subservient to his purposes — call forth his
moral excellence in union with his intellect, and he will apply every
power of thought and force of action to enlighten ignorance, alleviate
misfortune, remove misery, and banish vice; and, as far as his abilities
permit, to prepare a highway to the world’s happiness.57

In the nineteenth century, Matthew Arnold famously declared that education
should consist of “getting to know, on all the matters which most concern us, the best
which has been thought and said in the world,” not for reasons of false gentility or
snobbish pride, but because this would help us turn “a stream of fresh and free thought
upon our stock notions and habits, which we now follow staunchly but mechanically,
vanilly imagining that there is a virtue in following them staunchly which makes up
for the mischief of following them mechanically.”58 As the political philosopher Alan
Ryan recently said: “What liberal education does is to offer its beneficiaries the
chance to take an interest in everything that humanity has cared about over the past
several millennia.”59 There are obvious connections here with citizenship education,
and, indeed, Ryan elsewhere persuasively connects liberal education with education
for citizenship.60

It is true that history, literature, science, and the other staples of liberal education
can be badly taught. It is also true that they have often been used as ideological
weapons to enforce a particular sort of cultural and ideological hegemony.61 There
is no need to repeat here the by now well-known arguments over the “canon” of the
“dead, white European males” of western civilization. Indeed, the very concept of
western civilization, at least in its curricular form, was in large part originally created
as an ideological weapon.62 Nonetheless, these problems are not inherent in the
concept of liberal education, which, in practice as in theory, as Martha Nussbaum and
others have shown, is open to continuous and continual revision. And as Gerald Graff
has suggested, the arguments over the curriculum can themselves form an invaluable
basis for education.63 Even if one adopts the post-modernist position that all is
discourse, that there is nothing outside the text, that all knowledge is partial and
suspect, the fact remains that the practice of citizenship nonetheless depends on
familiarity with the discourse that characterizes and defines it. Not to teach this
discourse to students, therefore, deprives them of the chance to become citizens in
any real sense of the word.

There have been various attempts over the years to outline the knowledge that
citizens need if they are to act as citizens. Suffice it to say here that citizens need to
possess not just skills, but actual knowledge, and that school is the best place to begin
to teach what citizens need to know. It is a depressing commentary on the state of
educational discussion today that this even needs to be said, but in recent years it
seems that acquiring knowledge had been displaced as a goal of education. In
opposition to the policy-makers’ insistence on the economic priorities of schooling,
educationists turn to a rhetoric of needs, growth, development. They contrast so-called product-based learning with process-based learning to the disadvantage of the former, all the while ignoring that they are really two aspects of the same thing. They contrast child-centred education with subject-centred education, all the while ignoring that teaching involves doing both at the same time. Educational debate is full of such false dualisms, and in pursuing them we too easily lose sight of the importance of knowledge for citizenship. It is true that any attempt to define curricular knowledge can itself be controversial, as demonstrated most recently in the debate over the National History Standards in the United States, but debate and dissent are at the heart of democratic citizenship, and, if citizenship education is to prosper, it is better to argue over what knowledge schools should teach than to dismiss the whole idea of useful knowledge as unimportant.64

All the elements of citizenship education described in this paper are, in fact, open to debate. They present not simple verities, but contestable propositions, especially when they have to be applied to concrete cases. Thus, the seventh element of citizenship education consists of the capacity to reflect upon the other six and to act appropriately. In other words, an essential component of citizenship is dialogue, a willingness and an ability to enter into discussion with fellow citizens on matters of common concern no matter how divisive they might be. Theoretically, this ought not to present a problem for schools since it draws on abilities and skills that have long been central to educational theory if not always honoured in educational practice. The most obvious are critical and reflective thinking; problem solving; working cooperatively with others; discussion; empathy with other people. To the extent that schools are able to teach such skills, and they obviously can, they make an important contribution to citizenship.

Citizenship, Curricula, and Pedagogy

Occasionally it has been suggested that citizenship itself be explicitly taught as a subject, a suggestion which has recently been revived in the United Kingdom, but apart from occasional lessons here and there or special events such as Empire Day or Remembrance Day, this has rarely been done in Canada, though it is now being revived in Ontario and Quebec.65 For the most part, however, educators have seen citizenship as something that was best taught through the conventional subjects of the curriculum, not as something that needed its own slot on the timetable. The advantage of this, of course, was that it made no extra demands on an already overcrowded timetable or on hard-pressed teachers. The drawback was that it was all too easy for citizenship to fall through the cracks, especially when it was not subject to examination.

By the 1970s, a variety of subjects dealt with topics that were relevant to the education of citizens. For example, history, long a staple of citizenship education, was increasingly abandoned for courses organized around contemporary problems, all intended to rouse students’ interest in the issues of the day. In a similar spirit, units of study or whole courses were introduced in human rights, native studies, law-related education, holocaust studies, environmental problems, media literacy, and other citizenship-oriented topics. Science courses also departed from a pure science approach to take on more of what was called a science-in-society orientation. Home
economics curricula grew to include discussions of the environment, resources, and social justice generally. Literature was oriented to contemporary concerns of obvious citizenship application, among them questions of racism, sexism, war and peace, and the like. From the 1970s onwards, schools have paid increasing attention to Canadian content and approached all subjects in a multicultural framework that has obvious implications for some aspects of citizenship.

In Canada, as elsewhere, these developments have attracted some criticism both from those who see them as not going nearly far enough and from those who think they have already gone too far. Among the former are some Aboriginal Canadians who see the schools as still too assimilationist and too neglectful of Aboriginal culture and tradition. Some Afro-Canadians have voiced similar concerns and have also accused the schools of failing to take systemic racism seriously. Some advocates of multiculturalism have further criticized the schools for taking only a song-and-dance approach to ethnic and cultural diversity and thereby failing to address more fundamental issues. On the other side are those who regret what they see as the lowering of academic standards as schools move from academic to social priorities; who level charges of so-called “political correctness” against the schools; who are uncomfortable with the abandonment of familiar traditions such as the observance of specifically Christian festivals; who criticize multiculturalism for what they see as its divisiveness; and who, most recently, want to see the schools take a much more active stance in the promotion of national unity.

Thus, the curriculum has become, perhaps more than ever before, the subject of considerable debate. For the most part, however, this debate has not involved any serious discussion of citizenship except in the most indirect way. The debate has been about whether the curriculum is adequately inclusive, whether it is sufficiently rigorous, whether it is ideologically partisan, whether it properly prepares students for the high-tech global economy, but rarely about whether it effectively prepares young Canadians for citizenship.

No matter what the curriculum includes, how it is taught cannot be ignored. Students learn important lessons from how teachers teach as well as from what they teach. Teachers’ choice of teaching strategies and their general approach to students play some part in the kinds of citizens that students become.

Some theorists maintain that a one-to-one relationship exists between democratic citizenship and democratic classroom methods, with the latter being defined in terms of student-centred teaching, activity-based learning, student participation in classroom life, and so on. There is obviously something to this. Students who in the classroom are taught to be critical, to use their minds, to ask questions, to think for themselves, to expect a voice in decisions, and so forth, are likely to carry these attitudes outside the classroom. However, the argument can be pressed too far. Process alone is inadequate. To take an obvious example: whether an activity-based project fosters democratic citizenship or not depends upon the nature of the project and the way it is organized. Students can learn more about democracy from a careful reading of the classic texts than from any amount of apparently democratic classroom discussion. We need to remember that the most powerful democratic theorists, John Stuart Mill, John Dewey, T.H. Green, and the rest, all had decidedly non-democratic educations in terms of process. What they did have was a deep acquaintance with history,
philosophy, and literature, and the capacity to pursue the ideas they gained from their knowledge. As Emberley and Newell and others have argued, a good liberal education still has much to offer in terms of a preparation for citizenship.

At the same time, teaching strategies do matter. They have an impact on students and on how they interact with the world. Students can learn that they know nothing and that their task is to remember and repeat what their teacher tells them, Gradgrind fashion. Or they can learn that they have ideas of their own, that they know how to ask intelligent questions, to think for themselves.

It needs to be added that this kind of question-raising, critical, open-ended teaching is good for all students. All too often there are unacceptable differences in the teaching given to middle-class students compared to that given to their working-class counterparts. Middle-class students are taught to question, to inquire, to participate, and in the process they learn that they can control, or at least influence, their world. Working-class students, on the other hand, especially if they are also poor, receive a less demanding level of teaching. Rather than learning how to question, they learn to fill in the blanks. They learn that the world is an arbitrary place over which they have little control. Thus, they do the rational thing and withdraw from it. In effect two different kinds of citizenship education are in operation: middle-class students are taught to be active, to participate, to take charge; working-class students are taught to follow instructions.66

Some researchers are now suggesting that teaching methods also affect boys and girls differently. There is plenty of evidence that boys generally dominate classroom life. They get more than their share of their teachers’ attention. They are usually more aggressively competitive than girls. They demand more of their teachers’ time. We also know that there can be an unacceptably high level of sexual harassment in schools. Some researchers are suggesting that many girls have a different learning style than do boys, but that this learning style is undervalued and under utilized in many classrooms. Thus, for example, recent years have seen a small but noticeable trend to all-girls classes in some schools, and some researchers are suggesting that single-sex schools might be better for many girls. Thus, there is a gender dimension to teaching strategies which affects boys and girls differently and might go some way to explaining why men have been so heavily over represented in politics. Boys, especially middle-class boys, are taught to become active citizens; girls, at least until recently, for the most part are not.67

The classroom is not the only place where learning occurs in school. Indeed, it might be argued that some of the most important school learning takes place outside the classroom, not in it. This, after all, is why schools have long organized extracurricular programs and special events for students. From the early days of compulsory schooling in Canada, educationists have been well aware of the power of this kind of learning for citizenship education. In the early 1900s, for example, Prairie school inspectors promoted the value of school gardens, school fairs, field days, and school outings for promoting a sense of citizenship in children. Across the country schools organized special events with an explicit citizenship purpose. Empire Day was one such. Others were Arbor Day, Goodwill Day, Remembrance Day, special occasions such as the sixtieth anniversary in 1897 of Queen Victoria’s accession to the throne, or the fiftieth, sixtieth and one hundredth anniversaries of Confederation in 1917,
1927, and 1967. School sports, music programs, and student clubs of all types have also long been seen as important contributors to citizenship. This is where students learn both to compete and cooperate, to deal graciously with both victory and defeat, to set and surpass personal goals, to put aside personal gain for a common cause — all valuable citizenship lessons. Other forms of extra-curricular activity are aimed specifically at involving students in the world outside school and thus teaching lessons in citizenship. Such was the motivation between the Wars, for example, for the Junior Red Cross, the 4-H movement, the Canadian Girls in Training, and today of countless environmental clubs, international development projects, peace groups, and the like, all of which are designed to show students that they can indeed make a difference in the world.

Finally, citizenship education has, from its beginnings, been seen as carried out through the whole corporate life of the school. As the School Superintendent of Brandon, Manitoba stated in 1918:

Through such subjects as history, civics, literature, hygiene, opportunities will occur to teach the principles underlying democracy. It is folly to imagine, however, that we can transform a people merely by talking or teaching .... I would like to say with all the conviction that I am capable of expressing, that the spirit of democracy can only be made a part of the lives of our children when it becomes the prevailing spirit of the school itself, and I might also add, of the home and the church.48

Schools usually see themselves as communities and do what they can to teach their students to act as responsible community members, however defined. Hence the emphasis on school spirit, on school traditions, on standards of behaviour, from dress codes to students’ bills of rights.

Over the years, however, there has often been a gap between the rhetoric of citizenship and the practice of the schools. Citizenship has been emphasized in statements of aims, in curricular preambles, in official pronouncements, but it has been absent from the actual courses of study. Often the citizenship impulse has been diverted or diluted or simply overtaken by other, allegedly more practical, purposes, most often passing examinations, preparing for jobs, or simply covering the course of study. Even when citizenship was more than a matter of rhetoric, the lessons that students actually learned often differed from what schools thought they were teaching, in part because the concept of citizenship was itself left too vague and undefined. Often schools depoliticized the concept, equating the good citizen with the good person. There is, however, more to being a citizen than this. Ever since the Greeks, the essence of citizenship has been seen as involvement in the public life and affairs of one’s society. As Pericles famously said in the Funeral Oration:

Here each individual is interested not only in his own affairs but in the affairs of the state as well; even those who are mostly occupied with their own business are extremely well-informed on general politics — this is a peculiarity of ours: we do not say that a man who takes no interest in politics is a man who minds his own business; we say that he has no business here at all.49
This political dimension of citizenship has too often been submerged in a concern with the shaping of personality and character. Here, for example, are the categories used on a 1936 school report card, which were described as constituting the "habits and attitudes desirable for good citizenship": obedience, courtesy, thrift, promptness, initiative, reliability, self-control, good sportsmanship, service, industry and workmanship, cleanliness, good judgement. Each of these qualities is admirable in its own right but what is most obvious about this list is what is omitted. With the possible exception of "initiative"—which is further described as "Ambition to know and ability to do the right thing without being told. Leadership."—it says nothing about the qualities that fit citizens for participation in public life in a democracy. Indeed, despite their individual merits, taken collectively this list of qualities presents a very passive view of citizenship. It is not, however, untypical of the way schools have seen citizenship education over the years.

Consider, for example, the case of "assertive discipline" which enjoyed a certain popularity in some school systems a few years ago. Its rules ran as follows:

1. Students will follow the directions of all teachers and superiors the first time.
2. Students shall be on time for class.
3. Students shall have all equipment and supplies at all times.
4. Students will keep their hands, feet, and other objects to themselves.
5. Students will practise good citizenship and courtesy to all students and to each other.

In schools that adopted assertive discipline programs these rules were posted prominently in classrooms and around the school generally, leading one to wonder what impression was created on students who were thus told, right from the first, that they were not to be trusted, that their job was to do as they were told, no questions asked, and that "citizenship" was above all a matter of obeying orders and following procedures.

The problem does not lie so much in any of the rules in themselves. Students should certainly be on time for class, respect others, have their equipment with them (though at appropriate, not at "all" times), and so on. But what is striking is the overwhelmingly negative tone of the rules. Why not, for example, display rules such as these in classrooms?

1. Students will think for themselves whenever possible.
2. Students will be as creative as possible at all times.
3. Students must always read more than their textbook.
4. Students will ask original and provocative questions.

And so on. Moreover, once these rules are posted, they must be enforced. One can imagine a worried principal phoning parents to complain that their son or daughter has not had an original idea or asked an interesting question all week and telling them that they had better come to the school for a meeting to discuss what disciplinary measures might be taken. It presumably says something about our views of schooling that whenever I have floated this idea past audiences of parents and teachers it has always been treated as a joke and never as a serious possibility.
What is most striking about assertive discipline, however, is that few people saw it as anything more than a method of keeping order in the classroom. It was only ever discussed in restricted terms: Was it worth the time and effort involved? How did students respond to it? Did parents like it? Above all, did it work? No one apparently saw its implications for citizenship education.

A Conception of Citizenship Education

What we need is a conception of citizenship which is rich enough to include its many dimensions, but also simple enough to be of practical service to teachers, so that they can easily judge the extent to which their everyday activities are consistent with the kind of citizenship we need. Just as when we drive we know more or less automatically that there are certain things we must do, such as staying on the proper side of the road and obeying traffic signals, without consciously thinking about them, so teachers need to govern their teaching by an internalized conception of citizenship. Elsewhere I have suggested that such a conception might best be thought of as the “twelve C’s” (with the C’s being used purely for mnemonic purposes, to serve as a rough and ready checklist), as follows:

The first C is Canadian and it asks whether their schooling teaches students enough about Canada — its history, geography, artistic, scientific, and other achievements, and its current problems — to help them understand and to participate in the continuing debate that is so quintessentially Canadian: what kind of country are we and what kind of country do we want to be?

The second C stands for cosmopolitan, in the traditional sense of the world. It asks whether their schooling teaches students that they are citizens not only of Canada, but of the world. Do they think not only of their own country or their own group, but also of the world as a whole?

The third C stands for communication, and asks whether schooling gives sufficient emphasis to teaching students to communicate effectively, in all the different forms that communication can take: speech, writing, numeracy, graphics, and so on.

Since the ability to communicate cannot be separated from the content to be communicated, the fourth C stands for coherence or content. Does schooling give students adequate command of a broad body of subject matter, representing the spectrum of human endeavour, the humanities and social sciences, mathematics and science, the expressive arts, and so on?

This leads to the fifth C which stands for critical. It asks whether schooling teaches students to think critically and whether teachers approach knowledge, not as sacred dogma but as invitation to inquiry and reflection, since acquiring knowledge but never using it is of little benefit since it does not lead one to think and to improve one’s reasoning powers.

Criticism, however, can be little more than a reactive process and education should involve more than simply responding to the ideas of others. Thus, the sixth C represents creativity, which is something that all people possess in one form or another, and it draws attention to the extent to which schooling actively seeks to foster creativity in students, not only in the arts but in all subjects.
Creativity goes hand in hand with curiosity which is the seventh C, representing the willingness and the capacity to ask questions and to continue learning.

Creativity and curiosity do not exist in a vacuum. They draw upon, while also going beyond and sometimes reacting against, the work of others. They draw their inspiration from what Robert Hutchins has called the “great conversation,” the continuing dialogue that has existed for centuries in all civilizations concerning the meaning and nature of life. Thus, the eighth C stands for civilizations. It asks whether schooling seeks to convey to students an adequate understanding of the heritage of civilizations [in the plural] of which they are both the heirs and the trustees for the future.

Civilization is a collective, cooperative enterprise and this leads to the ninth C, community. It raises the question of whether and to what extent schooling seeks to prepare students to become informed, participating, and involved members in their various communities — local, regional, national, and global.

This in turn leads to the tenth C which stands for concern, and asks whether and how schooling creates in students a sense of concern and a readiness to act on that concern, both for other people and for the environment which makes life possible.

The eleventh C is character. The development of character used to be described as one of the key goals of education, but we do not use the word much these days. It stands for the commitment to do what is right, to follow one’s conscience, and to balance one’s own interests and concerns against the rights and welfare of others.

Finally, the twelfth C is the sum total of the previous eleven, and stands for competence. It asks how effective schooling is in playing its part in preparing students to be effective and competent citizens, workers and human beings.

All this may seem overly ambitious, but not when it is spread out over twelve years of schooling. The list is not intended to be applied to one particular lesson but to the whole range of a school’s activities. In their schematic way, the twelve C’s represent the whole of schooling. If attained, they will equip any student for citizenship. Equally important, they will contribute to the shaping of the kind of community in which individual success derives from and contributes to social purposes. More specifically they can help us focus on just what it is that we expect from our schools. In the words of the 1992 Newfoundland Royal Commission on education, school effectiveness depends on everyone involved pursuing a “common vision.” Such a vision is best provided by a conception of citizenship.

Such a conception has recently been offered by an international project in citizenship education which describes it as “multidimensional” citizenship. The argument here is that citizenship is best thought of as comprising four dimensions: the personal, the social, the temporal, and the spatial. The personal dimension is described as the “personal capacity for and commitment to a civic ethic characterized by individually and socially responsible habits of mind, heart and action.” Such personal qualities, however, while important, are not enough in themselves. Citizens are social beings not hermits. They must be able to interact with other people in a variety of settings, to engage in public debate, to participate in public life, and to contribute to the many forms of civil society that underlie effective democracy in the public sphere. This kind of involvement takes place within, and is conditioned by,
a tradition of beliefs and assumptions so that citizenship also contains a temporal dimension, requiring that citizens, while being understandably concerned with the problems they face in the present, never lose sight of the connections that the present has with both the past and future. Citizens need a rich knowledge of history and an awareness that their present actions will have an impact on the future and then act accordingly. Finally, the spatial dimension of citizenship recognizes that citizenship is not one single locus of identity, but that citizens are members of various overlapping communities — local, regional, national, and global.72

This level of abstraction might seem to be a long way removed from the daily realities of the classroom, but it can readily be translated into terms that even young children can handle, as shown by this example. A class of Grade 7 students was studying world geography, and the particular lesson that I observed was devoted to the Brazilian rain forests. The students had already learned something of the value of rain forests as climatic regulators and as homes of all types of flora and fauna. They were also learning that rain forests were being destroyed at a rapid rate and, with the certainty of thirteen-year-olds, quickly concluded that the people responsible were either stupid or thoughtless or both. What they did not take into account was that people were cutting down the rain forests because they had little choice in the situation they faced. Poverty, the need for land, patterns of international trade and economic pressures of various kinds shaped the attack on the rain forests, not silliness or ignorance. The students were led to consider that Canada had destroyed much of its forest cover since the beginning of European settlement and was continuing to do so. They were also asked to put themselves in the position of Brazilian peasants facing a range of equally difficult choices. It was suggested to them that, if the rain forests were indeed important to the world as a whole, and if one of the problems Brazilian peasants faced was that patterns of international trade worked to their disadvantage, then perhaps people in rich countries such as Canada should be prepared to pay a small surcharge, say a penny or so on every cup of coffee, which would be used to protect the rain forests. The idea is not far-fetched, being only an extension of the fair trade and fair price practices that some social justice agencies now sponsor. And what was central to the lesson was not the financial or economic practicalities of the proposal but, rather, the idea that rich consumers should be expected to help poor producers whose products they were consuming.

In this particular case, the students were not especially enthused about the proposal, but the point of the exercise was not to convert them to some political position but to lead them to think in ways they would otherwise have ignored. In the process, they were beginning to learn a lesson in multidimensional citizenship. They were led to think about the present in the context of past and future; to see how their personal lives connected with a broader problem, to note how Canada was involved with other parts of world, and to consider a wide range of alternatives and viewpoints. Obviously, one lesson by itself will achieve little, but if the kind of teaching described here were to be undertaken across the curriculum and throughout a student’s stay at school, the cumulative effect could be considerable. And this kind of teaching can be easily accommodated within the most conventional curriculum. It is neither especially innovative nor unorthodox, though perhaps more unusual than it ought to be, and the pedagogical literature offers plenty of suggestions.73 It embodies the problem-
posing, critical thinking, reflective, open-ended approach to teaching which has always been taken to characterize true education. It also provides valuable citizenship education.

The Renewal of Citizenship Education

Today, however, to return to where this paper began, citizenship seems to have vanished from the educational agenda. Since about the mid-1980s, schools have directed their energies largely to economic ends. Policy makers have demanded that schools focus on the basics, meaning not only the traditional three R’s but such contemporary additions as computer literacy, competitiveness, entrepreneurialism, and skills. In curriculum terms, the emphasis is placed on mathematics, science, literacy, and computer science.

As we enter the twenty-first century, perhaps the most urgent task facing us is to restore citizenship to its place in educational debate, not obviously in any narrowly national or restrictive sense, and not in the hegemonic and exclusionary sense that was common years ago, but in the sense of a participative, critical, and democratic involvement in public life. In 1932, in the heart of the depression, the Principal of the Manitoba Normal School, W.A. McIntyre, wrote: “The only hope for curing the ills of the world is that young people may picture a better one and strive to realize it. To frame this picture and to cultivate this ambition is the greatest duty of the school.”

A few years later, in 1937, the Principal of McGill University said much the same thing, telling an audience of teachers: “The path to a better community lies before us, open but not clear. As I see it, the task of education is to give us the wisdom to see that path, hope to believe in our goal, and will to pursue it.” It is a vision of education, and of citizenship, that is far more attractive and worthwhile than our present preoccupation with training workers who can adapt to the imperatives of the global economy.

NOTES


5. See, for example, Senate, Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training, Active Citizenship Revisited (Canberra, Australia, 1991); Senate, Standing Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology, Canadian Citizenship: Sharing the Responsibility (Ottawa, The Committee, 1993); Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, Advisory Group on Citizenship, Education for Citizenship and the Teaching of Democracy in Schools (London, 1998).


17. See, for example, Ted Tapper and Brian Salter, Education and the Political Order: Changing Patterns of Class Control (London: Macmillan, 1978), esp. 68-87.


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