



Citizenship Education:

CANADA DABBLES WHILE THE WORLD PLAYS ON

ANDREW S. HUGHES AND ALAN SEARS

THE SUMMER OF 2006 SAW THE WORLD TRANSFIXED ON GERMANY AS 32 teams from across the globe competed for the World Cup of football. Many Canadians joined this international cadre of fans around television sets in homes, pubs and clubhouses to cheer for their favourite teams. Canada, however, was not among the nations represented. In fact, Canada has only qualified for the World Cup once, 20 years ago. Even though “millions of Canadians [are] bitten by the World Cup bug,”¹ Canada perennially cannot mount a team that can make the grade. The general consensus on the reason for this failure is the lack of capacity (including minor league systems, quality coaching, and professional leagues) to support the development of world class players and teams. As long as that capacity is lacking, Canadians will have to be content with cheering for teams from “the old country.”

Our work comparing policy and practice in citizenship education in Canada with that in several international jurisdictions (Australia, England, the European Community, and the U.S.) reveals an analogous situation. While Canada has joined the rest of the world in proclaiming the fostering of democratic citizenship as a key – in fact, “the” key – goal for education, it has failed to keep pace in terms of building the capacity to meet this objective. During a period when many countries have been coming to grips with citizenship education, Canada’s involvement has languished. Our work has led us to the conclusion that, as educational jurisdictions around the world have become increasingly proficient in citizenship education over the past two decades, Canada has been a dabbler rather than a player. It is possible for Canada to make the grade, to play in the big leagues, but doing so will require paying attention to the underlying fundamentals.

INTERNATIONAL CONSENSUS

There is a pervasive sense of crisis in democracies around the world about the disengagement of citizens from participation in even the most basic elements of civic life. This concern is commonly expressed in both academic literature and popular media and is manifested in disengagement from both formal politics

and more community based grassroots involvement, as well as a rise in political and social extremism.

Along with the substantial consensus that disengagement poses a considerable threat to the health and stability of democratic societies, there is also widespread agreement that education must play a key role in addressing the problem. This belief has precipitated a flurry of policy and program development in many countries. Examples include national initiatives such as the citizenship requirement of the National Curriculum in England, the development and implementation of the Discovering Democracy program in Australia and the publication of The Civic Mission of Schools in the U.S., as well as international programmes such as the declaration of 2005 as the Year for Citizenship Through Education by the Council of Europe. While there have been no national policies or program initiatives in Canada, almost all provinces have revised their social studies curricula in the past decade, resulting in more explicit recognition of citizenship education. This includes the reintroduction of designated high school civics courses in Ontario and British Columbia.

International consensus exists as well about the kind of citizenship that ought to be the focus of attention. Although declining youth voting rates is a key empirical factor often cited as a reason for concern about citizenship, all jurisdictions we examined expected citizens to be engaged in much broader ways than voting. Initiatives in England, for example, call for a “maximal” rather than “minimal”² approach to citizenship; that is, citizens are expected to go far beyond minimal requirements of voting



and obeying the law to be actively engaged in both the formal mechanisms of the political system and the grassroots community involvement of civil society. This civic republican approach to citizenship with its emphasis on the obligation of all citizens to participate actively in shaping society at all levels is endemic to definitions of citizenship and citizenship education in all democratic societies including Canada.

In addition to this agreement about the nature of good citizenship, there is consensus across Canada and around the world that best practice in citizenship education is broadly constructivist in character and must engage students in meaningful activities designed to help them make sense of, and develop competence with, civic ideas and practices. Constructivist approaches to citizenship education advocated around the world call for students to be engaged in substantive study of authentic and important issues related to citizenship. Contemporary curricula across Canada, including those in social studies, where citizenship most commonly finds its place, are infused with the language of constructivism. Québec is most overt about this, arguing that “the development of competencies and the mastery of complex knowledges, call for practices that are based on the constructivist approach to learning.”³ Even where the term is not used explicitly, constructivism informs discussions of teaching and learning in curriculum documents across the country. Good teaching and learning are described as, among other things, “collaborative, issues based, interactive, and participatory” and students are described as being engaged in an “active process of constructing meaning;”⁴ all hallmarks of what is broadly

EN BREF Même si le Canada s’est joint à la communauté internationale pour proclamer que la promotion du civisme démocratique est un objectif, voire le principal objectif de l’éducation, il a pris du retard dans le développement de programmes de qualité dans ce domaine. À une époque où de nombreux autres pays ont reconnu l’importance de l’éducation civique, l’engagement du Canada à cet égard semble languir. Depuis vingt ans, les instances d’éducation partout dans le monde ne cessent d’améliorer leurs programmes d’éducation civique, tandis que la prestation du Canada dans ce domaine est plutôt timide et hésitante. Or, notre pays peut certes faire mieux, mais pour ce faire, il devra accorder davantage d’attention aux éléments fondamentaux de l’éducation civique.

referred to as constructivist teaching.

In all of these areas – a growing sense of crisis regarding civic knowledge and commitment, a belief that effective citizenship requires substantive engagement by all citizens, and a reliance upon civic education organized on a constructivist framework to address the former and foster the latter – Canada is completely in step with other jurisdictions in the democratic world. Looking beyond the rhetoric, however, exposes the extraordinarily weak commitment in Canada to democratic citizenship education. This is particularly evident when comparing what others have done to build capacity to support citizenship education to the largely unfunded mandates of Canadian provinces.

CAPACITY BUILDING

Over the past two decades the international jurisdictions that we have studied have engaged in capacity building for citizenship education in four areas:

- The development of clear, consistent and widely accepted goals or outcomes for establishing directions and formulating standards;
- The provision and/or the development of curriculum materials to support both teaching and learning in citizenship education;
- The provision of substantive programs for teacher development at both pre and in-service levels; and
- The funding of research and development to support policy and program development as well as teaching and learning in citizenship education.

All of the international jurisdictions have built capacity in some of these areas; some have built capacity in all. Canada has built capacity in none.

Policy development in citizenship education in Australia, the European Community, England and the U. S. has included widespread public and professional discussion. This has been generally fostered by the formation of a government commission – or commissions – followed by public hearings, the publication of discussion papers, and the development of and debate about legislative mandates. Educators, as individuals and through their professional associations, have been sought out and directly invited to participate in these deliberations. The processes have provided the opportunity for the public as well as educational practitioners to shape the goals and feel some ownership of them.

In Australia, for example, national public discussion of citizenship education has gone on for nearly 20 years. It began with an investigation of Australian citizenship and citizenship education by the Australian Senate in the late 1980s resulting in a range of recommendations for



CANADA HAS NEVER HAD A WIDESPREAD OR IN-DEPTH DISCUSSION OF GOALS FOR CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION AT EITHER THE NATIONAL OR PROVINCIAL LEVELS. IN FACT, STANDARDS FOR SOCIAL STUDIES EDUCATION ARE LARGELY BORROWED FROM THE NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR THE SOCIAL STUDIES, AN AMERICAN PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATION.

improvements in school curricula, pedagogy and teacher preparation. The federal government responded by pointing out that specific educational initiatives were the responsibilities of the states but acknowledging its obligation to stimulate and support reform in civic education nationally. It struck the Civics Expert Group and gave it the task of preparing a strategic plan for a national program of citizenship education. The Group's report, *Whereas the People . . . Civics and Citizenship Education*, garnered wide response from politicians, policy makers and practitioners and led directly to the development and implementation of the *Discovering Democracy* program – a national multilevel citizenship education program.

In contrast, Canada has never had a widespread or in-depth discussion of goals for citizenship education at either the national or provincial levels. In fact, standards for social studies education are largely borrowed from the National Council for the Social Studies, an American professional association. Consequently, neither the Canadian public nor professional educators have a deep understanding or sense of ownership of goals for citizenship education. We know from years of educational research that clear objectives are fundamental to good teaching and learning; they are also fundamental to good policy development and implementation.

A key enterprise in successfully introducing new programs is the production and dissemination of quality materials to support teaching and learning. Canadian social studies teachers, particularly at the elementary level, consistently identify the lack of such materials as one of the biggest problems they face. Again, Australia provides a stark contrast with its *Discovering Democracy* program, consisting of a series of kits on topics related to Australian democracy spanning grade levels for primary through secondary school. The program was developed at a cost of 32 million Australian dollars, a copy was distributed free to all schools, and extensive in-service education was provided to support implementation. While the other international jurisdictions have much more decentralized materials development initiatives, all have dedicated substantial resources to building this kind of capacity to support educators in implementing effective citizenship education.

In education, as in other professions, the best policies and materials will come to naught without well-educated and skilful professionals to implement them. The most significant teacher development related to citizenship education has gone on in England. Concurrent with the order mandating citizenship education in the National Curriculum, the government established 200 places per

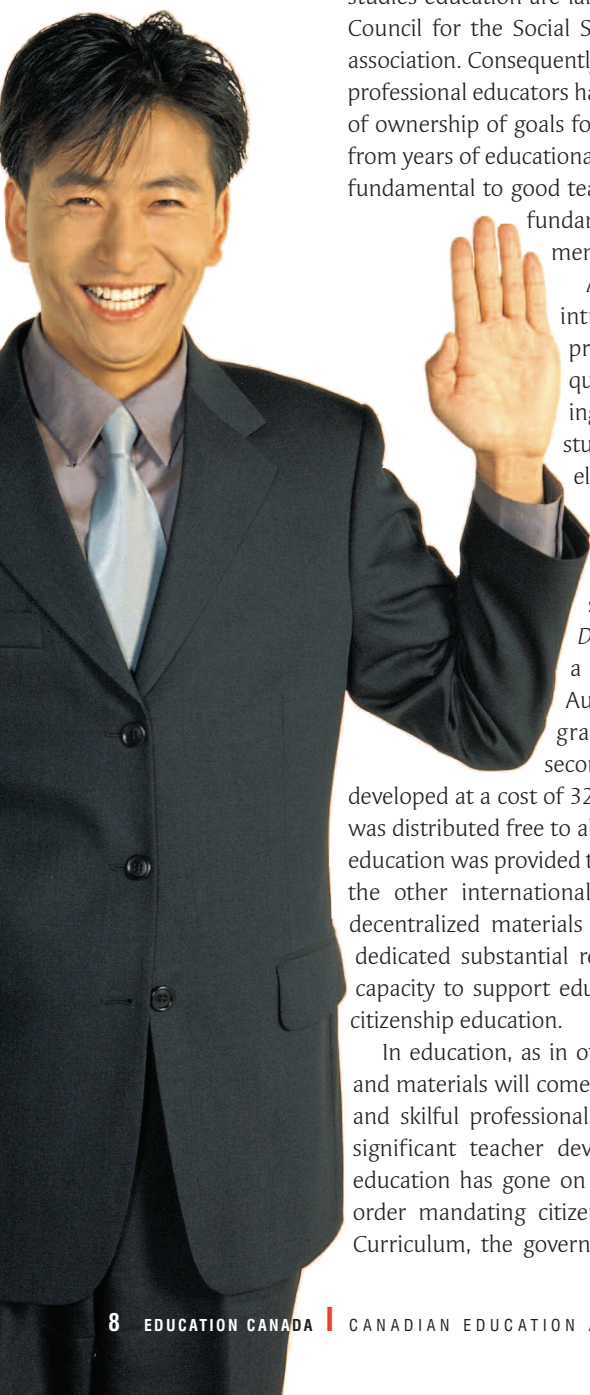
year at undergraduate teacher education institutions across the country to prepare citizenship specialists. In addition, it established the citzED project to coordinate and enhance efforts in the initial teacher training of citizenship education specialists. As well, English universities have developed an extensive range of post-graduate programs, and there has been a massive effort to create quality professional development opportunities for in-service teachers. The latter has been a multi-sector effort involving the Department for Education and Skills (DfES), citzED, and several NGOs such as Community Service Volunteers and the Citizenship Foundation. In our over 60 years of combined experience in education, more than 40 of that in teacher education at eight Canadian universities, we have never seen anything to compare with this range of initiatives in terms of its potential to build capacity to support teaching citizenship.

When the Citizenship Order took effect in England in 2002, policy and program developers realized full well that “the evidence base concerning citizenship education was weak,”⁵ but they moved forward to implement the citizenship curriculum order using the evidence that was available. They were not, however, satisfied to leave the research base where it was. With support from the DfES, a multilayered system of research, monitoring and assessment was put into place. This includes:

- Substantive reviews of the world-wide research base for effective practice;
- A national program of longitudinal and cross sectional research on school policies and programs as well as student progress run by the National Foundation for Educational Research;
- Citizenship as an area for investigation in the regular school inspections by the Office for Standards in Education.

All of these mechanisms feed information back into the English system at multiple levels and provide a basis for adjusting policies and programs. This kind of recursive action, moving forward based on available evidence with careful monitoring of progress to inform adjustments down the road, is a sensible model for reform in public policy generally and citizenship education in particular, but it does require a substantive investment in building research capacity.

The research base for citizenship education in Canada is at best fragmented and sporadic. Several recent reviews of educational policy in Canada have concluded that important programs are often introduced or changed based on personal agendas “without much demonstrable attention to empirical evidence about what would improve teaching and learning.”⁶ Given that Canada has neglected to build any substantial research capacity in citizenship education, particularly when compared with other jurisdictions, we see little or no chance of moving anytime soon to ‘evidence-based’ reform in the field even though that phrase is part of the common rhetoric of politicians and policy makers.



CONCLUSION

When Canadian teams take the field in World Cup qualifying matches they are at a considerable disadvantage vis-à-vis most of their opponents, who have had many more years of experience with the game and have developed extensive capacity to support the development of world class teams. While Canadian players are sent out with the same purpose as players on the other teams and look as fit and ready to play, important groundwork has not been laid, and that shows up on the scoreboard.

We see a clear connection between this perspective and the findings outlined here. In the field of citizenship education Canadian teachers and schools operate under very similar mandates to their counterparts in other jurisdictions. These mandates, however, exist without the capacity in place to carry them out. Canadian teachers have the obligation to pursue the policies of the state, but without access to the human and material resources many find it impossible to infuse life into the inert requirements of public policy and program directives. Other nations that face similar challenges to those we find in Canada have moved forward to build capacity to support quality teaching and learning related to democratic citizenship; Canada has not. As with the World Cup, while the world plays on Canada dabbles on the sidelines. |

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Notes

- 1 Canadian Press. "Poll: Millions of Canadians Bitten by the World Cup Bug," *Globe and Mail*, June 28, 2006. Available from http://www.theglobeandmail.com/servlet/story/RTGAM.20060621.wwwpoll21/BNStory/World_Cup06/home
- 2 Terence H. McLaughlin, "Citizenship Education in England: The Crick Report and Beyond," *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 541 (2000): 550.
- 3 *Quebec Education Program, Approved Version: Preschool Education, Elementary Education* (Gouvernement du Quebec, Ministère de l'Éducation, 2001), 5.
- 4 *Foundation for the Atlantic Canada Social Studies Curriculum* (Halifax: Atlantic Provinces Education Foundation), 29-30.
- 5 Elizabeth Cleaver, Eleanor Ireland, David Kerr, and Joana Lopes, "Citizenship Education Longitudinal Study: Second Cross-Sectional Survey 2004. Listening to Young People: Citizenship Education in England." (Berkshire: National Foundation for Educational Research, 2005), 1.
- 6 Kenneth A. Leithwood, Michael Fullan, and Nancy Watson. *The Schools We Need : A New Blueprint for Ontario : Final Report*. (Toronto: OISE/UT, 2003), 24.

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