

Crossed Perspective about Citizenship Education in Brazil and Canada: Social Inequity and Participation in Public Debate

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Abstract

The article aims to identify principles that underlie democracy and citizenship in Quebec, English Canada and Brazil. For this, it uses a comparative perspective to present and analyses the origins, foundations and evolution of citizenship education in the school curriculum in these realities. By putting forward the similarities and differences between these three societies, it emerges that the more difficult experience of Brazil with regard to democracy and social equity, in part because of its colonialist history, induces concerns about citizenship education that are very different from those observed in Quebec and English Canada. While in Canada citizenship education is for the most part centred on active and informed participation in democratic conversation, in Brazil citizenship education is largely articulated around issues of social inequity and social justice.

Keywords

Citizenship Education, Evolution, Curriculum, Brazil, Québec, English Canada

1. Introduction

Citizenship is related to democracy in the sense that democracy needs a healthy citizenship to allow deliberation between its constituents and to promote the pursuit of social justice (Demirbolat, 2012). Schools are an essential means that an operative democracy can deploy to achieve these objectives. For the purposes of this article, citizenship education will be considered according to its broadest definition, namely as the various elements of training given to children through

the school curriculum and which aims to make them informed, autonomous, critical citizens and actively involved in community affairs.

If at the turn of the 21st century citizenship education imposed itself in many countries as a priority educational objective in schools, it seemed interesting to us, twenty years later, to carry out a comparative exercise between two societies with very different historical and socio-political contexts. Brazil and Canada are both characterized as democratic, but there are substantial differences in the meanings attributed to democracy in each country and the consequent nature and quality of citizenship education. One difference lies in their contrasting histories, particularly in terms of their evolution from colony status to the establishment of citizenship education in their respective school systems. Another difference is that in Brazil education falls under federal jurisdiction, while in Canada education is under provincial jurisdiction. Thus, in Brazil education and school organization are homogenized across all states by national curriculum parameters (Brasil, 1998) and other guidelines, while in Canada there is no formal uniformity in public policy, curriculum, school management, or teacher training, even if common characteristics exist. Educational democracy is thus discussed here in its relationship to universalism or curricular diversity.

This article presents and analyses these differences and other issues related to citizenship education in Brazil and Canada, contrasting the limits and possibilities of the two realities. As Québec is the only predominantly French-speaking province in Canada, the specific case of this province is discussed as distinct from that of English Canada. This study highlights two different approaches to the sensitive subject of citizenship education, based on different principles, themselves stemming from different cultures and histories (Nieto, 2018). In Québec and English Canada, citizenship education is largely entrusted to history programmes. Its key aims are to combat sociopolitical passivity and to promote the civic involvement of future adults in social change. In Brazil, citizenship education has been the subject of dispute between different government projects throughout history and is carried out through a somewhat reactionary conservative moral and civic education, in a society widely impacted by social inequality that is directly linked to the country's colonial and slavery past.

On a methodological level, this comparative study about citizenship education (Kovalchuk & Rapoport, 2018), speculative and exploratory in nature (Martineau, Simard, & Gauthier, 2001), presents a dialogue between two researchers, each a specialist in citizenship education in their country. As Nieto (2018) put it, citizenship education in South America and North America refers to very contrasting realities, where the issue of decolonization—as a process of cultural, psychological, and economic liberation and reappropriation—appears to be important. It is in this specific comparative perspective that the relevance of this study lies. The study proceeded in two steps. First, each author independently wrote a section on citizenship education in their own country. Secondly, based on this material, they discussed the most obvious and salient avenues of comparative analysis. Our different backgrounds enriched our analysis with new pers-

pectives.

This article thus consists of three parts. The first part reports on the evolution and nature of citizenship education in Canada, specifically in the central provinces of Québec and Ontario. The second part focuses on citizenship education in Brazil. In the third section, avenues for comparative analysis between the two situations are presented.

2. Citizenship Education in Québec and English Canada

2.1. Historical Overview: Citizenship Education and Public Schools in Québec (19th-20th Centuries)

In this section, I place some historical markers that elucidate government intentions in respect to citizenship education and its incorporation into official school programmes in Québec and English Canada.

The establishment of public schools in Québec in the mid-19th century: educating citizens for enlightened participation in the democratic process

The first elections in Québec were held in 1792, leading to the formation of the first legislative assembly. At that time, although the elected representatives passed laws, the real power remained with a governor, appointed by Great Britain, who exercised a veto on these laws and passed his own. In 1840, notably to assimilate French Canadians (Monet, 2006), the territories and legislatures of Québec and Ontario were united under a new entity, the Province of Canada. It was in this context that, beginning in 1841, a series of school laws were adopted that lead to the Québec public school system as we know it today (Charland, 2005). Separate school laws were passed for Ontario. When the Canadian Confederation was formed in 1867, Québec and Ontario once again became separate provinces, with their own school systems and educational policies.

In Québec as in Ontario, the need to educate the population was closely linked to the establishment of a democratic parliamentary system and the liberal state of British tradition (Charland, 1987). With the creation of the Province of Canada in 1841, public pressure mounted to ensure that governments were chosen from elected representatives and that laws passed by the legislative assembly as expressions of the will of the people could no longer be rejected or changed by the governor. In 1848, this principle of ministerial responsibility was adopted enshrining the principle of the sovereignty of the people.

Therefore, the common people needed to be politically educated. In Québec, a public school system was set up to educate a largely illiterate rural population, with the goal of producing “enlightened” citizens according to Enlightenment philosophy and classical liberalism. The creation of such a citizen required a minimum of reading and writing, as well as an understanding of history (Charland, 1987; Roy, Gauthier, & Tardif, 1992). In Québec, this school discipline appeared in the curriculum in the 1850s. Knowing the past was to play a key role in the education of future voters.

However, the subject of history centred citizenship around the development of

a patriotic feeling, adhesion to the basic values of the national community and transmission, without critical distance, of a stereotypical teleological national narrative (Tutiaux-Guillon, 2009; Cardin, 2010). Thus, in Québec, even in the early 1960s, history programmes intended for Franco-Catholics offered an edifying historical account, for the most part unchanged since the end of the 19th century. In short, in Québec, as in most Western societies, citizenship education was decidedly patriotic in substance.

The great turn of the 1960s: the will of the State to train an active, open and critical citizen

During the 1960s and 1970s, the idea of reverting to the education of an “enlightened” citizen resurfaced in formal school curricula. This desire was far from unique to Québec, but was fostered in the province by the 1960 election of a progressive government that initiated an in-depth modernization of the institutions of the Québec state. What has been dubbed the “Quiet Revolution” (1960-1970) also modernized the sociocultural values of society while a new, more open civic nationalism, based on belonging to a territory rather than an ethnic group, replaced the old (Durocher, 2013). A sweeping reform of all aspects of education was initiated, dedicated to the secularization and modernization of educational content and structures, with the overall objective of increasing the level of education and graduation in the population (Wikipedia Contributors). The reformers sharply criticized the narrowly patriotic citizenship education that had prevailed in history curricula for over a century, proposing instead to establish history as an area in which to develop students’ open-mindedness and critical capacity (Québec, 1965).

From the end of the 1960s to the present day, new curricula that better implemented the objectives of citizenship education as defined by the Quiet Revolution reformers have replaced previous editions at the primary and secondary levels. Québec history courses were gradually modified to reflect the societal contributions of previously omitted groups, including Indigenous peoples, anglophones, and immigrant populations. In 1982, new history programmes were put in place; out of seven training objectives, four emphasized educating an active, open and critical citizen in a democratic and deliberative society (Québec, [1983] 1999).

As discussed in a later section, developments in English Canada about the relation between history teaching and citizenship education were much the same. Each according to their own characteristics, the Canadian provinces gradually abandoned the traditional patriotic vision in favour of a more critical and open conception of citizenship education, particularly in history programmes.

2.2. The School Reform of the 2000s in Québec and the Place of Citizenship Education

Making space for citizenship education in history programmes and in the curriculum of Québec schools

During the second half of the 1990s, Québec began the most significant review

of its education system since the 1960s. Between 2000 and 2009, new school programmes were prescribed at the elementary and secondary levels. Designed according to cognitivist, constructivist and socio-constructivist theories, these programmes were articulated around a competency-based approach (Québec, 2004); for the most part, these programmes are still in place today.

During this reform, concern for citizenship education was not only renewed, but reinforced. At the end of the millennium, Québec shared a worldwide concern for citizenship education, influenced by the fall of the Berlin Wall, the rise of globalization and the redefinition of national and international relationships and equilibriums inherited from the post-war period (Québec, 1998; Hughes, Murray, & Sears, 2010). The youth, who seemed at first glance apathetic and not very sociopolitically engaged, were at the same time unpredictable and quick to ignite, as they did, for example, in violent demonstrations at G7 or G20 meetings (Hudon & Fournier, 2003; Quéniart & Jacques, 2002; Hughes & Sears, 2006). Consequently, several countries stated their intention to reaffirm citizenship education in the school curriculum to channel the ardour of young people and to involve them in social deliberation and in the future of society in a more rational and conscious manner (Québec, 1998; Cogan & Derricott, 2000).

A novelty among the major training objectives in the new Québec Education Programme is the theme “Citizenship and Community Life”, which is broken down along three development axes: 1) promotion of the rules of social conduct and democratic institutions; 2) participation, cooperation and solidarity; and 3) contribution to a culture of peace. In short, students are invited to get involved peacefully and within established democratic frameworks (Québec, 2004).

In this strengthening of citizenship education, the teaching of history and geography play a leading role: “It is by learning to decode the real world from a spatiotemporal perspective [i.e. both geographical and historical] and by understanding the importance of human action that students construct their consciousness of citizenship” (Québec, 2004: p. 255). In secondary school, the history programme was renamed “History and Citizenship Education”, and citizenship education became one of the three competencies teachers would be required to develop in students: “Construct his/her consciousness of citizenship through the study of history” (Québec, 2004: p. 306). **Figure 1**, taken from the programme, explains this competency to the teacher, breaking it down into various elements (Québec, 2004).

If citizenship education is primarily entrusted to history and geography teachers at the primary and secondary levels, note that it also permeates the entire curriculum and all school subjects (Québec, 2004).

Nationalist criticism of citizen education and implementation of a new programme (2006 to present)

In several Western societies, a shift towards teaching history that promotes critical and open citizenship was far from appealing to everyone. Particularly on the political right, many called for a return to a traditional and patriotic national narrative centring the dominant majority. Thus, in English Canada in the 1990s,

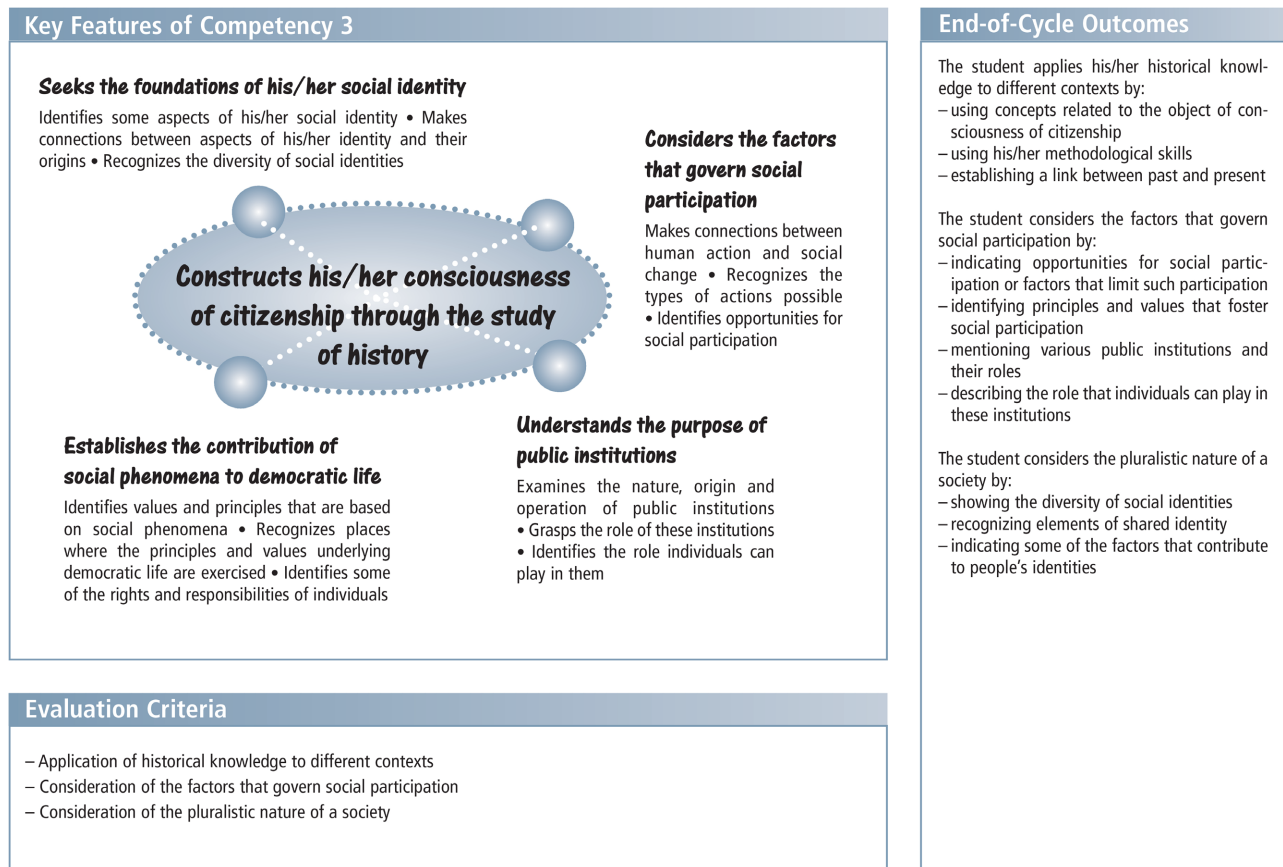


Figure 1. Explanation of the competency “Constructs his/her consciousness of citizenship through the study of history” (Québec, 2004).

historian Jack Granatstein criticized programmes that offered what he called an unrecognizable, fragmented and victimized narrative, in which the heroes of yesteryear were gone (Granatstein, 1998). Granatstein argued that the abandonment of the traditional national narrative for a history reflecting multiple perspectives (e.g. those of women, Indigenous peoples, immigrants, racialized minorities, and others) could only be divisive and generate bitterness.

At the turn of the new millennium, similar reactions were seen in many countries, notably Australia, Great Britain, the United States, Greece and France (Grever & Sturman, 2007). The abandonment of the traditional national “canon” for a new narrative of victimhood and penitence was deplored. Rather than instilling pride and respect for the nation and its past, critics said, citizens would be educated to atone for the past, soaked in guilt.

Québec was no exception to this movement. Beginning in 2006, conservative nationalist groups mobilized to denounce the new Québec history programme in the media, making similar arguments to those of Jack Granatstein (Boutonnet, Cardin, & Éthier, 2014). Some were outraged by the third competency on citizenship education, which they viewed as a way to promote the multiculturalist philosophy dear to English Canada (Courtois, 2009). Opponents demanded a return to traditional history teaching and denounced the socio-constructivist

foundations and competency-based approach of the new programme as a means to dismiss the traditional historical framework (Cardin, 2010; Lavallée, 2012). To these attacks, some retaliated by asserting that history programme revisions in the 80s had also prioritized citizenship education and that the traditional nationalist and patriotic narrative had been set aside since the beginning of the 1970s (Éthier, Cardin, & Lefrançois, 2014).

In 2012, the election of the Parti Québécois, a nationalist and independentist party, turned the tide in favour of the programme's critics. A process to revise the programme was initiated, recalling the 2007 curriculum and, in 2017, replacing it with a new one which, while still centred on the development of competencies, emphasized a factual narrative (Québec, 2017). But the main novelty of the 2017 programme was the quasi disappearance of the citizenship education component. In any case, it appears that teachers had made little use of the third competency in the classroom, and furthermore, the latter had not been officially assessed since many years during ministerial grade 10 final exams (Cardin, Fardeau, & Bidjang, 2012). At the time of this writing, the Québec Ministry of Education is considering creating a specific course dedicated to ethical reflection and citizenship education (Québec, 2022).

2.3. Citizenship Education in English Canada in the 21st Century

Transition to a more active citizenship education (1990s and 2000s)

In general, the evolution of citizenship education in English Canada since the 1960s was similar to that in Québec (Tomkins, 1983; Sears, 1994; Bickmore, 2014). Québec and the English-speaking provinces have followed parallel paths, evolving in the same global context and subject to the same forces of change: increasing ethnocultural diversity, globalization and the realignment of national concerns resulting from the end of the Cold War.

During the 1960s, citizenship education in English Canada generally was assigned to history or social science courses. In the late 1960s, Hodgetts found that citizenship education was still largely patriotic and nationalist in nature (Hodgetts, 1968). In terms of content, programmes were preoccupied with getting the population to identify with Canada as a unitary nation, in a country strongly fragmented in terms of regions, cultures, languages and communities. It must be noted that at that time, the fear of being culturally and economically swallowed by the United States was a major concern in English Canada. Hodgetts also found, as was found in Québec, that these history lessons were not really educating students about citizenship. Rather, they sought to promote patriotism and ethnocultural homogenization through the transmission of a canonical factual narrative, centred on politico-military aspects, and emphasizing the Anglo-British roots and values that distinguish Canada from the United States.

In response, during the 1970s and 1980s, many demanded more dynamic teaching of history and the social sciences (Sears, 1994). History programmes began to invite students to investigate the country's past in order to better un-

derstand current issues in society rather than valuing its British roots. These programmes sought to train a critical citizen to be open to otherness, drawing on intellectual and methodological skills developed through active learning methods.

During the same period, multiculturalism was becoming the dominant sociopolitical philosophy in English Canada including in the field of education. This doctrine rejected the cultural homogenization of yesteryear, which had been based on the integration of immigrants into the Anglo-British majority. On the contrary, it valued the maintenance of the socio-cultural and religious differences of various communities in the population, at a time when immigration was accelerating and diversifying; Canada was increasingly referred to as a cultural or ethnic “mosaic” (Driedger, 2010). The enhancement of multiculturalism and respect for cultural differences were therefore also added to the objectives of citizenship education.

As a result, during the last thirty years of the twentieth century, the various English-Canadian provinces gradually adopted programmes reflecting these aims and trends. To this end, some provinces adopted a multidisciplinary approach focusing more on the social sciences than on history, the latter subject declining in the curriculum, especially in the western provinces of Canada.

Over the past two decades, these trends continued to strengthen with, in the background, the rise of political correctness in the public sphere and the fight against sexism, racism and inequities against Indigenous peoples. In several Anglo-Canadian provinces, citizenship education expanded into other programmes such as Health, Language Arts, or even courses specifically dedicated to the subject. However, researchers have noted that while the written intentions of these programmes were somewhat avant-garde and promoted active, engaged and critical citizenship—especially in regard to gender and race inequities—textbooks and classroom practices did not really aim to challenge the established order (Sears, 1994; Bickmore, 2014; Davies & Issitt, 2005). However, right-wing nationalist opposition did not drive English Canada to rewrite curricula or retreat from this approach, as it had in Québec.

The next section will describe how citizenship education is reflected in the current curriculum of Ontario, a province neighbouring Québec and the most populous in Canada.

An example: citizenship education in current Ontario school programmes

According to Davies and Issitt, “the Ontario provincial government was consistently supportive of the need for citizenship education and, despite controversial debates about the nature of the full range of policies, Ontario makes it clear that civics is related to its conception of a high-quality lifestyle” (Davies and Issitt, 2015, 396). For example, in 2000, Ontario implemented a new Grade 10 civics course, in addition to history and social science courses. At around the same time, the province required high school students to complete 40 hours of community volunteer work as a condition of high school graduation. Since that time, the curriculum configuration at the secondary level has changed, but citizenship

education remains a priority, with several programmes contributing to it.

A programme implemented in 2018 for Grades 9 and 10, titled *Canadian and World Studies—Geography, History, Civics (Politics)*, (referred to as CWS2018 for the remainder of this section) (Ontario, 2018), captures the nature of high school citizenship education in Ontario. Two reasons for focusing on CWS2018 are that the programme gives pride of place to citizenship education and describes in detail its aims and contents, and that it is recent enough to illustrate the current direction of the Ontario government in the field of citizenship education.

In the CWS2018 programme we find “The Citizenship Education Framework”, a charter for citizenship education (see **Figure 2**, taken from the programme, p. 10).

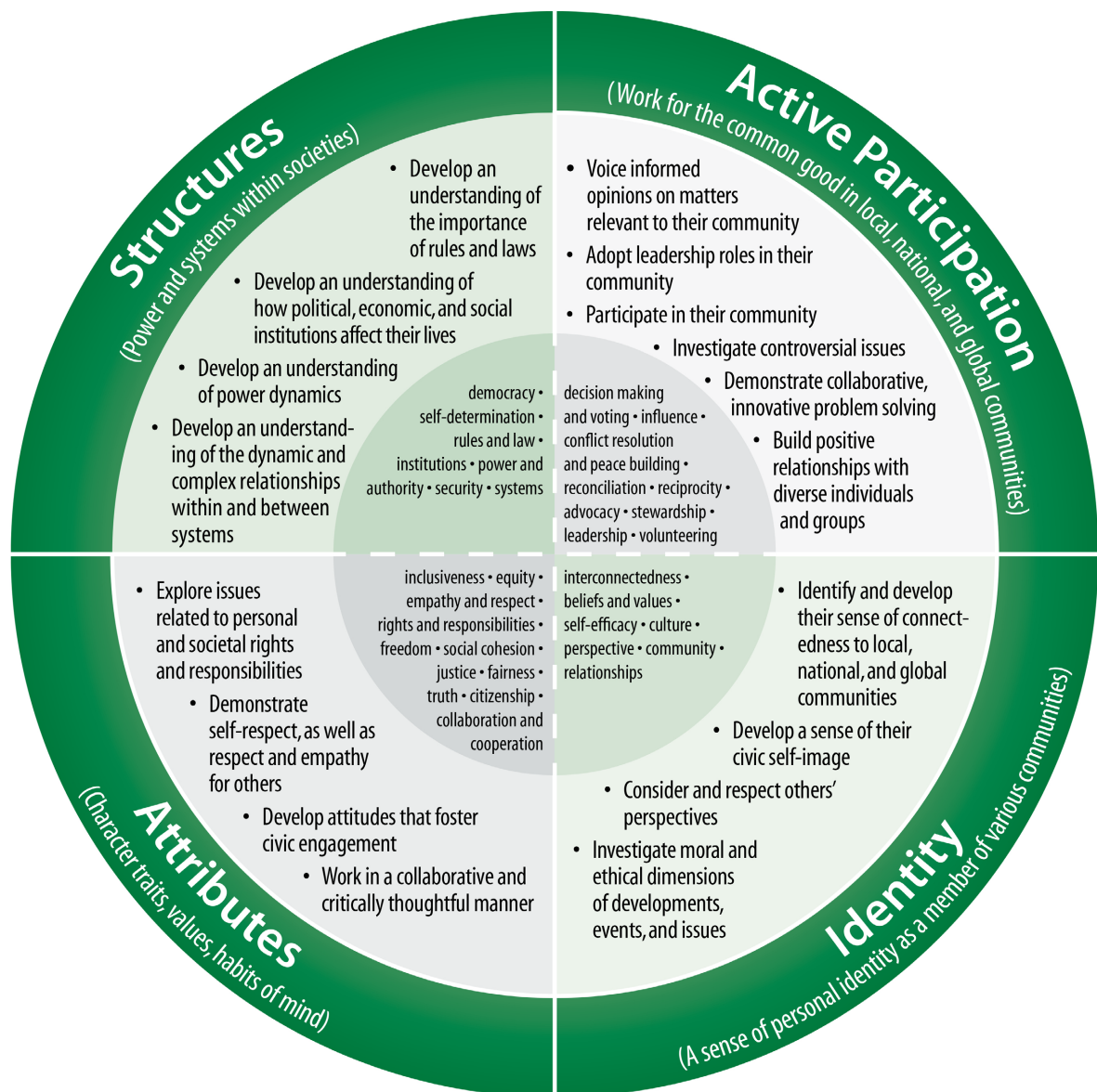


Figure 2. The citizenship education framework in Ontario (Ontario, 2018).

Four main training goals define the nature of the citizenship education promoted in this programme:

- 1) to encourage the student to actively participate in the common good;
- 2) to develop their own identity “as a member of various communities” and in a world with diverse identities;
- 3) to develop values and attitudes favourable to living together in harmony;
- 4) to develop an understanding of social and power structures.

Admittedly, these features are similar to the major trends mentioned in the previous section. To varying degrees, we find their equivalents in the curricula of Québec and the other provinces. But the CWS2018 programme stands out because of its insistence on certain points:

- emphasis on history, geography and civics (politics) and on the concepts, ways of thinking and methodologies associated with each of these three subjects;
- inclusion of a coherent approach in regard to Indigenous perspectives on past and current issues;
- a concern for “cultural safety”, based on the will to create “a learning environment that is respectful and that makes students feel safe and comfortable not only physically, socially, and emotionally but also in terms of their cultural heritage” (p. 15);
- focus on “Big Ideas” rather than unnecessary details (pp. 8 and 14).

It would not be a stretch to expect that, in the coming years, the ministries of education in other Canadian provinces will turn to the CWS2018 programme when the time comes to update the citizenship education component of their curriculum.

3. Citizenship Education in Brazil

3.1. Historical Context: Citizenship Education and Public Schools in the 20th Century

Brazilian colonization dates from the 16th century and was characterized by the intention to explore and profit from, but not to populate or invest in the project of an autonomous nation. The political culture that developed from this model of colonization was based on legal and fiscal privileges like those of feudalism, an aspect of Brazilian history that has been well documented (Furtado, 1971; Cunha, 1971; Romanelli, 1988; Moreira & Silva, 1995).

I will take as a starting point the process of the effects of the Industrial Revolution on manufacturing, modernity (especially as demarcated by the introduction of Modern Art Week in 1922) and transformation of agricultural privileges. At a time when Brazilian intellectuals had been resigned to importing social norms from Europe, a change in consciousness and shift towards valuing Brazilian customs generated cultural and political rupture. The international economic crisis of the early 1930s was reflected in changes to the structure of production, but not to the status quo of citizenship. The old system required manual labor-

ers, not educated workers. Among the changes that occurred at the beginning of the 20th century was a transition from the agricultural-export production model to the urban-industrial model, which required training in the sense of more schools and more education.

Thus came the late emergence of an educational system and the quantitative expansion of schools in Brazil, initially at the primary level, and gradually expanding to the middle and higher levels. This process had an especially strong impact on social movements that broke out in the late 1960s against the military dictatorship, in which citizens demanded re-democratization of the country and access to better living conditions, including education. In 1964, Brazil's president, who had defended structural reforms to reduce social inequalities, was overthrown by a civil-military coup on the basis of a possible communist threat. This fact demonstrates that conflicts in Brazilian politics have repercussions in all areas including education.

Because education was feared as an instrument of political mobilization and insubordination, especially at universities, the military government undertook educational reform in 1968 with the justification of expanding access to higher education. A new model was implemented that privileged academic and social selectivity in higher education. Free universities linked to the government were maintained; only students from wealthy families were admitted. Private colleges aimed at the low-income population who were unable to access places in public universities were created. In addition, the system of lifelong chairs was eliminated and the organization of higher education, previously based on larger units that brought together many professors, was divided into smaller departments. In this way, professors had less chance of political mobilization and students, who used to mobilize for places in higher education, were silenced.

The 1971 reform instituted a requirement for vocational education in secondary schools, which mainly affected public schools attended by poor students, while private schools served children from wealthy families. As expressed by [Bourdieu & Passeron \(1982\)](#) and analyzed so well by [Saviani \(1999\)](#), the Brazilian educational system is characterized by reproductivism, in which disadvantaged populations attend low-quality public schools, while the wealthy pay for private schools that assign their children to high quality jobs.

In the 1970s, basic school curricula included subjects such as "Moral and Civic Education" and "Brazilian Social and Political Organization" which focused on nationalist, disciplinary education based on the idea of belonging to the territory.

Dictatorship was gradually replaced with a transition from military to civilian government and the formulation of a new constitution in 1988 that recognized the democratic rights of all people in Brazil. In 1996, the Law of Education Guidelines was enacted. Since then, Brazil's educational policies have been referred to as democratic since decentralization is assumed to be a political direction associated with participatory citizenship ([Botler, 2004](#)).

This is tied to the fact that the National Education Guidelines and Bases Law

(Brasil, 1996) included the disciplines of philosophy and sociology, which were reintroduced into the high school curriculum but became compulsory only in 2009. In 2016 they were again excluded. Thus, while such educational policies are called democratic, each context reveals the conflicting interests of various pedagogical and political influences. Such disciplines are important in the formation of reflective, autonomous, critical and emancipatory thinking, which is not always desired by those in power.

In addition, in 1998, National Curriculum Parameters (Brasil, 1998) were developed that focused on curriculum flexibility, but in 2017 changes occurred in the implementation of the Common National Curriculum Bases (BNCC; Brasil, 2017), which emphasizes a fragmented view of knowledge and human development by making invisible issues related to gender identity and sexual orientation and emphasizing religious teaching. Despite inclusion of educational policies for the implementation of local curricula a universal curriculum persisted. While the BNCC included 15 “contemporary themes”, there was no clear training policy for citizenship education, and these themes were only superficially transposed in school.

Alongside educational regulation, it is important to highlight pedagogical trends in Brazil. A first break with traditional pedagogy was observed in 1932 with the *Manifesto dos Pioneiros da Educação Nova* (New Education Pioneers Manifesto), based on the New School ideas of American philosopher and educator John Dewey (INEP, 1984). The manifesto questioned the passivity of students and defended the social transformation function of schooling, based on making opportunities accessible to all through respect for the rhythm of individual learning.

Another key influential figure was Brazilian philosopher and educator Paulo Freire. Freire sought to make it possible for field workers to learn to read and write so that they could get to know the world. In the 1950s and 1960s, his ideas revolutionized education outside of school, but his method was not institutionally incorporated into schooling policy.

In the 1990s, education began to incorporate an awareness of how knowledge is constructed, with socio-constructivist approaches gaining ground. Official education documents began to include some of these principles, guiding the pedagogical practices of schools and teachers, but the process of incorporating them was slow and gradual. Even today, schools show traces of traditional pedagogy, which implies limits to students’ full learning and socio-cognitive development. Some authors like Moreira (2021) claim that this is due to the business bias of education management, based on the guidelines of international organizations. These organizations place education as a strategy for reducing social inequalities, while at the same time there is a pseudo-democratization that contributes to social reproduction.

Macedo (2016) explains that the debate about the curriculum in Brazil is based on an antagonism between knowledge to do something and knowledge in itself.

The author analyses this opposition and contends that this dispute naturalizes the sense of curriculum as control.

These aspects of the political arena pertaining to the curriculum help to explain why in the Brazilian socioeconomic context today, the basic needs of a large part of the population, who are culturally characterized as *inferior*, are not met. Current education data reflect this reality. Despite having consolidated school attendance in early 2000 to about 87% of school-aged children and adolescents (aged 6 - 14 years), and seeing an increase to 99.7% attendance or 25.8 million students by 2019 (IBGE, 2019), the national illiteracy rate for individuals aged 15 and up is 6.6% or 11 million citizens. In addition, the illiteracy rate among Black or Brown people is 8.9%, versus 3.6% for White people (IBGE, 2019). Thus, a functionalist sense is still attributed to the school, which reflects an instrumental rationality as if it were the path to administrative modernization. This is necessary because the educational results reveal an anti-democratic reality (Botler, 2004).

In 2020, the IBGE released data on school dropouts: of 50 million people aged 14 to 29 in the country, 20.2% (or 10.1 million) had not completed any of the stages of basic education, either due to dropping out or never having attended school. Of this total, 71.7% were Black or Brown, and 51.2%, or 69.5 million adults, had not completed high school (IBGE, 2019).

In 2019, 1.8 million children and youth (aged between 5 and 17) were in situations of child labour. The majority of child labourers were Black or Brown (66.1%), and 32.8% were White. In the Northeast, three out of five adults (60.1%) had not completed high school due to the need to work (39.1%) or, among women, pregnancy (23.8%) (IBGE, 2019). Further, the context of the COVID-19 pandemic in Brazil warrants particular attention, as in addition to the structural unemployment resulting from limited education in the face of technological advances, by the end of 2020 the national unemployment average reached 14.1%, with the highest rates in the Northeast (around 18%), not including people working informally. This rate provides some context to a situation of family breakdown, which further contributes to the vulnerability of children and adolescents and their socio-economic barriers to access school.

These and other data show that child and adolescent vulnerability is still high. In line with the Convention on the Rights of the Child, Brazil created the Statute for Children and Adolescents (Brasil, 1990), which has the force of law and is an international reference on this matter. Brazil assumes that children are an absolute priority and have been, since 1990, defined as “subjects of rights”.

This brief historical context shows that the Brazilian educational system reflects the marks of colonization based on slavery and has not yet solved problems related to the resulting social and political inequalities. This partly explains why democratic legislation finds limits in social practices.

In the following section, I offer an analysis of how citizenship education can be addressed in a way that improves the quality of education, avoids the pitfalls

of reproductivism and seeks instead the path to an emancipatory education.

3.2. Citizenship Education and the Issue of Quality of Education

In the 1990s, citizens' lack of participation in political life was an obstacle to achieving education as a right and as training for critical, conscious and participatory citizenship. What most hampered the enforcement of rights was social inequality. It is worth remembering that until 1988, education was not considered a right. In the Federative Constitution of 1988, it became a social right (which obliged the State to offer it to anyone with an interest), while the Statute of Children and Adolescents determined the obligations (with punishment) of parents and the State in cases of no offer.

Consequently, the discourse of Brazilian educational policy took on a new perspective of citizenship, focusing on the reorganization of school management to prioritize the population's participation in decision-making. The concept of citizenship now incorporated a set of individual, social, economic and cultural rights and duties. Democratic equality of participation, then, concerns the political and social dimensions.

Political participation was understood as the right to vote. In the 2000s, this included election of public school principals (Brasil, 1996). In other societies this is considered absurd, since the educational system should establish technical criteria for the proper performance of this function. This aspect has been improved and now includes training for the position.

In Brazil, the institutions that distribute and oversee social rights not only extend them, but also expand the political obligation of the working classes in the State. This means not only the right to vote, but the obligation to do so. Thus, social rights are part of the development of society as a form of control over people.

Analyzing political participation in Brazil, Arretche (2015) showed that between 1945 and 2010, the electorate grew in quantitative terms (demographic and educational growth) due to an intense process of political incorporation. Elections in Brazil have broad participation and are free, fair, and safe from fraud, but even so, the low education of the population limits voters expressing their preferences.

Therefore, the political model influences the design, organization and functioning of the educational system, which induces schools to educate for citizenship through democratic management. But democratic management can be characterized by emancipatory and dialogical processes, or alternately, by control and direction, depending on the culture of each organization.

Democratic culture and participation vary, reflecting the individuals who integrate it, their ideals of democracy and citizenship, and their potential for transformation or conservation. Such a culture can be modified according to inherent values (adopted principles) and can be built on collective or centralized management.

Thus, it becomes evident that in Brazil, citizenship does not necessarily imply quality education, or training focused on emancipation and autonomy. In the next section I provide an overview of the fundamentals that support the Brazilian educational project.

3.3. Justice and Rights in Brazilian Education

Since the 1980s, educators have been researching possibilities for implementing quality education in a democratic system that might overcome the vicious circle of poverty, political patronage and functional education. In macropolitical terms, this would result in a citizenship based on formal participation and political representation. In this sense, a quality education is one that achieves positive quantitative results in large-scale examinations but would not necessarily include training in autonomy, critical thinking or emancipation.

I would argue that citizenship must include more than that, since a school not only follows educational system standards, but formulates its own philosophical-pedagogical project, oriented by action and organizational reflection.

Friedberg stated that it is not possible to hierarchize the contexts of action and their regulatory mechanisms a priori and in a stable manner (Friedberg, 1993). It is, therefore, in the contexts of action that relationships are established, which leads me to examine the school microcosm. Estêvão (2000) related democracy to citizenship and education, stating that local democracy enhances the very essence of democracy, but can also reflect power, privilege, rationalities and justifications for actions. Walzer (2003) argued that education should be divided into two distinct spheres: first, a fundamental education that would allow all children to master a simple egalitarian citizenship; second, a specialized education respecting each student's abilities, as children have different degrees of interest and comprehension. These two spheres demand different distribution criteria: either individual needs or qualifications.

The micropolitical approach to education therefore includes sociological and philosophical aspects that help analyse how effective citizenship education is in practice. This means that the intrinsic value of the school's function is as a trainer, but it also takes into account the socio-economic conditions that support or impede student development.

Citizenship training is based on principles such as social equality. Equality allows recognition of achievement, which can be positive and dignifying, but also negative when the unrecognized person feels invisible. Equality is, therefore, complex, especially in social contexts with such inequalities as in Brazil.

Historical inequalities impose meanings as legitimate, concealing the power relations that underlie them as a symbolic force, as Bourdieu & Passeron (1982) have argued. This perspective allows us to view organizational action as based on the influence of a cultural arbitrary that can lead to the realization of a specific model of organization as an arbitrary imposition (Botler, 2004).

On the other hand, it is in the school microcosm that values are transmitted,

but also criticized by real people. The expression “resistance” has been used by authors such as [Dourado & Oliveira \(2009\)](#) and [Freitas \(2016\)](#) to demarcate this instituting force.

Democracy *at school*, which in essence is the search to overcome individualism and unequal relations, supposedly aims to achieve the reduction of prejudice and discrimination and minimize social inequalities: it is another kind of citizenship.

Thus, I propose that citizenship is related to the idea of social justice, which is a complex, plural, contextual concept ([Walzer, 2003](#)). A fair and egalitarian school must be conceived from the local culture. A culture of positive discrimination, therefore, can only effectively emerge from people who *make policies in practice*.

4. Conclusion: A Shared Discussion on the Respective Realities of Québec/English Canada and Brazil: Social Justice versus Participation

As illustrated throughout this article, the foundation for the curricular organization of basic education in Canada is a decentralized paradigm, rooted in a distribution of powers and responsibilities. In Brazil, while states and municipalities have a certain managerial autonomy, the curriculum is largely centralized.

Thus, how citizenship education is taught in Canada is determined by the choices of each provincial government. In contrast, in Brazil, despite a discourse of democratization, ideological conflict between different governments limits the development of a culture for teaching critical citizenship.

The curricular “citizenship education” component and its contents were also objects of attention for both authors in their explanatory narratives. While in Brazil there have been disputes between different government projects throughout history, conservative moral and civic education remains the dominant model. In Québec and in English Canada, the citizenship education component is assigned to history programmes and aims to stimulate political awareness through knowledge about the history of social change. In this way, Brazil continues to see its inequalities grow, while Canada is more likely to see a reduction over time.

The two authors of this article tackled the same theme with quite different approaches. For Brazil, citizenship education was approached from the angle of social inequalities which must be addressed in order to improve access to education; for Québec and English Canada, the evolution and nature of citizenship education was approached more indirectly, from the perspective of valuing the participation of young citizens in public deliberation, and from there to more recent shifts that generate a reflection on inequities, especially of gender and race. Thus, Brazil is an emerging country still marked by strong socio-economic inequalities, while Canada is a rich and privileged country, which certainly still has significant social inequalities, but is also endowed with a relatively functional democracy and a social system that allows some redistribution of wealth.

Certainly, there are similarities between the two countries when it comes to citizenship education. For example, they are both marked by continental dimensions and regional diversities whose socio-economic and cultural characteristics should give meaning to the structuring of the school curriculum. Even though both countries seek to offer access to all school-aged children, in Canada the culture of each province or region is respected, despite a strong tendency towards centralization by the federal government. Further, democratic participation and the confidence of the population in education as a social promotion tool remain strong. In Brazil, the universalization of education is formally democratic, with around 99% of children in schools, but the curriculum does not respond to the demands and needs of different regions.

In the recent crisis arising from the COVID-19 pandemic, Brazil has further distanced itself from social rights and universal access to a successful school experience. It is worth noting that the discontinuity of policies contributes to the weakening of access to education for the majority of the population. This has contributed to the election of an irresponsible president who does not know how to lead the country through this moment of crisis. In Canada, the pandemic health context has also had negative effects on social equity in education. In Québec, for example, it has been widely reported that distance schooling has disproportionately harmed students from less wealthy families and students in need of learning accommodations.

In conclusion, whatever the particular situations in Brazil and in Canada, it seems clear that both countries are equipped to continue to strengthen the notion of citizenship education in their school systems, including development of a critical narrative and respect for curricular diversity. But in Brazil a clearer view is needed on the subject of rights, including the right to a home and the rights of those responsible for feeding and sending children to school. With a focus on social justice, the country can overcome political and ideological disputes within the scope of the national curriculum, to focus on training young citizens to participate in public debate.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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