

Francisco J. Villegas · Janelle Brady  
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Francisco J. Villegas  
Anthropology and Sociology  
Kalamazoo College  
Kalamazoo, MI, USA

Janelle Brady  
University of Toronto  
Toronto, ON, Canada

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# Be a Good Citizen or Else! Neoliberal Citizenship and the Grade Six 2013 Revised Ontario Social Studies Curriculum

*Ardavan Eizadirad*

## 9.1 LOCATING THE SELF

Being born in Iran, my schooling experiences differed drastically compared to Toronto, Canada transitioning from an authoritarian teacher-centred learning environment to a more democratic student-centred atmosphere. As a male, Middle Eastern immigrant from a working-class background, I struggled mastering the English language upon arrival to Canada. I became involved with many extra-curricular activities at school and within my community. My interest in the area of citizenship and social justice was sparked based on attending three different secondary schools within four years each located in different socio-geographical areas in Toronto. It became evident to me that there were profound elements of racism and stratification that were embedded and intrinsic in various aspects of the school board and that each school had its own unique power relations that impacted its everyday functioning.

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A. Eizadirad (✉)  
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education,  
University of Toronto, Toronto, ON, Canada  
e-mail: [ardavan.eizadirad@mail.utoronto.ca](mailto:ardavan.eizadirad@mail.utoronto.ca)

Two major incidents in my life gravitated me towards questioning major ideas around citizenship and what it means to be a “good” citizen. Both of these interactions involved encounters with violence impacting me directly and indirectly. When I was in high school, I lost one of my friends to gun violence where he was killed by a stray bullet at a party. The news of his death sparked a lot of anger within me. The incident made me begin questioning ideas around citizenship; rights and responsibilities of individuals to themselves, their families and communities, and the larger nation. Another major incident which impacted me severely was the imprisonment of my best friend for committing a series of crimes. These events inspired and guided me to become a teacher and pursue graduate studies. These experiences remain with me and impact my pedagogy. I often engage students and young adults, many who are racialized and living in high-priority neighbourhoods, in conversations about what it means to be a good person in their immediate lives and in larger context of their neighbourhoods.

## 9.2 NEOLIBERALISM AND CITIZENSHIP

Under the current North American economic system and its neoliberal market-driven ideologies of citizenship and individualistic notions of personal responsibility, many of today’s young children from an early age are socialized to equate citizenship exclusively with voting and being complicit and passive. Within this paradigm, citizenship is framed as accepting established systems of authority and hierarchical power relations without questioning institutional practices or laws, even if the outcome of such practices and laws results in injustice and inequity. Thus, it is critical to question how have we arrived at a narrowing of the problematic so that it is solely individualistic and often economic determinist where profit has more currency than justice and equity?

From kindergarten, the explicit and hidden curriculum and routine nature of schooling diminishes the capacity of students to be curious and ask critical questions; instead moulding them through a rewards and punishment system that equates being “good” to following instructions and not deviating from the “norm” imposed by dominant culture. Dominant hegemonic culture positions systemic and institutional structures such as schools to function in “neutrality” while proclaiming equal service is provided to all members of society (Apple, 2004; Au, 2013; Giroux, 2003). Schools serve as an Ideological State Apparatus that

promotes dominant ideology (Althusser, 2006) while masquerading as equitable. Yet, how can equality of outcomes be achieved when everyone does not have the same starting point or access to opportunities?

Under a market-driven capitalist economy, neoliberal ideologies place blame on individuals (Giroux, 2003; Pinto, 2015; Portelli & Sharma, 2014) and their decisions as the direct cause of their lived circumstances, contributing to a disregard for the salience of race in defining social order in society. As Giroux (2003) argues,

Within this market-driven perspective, the exchange of capital takes precedence over social justice, the making of socially responsible citizens, and the building of democratic communities. There is no language here for recognizing antidemocratic forms of power, developing nonmarket values, or fighting against substantive injustices in a society founded on deep inequalities, particularly those based on race and class. (196)

When institutions prioritize market needs, internal decisions are often guided by monetary values, leading to perpetuation of various forms of oppression predominantly impacting racialized identities. This leads to dehumanizing practices where human and collective needs of local communities are overlooked for savings and profits. Driven by hierarchical power relations, “colourblind” politics of neoliberalism promote neutrality, which perpetuates the hegemonic status quo and its inequities in pursuit of the market logic while hiding and masking institutional racism (Bailey, Chapter 3; Madan, Chapter 4). Race is “marked as a private manner” signifying a denial that “race is responsible for alleged injustices that reproduce group inequalities, privilege Whites, and negatively impacts on economic mobility, the possession of social resources, and the acquisition of political power” (Giroux, 2003, p. 198). Such neoliberal ideologies permeate social, political, and cultural spheres perpetuating a socially stratified and hierarchical society privileging Whiteness at the expense of suffering and marginalization to others (Apple, 2004; Au, 2013). Pinto (2015) defines neoliberalism by stating,

Neoliberalism is the dominant political and ideological paradigm of our time, embodied by policies and processes that place political control in a handful of private interests. Its defining characteristics include a shift of shared concern for the common good between the state and citizens to a relationship based on economics whereby citizen roles are limited to “taxpayers” in the social order, and a predominant consensual discourse

whereby contestation and dissent are compromised. Resulting social policies reflect managerialism, privatisation and a preponderance of punitive accountability mechanisms. (p. 142)

Within a neoliberal system, certain social groups, such as the poor and immigrants, become expendable and dispensable for profits, yet ironically, the same groups are blamed for causing many social problems such as crime and violence plaguing communities today. Why are the root causes of social problems plaguing society not attributed to ineffective functioning of systems and institutions which reproduce inequity of access to power, resources, and opportunities? As Giroux (2003) explains,

Color-blindness is a convenient ideology for enabling Whites to ignore the degree to which race is tangled up with asymmetrical relations of power, functioning as a potent force for patterns of exclusion and discrimination, including, but not limited to, housing, mortgage loans, health care, schools, and the criminal justice system. (p. 199)

The presence of “color-blindness” also robs the ability to proclaim citizenship by those who are scapegoated as responsible for societal social ills.

Being a “good” citizen is a complex notion that requires a framework that prioritizes justice and equity relative to the sociocultural context of the situation and space. Reflexive thinking and development of a social consciousness for elementary students can be facilitated through teaching Social Studies as they transition from elementary to high school, and consequently lead to blossoming of new understandings of what it means to be a global citizen (Bourdieu, 1999; Freire, 1970). As humans, we have the capacity and potential to become informed, inspired, and motivated to break free from socioculturally constructed boundaries and psychological shackles that try to indoctrinate our minds through social institutions such as the education system. This emancipatory process begins by engaging in critical thinking and asking questions from multiple vantage points (Brady & Abawi, Chapter 6). As Mosley (2000) states, “If you can’t question the world around you, seeking real answers, then you are trapped by the false answers provided by prejudice” (p. 69).

### 9.3 CITIZENSHIP IN THE 2013 REVISED ONTARIO SOCIAL STUDIES CURRICULUM

Prior to 2013, the latest Social Studies curriculum revisions by Ontario Ministry of Education occurred in 2004. This chapter critically analyses the Grade 6 2013 revised Ontario Social Studies curriculum and explores how citizenship is defined and taught; seeking to understand citizenship at the micro-level relative to students' identities and their local communities, as well as at the macro-level relative to their responsibilities to the nation as global citizens. The analysis is guided by two central questions: (1) how citizenship is defined theoretically, ideologically, and conceptually and (2) how citizenship is suggested to be taught pedagogically. Grade 6 is the focus of the analysis because in Ontario, Social Studies is taught as a subject from Grades 1 to 6. Additionally, all students in Grade 6 attending publicly funded schools write the provincial standardized test administered by the Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) which assesses student achievement levels in literacy and numeracy at the end of their primary education relative to established provincial standards (Basu, 2004; EQAO, 2013).

### 9.4 WHAT IS CITIZENSHIP?

In Ontario, Social Studies as a subject is taught from Grades 1 to 6, History and Geography in Grade 7 and 8, and Canadian and World Studies from Grades 9 to 12. The 2013 revised Ontario *Social Studies, History, and Geography* curricula are produced by Ministry of Education as a 212-page document which outlines Grades 1–6 Social Studies and Grade 7 and 8 History and Geography curriculum content and expectations. In comparison, the 2004 edition of the document was only 84 pages. One of the new aspects of the revised document is the realignment of elementary and secondary curriculum through a common vision and unified goals. The unified vision states:

The social studies, history, geography, and Canadian and world studies programs will enable students to become responsible, active citizens within the diverse communities to which they belong. As well as becoming critically thoughtful and informed citizens who value an inclusive society, students will have the skills they need to solve problems and communicate ideas and decisions about significant developments, events, and issues. (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013, p. 6)

Within the vision statement, the word citizen is directly associated with words such as “responsible”, “active”, “critically thoughtful”, and “informed”. These words situate citizenship as an individualistic concept, thereby promoting the neoliberal ideology of the subject as being responsible for their lived realities and progressing linearly through education to become a “critically thoughtful” and “informed” citizen in order to be a valuable and “active” member of the “communities to which they belong”. The language describes and situates citizenship within a limited linear scope that excludes concepts such as collective and shared responsibility and activism as a means of opposing and resisting injustice and inequity. Although it mentions that the goal of the curriculum is to equip students to “solve problems” it is unclear for what purposes or for whose benefits. Does the curriculum promote a stance where problems are solved as a means of maintaining the hegemonic racial and social order and the status quo or as a means of critically altering the racial and social order through social activism guided by justice and equity as its priorities? Giroux (2003) in problematizing the nature of such neoliberal language expresses,

Lost here is any critical engagement with state power and how it imposes immigration policies, decides who gets resources and access to a quality education, defines what constitutes a crime, how people are punished, how and whether social problems are criminalized, who is worthy of citizenship, and who is responsible for addressing racial injustices. (p. 207)

Westheimer and Kahne’s (2004) conceptual framework of different types of citizenship provides an effective lens to examine the type of citizenship promoted in the 2013 revised Ontario Social Studies curriculum. Their research was guided by the question, “What kind of citizen do we need to support an effective democratic society?” (p. 239). Examination of ten programs “aimed to advance the democratic purposes of education” (p. 239) included looking at their visions, values, goals, and practices and led the authors to operationalize three kinds of citizenship, each with its unique ideologies of what it means to be a “good” citizen. The three conceptions of citizenship are defined as the *personally responsible citizen*, the *participatory citizen*, and the *justice-oriented citizen*. According to Westheimer and Kahne (2004), programs that reinforce *personally responsible citizenship* emphasize the importance of character education and personal characteristics such as “honesty, integrity, self-discipline, and hard work” (p. 241). Personally responsible citizenship



equates being a “good” citizen as someone who works, pays taxes, obeys laws, recycles, gives blood, and/or volunteers to assist others in times of crisis as a means of demonstrating their responsibility to others and to the environment. *Participatory citizenship* frames the “good” citizen as someone who is constantly active and involved with “civic affair and the social life of the community at the local, state, or national level” (p. 241). Within this paradigm, leadership in the form of organizing events within established systems and structures plays a pivotal role in demonstrating civic engagement. *Justice-oriented citizenship* is characterized as someone who speaks up and acts against what he/she perceives as unjust. The justice-oriented citizen seeks the root causes of problems; synthesizing multiple perspectives and constructively questioning established systems of racial and social order and the role social structures play in creating or perpetuating oppressive policies and practices. Within the justice-oriented conception of citizenship, systemic change might be needed in order to solve a social issue from a grass-roots level. These constructed conceptions of citizenship are not mutually exclusive and can at times overlap in their approaches and practices.

The language of the unified vision statement of the 2013 revised Ontario Social Studies curriculum reinforces predominantly Westheimer and Kahne’s (2004) *personally responsible* and *participatory* conceptions of citizenship. By emphasizing the importance of becoming “responsible, active citizens within the diverse communities in which they belong” and becoming “critically thoughtful and informed citizens who value an inclusive society” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013, p. 6), the vision statement makes the presumption that Canadian society is equitably diverse and inclusive and that all social groups have an equal voice in the public sphere. The language further reinforces the ideology that it is through the “responsible, active citizen” that an inclusive and diverse society is produced and maintained. Yet, what is not said is just as important. By not mentioning the role of institutions and their systemic policies and practices in creating (in)accessibility to opportunities to succeed, the assumption is made that institutions and systemic structures operate consistently in sync to promote a “diverse” and “inclusive” society, when this is not the lived reality for many social groups within Canadian society particularly for racialized citizens (Apple, 2004; Benn-John, Chapter 4; Block & Galabuzi, 2011). The language of the vision statement does not promote development of a *justice-oriented* citizen, who might question, in solidarity and allyship with others, the established systems of power and their practices.

Along with a unified vision statement, the 2013 revised Ontario Social Studies curriculum outlines five specific goals for the Social Studies curriculum that students will work towards thematically from Grades 1 to 6. The five goals are:

- Developing an understanding of responsible citizenship;
- Developing an understanding of the diversity within local, national, and global communities, both past and present;
- Developing an understanding of interrelationships within and between the natural environment and human communities;
- Developing the knowledge, understanding, and skills that lay the foundation for future studies in geography, history, economics, law, and politics; and
- Developing the personal attributes that foster curiosity and the skills that enable them to investigate developments, events, and issues. (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013, p. 7)

Within the goals section, the word “citizenship” is explicitly mentioned and coupled with “responsibility” whereas such statement did not exist in the 2004 curriculum document. In relation to Westheimer and Kahne’s (2004) conceptual citizenship frameworks, the language describing the curriculum goals promotes the *personally responsible* and *participatory citizen* with references to “developing an understanding”, “knowledge”, “skills”, and “personal attributes” (p. 7). Although majority of the goals focus on “developing an understanding”, what is missing from the discussion in relation to citizenship is exploring what students should do and in what ways with their heightened level of “understanding”, such as how to collectively oppose and resist injustices they recognize at the local, provincial, national, and/or global level.

## 9.5 CITIZENSHIP EXPECTATIONS AND CONCEPTUALIZATION IN THE 2013 SOCIAL STUDIES CURRICULUM

In order to evaluate the extent which conceptualization of citizenship is further implemented, the focus will shift to specifically examine the Grade 6 Social Studies curriculum content as mandated by Ministry of Education through naming of overall and specific expectations within the document. The expectations for Social Studies in the 2013 revised

Social Studies curriculum from Grades 1 to 6 are organized thematically under two strands; *Heritage and Identity* and *People and Environments* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013, p. 21).

In Grade 6, for *Heritage and Identity*, students learn about “Communities in Canada, Past and Present” and for *People and Environments*, students learn about “Canada’s Interactions with the Global Community” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013, p. 21). In assisting teachers to understand the holistic notion of the overall and specific expectations outlined, an overview for the Grade 6 curriculum is provided which states,

Students will explore the experiences and perspectives of diverse communities in historical and contemporary Canada and examine how they have contributed to the development of Canadian identity. In addition to developing their understanding of different communities in Canada, students will explore the global economy and Canada’s role in it. They will investigate current social, political, economic, and environmental issues, and develop the understanding of the importance of international action and cooperation. (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013, p. 117)

Although students through exploration of multiple perspectives learn about “experiences and perspective of diverse communities” and their influence in the “development of Canadian identity” what is omitted are discussions about how Europeans had systemic status and state-sponsored power to influence institutional policies and practices to promote their own self-interests. By dominating the public and social sphere of politics, Europeans had the power to inscribe their own identity, values, and way of life onto others through institutions such as the Church and the education system (Grosfoguel, 2011). The power of white settlers to implement change in society led to perpetuation of injustices such as; the development of the reserve system and residential schools for the First Nations; creation of the Chinese head tax as a discriminatory immigration policy; and forced displacement and seizing of property of Japanese Canadians during the Second World War. These injustices perpetuated through the white settler hegemony are also present today and can be seen in the missing and murdered Indigenous women across the country; devaluation of Black lives in encounters with the state and police; and the rise of white supremacist and xenophobic groups.

Nancy Fraser (2004) argues for “reconceptualizing recognition in terms of status” (p. 376). She emphasizes learning about power through the lens of status in society relative to the extent a social group can participate equally in social interactions. Fraser (2004) explains “what is really important is not the demand for recognition of a group’s specific identity, but the demand for recognition of people’s standing as full partners in social interaction” (p. 377). This is important because validating a group’s identity, and their contribution to Canadian identity does not indicate a change in their status and their representation within political, economic, and sociocultural public spheres. Fraser’s (2004) status model aligns with Westheimer and Kahne’s conception of the *justice-oriented citizenship*, where injustice is located in “institutionalized hierarchies of cultural value that prevent some members of society from participating as peers in social interaction” (p. 377). Therefore, although students in Grade 6 learn about struggles of various social groups that contributed to the development of a Canadian identity, they are not guided to critically analyse the interconnectedness between the current unequal status of various social groups in Canadian society and their lack of representation and power in public spheres relative to access to opportunities and outcomes.

By avoiding discussions and dialogue about how Canada creates and maintains systemic oppression, it creates a utopian mirage which leads to invisibilization of inequity. Inequities in society continue today and have real-life implications for specific social groups and identities such as racialized workers. Block and Galabuzi (2011) emphasize that “racialized Canadians earn only 81.4 cents for every dollar paid to non-racialized Canadians” (p. 3). Contextualizing the data, the authors point out that “racialized Canadians have slightly higher levels of labour market participation, yet they continue to experience higher levels of unemployment and earn less income than non-racialized Canadians” (p. 3). Furthermore, they argue that

if the labour market continues to relegate workers from racialized groups to the back of the pack, the number of Canadians left behind will only accelerate- calling into question the promise that Canada is a fair and caring society committed to equal opportunities, no matter who you are and where you come from. (p. 4)

The aforementioned statistics demonstrate that racism continues to plague the Canadian labour market and its institutional practices where racialized workers are treated as sub-citizens by being paid less compared to non-racialized workers often with fewer or no benefits. This leads to racialization of poverty where inequality of access to opportunities leads to racialized workers continuing to struggle as a means to survive and provide for their families. A curriculum focused on the merits of the nation does not provide students the necessary tools to comprehend and address the systemic inequities present in Canadian society and the ways power is differentially allocated across social groups.

## 9.6 CITIZENSHIP AND NATIONAL AND GLOBAL NARRATIVES

As stated earlier, the expectations for Social Studies in the 2013 revised Social Studies curriculum from Grades 1 to 6 are organized under two strands thematically; *Heritage and Identity* and *People and Environments*. As part of *People and Environments: Canada's Interactions with the Global Community* strand, students learn about the “global economy and Canada’s role in it” with an emphasis on the “importance of international action and cooperation” (p. 117). Canada is portrayed as a country which often plays a peace-keeping role in various regions around the world. Consequently, by only teaching about selective, positive influences of Canada in the global world, it dismisses and silences inquiries and discussions about national interests and how at times Canada’s decision-making has led to perpetuation and reinforcement of violence internationally such as in Somalia, Rwanda, Iraq, and Afghanistan. Framing Canada exclusively in a positive light facilitates the sociocultural construction of Canada as “the helper”. This is evident in schools where “fundraising for international charities is often equated with global education, while other aspects of global learning are neglected” (Mundy & Manion, 2008, p. 941).

There are other implications that arise from teaching national Canadian identity in the global context as synonymous with actions of peace-keeping, cooperation, and various forms of help and assistance to less developed nations. For one, this form of representation and metanarrative contributes to creating a “them/us” dichotomous mentality where “violence directed against bodies of colour becomes normalized

as a necessary part of the civilizing process” (Razack, 2004, p. 8). These binaries occur linguistically across many levels such as the North and South or developed and developing nations. As a result of reinforcing the ideological image of Canada as “the helper”, social issues are simplified and depoliticized taking away from teaching through a critical lens that illustrates complexities in decision-making at the international level where power, status, voice, and representation are unequally distributed leading to tensions and friendships among nations and their leaders. The North often secures a lavish comfortable lifestyle at the expense of exploitation of natural and human resources in the South. Exploitation masks itself behind labels such as “international assistance” and “peace-keeping” yet only one side of the story is often told through dominant media outlets and their mainstream discourses. As Razack (2004) points out in *Dark Threats & White Knights: The Somali Affair, Peace Keeping, and the New Imperialism*,

As it was in Somalia in 1991, colour-line thinking was certainly in evidence in the American invasions [*with the Canadian army support*] of both Afghanistan in 2002 and Iraq in 2003; invasions justified on the ground that it was necessary to drop thousands of bombs on Afghans and Iraqis in order to save them from the excesses of their own society. (pp. 7–8)

Razack (2004) deconstructs ideologies about “help” and “assistance” and connects it with notions of power and nation-building pointing out, “Oil, the free market, and the historical support the United States has given to the Taliban and Saddam Hussein, among other despotic regimes, all disappear under ‘smart bombs’ once the smoke clears and peacekeepers walk in” (p. 8). Similarly, Grosfoguel (2011) emphasizes, “The idea of race organizes the world’s population into a hierarchical order of superior and inferior people that becomes an organizing principle of the international division of labour” (p. 10). Hence, through hegemonic metanarratives in education and the media, violence is justified to “assist” the uncivilized in importing capitalism and democracy as a means of transitioning from a “developing” nation to a “developed” nation. National self-interests are at the heart of international assistance to other countries, yet the narrative of the dominant hegemonic discourse, including the Canadian Social Studies curriculum, often depicts a simplistic depoliticized story emphasizing heroism and selflessness of the Canadian nation to assist others without strings attached.

The reinforcement of the *responsible* and *participatory citizen* through dominant ideologies presented in the 2013 revised Social Studies curriculum teaches students monolithically to view Canada as doing a heroic service by helping others experiencing crisis in other parts of the world. On the other hand, the *justice-oriented citizen* would critically question and examine Canada's political, social, economic, and capitalistic agenda particularly whether the assistance they provide in its various forms leads to further exploitation of that country. The *justice-oriented citizen* would raise questions about whether or not the "help" comes with strings attached and who benefits more from this process in long term. As Andreotti (2006) points out, "in order to understand global issues, a complex web of cultural and material local/global processes and contexts need to be examined and unpacked" (p. 41).

How citizenship is defined in the curriculum, in the local and global context, has implications for how learners view the world including the nature and understanding of problems and the extent to which they can make a difference at the macro- and micro-level. Kennelly and Llewellyn (2011) examined keywords associated with terms such as citizenship and democracy within Civics curriculum documents in provinces of Ontario, Alberta, and British Columbia. They concluded that "the formation of the 'active' citizen as a fundamentally neoliberal project" (p. 903). They found that "the constant reiteration of active citizenship as a responsibility and not a right (in and of itself) affirms passive messages about the 'good (young) citizen'" (907). The emphasis on individualistic responsibility, which aligns with Westheimer and Kahne's (2004) conceptions of *responsible* and *participatory citizenship*, frames active citizenship as "consistently coupled with cautions about the importance of compliant behaviour (i.e. ethics, duty, and responsibility) and silenced from seemingly 'inappropriate' participation in civic dissent" (p. 903). From this vantage point, responsible and active citizenship is equated with being complicit and associated with behaviours deemed acceptable within the parameters set by the state, the nation, and its institutions reinforced through laws, policies, and practices.

Neoliberalism places the onus of responsibility on the individual, reinforcing the ideology that it is exclusively their choices and decisions that leads to their circumstances (Giroux, 2003; Pinto, 2015; Portelli & Konecny, 2013). The collective and shared struggle for rights, justice and equity, and various tactics to have one's voice heard is lost in translation in hegemonic discourses about responsible, self-regulating citizens.

The curriculum emphasizes it is the responsibility of the individual to self-regulate themselves and behave in a manner that does not challenge sanctioned rules, laws, and “normative” behaviours established through state authorities and its institutions. As Kennelly and Llewellyn (2011) point out,

Those who are able to easily take part in traditionally public spheres of activity – which, in Canada, have generally been white, heterosexual, able-bodied, middle class men – continue to benefit from the new ‘active citizenship’. Those who have not traditionally had such access – in Canada, typically women, ethnic minorities, sexual and gender minorities, people with disabilities, and Aboriginal peoples – receive no additional assistance in transcending these structural barriers than before the new civics curricula were introduced. (p. 910)

Neoliberal ideologies embedded within the curriculum also extend to global contexts in examination of international affairs, where dominant discourses portray that circumstances of any nation are a reflection of choices made by the country and its government in the past and presently by its leader. This leads to what Andreotti (2006) calls “sanctioned ignorance” referring to,

[T]he role of colonialism in the creation of the wealth of what is called the ‘First World’ today, as well as the role of the international division of labour and exploitation of the ‘Third World’ in the maintenance of this wealth. (p. 44)

Andreotti explains that “this sanctioned ignorance, which disguises the worlding of the world, places the responsibility of poverty upon the poor themselves and justified the project of development of the Other as a ‘civilizing mission’” (p. 45). From this viewpoint, values and interests of the North and Western countries are presented “as global and universal which naturalises the myth of Western supremacy in the rest of the world” (p. 44). Colonization is positioned as a thing of the past and situated as non-influential in today’s world matters; reinforcing a de-politicization of public spheres.

The language of the new 2013 revised Social Studies curriculum and its embedded neoliberal ideologies about citizenship, through constant references to development of the “responsible, active citizen”, contributes to perpetuation of “sanctioned ignorance” (Andreotti, 2006). What is problematic about conceptualizing citizenship through such a



narrow and limited lens is that it assumes that all individuals and social groups enter the public sphere as equals; that all have the same access to opportunities and resources and can voice their concerns and be heard. Yet, as Giroux (2003) points out,

In this view, freedom is no longer linked to a collective effort on the part of individuals to create a democratic society. Instead, freedom becomes an exercise in self-development rather than social responsibility, reducing politics to either the celebration of consumerism or a privileging of a market-based notion of agency and choice that appear quite indifferent to how power, equity, and justice offer the enabling conditions for real individual and collective choices to be both made and acted upon. (p. 197)

Systems of oppression work in convergence and intersectionally to perpetuate a hierarchy that distributes inequitable power, privilege, and status to selective social groups at the expense of marginalization and oppression to others. Therefore, it is necessary to question what is included in the curriculum and how it is (re)presented, just as much as it is important to question what is left out and not (re)presented. This will be an ongoing struggle and a meaningful process as a means to establish a society and understanding of citizenship that prioritizes social justice and equity over national market interests and profit.

## 9.7 SUGGESTIONS FOR TEACHING CITIZENSHIP

One of the major new positive additions to the 2013 revised Social Studies curriculum is its pedagogical emphasis on learning through the “inquiry process”. The inquiry model “represents a process that students use to investigate events, developments, and issues, solve problems, and reach supportable conclusions” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013, p. 7). Similar to the scientific model of doing research, the inquiry process consists of five components which include; formulating questions, gathering and organizing data, interpreting and analysing data, evaluation the data and drawing conclusions, and communicating findings (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013, p. 10). The push for “inquiry-based” learning is a means of implementing student-centred learning by allowing students’ interests and questions to guide the learning process through which curriculum content is taken up to be explored and critically examined. This is a great addition as it allows students to guide

the learning process and content, allowing for examination of local spatial power dynamics as well as lived experiences as a form of valuable knowledge.

Another new component of the 2013 revised Social Studies curriculum is the introduction of the Citizenship Education Framework (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013, p. 10). The Citizenship Education Framework consists of four elements which combine to contribute to understanding and defining what it means to be a “Responsible, Active Citizen”;

*Active Participation* defined as “Work for the common good in local, national and global communities”.

*Identity* defined as “A sense of personal identity as a member of various communities”.

*Attributes* defined as “Character traits, values, habits of mind”.

*Structures* defined as “Power and systems within societies”.

Themes and topics suggested under *Active participation* and *Identity* predominantly aligns with emphasizing the *responsible* and *participatory* conceptions of citizenship. They reinforce words such as voting, conflict resolution and peacebuilding, leadership, volunteering, beliefs and values, culture, and community. *Attributes* and *Structures* component presents a unique feature that holds possibilities to develop and reinforce the *justice-oriented citizen*. For *Attributes* and *Structures*, relevant words such as inclusiveness, equity, rights and responsibilities, fairness and justice, democracy, rules and law, institutions, power and authority, and systems are mentioned. Although mentioning of words such as equity and justice is good indication of moving in the right direction, unfortunately the vague and open-ended use of these words does not provide any specific direction for deconstructing the terminology in a manner that facilitates development of the *justice-oriented citizen*. This is an area that further needs to be developed to provide guidance for teachers to engage these words in a manner that promotes critical thinking and critical consciousness (Freire, 1970). For example, although students will learn about the influence of “power and systems within societies”, they are simultaneously encouraged to follow rules and laws as a means of being a “good” citizen. The paradoxical nature of the 2013 revised Social Studies curriculum is that although at times it promotes an understanding of the complexities of the world and its social issues through an

analysis that considers power of institutions and systems, it consistently reinforces the notion of the responsible, participatory citizen as the ideal prototype of a valuable member of society; a person who respectfully obliges by the rules and laws of the nation even if the outcomes result in marginalization and oppression to certain social groups.

The inquiry process as a tool can be utilized to encourage critical thinking and consciousness in students that goes beyond focusing on individual decisions in relation to acting responsible and following rules and laws. As educators we can strive to utilize various teaching methods such as inquiry-based, student-centred learning to teach towards opening up of new possibilities instead of validating one viewpoint at the expense of disregarding all others. This begins by allowing students to bring their lived experiences into the classroom and acknowledging them as a form of valuable knowledge including the social problems they deal with on a daily basis in their families and communities. The next step would be to interpret the social issues impacting student lives through multiple vantage points, in the process allowing emotions to be expressed and multi-voices and perspectives to be heard to assist and facilitate in finding alternative action-oriented solutions.

Tupper and Cappello (2008) provide a great example of how education, specifically exposure to counter hegemonic narratives, can be used in a way to open up new possibilities. As St. Denis (2011) explains, “normative Canadian history refuses to recognize Aboriginal interpretation of history, and this refusal in turn places limits in understanding Aboriginal sovereignty” (p. 309). Tupper and Cappello (2008) used treaties as counter hegemonic narratives to raise questions about how history is told and interpreted by the dominant gaze and its representations through official curriculum texts. As the authors point out, “mainstream education is an extension of colonization insofar as it has been used to promote a dominant narrative of the past and privilege certain ways of knowing” (p. 563). By conducting qualitative interviews and quantitative surveys, Tupper and Cappello (2008) argue what is said and how it is said is just as important as what is not said or silenced intentionally within the curriculum. Whereas many non-First Nations students began to gain a better understanding of “the mechanisms through which dominance is enacted, privilege secured, and marginalization produced” (p. 570), a more influential micro-level impact included how a First Nations student went from being shameful of her race and heritage to being proud of it.

When considering how to implement different components of the Citizenship Education Framework, it is important to consider whether citizenship education should “nurture loyal law-abiding citizens aware of their duties and responsibilities to state and society, or produce citizens who stand up for their rights, question state authority and are open to other views and cultures” (Janmaat & Piattoeva, 2007, p. 527). Whereas “education for citizenship” emphasizes “responsibility, conformity, national loyalty and service to the community”, on the other hand “citizenship education” promotes “democratization, individual autonomy, respect for diversity, and challenging authority and standing up for one’s rights” (Janmaat & Piattoeva, 2007, p. 532). This is an important distinction, as the language and objectives of the 2013 revised Social Studies curriculum aligns with neoliberal ideologies of “education for citizenship” with its emphasis on autonomy, objectivity, personal responsibility, and service to the community and the nation. Yet there is potential for deviating from such neoliberal ideologies through constructive use of inquiry-based pedagogy coupled with use of external resources that bring multi-perspectives into the classroom that can inspire and empower students and teachers to work collectively to take action and try to change the world in the name of justice and equity.

### 9.8 *YOUTH FOR HUMAN RIGHTS: RESOURCES*

#### FOR DEVELOPMENT OF THE JUSTICE-ORIENTED GLOBAL CITIZEN

Teaching about Human Rights can serve as an alternative framework for teaching citizenship as it deviates from promoting neoliberal ideologies that focuses on personal responsibility and transitions towards promoting a social justice-oriented global citizen based on Human Rights that apply to all regardless of differences. This paradigm shift has occurred in some countries over time due to changes in their sociopolitical sphere and its consequential policy and curriculum reforms. Comparing Civic education through examination of textbooks and policy documents in Costa Rica and Argentina, Suárez (2008) points out that in both countries over time “discussion of rights increase....and the discussion of citizenship as responsibility diminishes” (p. 495).

Another important factor to consider beyond whether or not Human Rights are used to teach citizenship is how Human Rights are discussed in class. Suárez (2008) points out that textbooks in the earlier period in Costa Rica and Argentina avoided discussions of gender and other

forms of institutionalized inequality, even if economic, social, and cultural rights were addressed. In the more recent period, textbooks in both countries begin to apply general discussions of human rights to particular groups. From this perspective, silenced groups who historically have been marginalized and struggled for liberation against state authority are affirmed and validated as having an important role in establishing certain Human Rights within the nation through activism and various forms of resistance. Within this paradigm, to be a “good” citizen requires one to oppose, challenge, resist, and act against injustice, which at times involves opposing the state’s and nation’s policies and practices.

Human Rights as a conceptual framework is not explicitly outlined to be used as a tool to teach about citizenship education within the 2013 revised Social Studies curriculum. Although the open-ended nature of overall and specific curriculum expectations provides flexibility for teachers to utilize their choice of resources to teach citizenship education, one of the downfalls of this vague language is it can omit discussions about Human Rights. This could be done intentionally due to avoidance of controversial topics (Mundy and Manion, 2008) or unintentionally due to lack of tangible resources or lack of support to feel comfortable enough to teach about Human Rights. As Mundy and Manion (2008) point out, “many [educators] view global education activities as an optional rather than a mandatory activity” (p. 956), and where activities took place, it was in the form of one-time fund-raising for charities at the expense of other aspects of global citizenship such as awareness of Human Rights and their violations locally, nationally, and internationally. Mundy and Manion (2008) express,

The frequency of... comments in our school-level interviews suggests that much of what is understood as global education in Canadian schools continue to foster a “them/us” mentality that is not in keeping with the themes of global interdependence and social justice that appears as ideals in the global education literature. (p. 960)

*Youth for Human Rights* as a tangible educational toolkit can be used by any grade level teacher to teach about social justice-oriented citizenship through the framework of Human Rights. *Youth for Human Rights* ([www.youthforhumanrights.org](http://www.youthforhumanrights.org)) is a non-profit organization founded in 2001 by Dr. Mary Shuttleworth, an educator born and raised in apartheid South Africa, where she witnessed and experienced the devastating

effects of discrimination and the lack of basic Human Rights. *Youth for Human Rights* invests in education as a primary tool in addressing root causes of many social issues that are prevalent across the world related to the violation of the thirty universal Human Rights contained in United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Over time, *Youth for Human Rights* has grown internationally to provide relevant and educational content to educators in more than 190 countries to teach about Human Rights in classrooms and non-traditional settings within a social justice-oriented framework.

*Youth for Human Rights*'s website (2018) outlines its purpose as inspiring youth "to become valuable advocates for tolerance and peace". It further states,

Children are the future. They need to know their human rights and know that they must take responsibility to protect themselves and their peers. As they become aware and active in this cause, the message travels far and wide, and someday universal human rights will be a fact, not just an idealistic dream.

Within this vision, not only is personal "responsibility" and being an "active" citizen emphasized, similar to the current vision of the 2013 revised Social Studies curriculum, but more importantly social justice is reinforced through notions of "protecting themselves and their peers". This vision includes knowing one's human rights rather than responsibilities, and being able to name injustice and inequity, and more importantly, feel obligated to challenge various forms of injustice through personal and collective actions, even if it means opposing, resisting, and challenging state-sanctioned authority and its unfair policies and practices regardless of one's social location.

*Youth for Human Rights* has made its educational toolkit package content available online as a digital curriculum. This is significant as it makes the material accessible, since anyone with access to Internet can download the resources. Teachers can access the content by signing up free of charge and all lesson plans include a step-by-step breakdown with subsections titled "Primary Question", "Learning Objectives", "Section Content", "Discussion Questions", and "Application". One of the great features of the Human Rights digital curriculum is it can be accessed by students similar to an online course. Students also have the opportunity to discuss and share ideas in the online forums at any time at their own

pace. Overall, by incorporating *Youth for Human Rights* educational materials into the Grade 6 Social Studies curriculum and beyond, teachers in Ontario, Canada will be able to better assist students in learning about citizenship through a Human Rights lens. This difference in vantage point places priority on social justice and equity instead of economic and market-driven needs of the nation.

## 9.9 CONCLUSION

In 2013, the Ontario Ministry of Education made new revisions to the Social Studies curriculum. It included many new additions including a common vision statement aligning the purpose of the elementary and secondary curriculum, a set of unified goals that students work towards thematically through Grades 1 to 6, an emphasis on inquiry-based student-centred learning, and the introduction of a Citizenship Education Framework as a guide to teach about citizenship. An analysis of the language in the 2013 revised curriculum, specifically the language describing the vision statement, unified goals, and the Grade 6 overview of overall and specific expectations indicated the promotion of neoliberal ideologies of citizenship by constantly reinforcing themes of personal responsibility and the self-regulating citizen who abides by rules and laws approved by state-sanctioned authorities and its institutions. Within this paradigm, being a responsible, active citizen is equated with being compliant and outspoken only to the extent it does not challenge authority and hegemonic status quo.

It is necessary to question what is included in the curriculum and how it is (re)presented, just as much as what is left out and not (re)presented. The problematic language in the 2013 revised Social Studies curriculum does not encourage critical thinking about how institutions and their practices can work in convergence to produce a social and racial hierarchy that marginalizes certain identities and social groups. The language of the Social Studies curriculum assumes that all social groups are heard and treated equitably at a systemic level. Overall, the curriculum reinforces the personally responsible and participatory conceptions of citizenship (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004). As a result, social justice is placed at the periphery and on the margins instead of being the main lens through which citizenship is taught.

There are new additions to the 2013 revised Social Studies curriculum that holds potential for deviating from neoliberal ideologies and transitioning towards citizenship education that reinforces

development and growth of a justice-oriented global citizen. These changes include the introduction of a student-centred, inquiry-based pedagogy and the *Attributes* and *Structures* element of the Citizenship Education Framework. The promotion of inquiry-based learning reinforces student-centred teaching, having to take into consideration identities of learners and their interests and questions with respect to their lived experiences and the local context of the community in which they live. The *Structures* component of the Citizenship Education Framework raises some questions about the “importance of rules and laws”, “how political, economic, and social institutions affect lives”, “understanding of power and authority”, and the “dynamic and complex relationships within and between systems” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013, p. 10).

Teaching citizenship through Human Rights instead of responsibilities can lead to development and growth of a justice-oriented, global citizen who views difference not through the vantage point that prioritizes self-interests and complicity but through a lens that emphasizes interconnectedness and justice for all. *Youth for Human Rights* and their educational materials, which include tangible resources and an online digital curriculum, can serve as a great starting point for teachers in all grades to implement teaching citizenship education through the lens of Human Rights.

Although this chapter focused on examining the language of the new 2013 revised Social Studies curriculum specifically the Grade 6 content, further studies should analyse contents of other grades to produce further insight about how citizenship is operationalized and implemented. Further areas for exploration which hold potential for blossoming of new understandings include examining how teachers are supported professionally, both provincially and locally, to implement the content of the revised Social Studies curriculum such as introduction of the inquiry-based pedagogy and the Citizenship Education Framework. As well, future studies can interview students about their experiences in the classroom relating to exposure to the new revised Social Studies curriculum. What remains to be seen in the near future is whether Human Rights as a conceptual framework with a focus on social justice and equity will be implemented systemically in Ontario schools and if so, whether it will be in the form of a learning unit or as a cross-cutting theme across the curriculum in all grades and within teacher training programs.



To conclude, we as educators need to strive to do all we can to assist students in breaking free from physical and psychological shackles of oppression and its ongoing effects of creating feelings of apathy and powerlessness. It is critical to develop justice-oriented, global citizens who feel empowered to oppose, resist, and challenge injustice, and through their individual and collective agency make a difference in their lives, local community, and in the larger context of the world through cooperation, collaboration, solidarity, allyship, and implementation of new ideas. By encouraging and promoting critical thinking and social consciousness (Bourdieu, 1999; Freire, 1970) and working with differences through a Human Rights lens, educators can facilitate and encourage students to rupture, subvert, interrupt, and resist in multiple fronts to make the world a better place one step at a time.

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