ABSTRACT
This article explores how British Columbia and Québec high school students construct and understand their citizenship in light of their history/social studies experience. Two multi-ethnic high schools, one in Montréal and one in Vancouver, provided a window into Québec history (grade 10) and B.C. social studies (grade 11). Key citizenship concepts (rights, participation, cultural pluralism, and identity) developed in political theory guided this study. Using a multiple case study design, this qualitative study employed multiple data collection: document analysis, school and classroom observations, and semi-structured interviews with key participants. The findings suggest that, despite different programs and teaching approaches, students in both sites accord an importance to citizenship. Yet, contrasts emerge between francophone Québécois and anglophone British Columbians, particularly in terms of identity.

Key words: Citizenship education, social studies, history, curriculum
Introduction

If a pair of Canadian twins was separated at birth, one educated in an English-speaking milieu in British Columbia (B.C.) and the other one in a French-speaking neighbourhood in Québec, would these two compatriots have the same conceptions of their nation, their county, and their citizenship? Would they live in the same “imagined” country? This is precisely the kind of hypothetical questions that have motivated me to immerse myself in these two different cultural settings and conduct a comparative study on B.C. and Québec high school students and citizenship. Training in citizenship is one of the highest aims of the modern school in general, and history/social studies education in particular. “De Condorcet à Jefferson, en passant par une quantité de penseurs et d’éducateurs,” Audigier (1999) notes, “le lien École, citoyenneté, démocratie est fondateur. L’École et, en son sein, l’éducation à la citoyenneté ont pour finalité la formation d’un ‘bon citoyen’” (p. 6). At a time when the fabric of Canadian national life is strained both by the persistence of Canada’s oldest predicament – the relationship between the founding nations (Cook, 1995; McRoberts, 1997; Taylor, 1993) – and the increasing diversity of Canada’s population, the value of this aim remains unequivocal, but its meaning becomes increasingly difficult to define. In a society of divided aspirations, what constitutes good citizenship for the growing generation of French and English Canadians? Students in our schools are the leaders of tomorrow; those who will shape this regionally divided, multi-ethnic, and multinational country. School history/social studies, historical and cultural experiences, language, and many other factors play a key role in the construction of their collective memory, personal and collective identities, and conceptions of citizenship.

Yet, beyond sporadic surveys commissioned by a limited number of vocal organizations telling us what students don’t know (Bauch, 1998; Campbell, 1997; Ipsos-Reid, 2001; Kennedy, 1997), Osborne rightly argues that “we have very little information on what is actually going on in classrooms, or on how students or teachers see things” (Osborne, 1994, p. 27). Studies conducted in the 1980s and 1990s were concerned with official curricula, policy statements, and textbooks, which convey students to some forms of ideal citizenship. Recent research in cognitive development indicates that learning is far more complex than mechanically reproducing what is taught (Boix-Mansilla, 1998; Gardner, 1991; Saint-Onge, 1993). It implies that students can independently reconstruct and use information in sophisticated, flexible ways (Wiggins & McTighe, 1998). There is thus a fundamental difference between remembering facts and understanding facts or events (Case, 1997; Seixas, 2002). As Case (1997) puts it, “students
may not remember exactly... that the awakening of Quebec nationalism in the 1960s is called the 'Quiet Revolution' yet they may nevertheless have some understanding of the significance and key features of [this event]" (p. 141). In other words, understanding past and current events and issues is far more important – and also intellectually stimulating – than recalling the date and the label of those events or issues.

Taking a constructivist approach to education, this article looks at some B.C. and Quebec high school students' understandings of citizenship in light of their history/social studies experience. Relying on research in political theory (Beiner, 1998; Gagnon & Pagé, 1999; Kymlicka, 1995; Taylor, 1993), I defined citizenship as a desirable activity where the quality of one's citizenship is a function of rights, participation, and membership in the affairs of the communities and state to which one belongs. From this definition, citizenship is not simply a status conferred by the state but an activity which implies a set of practices that support the rights provided by the state. The key concepts (rights, cultural pluralism, participation, and identity) embedded in my definition were used as sensitizing concepts in this research.

Procedures

Two multi-ethnic high schools, one in Quebec (dubbed Montreal Secondary School – MSS) and one in B.C. (dubbed Pacific Secondary School – PSS), provided a window into grade 10 history and grade 11 social studies classrooms. These classes were used to examine how students construct their citizenship, in terms of rights, cultural pluralism, participation, and identity. Using a multiple-case study design (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992), this ethnographic study employed multiple data collection. In addition to the analysis of document record, I observed in 1999 (for one semester in each school) and interviewed 36 voluntary B.C. and Quebec students, five history and social studies teachers, and staff from each school. The classrooms were chosen since much of the burden of Canadian citizenship has officially been assigned to history (grade 10) in Quebec and social studies (grade 11) classes in B.C (see B.C. Ministry of Education, 1997; MEQ, 1982). No information was recorded on the reasons why informants participated in this study.

Findings

"It's part of your responsibility to protect your rights"

Educational reforms of the 1980s have had a non-negligible impact on human rights and law-related education in Canada (O'Sborne, 1996; Sear & Hughes, 1996). Several studies (see Kirkwood et al., 1987; Ungerleider, 1990; Yates, 1997) suggest that not only are curricula now more sensitive to the matter, but students have gradually adopted deep, positive attitudes towards rights and freedoms. These findings were recently supported by surveys conducted for the 20th anniversary of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms (see Jedwab, 2002). In my study, I found that Quebec history and B.C. social studies programs and textbooks also have explicit references to citizenship rights.
In Social Studies 11, students develop understanding of the fundamental principles of law in Canada. This understanding of the legal system of Canada, coupled with an understanding of the rights and responsibilities of individuals in a democratic society, is essential for the practice of effective citizenship. (B.C. Ministry of Education, 1997, p. 4)

In its rationale, the Québec grade 10 history curriculum states:


More interestingly, the last unit of the program reinforces the importance of both individual and collective rights by focusing on the various changes that have affected Québec society since the Quiet Revolution. Some of the elements outlined in the curriculum are: language, individual rights, and collective rights (MEQ, 1982, p. 60).

Supporting the B.C. curriculum, the grade 11 social studies government textbook (Bartlett, Craig & Sass, 1989) also has an entire chapter on Canadian rights and freedoms. The section includes, among other things, a set of moral questions and activities on the limits and possible contradictions of both individual and collective rights and the challenges of interpreting and applying the Charter since 1982. Controversial cases, such as Regina vs. Oakes (on the right of a Regina citizen charged with possession of drugs to be presumed innocent), are also introduced to students.

Class observations and interviews also determined that rights and freedoms are an important aspect covered in class; so important that two teachers (one at PSS and one MSS) claimed students have become increasingly aware of their inherent democratic rights, even in the school system. They are more conscious of what is both legally and morally acceptable (or ‘fair’ as students often put it) for their development and autonomy. One Québec history teacher had this to say:

S’il est vrai qu’elle [la Charte] était nécessaire pour certaines choses, comme les abus, on te l’a généralisée à un point tel que c’est uniquement de ça [dont] on parle: “j’ai le droit, j’ai le droit, j’ai le droit…” . (MSS male teacher)

One immigrant student comments on the important role of social studies for his successful integration to Canadian society.

When I came to Canada, I knew nothing about Canada at all. But because of Social Studies courses, especially Social Studies 11, I understand [pause] Canadian history, Canadian background, the Charter, how the government works, and how a bill is being processed…. So I think it’s a good course. (PSS male student)

I found in this study that twenty years of increased focus on citizenship rights in education has helped to develop a ‘right-based consciousness’ among these Canadian students.
For them, a country can no longer function democratically without due respect to the equality of all individuals (regardless of race, ethnicity, gender). In their interviews, they repeatedly stressed not only the rights, but also freedoms and opportunities they have in this country. In fact, rights and freedoms were used interchangeably in their discussion. No distinction was apparent between Québécois and British Columbians on this point. The Charter of Rights and Freedoms was frequently given in example as a symbol of respect for rights in Canada.

I don’t want to say third world countries, but other countries don’t have our freedoms... So, it’s very freedom oriented here... We have a lot of choice, rights, and freedoms, I like being a Canadian. (PSS female student)

Le Canada, en théorie, c’est le meilleur pays où il fait mieux vivre. Je vis bien, j’ai mes [droits]. Je n’ai pas à me plaindre... . (M SS male student)

Tant que j’ai ma carte de citoyenneté j’ai autant de libertés qu’un autre qui est né ici. J’ai autant de libertés que lui, je suis citoyen canadien, j’ai été accepté lorsque j’ai fait ma demande pour venir ici, donc j’ai autant de droits que lui. (M SS male student)

For some immigrant students, their experience in their home country gave them a means of comparison between here and there, between liberal democracy and oppression and dictatorship. From this point of view, it is clear that these new Canadians exhibited a certain pride and loyalty with reference to living in Canada, as expressed by the following immigrant students.

I [pause] haven’t been to a lot of different countries but it seems like one of the best countries to live in, there’s just a lot of opportunity... I think it’s just one of the [pause] few countries where there’s a really good set of morals, ideals and values. (PSS male student)

Je dirais que c’est très juste ici [au Canada], il n’y a pas vraiment de problèmes de respect des libertés. (M SS female student)

I also found that some students, particularly in B.C., implicitly talked about the social rights provided through the welfare state, which, to my surprise, deserves an entire section of the government textbook. In making comparison either with the United States or their home-country, they suggested that Canada has a better public education and medicare system.

I don’t want to just keep comparing to the [United] States but our education here, I think, is quite good. I like our education... . (PSS female student)

Canada is definitely a great place to live. That’s why we immigrated here, to Canada... . We just wanted to find a better place to live... [pause] to get more, to get better education, [pause] higher living quality. There’s so many considerations. (PSS male student)
Gilbert (1996) argues that in a welfare state, while all three types of rights (civil, political, social) are important, it is the third one which usually holds the greatest potential for citizens because it relates to “the equitable redistribution of access to normally expected levels of wellbeing” (p. 51).

From my study, however, it is hard to provide clear conclusions on students' knowledge of rights as the intent was not to assess what they know (or don't know) about citizenship rights, but to understand more about their attitudes toward these rights. Unlike the comments of some Québec nationalists (see, for example, Laforest, 1995) on the illegitimacy of the Charter and the weak support of Québécois for it, I found very little discrepancy between Québec and B.C. students' attitudes. From an historical perspective, the fact that most of them do not have a bitter memory of the emotionally powerful events surrounding the patriation of the Constitution in 1982 without Québecois' consent - as they were not born yet - is clearly not foreign to this state of affairs.

“If you care about your province, your country enough, then you will go out and vote”

Several studies (Chamberlin, 1991; Osborne & Seymour, 1988; Sears, 1994) have suggested that “the main ideology of citizenship education [in Canada] is the importance of citizen action and participation” (Masemann, 1989, p. 5). B.C. social studies and Québec history curricula are more-or-less consistent with this finding.

The Social Studies Kindergarten to Grade 11 curriculum provides students with opportunities to practise the skills and processes necessary to be responsible, active citizens. (B.C. Ministry of Education, 1997, p. 2)

[A la fin de l'étude du programme l'élève devrait] avoir pris conscience de son rôle de citoyen responsable de l'avenir de la collectivité. (MEQ, 1982, p. 13)

Yet, if the term responsible citizenship refers to active democracy in the programs of the Ministries, Sears and Hughes (1996) note that adjectives used to describe citizenship in the programs - such as 'responsible' and 'informed' - are imprecise, without clear or satisfying definitions. As a result, the term responsible citizenship could be consistent with conservative notions of democracy. It is no surprise that both programs have been severely criticized for their lack of clear emphasis on active citizenship skills (see B.C. Ministry of Education, 1999; CSE, 1998; MEQ, 1998). This prompted the Québec Ministry of Education (1998) to recently state:

[T]here is at present no citizenship education course to encourage students to participate actively in the community and help them develop a civic spirit that is attuned to a pluralistic society. The programs that treat this question do not cover it adequately. (p. 14)

Saying the actual programs do not adequately focus on civic participation is not to say, however, that citizenship education lead to the shaping of passive citizens. In this study, a majority of student informants expressed a moral responsibility for being involved in
public affairs. They emphasised the necessity of voting, when they become full citi-
zens, and caring for the good of their communities. No distinction was made between
their province and their country, even in Québec. Some talk about the beliefs that citi-
zen action can make a difference in the political process (political efficacy). Others
stressed the importance of exercising a democratic right.

I think definitely when I'm old enough to vote I'll exercise that right... . People
don't vote because they think 'Oh, it's not a big deal.' But, then they complain all
the time about taxes being too high. They don't realize that your vote makes a
difference... . It's pretty sad considering they complain about the lack of demo-
cracy when they don't even exercise it themselves. (PSS male student)

As I said, if you care about something... like if you care about your province,
your country enough, then you will go out and vote. It does come with the
responsibility of [citizenship]. (PSS female student)

Bien sûr je vais voter pour le gouvernement, pour celui qui sera le mieux puis qui
va le mieux nous servir. Si c'est pas toi qui vote, c'est quelqu'un d'autre qui va
voter à ta place. Si on regarde, un vote c'est pas grand chose, mais c'est un vote
qui fait que la personne peut gagner en bout de ligne. (MSS male student)

Those who held that full citizenship implies active participation also had developed a
sense of political trust and confidence in our institutions and representatives. Some
suggested that Canadian politicians, compared to other countries, are less corrupt and
doing a better job for their fellow-citizens. On this last point, immigrant students
tended to be more enthusiastic about the democratic nature of Canada than Cana-
dian-born students, as noted by these two informants.

Moi je vois les politiciens comme des gens qui ne peuvent pas plaire à tout le
monde. C'est normal qu'ils ne peuvent pas plaire à tout le monde, c'est quasi-
ment impossible de plaire à tout le monde. La plupart, je vois qu'ils sont hon-
nètes et j'ai confiance en eux. (MSS male student)

I guess compared to, like comparing [politicians] to some of the leaders in Africa
or whatever, they're much better, they're not as corrupt. (PSS male student)

In both cases, however, a minority of student informants was categorically cynical
about our politicians and institutions. For one PSS student, political parties, elections,
and politicians are part of a “masquerade.” For others, politicians are officially elected,
but corruption and lies motivate their personal aspirations.

I don't agree with anything of our politics. I don't agree with anything that
they're doing. I don't personally want to vote. Like I know it's just one vote. I
don't personally think it's going to make a difference out of millions of peo-
ple... . [Politicians] know some stuff, they know what they're doing, but I don't
agree with anything they're doing. I don't completely believe everything that
they have to say. (PSS female student)
La politique ça m'intéresse pas vraiment. C'est sûr que je vais aller voter, mais je pense pas que je vais vraiment suivre à fond la politique. [Dans le fond] la politique c'est quoi? C'est des référendums, des élections... . (M SS male student)

I have noticed that these passive students were generally those who had a relatively narrow and limited understanding of democracy, reducing everything to 'elections' and 'referenda.' Indeed, in my study, the concept of democracy is conceived in much more extensive ways than a mere system of checks and balances (institutional and procedural devices) in which people can sporadically participate in the selection of their representatives. In modern liberal democracy, procedural-institutional mechanisms are clearly not enough and the commitments of citizens must go well beyond participation in electoral/referendum process. The central idea is that people, including young citizens, should not only have different opportunities to participate in the civic affairs and social life of their communities (local, national, state), but also a willingness to engage in public action and discourse (see Barber, 1984; Dewey, 1916; Kymlicka, 1999; Macpherson, 1977; Resnick, 1990).

Based on this liberal conception, I asked students if they were engaged in their school community. In both schools, I was surprised by the level of involvement of student informants. Most of them declared a moral responsibility to participate in the life of their school or neighbourhood. Administrators in both sites made similar observations. School newsletters and local newspapers often highlighted the activities and success of students in various sports, clubs, and organizations (e.g., a local newspaper published an entire article on historical murals painted by students on the barren walls of their concrete school building).

One PSS student linked this level of participation to the fact they are the senior students of their school and feel an obligation to be involved, and to play a leading role.

Now that we are in grade 11 and 12, the senior grades, we have this feeling, this obligation that we have to be involved because if we didn't, there'd be no one there. (PSS male student)

Others felt that participation in school activities were important for developing democratic skills and acquiring a sense of belonging to the group.

A comparer à mon ancienne école, il y en a beaucoup plus d'activités parascolaires ici. C'est comme un lieu où tu apprends et aussi où tu t'enrichis, où tu peux mettre tes talents en pratique. (M SS male student)

I've noticed that [involvement] prepares you for the future in the fact that the different councils and committees, they really welcome students to join things such as the student council, library club, multicultural club, et cetera. I feel that as I got involved with those I gained certain skills that would help me with the future. (PSS female student)
A small number of students finally mentioned they prefer to participate in the life of their school in more personal ways (e.g., peer tutoring or foreign language assistance) or simply concentrate on their academic achievement (perceived as the crucial goal of their ‘education’).

Je vais pas trop dans les activités après l’école, dans le parascolaire. Je ne suis pas dans aucune organisation non plus. Je préfère donner des cours de mathématique au secondaire I. (MSS male student)

Honestly, I don’t volunteer very much, I’m not in Student Council, I don’t really play sports. I just never considered it, so I just never decided to go for them.... (PSS female student)

I recognize in this research that student informants, who volunteered for this study, could be part of the group of students who tend to be more active and outspoken than the majority. This would help explain why so many of them were engaged in their school life. It is difficult to advance clear conclusions because teachers and administrators also study corroborated their comments. My school observations during the year also led in the same direction.

“I’m half Chilean, half German, all Canadian”

In both cases, citizenship education programs agree with the necessity of being committed to cultural pluralism for creating an inclusive community. Textbooks and, to a certain extent, teaching practices are also sensitive to the multi-ethnic heritage of Canada. “In that course,” says one B.C. teacher, “there’s venue for learning about each other’s background, and having a sense of common citizenship; that’s good [since] Canadian is a multicultural [country].”

Yet, the approaches taken by both provinces to deal with cultural pluralism have been different (Lévesque, in press). Following the adoption of the federal Multicultural Act (1988) and the B.C. Multicultural policy (1990), multicultural education is today integral to social studies education in that province. For example, the social studies grade 11 curriculum states in its learning outcomes that:

The 20th century has seen profound changes in the social fabric of Canada. In examining social issues, students [should] gain understanding of the dynamic regional, cultural, and ethnic diversity of Canadian society. (B.C. Ministry of Education, 1997, p. 4)

A similar view is offered by Morton (1988) in his social studies textbook. To the question “what is a Canadian?” Morton (1988) replies that “[t]he answer is for each Canadian to decide, from a range of choice” (p. 220). “In a rapidly shrinking world,” he adds, “showing that different groups can live together in harmony is one of the most important contributions which Canada can make to the survival of humankind” (Morton, 1988, p. 220).
B.C. high school students are children of the multicultural era. For most of them, all they know about Canada is multicultural. A few informants even learned in their home country the harsh consequences of racial intolerance and extreme ethnic allegiance. In this context, it is not surprising that students think multiculturalism is the solution to cultural pluralism. They reject Anglo-conformity as the only way of being good Canadians. They do not see multiculturalism as a way of segregating people according to their ethnic background. As one Canadian-born student, who is also member of the multicultural club, put it:

I think, I feel it's pretty open [in this school]. I think we have built multiculturalism through the years, because we have a multicultural club. And I think they've been pretty successful with that. (PSS female student)

Students, particularly immigrants, find compatibility between multiculturalism and common citizenship. On the one hand, multiculturalism allows people to express their double-sided identities without fear of public discrimination. On the other hand, it encourages people to progressively adapt to the dominant society.

When I describe myself to people who ask, I usually say “I’m half Chilean, half German, all Canadian.” I don’t know, I see myself as [pause] a little bit of everything. And I think that’s what Canadians do... that they’re not just one select race... they’re part of the whole world. (PSS female student)

I found, however, that language segregation was a key factor in reinforcing prejudice at PSS. The administration as well as the multicultural club of the school took the situation very seriously and hired an external consultant to lead focus groups. Various multiculturalism activities and anti-racism sessions were later developed.

We have a bulletin board that... celebrates all different celebrations of all cultures. [Also], what we did was to have a week where it [was] multicultural week. One day it [was] Japanese, and at lunch time, in the cafeteria, everyone really dressed in Japanese cultural clothing. We sold like sushi and we had dances and things like karate. And Mexico was the next day... . (PSS female student)

Studies (see Fisher & Echols, 1989; Kehoe & Mansfield, 1993; Moodley, 1995) have shown, however, that such initiatives are very often superficial and do not necessarily lead to better understanding of diversity. More interestingly, I found that the administration had limited understanding of racial intolerance, assuming that language adaptation was the essential condition to successful integration. As one administrator put it:

There’s been a couple of incidents where we think maybe they’ve been racially motivated. [But] I think it has to do with their language ability. Once they can speak English, fine. It’s when they can’t speak the language that there becomes an issue. (PSS female administrator)
In Québec, the approach to cultural diversity has been different than that of B.C. Québec has always feared that federal multiculturalism would reduce the national culture of Québécois to one of the various cultures forming the Canadian mosaic (Balthazar, 1996). As a result, Québec has favoured its own integration policy of so-called ‘interculturalism’ more consistent with Québécois’ understandings of citizenship. A comparison between the two (Québec and Canadian) policies shows many similarities (Pietrantonio, Juteau, & McAndrew, 1997). The Québec policy, however, makes the limits of diversity more explicit, focusing on the non-negotiable requirements such as the French language embedded in its moral contract (Ouellet, 1995). The Ministry of Education, in conjunction with the Québec Ministry of Immigration and Relations with Citizens, has put forth in 1998 a new policy statement and plan of action for intercultural education and new cultural integration programs to be used in all Québec schools with a particular focus on the Montréal region, where most immigrants settle. The objectives of intercultural education, the document reads, “overlap with those objectives in the citizenship education program that bear on diversity and learning to live together, which means that intercultural education is part of citizenship education” (MEQ, 1998, p. 2).

Although the grade 10 history program was elaborated 20 years ago, it supports some objectives of interculturalism. More explicitly, in its general orientations, the program defines Québec society as follow:

Comme les autres sociétés industrialisées du monde occidental, la société québécoise se caractérise par la pluralité et le changement…. La richesse même de cette diversité pose l’exigence de citoyens informés, capables d’efforts d’objectivité et soucieux de respect mutuel. (MEQ, 1982, p. 11)

Yet, the program has been strongly criticized by the Task Force on the Teaching of History (1996) for its clear lack of emphasis on the contributions of ethnocultural groups in the shaping of Québec and Canadian history. For example, First Nations people are introduced during the colonial period and then disappear until teachers deal with the tragic Oka Crisis of 1990 in Southern Québec. The report legitimately recommended, therefore, that the new programs pay special attention to the historicity of the presence of ethnocultural groups in Québec and Canada (Task Force on the Teaching of History, 1996, pp. 47-48). Similarly, it suggested that teachers (mostly white francophone) adapt their teaching practices to the ethnocultural values and attitudes of the student-body, particularly in the Greater Montréal Area where most immigrants settle. As Moodley (1995) has noted, the existence of multicultural policies does not ensure sound practice in the classroom. In this context, student informants recognized that they probably learn more about cultural pluralism through different agencies of interculturalism such as the school environment than in their citizenship education classes.

Le multiculturalisme, on l’apprend pas mal sur le tas. On l’apprend à voir du monde d’ethnies différentes, de religions différentes, [et] d’opinions différentes…. On l’apprend tout de suite à composer avec ça sans en avoir été avertis par les professeurs. (M SS male student)
Valuable lessons can be learned, therefore, from interactions inside and outside the classroom with students who are culturally and linguistically different. In support of this idea, school administration has helped to develop extra-curricular activities, such as intercultural and immigration student clubs, to favour social interaction, respect, and mutual understanding. The goal, as one administrator puts it, is to create an “inclusive school community.”

I found in my discussion with students that both Québec-born and immigrant students have developed an attitude toward cultural pluralism that is similar to that of B.C. students. For them, Québec is no longer a province of white, francophone ‘pur laine’ and Catholics. Their classrooms, neighbourhood, and city are representing a rich multi-ethnic environment where all students have, at least rhetorically, the opportunity to learn from people of various ethnocultural and linguistic backgrounds. Commenting on the relationships between students of different ethnocultural backgrounds, one immigrant student from Zaire noted that ethnicity is not an element considered by students for establishing links and personal relationships.

C’est pas la couleur qui va influencer si les gens t’aiment ou non, c’est la personnalité, comment tu es avec les autres. (MSS female student)

One Québec-born student declared that he feels fortunate to be in such a multi-ethnic environment where he can learn from different nationalities while still being at home.

Je trouve ça intéressant que ce n’est pas juste des Québécois [d’origine], qu’il y ait plein de nationalités. C’est différent, on apprend! (MSS male student)

From this point of view, then, the difference between MSS and PSS student informants is not so much in terms of attitudes found in the two groups, but in the nature of the society in which they live. In the Québec case study, most Québec-born students talked about the necessity of preserving French as the common public language, as acknowledged in the Québec French policy (Bill 101). This ‘non-negotiable’ requirement is perceived by both students and the administration as essential to maintaining a cohesive society: la société québécoise.

Ici, la langue de communication entre les gens, même s’ils ne parlent pas la même langue au départ, c’est évidemment le français. (MSS male student)

In B.C., some student informants also talked about the necessity of a common public language: English. But unlike the Québec case study, this requirement, implicit in multiculturalism, is not so explicit in educational policies and practices. As the language of English Canadians seems already protected by the fact that they are the dominant linguistic group, most anglophones do not think their language needs to be protected. And, as long as they feel it is not threatened they will not consciously take measures to protect it. One PSS administrator puts it this way:

You cannot enforce English only in the halls, unless we had a ‘Language Police’ out there. There’s no way you can do it. So, it can’t be policed.... (PSS female administrator)
“Il y en a beaucoup qui aime le Québec, moi je m’affiche comme canadien”

At the beginning of this study, my assumption was that in this era of globalization and mutual exchange, teenagers have ceased to care about metaphysical concepts such as patriotism and national identity. Students I met proved that I was wrong. I was surprised to find in both cases that students accord an importance to patriotism despite some popular myths around their too individualistic or segregated sense of belonging.

I agree we have to have some love toward the country and support national events that are going on. That kind of thing adds to the atmosphere. [We need to] be patriotic, open-minded, and accepting for being Canadian. (PSS male student)

Le patriotisme c'est l'attachement à la culture d'où on vient et je pense que pour le Québec c'est assez important.... (M SS male student)

I believe much of the criticism around students' collective identity may come from the fact that students suggest a very different conception of the nation than the older ideals used in Canada. In this sense, the matter at hand is not so much their lack of national identity and patriotism but their twenty-first century views of Canada and Québec. As shown in my discussion on cultural pluralism, these students have adopted more inclusive and democratic collective identities, which no longer refer to a backward nostalgia to be carried over or to a moral obligation to old allegiances and Canadian historical figures. These past 'heroes' have no clear impact on their collective identity and, as such, are not perceived as necessary for the links they make between the past, their present, and their future.

We've always kinda struggled in Canada [with] what is a Canadian, so I think we've kinda taken things [pause] from all these different countries, since we have so many different people in the country. And we've kinda made our own national identity... related to many different people. (PSS female student)

Moi je pense pas qu'il y a une personne qui peut représenter le Québec vraiment. Il y a tellement de gens qui pensent de façons différentes, qui agissent de façons différentes. Il y a une si grande diversité dans la population qu'on peut pas prendre quelqu'un puis dire qu'il représente le reste, c'est impossible. (M SS male student)

From one perspective, this modern nationalist attitude among Canadian students is remarkable. It has freed them from a static, non-interpretative vision of history, not open to discussion or criticism. In rejecting the role of certain past historical figures or patriotic events, students have greater chances to avoid what Létourneau (1998) calls “la vénération des origines et le culte des ancêtres” (p. 414). But, from another perspective, it has placed students in a precarious historical position. Many have great difficulty to understand that nurturing a historical consciousness is necessary if we are to get to the bottom of the social, political, and educational questions Canadians face today. The ahistorical commentaries from the following students are telling:
I'm not sure exactly sure how come a lot of people [in Québec] want to separate, how come they're not feeling as pleased with Canada as we are... (PSS female student)

I don't feel as if I've learned that much about [Québec]. I mean, we're kinda aware that there's a problem, but it's kinda over there. I don't really know the exact details of what's going on, so I think that we're more concerned about B.C. and Canada as a whole. (PSS female student)

But saying that B.C. and Québec students have adopted more inclusive forms of national identity should not hide the fact that a number of students on both sides have different understandings of their nation. A growing number of immigrant students, and many Canadian-born anglophones, imagine their country as a multicultural nation. Two immigrant students, one from Portugal and one from Algeria, put it this way:

Quand on fait partie du même pays, que je sois québécoise ou canadienne c'est la même chose. (MSS female student)

Moi je me dis que si le Québec était un pays, je serais Québécois. Mais comme je suis ici au Canada, je suis citoyen canadien. Je veux dire, c'est stupide, c'est juste une province et elle fait partie du même grand pays qui fonctionne bien. (MSS male student)

Yet, a relatively important number of francophone Québec-born, including certain immigrant, students view their province as their true nation, and potentially sovereign state. For them, Canada is not a traditional nation-state, but clearly a multinational state, that is, a sovereign state made up of distinct national entities. Unlike B.C. students, these informants had a much more defined conception of a 'nation.' Language, culture, history, and also more subtle practices all contribute, in their opinion, to shape this secured francophone community in North America.

Je trouve ça heureux qu'on parle encore le français ici au Québec. On est différent, on est unique. Si on devenait un pays, en plus, ça serait vraiment le "fun" comparé au Canada car eux autres parlent anglais. (M SS male student)

Moi j'aime beaucoup le Québec. J'aime ça parce que je trouve que c'est comme un pays, on est une province, mais je trouve qu'on est vraiment à part du Canada. Parce que si tu sors du Québec, t'as l'impression d'être dans un autre monde, d'après moi. T'as l'impression de changer de pays même si tu restes au Canada. (M SS female student)

From this research, however, we cannot conclude so freely that Québec history courses contribute actively to the formation of sovereignists as claimed by some Canadian critics (see Nemni, 1996; Granatstein, 1998). Of course, programs, textbooks, and teaching practices of teachers are influenced by Québec political and ideological trends, as noted by the following teacher.
Les élèves sont tous sûrs, sûrs, sûrs que j'ai dit oui [au référendum de 95].
Pourquoi? Parce que le programme d'histoire porte sur le Canada et le Québec mais la lorgnette est beaucoup plus sur le Québec. Et, depuis la Conquête, il y a eu beaucoup d'oppression envers les Canadiens-Français. Avec le cours d'histoire qu'on fait, oui, ça les amène à voir le Canada comme un oppresseur. (MSS female teacher)

But it is not clear whether my Québec nationalist informants have developed these attitudes in class or outside the school system. I believe it would be wrong to put all the blame on the school, or more specifically on history education for this state of affairs. Several agents of political socialization in Québec have possibly greater influence on their national attachment and identity than about 100 hours of national history (Lavallée, 1996). This research could not verify the extent to which the grade 10 history program has a sizeable influence on students' prior knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs.

Yet, this reality should not eclipse the fact that for students of the West Coast, Québec's aspirations are confused with the political discourse of regionalism. Territorial tensions between Western and Eastern Canada make students feel that Québécois are asking for more power just like B.C. wishes to have a stronger voice and a better representation in the political system.

To us it's not a matter of French versus English, it's more an East-West kinda thing. I see like us drifting away from East Coast.... [The problem is that] we're studying Québec within our own country which is like several-countries-big. (PSS male student)

This regional-provincial vision of Canada is clearly expressed in the B.C. social studies textbook on government, which makes some parallels between Québécois and British Columbians.

Many Canadians, when in Canada, tend to take on a provincial identity and to refer to themselves as British Columbians or Ontarians, Newfoundlanders or Québécois. When travelling overseas, however, they take on a national identity and call themselves "Canadians". In fact, most Canadians have both a national and a provincial sense of themselves. (Bartlett, Craig, & Sass, 1989, p. 170)

From this view, we can conclude that beyond multicultural education, citizenship education seems to have done little to enhance cultural empathy or to change the views of English Canadians on Québec. And, as one B.C. teacher confessed, as long as Québec is viewed in citizenship education as une province comme les autres (a province like other), there is no evidence suggesting that the situation will change for the better in the near future.

Of course, as Québec separatism comes and goes, it becomes less of an issue in the curriculum. If it happens to be a national or federal election, then, that becomes sort of the issue that year. But I think when it comes to the overall curriculum,
Québec is just one of many provinces in Confederation. Therefore, I don’t think teachers particularly single it out unless it happens to be a referendum. (PSS male teacher)

Conclusion

I was surprised to find in both sites organizations and classes that do not operate democratically, but still provide their students ways of developing democratic citizenship. All students have, at least rhetorically, some opportunities to participate and be active creators of the life of the school. Similarly, the multi-ethnicity of the student-body and, to a certain degree, more progressive teaching practices, textbook materials, and classroom environments make these two schools remarkable laboratories for teaching multicultural/intercultural education. But, saying B.C. and Québec citizenship education courses contribute to the development of democratic citizenship is not to say that the present situation is adequate. We urgently need more discussions and research in Canadian education on the nature of citizenship education. It appears from this study that the concepts of citizenship and education are contested, both theoretically and practically. It is not enough to claim that Canadian schools and classrooms promote, to varying degrees, democratic citizenship. We must urgently clarify what we mean by democracy and citizenship and how we can develop students’ abilities to be effective democratic citizens. Varying conceptions of democratic citizenship, Sears, Clarke and Hughes (2000) argue, “may exist not only between states but within them” (p. 152). Indeed, my readings and discussions with French and English Canadian teachers, staff, and students indicate that they have little shared experience of this country. If they have supportive attitudes towards rights, cultural pluralism, democracy, and nationalism, their attitudes and body of civic and history knowledge do not necessarily lead to a better understanding and appreciation of our complex social, political, and historical issues.

From this point of view, the two solitudes of MacLennan are still a reality in Canadian education, at least in the ways citizenship education programs are elaborated and shared collectively. It is ironic to see that while recent studies (Laville, 1996; Sears, Clarke & Hughes, 2000; Sears & Hughes, 1996) have shown that in this era of greater mobility, communication, and interdependence Ministries of Education across Canada have taken “a remarkably similar approach to citizenship education” (Sears, Clarke & Hughes, 2000, p. 152), political, ideological, linguistic, and pedagogical factors can lead to divergent teaching and learning practices. To paraphrase Hahn (1998), despite increasingly integrated economies and communication systems, the forms citizenship education practices take continue to reflect the distinct values of a particular society. The key challenge for Canadian educators, then, is not to find a common myth-like grand narrative, which all Canadians can believe deeply, but to build on the inherent differences in their discipline to help 21st century students gain insight and perspectives from other social and cultural contexts. “We are living,” Ignatieff (2000) observes in The Rights Revolution, “in the first human society that has actually attempted to create a political community on the assumption that everyone - literally everyone - has the right to belong” (p. 140). The entire legitimacy of this collective project rests upon our very capacity as educators to be attentive and committed to difference.
Notes

1. I use the term commitment rather than duty (or obligation) since it refers to a moral engagement of citizens to assume particular functions in a democracy. Duties and obligations often invoke the spectre of coercion and totalitarianism because they are viewed as imposed by the state and, thus, do not allow for assent and dissent.

2. A sensitizing concept is defined as “a construct from the research participants’ perspective, uses their language or expression, and sensitizes the researcher to possible lines of enquiry” (van den Hoonoord, 1997, p. 1). Sensitizing concepts, as initially conceived by Blumer (1972), were introduced in social theory as a method of remaining true to the empirical world of others during research processes. Because concepts such as citizenship, culture, and identity do not have clear definitions in terms of attributes or fixed benchmarks, and thus cannot lead to theoretical statements in close and self-correcting relations with the empirical world, Blumer proposed to define them in terms of non-definite concepts which give the users a sense of guidance and reference in approaching various empirical instances. I suggest that these concepts have utility in the study of citizenship education because they can inform both practice and research by exposing meaningful pictures or illustrations, which enable one to grasp the reference in terms of one’s own experience.

3. A recent (limited) study conducted with 82 grade 10 and grade 11 students, in two francophone Montréal high schools, came to similar conclusions. Based on a survey on citizenship attitudes, the author claims that over 90 percent of respondents said that knowledge of rights and respect of others are central principles of democracy (see Truchot, 1998).

4. A recent survey conducted by Environics for the 20th anniversary of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms came to similar conclusions. Over 85 percent of Québec respondents (81 percent for English Canadian respondents) believed the Charter has had a major positive impact on the protection of their rights and freedoms. More interestingly, while a majority of Québec respondents hold concerns about the future of the French language, they do not attribute them to the multicultural provisions of the Charter as claimed by some Québec nationalists (see Jedwab, 2002).

5. This is not to say, however, that current pedagogical materials and teaching approaches fully support intercultural education. Indeed, if students in this Montréal high school now find themselves in a multi-ethnic environment, most staff, administrators, and teachers at MSS continue to represent the white, francophone Québécois majority. Similarly, I found that teaching practices often reflected particular ethno-cultural values and attitudes (taken for granted) that do not always respect and represent immigrants’ experiences in Québec and Canadian history.

6. A recent study on the attitudes of Montréal students (Jodoin, M. Andrew & Pagé, 1997) suggests that francophone students are largely supportive of interculturalism. According to their conclusion, language and/or ethnicity is not a determining factor when it comes to social relationships for Québec-born and immigrant students in francophone Montréal schools.

References


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