

# **A/Political Education: A Survey of Quebec Students' Perceptions of Their Citizenship Education**

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## **Abstract**

This survey of 370 recent high school graduates reveals that history and citizenship courses in Quebec focus on cultural and religious viewpoints, favour a transmission approach to learning, and fail to connect the political process to students' concerns and interests. Without a clear conception of citizenship as a reference point, this curriculum appears to neglect the development of agency around civic engagement and social change. Recommendations on how to improve the program are guided by students' answers to open-ended questions and current scholarship on the need for a more critical analysis of national and global diversity and inequality in school curriculums.

*Keywords:* civic education, citizenship education, democratic education

## **Résumé**

Cette étude sonde 370 étudiants Québécois nouvellement diplômés du secondaire au sujet de leurs cours d'histoire et de citoyenneté. Cela démontre que ce cours se concentre davantage sur l'aspect historique et religieux, ne favorise pas une approche pédagogique

interactive et développe davantage le volet historique plutôt que le volet citoyenneté, ce qui ne rejoint pas les préoccupations des élèves. Sans une conception de la citoyenneté comme référence, le curriculum semble négliger l'engagement civique et la transformation sociale. Les recommandations pour l'amélioration du programme se base sur les réponses des questions réflexives du sondage et la littérature pédagogique concernant la nécessité du développement d'un curriculum qui applique une analyse critique de la diversité et de l'inégalité autant nationale qu'internationale.

*Mots-clés* : éducation civique, éducation à la citoyenneté, éducation démocratique

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## Introduction

In the midst of ongoing debates on the need for a charter of values, the requirements of Quebec citizenship have been a source of heated debate. Across Quebec, citizens have discussed whether or not religious symbols can threaten a nation's commitment to cohesion and equality. Much of the media coverage on this issue has focused on the overt discrimination that some of these discussions have evoked. This research looks into citizenship education courses in Quebec high schools in an attempt to understand the foundations for citizenship that are being instilled in today's students and the extent to which students are being prepared to engage in these types of debates. Course content and teaching practices will also be viewed in relation to a growing scholarship on the need for a more critical and globalized conception of citizenship.

## Literature Review

Since the 1990s, numerous research projects from around the world have affirmed the necessity for a rigorous approach to citizenship education. Countries with demographics and political structures similar to Canada's, including the United States and the United Kingdom, have undergone thorough examinations of their pedagogical goals and assessment criteria. Canada in general and Quebec in particular, however, have yet to make similar commitments (Kerr, 1999; Lefrancois & Ethier, 2007; Sears & Hughes, 1996). In 1999, researchers Sears, Clarke, and Hughes (1999) suggested that Canada's failure to engage in discussions regarding citizenship education stemmed from persistent country-wide debates regarding identity and nationhood. In contrast to the United States, they suggest that Canada lacks a cohesive political ideology: "Canadians are and always have been a people of divided loyalties with multiple understandings of the country and their relationship to it" (p. 119).

Since the implementation of the Multiculturalism Act in 1971, the central debate in Canada has revolved around the development of a conception of citizenship that balances the tension between respecting differences and fostering cohesion (Hébert & Wilkinson, 2002). Given Quebec's status as a cultural minority, Quebec follows what has been labelled an "interculturalist" model that prioritizes integration through interaction

in an attempt to preserve “the creative tension between diversity and the continuity of the French-speaking core” (Bouchard & Taylor, 2008, p. 37).

Whether multicultural or intercultural, persistent discourses on citizenship education in North America have been couched in liberal democratic understandings of citizenship that imply that equality is necessarily attained through the rights gained by citizenship and articulated in governing documents. This discourse, however, has been accused of a “false universalism” that is devoid of any substantial reflections on race, class, and gender (Tupper, 2007, p. 259; see also Blades & Richardson, 2006). Tasked with exploring the tension between cohesion and plurality in Quebec, the 2007 Bouchard-Taylor Commission similarly concluded that insecurities around identity are often misguided and that the real task for government and citizens is to reflect on and take responsibility for the inequalities experienced by immigrants and ethno-cultural minorities such as under-employment, under-representation in public service, and poverty. Like Tupper (2007), the Commission (2008) concluded that any conception of citizenship will fail to promote unity if it does not acknowledge and address discrimination and inequality.

In addition, a conception of citizenship and identity that is relevant to young people may no longer be contained by traditional geographical, political, cultural, or economic boundaries (Hébert & Wilkinson, 2002). As a result of global migration, inter-connectivity, and massive social movements, people increasingly consider themselves as having multiple identities with strong feelings of belonging to more than one cultural group or country (Williams, 2007). As a consequence, conceptions of citizenship and the boundaries of political participation have evolved beyond the scope of traditional understandings of civic engagement.

In the past 15 years, new discourses of “global citizenship” have arisen to address a growing tension between national self-interest and a sense of responsibility for people around the world (Richardson & Abbott, 2009). Richardson and Abbott (2009) describe this tension as “the radical disjunction between developing perspectivity and world-mindedness on the one hand and preparing students to compete in the global economy on the other” (p. 385). A global citizenship education program thus requires a conversation about common human values that transcends national boundaries and moves away from “focusing on values which constitute a unique Canadian identity and towards a more thought-provoking discussion of issues that contribute to patterns of conflict and paths of peace” (Hébert & Wilkinson, 2006, p. 32). Within a more global framework, students

should be encouraged to question “existing understandings and perspectives with the aim of developing a new sense of world mindedness, and empowering students to become active participants in addressing issues that impact the global community” (Hébert & Wilkinson, 2006, p. 386). This reflective process also requires students to gain an understanding of their own level of privilege along with a sense of responsibility to address oppression and inequality on a local and global level (Tupper, 2007).

The fundamental pedagogical tension in citizenship education curriculums involves the prioritization of content over process (Richardson & Abbott, 2009). Although the approach and weight given to citizenship education varies significantly from province to province, researchers suggest that a value-neutral-transmission approach to politics is consistent with and contributes to passive notions of citizenship and the depoliticization of youth (Jenson & Papillon, 2001; Sears, Clarke, & Hughes, 1999; Sears & Hughes, 1996). The Canadian Policy Research Network describes the teaching of citizenship courses as being largely dominated by “procedural knowledge and compliant codes of behaviour that do not envelope students in collective action for systemic understandings of political issues” (Llewellyn, Cook, Westheimer, Molina Girón, & Suurtamm, 2007, p. 2).

Research on pedagogical approaches points to the fact that an emphasis on process is more likely to affect students’ commitments to civic engagement and participation. For example, an “open classroom climate,” characterized by the extent to which students perceive that they can express their views in the classroom, has been correlated with students’ intentions to vote (Torney-Purta, Oswald, & Schulz, 2001). Research has also shown how open discussions and debates between students and teachers on the political process and policy issues is positively correlated with interest, knowledge, and the intention to participate in community or political structures (Feldman, Pasek, Romer, & Jamieson, 2008; Kahne & Sporte, 2008; McDevitt & Kioussis, 2006).

Teaching for civic engagement has also been determined to be most effective when grounded in the interests of the learner and coupled with a sense of self-efficacy (Feldman et al., 2008; Office of Democracy and Governance, 2002; Perliger, Canetti-Nisim, & Pedahzur, 2006). This perceived self-efficacy involves how well a student believes he or she can execute a course of action and make a difference in government decisions (Kahne & Sporte, 2008; Torney-Purta et al., 2001). As such, civic skills and dispositions are best developed through project-based learning, community-service learning, simulations, and workshops (Llewellyn et al., 2007). Similarly, Westheimer and

Kahne (2006) demonstrate that the pedagogical approaches of teachers whose students have shown the most statistically significant increases in their intentions to participate in the political process not only examined social problems but also provided positive experiences in civic participation and made efforts to engage students in real world projects. Tupper (2009) warns, however, that these approaches must be accompanied by in-depth discussions of power and privilege so as not to inadvertently reinforce the inequalities they are meant to address.

The extent to which an intercultural or global vision of citizenship has been adopted in the Quebec education program is difficult to determine. Although references to citizenship are made in different subject areas, at no point is the concept of citizenship defined or clarified through the statement of competencies. For example, the history and citizenship education course states that when taking the course, a student

1. examines social phenomena from a historical perspective,
2. interprets social phenomena using the historical method,
3. constructs his/her consciousness of citizenship through the study of history.

(Ministère de l'Éducation, 2004, p. 294)

This lack of explicit theoretical or philosophical foundations, including a working definition of citizenship, makes the program difficult to assess. Lefrancois and Ethier (2007) suggest that “Quebec’s project for citizenship education reveals itself to be as obscure as it is ineffectual, at the very least from the point of view of its content, because everything seems to take place ‘as if’ this notion of citizenship has already been given an agreed-upon meaning” (p. 2). As such, there is also a coinciding lack of clarity concerning the pedagogical strategies that would most effectively reflect program goals and expectations.

## **Purpose**

Although the history and citizenship education course is part of the high school curriculum in Quebec, little scholarship exists that explores what happens in the classroom. Curriculum documents also neglect to define the concept of citizenship and its parameters. The purpose of this research is to address this gap in the literature by surveying 370

recent high school graduates on their perceptions of their citizenship education courses. Specifically, the research questions are:

1. What is being taught in Quebec history and citizenship education classes?
2. How is it being taught?
3. How do students view the student government and volunteer work?
4. What are students' attitudes toward/ intentions to participate in the political process?

By asking students about what and how they were taught, as well as the environment in which they were taught, teachers and policy makers may be better equipped to meet the goals of these courses as well as better meet the needs of students. Answers to these questions may also help situate the philosophical and theoretical underpinnings of the Quebec Education Program's conception of citizenship which, in turn, can help assess the coherency and relevancy of the current program.

## **Method**

### **Questionnaire Construction**

There are many reasons why a survey design was determined to be optimal for obtaining the data needed for the purpose of this research. For one, surveys are ideal for describing trends—in this case, what is happening in citizenship education courses. As well, a survey allows the tracking of perceptions and attitudes that will be essential for reflecting on the effectiveness of citizenship education. A survey will also help to determine the relationships between variables such as classroom climate and intentions to participate in the political process.

The survey produced in Phase 2 of the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) Civic Education Study, which was developed over a five-year period involving research coordinators from over 20 countries (Schulz & Sibberns, 2004), was an ideal starting point for the development of this survey. The IEA survey has been used not only as the basis of the international comparison for which it was originally intended but also for subsequent small- and large-scale studies around the world (Cleaver, Ireland, Kerr, & Lopes, 2005; Schulz, Ainley, Friedman, & Lietz, 2011).

The survey that was developed for this project may be viewed as yet another incarnation of the IEA survey instrument. It has been significantly shortened with a focus on course content, climate, and intentions to participate in the political process and community structures. Sections on student government and volunteering have also been added to reflect current research on civic pedagogy. Categories and language have been adjusted in order to more directly reflect the research questions. Two open-ended questions conclude the survey in order to allow students to use their own words to voice their opinions on citizenship education as well as to provide any comments or feedback that may not have been anticipated by the survey questions.

### **Data Collection**

The survey was distributed to 377 students from Champlain College in Saint-Lambert, Quebec. These students were available for participation due to the cooperation of twelve teachers from the Humanities Department. All data collection was conducted in accordance with the ethical standards of the Concordia University Department of Education Ethics Committee.

## **Results**

### **Data Screening**

Of the 377 completed surveys, 4 were excluded from the final analysis because the respondents did not attend high school in Quebec and 3 were taken out because less than 85% of the 54 items (excluding the last two open-ended questions) in the survey were answered. The exclusion of 7 surveys constitutes a return rate of 98%. Among the 370 remaining respondents, only 5 surveys contained missing values, which were replaced by the series mean. One question was reverse coded (B7). The data from the surveys were entered and analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences. The statistics are used to both describe and make inferences about students' perceptions of their citizenship education.

## **Sample**

As recent high school graduates (90% graduated from 2009 to 2011), the participating CEGEP students were well positioned to reflect on and describe their citizenship education courses and intentions to participate in the political process. Given that civic engagement and/or political participation is enacted outside of the classroom and may be revealed in a multitude of ways, a measurement of this shift must rely on the self-evaluation or reflections of students on their current or future roles within society (McDevitt & Kiouisis, 2006; Office of Democracy and Governance, 2002; Westheimer & Kahne, 2006).

Section A revealed that, of the students whose surveys were retained for analysis, 85.4% were between the ages of 18 and 19; 45.7% identified French as their first language; 38.9% were Anglophones; 14.9% identified another language as their mother tongue; 53% were male; and 47% were female. These 370 students represented over 70 high schools from across Quebec.

## **Curriculum**

Section B of the survey provides an overview of possible curriculum content, ranging from learning about different cultural and religious viewpoints (B1) to participating in government structures (B9). Respondents expressed their level of agreement on a Likert scale. Statements in this section emphasized both passive content (e.g., I learned about...) and more active or participation-oriented content (e.g., I learned how to address an injustice or how I could participate). As Table 1 shows, current curriculum places the most emphasis on B1 (learned about cultural and religious viewpoints) ( $M = 1.43$ ,  $SD = .59$ ), with B5 (learned how to address an injustice or change a law) ( $M = 2.75$ ,  $SD = .78$ ) and B9 (learned how to participate in government and politics) ( $M = 2.78$ ,  $SD = .73$ ) being the least present. Reliability for Section B was calculated at Cronbach's  $\alpha = .82$ .

**Table 1:** Section B: School Curriculum

| <u>In my classes, I...</u>  | <u>Mean</u> | <u>Std. Deviation</u> |
|---|-------------|-----------------------|
| B1 Learned about cultural and religious viewpoint                   | 1.43        | .59                   |
| B2 Learned about political parties and their viewpoints             | 2.41        | .84                   |
| B3 Learned to contribute to community                               | 2.08        | .71                   |
| B4 Learned about levels of government and their responsibilities    | 2.45        | .83                   |
| B5 Learned how to address injustice or change a law                 | 2.75        | .78                   |
| B6 Learned to be concerned about other countries                    | 1.88        | .68                   |
| B7 Learned about government and political issues*                   | 2.19        | .83                   |
| B8 Discussed what it means to be a citizen                          | 2.29        | .76                   |
| B9 Learned how to participate in government and politics            | 2.78        | .73                   |
| B10 Considered issues from different perspectives                   | 1.89        | .62                   |
| B11 Learned about voting  | 2.34        | .88                   |
| Response Scale: 1 (Strongly Agree) to 4 (Strongly Disagree)         |             |                       |
| N = 370   |             |                       |
| * Item negatively worded in survey. Reverse coded for all analyses. |             |                       |

## Classroom Environment

Section C of the survey attempts to go beyond perceptions of what was taught and asks about how it was taught. The response scale of 1 (Often), 2 (Sometimes), 3 (Rarely), and 4 (Never) provided options as to how much one type of approach dominated in the classroom. Unlike Section B, in which the scale asked for a level of agreement, this scale has the objective of determining the balance between different approaches. These approaches can be distinguished between more traditional or rote learning (Questions C2, C4, C8, C9, C10) and a more open or student-centred approach characterized by letting students determine some of the content and make up their own minds about issues (Questions C1, C3, C5, C6, C7). The results are presented in Tables 2 and 3. The traditional approach section is considered reliable at Cronbach's  $\alpha = .68$  while the student-centred approach section is reliable at Cronbach's  $\alpha = .76$ .

**Table 2:** Section C: Classroom Environment—Traditional Approach

|   | <u>Mean</u> | <u>Std. Deviation</u> |
|---|-------------|-----------------------|
| C2 Required to memorize dates and definitions     | 1.84        | .82                   |
| C4 Emphasis placed on facts and dates             | 1.80        | .77                   |
| C8 Memorize dates and facts = good grades         | 2.13        | .93                   |
| C9 Teachers mostly lectured/students took notes   | 1.76        | .79                   |
| C10 Worked on material from textbook              | 1.85        | .78                   |
| Response Scale: 1 (Often) to 4 (Never)<br>N = 370 |             |                       |

**Table 3:** Section C: Classroom Environment—Student-Centred Approach

|  | <u>Mean</u> | <u>Std. Deviation</u> |
|--|-------------|-----------------------|
| C1 Encouraged to discuss controversial political and social issues   | 2.12        | .79                   |
| C3 Felt free to disagree with teachers on political or social issues | 1.95        | .83                   |
| C5 Students encouraged to make up their own minds                    | 1.77        | .75                   |
| C6 Teachers presented several sides of an issue                      | 1.88        | .72                   |
| C7 Students brought up political events for discussion in class      | 2.39        | .85                   |
| Response Scale: 1 (Often) to 4 (Never)<br>N = 370                    |             |                       |

A dependent samples t-test was calculated in order to compare the extent to which students perceive that a traditional versus student-centred approach was used in the teaching of citizenship education across the province ( $t(368) = 3.4, p < .05$ ). Given that the lower the mean the more present a particular approach was, an examination of the means reveals that the traditional approach to teaching and learning ( $M = 9.37, SD = 2.71$ ) was more prevalent than a student-centred one ( $M = 10.1, SD = 2.8$ ). See Table 4.

**Table 4:** Results of Paired Test Samples

|         |                             | Paired Differences |                |                 |   |       | t    | df  | Sig.<br>(2-tailed) |
|---------|-----------------------------|--------------------|----------------|-----------------|---|-------|------|-----|--------------------|
|         |                             | Mean               | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean | 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference |       |      |     |                    |
|         |                             |                    |                |                 | Lower                                     | Upper |      |     |                    |
| Pair 1  | Student-centred-traditional | .73                | 4.08           | .21             | .31                                       | 1.15  | 3.41 | 368 | .001               |
| N = 370 |                             |                    |                |                 |   |       |      |     |                    |

Correlations reveal the consistency within these two approaches. Specifically, encouraging students to discuss controversial political and social issues is moderately correlated with students being encouraged to make up their own minds ( $r(368) = .4, p < .05$ ), as well as with teachers who presented several sides of an issue ( $r(368) = .41, p < .05$ ). Teachers presenting several sides of an issue was also correlated with students being encouraged to make up their own minds ( $r(368) = .58, p < .05$ ).

On the other hand, memorizing dates and facts as the best way to get good grades was correlated both to the requirement to memorize dates and definitions ( $r(368) = .46, p < .05$ ) and the emphasis being placed on facts and dates ( $r(368) = .45, p < .05$ ). Not surprisingly, students who were required to memorize dates and definitions felt that an emphasis was placed on facts and dates ( $r(368) = .6, p < .05$ ). There were no correlations between student-centred and traditional approaches.

## Volunteer Work and Student Government

The section on volunteer work and student government was limited to yes and no answers. Given that the emphasis of the survey was on civic or citizenship education courses, this section was meant to provide some context as to whether or not course content was reinforced by the school itself through student governments and volunteer work (both of which are viewed by some researchers as predictors of political interest and involvement) (Torney-Purta et al., 2001). One-fourth (25.4%) of the students did have to complete a certain number of hours volunteering in order to graduate from high school, while 65% felt that it was strongly encouraged, and 41% felt it should be mandatory. Ten

percent participated in student government while 44% at least voted for their representatives. Only 13%, however, felt the student government had any power. The intra-item correlations were all below .3.

### **Political Intentions**

Section E outlined possibilities for political participation. This participation was not limited to political institutions and included community involvement and protesting. Respondents answered these questions by estimating the likelihood that they would engage in these types of activities (1 = I will do this, 2 = I may do this, 3 = I will not do this). These items can be considered reliable at Cronbach's  $\alpha = .8$ .

As demonstrated in Table 5, most of these students ( $M = 1.35$ ,  $SD = .57$ ) intended to vote and even more intended to research political candidates ( $M = 1.43$ ,  $SD = .61$ ). From this point there was a clear drop with a minority of students intending to join a political party ( $M = 2.78$ ,  $SD = .49$ ) or write letters to a newspaper regarding social or political concerns ( $M = 2.78$ ,  $SD = .7$ ). A higher number of students intended to work in their community by volunteering ( $M = 1.9$ ,  $SD = .44$ ), collecting money for a cause ( $M = 1.9$ ,  $SD = .44$ ), collecting signatures on a petition ( $M = 2.19$ ,  $SD = .72$ ), or participating in a march or a rally ( $M = 2.18$ ,  $SD = .72$ ).

**Table 5:** Section E: Political Engagement

|   | <u>Mean</u> | <u>Std.</u><br><u>Deviation</u> |
|---|-------------|---------------------------------|
| E1 Will vote in elections   | 1.35        | .57                             |
| E2 Will research candidates   | 1.43        | .61                             |
| E3 Will join a political party  | 2.77        | .49                             |
| E4 Will write letters to a newspaper re: social or political concerns | 2.77        | .44                             |
| E5 Will run for political office                                      | 2.86        | .38                             |
| E6 Will volunteer to help in the community                            | 1.9         | .7                              |
| E7 Will collect money for a social cause                              | 1.88        | .68                             |
| E8 Will collect signatures for a petition                             | 2.15        | .72                             |
| E9 Will participate in non-violent protest march or rally             | 2.18        | .72                             |
| E10 Will spray paint slogans on walls                                 | 2.86        | .42                             |
| E11 Will block traffic as a form of protest                           | 2.81        | .46                             |
| E12 Will occupy buildings as a form of protest                        | 2.73        | .53                             |
| <b>Response Scale: 1 (I will do this) to 3 (I will not do this)</b>   |             |                                 |
| <b>N = 370</b>  |             |                                 |

### Views of Efficacy

The last section of the survey was dedicated to identifying what students think are the most effective way of influencing decisions in society. The three possible responses were “Very Effective” (1), “Somewhat Effective” (2), and “Not Effective” (3). Participating in a march or a rally was viewed as the least effective ( $M = 2.02$ ,  $SD = .60$ ) means, followed by collecting signatures for a petition ( $M = 1.98$ ,  $SD = .62$ ) and working in local action groups ( $M = 1.97$ ,  $SD = .55$ ). As presented in Table 6, the most effective strategy was to get attention through the media ( $M = 1.44$ ,  $SD = .59$ ) and, finally, to vote ( $M = 1.5$ ,  $SD = .62$ ). Section F can be considered reliable at Cronbach’s  $\alpha = .71$ .

**Table 6:** Section F: Effectiveness of Political Action

|  | <u>Mean</u> | <u>Std. Deviation</u> |
|--|-------------|-----------------------|
| F1 Effectiveness of working in political parties         | 1.88        | .59                   |
| F2 Effectiveness of working in local action groups       | 1.97        | .55                   |
| F3 Effectiveness of voting in elections                  | 1.53        | .62                   |
| F4 Effectiveness of contacting influential people        | 1.84        | .69                   |
| F5 Effectiveness of getting attention through the media  | 1.44        | .6                    |
| F6 Effectiveness of collecting signatures for a petition | 1.98        | .62                   |
| F7 Effectiveness of participating in a march or rally    | 2.02        | .6                    |
| F8 Effectiveness of running for office                   | 1.93        | .65                   |
| Response Scale: 1 (Very Effective) to 3 (Not Effective)  |             |                       |
| N = 370  |             |                       |

### Relationships between Sections of the Survey

Questions within sections of the survey were aggregated and regressions were conducted in order to determine relationships between sections of the survey. As demonstrated in Table 7, a regression analysis verifying whether views of effectiveness could predict political participation had positive and significant results. Views of efficacy also explained a significant proportion of variance in intentions to participate in political and community structures ( $R^2 = .15$ ,  $F = 61.62$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Multiple regressions did not yield any significant results.

**Table 7:** Regression on Views of Effectiveness and Political Participation

| Coefficients <sup>a</sup>         |               |                                    |            |                                  |          |             |
|-----------------------------------|---------------|------------------------------------|------------|----------------------------------|----------|-------------|
| <u>Model</u>                      |               | <u>Unstandardized Coefficients</u> |            | <u>Standardized Coefficients</u> | <u>t</u> | <u>Sig.</u> |
|                                   |               | B                                  | Std. Error | Beta                             |          |             |
| 1                                 | (Constant)    | 20.08                              | .99        |                                  | 20.37    | .000        |
|                                   | Effectiveness | .52                                | .07        | .38                              | 7.85     | .000        |
| a. Dependent Variable: Intentions |               |                                    |            |                                  |          |             |
| N = 370                           |               |                                    |            |                                  |          |             |

## **Students' Views of Their Education**

Two open-ended questions comprised the last page of the survey. Of the respondents, 92% answered these questions; of these, 64 left their contact information in order to discuss this topic further. Data were in-vivo coded in order to add students' voices to the results of the survey. Of the students who answered the question G1 about whether they felt they had the knowledge and skills to participate in the political process (n = 342), 51 (15%) answered "yes" and 221 (65%) answered "no." As expressed by one student, "When we did talk about politics, it was always in the past. I don't feel at all prepared to participate in the present." The remaining responses were either ambivalent or "some-what" satisfied (54), or the answers were considered "inconclusive" as they did not directly answer the question (16).

When asked, "Do you have any suggestions on how to improve the state of citizenship education in high schools?" (G2) certain answers came up frequently. By far the most consistent suggestion was that citizenship education be offered as a separate class (64). As stated by one proponent of a citizenship education class, "We didn't learn much about integrating ourselves into politics or even the importance of voting. A contemporary politics course would be beneficial."

A common criticism was that the political content was not current (32) and did not help students distinguish between political parties (22). One student commented, "Although we discussed issues, we did not discuss political parties, which makes it hard when it comes to deciding who to vote for." Similarly, another student expressed, "I think if we had a chance to debate our views and compare them to political parties' views we might feel better prepared to vote."

Other recommendations regarding classroom environment included simulations of elections (16), discussions/debates (13), speakers, and field trips (9). The lack of commitment and enthusiasm from the part of the teachers was also highlighted (12). Representative comments include "We need to learn how to form and defend our opinions" and "Classes need to be fun and interactive!"

## Discussion

The results from this survey suggest that citizenship education courses in Quebec are largely content driven, adopt predominantly passive teaching practices, and conceive of citizenship from a liberal democratic perspective that fails to address inequalities or inspire commitments to political participation or social justice much less capture the interest of the student population overall.

### Course Content and Teaching Practices

Despite the fact that an intercultural vision of citizenship is said to define Quebec's approach to social cohesion, there is little evidence to suggest that interaction is prioritized in citizenship education curriculum. Although many students did report that they felt encouraged to discuss controversial issues and to make up their own minds, a greater number reported that their citizenship education courses were lecture-based and focused on the memorization of dates and facts. This prioritization of content over process is not surprising given its location within a historical framework from which students are expected to gain a "consciousness of citizenship through the study of history" (Ministère de l'Éducation, 2004, p. 294). According to Richardson and Abbott (2009), studying citizenship from a historical perspective tends to neglect critical and participatory dimensions. This approach that transmits information by rote rather than by deep thinking and discussion is said to reinforce passive notions of citizenship and the depoliticization of youth (Jenson & Papillon, 2001; Sears et al., 1999). It also fails to uphold an intercultural view which places interaction and debate at the center of identity formation and cohesion.

Most respondents reported that they learned how to consider different cultural and religious viewpoints, how to consider issues from different perspectives, and how to be concerned about other countries. Consistent with a liberal democratic conception of citizenship, however, few reported learning how to address injustice or to actively take part in political structures or collective action. This is consistent with the Canadian Policy Research Networks' findings that the emphasis on diversity in citizenship education curriculum across Canada seems to have come at the expense of a critical understanding of political and social issues. Lefrancois and Ethier (2007) accuse the Quebec curriculum of neglecting conceptions of citizenship that include democratic participation and collective

responsibility. As mentioned, teaching about difference without engaging in critical conversations about inequality runs the risk of reinforcing the discrimination (Bouchard & Taylor, 2008; Tupper, 2007).

### **Intentions to Participate and Views of Effectiveness**

A barrier to civic participation, as identified by the students themselves, was the inability to connect their personal views to the social and political issues discussed by political parties. Examples of the numerous comments made along these lines were “Show us that we have a place in society and explain political parties’ positions” and “Teach students about modern politics and different political parties, in a way that would get their attention and make them want to be a part of it.” These comments may explain why, despite the perception that political participation is the most effective way to influence decisions in society, a majority of respondents said they were unlikely to do anything other than vote.

The survey results also point to an important link between views of effectiveness and intentions to participate in civic actions. The connection between agency and the intention to be an active citizen highlights the importance of not only demonstrating how to participate in the democratic process but also to provide positive examples of the effectiveness of such participation. Students should not, for example, be limited to studying about issues surrounding the global economy and must have opportunities to reflect on its challenges and develop responses (Richardson & Abbott, 2009). Many students expressed the need for enthusiastic teachers and positive examples of social change that could counter the negative portrayals of government and politics that are often expressed in the media and by parents. One such student wrote, “When your parents, the media, and your teachers talk badly or don’t care about politicians it makes you disinterested. No one cares or tells us why we should care, so we don’t. Some good examples would probably help.”

## **Conclusions, Limitations, and Implications for Further Research**

A survey methodology can only provide a general overview of the state of citizenship education in Quebec due to its controlled questions and limited possibilities for answers. This study does, however, reveal a lack of grounding in an intercultural or global conception of citizenship as well as a disjuncture between effective teaching practices for civic engagement and what students perceive is happening in the classroom. This study can, therefore, make several recommendations for the development of citizenship education in Quebec.

On a policy level, a more explicit definition of citizenship would serve as a critical starting point for developing and evaluating curriculum. This study suggests that the current program is grounded in a liberal understanding of citizenship that fails to acknowledge the complexities and tensions surrounding cohesion, plurality, national self-interest, and global responsibility, which dominate much of the current scholarship on citizenship education. Tupper (2006) warns against the “deceptions” of liberal understandings of citizenship that “advance citizenship as unproblematic and as universal” (p. 47). Without negating the importance of participation, she insists that participation without a “self-reflective and critical understanding of privilege, may only serve to reinforce inequality” (p. 48). Recent discussions in Quebec regarding the charter of values, for example, have centred on a perceived threat posed by religious symbols while neglecting the inequality and discrimination faced by many of Quebec’s ethno-cultural minorities.

In addition to defining citizenship, the Quebec Education Program should make a more overt commitment to developing global citizenship competencies and commitments. Blades and Richardson (2006) suggest that citizenship education curriculums across North America need to be re-conceptualized as a vehicle for international dialogue. This goal necessitates that students not only understand issues from multiple perspectives but are also able to recognize inequitable power relationships. From this vantage point, students should have the opportunity to discuss strategies to address issues surrounding international trade, development, conflict, environmental degradation, and human rights (Richardson & Abbott, 2009). In addition, as articulated by the participants of this survey, students need positive examples of social change that will convince them that such action is worthwhile and can have tangible results.

In addition to a well-articulated conception of citizenship and the integration of teaching practices that have been shown to impact agency and civic commitments, the development of citizenship education should occur in consultation with administrators, teachers, and students. As discussed, an effective strategy for preparing students to become citizens is to provide them with opportunities to participate in decision-making processes within their schools. According to the results presented here, however, few students consider that their student governments have actual power or wield any influence. As such, giving student governments a substantial say in the functioning of their schools promises to engage them in the political process while also revealing its challenges and complexities.

Teaching strategies that are proven to impact civic commitments by supporting evolving conceptions of citizenship will centre on opportunities for open dialogue and debate in the classroom. Prioritizing this format requires a move away from the more prevalent forms of evaluation that rely on the memorization of facts and dates, and instead requires teachers to facilitate discussions on controversial issues. One cannot expect this type of shift to happen without consulting with teachers and determining the needs for training. After all, as the respondents pointed out, their own teachers' sense of enthusiasm for the subject matter and commitment to the democratic process was perceived to significantly impact students' own sense of agency. As suggested by several students, a more interactive citizenship course may need to be offered separately.

Future research should inquire into the role of the Internet and online networks in young people's conceptions of citizenship, engagement, and their role in a global community. A better understanding of the potential use of technology as a tool for civic debate and discussion may help school-based citizenship education become more relevant. Consulting with youth on their educational needs and visions of citizenship would advance research in this area while also embodying the collective responsibility that this type of education is meant to inspire.

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