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**Citizenship, Literacy and ESL: Two Recent Studies**

**Introduction**

Too often, in my opinion, curricular documents pertaining to English as a Second Language (ESL) and Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) do not treat the topic of citizenship at the basic levels of English language and literacy proficiency. A prime example of this is the *Canadian Language Benchmarks* (CLB).

Not long ago, I reported a qualitative case study that shed light on how a sample of adult ESL learners within a LINC program were constructing new national identities in the context of the challenges associated with immigration (Fleming, 2010). Specifically, this study examined the conceptions of Canadian citizenship expressed by working-class Punjabi-speakers living in a Vancouver suburb and attending evening ESL classes provided by the local public school district. Based on a broader sampling of ESL learners at the site derived from a questionnaire previously administered with 114 respondents, a set of preliminary start questions were determined in-depth interviews of 25 participants. After preliminary questions focusing on the context of their immigrant experiences, the participants were polled on the way in which they defined citizenship. Space here does not allow a more detailed overview of the data pertaining to this earlier study I traced how the common threads among their conceptions of citizenship compared to those embedded within official, national assessment and curriculum documents related to the CLB. My research revealed significant gaps between the experiences of these immigrants and what is implied in these documents. While these students conceptualized citizenship in terms of multiculturalism, civic rights, and a respect for legal responsibilities, the CLB constructed what might be considered infantilised conceptions of second language learners. As noted below, with the exception of a couple of trivial examples, citizenship was treated, if at all, only at the very highest levels of English language proficiency. I made this argument on the basis of an analysis of the 2000 version of the CLB (Pawlikowska-Smith, 2000). As briefly outlined below, although the 2012 version of the CLB (Hajer & Kaskens, 2012) is an improvement, it seems that this fundamental weaknesses in regards to citizenship still exists in the new document.

In this article, I look more closely at what I consider to be positive alternatives by reporting a second study I recently conducted that asked veteran LINC teachers in Ontario and BC whether or not their treatment of citizenship and literacy changed over the course of their careers. Although I do draw below upon my earlier study in order to highlight some of the needs learners have in terms of citizenship education, what needs to deemphasized here is that the findings from this second study indicate how concrete classroom methods can link the skill-based literacy needs of learners to a justice orientation towards citizenship as outlined below. I argue that second language educators should avoid the temptation to automatically link citizenship education too closely to higher levels of English language proficiency.

This paper first reiterates my critique of the 2000 version of the CLB (Pawlikowska-Smith, 2000) from my first study, and adds a few remarks in reference to the 2012 version (Hajer & Kaskens, 2012). It then presents a summary of the theoretical frameworks for the second study: the notions of justice-orientated citizenship and critical literacy. This is followed by an outline of the methodology and findings related to this second study. I conclude with a discussion of the implications for teaching practice.

**The Canadian Language Benchmarks 2000**

*The Canadian Language Benchmarks 2000: ESL for Adults* (Pawlikowska-Smith, 2000) was an attempt to define English language proficiency, arranged in 12 levels, from beginner to full fluency. As Norton Pierce and Stewart (1997) noted, the policy initiatives that gave rise to this document were framed around the need to develop a systematic and seamless set of English language training opportunities out of the myriad of federal and provincial programs that existed previously.

The bulk of the content found in both the 2000 and 2012 versions of the CLB was arranged for each level in a series of matrixes that correspond to the four language skills. Each benchmark (or level) contains a general overview of the tasks to be performed upon completion of the level, the conditions under which this performance should take place, a more specific description of what a learner is expected to do, and examples and criteria that indicate that the task performance has been successful. These are complex matrixes, as one might expect from a document attempting to describe how an English language learner’s abilities evolve from basic competency to high proficiency.

In the entire 2000 document there were only three references to tasks or competencies that could be said to be broadly associated with citizenship. These were "understand rights and responsibilities of client, customer, patient and student" (p. 95); "indicate knowledge of laws, rights, etc." (p. 116); and "write a letter to express an opinion as a citizen" (p. 176). Unfortunately, these competencies are not elaborated upon further, and so remain rather vague and incomplete. It was disappointing to see such a small number of references to citizenship in such an important document. In many ways, in fact, it was very revealing to note what was missing, especially in terms of how language is connected to exercising citizenship. For example, the word *vote* did not appear in the document.

In addition, the document represented (through admission and omission) good citizens as obedient workers. This can be seen in the fact that issues related to trade unions and collective agreements were given next to no attention in the document. References to labour rights, such as filing grievances or recognizing and reporting dangerous working conditions, were nonexistent. Employment standards legislation is covered in a singular vague reference to knowing about the existence of minimum wage legislation. The 2000 CLB had no references to other aspects of standards of employment legislation, workers compensation, employment insurance, or safety in the workplace. At the same time, however, a lot of space in the document was devoted to participating in job performance reviews, giving polite and respectful feedback to one's employer, and participating in meetings about trivial issues, such as lunchroom cleanliness.

The document did represent language learners as having rights and responsibilities. However, these were almost exclusively related to being good consumers. Learners were to understand their rights and responsibilities as a “client, customer, patient and student” (p. 95), but not as a worker, family member, participant in community activities, or advocate. As I have discussed elsewhere on the basis of empirical evidence taken from a LINC site (Fleming, 2010), adult English language learners enrolled in programs informed by the CLB often complain about consistently having been denied overtime pay, access to benefits, forced to work statutory holidays, or being fired without cause. It was also disconcerting to note the limitations placed on the few references to citizenship noted above and the manner in which they were often couched. Only one of the three instances noted above (writing a letter) provided a view of citizenship as active engagement (albeit fairly limited). The other two were decidedly individualistic, vague, passive and abstract. No content linked citizenship to collective action or group identity.

What was even more significant was the way in which forms of exercising citizenship were connected to levels of English language proficiency. All three of the above competencies that referred to citizenship occurred at the very highest benchmark levels, at the point at which one is writing research papers at universities. In this way, the document implied that opinions not expressed in English had little value and that voting not informed by a high level of proficiency is an activity that did not warrant much engagement. Quite frankly, one is reminded of the ways in which voting rights have been denied in other jurisdictions on the basis of low levels of education.

**The Canadian Language Benchmarks 2012**

The new version of the CLB (Hajer & Kaskens, 2012) is the result of an extensive series of processes designed to establish the validity and reliability of descriptors included within the document. Comparisons were first made with the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (Council of Europe, 2011), the *ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines* (American Council for the Teaching of Foreign Languages, 2012),and the *L'Échelle québécoise des niveaux de compétence en français des personnes immigrantes adultes* (Ministère de l'Immigration et des Communautés culturelles, 2006). The document was then subjected to field validation and checked against the *Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing* (American Education Research Association, 1999).

In contrast to the introduction found within the 2000 version, the new version is more forthright about claims that it is designed to be “a national standard for planning curricula for language instruction in a variety of contexts” (Hajer & Kaskens, 2012, p.v). However, the document still claims not to endorse a specific instructional method. In my estimation, this is somewhat disingenuous since the new version, like the previous one, exhibits many hallmarks of the communicative approach, including task-based exemplars and an explicit endorsement of Bachman’s model of communicative language ability (1990). In my estimation, much of my critique of the 2000 version of the document from a language-testing standpoint (Fleming, 2008) still holds.

I have argued elsewhere (Fleming, 2010) that exemplar tasks within assessment and curriculum documents in this context should be scrutinized carefully since they contain and represent privileged orientations that influence how teachers approach the treatment of curriculum content. Content that is held up as exemplars in such documents is privileged in the sense that it encourages particular orientations towards themes and discourages others. My purpose here is to outline a critique specifically of the citizenship content found with the new version of the CLB. The exemplar tasks that deal with citizenship represent privileged content that a teacher or curriculum writer is encouraged to reproduce and elaborate upon. These tasks are not devoid of ideology.

Although the focus on consumer rights is as dominant within the new version of the CLB as it was in the old, there has been the significant addition of content that refers to labour rights. Benchmark 5, for example, contains an exemplary task that requires an understanding of employment standards legislation (Hajer & Kaskens, 2012, p.89). Within benchmark 7 there is reference to pedagogical tasks in which one “participate[s] in a union meeting to discuss workload, wages and working conditions” (p.57). These are marked improvements for which the authors should be commended. As I argued previously, this aspect of civil rights was central to the concerns of the ESL learners I interviewed in my 2010 study.

However, it appears there are still problems within the new version of the CLB in terms of citizenship rights. By way of illustration, it is helpful to examine the use of the word vote, which is of pivotal importance when discussing notions of citizenship. As mentioned above, the word did not occur in the 2000 version, but voting is mentioned twice in the new document. One of these references is within the exemplar task in which a learner is expected to “listen to an all-candidates’ debate during an election campaign to analyze and evaluate arguments presented by each candidate and determine which candidate to vote for” (Hajer & Kaskens, 2012, p.35). The other reference to voting is almost identical in content and appears on the same page. This is an improvement over the previous version of the CLB, which contained (as mentioned above) no reference to voting at all. Unfortunately, both of these references in the new version of the CLB are found in the listening framework at benchmark 12, the highest in the document. In my estimation, my previously expressed complaint that the document links citizenship rights to high levels of English language proficiency still holds. This is a disappointment to me, since this implies that citizenship rights are tasks that can only be fully realized once one is at the level of writing graduate level assignments, another exemplar task found within level 12. In the following, I turn to a discussion of the second of my two studies by outlining the first of my two theoretical frameworks.

**Justice-Orientated Citizenship**

As I have argued elsewhere (Fleming, 2008), citizenship historically been a common component in Canadian ESL programming. As Crick (2007) makes clear, debates about how to define citizenship are still central in the academic literature. These debates have also found a central place in the research literature pertaining to Canadian English as a Second Language (ESL) provision (Derwing, 1992; Derwing & Thomson, 2005). They are increasingly marked by nuanced treatment of how being a citizen can be actively taken up as a participatory role, rather than as a passive status simply conferred by a nation state (Kennedy, 2007). In fact, Lankshear and Knobel (1997) make the case that meaningful citizenship education can only take place within second language and literacy education when teachers deliberately adopt justice-orientated paradigms. This leads to the question of what such an orientation would look like.

Westheimer and Kahne (2004) have argued that education forcitizenship should encourage students to become critical citizens who explore the causes of social problems in order to work for substantial societal change. Within their framework, three different types of roles are possible as part of one’s civic identity: the *personally responsible citizen*, the *participatory citizen* and the *justice-orientated citizen*. The personally responsible citizen is honest, self-disciplined and hard working. A citizen with this type of orientation may contribute time or money to charitable causes and do such things as volunteering at a food bank over a holiday period. Voting is the quintessential activity that this form of citizenship takes. The second form of citizenship, the participatory citizen, is distinguished by the attributes of the first type, but is more involved and has a greater understanding of the inner workings of government and civic institutions. This citizen organizes charitable activities such as food banks and develops relationships that feature common understandings and commitments. A citizen with this type of orientation might seek political office for the purposes of making a contribution to existing institutions and traditions in uncritical ways. The third form of citizenship, the justice-orientated citizen, has the attributes of the other two, but has also developed a critical understanding of civic institutions and overall societal contexts. This type of citizen seeks fundamental change that addresses social inequality and redress in the context of pressing current issues but does not limit his or her activities to voting. Instead, citizens of this sort work to connect a critical analysis of pressing social issues to collective social action. As Westheimer and Kahne (2004) put it, justice-orientated citizens “critically assess social, political and economic structures and explore strategies for change that address root causes of problems” (p. 29).

**Critical Literacy**

Street (1984) points out that literacy is more than a simple set of skills centred on coding and decoding text. Rather, it is a form of social practice in which multiple forms of text are negotiated and critically examined through explorations of the relationships between language practice, power relations and identity. In general, Papen (2005) has noted that it is important to understand how literacy is practiced within everyday life beyond the institutional restraints of school and work. Literacy practice takes place at the personal level in the home, family and community. In addition, a critical examination of contemporary literacy practice must also take into account the enormous change and variability exhibited by the emerging globalized and digital age (New London Group, 1996). At the level of concrete practice, Dionne (2010) recommends that teachers follow a set of guidelines originally formulated by the literacy theorist Lenski (2008):

• examine the representation of various groups in the text,

• understand that texts offer a particular view of the world,

• analyze the methods used to transmit the message,

• take into consideration the power of the language used by the author,

• read the text from different perspectives,

• encourage students to take a stand on the author’s statements,

• provide students with the opportunity to consider and clarify their own points of view,

• provide students with the opportunity to take social action.

In recent years, the influence of critical literacy theory has been felt within second language education literature. Morgan and Ramanathan (2005), for example, recommend that ESL teachers should adopt a critical orientation towards literacy and “advocate a pluralized notion of literacies and multiliteracies [in order] to help students negotiate a broader range of text-types and modes of persuasion, not only via print, but also sound, images, gestures, spaces, and their multimodal integration” (p. 152). Others within this literature note that pluralized notions of literacy should be viewed as being “socially and historically constructed within particular relations of power” (Norton, 2008, p. 49) and that the ultimate goal of looking at literacy in this way is to enhance learner empowerment (Pennycook, 2007).

**Methodology**

The research question guiding the overall study was “how do veteran ESL and literacy teachers understand the purposes of ESL and literacy education”. The University of Ottawa’s Ethical Review Board approved the ethical protocols for the study. The eight participants were recommended to me by the supervising managers of two large public school continuing education departments in Canada. One was in Ontario, the other in British Columbia. Each administrator was asked to identify four long-serving instructors who were or had recently been employed in both ESL and literacy adult programs in their respective departments. In the interests of clarity, I have outlined each participant’s work experience in my findings section below. Participants’ experience and attitude towards citizenship education are summarized in appendices 1 and 2.

Semi-structured interviews were the only method of data collection. Each participant was interviewed once, for an average of an hour to an hour and a half, at a place and a time of their convenience. Informed consent prior to these interviews was obtained from participants after they had been supplied with a statement that outlined the purposes of the research and contained a copy of the interview prompts that were to be used. The interviews were conducted either face-to-face (in the case of the Ontarian participants), or over the telephone (in the case of the participants in British Columbia).

Although an initial start list of questions was utilized (see below), the interviews were conducted informally. The participants were first asked to describe the highlights of their careers and then encouraged to provide definitions of ESL and literacy. The interviews then focused on what the participants believed to be the overall purposes of these forms of education. Finally, the participants were asked about how their understandings changed over time and encouraged to provide concrete examples from their teaching, particularly in how their instructional experiences were shaped by their conceptions of citizenship. The start questions were:

* Please tell me about your career path?
* Why did you go into continuing education?
* How did you get your training?
* Can you tell me about some of your most memorable moments teaching?
* What kind of challenges have you had as a teacher?
* How would you define ESL acquisition?
* How would define literacy acquisition?
* What, in your opinion, are the purposes of ESL instruction?
* How would you define citizenship?
* What role does citizenship play in your instruction?
* What, in your opinion, are the purposes of literacy instruction?

The interviews were audio taped and then transcribed. Coding was subsequently conducted through the use of NVivo Qualitative Research (QSR, 2012) software. Coding was conducted in terms of identifying emerging themes and patterns that were related to demographic information, training, teaching experiences, career paths, opinions as to the purposes of ESL and literacy instruction and conceptualizations of citizenship.

**Findings**

In the subsections below, I provide quotes from the interviews for each of the eight respondents to support the claims I make in regards to my findings.

*First Participant*

My first interview was with a long-time literacy practitioner who at the time of this study was serving in an executive capacity for one of the largest provincial literacy organizations in the country. This practitioner had been involved in ESL and literacy education for over 15 years as a teacher, program director and curriculum writer.

This participant noted that a recently published research report (Ontario Literacy Coalition, 2007) identified serious confusion and overlap in the knowledge base related to the fields of ESL and literacy education around definitions and terminology. As the participant stressed, the confusion associated with this overlap is not new. She, in fact, remembered discussing these issues at the beginning of her career. She stressed the need to make distinctions between these types of programs.

This respondent noted that the confusion related to the overlap between ESL and literacy has had serious practical implications in terms of how citizenship is treated. Although “citizenship is extremely important” in both ESL and literacy education, she felt that one should tailor-make curriculum development and programming appropriately for the two fields. Learners born in Canada and immersed in the predominant culture have different citizenship education needs than those born elsewhere. She argued that clear definitions could streamline how citizenship is treated in both fields, stressing “we have to make a lot more connections between different kinds of programs and citizenship”.

For this participant, justice-orientated citizenship lay at the core of literacy education. As she put it:

This is what the value of literacy is. It is about citizenship. It is about how you get involved, how you understand what your community is, what it is as a citizen, what you are entitled to, what you should be giving back and the whole concept of citizenship at large.

Moreover, according to this participant, learners from lower socio-economic backgrounds need to be shown that their desires for social change were “legitimate”. In terms of Westheimer and Kahne’s (2004) framework, this teacher strongly endorsed a justice-orientated notion of citizenship and a critical orientation towards literacy as a form of social practice along the lines recommended by Street (1984).

*Second Participant*

My second participant taught elementary school for six years before entering adult ESL and literacy education. She then taught employability skills at a community college level before taking on a supervisory role in literacy programs at the school board. She had several decades' worth of experience in literacy programs. At the time of our interview she was concluding 5 years experience in a program designed to assist foreign trained professions gain the credentials needed to access the Canadian labour market.

This participant corroborated many of the things my first respondent noted, especially in terms of the importance of making a differentiation between the needs of ESL and literacy learners. She mentioned that when she was first employed at the school district, “we were fortunate because there was a distinction between literacy and ESL.” This meant that literacy students could be streamed into classes that more effectively met their needs.

In connection to this, this participant had specific ideas about the links between literacy and citizenship. She noted that for many students who lack literacy skills, issues related to citizenship are “really foreign to their personal lives. [Citizenship] is something they haven’t considered because they are in a day-to-day struggle, so they don’t see things from other perspectives and what their role or responsibility is as a Canadian.” This participant thus noted that the economic pressures on these learners and their limited access to more sophisticated forms of media give them a restricted sense of the overall forces at play in society. By implication, then, she noted that limits to literacy are limitations on citizenship.

The participant stressed that literacy education must not be limited to reading and writing skills, but must also engage learners in an awareness of what happens in society. As she put it, “it’s a consciousness raising kind of thing.” The participant stressed that this would mean, for example, that teachers must find specific ways to discuss voting rights in the classroom through the context of the concrete issues affecting one’s learners and their community. This particpant thus closely linked critical forms of literacy to justice-orientated forms of citizenship. Thus, similarly to the first participant in this study, in terms of Westheimer and Kahne’s (2004) framework, this teacher strongly endorsed a justice-orientated notion of citizenship and a critical orientation towards literacy (Street, 1984).

*Third Participant*

Although the third respondent had been trained as an ESL teacher, most of her twenty years of work experience in programs was as a supervisor of joint ESL/literacy programs. As part of her duties, she was conducting a multitude of training workshops for instructors. She noted that in her estimation second language literacy learners do not simply lack graphic language skills. They also quite commonly have limited vocabulary and an incomplete command of syntax in the target language. In addition, these learners lack an understanding of the culture of the surrounding social environment. Literacy learners whose first language is English, on the other hand, usually possess a command of common vocabulary and have few problems understanding anything that an interlocutor says to them. Significantly, these other learners identify themselves as belonging to the surrounding culture. For these reasons, this participant believed that it was important to cover citizenship explicitly for the foreign-born learners in her classes.

Although this participant conceptualized literacy as being more than a set of decoding skills, she did not stress critical notions related to the interrogation of the underlying assumptions inherent within texts. Significantly, in terms of my focus here, she did not emphasize justice-orientated forms of citizenship.

*Fourth Participant*

The fourth participant in this study had over ten years teaching experience in both ESL and literacy education. In addition, at the time of the interview she had worked for five years as an editor of a national magazine that focused on literacy. This participant started her career as a volunteer tutor in the school district’s ESL program and only gradually moved into literacy education through a pilot program designed to strengthen the writing skills of second language learners. Her employment became permanent when that pilot was expanded into a full-scale literacy program.

This participant told me that many beginning ESL classes typically developed focus on broadly-based notions of literacy because of the needs of particular learners, noting that many immigrants from poorer backgrounds or warzones often have had limited experience in formal classroom situations. Literacy could not be conceptualized in these circumstances simply in terms of skills. She provided me with an example from the start of her teaching career of a class that was designed to develop the oral English skills of Gambian immigrants. As their teacher, she found that her students lacked the ability to attend to classroom tasks, goals setting, cognitive restructuring and self-evaluation. This participant felt that she could turn to skill-based instruction only after her students had “learned how to learn” in a classroom setting.

The participant made the link between literacy and citizenship explicit by noting that literacy helps one clarify

how you feel about yourself as a part of this community and a part of this place, it is about the stuff that happens around the learning to read. As people learn to read, they start to analyze class and privilege. One of the things that people do in literacy programs is they start to make connections.

In ways that were similar to the first and second participants, this fourth participant strongly endorsed a justice-orientated notion of citizenship and a critical orientation towards literacy.

*Fifth Participant*

The fifth participant had taught extensively in both the ESL and literary components of her school district’s Continuing Education Program before becoming its administrator. She had earned a Master in Curriculum Studies and was working on her doctorate at the time of the interview. She emphasized that an ESL classroom is “a very complex classroom environment to teach in” because one is not only dealing with the nuts and bolts of the English language [but also with the] very really needs the students have in terms of settlement, day to day life, frustrations and struggles.” Given the diversity of needs of the learners in these classrooms, covering literacy involves helping them with such basic skills as the physical mechanics of writing as well as deciphering the messages contained within advanced technological media.

For this participant, dealing with citizenship meant helping learners make an “inquiry into the culture being of Canadian and what it means to be a Canadian.” In her program, as she expressed it, “we most certainly do not limit ourselves to teaching to a citizenship test that focuses on such objective facts as the names of provincial capitals or the date of Confederation. Rather, teachers should interweave principles related to “participatory citizenship into everything they do”, so as to help students who are becoming Canadian and “attempting to navigate in our culture and sort of juggling their own culture at the same time.” In terms of Westheimer and Kahne’s (2004) framework, this teacher endorsed a participatory notion of citizenship. Although it might not be termed fully critical in the way in which Street (1984) uses the term, this teacher showed an orientation that went beyond a skill-based notion of literacy.

*Sixth Participant*

The sixth participant started her career 34 years prior to the interview as a high school teacher in Kuwait where she taught grades 11 and 12 English. At the time of the interview, she had lived and taught adult ESL in Canada for eleven years. One thing that this respondent stressed was the extreme variability of the learners that the teachers in her setting faced in their classes. There were “a lot of challenges [because] the needs [of these students] were quite different.” This meant that teachers in this context have “to have different preparations for different students.” For some students, “holding a pen or pencil was pretty challenging.” Others “could read perfectly well but needed conversation skills.”

Literacy programs, like the one in which this participant taught, were designed for students who “didn’t really get the kind of education they needed.” As a result, these students needed a “place where they could come and have a safe learning environment.” Thus, literacy teachers had to spend considerable time paying attention to the special needs of these learners and avoid developing curricula in which language was rigidly defined or linear. Such classes had to be flexible both in terms of content and delivery.

Part of this participant’s mandate was to prepare students for the multiple choice citizenship tests that featured the set of normative “facts” that the fifth participant described. However, in a similar fashion, this sixth participant stressed the need to go beyond these tests in order to develop students’ own thinking about what it means to be Canadian. This participant gave a multitude of examples from her classrooms in which she organized debates and mock elections.

Just prior to the interview, this participant and her colleagues delivered a month-long unit plan that involved the entire school, from the lowest to the highest levels in terms of English language proficiency. In preparation, these teachers had to select and adapt material that was suitable linguistically and thematically. They had to design activities that, while providing citizenship information didactically, also allowed for the maximum amount of discussion and debate around the issues that the learners wanted to engage in. In addition, these teachers invited actual local candidates for a forthcoming provincial election to speak to the student body and then organized an election for the school’s student council that featured debates on local issues of real pertinence. Most of the learners who participated in this activity were at the very basic levels of English language proficiency. These activities used mock election material supplied by Elections Canada, involved a multitude of local civic leaders from various points of view and explored issues of real and burning concern within the local community. Issues included the need for expanded health services, the lack of workplace safety inspections and the importance of addressing domestic and drug-related violence.

As this teacher explained, the overall purpose of this unit was to help students make independent and informed judgments about issues related to the local community and to Canada as a whole. In essence, these learners were exploring the meaning of:

[B]eing a good person, being a good citizen, and being a role model for others and bringing in the compassion and the generosity to help others, the vision for future… You need to have basic knowledge of what it is you are looking into, what the country needs… a good citizen would be a person who is doing his or her best for the betterment of humanity.

In terms of Westheimer and Kahne’s (2004) framework, this teacher appears to endorse a participatory notion of citizenship that is close to being justice-orientated. Again, although it might not be termed critical in Street’s (1984) definition, this teacher had an orientation that clearly went beyond skill-based notions of literacy.

*Seventh Participant*

The seventh participant had been teaching full time in an ESL program for about four years at the time of the interview. Previously she had taught part-time in a literacy program for the same school district and been a teachers’ aide in a local elementary school for about eight years. When asked whether there is a skill component to literacy, this teacher strongly emphasized that “it is more than that.” She indicated that literacy instruction does have a skill-based dimension, but that there is a second level that “is like trying to invent a third language” in which students learn self-confidence and autonomy. As this teacher expressed it, “confidence, yes, because if learners feel they are less competent… they cannot articulate their rights and needs”. This teacher showed an orientation that went beyond a skill-based notion of literacy and clearly linked this to a justice-orientated notion of citizenship.

*Eighth Participant*

My eighth participant had been teaching in literacy and ESL programs for 21 years at the time of the interview. The class that she taught was specifically designed to meet the needs of learners who were at the basic levels of English language proficiency and/or literacy skills. Most of her students had no prior knowledge of English. Some spoke English as their first language but were not proficient in the mechanics of writing, others had very few literacy skills in their first or second languages.

This teacher noted that the multiple needs of her particular students led her to focus her class content on writing skills. As she put it, she was “making [her] lessons more towards formal practicable skills that they can immediately use: life skills”. This is because the literacy students in her class either had not or would not “do well in the regular school system or have dropped out for one reason or another” and needed more practical and less abstract content in their classes.

It is important to note that this teacher also took her class to the school’s computer lab once a week for the express purpose of exposing her students to different modes of writing. She assigned basic readings and writing tasks that made systematic use of Internet and word processing technology. Thus, although it could be argued that she had a skill-based notion of literacy, she encouraged the development of these skills in multimodal directions.

This teacher placed considerable emphasis on teaching the factual content of the Canadian citizenship test discussed above by the fifth participant and, in fact, taught a special half-hour class most mornings that focused on memorizing the answers to the multiple-choice questions that constituted that test. Nonetheless, this teacher participated fully in the activities described above by the sixth respondent, activities that were designed to inculcate a participatory orientation towards citizenship.

Given the needs of her particular students, this teacher had adopted what she felt by necessity was a skill-based definition of literacy. However, her classroom practice included activities that were designed to expand the skills of her students into technologically based modes of expression. In addition, her classroom practice, by virtue of her involvement in the school activities around elections described above, also emphasized a participatory orientation towards citizenship. At first glance, this teacher could be characterized as having imposed limits to how both literacy and citizenship were treated in her classroom. However, I think it important to emphasize that this teacher believed that these limits were a function of the basic proficiency and skill levels of her students. She did not believe that these were universal or static limits.

**Conclusion: Implications for Practice**

To summarize, half of the participants in this study (1,2,4,7) endorsed justice-orientated versions of citizenship and critical orientations towards literacy. They also made strong links between the two. Two respondents (5,6) endorsed participatory notions of citizenship and adopted positions that went well beyond skill-based orientations towards literacy. One respondent (3) conceived of literacy as being more than a set of decoding skills. However, she did not did emphasize participatory or justice-orientated forms of citizenship. Another participant (8) had a skill-based definition of literacy and a “fact-based” notion of citizenship. Nonetheless, this teacher conducted multimodal literacy activities and was involved in school participatory citizenship education projects.

As I have noted above, citizenship has been a common programming component historically in ESL education. The majority of the veteran teachers who participated in this study believe that justice-orientated citizenship and critical notions of literacy can be utilized even at the most basic levels of English language proficiency. Although the teachers in this study might not have explicitly referred to the theoretical models espoused by such theorists as Westheimer and Kahne (2004), the majority adopted very similar curricular orientations to the ones these academics recommend. There is no need, as the two versions of the CLB do, to link citizenship to high levels of English language proficiency. As the veteran teachers in this study understood, citizenship education does not have to consist of rote learning of a static set of facts in preparation for a test.

In the concrete example given by the sixth participant above, citizenship education can be treated at a very basic level of English language proficiency. The issues that were dealt with in the activities this teacher and her colleagues led, as noted above, were important and concrete to the learners in the program under study. As this teacher explained, this collaborative activity involved elaborate and creative planning, especially in terms of language scaffolding and the adaptation of teaching material. However, despite this extra work, these activities were highly rewarding because they assisted learners in the development of independent and informed opinions about concrete issues that were at once local, provincial and national. This was accomplished regardless of the level of English language proficiency of the learners in question.

To deny learners opportunities to explore meaningful and active civic engagement on the basis of their English language proficiency is to do great disservice not only to them, but also to Canada. Most of the second language adult learners will not reach the point at which they will write graduate papers, as is described in level 12 of the CLB. Instead, learners have been engaged with notions of active citizenship and a commiserate treatment of critical literacy skills long before they leave their classrooms. Quite frankly, I believe that Canada does not need immigrant learners whose understanding of citizenship is confined to the rote memorization of provincial capitals or blind obedience to local power structures. Second language educators need newcomers who utilize critical literacy skills (both traditional and digital) to engage in justice-orientated forms of citizenship. In this way, the nation moves forward.

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**Appendices**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Participant | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| Experience | 15yrs+ as a teacher, program supervisor, curriculum writer and director of a literacy organization. | 6yrs elementary teaching experience; 20yrs+ adult literacy, ESL teaching and supervisory experience. | 20yrs+ years as teacher, professional development trainer and supervisor in joint ESL/literacy programs. | 10yrs+ experience in both ESL and literacy education; 5yrs+ as editor of a national literacy magazine; 5yrs+ as volunteer community tutor. |
| Attitude towards citizenship education | Explicitly stated justice-orientated notion of citizenship that was linked to a critical orientation towards literacy. | An implicit justice-orientated notion of citizenship and a critical orientation towards literacy. | Although conceived of literacy as more than a set of decoding skills, did not stress critical notions or justice-orientated forms of citizenship. | Explicitly stated justice-orientated notion of citizenship that was linked to a critical orientation towards literacy. |

Appendix 1: Ontario-based Participants

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Participant | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 |
| Experience | 10yrs+ ESL and literary teaching experience; 6yrs+ in a supervisory role. | 21yrs teaching high school and 11yrs+ in adult ESL and literacy. | 8yrs+ as ESL and literacy teacher’s aide and 4yrs+ as an ESL teacher. | 21yrs+ in adult ESL and literacy. |
| Attitude towards citizenship education | Endorsed a participatory notion of citizenship and an orientation that went beyond skill-based definitions of literacy. | Participatory notion of citizenship that came very close to being justice-orientated; a definition of literacy that went clearly beyond skill-based notions. | An orientation towards literacy that went beyond skill-based notions; clearly linked this to a justice-orientated notion of citizenship. | Although defined literacy as skills and citizenship as factual knowledge, engaged in activities that stressed participatory citizenship and multimodal forms of literacy. |

Appendix 2: British Columbia-based Participants

**Biography**

Douglas Fleming is an Associate Professor of Second Language Education at the University of Ottawa. His research focuses on ESL and citizenship. He supervises and teaches at the graduate and undergraduate levels on research methodology, current social and political issues in second language research, teaching methods, program development, multicultural citizenship education, equity and language policy. He earned his doctorate in Language and Literacy Education at the University of British Columbia. He has also had 20 years experience as a public school continuing education teacher, consultant, administrator and curriculum writer in Ontario and British Columbia.

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