A framework to explore lifelong learning: the case of the civic education of civics teachers

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This study investigates learning about civics and citizenship throughout individuals' lives (lifelong) and across various pedagogical settings (lifewide). A basic hypothesis is that civics teachers, among all social actors, are particularly well positioned for engaging in this type of introspective exercise because they are both familiar with civics and politics and also with teaching and learning processes. The lifelong civic learning of civics teachers was examined in the different settings in which they acquire their knowledge, values, skills and ideological frameworks, and to understand the relative weight of each one in their overall learning process. This study also coincides with the implementation of a new provincial civics course for grade 10 students in Ontario, Canada during the 2000–1 school year. This case study consists of interviews with 15 social studies teachers who have taught the new civics course in Ontario. One of the clearest findings of the study is the powerful influence of the experience of teaching and of early family socialization on the acquisition of civic knowledge, skills and values, and on the development of political beliefs. Civic engagement and political participation were also considered an important source of civic learning, particularly in relation to the acquisition of civic and political skills. This is a finding that deserves further exploration, because our understanding of social movement learning remains limited. The findings suggest the promotion of lifelong citizenship learning entails the creation and nurturing of inclusive democratic spaces that have particularly high civic educational potential.

Introduction

Where do we acquire our civic values, attitudes, knowledge and skills throughout our lives, and what is the relative impact of each setting? This was the initial question that prompted this study. It was not an easy departing point, because the acquisition of competencies and dispositions such as civic knowledge, democratic values, political skills or ideological frameworks is a long process that starts early in life and is reshaped over time with every new learning experience. From a lifelong citizenship learning perspective, it is possible to suggest that we build our
understanding and assumptions about the political world from a hodgepodge of ideas and learning experiences. Many of these learning experiences are difficult to recall and to articulate, particularly if they belong to the realm of informal learning. Often, informal learning experiences are unconscious, and the knowledge, skills and attitudes acquired through them are tacit. As Polanyi (1966) nicely put it, tacit learning refers to those things that we know but we cannot tell. Not only is it difficult to express this type of knowledge to another person, but it is also difficult to identify the particular setting and circumstances of the learning experience. At the same time, the most interesting and significant learning tends to be informal, unplanned and incidental, as part of people’s everyday lives (Polanyi 1958, La Belle 1986, Foley 1999, Schugurensky 2001a).

It was our hypothesis that, among social actors, civics teachers were particularly well positioned for engaging in this type of introspective exercise because they are both familiar with the subject matter (civics, politics and democracy) and also with teaching and learning processes. Therefore, we reasoned, they could more easily identify and reflect on their civic learning experiences than could many other groups (probably even more than professional politicians). Then, we reformulated our initial question as follows: what are the different settings in which civics teachers acquire their civic and political knowledge, values, skills, and ideological frameworks, and what is the relative weight of each one in their overall learning process?\(^1\)

The study frames learning as a social process, the result of a constant interaction between the self and the context. Thus, in our framework learning is an active and historically specific process that can take different forms in a variety of sites or settings (Dewey 1909, Vygotsky 1978, Bandura 1977). For the purpose of this research, ‘settings’ are understood as sources of civic/political learning, be they formal, non-formal or informal. Another way to put it is that learning settings are institutional or organizational agencies that may or may not have educational purposes, but by the nature of interactions that take place there they act as pedagogical spaces. Although for us lifelong learning encompasses all different learning experiences acquired from cradle to grave in many settings and in different learning domains, in this exploratory study we did not attempt to uncover every possible learning experience in all pedagogical spaces. Rather we attempted to identify and map out teachers’ key civic learning experiences in a few selected settings and learning domains.

To guide the exploration, 10 settings were chosen: (1) family socialization; (2) elementary schooling; (3) secondary schooling; (4) pre-service training; (5) higher education programmes; (6) the media; (7) non-formal education (including in-service teacher training, professional development, adult education courses and workshops); (8) political engagement and community involvement; (9) the teaching of civics; and (10) other sources. For each setting, we encouraged teachers to retrieve, uncover and critically examine their learning experiences in five selected domains or areas of learning: (a) civic knowledge; (b) civic values; (c) civic and political skills; (d) political ideology; and (e) pedagogical strategies for the teaching of civics. While in the original design of the study the variable ‘teaching of civics’ was conceptualized only as a learning domain (or area of competency), as a result of teachers’ narratives it was also conceived of as a source of civic learning.

Although table 1 may suggest a chronological sequence and that the interview was structured as a life history, it is pertinent to clarify that we do not conceptualize lifelong learning as a continuous, uninterrupted and linear accumulation of
learning experiences, but as a messy complex of multiple lifelong and lifewide learning experiences (ranging from early family socialization to formal education to active engagement in social movements) that can complement and contradict each other. Based on prior research on primary and secondary socialization, we assumed that the learning experiences sought after by interviewees—and even those unintentionally acquired by them—do often reinforce each other, but occasionally can be contradictory in nature, creating significant tensions and conflicts to the learner. Based on this literature, we also raised the hypothesis that family socialization would be an important source for civic and political learning. We did not anticipate, however, that this would be recognized as the most significant source. Equally surprising was the negligible impact of pre-service training.

This article is organized in five sections. In the first section we discuss the concept of lifelong citizenship learning, and its connections with related concepts. The second section outlines the methodology and the characteristics of the sample. The next three sections deal with the main findings of the study, describing the learning experiences reported by interviewees in formal, informal and non-formal settings. The last section presents a summary, elaborates several conclusions and provides some recommendations for future research in this field.

### The debate over lifelong learning

During the last decade, the concept of lifelong learning has received considerable attention in policy and academic circles, particularly in the USA, Canada and Western Europe. For instance, in the year 2000 the first international conference on lifelong learning was celebrated in Australia, a Global Colloquium Supporting Lifelong Learning was held in the UK, and an international conference on lifelong learning as an affordable investment was jointly hosted by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the Canadian government in Ottawa.

In those events, in scholarly journals and in many other venues, much has been written and discussed in favour and against ‘lifelong learning’. However, these
debates tend to conflate two different dimensions of lifelong learning (one normative, one ontological) that should be distinguished in order to avoid confusion. In the normative dimension, lifelong learning is a concept that operates as a guiding principle for the development of educational policy. In its ontological dimension, lifelong learning is a concept that describes the simple fact that people learn many things in a variety of spaces throughout their lives, both inside and outside educational institutions. In general terms, normative discourses focus on the ways reality ‘should be’ whereas the ontological dimension is more concerned with exploring the ways reality ‘is’.

At the normative and policy level, lifelong learning is a contested territory in which a variety of questions are intensely debated. Among them are the following: how should societies organize themselves to promote learning among its members, and what should be the role of the public and the private sector? To what extent should these institutional arrangements and policies promote individual learning processes and to what extent collective learning processes? Which social groups (e.g. employers, unions, community groups, business groups, educators, government, learning communities, etc.) should participate in the definition of the content, methods and outcomes of the learning, and to what extent? Who should benefit primarily from this learning? What are the most appropriate accreditation systems for learning that are usually unrecognized by educational institutions and workplaces? And, lastly, one of the most contentious questions: Who should pay for it? At the ontological level, the questions are of a different nature and their answer usually demands empirical research that goes beyond schools. For instance, what, how and when do people acquire certain knowledge, skills, attitudes and values throughout their lives? How is the learning acquired in different educational settings (formal, non-formal and informal) internalized, adapted, challenged or rejected by learners? How do these different learning experiences interact with each other? Do different types of institutions and organizations promote different types of learning? Do current institutional arrangements for lifelong learning favour or hinder particular groups? These questions could focus on the learning of a particular trade or profession, a second language, a musical instrument or a sport. In our study, we focus on civic and political learning.

The normative and policy debate

In the normative debates on lifelong learning, we can identify at least three main schools of thought: human capital, neoliberalism and progressive humanism. In the human capital model, education is understood as a social investment in the training of employees for market needs. In this approach, lifelong learning is simply a new incarnation of previous attempts (using labels such as further education, continuing education, lifelong education, education permanente, etc.) to ‘recycle’ workers so they can catch up with the new technologies of the workplace. This model maintains a narrow focus on training but adds a new language that refers to the information society, knowledge management, global competitiveness and the like. The argument is that in the context of increasing globalization, and the ensuing technological, informational and work organization changes, what is needed in order to keep nations economically competitive is the training and development of flexible and autonomous workers. The broad concept
of lifelong learning in this framework is equated with professional development and professional development tends to be narrowly equated with job skills. In this sense, lifelong learning becomes merely ‘worklong’ learning (Hunt 1999, Church et al. 2000, Mojab and Gorman 2002).

The neoliberal (or market-oriented) conception of lifelong learning puts the onus and the responsibility for learning (including the financial responsibility) on the individual. In this model, people are not conceived of as citizens with the inalienable right to education funded and often also provided by the state, but as potential consumers of educational products and services whose right consists of choosing among several options in the marketplace. This goes beyond the classic human capital approach because in this model education is no longer considered as a social investment with economic returns, but as a commodity (Pannu et al. 1994). In this context, there is a concern among many in the educational community that the neoliberal conception of lifelong learning could lead, through a series of policies and programmes, to a shift from workplace training and state provision of public education to self-recovery or for-profit courses offered by private companies and paid by the learner in a competitive marketplace. It also raises the suspicion that the enthusiasm for lifelong learning espoused by many governments and international agencies (as well as the progressive language often used in official documents) is a façade to justify states’ cutbacks to adult education programmes and employers’ withdrawal from training programmes. In other words, lifelong learning can become an excuse for the public sector to resign its prime responsibility in educational provision and for employers to ‘pass the buck’ to employees in terms of training, increasing the gap between haves and have-nots (Hart 1996, Baptiste 1999, Hake 1999, Tobias 1999, Butler 2000, Gorman 2002, Grace 2002, Mojab and Gorman 2002, Rubenson 2002).

The progressive humanist tradition can be traced to the early 1970s, with the works of Ivan Illich (1971), Lengrand (1970), Freire (1970), and the influential UNESCO report Learning to Be (Faure 1972), among others. With different arguments and from different perspectives, they claimed that education for all could never be achieved within the confines of traditional education. This progressive tradition re-emerged during the 1990s in a variety of declarations and reports such as The Dakar Framework for Action: Education for All (World Education Forum 2000), the Hamburg Declaration (CONFNETEA 1997) and the Mumbai Statement (CONFNETEA V 1998). Additionally, the vision of what a new learning system may look like was particularly well articulated in the Report of the Delors Commission, Learning: The Treasure Within (Delors et al. 1996), which updated the Faure Commission Report and proposed four pillars for lifelong learning: Learning to Know, Learning to Do, Learning to Be, and Learning to Live Together. Coinciding with the release of the Delors Report, the European Union declared 1996 as the European Year of Lifelong Learning.

The progressive humanist tradition includes a broad range of ideologies in the centre-left spectrum (from liberals to marxists to anarchists). Among progressive activists, scholars and educators in this tradition, there is not consensus yet about the emancipatory (or oppressive) potential of the lifelong learning concept. For some, it is a concept that individualizes collective political movements, bolsters the cult of credentials, promotes competition and individual entrepreneurship as mantras, and further excludes marginalized groups. For others, lifelong learning has a liberating and transformative potential, but in order to release that potential
it should be shaped as an inclusive, holistic and critical learning project that supports learners as they negotiate changing life, learning and work conditions (Schuller 1998, Jarvis 2000, 2001, Gorman 2002, Grace 2002, Rubenson 2002). For instance, Elliot (2000) argues that lifelong learning has great potential for extending citizenship for women through a Freirean approach that encourages critical awareness, political skills and civic participation in formal academic institutions (e.g. Women’s Studies) and in informal settings (e.g. social movements and political activism). In the same vein, Aspin and Chapman (2000, 2001) call for identifying lifelong learning as a public good for the benefit and welfare of everyone in society. Their strategy consists of focusing on the intended outcomes of lifelong learning, reframing it as inherently good learning for life and for work, promoting simultaneously economic progress and development, personal fulfilment, social inclusiveness and democratic understanding.

In any case, at the normative level, the struggle among the different projects is for developing a discourse that captures the imagination of society and translates goals and visions into policies and programmes. To what extent lifelong learning can contribute to a project of emancipation, social transformation and democracy (or simply become another tool for retraining or just another commodity) will depend on the context and on the disposition and the relations of concrete actors in each context.

**Lifelong learning as social practice**

While the debate on what lifelong learning should be about is relevant, urgent and necessary, in this study we were interested in exploring the ontological dimension of lifelong learning rather than the normative one. This means that we are approaching lifelong learning not in terms of its ideal values, guiding visions or intended goals, but as a social practice in terms of an empirical and researchable reality. Indeed, as an ontological claim, lifelong learning that takes place among all individuals in all societies, regardless of the particular ideology of the government in turn, the specific funding arrangements or the political economy of the social formation, although the learning experiences are highly shaped by the political, economic and social context. In this case, we explored the self-perceptions of concrete learning subjects (teachers) about their lifetime learning about a few subject matters (civics, politics, democracy) in a particular social formation (an advanced capitalist democracy).

For the purposes of this study, the concept of learning is broader than the concept of education. Education is activity which has learning as a purpose. However, learning may occur without having it as an explicit purpose, even in schools (through a variety of institutionalized routines and practices). From our framework, lifelong learning includes formal, non-formal and informal learning experiences, be they intentional, incidental or unconscious. Understood as such, the concept of lifelong learning calls the attention of researchers to a reality that is often unrecognized by our tendency to identify learning with schools, formal curricula and diplomas: we learn from cradle to grave in multiple spaces, both inside and outside educational institutions. For this reason we made a special effort to explore with teachers their informal learning, which can be defined as ‘any activity involving the pursuit of understanding, knowledge or skill which occurs outside the curricula of educational institutions, or the courses or workshops
offered by educational or social agencies’ (Livingstone 1999). While the effects of formal civics courses, especially for children and youth, are well documented (Hahn 1998, Torney-Purta et al. 2001), the area of informal citizenship learning among adults is relatively unexplored.

In this regard, our study is a modest contribution to a better understanding of learning as an uninterrupted, complex and dynamic lifelong and lifewide process in which agency and structure constantly interact. Our inclusive model of lifelong learning, then, addresses the formal, non-formal and informal learning settings. Formal learning refers to the institutional system that goes from preschool to higher education, which is organized in a sequential fashion (entry to each level usually requires the diploma of the previous level), is controlled, regulated and/or funded by the state, and often has a prescribed curriculum. Non-formal education refers to all organized educational activities (e.g. workshops, short courses) that are outside of the formal education system, and can be organized by a variety of agencies such as government, professional associations, non-profits, business groups, churches or unions. Informal education is a residual category that encompasses the learning that occurs outside of formal and non-formal settings, in ‘everyday life’ (family, media, social movements, etc.) and is typically expressed in three main forms: self-directed learning, incidental learning and socialization (Schugurensky 2001a).

While discussed so far as discrete categories, it is important to emphasize that the three dimensions of learning are categories that interact and overlap with each other both conceptually and temporally. For instance, schools can be sites of formal learning (the official curriculum), non-formal learning (e.g. extracurricular activities such as after-hours programmes, chess clubs, etc.) and informal learning (hidden curriculum, peer interaction, etc.). Drawing on these concepts and insights, we suggest that civics teachers’ understanding of civics and politics is the result of the interaction of a variety of lifelong learning experiences. Indeed, the existing research reveals that teachers’ broad social and political worldview is consistent with their ideas about the purpose of education and the role of the teacher (Cornett 1990, Reid et al. 1998, Fickel 1999, Walkington and Wilkins 2000). The significance of this study is in the presentation of a holistic picture of school and out-of-school learning that together inform the civic knowledge, skills and attitudes of teachers, as well as their pedagogical methods. In our literature review, however, the empirical research on the civic learning of teachers is negligible. While teachers require aptitude in a range of these domains, they are seldom sufficiently acquired in a single pedagogical setting. Citizenship is particularly relevant in this regard because it is a social practice that inheres engagement in local, national and global public issues, which underscores the importance of lifewide learning for teaching. Indeed, it has been argued that civics teachers need to have more than academic knowledge about civics topics, as they should become ‘teacher democrats’ in terms of their commitment to democratic ideals and their participation in political and civic activities (Kennedy 1998).

Civic learning: an overview

Civic learning consists of the acquisition of a variety of attitudes, knowledge and skills, including tolerance to difference, the development of political efficacy, the
willingness to balance self-interest and the common good, the understanding of 
circulation of power and the working of public institutions, and the ability to 
deliberate, to make collective decisions or to influence the political process. 
Whereas this learning takes place in a great variety of settings, researchers tend to 
focus on a few specific areas, particularly family socialization, formal schooling and 
civic participation.

The family is considered one of the main sources of political socialization. In the 
classic study, Almond and Verba (1963) found that non-political authority patterns in 
the family have a strong influence on attitudes toward political participation. For 
instance, early socialization in a family that allows participation is more likely to build 
political efficacy and to promote political participation in adulthood. Linked to 
family dynamics, factors like the educational attainment of the parents, their cultural 
capital, their values and principles, and their levels of political participation tend to 
influence the level and type of participation of the next generation, and their 
ideological outlook (Berger and Luckman 1966, Niemi and Junn 1998).3

Almond and Verba (1963) also pointed out that formal education has the 
greatest influence on political attitudes and knowledge and is the single most 
powerful variable for predicting civic and political engagement. Studies on this area 
have shown education as having a significant, independent impact on political and 
social attitudes, on political participation and on political expertise. Since then, the 
accumulated research on this area shows a correlation between participation in 
formal education, political interest and knowledge, and political efficacy. However, 
the jury is still out on the nature of the ‘education effect’ (that is, what are the 
specific contents and processes of formal education that explain the correlation) 
and to what extent the correlation expresses a causal relationship, that is, whether 
the difference is caused by participation in formal education or by a third variable 
such as social class (Almond and Verba 1963, Stradling 1977, Ichilov 1990, 1998, 
Haste and Torney-Purta 1992, Parry et al. 1992, Putnam 1993, Niemi and Hepburn 
Hahn 1999, Torney-Purta et al. 1999, 2001). Likewise, research on the impact of 
school on political attitudes has included the role of the hidden curriculum 
There is also a long-standing debate in the research community about the impact 
of civics courses on political knowledge, attitudes and behaviours. While many 
researchers have not found a significant effect from civics courses on political 
knowledge or political participation (Langton and Jennings 1968, Merelman 1971, 
Stradling 1977, Braungart and Braungart 1998), recent studies strongly suggest that 
civics courses increase both political knowledge and the likelihood to participate in 
civic activities (Denver and Hands 1990, Niemi and Junn 1998). Moreover, when 
civics courses have open discussions in the classroom and the students feel 
comfortable, they are likely to foster greater civic participation and positive political 
attitudes later in life (Hahn 1998).

Research on civic learning also suggests that significant learning occurs through 
civic and political participation, be it in oppositional settings or in co-governance 
dynamics. Learning in oppositional settings is particularly intense in contested 
regimes,4 where the role of informal political socialization is particularly evident 
and much learning occurs outside of the schools, in the streets and in social 
movements. For instance, in apartheid South Africa, in many Latin American 
countries during the military era, or in today’s Palestine, children and adolescents
take a particularly active role in their own political socialization (Mazawi 1998, Barker 1999, Schugurensky 2002). Organizations such as neighbourhood councils, social clubs, political parties, religious institutions or voluntary associations can be powerful sites of political learning. Also, these organizations can positively influence the political participation of individuals, regardless of their formal education, especially if they have the opportunity to participate in political discussions, to practise political skills and to take relevant political actions (Bell 1990, Parry et al. 1992, Verba et al. 1993, Nie et al. 1996) As Emler and Frazer (1999) note, these organizations are often educational institutions. Dynamics of co-governance, like participatory democracy, that provide opportunities for citizenship participation through municipal programmes of shared decision making, are also informal ‘schools of democracy’ in which citizens learn democratic knowledge, skills and attitudes (Abers 1998, Pontual 1999, Schugurensky 2001b).

Two difficulties of empirical research with adults on the learning experiences in family or K-12 schooling are the often unconscious dimension of the socialization process and the fading of memory over time. Indeed, it is difficult to uncover the effects of this socialization because it involves those learning processes of which the learners are unaware, and because the past socialization of adults is particularly cloudy due to the number of years that have passed since their formal education. Memory is an obvious factor in the recollection of past socialization experiences, and it is not easy to distinguish them from the effect of other experiences that occurred since youth. These limitations were also present in this study.

The study: methodology and characteristics of the sample

The study consisted of in-depth interviews with 15 social studies teachers who have taught the new civics course in secondary schools of the province of Ontario, Canada. Civics is a half course for all grade 10 students that was mandated starting in the 2000–1 school year. Invitations to participate in the study were sent to social studies teachers through professional associations and school contacts. The interviews lasted between 45 minutes and one and a half hours.

The interviewees ranged in age between 25 and 55, with just over half between the ages of 25 and 34, and about two-thirds were female. All of the interviewees were born in Canada and two identified themselves as visible minorities. The teaching experience of the interviewees ranged between 1 and 30 years, with an average of 6.8 years, and just over one-half have earned graduate degrees; 79% of the interviewees have at least one parent with post-secondary education.

Teachers as citizens

All of the teachers interviewed in this study have participated in civic activities in the past, and two-thirds of them still participate in some type of civic activity today. Participation is not homogeneous, however, ranging in frequency, intensity and type. The most common past activities mentioned related to involvement in student government, involvement in electoral campaigns, volunteering and participation in teachers’ unions. Past civic activities could be organized in three main categories that are not necessarily exclusive: political, social (community service) and
educational. Overall, the most common current civic activities mentioned by teachers were participation in the teachers’ union, in political parties and volunteering in community organizations.

Among the activities mentioned by teachers that were of a political nature were letter-writing campaigns, protest marches, demonstrations and electoral politics. Participation in electoral politics included a variety of activities such as following the electoral debates and the platforms of the contending parties, active engagement in electoral campaigns, and voting regularly in elections in all three levels of government. The voting rate of this group for federal elections is much higher than the Canadian average, which was 61% in the last federal elections held in 2000.

The letter writing campaigns, for me those are ongoing. And I don’t know if you consider it but just being aware of the issues, going beyond headlines to really trying to inform myself.

I’m not a card-carrying member of any particular political party. At various times in my voting career I probably voted for all three of the main parties. As far as participation, I consider myself an active voter in all elections: provincial, federal and at the municipal level. I take an active interest in civic affairs, I’m engaged in the process.

I’ve been very active in politics as a supporter and sometimes member of a political party. I’ve worked in numerous elections—campaigning, canvassing. All three levels of government: municipal, provincial and federal. Since I was 13 years old, grade 9, I don’t think there’s been an election at any level that I haven’t been at least marginally involved in, sometimes greater, sometimes less, depending on a number of factors.

Another major area of reported civic activities was of a social nature, including community service, environmental work, volunteering with non-governmental organizations, working with youth and the elderly, and the like.

I volunteered with the Thornhill festival as part of the international Rotary group. And when I was much younger I used to help out with Jewish Women’s International. I volunteered as a figure skating coach for 10 years, and I volunteered during my university. I served dinner to underprivileged families one year at the Hope Foundation at Christmas time.

Activities belonging specifically to educational institutions included participation in student government (be it in high school or in university) or in the teachers’ union.

[I participated in the] . . . school council at my teachers’ union, and in my federation; the Black Student Union at my university. That’s it. With the federation of student unions at my university we did a lot of outreach.

My first year teaching, it was when all of this political stuff was going on between the boards of education and the government. So that’s when,
because I had more of a stake in it, I got more involved and I was part of the OSSTF [The Ontario Secondary School Teachers’ Federation] for Durham. Not now. I just went to the meetings, I didn’t actually do anything but I learned a lot. You know, those rallies that they had at Queen’s Park for the past couple of years, I’ve been to those to give my support.

In addition to the activities reported above, some teachers pointed out that teaching civics is itself a civic activity. For those teachers, making a daily effort to nurture the values and skills of good citizenship among the next generation, and trying to promote the development of an engaged, informed, critical and active citizenship, is a civic duty that they take seriously.

I guess that it’s hard to be a good citizen. It’s not really all that enjoyable. You volunteer your time and you think, am I really bettering society by doing this? I feel that I am doing something by teaching more than I ever did as a volunteer for anything. I see that as more important than what I did in the hospital.

I kind of see that teaching is a form of citizenship. It’s not sitting behind a desk. That’s what I do, that is my contribution. I am educating my students and I see that as a part of my active citizenship.

My public activities are when I go to work everyday. I teach kids about history and I have to interact with a large audience of my peers in a politicized environment. It’s a politicized environment at school.

**The civic learning of civic teachers**

As mentioned in the introduction, in this study teachers were asked to recollect their lifelong and lifewide civic learning experiences, and to assist them in this process of retrieval and identification of learning episodes, a variety of settings and domains were proposed. For the purposes of presenting the information, we will group the settings in three main categories: formal, informal and non-formal.

**Citizenship learning in formal settings**

The category of ‘formal settings’ refers to learning acquired in elementary, secondary and higher education. Higher education, in turn, includes community colleges, university programmes, teacher training and other degree or certificate courses. Formal education has been the site of most research on citizenship education, ranging from curriculum analysis to observation of teaching practices to large surveys of students’ civic knowledge and attitudes.

*Elementary school.* About two-thirds of the interviewees remember learning something about civics in elementary school. The other third could not remember anything about civics during their elementary years. This could be the result of a
lack of civic lessons, the individual’s memory about their elementary schooling, or because of the difficulty in distinguishing socialization experiences.

I don’t think we had a civics class *per se*. Other than the very basic, learning how to get along with people, just normal socialization . . . We had these men and women come and talk about being a good neighbour and watching out for one another.

For the most part, I don’t recall that there was anything in elementary school that really focused on ‘this is the government, the structure of your government and this is your role as a good Canadian citizen’.

All of those who did identify civic experiences named the transmission of values as the primary learning. The values of responsibility, obedience and loyalty were conveyed, often through extra-curricular activities, and emphasized specifically the importance of being a ‘good neighbour’, ‘contributing to society’, and the importance of national loyalty and allegiance to the Commonwealth. None of the interviewees could recall learning any specific civic skills or knowledge.

Not to be a burden to society, that was a general message. Do your best in order to not be a burden to taxpayers. The teacher would always talk about being a good person or a good citizen and that would fall under doing well in school, doing your work, not getting into trouble with the law, getting a good job and contributing to society.

I can remember a general feeling about this notion that there’s such a thing as moral standards or ethical standards that were to be adhered to, that volunteerism was a good thing, that you were a member of a community. So there’s a real sense of participation in things and making contributions and sacrifices was important. I think that’s something that I incorporated into my worldview.

Beyond rules, I don’t remember learning anything specifically about behaviours, like how you are supposed to behave. I’m sure we did field trips and things like that, but nothing had an impact on me in terms of learning about citizenship, learning about what’s expected of you.

Those who remembered having civics lessons described the traditional teaching methods as authoritarian and concerned with factual memorization, although there were notable exceptions. One teacher recalled having open, weekly discussions on current events and another remembered having political simulations and role-playing.

[My elementary teachers taught] not to allow any kind of dissent, or to discourage it, or to promote a kind of view that was the conventional wisdom. Just as a negative I suppose I try not to do those things because I always felt frustrated by that myself when I was a student.

We didn’t really have it as civics. We would have current events discussions and we had more of those in later elementary. I remember in grade 7 we would
have a kind of freewheeling current events discussion every Friday afternoon, which I looked forward to a lot.

When I was in grade 7 and 8, we did a project called the World project where we had to basically invent our own countries, elect our own presidents, have our own ministers. The whole class was split into groups of five or six. I don’t know about learning about politics like in the textbook like we’re learning here, but we were learning about politics in terms of what a minister does and we impeached our president so we learned stuff like that.

Secondary school. None of the interviewees stated that they had separate civics courses during their secondary education. Rather, civics was integrated in social science courses, especially history and government, and was generally limited to civic knowledge pertaining to the Canadian government or at best different types of government, and ignored citizenship rights and responsibilities. Civic skills and values were not cited as areas of learning although they were mentioned in association with extracurricular activities. Politics was incorporated in a few cases but was largely limited to occasional discussions of current issues and there was little skill training to prepare students for political participation.

While a few of the interviewees did not recall any civics lessons, most could describe lessons on Canadian government in their history courses or at least were aware that they learned about these topics somehow without recalling the specific courses.

We didn’t have any formal civics lessons but somehow we did learn about the Canadian political system and how the American system and the British system are similar and different. I’m not really sure, to tell you the truth, how we did learn that. It was never taught aside from or apart from history. But we did, at least I learned it.

Typically, however, history courses were more concerned with wars and nation-building than civics and politics.

I don’t remember anything from secondary school civics. We just talked about history, straight history. Junior history was wars and senior history was ancient and modern west and we never talked about government in it.

When civics was addressed, it usually depended on an individual teacher’s personal interest in politics and their willingness to set aside time to discuss current events and to express their own political opinions.

I had a number of history teachers in high school who like me were politically active and brought their political views into the classroom. They weren’t necessarily the same views that I had but at least it was good to see some teachers encourage active involvement and discussion of politics. The best history teachers I had were the ones who did that.

Several interviewees commented that they disliked the traditional, rote learning approach to teaching, which lacked opportunities for critical thinking. Important learning experiences were participation in extra-curricular activities and classes
that had field experiences (such as visiting the legislature in session), and lessons connected to real events:

I remember it being aristocratic, I remember it being blackboards and blackboards. My school was very academic and that’s what we did, sort of rote learning. We would see it, write it down. There wasn’t much discussion, you’d answer the questions and that’s it. The teacher would basically be teaching it to you or saying it to you. There wasn’t much room to talk about it. It was all one lecture.

There was never any connection to the real world. It was always just book learning. Just learn it so that you could write a test at the end of the unit. Except the environmental one, this was my favourite teacher of all time. He took us on all of these trips. We went out and we saw. If we were learning about something we went out and we experienced it. I liked that component.

We had a pretty dynamic teacher at the time who tried to take a lot of the stuff that was going on in the media into the classroom and I was already watching some of the stuff anyway. This was a natural connection, and I thought that was great because this was something that I had picked up myself at home and you don’t really see the relevance. You know it but then all of a sudden the teacher makes a big deal out of it.

One teacher mentioned an incident that illustrates how a teacher used his authority to attempt to influence and control students’ political participation in the peace movement during the Vietnam War.

A number of us were quite concerned about Canada’s support for the US. We organized a little demonstration, well we were part of a much bigger group going to Ottawa. A teacher at the school who wasn’t a teacher of mine, who was quite right wing, got wind of this and called me and a few other people in after school and gave us a royal dressing down about how we were dupes of the international communist conspiracy and we should be expelled from school. It never really happened, nothing was done about it but just the fact that he thought that he could take it on himself.

Teacher training (pre-service)

According to the interviewees, their teacher training emphasized general teaching methods and classroom management. There was little direct mention of civics or citizenship. This is partly explained because there was not a civics course offered during any of the interviewees’ teacher training.

I don’t think that it really permeated anywhere in my education . . . there wasn’t even a lot of time spent on how teachers should behave in terms of role models for students, which I think is part of citizenship. That’s something I have never really thought about it but it’s true, there is not a lot of time spent in that year on how you should behave in order to be that good citizen role model for a student. It’s a lot of logistics, this is how schools are run, this is
how children learn, this is how you read the guidelines, this is a lesson plan, this is a unit, that kind of stuff.

However, there were three exceptions to this finding, two by teachers who had a common social studies instructor who was interested in civic education. This instructor taught about democratic teaching methods, the concept of active citizenship, and the role of the teacher as agents of social reform. The third learned about democratic teaching methods and international political institutions by doing a model United Nations (UN) simulation.

We studied issues of whether or not the teacher could be an agent of social reform in that course . . . Like, to what extent can a teacher help to contribute to forming students as active citizens. It was a small part. I just remember reading articles about it and talking about it in open discussions. And that a lot of the students did their special projects on that . . . I guess it made me more aware of the issue of teachers being agents of social reform, and it kind of inculcated a value in teachers that they should be such agents.

The only positive thing I can think about it is taking the Politics course with one inspiring professor. He had an impact on me . . . in terms of not just sitting around and reading books but teaching skills and getting students to do things and then to get that learning to transform them, to turn them into more active citizens. I think he was way back then working on this concept of active citizenship and then the New Curriculum came around and obviously it was a fit for him.

I think I did a course during my bachelor of education year on how to teach grades 7 and 8. The professor that taught it showed us how to create a model UN, the model UN thing that goes on every year in New York and how it’s this great big thing. Some of my ideas on how to debate come from that.

Other post-secondary education. This dimension refers to undergraduate studies as well as graduate programmes but excludes teacher training, continuing education or professional development. The interviewees learned from different aspects of post-secondary education and sometimes the same source of influence had a different effect. Nearly half of the interviewees mentioned that they took courses on politics or government during their university years and that they acquired substantial civic knowledge through theses courses. Other experiences from the university that contributed to their learning were the teaching methods employed in their courses, participation in extra-curricular activities, and the exposure at university to a broader range of social, ethnic and cultural groups. For the teaching methods, lecturing and other traditional teaching methods were cited as negative influences on learning.

It’s all focused on the facts, on research, and not so much on who the people are. It seems like that, maybe that’s the old school academic direction, but it seems like schools focus at any level on getting the material out and not very much on what you’re supposed to do, what’s that material or what’s that knowledge.
Yes, it [university education] had an influence. I had some really dynamic professors that were really involved in government and encouraged you to take an active role in government.

Extra-curricular activities, such as student government, were also mentioned as sources of learning about the political process.

Getting involved in the Black Student Union was another initiative. I was the vice president my last year. Moving up the ranks from being a member-at-large, then I was treasurer, and then I was vice president. But just moving up the ranks and seeing how things operate and being involved in the whole school process—being one of the unions on campus.

Lastly, by attending university one interviewee learned about the city and its cultural plurality and became more aware of social issues in the community.

In Toronto I grew up in a very homogenous neighbourhood, very upper middle class, white. I think getting out there in university, being with a variety of people, and then getting out there in the classroom, and actually being actively involved in the lives of people who are not as well off or who come from a different culture or different religious background, different values. I think that really brought for me the issue of becoming involved and having a greater communal sense just to increase people’s understanding of each other in terms of social issues regarding poverty.

Informal citizenship learning

Teachers’ informal civic and political learning was explored in four significant settings: family socialization, political involvement, exposure to the media, and the process of teaching civics itself.

Family socialization. Family socialization was cited as the most powerful influence on the interviewees’ civic learning. The influential aspects of the family range from the modelling of the civic participation of parents and other family members, to the cultural climate of the home (e.g. watching the news, reading the newspaper, encouraging discussions) to the values and attitudes characteristic of the family ethos (e.g. inculcation of a feeling of social responsibility). These conditions were cited as being sources for the political orientations, political knowledge and civic participation of the interviewees. In general, those with families that were highly political, in terms of discussing events around the kitchen table and in which the parents were involved in politics, learned to value political involvement, learned about historical and contemporary political issues, and learned skills for getting involved.

My father was a strong Black activist, so what it is to be a black person in Canada or in the US. They always taught us about what’s going on in the world. I used to go to the Saturday classes for African heritage. So it’s been
a real strong influence where I’ve watched and I’ve learned about things like the civil rights movement and slavery and even issues that are going on today like in South Africa, and so forth. We’ve always been informed where we have to sit down and watch the news or read the newspaper to my dad.

My mother definitely influenced the way I teach because anytime my dad would have a conservative bent on anything, you know ‘I never lived on welfare’, my mom would say something. I think my brother and I are on the liberal side of things. It happens when students say something, like ‘why should we have to pay for these people?’ I find myself, feeling something burning inside me and you have to address it. It’s my mom.

There’s always been a very strong example in my family of voting. Although neither of my parents have stood for political office, they have always been very adamant that we always had to vote. When we were kids we were always taken to the polling station to watch my mother vote. Going behind the screen with her made a certain mystery of it. I wouldn’t say that they’re as politically active as I am, but they’re very well read and they’re updated on issues. That for me was an example of how to learn.

However, the influence of the family was not identical for all interviewees, as it sometimes inhibited civic inclinations. Indeed, family socialization had a negative influence on three individuals, who stated that they were less inclined to participate in civic activities because their family was not a positive role model in that respect.

Certainly, one of the influences is the fact that in my family, there’s nobody who volunteers their time. So that would have a negative influence in terms of not wanting to volunteer time . . . I didn’t see them going out and doing things all the time, or being involved politically, being involved in environmental issues, being involved in social issues. They really aren’t those kind of people. In a sense, they had a negative influence on me in terms of that’s probably partly why I didn’t get involved. Probably more of a learning what not to do. My family, especially in politics, was never involved. My parents very rarely vote. That to me as I was growing up just seemed very hypocritical. They wouldn’t vote but then they’d complain about things that we’re going on in the community. That always really bothered me. That’s something that I try to impress on my students is that if you don’t get involved then you don’t have a right to even comment on what’s going on around you because you didn’t even put your two cents in, you didn’t even make an effort.

*Civic and political involvement.* In reflecting on their civic involvement, the interviewees discussed the themes of social justice and citizenship, and the skills that they employed in their activities. Specific political skills were occasionally mentioned in the interviews as learning outcomes of participation but were often left as implicit. The questionnaire responses indicated that civic and political participation were the second most important source for learning civic and
political skills, and were moderately important for learning civic knowledge and values.

I’m involved with my MP [Member of Parliament], where I’ve gone out and canvassed, made phone calls and so forth. It influenced me because I don’t like to sit back. I usually inform the students about that, that if you get involved you can have your voice heard . . . The way I got involved was I didn’t like my past MP. When he was running he was always winning and people were just voting for him by name recognition. So I got involved that way. I researched the other candidates and then when we had another election I picked one and got along with him. We worked together and lost, but the second time we had more support and won.

I think when you personalize issues you have to think about what draws you to them and through that involvement what do you accomplish. Realizing that, often you don’t bring about the great change that you hoped for, but where does the movement or where does the issue go by virtue of you being involved with it? And it’s not simply done for the self-satisfaction and ‘aren’t I a great person’ . . . but it’s what you do with that knowledge if you fail at this. What do you do next? That it’s an ongoing struggle. The challenges of civics, being a civic-minded person are ongoing.

Media. The interviewees reported using the media extensively for information on politics and current events. The majority of the interviewees stated that they regularly follow several media sources of which the most common are newspapers and television news. As well, several mentioned that they take a critical approach to media by comparing the viewpoints and coverage of several newspapers and/or television news programmes. They also revealed an interest in media literacy and alternative news sources that have a critical stance on the mainstream media.

So you should look at different media, different sources of information and not just go by what’s on CNN or CBC, that you should try to find alternative viewpoints and read and be aware as widely as you can of those different angles on new stories, not just accept the mainstream. I use them to deconstruct the meaning. I try to. I guess I was doing that before I knew what that word was. To pick apart the biases and the ideologically loaded concepts.

I get my information from there [the news] but I also realize that sometimes the person who is giving the information could be biased or have an opinion. So I tell my students to be aware of what party this person may follow, or what past experiences this person may have, which sometimes reflects the way they present the information.

I am what I would call a newshound. I always watch the 11 o’clock news. I have my daily subscription. I may not get to read the paper everyday but definitely even the issues that get piled up I get to. And I watch the news and I listen to the radio coming in and out of work in the morning, not cds, not tapes. Because I want to know what’s going on. I would say it’s high.
Teaching of civics. The interviewees’ own experience of teaching was also recognized as a source of informal civic learning. In particular, teaching helped them to learn about government and social issues, to develop a more complex view of citizenship and of civic participation that exceeds electoral politics, and they were induced to be more politically active in their own lives. This learning occurred as they examined and explored civic concepts with their students.

I knew some things about the structure of government from . . . newspapers and things like that, but I actually taught the grade 9 history course here and that’s where I would have learned more about civics and the structure of citizenship than anywhere else.

. . . citizenship is not just about political involvement. It can be involvement in all kinds of activities. When I was younger, that’s what citizenship meant, you get involved in political parties. As I’ve taught the course, I see it in a much broader context. I think I’m a better model citizen in that area. Not a good model citizen, but better. I’ve volunteered a lot. That I feel I have more credibility on. I kind of see that teaching is a form of citizenship. It’s not sitting behind a desk. That’s what I do, that is my contribution. I am educating my students and I see that as a part of my active citizenship. They see it as my job, I see it as . . .

Regarding their own teaching, several interviewees learned how to balance the expression of their political beliefs with their duties as a teacher, highlighting the relationship between their lived experience and their teaching, and the learning that comes from their own mistakes such as passing biases instead of nurturing critical reflection. This issue illustrates one way in which teachers’ civic activity and the teaching of civics intersect.

One thing that I learned is that I try not to pass on my biases to the kids, but I know it happens and it’s just kind of shocking because I thought I wasn’t doing it and I did . . . I had to realize that. It was kind of shocking because we have to be careful. When we did political parties and elections . . . I didn’t vote, because I didn’t want the kids to know what type of party that I follow and then they would just follow me because I’m the teacher. I want them to state their own opinions and find a comfort zone.

The first time I taught it, I realized I can’t push more of my opinion. That was huge and then the second time I taught it, it was more that I played devil’s advocate for any side. I think that’s what I learned from teaching it two times. I’ll play devil’s advocate every time I teach that course.

I have changed a lot since I first started teaching. I suppose when I first went into teaching, I had come out of the sixties and this whole radical period and my own influences, my own ideas. I was probably way too preachy and I assumed that the students would already be at a level where they would be receptive to a radical viewpoint and of course most of them weren’t. So a lot of what I did in those years probably was a disaster and backfired and I think I did learn from that; you realize that you can’t just preach to people, that
you’ve got to help them learn and think critically on their own, and to be a little less didactic and dogmatic and a little more open to different viewpoints but at the same time continuing to promote your own. So I guess that approach changed and I think it has worked much better.

Sometimes the clash between teachers’ own ideological preferences and learners’ political past creates pedagogical dilemmas that can be a source of learning. It may happen when a conservative teacher interacts with a leftist student, or vice versa. The latter case is clearly described in this story, which we decided to quote in its entirety despite its length:

I was very happy when the Cold War ended. It made it a lot easier because for all of those years it was just us and them, good guys–bad guys. I was teaching at a school in those days where a lot of the kids were from Eastern European backgrounds—it’s changed since then—today it’s a mixed bag, a lot from the Caribbean, South Asia, South-East Asia—but in those days it was a largely Eastern European community. That was the main non-Anglo ethnic group, and the Cold War just made it impossible for me to reach them. Because as soon as you said something negative about the United States you were immediately accused of being a communist. And if you said anything positive about socialism, it just got to be a mess. It was good when that ended from that point of view, at least we could talk about things a little more. A lot of their families were refugees from communism so they were extremely right-wing, extremely anticommunist and I was extremely the other way so it just polarized them. It wasn’t like I was defending Stalin but I picketed against the war in Vietnam and Central America, and Reagan and all this stuff and it just got to be a dialogue of the deaf because they had their views, which of course now I can perfectly see came from their political socialization and their families and to give that up would mean giving up a good part of their culture. And yet I seemed to think that once I could present them with evidence that they would accept it and of course they didn’t, they couldn’t. And I really see their perspective as clearly I can now. I had one student right toward the end of the Cold War who had come from Poland and he had been involved in youth solidarity activism and at first we didn’t get along but gradually he learned to get beyond my biases and I got beyond some of his. That was the beginning of some kind of a détente.

**Non-formal citizenship learning**

The field of non-formal citizenship education, at least in countries with high immigration rates like Canada, tends to be understood almost exclusively as courses for the naturalization test, and it is often conflated with English as a second language programmes. In the case of the teachers of this sample, however, non-formal education was expressed in a range of activities, most often related to in-service training. This included a variety of workshops and specialist courses. Some of these courses and workshops were related directly or indirectly to citizenship education (e.g. character education, media literacy or environmental education) although others were not directly connected to a specific subject matter.
I’ve done a workshop on climate change, which was really good. It provided a really useful teaching tool as well . . . They’re based out of Alberta and they put together this package that goes through what climate change is from the beginning to the end. They actually spend some time in that package dealing with what kids can do, what they can do at the community level, what they can do at a national level like writing letters to try and influence change. I learned a little there and also was given tools to use in the classroom to teach kids what they can do. That would have been a really profound thing because I’ve drawn from that and used it for other topics, like the letter writing, because they provided us with a tool and the letter writing doesn’t have to be just toward climate change. You could use the formula for any number of other issues.

The one thing that I was in was Teachers’ Institute on Parliamentary Democracy, which has been going for a few years now . . . That was a very worthwhile activity because it was a good behind-the-scenes look at how the government system works. It gave me the opportunity to meet teachers from different parts of the country and share experiences and points of view and so on. I knew a lot already but it gave me a good behind-the-scenes look and we got to meet with MPs and their assistants. We got an intensive look at the details of the political system, the government system, and we got to meet with Senators and the Speaker of the House, and we were taken to the Governor General’s residence. The nuts and bolts of the way the government system works in Canada.

Non-formal activities were also cited as a positive influence on one interviewee’s civic participation.

I think it may actually go back to when I was a kid and just the fact that I was involved in community sports. I think that I recognized that I appreciate when you have a baseball team or a hockey team that somebody had to organize that, coaches giving up their time. I recognized from an early age that it was a good thing that things only get done when somebody is actively involved in the process. That generally promoted a feeling that volunteering is important.

The learning settings and learning domains at a glance

The interviews were complemented with a questionnaire that attempted to capture in a summary fashion (using a 1–7 scale) the influence of each setting on a variety of competencies and attitudes (see table 2). The questionnaires confirmed the interview data that, according to teachers’ own accounts, family socialization was one of the strongest influences on their political knowledge and civic values. The other significant source of civic and political learning was the experience of teaching civics itself. This can be explained in part by the fact that these teachers did not undertake any specific training on civics (it is a new subject matter in the Ontario curriculum) and thus they are learning civics at the same time that they are teaching it. In any case, these two settings were found to be the most powerful sources of civic learning for these teachers.
According to responses to the questionnaire, primary school had a negligible influence on every category except civic values, on which it had a modest influence (2.6 out of 7). Secondary education was recognized as an influence, but usually as a negative one, in the sense that teachers today are consciously striving to teach in a different way than they were taught. In a nutshell, teachers pointed out that they were taught ‘constitutional civics’ content with an authoritarian and passive approach that emphasized memorization of dates and institutional arrangements, and that they aspire to teach with an active approach that emphasizes critical analysis of social reality and that promotes the development of civic virtues through engagement in civic life and community participation.

A summary review emanating from the questionnaire on the sources of civic learning regarding civic knowledge, civic values, civic and political skills, and teaching of civics, reveals the following:

(a) **Knowledge**: interestingly, family and teaching were recognized as the strongest influence on civic knowledge, followed by media, secondary school, university and political participation. Teacher training had a weak influence, although this could be explained by the absence of civic courses at the time of their teacher training.

(b) **Civic values**: family and teaching were again the strongest influences, while post-secondary, the media, civic participation and secondary had moderate influences.

(c) **Civic and political skills**: civic participation and teaching had the strongest influences on this category. Post-secondary, the media, secondary and the family had moderate influences.

(d) **Teaching**: all learning settings, with the exception of primary education, had at least a moderate influence on teaching. The teachers’ own experiences of teaching had the greatest impact on their teaching methodology. Teacher training had a relatively high influence on teaching, followed by non-formal education and university programmes.

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Summary and conclusions

The acquisition of civic competencies and values is a lifelong and lifewide process that in great part remains tacit and unconscious. We anticipated that civic teachers, however, were particularly well positioned to uncover the most significant learning episodes of their civic and political socialization. This study confirmed that original hypothesis, as civics teachers demonstrated a great capacity to retrieve, reflect, interpret and comment on their civic and political learning.

Like anybody else, civics teachers acquire their civic competencies and values in different settings, in different ways and at different levels of intensity. Although it is not easy to distinguish among them, the interviews helped these teachers to look systematically at different sources of educational experiences, which was comprised of family socialization, elementary and secondary schooling, pre-service and in-service teacher training, university courses, short workshops, media, political and civic engagement, and their own teaching practice. They explored the relative role of each of these settings in the acquisition of civic knowledge, civic values, civic and political skills, political ideology, and teaching strategies.

The preliminary findings of this study suggest that although the learning of civics and politics is a complex and long process that draws from different sources, it is possible to start mapping the different pedagogical settings and social actors that intervene in the process, and to identify the relative impact of each one on the learners. The study confirms that most informal learning tends to remain tacit until the interviewer makes it explicit, but once it becomes conscious the interviewee is able to trace, describe and evaluate the positive or negative features of significant learning experiences. The study also shows that civics teachers come to their classrooms with a rich variety of political and civic learning experiences, which they have to negotiate among themselves in order to make sense of them in a relatively coherent way, and they have also to negotiate them with the context in order to be able to teach within the confines of curriculum constraints and institutional limits.

One of the clearest findings of the study is the powerful influence of early family socialization on the civic engagement, community involvement and political values of their children when they grow up. In this regard, the study confirms previous research that a politically active mother, father or grandparent, after-dinner conversations around the kitchen table, or simply an open and intellectually stimulating environment at home can make a great impact on the political enlightenment and civic engagement of new generations, and often a greater impact than many ulterior secondary socialization experiences.

The impact of K-12 schooling was generally described as negligible. Elementary school experiences were perceived by most interviewees as having the lowest impact on their civic learning, and the few memorable episodes had to do with the nurturing of passive citizenship and national identity, rather than with active engagement and critical analysis of current affairs. Secondary schooling, including civics-related courses, usually provided information on government structures and history. Confirming the previous findings of Stradling (1977) and Braungart and Braungart (1998), civics courses were perceived as dry, dull and irrelevant, with a traditional, blackboard-centred, rote learning approach to teaching. The new civics curriculum in Ontario is attempting, at least in theory, to break with that passive approach by promoting the development of an informed, purposeful and active citizenship, and by providing opportunities to exercise full participatory citizenship.
and to practise the skills necessary to influence public decision-making. An interesting follow-up of this study would be to explore in 10 years from now the impact of these courses on the new generation of civics teachers.

Teacher training, both pre-service and in-service, had a considerable influence on teaching methodology, but appears to have a weak influence (in relation with other settings) in the development of civic knowledge, attitudes, values and skills. The exceptions occurred when inspiring, committed and engaged teachers set foot in the classroom. The issue of pre-service and in-service training of civics teachers seems to be a problem in many parts of the world. For instance, in the most recent International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) study of civic education, which included 24 countries, a general concern about teacher preparation was expressed (Torney-Purta et al. 1999). From Australia, in a paper precisely entitled ‘Preparing teachers for the new civics education’, Kennedy (1998) argues that ‘teacher education programmes must prepare not only technically proficient civics teachers but also “teacher democrats” who can model democracy in their public, private and professional lives’. He goes on to claim that teaching ‘civics is not like teaching mathematics, and it is not an intellectual game the outcomes of which are basically irrelevant to the real challenges of life’, and concludes that ‘civics is about engagement in issues and ideas that fundamentally affect the way we live, and to teach civics effectively, teachers themselves must be engaged in these issues’. If teaching civics is about promoting an active, purposeful and informed citizenship, it is not necessary to accept all the premises of Kennedy’s argument to recognize that training civics teachers implies more than teaching methods. That the teachers in this study commented that their learning experiences derived from inspiring teachers is a clear indication of this.

Other university programmes and courses had a relatively high impact on civic learning in most domains. This can be explained by the fact that many interviewees took courses on politics or government during their university years, participated in student groups, or were part of university governance through student councils. The media was also perceived as having a significant impact, particularly in terms of knowledge, as civics teachers acquired vast amounts of current and historical information through TV news, magazines and newspapers, documentaries and the like.

Civic engagement and political participation were also considered an important source of civic learning, particularly in relation with the acquisition of civic and political skills. Interestingly enough, the learning acquired informally through civic involvement was consistently higher than the learning acquired through non-formal means such as workshops and short courses, the only exception being the area of teaching methods. This is a finding that deserves further exploration, because our understanding of learning in social action (also known as ‘social movement learning’) is still limited. Indeed, the dominant paradigm in adult education research still excludes a great deal of adult learning. By and large, among both adult educators and lay people, adult education is generally equated with organized provision by professionals, and adult education research has focused on learning in institutionalized settings.

Although in recent times a renewed interest in better understanding informal learning in social contexts (beyond individual self-directed learning projects) has arisen in different parts of the world (e.g. Livingstone 1999, Clover and Hall 2000, Schugurensky 2001a, Schugurensky and Myers forthcoming), there remains a need
for more empirical research. A research agenda on social movement learning should continue exploring the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes that are learned through oppositional movements, but also through local experiments of collective deliberation and decision-making that have a potential to increase the political capital of the poor and women (e.g. the participatory democracy models of Porto Alegre, Brazil or Kerala, India). From a broad policy perspective, the promotion of lifelong citizenship learning implies the creation and nurturing of inclusive democratic spaces that have particularly high civic educational potential. These spaces, be they inside and outside formal education institutions, and whether they are promoted by government agencies, non-governmental organizations or grassroots movements, should complement each other in encouraging the development of the knowledge, skills, values and behaviours that promote a more pluralistic, critical, engaged and solidarious citizenry, and particularly in increasing the opportunities for participation and the political capital of the most marginalized groups in each society.

Notes

1. Part of this research also considered the relationship between citizenship learning and citizenship teaching, but for space reasons we decided to exclude that section from this paper. We are presently writing a paper on this specific topic, which is tentatively entitled ‘The relationship between citizenship learning and citizenship teaching: a study of civics teachers in Canada’.

2. One such model (Mocker and Spear 1982) proposes a two-by-two matrix of the learner and institution in which the concept of control over objective and means of learning is the basis for the classification scheme. There are four learning scenarios that correspond to formal, non-formal, informal and self-directed learning. The importance of this model is the linking of the categories of learning under the concept of lifelong learning and the view of adults as actively engaged in the pursuit of learning rather than as reluctant and passive non-learners. In our own model, self-directed learning is described as a particular form of informal learning rather than as a distinct category.

3. The concepts of primary and secondary socialization, key principles of social constructionist theory, contribute to this understanding (Berger and Luckmann 1966). Socialization in this case is based on the sources or sites (home or institutions) and the agents of learning (significant others or institutional agents). It is defined as ‘the comprehensive and consistent induction of an individual into the objective world of a society or sector of it’ (Berger and Luckmann 1966: 120). Primary socialization is the first process that occurs in childhood, through which the child becomes a member of society, while secondary socialization is any later process a socialized individual undergoes that inducts him or her into new sectors of society. It is more difficult to develop the affective qualities (i.e. commitment and dedication to a cause) when the socialization is in competition with other ones. The view of competition between primary and secondary socialization provides an understanding of the distinction between societal norms (largely informal) and institutional knowledge (largely formal and non-formal) and recognizes and explicates the relationship between them.

4. Mazawi (1998) defines contested regimes as those characterized by the absence of institutionalized and accepted norms by which a single group claims the right to rule.

5. For a discussion on the concept of political capital and its relation to Pierre Bourdieu’s analysis of the forms of capital, see Schugurensky (2000).

References


TORNEY-PURTA, J., SCHWILLE, J. and AMADEO, J. (1999) Civic Education Across Countries: Twenty-four National Case Studies from the IEA Civic Education Project (Amsterdam: The International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA)).


