A Call for Change in Times of Globalization. A Comparative Analysis of the Ontario Secondary Second Language Curricula Through a Citizenship Lens

Taciana de LiraSilva
Faculty of Education
University of Ottawa

This paper received CERN's Best Graduate Student Paper Award in 2020

Abstract

This paper discusses the findings of a comparative analysis of the English as a Second Language/English Literacy development (ESL/ELD) curriculum Grades 9-12 (OME, 2007a) and the FSL curriculum Grades 9-12 (OME, 2014) (FSL) which focused on the Ontario Ministry of Education's (OME) global citizenship goal for second language (L2) learners. Global citizenship has become a curricular goal in many educational systems around the world, including in Ontario, Canada. Learning for global citizenship in tandem with L2 has become advantageous in the 21st century because learning a new language, in addition to promoting career growth, fosters understanding and acceptance of otherness in global society. Therefore, it is important to understand how OME integrates global citizenship principles in the education of English and French L2 learners. Results suggest the ESL/ELD curriculum does not promote global citizenship but aims to prepare students for the job market; however, in competitive disadvantage compared with their English-speaking peers. Additionally, the French as a Second Language (FSL) curriculum goal to prepare students for global citizenship, through intercultural awareness, is superficial and inefficient. Findings show the OME needs to review the ESL/ELD and FSL curricula to promote global citizenship education and prepare learners to become caring and connected citizens of the world.

Résumé

Cet article partage les résultats d'une analyse comparative du curriculum ESL/ELD de la 9ème - 12ème années (OME, 2007a) et du curriculum Français Langue Seconde de la 9ème - 12ème années (OME, 2014) axée sur les objectifs du ministère de l'éducation de l'Ontario (MEO) à la citoyenneté mondiale, pour les étudiants de langue seconde. La citoyenneté mondiale a été mise en œuvre par de nombreux systèmes éducatifs à travers le monde, y compris le Canada – Ontario. L'apprentissage de la citoyenneté en tandem avec la langue seconde est avantageux au 21ème siècle car l'apprentissage d'une nouvelle langue, en plus de promouvoir la croissance de carrière, favorise également la compréhension et l'acceptation des membres de notre société mondiale. Par conséquent, il est important de comprendre comment le MEO incorpore les principes de citoyenneté dans l'éducation des apprenants de L2 anglais et français. Les résultats suggèrent que le programme ESL/ELD ne promeut pas la citoyenneté mondiale mais vise à préparer les étudiants au marché de travail; cependant, en désavantage concurrentiel par rapport à leurs pairs anglophones. De plus, la manière que le programme de FLS prépare les apprenants pour la citoyenneté mondiale, à travers la compréhension interculturelle, est superficielle et inefficace. Les résultats ont montré que l'Ontario doit revoir les programmes de Français et Anglais L2 pour promouvoir l'éducation à la citoyenneté mondiale et préparer les étudiants et étudiantes à devenir des citoyens et citoyennes mondiaux bienveillants(es) et connectés(es).

Keywords: ESL, FSL, L2 learner, secondary curriculum, global citizenship.

Mots clés : Anglais Langue Second, FLS, élèves de L2, curriculum du secondaire, citoyenneté globale.

Introduction

Globalization and the World Wide Web have increased human interaction and mobility, and influenced citizenship education the world over. In fact, the concept that individuals are citizens of one nation "no longer corresponds with reality for millions of people who move across borders and who belong in various ways in multiple places" (Castles, 2004, p. 18). To accommodate this new reality and try to create a more peaceful world, a number of educational researchers, non-governmental organizations, and educators have shifted their citizenship goals from nation-centered to world oriented (UNESCO, 1987 and 2019; Starkey, 2007; COE, 2001). This paper will focus on global citizenship (GC), which I define as the disposition to learn from the unknown, at the local, national and global spheres, and engage in reflection of one's own biases of the known and the unknown. Nurturing learners' curiosity and promoting examination of one's own beliefs encourages learners to recognize human interconnectedness and interdependence and acknowledge that their choices and actions "may have repercussions for people and communities locally, nationally or internationally" (Ideas for Global Citizenship, n.d.); hence, the importance of GC education.

In the 21st century, instead of learning languages for tourism or erudition, people learn for effective communication, intercultural understanding, and GC (Starkey, 2007). Therefore, interweaving GC principles into second and foreign language education gives the learner the opportunity to learn the language while focusing on the content of the debate rather than on its form (Starkey, 2005). This learning approach also introduces students to a human-rights framework that will prepare them "to engage in struggles for justice in their local contexts" (Porto, 2014, p. 14). Summarizing, language learning in the 21st century can be reframed as an "intercultural rather than an international experience" (Starkey, 2015, p. 37) which creates an environment that promotes the building of GC skills among learners.

The frame of reference for this study is grounded in the perspective that L2 courses are ideal to teach learners to become global citizens. Taking into consideration the importance of the emergent concept of teaching L2 and citizenship interweaved, a comparison between the high school FSL curriculum and its equivalent ESL/ELD document illustrate how language learners in Ontario are being prepared to live and work at the present time.

The grounds for this comparison are based on two factors. First, most curricula in Ontario, including the FSL curriculum, have been reviewed in the last 10 years, but the ESL/ELD document dates to 2007. Second, both curricula direct the learning of secondary L2 learners.

Throughout the paper, I will present points from the ESL/ELD curriculum first and, subsequently, from the FSL document.

Who are the learners?

In Ontario, a student who enters grades 9 to 12 and whose first language is not English or who speaks "different varieties of English" (OME, 2007a, p. 21) attends one of two courses, English as a Second Language (ESL) or English Literacy Development (ELD), depending on his/her English language proficiency. The ESL/ELD curriculum aims to guide teachers to prepare students to "participate fully in the social, economic, political, and cultural life of their communities and of Canada" (OME, 2007a, p. 4) and to "demonstrate an understanding of the rights and responsibilities of Canadian citizenship" (OME, 2007a, p. 20). The FSL

curriculum (2014), on the other hand, is mandatory for all Ontario students in grade 9, but becomes elective in grade 10. Most FSL students are English speakers, and they are educated "to participate fully as citizens in Canada and in the world" (p. 6). The FSL document's main goals are associated with effective communication with francophones from Canada and around the world, and to prepare students for "a competitive advantage in the workforce" (OME, 2014, p. 6).

The ESL/ELD document guides the education of English as a Second Language (ESL) learners who are members of minority groups. In fact, if an English speaker (ES) student has difficulties learning English for educational purposes, his/her education will be planned according to the English curriculum Grades 9 – 10 (OME, 2007b) or Grades 11 – 12 (OME, 2007c), even if sometimes his/her language proficiency is lower than that of the ESL students. FSL, conversely, is a mandatory course for every grade 9 student in Ontario, which means that ESL students will also learn FSL for at least one year in high school, even if they have no knowledge of French. To address this problem, the 2014 FSL curriculum introduced a new program called Core French Grade 9 Open (FSF10), which is "an introductory course for students who have little or no knowledge of French" (OME, 2014, p. 88). Nonetheless, ESL students have demonstrated they can become very successful in learning French, and even surpass their Canadian-born English-speaking peers (Mady, 2012), which can boost their self-esteem, increase their employment opportunities, and enable them to compete with their Canadian-born bilingual peers.

One of the FSL curriculum goals is to prepare all students to understand and appreciate the history and evolution of other cultures, through intercultural awareness (IA). The document claims IA can promote global citizenship (GC) skills; however, IA examples provided by the FSL curriculum are not effective because they focus on a soft approach to cultural understanding, the *them versus us* formula, which explores superficial themes and does not promote IA or GC (Banks, 2014). For example, in grade 9, students learn about Canadian foods and ingredients and family life; and in grades 10, 11 and 12, about tourist destinations and popular songs. Nevertheless, Loo (2017) observed the FSL curriculum expectations are somewhat open and flexible, which could give teachers the opportunity to genuinely promote global citizenship in FSL.

The two Ontario curricula, although at first appearing to demonstrate different views of citizenship, have similar ideologies. The ESL/ELD document focuses on Canadian citizenship but aims to prepare students for employment. The FSL curriculum states students should be prepared for GC but does not encourage deep cultural understanding, which promotes GC, but only a superficial knowledge of other cultures to give learners an "advantage in the workforce" (OME, 2014, p. 6).

The curricula state they aim to instruct students for the workforce and to participate in Canadian and global societies, but language teaching is a political affair that affects how it is taught and learned (Pennycook, 1994). Politics affect language learning in many ways. For example, there is an international concern about teaching practices that focus on promoting a view of citizenship that is nation-oriented, culturally homogeneous, and exclusionary (e.g., Fleming, 2010; Pennycook, 1999; Starkey, 2007). Other issues affecting L2 education are the lack of training, lack of unbiased learning resources, and curricular restrictions (Starkey, 2007; Cummins, 2014), and a hegemonic discourse through materials and textbooks (Starkey, 2007) which influences learning and learners' identity building. Additionally, Pennycook (2000) admonishes teachers to become aware of the cultural and ideological messages hidden in teaching resources, including the curriculum that states students' learning expectations. Biased resources could influence students' learning attitudes toward the target language and group

members because the classroom is also a place "where students' identities are produced and changed" (Pennycook, 2000, p. 99).

The paucity of inclusive teaching material and teacher preparation can be obstacles to educate learners to become global citizens. Therefore, teachers and students must become aware of the hidden curriculum and become critical of it. Below are examples of the discourse used by the ESL/ELD and the FSL curricula.

Theoretical Framework

The study aims to critically analyze both curricula through a GC lens, while seeking to understand the OME's goals for two diverse groups of students: The group learning ESL, formed by newcomers or members of minority groups who cannot communicate in "standard English" (OME, 2007a), an ideological version of a language that does not really exist (Milroy, 2001), and the group learning FSL, encompassing mostly Canadian born students. Under the GC umbrella, the author investigated four themes which were chosen because they appear in both curricula and have the potential to promote active participation in society (OME, 2014): Citizenship, inclusion and diversity, student well-being, and critical thinking.

The document analysis uses Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) (1989, 2012, 2013) to analyze the two curriculum documents. Fairclough (2012) considers text as an element of social events, which are components of social reality; consequently, the analysis and comparison of both curricula unveils societal values that are brought to the classroom to be perpetuated by teachers and learners. There is opposition to the idea that CDA 'unveils' hidden powers (Patterson, 1997; Pennycook, 1994, 2001 as cited in Henderson, 2010) because power is not static but moves within competing social and bureaucratic discourses. Nevertheless, Fairclough (2013) explains that discourse reflects a *trans-disciplinary* dialogue because government, society, the educational system, and economy are connected and influence each other. Subsequently, although the Ontario Ministry of Education dictates the curriculum, at school, teachers, students, families, school staff, and so on will engage with the document, and power, fluid as it is, could change hands. Consequently, finding out how power is being used in L2 education through document discourse analysis, will give the writer and the reader the opportunity to understand how deficit and disadvantage play out in school settings (Luke, 1997, 2002), and will open the gateway to change the state of inequity present in L2 education in Ontario.

The ESL/ELD curriculum (OME, 2007a) aims to prepare students for full participation as Canadian citizens. The specific expectations for citizenship include learning about the geography and history of the country and comparing diverse cultural groups in Canada. The document suggests students should learn about "gender roles, family structures, and days of significance in different cultural groups" (OME, 2007a, p. 91), and "identify some rights and responsibilities of Canadian citizenship" (OME, 2007a, p. 90). Focusing on Canadian citizenship restricts students from developing their full identities, as well as from becoming global citizens. Curiously, the curriculum limits the L2 students' knowledge of citizenship in Canada when it states they should identify *some rights* and *responsibilities*. This is an example of the hidden discourse, outlined by Fairclough (1989) who brings to attention the connections between language, power, and ideologies, which determine the hierarchy of social relationships.

The FSL curriculum conveys that IA and Intercultural competence (IC) are essential elements of the FSL curriculum that prepares students for GC (OME, 2014). IC is a foundation for dialogue and living together (Barrett et al., 2013); however, the curriculum

promotes inter-cultural learning through the *us versus them* approach which uses shallow cultural comparisons that, instead of promoting dialogue, could create competition among cultures. A comparison can be valuable when it is for understanding, which is non-judgmental, as a way of looking at the *other*'s worldview from his or her perspective and being able to see ourselves as the *other* sees us (Barrett et al., 2013). When we compare for understanding we are not dividing the world but exercising acceptance of otherness and broadening our worldview, which are characteristics of global citizenship; otherwise, the exercise of comparison used by the FSL document nurtures competition between cultures, which separates instead of unifying groups.

Both curricula aim to prepare students to become responsible citizens, the ESL/ELD at the national level, and the FSL at the global sphere. However, citizenship education in both curricula is limited and superficial.

Another example of the biased discourse used by the curriculum is the way it determines how teachers and students should communicate during teaching and learning. OME, (2007a) uses *prompts* and *examples* of how to teach and behave (e.g., when teaching about sound pattern the *teacher prompt* is: "Listen to my voice when I read these questions. What do you hear at the end of each question? Move your hands to show what my voice does" (OME, 2007a, p. 61). Conversely, the discourse of the Ontario FSL curriculum (2014) uses suggestions to communicate, instead of stipulations. For example, it says: "teachers *can* clarify", "teachers *can* encourage", and "teachers *can* ask students" (p. 60), which shows more respect for teachers and students.

The discourse used throughout the ESL/ELD curriculum to communicate with teachers and students, appears to portray the "teacher (as a deskilled professional needing instructions), learning (as passive compliance), and school knowledge (as behavioral skills)" (Luke, 1995, p. 29). When the government decides what and how the curriculum is learned, they retain great power over education (Luke, 1995) and deny students and teachers the right to question and investigate concepts, which according to Dewey is undemocratic (Dewey, 1914/1977). The FSL curriculum discourse, on the other hand, gives teacher and students a certain freedom to choose how they will approach learning, which seems more democratic.

Inclusion and Diversity in Curricula

Canada is a multicultural and multilingual country where newcomer students must learn either English or French, our official languages. The aforementioned curricula have demonstrated little commitment to an inclusive education. Likewise, a framework developed to assess and monitor the English learner's learning, the Steps to English Proficiency (STEP) was created to "inform [teacher's] instructional practice" (OME, 2015, p. 9), but not to educate for inclusion and diversity. Although STEPS states students will "feel that their culture and language are valued" (OME, 2015, p. 6), it does not clarify how cultural inclusion should happen in the classroom. Contrarily, it focuses on the students' English proficiency, which must be closely measured through regular assessments to help students "meet the Ontario Curriculum Achievement Chart and rubric" (p. 3). Such discourse reflects the structures of society which are the "long-term background conditions for social life" (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999, p. 22, as cited in Henderson, 2005). Ultimately, OME is demonstrating, once again, that their goal for the English learners is to prepare them for the job market, not to help them feel included, valued, and accepted by Canadian society.

There are many examples in the curriculum which depict ESL students as 'aliens' when compared to the dominant group, and in need to learn about "basic social forms and practices

that may vary from culture to culture" (OME, 2007a, p. 66). For example, the curriculum informs teachers to ask students questions such as: *"How did you get your name?", "What does it mean?",* and *"Compare Canada to your home country"*. Addressing someone's name as an object of curiosity is not inclusive or respectful. Typically, many East Asian students adopt a 'western' name to 'fit in'; nevertheless, name changing could represent losing part of one's identity. Additionally, using the statement *your home country* could imply that Canada is not their home country and contribute greatly to student resistance to learning the language (Norton, 2001) and to feel part of society. ESL students are also expected to learn Canadian social etiquette. They should become proficient in *determining* and *using* the *appropriate* language; *making appropriate* eye contact; *nodding* to indicate agreement; using humor when *appropriate*; and making *polite* suggestions. This imposition is a form of power which contradicts the ESL/ELD curriculum's (2007a) statement that says, "[a] major goal of any instructional program for English language learners should be to encourage students to value and maintain their own linguistic and cultural identities so that they can enter the larger society as bilingual and bicultural individuals" (p. 4). Ultimately, the document is sending contradictory messages to teachers and students; it encourages students to become bilingual and bicultural but pressures them to assimilate the Canadian way of life. Luke (1995) explains that the use of power by the dominant group occurs when some discourses are introduced as real knowledge while others are silenced or omitted, which is a political decision that favors one discourse over others.

The ESL/ELD curriculum is a political tool that promotes the making of *human capital*, the knowledge and skills that determine an individual's professional success and help the country's economy grow, which is part of neoliberal ideology and "represents a subtle masking of social conflicts and expresses metaphorically the commodification of human abilities and an alienating notion of human potential" (Holborow, 2012, p. 93). In summary, English learners are trained to contribute to Canada's economic growth, through academic success which will foster future professional achievement, but not social and cultural inclusion. Curricular evidence is subtle but noticeable. For example, the curriculum expects ESL students to learn to use *English in socially and culturally appropriate ways* to succeed in Ontario's education system. Additionally, English proficiency is depicted as an essential learning goal, as students must become "responsible and productive citizens" (OME, 2007, p. 3). Finally, the ESL and EDL programs aim to prepare students mostly for academic English, while prompting them to compete with their English-speaking peers who will not stop learning grade-appropriate skills to wait for them. In fact, "English language learners must catch up with a moving target" (p. 4). ESL students suffer a lot of pressure from the curriculum to succeed academically and to assimilate the Canadian social and cultural principles. Although focusing on academic success can be a positive approach, it would be more beneficial to students if ESL education also nurtured their social and cultural well-being and helped them develop feelings of allegiance to Canada.

Some may argue that newcomers would be interested in learning Canadian social and cultural ways of life to feel accepted by society. However, making students use *appropriate* conventions, is a discourse of power that induces minorities to imitate the dominant group. Additionally, such discourse could also be interpreted as racial discrimination. In fact, studies have shown that racial discrimination is a reality in Canada. Cui (2015) reported that 33% of the children of Chinese immigrants experienced racial discrimination; they were only behind African Canadians, who were the most racialized group to suffer from prejudice.

The ESL/ELD curriculum interweaves ideas to teach about the diverse cultural communities in Canada and indigenous education into specific expectations. As an illustration, when students learn about locating information, the curriculum suggests students should use

"(e.g., encyclopaedias and other informational texts to research contributions of Aboriginal and immigrant groups to Canadian society; use online databases to gather information about postsecondary career pathways)" (p. 87). This is a disregard of the importance of indigenous peoples and members of other minority groups who have contributed to Canada's development. If the curriculum aimed to "recognize the contributions of various cultures to Canada including the unique role of Aboriginal people in the historical and cultural development of the country" (OME, 2007, p. 51) it would have direct expectations, instead of treating the subject as a mere add-on.

The FSL curriculum (OME, 2014), in comparison, suggests that students learn about Indigenous peoples in many instances, but similarly to the ESL/ELD curriculum, not as an expectation. The discourse used is intermittent and superficial rather than promoting a critical view of indigenous peoples' struggles in this country. Fairclough (2012) posits that, "discourse is ideological in so far as it contributes to sustaining relations of power and domination" (p. 8). When looking at the curricula through a social lens one can become aware of the kinds of 'truths' the documents make available (Apple, 1985). Therefore, one can conclude that learning about indigenous peoples, minority groups, and maintaining one's own culture is not an essential goal of either curriculum.

Student Well-being

The ESL/ELD curriculum (2007a) states that, "broad proficiency in English is essential to students' success in both their social and academic lives and to their ability to take their place in society as responsible and productive citizens" (p. 3). Social well-being is a mutual process that depends on the society and individuals because it stems from *freedom, trust,* and *equal rights* (Goleman, Bennett, & Barlow, 2012); consequently, the well-being of the English learners does not depend only on their mastery of the language, but also on how society treats them. Additionally, connecting English proficiency to becoming a productive citizen is only one indicator of socially and financially successful Canadian citizens. Dewey (1914/1977) explains that in addition to intellectual capacity learners also need to develop their moral faculties, through critical thinking and cultural understanding. However, the curriculum focuses on preparing ESL students to become productive individuals and neglects their sociocultural identities. Giroux (2006) explains language learning is "the site in which people negotiate the most fundamental elements of their identities, the relationship between themselves and others, and their relationship to the larger world" (p. 174). Consequently, not having the opportunity to understand how they fit into their new society and vice-versa, could only create cultural misunderstanding.

The FSL curriculum (OME, 2014) addresses student well-being differently. It instructs teachers to take "students' well-being, including their mental health, into account when planning instructional approaches [and] helping establish a strong foundation for learning" (OME, 2014, p. 5). Although the FSL curriculum also aims to prepare students for "success in school, work, and life" (OME, 2014, p. 54), it does not depict learning a language as the only way of promoting well-being, but also acknowledges that if students are feeling well mentally and socially, they will be academically successful. The different curricula discourses related to student well-being depict distinct goals for the diverse student populations. Whereas FSL students' mental health is taken into consideration, ESL students are compelled to concentrate on their professional success, which is an unequal treatment that could cause serious damage to society. According to School Mental Health Ontario (2020, December 07), "schools are an ideal place for mental health promotion, prevention and early intervention".

Consequently, all students deserve to be treated equally if we want to build a just and healthy society.

Critical Thinking

Critical thinking is a skill promoted by the Western educational system (Resaei, Derakhshan, & Bagherkaziem, 2011) which encourages learners to analyze and judge diverse perspectives before making decisions, instead of accepting someone else's view without questioning. In L2 learning, Guo (2013) explains that learning about the host culture helps students develop critical thinking skills. When students understand cultural differences, they can identify the barriers to promoting critical thinking skills and develop the competency consciously, instead of being treated like empty vessels who must memorize how to think and act in the new cultural context.

The 2007 ESL/ELD curriculum document defines critical thinking as "[t]he process of thinking about ideas or situations in order to understand them fully, identify their implications, and/or make a judgement about what is sensible or reasonable to believe or do." (p. 178). In addition to writing, reading, listening, and speaking, the curriculum has a socio-cultural competence and media literacy strand, which aims to prepare students to study, live and work in Canada through understanding "of rights and responsibilities" (p. 20), and adaptation to the Canadian context. Critical thinking, according to Benesch (1993) is not an academic skill, but a journey to transform learning and society. Conversely, the curriculum expects learners to mimic the *appropriate* ways English is used in social and cultural environments, which does not foster critical thinking.

The FSL curriculum (OME, 2014) argues students will develop critical reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills but does not stipulate critical thinking expectations for FSL. Luke (1995) explains that "discourse in institutional life can be viewed as a means for the naturalization and disguise of power relations that are tied to inequalities in the social production." (p. 12). Despite recommendations, teaching critical thinking skills is not a priority in either L2 curriculum.

Conclusion

Curriculum reflects societal ideologies and contradictions (Apple, 2017). Ontario's L2 curricula state they aim to prepare students to fully participate in society as citizens. However, one can infer the type of citizenship they promote is passive, rather than active. In fact, both documents eschew the teaching of principles that promote democratic citizenship. The ESL/ELD curriculum discourse aims to promote assimilation, the process by which individuals become part of the dominant society by adapting to the dominant culture's way of life (Park, 1914). Typically, it teaches learners "basic social forms and practices" (OME, 2007a, p.66) so they can understand and mimic Canadian social codes. However, Gosh (1995) explains that incorporating the *other*'s culture does not result in "difference-blindness" (p. 237) because humans are different and "have the right to be different" (p. 237). Therefore, instead of trying to force a particular perspective of Canada's way of life onto English learners, sharing an inclusive and democratic view of a global society where students can seek to participate actively as citizens, is a better approach for ESL education.

The 2014 FSL curriculum introduces IA as a way of promoting GC but promotes learning for job readiness. Additionally, teachers are prompted to teach other cultures through

cultural events, *tourist destinations*, *food and sports*, among other topics, rather than giving students the opportunity to learn to understand diverse perspectives and worldviews.

Globalization has increased peoples' interconnectedness and expanded citizenship education's goals to include GC and challenge inequities at the local, national, and global levels. In Ontario schools, students speak more than 100 languages (OME, 2007), therefore, L2 curricula must reflect students' pluralism and advocate for citizenship education that is inclusive and promotes GC.

This comparative analysis of two Ontario L2 curricula has shown that ESL students in Ontario learn to be passive citizens while focusing on learning for the job market. Additionally, FSL students, who are predominantly English speakers, are not taught to be understanding and accepting of cultural diversity as a way of life, but solely for employment. This type of education is a *social wrong* (Fairclough, 2012) and needs to be countered. L2 education in Ontario needs to be reviewed and students need to be taught ethical principles of equity and acceptance of otherness, which encompasses GC. Through a GC approach students will have the opportunity to build a society where citizens are prepared for the job market and to work together, promoting freedom, justice, and peace for all, as global citizens.

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