



Canadian Policy
Research Networks

The State and Potential of Civic Learning in Canada

Charting the Course for Youth Civic and Political Participation

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Abstract

June 2007

Canadian Policy Research Networks

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This research paper is one of the six papers prepared for CPRN's Democratic Renewal Series, *Charting the Course for Civic and Political Participation*. All research papers and CPRN's synthesis report for this project are available on the CPRN Web site at www.cprn.org. The six papers are listed below.

1. *A Group Apart: Young Party Members in Canada* – Lisa Young and William Cross
2. *Indifferent or Just Different? The Political and Civic Engagement of Young People in Canada* – Brenda O'Neill
3. *The Meaning of Political Participation for Indigenous Youth* – Taiaiake Alfred, Jackie Price and Brock Pitawanakwat
4. *Rendre compte et soutenir l'action bénévole des jeunes* – André Thibault, Patrice Albertus and Julie Fortier
5. *The State and Potential of Civic Learning in Canada* – Kristina R. Llewellyn, Sharon Cook, Joel Westheimer, Luz Alison Molina Girón and Karen Suurtamm
6. "What Do You Mean I Can't Have a Say?" *Young Canadians and Their Government* – André Turcotte

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The observations and conclusions are those of the author(s).

Abstract

This report is focused on the role of the education in improving civic learning for youth. We question: What knowledge and skills serve as a basis for models of civic learning for young Canadians? What changes to learning processes are needed to encourage youth participation in democratic processes? To answer these questions the report examines the various perspectives represented in the literature on youth and civic literacy. It also offers the various perspectives of Ottawa students and teachers in relation to government curriculum to provide a snapshot of the state and potential of civic learning within secondary schools. We synthesize this research to identify youth trends in civic participation, possible reasons for political disengagement, and the kind of citizenship knowledge and skills we have historically and currently provided for students. In so doing, we argue that civic learning is primarily characterized by procedural knowledge and compliant codes of behaviour that do not envelope students in collective action for systemic understandings of political issues. We contend that schools need support for renewing efforts that put social justice citizenship at the heart of student learning and the school environment. Educational programs for civic literacy would teach students to make informed, active choices about policies that affect their lives and to engage with their community in efforts for social change.¹

¹ Report of the Standing Senate Committee of Social Affairs, Science and Technology, 1993.

Acknowledgements

The authors of this report wish to thank Amanda Pyykonen and Ranilce Guimaraes for their assistance with this research project. We also extend our appreciation to those schools, teachers and students who welcomed us into their classrooms and to those youth who participated in the CPRN Youth Workshop in March 2007.

We at CPRN would like to express our appreciation to the following financial and in-kind contributors:

Laidlaw Foundation

Elections Canada

Human Resources and Social Development Canada

Government of Saskatchewan, Department of Culture, Youth and Recreation

Canadian Council on Learning

Government of Nova Scotia, Nova Scotia Youth Secretariat

Fireweed Democracy

Laboratoire en loisir et vie communautaire (LLVC), Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières, in collaboration with la Table de concertation des Forums jeunesse régionaux du Québec

The project also benefited from the collective insights and advice of our Project Advisory Group (PAG). We also wish to thank them for attending (as observers) the March 7th Youth Workshop and for their participation at the May 16th Roundtable. The PAG members are:

Rick Anderson, Fireweed Democracy

Uttara Chauhan, Elections Canada

Jennifer Corriero, TakingITGlobal

Nevin Danielson and Spencer Robertson, Government of Saskatchewan, Department of Culture Youth and Recreation

Violetta Ilkiw, Laidlaw Foundation

Peter MacLeod, The Planning Desk

Andrew Medd, Canada 25

Melinda Morin, Aboriginal Youth (Saskatchewan)

Deborah Pellerin, Government of Nova Scotia, Department of Education

Daryl Rock and Deborah Monette, Canadian Council on Learning

Tom McIntosh, University of Regina

Thanks as well to the anonymous reviewers of the papers, the youth participants of the March 7th Youth Workshop and the May 16th Roundtable attendees for their helpful comments and suggestions. Special thanks to Larry Booi, Canadian Council on Learning (Board Member), for his additional insights and advice.

