

Becoming Citizens: Racialized Conceptions of ESL Learners and the Canadian Language Benchmarks

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In this article, I report a qualitative study that sheds light on how adult learners of English as a Second Language (ESL) are constructing new national identities in the context of the challenges associated with immigration. In particular, I trace how the common threads among their conceptions of citizenship compare with those embedded within official, national assessment, and curriculum documents. Using a broad questionnaire and a focused set of semi-structured interviews at a large ESL site in British Columbia, my research reveals the gaps between the experiences of these immigrants and how these documents construct and position idealized and racialized conceptions of second language learners.

Key words: Adult ESL; identity; immigration; assessment and curriculum documents; semi-structured interviews; gap analysis; racialized conceptions; language learning; Language Instruction to Newcomers to Canada (LINC); language policy and planning

Dans cet article, l'auteur présente une étude de cas qualitative qui permet de mieux comprendre comment des adultes apprenant l'anglais à titre de langue seconde (ALS) se façonnent de nouvelles identités nationales dans le cadre des défis associés à l'immigration. L'auteur analyse tout particulièrement de quelle manière les éléments communs de leurs conceptions de la citoyenneté se comparent à certains des thèmes des documents de curriculum et d'évaluation officiels. Reposant sur un vaste questionnaire et une série ciblée d'entrevues semi-structurées menées dans un grand centre d'ALS en Colombie-Britannique, cette recherche révèle les écarts entre les expériences de ces immigrants et la façon dont ces documents créent et positionnent des conceptions à la fois idéalisées et racialisées des personnes apprenant une langue seconde.

Mots clés : adultes en ALS, identité, immigration, documents d'évaluation et de curriculum, entrevues semi-structurées, analyse des écarts, conceptions racialisées, apprentissage d'une langue, Cours de langue pour les immigrants au Canada (CLIC), politique -et aménagement linguistiques

In this article, I outline a qualitative study to examine the nature of alignments and gaps between the conceptualizations of Canadian citizenship that are expressed in official national assessment and curriculum documents and those that are articulated by a community of adult learners of English as a Second Language (ESL). Drawing on the voices of Punjabi-speaking immigrants enrolled in a government-sponsored ESL program, my study sheds light on how a contemporary sample of adult ESL learners is constructing new national identities in the context of the challenges associated with coming to Canada. In particular, tracing how the common threads among their conceptions of citizenship compare with those embedded within national ESL assessment and curriculum documents, I illuminate how these documents construct and position idealized conceptions of second language learners.

As this study establishes in detail, significant gaps occur between the principal national assessment and curriculum documents used in this context and the views expressed by the learners in this study. The participants described Canadian citizenship predominantly in terms of human rights, multicultural policy, and the obligations of being citizens. The documents, however, rarely refer to citizenship in these terms. Instead, they tend to describe being Canadian in terms of normative standards, including various forms of social behaviour that imply the existence of a dominant and singular culture to which second language learners have to conform.

The present study raises serious questions about the nature and purpose of adult English language programming in Canada. Despite what multicultural policy statements might claim to the contrary, key curriculum and assessment documents tend to position ESL learners as relatively powerless, passive, and atomized recipients of programming designed to normalize them into a dominant culture. By focusing on normative references to what it means to be Canadian, these curriculum documents, in effect, deny full citizenship rights to adult second-language learners by focusing on normative references to what it means to be Canadian.

In this article, after a brief outline of the theoretical background related to citizenship, I analyze key national curriculum and assessment documents. I then discuss my study of adult ESL learners. For this study,

I first administered an open-ended questionnaire to 114 respondents at my research site: a large evening ESL program provided by a local public school district in British Columbia. I then constructed a set of initial interview prompts based on the responses derived from this questionnaire. These prompts informed my subsequent semi-structured interviews with 25 working-class, Punjabi-speaking, adult learners attending classes at this same site. I used these interviews to ascertain the common themes within my respondents' conceptualisations of citizenship. I finally compare their conceptualisations and with those embedded within the national curriculum and assessment documents. I conclude this article with a treatment of how citizenship has been racialized in this context.

CITIZENSHIP: THE THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Citizenship has been a deeply problematic notion within academic discourse since 1950 when T. H. Marshall wrote *Citizenship and Social Class*. In this seminal work, Marshall argued that, although national citizenship formally conferred equal status on all members of particular societies, inequalities of class prevented poorer members of society from participating as fully as those who were richer. Isin and Wood (1999) sum up this discrepancy: "[M]odern citizenship conferred the legal capacity to strive for the things one would like to possess but did not guarantee the possession of any of them" (p. 28).

As Crick (2007) makes clear, debates about how to define citizenship are still central in the academic literature. These debates, fuelled in large part by declining youth participation in electoral processes in Western countries (Print, 2007), are marked by an increasingly nuanced treatment about how being a citizen can be actively taken up as a participatory role, rather than as a passive status simply conferred by a nation state (Kennedy, 2007; Cook & Westheimer, 2007). These debates have also found a central place in the research literature pertaining to Canadian English as a Second Language (ESL) provision (Derwing, 1992; Derwing & Thomson, 2005).

Since Marshall (1950), citizenship theory has moved into a deeper concern with group rights that have been informed by identity politics. Coincidentally, the field has had to contend with the emerging forces of globalization and intense migration. These forces are quickly reshaping

most nation states throughout the world into either actual or formally recognized multicultural and multilingual entities (Favell, 2001; Fulford, 1993; Guiraudon & Joppke, 2001; Spencer, 1997).

Some scholars of citizenship theory (Boli & Thomas, 1999; Campbell & Rew, 1999; Falk, 2000, Mathews, 2000) have predicted the end of citizenship in an age of globalization, arguing that citizenship has acquired a transnational dimension that will eventually replace its old ties to exclusive territoriality. Much of what unites this scholarship is the perception that the nation state is crumbling under the weight of globalisation. Trends often cited are the willingness of international bodies to intervene in autonomous states, (as in the case of former Yugoslavia), or the fact that international capital finds national borders to be increasingly permeable, (such as with the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA)).

However, as Stasiulis and Bakan (2005) argue, to grasp how citizenship operates in a globalized world, one must look at particular nation states and the hierarchical position each occupies internationally. States that occupy powerful positions are, in effect, "more equal than others" and are able to extend power and influence on others that are less powerful. It is still true that "nation-states remain the most important governance site for the allocation and regulation of citizenship rights, responsibilities and burdens" (Stasiulis & Bakan, 2005, p. 13). Given this context, the power of (some) individual nation states and the worth accorded to the citizenship status they confer are far from undiminished. This conclusion is, of course, not a new historical development – one recalls the status that was once conferred by Roman citizenship. However, as Stasiulis and Bakan (2005) point out, much of the academic literature does not take these differentiations into sufficient account.

How do nation states allocate citizenship? According to Isin and Wood (1999), scholars have used two general ways to define national membership. The first consists of ethnic-cultural-linguistic models to establish what constitutes a normal citizen. In these models, the deciding factor is whether one has been born or assimilated into a particularly defined ethnic group or culture. Perceptions of what constitutes fluency in a particular national language have also been used to categorise people in this manner. These models owe much to the anthropological

literature that focuses on group membership and how culture is passed down from generation to generation. Thus, in this sense, citizenship is best understood as a form of belonging to or membership within a nation state.

The other way to define national membership is the use of legal-political-economic models. These models, which as Kymlicka (1992, 2007) argues have been gaining ascendancy in a globalised world, confer a set of formal political or economic rights and responsibilities after an individual has either been born within a nation state (regardless of their perceived ethnicity) or has undergone a legalistic process to establish their eligibility.

These models of establishing a person's national membership are not always clear cut nor mutually exclusive. In Canada, for example, acceptance of multiculturalism is often taken as an important marker for being Canadian. Much of Taylor et al.'s (1994) influential work, in fact, revolves around how respect for multiculturalism has been a catalyst for Canadian unity. Certainly, as I note below in my discussion of my research data, this understanding is an important way many newcomers define their own membership within their new nation state. However, multiculturalism in the Canadian context is also a legalistic concept because it forms a central part of the national constitution and a plethora of significant policy documents.

I contend that these two ways of defining citizenship operate concurrently within Canada. Citizenship is conferred in a formal way by virtue of one's birthplace, the status of one's parents, or the completion of a legal process that starts when one applies for landed immigrant status. However, a normative standard or cultural definition of being Canadian also stands in addition to the legalistic forms of citizenship. Normative forms of citizenship, as Bannerji (2000) points out, have established hierarchical standards for what it means to be Canadian.

THE CANADIAN LANGUAGE BENCHMARKS

The *Canadian Language Benchmarks 2000: English as a Second Language – for Adults (CLB)* (Pawlikowska-Smith, 2000), the most important national assessment document within the Canadian adult ESL context, does nothing less ambitious than describe the full range of English language profi-

ciency (from beginning to full fluency) as represented in elaborate sets of pedagogical tasks. It is an official instrument in the implementation of Canadian adult ESL policy because its implementation is overseen by the Centre for Canadian Language Benchmarks (CCLB), a non-profit organization funded by the federal government, and because its development was the result of a painstaking process of consultations and draft formulations facilitated by federal agencies (Norton Pierce & Stewart, 1997).

Although Pawlikowska-Smith (2000) states in her introduction that the *CLB* is “not a curriculum guide” (p. viii), she does say, in the very next paragraph, that the *CLB* describes “what adult ESL instruction should prepare adult ESL learners to do” (p. viii). Thus, the *CLB* quite clearly sets up tasks that learners are meant to perform to advance to the next level of instruction. Teachers, as the document plainly states, are expected to organize learning opportunities for the successful completion of these tasks. To my mind, the claim that the *CLB* is not meant to inform curriculum development is rather disingenuous and illustrative of Shohamy’s (2007) argument that externally imposed assessment tools such as the *CLB* are in fact meant to control the content and methods of instruction. As Fox and Courchène (2005) point out in this context, “although the *CLB* is neither a curriculum or test according to its developers, providing details regarding text length and sample tasks leads anyone using the document to use these as guidelines for task development” (p. 13). This point is reinforced by a study of Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC)¹ teachers recently conducted by Haque and Cray (2007) in which their respondents confirmed that the *CLB* was something they could not ignore as a set of reference points for curriculum development.

¹ Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) is the national federally-funded adult ESL program. LINC and its provincial equivalents are the largest adult ESL programs in the country. All students enrolled in LINC programs have their English language proficiency assessed through instruments based on the *CLB*. See Fleming (2007) for a fuller description of the relationship between LINC and the *CLB*.

Why is this an important point to make? If practitioners use the *CLB* as a set of guidelines to inform pedagogical choices, as the above quotation indicates, then the sample tasks in the document are of crucial importance to determine classroom content. In effect, given the official nature of the *CLB*, the document officially sanctions content found within the sample tasks they provide. Content not included in the sample tasks will thus not enjoy official sanction. This latter content, although not prohibited – depending on the pedagogical situation, will not be privileged or necessarily emphasized. As Spolsky and Shohamy (1999) have pointed out, what is excluded from curriculum documents tells educators as much about what is intended in a pedagogical situation as what has been included. The content, both included and excluded, of the sample tasks tells a great deal about how those who framed the *CLB* viewed English language newcomers to Canada and what ESL teachers should teach them. The *CLB* specifies what should be given priority in terms of English language training and, in view of its official character, represents itself as an instrument of national language policy.

The *Canadian Language Benchmarks 2000: English as a Second Language - for Adults* (Pawlikowska-Smith, 2000), comprising over 200 compact pages, consists mainly of the actual benchmarks, arranged in 12 levels, from basic English language proficiency to full fluency. On these pages, naturally, I focused my attention.

The preface and introductory chapters provide an interesting segue into the rest of the text. In an obvious reference to the original policy initiatives that gave rise to the *CLB*, the Board of Directors for the CCLB used the preface to tell the fictional story of a 25-year old immigrant from Indonesia who, on changing institutions, is confused about how his previous school had assessed his English level. According to the preface, this situation occurs less and less frequently because of the introduction of the *CLB*. In addition, as the preface emphasizes, immigrants are now able to refer to the *CLB* in high stakes situations to demonstrate their English language ability to employers or to gain entrance to educational institutions. The author of the preface describes this shift as no less than a “revolution” (p. v).

Even more tellingly, the preface also states that, thanks to the *CLB*, learners will “plot out for themselves, in advance, their own paths of

language learning to attain their goals" (p. v). This is an important point. If learners can predict how their learning will progress upon entrance into the "CLB movement" (p. v), as the preface characterizes programs that have adopted the *Benchmarks*, then is this document not more than simply a description of the English language at a particular level of proficiency? Leaving aside the problem of whether "one size fits all," does this document not now become a set of learning objectives meant to inform curriculum development?

This ambiguity continues into the text's introduction, which says that the *Benchmarks* are "a national standard for planning second language curricula for a variety of contexts" (p. viii), while stating categorically that it is "not a curriculum guide: they do not dictate local curricula and syllabuses" (p. viii). The document even attempts to "have its cake and eat it too" in terms of methodology. Although the author states that the CLB is "not tied to any specific instructional method" (p. viii), the introduction emphasizes the need for instructors to adhere to common hallmarks of the communicative approach (Brown, 2001): learner-centred instruction, task-based proficiency, and communicative competency.

Personally, I have no argument with intelligent and nuanced applications of the communicative approach. However, putting aside the long-standing, ambiguous use in the field of such terms as *approach*, *philosophy*, and *method* (Stern, 1983), I think that it is important to note that the CLB does, in fact, imply that teachers should adopt a particular way of approaching curriculum planning and instruction. This implication becomes explicit in the other documents that I discuss below.

The bulk of the content found in the actual *Benchmarks* is arranged for each level in a series of matrixes to correspond to the four language skills. Each benchmark found within the CLB contains (a) a general overview of the tasks to be performed upon completion of the level, (b) the conditions under which this performance should take place, (c) a more specific description of what a learner can do, and (d) examples and criteria to indicate that a learner has successfully performed the task. These are complex matrixes, as one might expect from a document purporting to describe English language proficiency from basic competency to fluency. I do not intend to provide the reader with any more detail of the general nature of the document because this would be outside my pur-

poses. Let me therefore turn to the matter at hand: an account of the language descriptors that contain elements pertaining to citizenship.

Unfortunately, there are not many. In the entire document, I consider only three references to be associated with citizenship. These are, learners will (a) "understand rights and responsibilities of client, customer, patient and student" (p. 95); (b) "indicate knowledge of laws, rights, etc." (p. 116); and (c) "write a letter to express an opinion as a citizen" (p. 176).

It is disappointing to see such a small number of references to citizenship in such an important document and, in many ways, I find it very revealing to note what is missing, especially in terms of how language is connected to exercising citizenship. The word *vote*, for example, does not appear in this or in any of the other documents I examined, an odd omission because the language skill for the physical act of voting requires (at least in Canada) simply marking a box in a voting booth against a name of a person and a political party. Thus, voting, one of the most important aspects of exercising citizenship in Western democracies, is conspicuously absent.

What is even more disturbing is how other forms of exercising citizenship are connected to levels of English language proficiency. Only at the very highest benchmark levels, at the point at which one is writing research papers at universities, does one find references to developing opinions about current events, writing letters to the editors of newspapers, or participating in meetings. Thus, the document, through the way it connects language proficiency and citizenship, implies that opinions not expressed in English have little value, and that voting is an activity that does not warrant much engagement.

In addition, issues related to trade unions and collective agreements are mentioned only twice, again at the stage at which one is able to write research papers. Labour rights, such as filing grievances or recognizing and reporting dangerous working conditions, are non-existent in the document. Employment standards legislation, such as minimum wage legislation, is mentioned only once and again at a relatively high benchmark. At the same time, however, the document devotes a great deal of space to participating in job performance reviews, giving polite and respectful feedback to one's employer, and participating in meetings about lunchroom cleanliness.

It is also disconcerting to note the limitations placed on the few references to citizenship noted above and how they have been couched. Only one of the three quotations listed above (writing a letter) provides a view of citizenship as active engagement, albeit fairly limited. The other two are decidedly vague, passive, and intellectual (understanding or indicating knowledge). No content links collective action, group identity, debate, or investigation into citizenship rights.

The document views English language learners as having rights and responsibilities that pertain primarily to being good consumers. In the first example above, for instance, the learners understand their rights and responsibilities as a “client, customer, patient and student” (p. 95), but not as a worker, family member, participant in community activities, or advocate. As I discuss below, workers’ rights were some of the major concerns of the learners I interviewed. Many respondents complained that they were consistently denied overtime pay or access to benefits, were forced to work statutory holidays, fired without cause, or the like. However, the *CLB* has no references to understanding standards of employment legislation, workers compensation, employment insurance, or safety in the workplace. However, there are plenty of references within the document about shopping and consumerism.

I did not limit my analysis to the *CLB*. In light of the controversy as to whether or not the *CLB* can be described as a curriculum document, I decided to consider all related publications that have some form of official status. Accordingly, I examined all fourteen of the official publications produced by the CCLB and listed on their website (Centre for Canadian Language Benchmarks [CCLB], 2007), reasoning that these publications, by virtue of their appearance on this website, held official status in this context. Upon examination, I found that six of these publications were simplified versions of the principal documents (such as posters and checklists) that contained no additional content. I thus rejected them for consideration. As a result, I selected the eight documents listed below for examination. These documents were:

- *Canadian Language Benchmarks 2000: English as a Second Language – for Adults* (Pawlikowska-Smith, 2000);
- *Canadian Language Benchmarks 2000: Theoretical Framework* (Pawlikowska-Smith, 2002a);

- *Canadian Language Benchmarks 2000: Additional Sample Task Ideas* (Pawlikowska-Smith, 2002b);
- *Canadian Language Benchmarks 2000: ESL for Literacy Learners* (Johansson, Angst, Beer, Martin, Rebeck & Sibilleau, 2002);
- *Canadian Language Benchmarks 2000: A Guide to Implementation* (Holmes, Kingwell, Pettis & Pidlaski, 2001);
- *Summative Assessment Manual – SAM (Volumes 1 and 2)* (Pawlikowska-Smith, 2005);
- *Developing an Occupation-Specific Language Assessment Tool Using the Canadian Language Benchmarks* (Centre for Canadian Language Benchmarks, 2004);
- *Integrating CLB Assessment into your ESL Classroom* (Holmes, 2005).

Space here does not permit me to enumerate the features of these documents in detail. Some of the related documents, especially the *Additional Sample Task Ideas* (Pawlikowska-Smith, 2002b), mitigate some of the shortcomings in the principal document by developing citizenship content slightly more fully. However, none of the documents addresses to any great degree the fundamental flaws I have identified. Active participation as full citizens is still limited to the very highest levels of English language proficiency, with a tendency in all the documents related to the CLB to represent learners as somewhat isolated and passive consumers. In a recent discussion of how citizenship education curricula are sites of ideological struggle (Morgan & Fleming, 2009), Brian Morgan and I argue that active citizenship finds a progressively more significant place in documents related to the CLB. Unfortunately, much of this progression occurs outside official documents.

I examined hundreds of other documents and texts found in an extensive database of resources kept, but not vetted by, the CCLB (CCLB, 2007). These documents included lesson plans, commercially produced texts, curricula produced by educational bodies receiving government funding, and descriptions of recommended teaching practices by teacher trainers. Some, such as *On Target* (Mitra, 1998), and *The LINC 1-5 Curriculum Guidelines* (Toronto Catholic District School Board, 1999), enjoyed wide usage. An online search of the CCLB database (CCLB, 2007) revealed that some of these documents treated citizenship as a topic. How-

ever, having a document included in the database is simply a matter of notifying the CCLB web master. Therefore, because the CCLB in no way endorsed any of these documents found in its database, I could not determine which of the hundreds I considered truly reflected official policy.

Of special note, in terms of the difficulty to determine the official character of *CLB* documents, the Toronto Catholic District School Board's (2000) *LINC 1 – 5 Curriculum Guidelines* provides an example. The official character of the *Guidelines* is suggested by its endorsement by the Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants and by the fact that the provincial branch of Citizenship and Immigration Canada distributes the document free of charge to LINC programs in Ontario. This document presents a different model of what citizenship could mean to adult immigrants because it emphasises voting rights and active participation in community life. However, I could discover no explicit policy statement in official government documents about its official status.

Taken as a whole the *CLB* and its related official documents tend to describe being Canadian in terms of normative standards, including various forms of social behaviour, which imply the existence of a dominant and singular culture to which second language learners have to conform. As Young (1987) has said about similar curricula for the general education context in Canada, these national documents help to maintain "the dominance of some social *identity* (a certain patriarchal Englishness) against and under which . . . all others are subordinated" (pp. 10-11).

THE STUDY: A SAMPLE OF ESL LEARNERS

As part of a study examining the attitudes and immigrant experiences of Punjabi speakers living in a Vancouver suburb, I interviewed 25 adult ESL learners about their conceptions of Canadian citizenship. Punjabi speakers have historically been subjected to discriminatory and restrictive practices embedded in Canadian immigration policy. In ways that were similar to the experience of Chinese immigrants, and very different from those coming from Europe, male Punjabi newcomers were often forced to leave their families behind to seek better-paying employment in their new country. Many also came to Canada to escape the persecution that Sikhs were subject to after the 1984 assassination of Indira

Ghandi (McGillivray, 2000; Sangha, 1999; Singh, 2001). Punjabi speakers living in British Columbia numbered fewer than 3000 until 1907 (Redway, 1984).

In 1907, a series of measures restricted Punjabi immigration to British Columbia and severely limited the rights of those already in the province. These immigrants were denied the vote and barred from a number of professions until 1947 (Sandhu, 1972). In recent years, however, immigration from the Punjab has steadily increased. According to the last census (Statistics Canada, 2003) there were 201,785 Punjabi speakers in Canada. Among the non-official languages (i.e., excluding English or French), only Chinese, Italian, and German are spoken more significantly nationally. The Punjabi-speaking community is the second largest and fastest growing immigrant group in British Columbia, where the majority of its members live. The neighbourhood from which I drew the students for the present study has the highest concentration of Punjabi speakers in Canada, where they make up one of every three of the neighbourhood's 91,000 residents.

My study concentrated on working-class, Punjabi-speaking, adult learners attending the largest evening ESL program that the local public school district provided. The school district in question was the largest in the province in terms of total student numbers. For this qualitative research, I employed semi-structured interviews as the principal method to collect data, fitting well into the study tradition as defined by Creswell (1997). Based on a broader sampling of virtually all the ESL learners at the site derived from a questionnaire previously administered to 114 respondents, I determined a set of preliminary start questions for in-depth interviews with 25 participants. After preliminary questions focusing on the context of their immigrant experiences, I asked the participants about their definition of citizenship. I interviewed all those Punjabi speakers at the site who volunteered. They exhibited a wide variety of backgrounds, English language proficiency, and gender. All had working class occupations and were recent immigrants to Canada. Each was given the opportunity to make use of an interpreter. In my discussion below, I have used the exact words from participants for verisimilitude.

Clear themes emerged from the data in terms of two broad areas: (a) the general challenges related to immigration, and (b) how these respon-

dents conceptualised citizenship. Comments related to the first of these areas help to contextualise the comments related to the second. However, space here does not permit a detailed presentation of the findings related to the first of these areas other than to summarize them as follows:

1. Students often described communicating in English in the wider society as difficult but not always necessary for daily life;
2. Students saw learning English as an important part of integrating into the larger Canadian society;
3. The students made strong links between learning English and obtaining better employment;
4. Family goals often took precedence over individual goals;
5. Most students strongly emphasized the importance of maintaining their first language and culture;
6. All respondents volunteered the view that the classes they had attended were good, especially how their classes helped them integrate into Canada;
7. Some students said that they had faced or were aware of various forms of discrimination since coming to Canada;
8. Women experienced immigration in ways that were different from men.

I now turn to a more detailed account of the seven themes related to conceptualisations of citizenship that emerged from the data. I have elaborated each of these themes through the use of participants' quotations.

Becoming Canadian Was a Major Shift in Identity

Coming to Canada, as the data gathered reveal, entails enormous concrete changes in the immigrants' daily life, work, family roles, and plans for the future. The data also make it very clear that the majority of participants also had major psychological shifts associated with immigration. Although two of my respondents claimed that the immigration experience had little impact upon them psychologically, the remaining 23 participants indicated that their self-perceptions had been profoundly affected as a result of this process.

For these ESL students, a large part of coming to Canada meant shutting the door on India. Although most said that they planned to return

occasionally to visit friends and family, or even to get married, immigration entailed a shift of allegiances to their new nation state. As one participant put it:

In my opinion my past in India. I left that country right. Now I'm still forever and living in Canada right and if I think. We should first when we get Canadian citizenship, right and we think Canada is my country now. Right. It is my country. I live here in Canada forever.

This change in national allegiance was something to be stated publicly and without room for doubt. As another respondent said through the interpreter, "[B]eing a citizen means that he belongs to the country. If he travels anywhere and people ask him, what is your citizenship, he will say it is Canadian."

Participants often made comparisons with life in India in which they told me that they felt discriminated against in India. Discrimination was not restricted to dramatic public events, such as when the Golden Temple was attacked by the Indian army in 1984, but experiences in daily life. For example, many of them cited examples from daily life in which they had been fearful of the local police and frustrated with an inability to access better employment opportunities. Through the interpreter, one respondent indicated,

He says there is no fear and it is very peaceful [in Canada] and [he says if he walks at] 10:00 at night feels safe; unlike in India if he is walking at 10:00 and a cop stops him and harasses him, he has to bribe him to get out of the situation.

Accordingly, Indian citizenship suffered in comparison, as when one of my respondents bluntly said that, "[Canadian] government good. India has no good government."

In this context, it is easy to see why some participants described their commitment to their new nation in ways that were very enthusiastic and relatively unconditional. One respondent, for example, said that being a citizen meant that one "will do anything for his country." For others, however, the satisfaction in becoming Canadian was tempered by the fact that citizenship did not necessarily solve economic difficulties. One respondent expressed this attitude in this way: "I feel very happy that time

[when he took the citizenship oath], but when I can't find a job then I feel sad, because job is very important for my life because we don't have, we can't enjoy our life."

This commitment to the new nation was not simply in terms of themselves alone. One respondent stressed how this shift in identity and commitment should be passed down to the next generation. As she said, *"I think of my children to think of Canada, good thinking and country good and something improvement in Canada."*

Becoming Canadian meant changes both in terms of how they viewed themselves and how others viewed them. Participants' comments noted that how others perceived them could be quite profound. One participant put this issue quite graphically when she described how they would be treated and viewed by Indian immigration officials if they ever returned for visits to the old country. She said that, *"Yeah, if we are Canadian citizen then everybody behave good with us like if we going to India; they make two lines, one for immigrants, one for citizens. They good behaving, the Canadian citizens."* In the same vein, another participant said that when she obtained her Canadian passport, *"[She felt] much more respectful person, a respectable person."*

For one respondent being a citizen meant that she would have an enhanced sense of self-worth and be equal to anyone else if she *"went to any white peoples' office right, like, or where special appointment I went to apply to my job, so I am very Canadian."* Even more profoundly, participants noted a change of citizenship could have a deep impact on how they believed the world should be interpreted, as in this example:

We have to change the new. My state's peoples [Punjabis] they have to change . . . they should think that woman and man same. . . . This is the main change, change the culture from my culture [to] Canadian culture.

Finally, I would be remiss if I neglected to note that the vast majority of the respondents looked upon Canadian citizenship in highly positive ways. Their attitude is exemplified by the response I received when I asked one student how she thought she would feel when she took her citizenship oath. She simply said that she would be *"grateful."*

Citizenship Rights

During the interviews, 17 of the 25 respondents mentioned that one gained better access to citizenship rights in their various forms when one obtained Canadian citizenship. This answer was the single most important element in how these respondents, as a group, referred to Canadian citizenship.

Some respondents spoke about citizenship rights simply in general terms, as when several of them associated Canada with the word "freedom" or in quotations such as this: *"Nation? Citizen nation. Yeah, citizen nation. This is very important because and important the rights."*

Sometimes these general remarks seemed to be in purely legalistic terms in the sense that these rights were recognized as coming into play only after one swore the citizenship oath. These rights were most often concretely described in terms of the electoral rights. For example, one woman simply stated that *"You vote if you are citizen."* On the other hand, electoral rights were often linked to becoming an equal member of Canadian society, as in this example, *"I think if I got the citizen, I get citizen I'm same right, get rights and vote as a man."* Electoral rights were also not simply regarded as the right to vote, but being involved in elections. In the following example, the respondent also regarded full participation in the electoral process as being important *"because I [will be] citizen, right. Yeah, I do the voting and other activities."*

Other examples of purely legalistic interpretations of citizenship rights referred to freedom of speech, the frequent use of the word "democracy," or the occasional reference to the right to unionize. Many remarks referred to equality and in the context of comparisons to the situation in India, as in this opinion expressed through the interpreter, *"He says he feels everyone is treated equally here in Canada and the laws are the same for all and he said it is not like India where there is difference."*

On the other hand, it was not always clear as to whether the student was referring to citizenship rights as a purely legalistic entity, or something wrapped up in Canadian culture. This ambiguity is exemplified in this quotation: *"We can get rights of the nation if we are citizens. We are really attached to that culture."* This lack of distinction between the legalistic and normative aspects of citizenship rights is even more clearly exemplified in the following example:

Canadian culture is good, good because it is a democrat country, freedom. Nobody is nothing. . . . Canadian culture is good. I don't think white people say that we should accept Canadian culture. Right. Because we live here. We child born here. Life is same. That's why we have to accept Canadian culture.

Multiculturalism

Nine respondents referred to multiculturalism during the course of the interviews, all of whom described it positively. This response was not manifested by abstract references to government policy. Much more frequently, in fact, the respondents talked about multiculturalism as the principle of respecting other people and their cultures, as in this example: *"Every culture [we] should respect and [be a] good citizen of Canada."* Respondents often linked respecting the multicultural makeup of Canada to being a good citizen, as when this student said, *"Yeah, everybody, yeah in this country and the culture. Every culture should respect and [be a] good citizen of Canada,"* or to general morality, such as in this quotation: *"[To be a Canadian] like you do good job, no like crimes, nothing. . . . Respect other cultures or peoples . . . because . . . Canada is multicultural."*

The benefits of living in a multicultural nation were seen as a two-way street. As one respondent said, *"We have to respect other people, then they give us respect."* One respondent applied this principle to daily life as demonstrated in the following quotation:

We follow the laws and we respect everybody. We respect everybody's language and cultures and respect everything is right. We no speak rudely, right. If you are Chinese and I am East Indian . . . we respect everybody and everybody respect us. . . . Canada is multicultural country and also people rights and we don't ignore anybody, right.

However, despite the fact that multiculturalism is a core aspect of federal policy, problems with discrimination still exist. As I discuss below, the students were well aware both that concrete manifestations of racism are common in Canadian society and that discrimination is in variance with stated government policy. One student noted this problem: *"Canada is multicultural country but [everyone] not treated equally";* or as another student said: *"Canada is multicultural because there are so many religions here but there is not equality."*

Respecting the Rule of Law

The second most commonly expressed opinion about what it meant to be Canadian had to do with the rule of law. To a certain extent, the students recognized that adherence to the law was part of being a member of any nation state, a sentiment expressed thus by one student: *"When you follow any country you right then we are citizens of that country. You first follow their rules and rights. I am Canadian."*

However, respondents thought of Canadian law differently from the law in India. The students at this site were very appreciative of what they perceived as the stability and consistency provided by the rule of law in Canada. This awareness was in contrast to the Indian legal system, which was often described as being arbitrary and corrupt.

In my estimation, the stability and consistency that these students prized was due to their perception that *equality* was as a key principle in the way Canadian law was framed. As one student stressed, through the interpreter, *"Here in Canada the laws are the same for all."* This was in contrast to India, which has a multiracial makeup, where the same student said that between the races *"there is difference."* This is not to say, however, that the students were blind to inequities in the way Canadian law was applied. As one student said, *"Here is laws too good"*; she believed that for South Asians in Canada *"it is not equal."*

These students did not simply look upon the Canadian legal system as the arbiter of a set of rights to which they were entitled. An analysis of the interview data revealed that some students (9 of the 25) stressed that respect for the rule of law was a large part of what it meant to be a responsible citizen. Most references in this regard were clear and adamant, as in this example: *"[Canadians] follow the laws, right, and we don't do any crime, criminal and don't sell drugs, right."* This sentiment is also clear in the following exchange that took place within an interview:

Student: *You know the rules.*

Researcher: *So you want to follow the rules?*

Student: *Follow the rules.*

Researcher: *Follow the law, I guess, the rules of the country. Yeah.*

Student: *And make a good citizen.*

This sense of responsibility to respect the law was linked to general morality and the family. As one put it,

[To be Canadian means] we follow the laws right and we don't do any crime, criminal and don't sell drugs, right, so we want keep education, we can have a job, make money and spend money on our family. We guide our family and be responsible.

A full interpretation of these remarks must include a careful assessment of what was happening in the larger community at the time of these interviews. As one of the educational leaders from the community I interviewed prior to the start of data collection stressed, crime and conflict were at the forefront of everyone's concerns. While I was conducting these interviews, for example, the Air India mass murder trials were commencing. These trials, in which prominent members of the community stood accused of a terrorist bombing of an Air India flight in support of an independent Khalistan, were causing great schisms within the community. Also at the time, the first of a series of public meetings was taking place on the issue of youth violence. In unprecedented numbers, young men in the community were being murdered in what police and media described as the result of involvement in drug-related crime. Conflict in the community was also evident in a number of high profile, and sometimes violent, struggles over the control of religious, financial, and educational institutions. In light of these issues, it is perfectly understandable that many in the community, like many of the students I interviewed, would stress adherence to law as an attribute of good citizenship.

Respecting the law was not simply an intellectual exercise that stood in isolation. Some linked following the law with emotions and moral precepts, such as in this statement, provided through the interpreter: *"Being a Canadian citizen means to love all people and to follow the law."*

Several Participants Interpreted Citizenship in Terms of Morality

Although most respondents seemed to focus on how to describe Canadian citizenship in terms of the legalistic precepts of adhering to law, accessing citizenship rights, or respecting multiculturalism, six students centred their discussions on what I consider to be the normative aspects

of being good citizens because they saw that a moral attitude was a central part of being Canadian.

Of course, the distinction between legalistic and normative references to citizenship is not always clear. When does respecting the law cease to be a purely legalistic concern and become a moral imperative, for example? Needless to say, my intention here is not to rehash arguments that have been central to philosophical debates for centuries – conducted most famously by such thinkers as Renan and Fichte. I present, rather, several quotations that stress a moral sense of what it means to be Canadian.

The best example within the data to show how morality finds its way into how the students conceptualized citizenship occurs in this quotation: *"He makes Canadian, a Canadian citizen, good, good behavior, not fighting, not secret things."* Similarly, another student described being a good citizen as being someone who *"Understands everybody like, don't hurt for anybody."* Again, the issues faced by the community I have enumerated above provide an important context in the consideration of this reflection.

With this ideal version of a citizen in mind, one of my respondents spoke of the need for immigrants to acculturate into a polite society. Newcomers have the responsibility, as she described it through the interpreter, to *"speak respectfully . . . freedom means to be respectful of other people."*

Several Participants Stressed Instrumental Purposes

Although most of the comments I gathered about citizenship encompassed large social concerns, comments from five of the 25 respondents related to narrower descriptions of citizenship that I have interpreted as being rather instrumental. Of course, all my respondents have come to Canada to better the lives of themselves and their families. However, in the following discussion, I highlight comments that emphasize the immediate personal benefit that one gains through becoming a Canadian citizen.

One respondent, for example, emphasized her goal of obtaining a Canadian passport to travel more freely. Another said that her primary concern was to access government medical insurance. A third said that

she liked having access to Canadian government services and living in a country with less pollution than in India. In the same vein, two students described coming to Canada as being important for their own personal betterment to gain a better education and to make money.

As mentioned above, only two of the students felt that coming to Canada made little difference to their outlook. At least one explained this attitude in terms of his comfortable economic status in both Canada and India. Given his relative wealth, he was able to travel back and forth between the two countries frequently and said, through the interpreter, that,

"[One's citizenship] doesn't make a difference. You could be a citizen of India or you could be a citizen of Canada. But . . . life is better in Canada and there are more facilities in Canada. It's good to be in Canada."

Attitudes towards English

Although English was considered key to gaining access to better employment and material well-being, only two of the 25 students felt that having a fluent command of English was essential to being Canadian. One respondent explained it this way: *"Canadian's language is English everybody's . . . [should] learn the English."* The other student was more adamant, declaring that *"I think you do all English. Then you Canadian."*

The vast majority of my respondents, however, felt that knowledge of English had more of an instrumental purpose than as a vehicle for integration into the wider community. None of these students saw anything incompatible with conducting the greater part of their daily lives in Punjabi and being good Canadian citizens. Most students put great stress on preserving the Punjabi language and the Sikh religion and culture. One participant, for example, mourned the fact that his brother-in-law had lost much of his Punjabi culture. He described his brother-in-law as a culturally integrated Canadian, despite the fact that he had not learned much English in the 20 years he had lived in Canada.

The data make it clear that becoming Canadian involved a major shift in identity for almost all participants, who noted that access to citizenship rights was a key element in how they referred to citizenship in their new nation state. They spoke most strongly about the right to par-

ticipate meaningfully in the political process and contrasted their hopes to their experiences in India. They viewed multiculturalism as an essential aspect of Canadian life that conferred real benefits to them. In addition, most saw respecting the rule of law as the central responsibility of Canadian citizenship. Some participants said that morality was related to being Canadian while a few participants stressed instrumental purposes in obtaining citizenship. However, these two latter groups, who evaluated citizenship in somewhat opposite ways, were definitely in the minority. Finally, only a few of the respondents believed that fluent command of English was necessary to become an integrated Canadian.

CONCLUSION: RACIALIZED FORMS OF CITIZENSHIP

As mentioned at the beginning of this article, this research raises serious questions about the nature and purpose of adult English language programming in Canada. Despite policy statements to the contrary, the key curriculum and assessment documents described in this study position ESL learners as powerless and passive. They are viewed as recipients of programming that is designed to normalize them into a dominant culture. In effect, these learners are denied citizenship rights through a focus on normative references to what it means to be a Canadian.

There are significant gaps between the principal national assessment and curriculum documents used for adult ESL programming and the views expressed by the learners through the present research in conceptualizing citizenship and being Canadian. The participants spoke of being Canadian predominantly in terms of citizenship rights, multicultural policy, and the obligations of citizenship. The official national assessment and curriculum documents I examined, however, rarely referred to citizenship in these terms. Instead, they approached Canadian-ness in terms of normative standards, including various forms of social behaviour, which imply the existence of a dominant and singular culture to which second language learners have to conform. When these documents covered material pertaining to citizenship, it was contained only within the higher levels of English language proficiency. These documents thus implied, in how they were organized, that citizenship rights and responsibilities are appropriate only for those learners with exceptionally high abilities in English.

Race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and class can be classified as master statuses that establish hierarchical positions that overpower or dominate other identities. As Weber (1949) noted early on, ethnicity and race describe a sense of identity based on descent, language, religion, tradition, arbitrarily chosen physical characteristics, and common experiences. Whereas race is a construction based on socially selected physical traits, ethnicity is a construction based on socially selected cultural traits. In both cases, dominant groups can define minorities, regardless of what these minorities find acceptable in ways that establish hierarchies that have important material effects. I argue that the documents in this study establish a racialized (or ethnicized, if you will) hierarchy of Canadian citizenship based on normative standards of what constitutes English fluency. Few learners in the present study, given their social and economic status, could ultimately hope to attain full citizenship in this sense.

It is not clear to me whether the children of my respondents will achieve a modicum of citizenship status, as it is defined normatively by the *CLB*. What is presently clear, however, is that the learners in the present study will not attain this status, given the material realities they face. If the *CLB* is anything to go on, these immigrants will not, despite their (hopeful) eventual legal status as citizens, be conferred equality. Marshall's (1950) argument, originally made regarding the way citizenship obscures class, has great explanatory power in this context. Legal citizenship is one thing. Equal status, blocked as it is here on the basis of an (ultimately) unattainable high standard of English language fluency, is another.

I conclude, however, on a hopeful note. I find it ironic that the learners in the present study were well positioned as emergent global citizens and, in a sense, well ahead of the curriculum documents I examined. Rather than the racialized form of citizenship so evident in the documents under study, most, through their focus on legalistic conceptions of citizenship and their relative neglect of normative standards, reflected and resonated with the trends I identified above in the emergent literature related to citizenship theory, language policy, and critical second language education.

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