



Global Citizenship Education in the Draft Social Studies K-6 Curriculum

Alberta Council for Global Cooperation (ACGC)

Preliminary Observations

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INTRODUCTION

This document is the Alberta Council for Global Cooperation’s (ACGC) response to the **Draft Social Studies K-6 Curriculum** released by the Government of Alberta on March 29, 2021. ACGC conducted the analysis of the draft social studies curriculum to better understand the alignment of the draft curriculum with global citizenship education (GCE) best practices. *Please note: Hereafter, the terms “draft” or “draft curriculum” will refer only to the Draft K-6 Social Studies Curriculum, and not the entire Draft K-6 Curriculum.*

Global citizenship is a lens through which to see the world. ACGC understands global citizenship as “an ethos” primarily concerned with fostering “a sense of belonging to the global community and common humanity” (UNESCO, 2013). This not only involves members experiencing solidarity and collective identity themselves, but also necessitates collective responsibility to take local and global action for a better world.

Following the analysis, ACGC strongly recommends that the draft curriculum be rewritten to reflect international best practices in global citizenship education. There are significant gaps in the draft when held against the suggested learning outcomes of UNESCO’s guide, *Global Citizenship Education: Topics and Learning Objectives*. Furthermore, the Alberta government’s *Guiding Framework for the Design and Development of Kindergarten to Grade 12 Provincial Curriculum* released in December 2020 provides an opportunity for GCE if the draft curriculum more closely aligns with our understanding of the *Guiding Framework*. Ultimately, the best path forward is rewriting the draft curriculum to include cognitive, socio-emotional, and behavioural learning outcomes that foster active global citizenship and prepare Alberta students to contribute to and thrive within a sustainable, interconnected world.

SUMMARY OF PRELIMINARY OBSERVATIONS

ACGC has identified three preliminary observations in analyzing the draft curriculum alongside global citizenship education best practices. These observations include:

1. The Draft Social Studies K-6 Curriculum is not aligned with international best practices for global citizenship education.

Despite the draft focusing heavily on knowledge development, there are no organizing ideas, guiding questions, or outcomes dedicated to building students' knowledge or understanding of current global issues. There are few opportunities for students to build empathy or understanding with those living outside North America, or engage in dialogue on topics that allow students to reflect on our roles and responsibilities in an interconnected world. Furthermore, there are no references to facilitating action learning or applying learning through meaningful community engagement. As such, students will have little to no opportunity to demonstrate learning by taking action as global citizens.

2. The Draft Social Studies K-6 Curriculum lacks coherence with the *Vision for Student Learning* and the *Outcomes for Learning* set in the *Guiding Framework for the Design and Development of Kindergarten to Grade 12 Provincial Curriculum* released in December 2020.

The *Guiding Framework for the Design and Development of Kindergarten to Grade 12 Provincial Curriculum* released in December 2020 reflects values of global citizenship education, including respect for citizenship, pluralism, and inclusion, and sets a vision that students will "make meaningful contributions to their communities and the world." However, the draft curriculum lacks coherence to the vision, outcomes, and competencies by failing to provide aligned learning outcomes, as well as failing to provide opportunities for students to make meaningful contributions to the local or global community. Had the vision, outcomes, and competencies articulated in the *Guiding Framework* been applied, more opportunities to educate students as global citizens could have been possible.

3. The Draft Social Studies K-6 Curriculum threatens to erode Alberta's national and international standing as a leader in global citizenship education.

Alberta became one of the first provinces in Canada to mandate global citizenship education across the curriculum in 2007. The removal of global citizenship as a core competency, and removing general and specific learning outcomes aimed at educating students to live in an interconnected world, threatens to erode Alberta Education's standing in national and international contexts.

ANALYSIS: GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION IN THE DRAFT CURRICULUM

Global Citizenship Education (GCE) is a transformative process aiming to “[build] the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes that learners need to be able to contribute to a more inclusive, just and peaceful world” (UNESCO, 2015, p.15). In the draft curriculum, opportunities to foster transformative learning for global citizenship are severely limited.

Observation #1: The Draft Social Studies K-6 Curriculum is not aligned with international best practices for global citizenship education.

Following extensive research and consultation around the globe, UNESCO released pedagogical guidance on global citizenship education in 2015 titled *Global Citizenship Education: Topics and Learning Objectives*. The publication provides guidance on how best to integrate GCE in local education systems, as well as suggested age-appropriate topics and learning objectives across the cognitive, socio-emotional, and behavioural domains of learning. The following is ACGC’s analysis of the draft curriculum against the suggested learning outcomes of UNESCO’s guide:

Cognitive Domain of Learning

Key GCE learning outcomes within the cognitive domain of learning include:

- *Learners acquire knowledge and understanding of local, national and global issues and the interconnectedness and interdependency of different countries and populations*
- *Learners develop skills for critical thinking and analysis*

The draft curriculum purports to help students “gain the essential knowledge and skills to shape their future with wisdom, prudence, and hope” (Alberta Education, 2020a, p.3). Despite this, there are no organizing ideas, guiding questions, or learning outcomes that build understanding towards living in a globalized world, nor opportunities for students to engage in critical thinking and analysis of current global issues. Using a simple keyword search demonstrates the lack of attention to GCE, with the term ‘global citizenship’ completely omitted from the draft. Moreover, the singular use of the word ‘global’ is only found in grades 5 and 6, as students explore the economic strength of Canada and the USA in relation to the global economy.

As emphasized by UNESCO, a critical component of global citizenship education is to “develop an understanding of global governance structures, rights and responsibilities, global issues and connections between global, national and local systems and processes” (UNESCO, 2015, p.16). The topics of governance structures, rights, and responsibilities do emerge in 5th and 6th grade, as students explore the historical development of Indigenous governance structures, as well as those of Canada and the USA. However, clearly missing is any understanding of these within current global governance systems, the role of the United Nations, or the importance of global cooperation. Furthermore, students in grade 1 are asked to explore migration due to “natural disasters and their impact: famine, wars, disease, drought, floods and fires,” but only in relation to ancient civilizations (Alberta Education, 2021, p.8). But this could be an opportunity to highlight contemporary global issues and Canada’s involvement in humanitarian and international development action. As the draft curriculum deals with key global topics only in a historical context, it fails to deliver the foundational knowledge and information necessary to prepare students for success in a modern, globalized world.

Socio-Emotional Domain of Learning

Key GCE learning outcomes within the socio-emotional domain of learning include:

- *Learners experience a sense of belonging to a common humanity, sharing values and responsibilities, based on human rights*
- *Learners develop attitudes of empathy, solidarity and respect for differences and diversity*

The draft curriculum includes some opportunities for socio-emotional learning through organizing ideas such as “overcoming ignorance and prejudice” and “[recognizing] our common humanity and dignity” (Alberta Education, 2021, p.3). Specifically, kindergarten students are asked to explore how rules or expectations “contribute to a sense of belonging to family, community or the wider world,” while grade 6 students are required to study various religious traditions to “[learn] about what other people believe and what their religions mean in their daily life” (2021, p.33). However, there is no clear direction for students to learn or reflect upon their personal roles and responsibilities as global citizens, or on Canada’s roles and responsibilities in a globalized world.

On a similar note, there is not much opportunity for discussion, reflection, or dialogue to build cross-cultural understanding, and limited possibilities for students to learn about, or develop empathy, solidarity, and understanding with those living outside of North America, especially those living in low-income settings. Grade 3 students learn about the quality of life in India, Tunisia, Ukraine, and Peru in the current Social Studies Program of Study.

Behavioural Domain of Learning

Key GCE learning outcomes within the behavioural domain of learning include:

- *Learners act effectively and responsibly at local, national and global levels for a more peaceful and sustainable world*
- *Learners develop motivation and willingness to take necessary actions*

The draft curriculum does not include clear opportunities for students to engage at local, national, and global levels, though there are few areas where students could be supported to take action. For example, when learning about the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in grade 5, students could be supported to demonstrate age-appropriate acts of reconciliation in their schools or communities (Alberta Education, 2021, p.5).

In the current Social Studies Program of Study, grade 3 students are encouraged to “develop age-appropriate behaviour for social involvement as responsible citizens contributing to their community” which includes “[participating] in projects that improve or meet the particular needs of their school or community” (Alberta Education, 2005). There is a clear requirement for students to demonstrate learning by taking action as global citizens to contribute to their community and highlight injustice, which is missing in the draft curriculum. In our survey to teachers and membership, several respondents noted the lack of opportunity for students to develop and practice skills for global citizenship.

Observation #2: The Draft Social Studies K-6 Curriculum lacks coherence with the Vision for Student Learning and the Outcomes for Learning set in the Guiding Framework for the Design and Development of Kindergarten to Grade 12 Provincial Curriculum released in December 2020.

In August 2020, a new Ministerial Order for Student Learning was introduced and emphasized a vision for learning whereby students will “make meaningful contributions to their communities and the world”

(Alberta Education, 2020a, p.5). This vision was further refined through the release of the *Guiding Framework for the Design and Development of Kindergarten to Grade 12 Provincial Curriculum* in December 2020, articulating three outcomes for learning: Knowledge Development, Character Development, and Community Engagement. The framework also includes several competencies that students will develop and be able to apply for learning, living, and working.

The *Guiding Framework's* three learning outcomes—Knowledge Development, Character Development, and Community Engagement—each align with the values of global citizenship education, including committing to the learning of compassion, empathy, sustainability, pluralism, and viewpoints of diverse communities. The framework articulates that students will address these topics through “respectful dialogue with varied viewpoints” (Alberta Education, 2020a, p.3). While the *Guiding Framework* commits to providing opportunities to engage in respectful dialogue, the curriculum’s heavy focus on knowledge development offers little space for this learning to take place.

Finally, through the competency of citizenship, the *Guiding Framework* further reflects values of GCE by stating that students will “approach the world with intellectual curiosity and humility” and “recognize the responsibility we share for environmental stewardship and sustainability” (Alberta Education, 2020a, pp.5-6). The framework also states that students will “develop empathy for human well-being locally and globally” (p.25). However, the draft curriculum fails to provide opportunities for students to demonstrate active global citizenship, with no current global perspectives outside North America, leaving minimal opportunities for students to consider perspectives and human well-being globally.

Observation #3: The Draft K-6 Curriculum threatens to erode Alberta’s national and international standing as a leader in global citizenship education.

Alberta became one of the first provinces in Canada to mandate global citizenship education across the curriculum in 2007 and has served as a model for other provinces, including the *Ontario Ministry of Education’s 2015 Strategy for K-12 International Education*. The *Ministerial Order on Student Learning* in 2013 solidified the province’s commitment to global citizenship through emphasizing students as “engaged thinkers and ethical citizens with an entrepreneurial spirit” who are able to demonstrate global and cultural understanding. In 2016, Alberta Education’s *The Guiding Framework for the Design and Development of the Kindergarten to Grade 12 Provincial Curriculum (Programs of Study)* included “cultural and global citizenship” as a key competency to be developed throughout all areas of learning (2016, p.15).

In 2020, the 2013 *Ministerial Order* was repealed, and a new *Ministerial Order* was introduced to set a vision that students will “make meaningful contributions to their communities and the world” (Alberta Education, 2020b). The subsequent *Guiding Framework* was introduced, replacing the competency of “global and cultural citizenship” with “citizenship,” though maintaining many aspects of the knowledge, skills, and values of global citizenship. Alberta Education had the opportunity to continue to show leadership in GCE, but as the above analysis demonstrates, they have failed in the delivery of this vision in the draft curriculum. Therefore, Alberta Education risks eroding its position as a leader in GCE, with Alberta’s youth unprepared to thrive in our interconnected world.

CONCLUSION

ACGC observes that the Draft Social Studies K-6 Curriculum does not reflect international best practice in global citizenship education, lacks coherence with Alberta Education's *Guiding Framework*, and threatens to harm Alberta's international reputation as an education leader. Overall, there are very few opportunities for students to develop the knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes necessary to become active global citizens. As the current curriculum is already content dense, there is limited possibility to insert additional outcomes into the curriculum to help meet international best-practice.

Our world is constantly becoming more interconnected, and our students, and our world, require education that fosters global connection, understanding, and empathy. As such, ACGC strongly recommends that the draft curriculum be rewritten in order to achieve this aim.

For questions regarding these preliminary observations, please contact:

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