Grade 12 Global Issues: Citizenship and Sustainability

Citizenship as a Core Concept

Students acquire the knowledge, understanding, and competencies necessary to live as active democratic citizens engaged in their local, national, and global communities.

Citizenship is the core concept of the Manitoba social studies curriculum from Kindergarten to Grade 12. Citizenship is fundamental to living in a pluralistic, democratic society and our complex and interdependent world. Social studies, as the study of people in relation to each other and the world in which they live, plays a particularly important role in education for citizenship.

Education for citizenship is not restricted to learning facts about Canadian society and the world. It involves more than conforming to the dominant world view about the meaning and implications of citizenship. Learners—students and teachers alike—are connected to diverse cultural, social, and interest groups in which a wide range of approaches to citizenship and civic engagement may coexist or even conflict. In order to build competencies as active democratic citizens, learners need to consider how their world view is shaped and think critically about the many factors that influence their decisions and actions. As students examine the issues of today’s world, it is particularly important that they acquire ecological literacy and a sense of environmental responsibility. It is also essential that they cultivate the ability to engage in dialogue across a range of diverse perspectives.

Grade 12 Global Issues: Sustainability and Citizenship provides learners with opportunities to reflect upon diverse world views and perspectives as they conduct inquiry into issues that are crucial to living in a contemporary, connected, interdependent world. The course is intended not only to enrich learners’ awareness of significant global issues, but to develop an ethos of concern as they come to understand their own capacities as contributing members of their local, national, and global communities. As they develop and practise the competencies of citizenship, students become able to envision and work toward a better future for all. They develop an ethos of engaged citizenship founded on the recognition of the importance of ecological principles as they address issues of social justice, economic sustainability, and quality of life on Earth.

Active Democratic Citizenship

An ethos of active democratic citizenship involves developing a set of coherent ethical principles upon which to base decisions and practices. Citizenship is a fluid concept that is subject to continuing change over time: its meaning is often contested, and it is subject to interpretation and debate. In the course of history, citizenship has been used both as a means of strengthening human solidarity and a means of excluding or maltreating groups or individuals while conferring superior privilege and power to others. An ethos of active democratic citizenship in the contemporary world is often referred to as global citizenship, since it is based not on nationhood or ethno-cultural exclusivity, but on a fundamental acceptance of the inherent, equal, universal and inalienable rights of all human beings.

However, the concept of global citizenship is a fairly recent phenomenon, and it too is subject to interpretation and debate. While some thinkers embrace global citizenship as a vision for a sustainable future for all, others argue that citizenship can only truly exist within the bounds of a nation state; hence, the idea of global citizenship is either pure idealism or an imposition of Western liberal democratic ideology.
Regardless, our students live in a world where national boundaries and identities may not have the same meaning as they did for previous generations, and students today more easily see themselves as citizens of an interconnected global community.

Active democratic citizenship involves developing a widening circle of empathy so as to come to a sense of solidarity with all humanity. It involves a recognition and acceptance of a collective responsibility for the continued economic and social well-being of humans while preserving the environmental integrity of the planet. This course has been designed to help students develop ecological literacy, so as to understand the relationships that link environmental, economic, social and political well-being. As students become conscious of their competencies as citizens, they are empowered by a sense of personal efficacy to address issues facing today’s world.

This learning process may be seen as a process of moving from a sense of me to we—from passive to active, from detachment to engagement, from status quo to change, from indifference to concern, and, practically speaking, from consumer to citizen. Active democratic citizenship is an ethos motivated by concern for humanity, society, the planet, and the future, and is activated by self-empowerment. Students will devote considerable time throughout this course to examining personal and social values and the factors that influence their decision making. This reflection will take place in the context of recognizing our collective human responsibility for the well-being of future generations and our individual responsibility to contribute to a better future.

Four Pillars of Education for the Future

According to the report to UNESCO of the International Commission on Education for the 21st century (1996), education must be organized around four fundamental types of learning for all people to be empowered as lifelong learners, capable of contributing to their communities now and in the future:

- *learning to know*
- *learning to do*
- *learning to be*
- *learning to live together*

The overarching goal of this course is the development of active democratic citizenship based on these four pillars, with a particular focus on ecological literacy and social justice. The following descriptors summarize the key competencies this course seeks to develop, organized under the four UNESCO pillars of learning.

**The Four Pillars**: Based on *Learning: The Treasure Within*, the report to UNESCO, by the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-First Century. 
[www.unesco.org/delors/delors_e.pdf](http://www.unesco.org/delors/delors_e.pdf)
**Learning to know**

*Acquire knowledge and understanding, and think critically about our complex and changing world*

- develop ecological literacy through an understanding of the interdependence of society, the environment, and the economy
- be open to new ideas and divergent thinking
- seek knowledge from diverse sources and perspectives
- use creative, critical, and systems thinking to address complex questions
- conduct focused in-depth inquiry
- explore alternative approaches to issues without fear of challenging the status quo
- engage in long-term thinking, and articulate a vision for a sustainable future

**Learning to do**

*Learn to participate effectively in local, national, and global communities*

- act responsibly towards self, others, and the environment
- be willing to give up and give back, and to make changes so as to live sustainably
- be an empowered and committed agent of change, willing to take a stand and engage in action for a sustainable future
- master and share personal skills, talents, and gifts
- practise helpfulness and share hopefulness
- demonstrate care and respect through language and actions
- apply intuitive and innovative thinking and decision-making skills
- plan informed courses of action

**Learning to be**

*Build self-knowledge and be conscious of connections to nature and society*

- appreciate the natural world and live by ecological principles
- be willing to contribute to the present and future well-being of all
- be introspective, reflective, and self-aware
- acquire a strong sense of self-knowledge and personal identity
- accept and express multiple identities, allegiances, and influences
- know how to be and live with others in shared spaces

**Learning to live together**

*Learn to live peacefully with others and to care for our common homeland*

- respect Earth as a commons in which human and natural systems interact
- recognize the solidarity of all human beings and their dependence upon the planet
- respect diversity and value equity
- engage in intercultural dialogue and cultivate a widening circle of empathy and concern
- respect the inherent, inalienable, and universal nature of human rights
- be willing to collaborate, lead, and support
- resolve conflicts peacefully
We cannot simply think of our survival; each new generation is responsible to ensure the survival of the seventh generation.

Enough for everyone, forever.
- African Elder

Why sustainability?
Sustainability is a complex topic, and there is considerable disagreement as to what the concept means as well as how it should be pursued as a goal for human societies.

As a social goal ... sustainability is fraught with unresolved questions. Sustainable for how long: a generation, one century, a millennium, ten millennia? Sustainable at what level: individual households, local villages, major cities, entire nations, global economies? Sustainable for whom: all humans alive now, all humans who will ever live, all living beings at this time, all living beings that will ever live? Sustainable under what conditions: for contemporary transnational capitalism, for low-impact hunters and gatherers, for some space-faring global empire? Sustainable development for what: personal income, social complexity, gross national product, material frugality, individual consumption, ecological biodiversity?

Understanding the meaning and implications of the concept of sustainability is an essential part of active democratic citizenship in the contemporary world, particularly for citizens of a developed and wealthy country such as Canada. The concept of sustainability is intricately woven into an ethos of responsibility: responsibility to future generations, environmental responsibility, economic responsibility, social responsibility, political responsibility, and responsibility to persons and groups that have been excluded from quality of life, well-being, or human rights and dignity.

A history of sustainable development
In 1987, the United Nations published the Brundtland Commission report entitled Our Common Future, a study of global concerns about social and economic inequities in the world. While acknowledging the importance of economic development, the report also declared an urgent need to adjust development to fit within the planet’s ecological limits. It also introduced into international dialogue the term sustainable development, which it defined as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”
Global concern about the limits of development became more intense at the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro. Known as the “Earth Summit,” it brought together a very large number of world leaders and resulted in two international agreements and a major action agenda on worldwide sustainable development. Since then, global interest in sustainability has continued to increase, and the concept has been broadened to include not only economic development, as determined by GDP (gross domestic product) and level of industrialization, but also social, political, and cultural elements that have an impact on quality of life, such as life expectancy and education. In other words, the sustainability initiatives became more concerned with ensuring quality of life for future generations and with the ecological limits of the planet to sustain this quality of life for all.

Sustainability is a concept which combines post-modern pessimism about the domination of nature with almost Enlightenment optimism about the possibility to reform human institutions.

– Simon Dresner

There are a variety of models and approaches to sustainable development, many of which are linked to political beliefs or ideologies. However, the generally accepted international view of sustainability is based upon the explicit recognition of the global interdependence of three fundamental components: environmental protection, economic well-being, and social justice. Education for a sustainable future, then, is education that empowers citizens to make actions and decisions that support continued quality of life for all human beings, now and in the future.

The engaged global citizen who seeks to be in, act in, collaborate in, and understand the world, therefore, needs to develop an enriched ecological literacy or a way of thinking that considers issues as part of an organic whole or a related set of interdependent systems. In the words of the UNESCO report Educating for a Sustainable Future: A Transdisciplinary Vision for Concerted Action (1997), this new ethos is global in nature and in scope, and recognizes the critical issues at stake in today’s world:

Perhaps we are beginning to move towards a new global ethic which transcends all other systems of allegiance and belief, which is rooted in a consciousness of the interrelatedness and sanctity of life. Would such a common ethic have the power to motivate us to modify our current dangerous course? There is obviously no ready answer to this question, except to say that without a moral and ethical foundation, sustainability is unlikely to become a reality.

– UNESCO (1997)