

# Building balanced citizens - analyzing civic education curriculum in Ontario

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## Introduction

Ontario provides a unique opportunity for civic education as it is the only jurisdiction in Canada that offers a mandatory stand-alone Civics (Politics) course at the secondary division. As the Ministry of Education writes the curriculum that states expectations of understanding, and knowledge that students should possess upon graduation, they have substantial discretion in what messages of civic participation to convey.

Westheimer (2015) describes three types of active citizens - **personally responsible, participatory, or social justice oriented citizens**. All of which play a key roll in building a healthy and democratic society, as such, one is not inherently better than another. However, it does become problematic when one type of active citizenship is prioritized over another within schooling. Therefore, in my study, it was examined what specific form of citizenship does the Canadian and World Studies curriculum, focusing on the Civics course, encourage.

## Methods

Defined blocks of text from the Ontario Canadian and World Studies curriculum – with a focus on civics, was coded according to the hierarchy in the curriculum structure, and type of active citizenship based on pre-determined definitions and keywords. It was the content of the text, not the authorship of the ministry of education, that was considered when coding sections of the curriculum.

### Westheimer's (2015) Three types of citizenship

#### Personally Responsible

“To solve social problems and improve society, citizens must have good character; they must be honest, responsible, and law-abiding members of the community. Acts responsibly in their own community” (p. 38)

Keywords: **character, give, obey, help, responsible**

#### Participatory

“To solve social problems and improve society, citizens must actively participate and take leadership positions within established systems and community structures.” (p. 38)

Keywords: **organize, strategy, leadership, create, establish**

#### Social Justice

“To solve social problems and improve society, citizens must question, debate, and change established systems and structures that reproduce patterns of injustice over time.” (p. 39)

Keywords: **structures, examine, critical, explore, debate**

### Example

#### Specific Expectation, Social Justice Oriented Citizen

“Describe ways in which some events, issues, people, and/or symbols are commemorated or recognized in Canada (e.g., by war memorials and Remembrance Day services; through citizenship awards such as the Order of Canada; by depicting them on postage stamps or currency; in museums; on public plaques; by naming streets or public spaces after them; through observances such as Black History Month, Fête nationale du Québec, Flag Day, Holocaust Day, Holodomor Memorial Day, Human Rights Day, Labour Day, National Aboriginal Day, Persons Day, Pride Week, Victoria Day), and analyse the significance of this recognition.” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013, p. 157)

## Canada and World Studies Curriculum Structure and Interrelationships

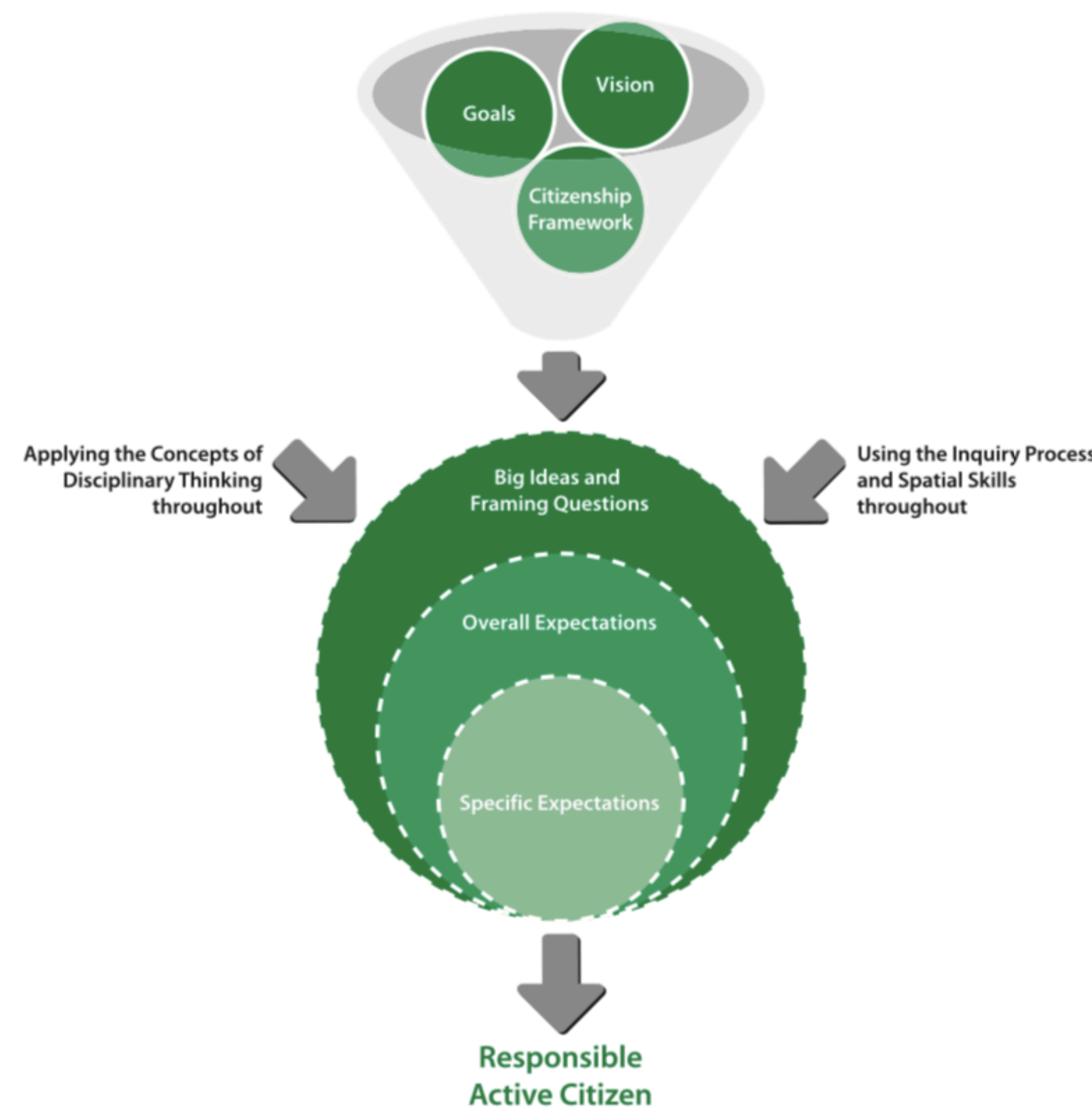
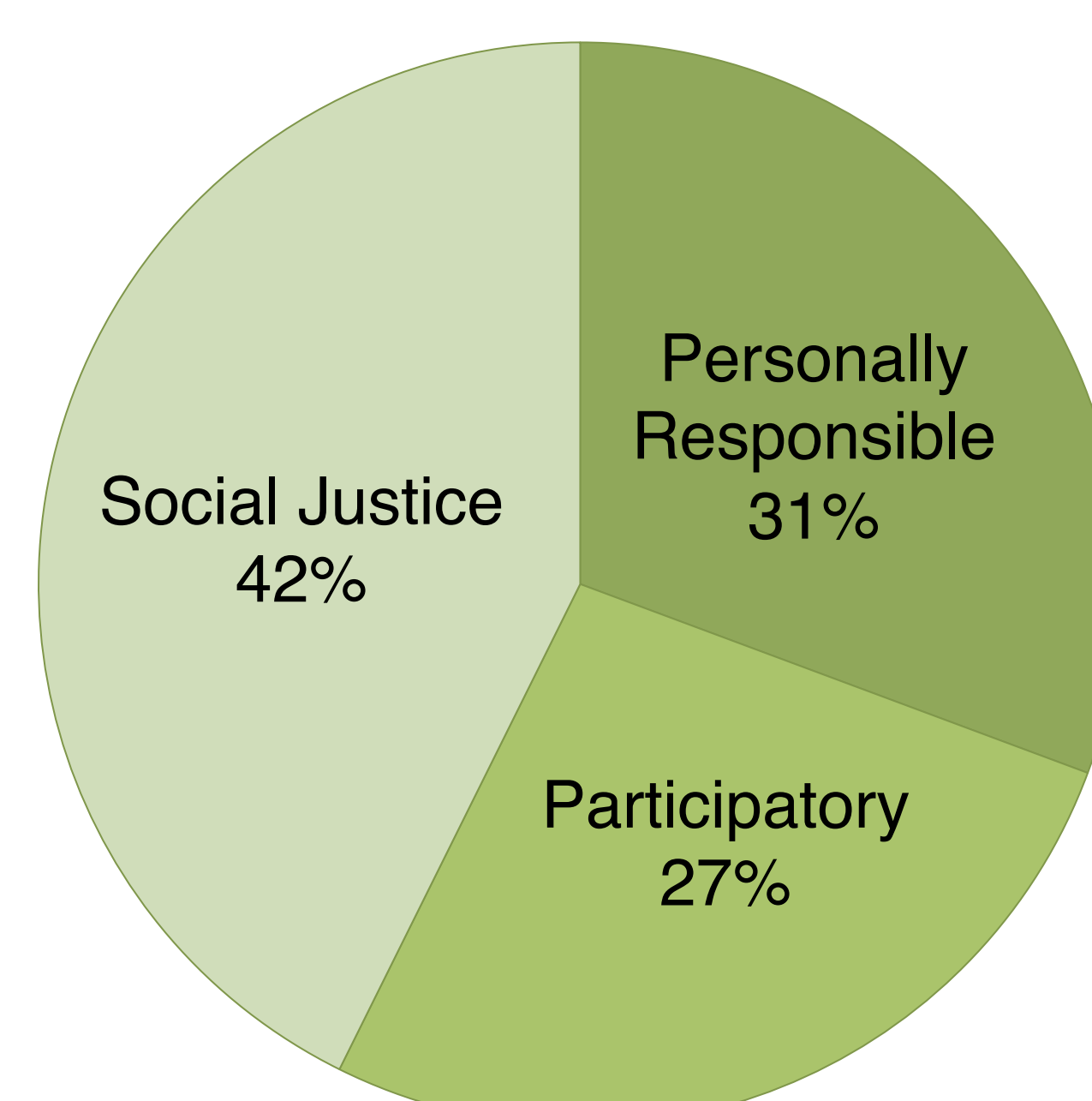


Figure 1: Structure of the Ontario Canadian and World Studies curriculum (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013, p. 8)

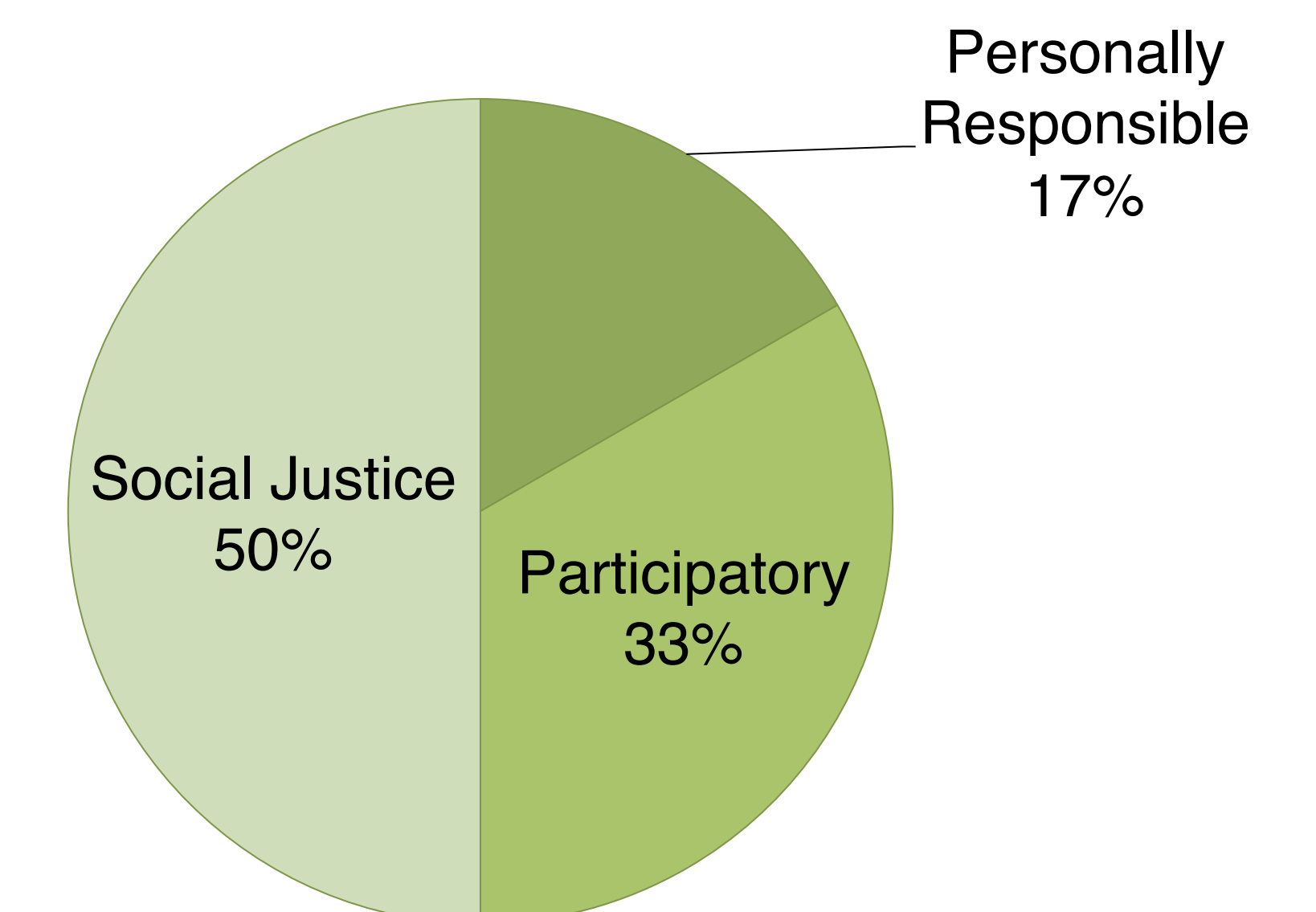
## Results

The curriculum has two defining sections. At the top of the hierarchy, the vision, goals, inquiry and citizenship frameworks, framing questions, and big ideas, act as guide on how to teach course content. Overall and specific expectations, are placed lower in the curriculum structure, and dictate what content is to be taught. Data was stratified data between these two different levels – interpretative sections and content text, to compare and contrast what the curriculum is portraying.

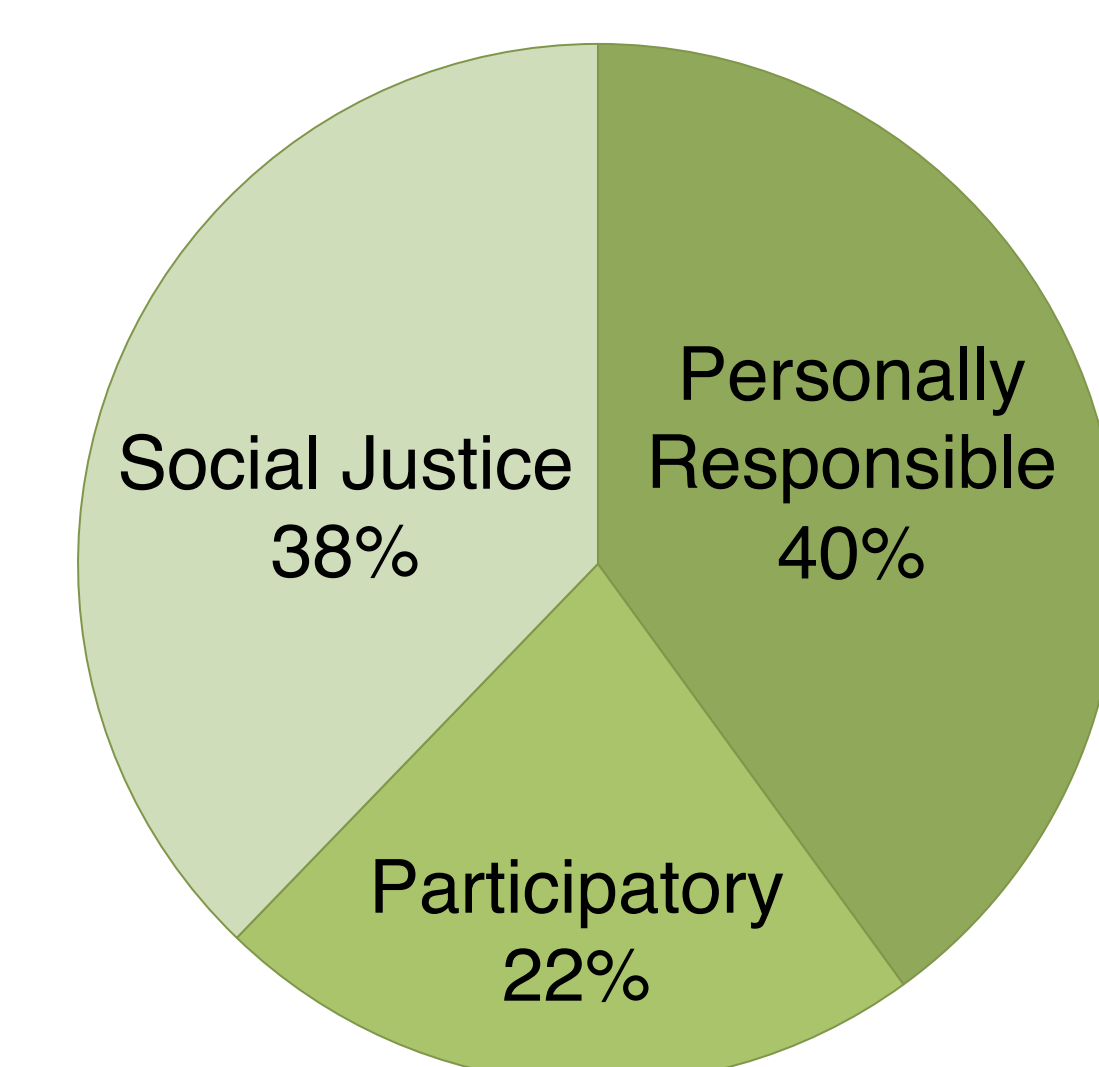
### Aggregate Segments, Canada and World Studies curriculum



### Interpretative Segments, Canada and World Studies curriculum



### Content Segments, Canada and World Studies curriculum, Civics (Politics)



## Conclusions

Overall, the civics (politics) course content is focused on a personally responsible, and participatory knowledge of citizenship. However, similar to the Ontario Social Studies, History, Geography curriculum (2013), the Ontario Canadian and World Studies curriculum demands content be analyzed using inquiry processes that encourage a social justice based understanding of course content and citizenship, presenting a balanced understanding of active citizenship.

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