

Articles

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Visualizing civic values

Visualizing civic values: Representations of idealized citizenship behaviours in images found in Nepalese social studies textbooks

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Abstract

Citizenship and political education has increasingly been identified as an important component in educating young people for democratic citizenship. The National Curriculum Framework for School Education in Nepal 2007, the Nepalese social studies school curriculum, and textbooks explicitly underline the promotion of a democratic system and culture along with the development of civic and citizenship skills among Nepalese citizens. This article reports on a qualitative analysis of selected civic

awareness images in Nepalese social studies textbooks using a 'Visual Grammar' framework. The analysis reveals that the images attempt to promote a message of national unity and respect for diversity in the country. However, the low quality black and white images and textbooks have some adverse teaching and learning implications for teachers and students and tend towards idealized representations.

Keywords

Civic values, social studies textbooks, Citizenship and political education, Visual grammar framework, idealized representations, Nepalese teachers, Textbook images.

Introduction

As a young democracy, Nepal has experienced the disruption and trauma of a recent civil war. Given this context, education has a key role to play in building and nurturing democratic civic dispositions in young people. Education – and citizenship education in particular – is commonly viewed as a driver of moral and ethical perspectives and actions (Peterson 2011). Better educated citizens are generally more tolerant of minority ethnic and religious groups and other marginalized groups within society (Banks 2008; Bobo and Licari 1989), more committed to civil liberties, and more likely to be opposed to government repression (Hall et al. 1986). Policy-makers in Nepal see education as an important means to overcome adversity and empower children to become active citizens (CDC 2007).

The aims of the current Nepalese curriculum call for the education system to inculcate and produce ‘value-oriented’ citizens (Ministry of Education 2016a). The National Curriculum Framework for School Education in Nepal 2007, which focuses on overall policy related to educational management, provides a foundation and context for the development of the social studies’ curriculum and associated textbooks as a means to promote civic virtues. Civics and citizenship education

aims to provide young people with the knowledge, understanding, and dispositions that enable them to participate as citizens in society. It seeks to support emerging citizens by helping them understand and engage with society’s principles and institutions, develop and exercise informed critical judgment, and learn about and appreciate citizens’ rights and responsibilities.

(Schultz et al. 2017: 1)

Civic education in most South and South-East Asian countries including Nepal is being taught under the umbrella of Social Studies education. Social Studies textbook images and texts exemplify how key civic values are represented and articulated in practice in school settings (So 2007).

School textbooks – particularly in developing country contexts such as Nepal – are considered an integral and authoritative part of the educational process, and often students will view their content and core messages as presenting essential truths (Apple and Christian-Smith 1991). They include ideas, values and knowledge, and act as powerful cultural artefacts. They also represent challenges and tensions about politics, culture and economics, and thus signify the ideological, linguistic and political power of dominant groups in the development of textbooks and tend to impose cultural homogeneity (Marsden 2001; Foster 2011). Thus, well-designed textbooks, in terms of

image/text combinations, are vital in presenting content knowledge and instilling sociocultural values among students.

The choices of images and accompanying text in Nepalese Social Studies textbooks are socially determined by illustrators and authors (and the curriculum-writers and textbook evaluation committees monitoring their work) who construe civic roles and key ideas linked to citizenship education, including identity, community and notions of active citizenship. Textbook images often support students' understanding and learning more effectively than words, and the illustrative information helps to orientate their response to the written information ([Diamond 2008](#)). The deployment of relevant images in textbooks helps to convey central messages to learners.

The Nepalese school textbooks can be described as texts that are part of a wider discourse: the discourse of Social Studies and civic learning in Nepal. Within this discourse, school textbooks are produced and interpreted within a framework shaped by the wider educational community in Nepal, including politicians, policy-makers, academic educationists, curriculum advisers, and school principals. Nepal has a centralized mechanism which publishes the official textbooks to be used in public schools. The same textbooks are used in public schools throughout the country regardless of geographical and cultural differences. The Curriculum Development Centre (CDC), under the Ministry of Education (MoE), is responsible for the overall development, modification and improvement of the school curriculum, textbooks, teachers' directives and resource materials, and for conducting studies on their effectiveness ([MoE 2016b](#)). Given their widespread use in schools, Nepali textbooks inevitably play a key role in developing young people's perceptions about democracy, participation, civic virtues,

identities and social and political rights and responsibilities (CDC 2007). They can serve the purpose of rendering the abstract nature of these concepts more concrete. The purpose of this research is to systematically **analyse** textbook images and associated text relating to the teaching of civic virtues to Grade 6 and 7 students (usually 10- to 12-year olds) in Nepalese public schools, with a view to critically assessing how key messages are conveyed and idealized, and evaluating the effectiveness of visual images in projecting visions of democratic engagement.

Political and educational context

Nepal is very rich in topographical, climatic, religious and population diversity. There are 125 ethnic groups of whom nearly half are indigenous groups. Moreover, 123 different languages are spoken in the country. Almost 80 per cent (%) of the population live in rural areas, mainly in relatively small villages. 80.6% of the Nepalese population is Hindu, around 11% Buddhist (although many people **labelled** Hindu or Buddhist often practise a syncretic blend of Hinduism, Buddhism, and/or animist traditions); 3.2% practise Islam and; 3.6% of the population follows the indigenous Kirant religion. Christianity is practised officially by less than 0.5% of the population (CBS 2014b). Nepal was an absolute monarchy until as recently as 1990. There were multi-party democratic elections in 1991, but from February 1996 until the end of 2006, a **'People's War'** was waged in Nepal, led by Maoist rebels motivated to address significant inequalities in Nepali society (not least in education). Schoolchildren and education often became directly caught up in the conflict ([Parker et al. 2013](#); [Pherali 2013](#)). After signing a peace agreement in November 2006, the Maoists transformed themselves into a legal political party named the Communist Party of Nepal-Maoist. They campaigned

successfully for an elected Constituent Assembly to draft a new constitution for the country, and, in the first post-civil war election, gained more votes and seats than any of the mainstream political parties. The Maoists have generally constituted one of the largest parties in post-2006 governing coalitions.

Nepal is a comparatively poor and unequal society. Indeed, with per capita average annual income of USD 862, Nepal is one of the poorest countries in the world ([Ministry of Finance 2017](#)). The overall literacy rate is low at 65.9 per cent (CBS 2014a). Children who belong to marginalized communities, and ethnic and indigenous groups, have a significantly lower academic achievement ([Parajuli and Das 2013](#)). The educational system in Nepal has represented the governing classes and has often failed to meet the needs of local populations ([Chitrakar 2007](#)). There are disparities in school participation between Dalit and other ethnic communities, between rural and urban areas and between students with and without disabilities ([Department of Education 2014](#); [Mathema 2007](#)).

The challenges of effecting educational change in Nepal are magnified by its complex topographic, demographic and socio-economic context (UNESCO 2015). Since citizenship education is centrally interested in exploring issues of identity and diversity and the promotion of open-minded consideration of multiple perspectives and multi-dimensional identities ([Osler and Starkey 2006](#)), Nepal's geographic and cultural diversity is highly relevant to how contemporary, social and political issues are addressed in Social Studies textbooks and classroom contexts.

A new constitution was promulgated in 2015, which affirmed education as a fundamental right ([Government of Nepal 2015](#)). The education sector is prioritized as an

important division of the government and there has been an increasing amount of public investment in education in recent years ([Ministry of Education 2016a](#)). But in relation to school textbook production and distribution, there is evidence of some systemic problems and irregularities in ensuring that all students receive free textbooks to support their study ([Local Nepal Today 2014](#)). There has been strong international interest in Nepalese education related to its political transformation from a monarchy to a federal republic and in the country's restoration of political equilibrium following its civil conflict ([Kabir 2013](#)). For example, the Asian Development Bank, the World Bank, the European Union, the Japan International Cooperation Agency and United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund have all supported initiatives in the education sector in Nepal in recent years ([Bhattarai 2016](#); [Vaux et al. 2006](#)).

Social Studies education in Nepal envisions developing young people's perceptions about democracy, participation, civic virtues, identities and social and political rights and responsibilities (CDC 2007). This article systematically analyses select images and associated text related to the teaching of social studies in Grades 6 and 7 using a 'Visual Grammar' framework. The article also includes perceptions of Nepalese social studies teachers about the effectiveness of the messages conveyed by the textbooks' images.

Methodology

The 'Visual Grammar' framework, developed by [Kress and Van Leeuwen \(1996\)](#), was used in this study as a framework for the analysis of images produced in Nepalese textbooks. Textual analysis, as [Fairclough \(2003\)](#) observed, possesses the capacity to reveal both social events and change in our knowledge of themes that are embedded in

texts. He noted that part of the analysis of texts is trying to identify what is assumed in a text and to understand its consequences because what is 'said' in the text always rests upon 'unsaid' assumptions. The visual semiotic analyst looks for signifiers which communicate meanings based on their social and cultural contexts. Visual communication embeds specific conventions and is coded. The word 'illustration' is derived from the Latin 'lustrō' (I make light), and textbook illustrations generally aim to both illuminate the text and enable the reader to make enlightened connections to a text's key themes. The constituent elements of an image such as its composition, perspective, modality, subject position and gaze, angle, line and frame (Kress and Van Leeuwen 2002) can all play significant roles in revealing meaning (Emmison et al. 2012). The meaning-making undertaken in this article will inform the interpretation of aspects of civic learning expressed in the Nepalese textbooks. Analysis of semiotic meaning will allow for observation of absence; what is absent can be as important in providing meaning as what is present (Potter and Wetherell 2006). Visual images are also important in relation to their symbiotic interaction with the associated written text, and in the case of each of the analysed images used in this study, this relationship is also unpacked. Finally, an attempt is made to interpret how the images will be read through the eyes of Nepalese young people in their specific (but diverse) contexts.

Building on seminal work by linguist Michael Halliday (1985) regarding the functions of language, Kress and van Leeuwen's grammar of visual design (1996) recognized that an image can present, simultaneously, three types of meta-semiotic tasks in creating meaning. They identified these tasks as the representational metafunction, the interpersonal metafunction, and the compositional metafunction. These metafunctions

can be thought of as three lenses through which we can view the meanings conveyed through images. Through a representational lens, we consider meanings that are used to represent our experiences in the world. Through an interpersonal lens, we consider meanings that allow illustrators to enact complex and diverse interpersonal relations. Through a compositional lens, we consider semiotic resources that manage and organize the flow of representational and interpersonal meanings in an image, so they form a meaningful whole. While the analytical framework applied in this article ([Table 1](#)) involves semiotic resources from each metafunction, it has also benefited from incorporating ideas and insights from Frank Serafini's (2014) extension of Kress and Van Leeuwen's 'Visual Grammar' framework to include conceptual interpretation and sociocultural and ideological readings of visual texts in different contexts. As Serafini (2014) noted, culture and ideology are influential in the interpretive process and illustrations provide a basis for students to construct meanings. He further encouraged instructional practices by teachers that adopt both dominant and oppositional interpretations of illustrations so that students can be provided with space to interpret these for themselves.

There is a distinctive language of visual semiotic analysis which informs the analysis of meaning in images. While whole articles have focussed on the use of individual semiotic resources to influence how meaning is conveyed in images (e.g. [Unsworth 2001](#); [Zappavigna 2016](#)), this study sought to [analyse](#) Nepalese textbook images for their broad use of a wide range of semiotic resources across each metafunction (representational, interpersonal and compositional, including vectors, symbolism, social distance, contact, angle, modality, framing and salience) to see how these images convey

meanings about democratic citizenship. Further information about the analytical framework used in this study is outlined in [Table 1](#).

[Table 1](#) delineates the questions that were considered in examining each of the textbook images, consistent with the [Kress and Van Leeuwen \(1996\)](#) Visual Grammar framework.

Table 1: Visual analytical framework for Nepalese textbook analysis.

Visual detail and narrative representation:

Who are the represented participants in the image?

How is representational meaning conveyed (e.g. facial expressions, body language, gestures, dress)?

What is the form of the representation in terms of setting, props and the participants' appearance?

4. How do props and settings confer symbolic meaning?

5. Are there any vectors in the image that indicate action? If so, what kind of story does this action tell?

Intended audience effect:

6. What is the relationship between the represented actors and the viewer (encoded through social distance and contact)?

7. How does the angle of representation affect a viewer's involvement with the represented participants?

8. What types of thinking by viewers do the represented participants and objects seek to evoke?

Compositional choices:

9. What is the effect of the modality of the image?

10. How is the image organized (and what effect does this have)?

11. How are framing devices deployed to underpin conceptual messaging?

12. Which represented participants or features are more salient than others, and how does this salience affect the impact and meaning of the image?

Ideological meanings, overall effect and application of analysis to discourses of citizenship:

13. What is the relationship between the image and any complementary text?
14. What is the image trying to tell the viewer in terms of social/cultural concepts?
15. How real does the image appear to the viewer and does the sense of reality affect the validity of its message and any accompanying or related text?
16. What are students intended to learn from this image about civic **behaviour** and values?

[Created drawing upon: [Kress and Van Leeuwen 1996](#); [Van Leeuwen and Jewitt 2004](#); Serafini 2014]

Visual detail and narrative representation

Specifically, in this study, we examined a selection of four images from two Social Studies textbooks for upper basic education students. These textbooks are published in Nepal and are widely used in public schools by Grade 6 and 7 students (CDC 2016, 2017). We purposively selected images that involve key civic themes and ideas promoted in the Nepalese Social Studies curriculum. These images were selected from a sample of sixteen possible images. The choice of the four images from this sample was driven by a mixture of their prominence and size in the text, and the centrality of the civic themes represented in terms of students' learning about democracy.

Nepalese Social Studies textbooks are published solely with black and white images for reasons to do with publication costs. Relatively simple, low modality black and white line sketches like the ones **analysed** in this study will have a different impact upon the reader than a photograph. The images **analysed** in this study are most closely aligned with a scientific-technical coding orientation ([Kress and Van Leeuwen 2006](#)). This has implications for the reading of the images – for example, the facial expressions of represented participants are sometimes difficult to read, making it a challenge to

determine definitively how the actors are feeling about the processes in which they are taking part.

Nepalese social studies textbook images: Findings and discussion

Figure 1: Voting (Grade 6). Visual detail and narrative representation.

Figure 1 depicts a busy scene at a voting station for an election. The represented participants include ten voters standing patiently in line waiting for their turn to vote and four election administrators sitting at a table, checking voter eligibility and distributing ballot papers. A young female police officer stands alongside the queue of waiting voters, truncheon in hand, ensuring appropriate order and discipline. She is alert and the truncheon is partly raised. Three other participants – all relatively young voters – are shown at different stages in the voting process: one young woman is receiving her voting papers from the administrators, a young man completes his form in an enclosed space where people cannot see his selections, and a third young woman is in the process of posting her voting paper into the ballot box. Eight out of thirteen voters represented in the image look to be in their 20s or 30s.

It is an inclusive image. There is balanced gender representation in the image overall, with an equal number of male and female waiting voters and election administrators. The ten voters, representing varied ages, are lined up into separate male and female lines of five each. There are varying forms of dress and headwear. The different dress and male headwear of the depicted voters represent something of the diversity of the Nepalese electorate; the individuals are recognizably from both the hilly and plains regions of Nepal. The vectors in the image are multi-directional with participants looking to different points of the compass, although the dominant action line

of sight is of the ten people waiting to vote all looking forwards in the direction of the young man casting his vote.

Intended audience effect

The act of voting is presented to the audience as something natural, orderly, normal and well-organized. The openness and transparency of a publicly viewable ballot box are also important, and this is the part of the illustration that is in the foreground of the image. It may well be a conscious choice to depict a young woman rather than an older man as representing the forces of law and order, thus softening the depiction of state oversight and control of the election process. The use of an angular-isometric perspective, with an oblique point of view and a relatively high angle, positions the viewer to consider the image from a detached point of view, without a direct sense of involvement. The viewer is not positioned as a participant in the voting process but instead looks on to learn about it, as though a fly on the wall.

Compositional choices

In assessing the modality of the image, there is an absence of **colour**, illumination and brightness, which allows the reader to focus on limited **contextualization**, representation and depth. A few props are included to clearly indicate the setting; however, most of the background is blank. The limited texture and minimum details in participants' faces make the expression of each individual appear neutral. In this way, the voting process is represented as devoid of strong emotional reaction from the participants. The fact that none of the participants is shown looking directly at the viewer also adds to the sense of procedural detachment of the image.

The image is composed in four distinct parts: the monitored queue of voters; the checking and administrative process; the sanctity of the voting booth; and the representativeness of accumulated votes as they are posted into the ballot box. None of the represented participants has greater salience than any other, which serves to make the image democratic in its projection.

Ideological meanings, overall effect and application of analysis to discourses of citizenship

The image projects a positive and reassuring image of democracy in action. The fairness of election processes is indicated in the sympathetic and respectful portrayal of the four election administrators seated at the table. They seem like everyday citizens who can be trusted. The privacy of the secret ballot is underlined in terms of each individual's right to make their own voting choices without others knowing about it. The body language of the people in the queue is positive and alert; they are standing straight and generally represented as keen to exercise their civic duty.

The theme of the chapter in which this image appears is civic awareness. The chapter has units with factual material about Nepal's constitution and the envisaged role of citizens in nation-building. There are separate units on the rights and duties of citizens, including moral duties to family, society and upholding the law. A suggested lesson attempts to underline the balance between respecting others' rights whilst also enjoying individual rights. The image is prominent, appearing on the title page immediately below the chapter heading of 'Civic Awareness'. There is no text in the chapter that specifically describes or explains voting or election processes; therefore, the image bears a lot of explanatory weight without textual support. The textbook writer, in an interview

conducted with him, argued that this was done intentionally to summarize the chapter with an effective image.

The caption to the image is distinctive to the Nepalese context and places a reading of the image in a slightly different light. It is a quotation from Buddha – ‘That every human is a religious person who can sacrifice themselves for others’. Voting in western democracies would be seen as an entirely secular activity. Here, the idea of a citizen’s civic duty to vote is connected to spiritual notions of sacrifice for others. One possible reading of this is that the illustrator intends the audience to view the act of voting as an act of sacred trust. It is perhaps a reminder that the factors being weighed up by citizens as they decide who to vote for ought not to be motivated by selfish, factional or partisan concerns, but empathetic consideration of the future common good of the community and the nation. The inclusion of a baby on his mother’s back as she awaits her turn to vote further underlines the desirability of considering the needs of the future as one decides how to cast one’s vote.

The image supports the discourse of future Nepalese citizens’ duty to participate in election processes. Electoral participation is one of the defining characteristics of a democratic system of government. Electoral democracy can empower the poor in the sense that low-income citizens usually make up a majority of voters in a democracy. There is a widening gap between urban and rural areas in terms of development and access to resources with poverty rates ten times higher in rural areas than in the more developed Kathmandu Valley. As such, the theory would be that Nepali people can use their electoral power to influence the redistributive policies of the government.

The image projects positive messages about voting, elections and democratic involvement. It seeks to dispel the myth that politics is predominantly the preserve of older men. The preponderance of representation of young citizens is no accident. Nepal is a young population; overall 35 per cent of Nepal's population is under 14, and over 44 per cent is under 19 (CBS 2014b). Moreover, there is very positive female representation; not only as a slight preponderance of the represented voters but also as administrators and monitors of the process. Although the image projects these positive messages, it is quite staid and calm, which may not represent some of the carnival aspects and dynamism of election day and voting in Nepal.

It is, of course, an idealized representation of democracy in action. There are some notable absentees who might serve to dilute the unreserved positivity about elections and voting. Not least is the fact that no politicians are on view. Whilst many Nepali polling stations will be as well-organized and orderly as the one on display here, elsewhere the queues might be longer, the organization less precise, and the forces of law and order armed and more prominent. There is not a whiff of corruption to be seen or inferred from this image and yet maintaining clean and fair election processes in some parts of Nepal remains a challenge (Rosser 2015). A recent study indicated that 'Nepal continues to face endemic corruption despite its recent democratization' (Truex 2013: 1134). This is a very tidy image, yet in reality, democratic processes can be messy and imperfect.

Figure 2: Civic awareness (Grade 7). Visual detail and narrative representation.

This representation juxtaposes two images of different kinds of political activity. In the first image, a circle of twelve people (i.e. seven young men, four young women

and a younger boy) sit and listen to a slightly older female speaker. Most sit cross-legged, whilst a few crouch or kneel. The listeners wear a traditional rural dress and the meeting is taking place under a tree in a public place. The event is held outdoors in a rural location, apparently on the outskirts of a village. The group sit beneath a large, old tree with an impressively wide trunk and visible spreading roots. The group are listening intently to the speaker who is explaining a point with one of her arms gesturing in an animated way. She wears a sash delineating her office and seniority. The image is captioned 'civic awareness' and thus one assumes that the meeting is fulfilling an educative rather than a politically partisan function. The speaker is smartly dressed and represented as speaking with some authority. It seems she is a community leader; possibly a Non-Governmental Organization worker or rural municipal government representative. The vectors in the image, created by the implied line of sight of the listeners and the trunk of the tree, all point towards the wise and respected female speaker. She is the centre of attention and point of action, not only for her young listeners but also the wider audience viewing this illustration.

The second image shows a crowd of Nepalese citizens marching in favour of the cause of education. The size of the crowd is unclear; around twenty people are depicted but the image fades into the middle distance and there could be many more people participating. Three banners are being held up, the one at the front of the march bearing the caption 'Let's send all children to school'. Most of the marchers' mouths are open and they may be chanting messages in support of their cause. The setting is a rural village, comparable to the setting of the first image. A small group of spectators are depicted as having come out of their houses and are viewing the march from their small

front gardens. The activists are mainly young adults. The young man at the front of the march holds up a fist of determination. The vectors in this image are uni-directional; all of the represented participants are looking forward and slightly upward towards an undefined respondent (presumably governmental authorities responsible for providing appropriate school infrastructure or community members who choose not to send their children to school).

Intended effect on audience

The audience is shown two distinct ways of engaging with politics and political issues. The top image may be interpreted as celebrating the virtues of paying respectful attention to the views of others to reach informed conclusions. The tree could be seen as symbolic of a range of other connected 'Civic awareness' themes, such as the wisdom of long-standing tradition and respect for the natural environment. Many Nepalese villages have a 'Chautari', a rest stop usually seen along the foot trails which also serve as meeting places. They are stone platforms under big trees providing a resting place, shade and a venue for community meetings. Such venues are considered as a neutral place and all villagers have access to it. In the background, the smart-tree-lined entrance to the village looks trim and well-maintained; a testament to civic and community pride.

The effect on the audience of the second image may be intentionally reassuring. The issue ('Let's send all children to school') is a relatively safe one endorsed by the central government as well as in most communities. In recent years, there are more opportunities to attend school in Nepal and increases in enrolment rates are encouraging (MoE 2016a). The eyes of the marchers are all raised; the audience cannot see what they are looking at, but the implication is perhaps that they are looking forward and upward to

a hopeful, better future for their children and community. The inclusion of community participants as apparently sympathetic – or at least interested – onlookers at the side of the image infers that this is a cause which has some community support. In a country that has experienced recent civil discord and violence, the audience is positioned to infer that civic protest can be entirely appropriate and a force for good, if undertaken responsibly.

Compositional choices

The modality of both images again possesses a relatively low level of depth, with a similar level of detachment achieved through an angular-isometric perspective. Despite this, the second image does have increased **contextualization** and representation. By depicting fairly detailed backgrounds for the two components of the image, the illustrator has shown them as particular events, connected with given locations and moments in time.

The angle of representation does affect the viewer's involvement with the represented participants. The **'Civic awareness'** scene is depicted from above but facing slightly uphill. The focus of most of the participants in the second image is towards the salient figure of the female speaker. Five of the listeners have their backs to the viewer; the other young people are viewed from the side or obliquely. The tree is an important framing device. It leans slightly in the same direction as the vectors of the image, and attention is further drawn to the orator/pedagogue by her framing in the **centre** of the trunk. In comparison, the most salient figure in the marching image is the young man with the clenched fist at the head of the march and in front of the prominent banner. While the young man is depicted as a leader, the representation is of him being **'first among equals'** and not a demagogue. There are plenty of female marchers, too. None of

the represented participants looks directly at the viewer; the march is viewed in a detached and impersonal way.

Ideological meanings, overall effect and application of analysis to discourses of citizenship

The two images project complementary visions of politics as a peaceful, civil discourse. Democratic engagement is depicted as calm, reflective and even as enjoyable; as far as can be deduced from the expressions on their faces, the marchers appear happy, if focused. No one is angry; there is certainly not a hint of latent violence. The mood of the 'Civic awareness' image is quiet and thoughtful. The twelve young people in their body language sit forward and seem keen to learn from the words and key messages of the speaker. The two images also project complementary visions of different forms of community involvement; in one case a group of citizens are depicted learning and thinking together and becoming better informed in a shared process of self-improvement; in the other case, community involvement is activated around an issue of community concern – their children's education. The implication is that responsible and informed community activism can bring pressure to bear to improve services for Nepalese citizens.

Together, the two images balance the theme of the textbook chapter in which they appear of citizens' rights and responsibilities. They show that 'civic awareness' is about both head and heart. It is the responsibility of citizens to make informed judgments on issues that affect them and to listen thoughtfully to the views of others and be open to new ideas (the top image); it is the right of citizens to use their informed judgment as a prompt to bring pressure to bear in order to improve their communities (the lower image) by encouraging the people to conform to government programmes. Civic awareness

provides a necessary foundation for civic activism. The chapter text in which the images appear has a similar logic. Students learn about the structure of Nepal's constitution and its role in ensuring citizens' access to services within their communities, but they also learn that this knowledge can be applied; a lesson idea has the children connecting what they have learned about active citizenship to co-operative community **endeavours** to look after public areas such as ponds, schools, churches and mosques.

The images are again highly idealized representations of the working of politics in rural Nepalese communities. It is within recent memory that committed young female Maoist activists will not have been educating young people in Nepalese villages about democratic processes but indoctrinating them as to the inequity of the policies of Nepal's governing classes and persuading them to join the cause of civil rebellion. The female orator in the top image possesses a great deal of power; this power can be used for virtuous or less virtuous purposes. We also know that in many contemporary Nepalese rural communities, young citizens lack the free will to make choices of their own; rather a culture of deference to larger landowners and a spirit of **'Clientelism'** dominates the political landscape ([Joshi and Mason 2011](#)). Nepalese young people's involvement in community development politics and activism is complex rather than simple. A range of factors can touch upon how young Nepalese community leaders or activists navigate their involvement in local causes ([Korzenevica 2016](#)). Issues need to be problematized; for example, the issue of all children going to school is not as straightforward as might be thought; sending children to school means parents and villages losing someone to work for them in the field and in household work that directly or indirectly affects families'

financial situation. The representation of community protest in this image depicts Nepalese political protest as being deceptively straightforward.

Figure 3: Civil rights (Grade 6). Visual detail and narrative representation.

Figure 3 depicts eleven diverse Nepalese people in their traditional dress. The image is balanced in terms of gender, and religious representation since half of the participants are female and all the major religions including Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism and Islam are visible in the image. The image also represents a regional balance. The older man speaking on the left-hand side of the image and wearing the 'lungi' traditional dress is a Muslim from the southern plains of Nepal. The other participant who is represented speaking is a younger woman, possibly from the hilly Midlands or further north into the mountains. The participants also include a boy and a girl. Mountains and hills are seen in the background.

The action 'vectors' in the image relate to the speakers; they are the only participants gesturing with their arms and hands. The participants' lines of sight are generally towards the two speakers. The audience is invited to view the positive representation of religious, geographical and ethnic diversity as something to be admired and symbolic of Nepalese national unity.

Intended effect on audience

The image supports a vision of national integrity and social harmony among various religious and ethnic groups. Although the Hindu religion is the most dominant in Nepal, an effort has been made to make students aware of the existence of other religious groups. This image portrays a message of equality and inclusivity. The layout of the image is overtly balanced in support of these conceptual ideas; there is a balance of

religions, regions, gender, ages and ethnicities in the represented participants. The angle of the image is from the same eye-level as the participants; the message of equality in the image is mirrored by the equal angle gaze of the illustrator. The image promotes the ideal of unity in diversity in Nepal to viewers.

Compositional choices

The image has a degree of artificiality in its make-up and is rather static as the participants look in all directions; most stand passively with arms by their sides. The two speakers balance one another on either side of the image; one male, older and from the south of Nepal; one female, younger and from the midlands or north of the country. The composition of the image depicts the natural and seemingly everyday interaction and mutual respect among the participants from different backgrounds.

Ideological meanings, overall effect and application of analysis to discourses of citizenship

The image is located preceding text relating to human and legal rights. The text notes that all are equal under the law; everyone has the right to follow their religion and celebrate their particular festivals. Under Nepalese law, there is no discrimination on the basis of caste, ethnicity, religion or gender. The image signposts the multi-dimensional identities and multi-cultural make-up of Nepal's population. A message of respect for others, positive co-existence, gender equality and shared values between people who hold different beliefs is projected.

The theme of the Year 6 chapter in which the image is situated is civic awareness. This chapter has units on the constitution, citizens and their rights, the responsibilities

and duties of citizens, traffic rules, nation and nationality and the federal democratic republic. The image underlines and reinforces the objective of the curriculum to promote respect for diversity and social harmony in Nepal. A key citizenship message is around the importance of religious tolerance.

Figure 4: Social rules (Grade 7). Visual detail and narrative representation.

This image depicts a group of seven people preserving and cleaning public places and clothing in their village. The scene is apparently taking place in a typical rural, hilly Nepalese setting. The activities within the **neighbourhood** scene include cleaning footpaths and a public resting place with traditional Nepalese brushes. Other participants are shown cleaning clothes and cooking utensils and disposing of rubbish. The two represented participants with visible faces are shown as smiling and happy in their work. The people are adults or older teenagers. Five of the seven depicted individuals are women. The image highlights a shared division of **labour** among the participants. The vectors in the image are multi-directional; there is **'action'** on behalf of the family or the village's common good wherever one looks in the image.

Intended audience effect

The student audience for this image is positioned to consider didactic messages about everyone's responsibility to keep their homes and public areas clean and the value of collective and co-operative **endeavour** in accomplishing common **neighbourhood** upkeep tasks. Although the caption references **'social rules'**, the image also seems to impart messages about responsibility and cooperation in community work. Cleanliness, hygiene and tidiness are projected as key civic virtues and as both an individual and collective **neighbourhood** responsibility. Although Nepal remains a largely patriarchal society

where it comes to housework, an effort has been made to include men in the cleaning work. There are conceptual messages here about pride in the community, the civic value of everyday tasks, and that playing one's individual part in community **endeavours** in Nepal is a societal expectation and part of the **'social rules'**.

Compositional choices

The image is composed as a village tableau of an everyday **neighbourhood** scene. Perhaps the fact that the participant closest to the viewer is a man underlines the point that cleaning is not only women's work. The cooperation between men and women in the collective task of keeping their community tidy is certainly a key feature of the image's composition. Natural elements also feature quite saliently in the composition of the image; the hills in the background, the tree in the **centre** of the village, and the valuable running water from a stream, perhaps pointing up that communities constantly strive to work in harmony with their natural surrounds.

Ideological meanings, overall effect and application of analysis to discourses of citizenship

Different ideas that are important within citizenship education are represented in the image; gender equality, working with others, community involvement and responsibility towards public places. This unit is a part of the theme related to civic awareness. This theme has units with factual information about social values, including democratic culture, equal **behaviour**, fundamental rights and child rights. The image supports the ideas of responsibility and joint efforts in community maintenance and **neighbourhood** pride. It rejects the notion that household work or cleaning is the sole preserve of women.

Conclusion

The 'Visual Grammar' framework, developed by [Kress and Van Leeuwen \(1996\)](#), provided a useful descriptive tool to systematically analyse the images and associated text from the selected Social Studies textbooks relating to the teaching and learning of civic virtues. This analysis enabled an assessment of how key messages are conveyed and idealized in the embedded images and the effectiveness of visual images in projecting visions of democratic engagement.

There are particular challenges in educating for democracy and its associated virtues in a developing country context such as Nepal when the lived reality of democratic experience may be less than optimal. Specifically, educating for political literacy and community involvement in a society where communities may be divided and politics (and teaching) is also politically divided, is a significant challenge. Neither textbook writing nor illustrating is easy. In creating learning materials for a multi-lingual, multi-cultural developing society, the balance between representing an ideal state of affairs and varied, nuanced realities are difficult to strike. It is not surprising that there can be a disjunction between projecting the values that an emerging democracy like Nepal wants to foster in young people and experienced actuality in contemporary real life. Nevertheless, over time, if idealized models fail to equate with lived and observed realities the subsequent dissonance can be damaging to democracy. In a young democracy such as Nepal, where most of the people are dependent on local patrons for their economic and social well-being ([Joshi and Mason 2011](#)), giving citizens the right to vote does not necessarily lead to the election of representatives who will legislate policies to materially improve their lives. Thus democracy and the calm and stable voting

processes represented in [Figure 1](#) may not necessarily inoculate Nepal against the prospects of the renewed rural insurgency. Similarly, although the political power-sharing period since 2006 has seen policy rhetoric of assertive multiculturalism, the idealized representation of diversity in [Figure 3](#) may not correspond with the lived experience of marginalized minority groups in many Nepalese rural areas. The underlying messages about civic engagement in Nepal depicted in the textbook images are broadly transmissive of social and moral responsibility. Nepali citizens' contribution to democratic action is mainly depicted as compliant although [Figure 2](#) hints at the debate inherent in democratic decision-making and the possibility for discussion and protest.

The varied ways in which teachers and students understand, mediate and pedagogically translate their personal understanding of textbook material can be a complex process. In interview responses as part of a wider study of civic and political education in Nepal ([Shah 2020](#)), Grade 6 and 7 teachers indicated that they were not satisfied with the quality of textbook images in supporting the teaching and learning of civic virtues in the classroom and they often sought to source additional resources such as newspapers, e-resources and private school textbooks (which are printed on higher quality paper and incorporate [colour](#)). In addition, they often draw images of their own to prompt more effective classroom discussion. We need to know more about how Nepalese teachers use images such as those explored in this article with students and more about the experiences of citizenship and civic engagement that Nepalese young people hold and bring to classroom exploration of democratic themes.

There are a variety of possible implications from our analysis of visual images in Nepalese Social Studies textbooks for teaching and learning approaches. As in many

developing countries, in Nepal teacher-centred pedagogic strategies are often dominant in the teaching of Social Studies. The education system of Nepal has often been criticized for being traditional and based upon rote learning and memorizing practices that promote passivity and limit opportunities for students to develop practical and applied knowledge in active ways (Nepal and Panuwatwanich 2011; Timsina 2011). It is hoped that this article draws attention to the capacity of textbook images to prompt purposeful student reasoning, thinking and discussion. In this way, knowledge might be co-constructed between students and teachers in relation to civic issues rather than received passively. The textbook images also represent a relatively untapped opportunity to induct students into engaging with complexity and criticality beyond a surface read of illustrations that might come to be viewed by teachers and students predominantly as merely presentational devices to break up text or consolidate key ideas. Ideally, all classroom learning materials should be open to questioning and reflection. Our article underlines the potential of visual images as resources to support multimodal and critical literacy and deeper civic thinking.

It is important for Nepalese teachers to provide opportunities for young people to reflect on their understandings of civic engagement in their own contexts and locations and on how their notions of civic and political issues have been constructed by recent history and community and parental experiences. This approach requires an epistemological assumption on the part of teachers that Nepalese young people's realities are socially constructed. Teaching about civic engagement is better undertaken with students rather than being delivered in a pre-determined package to them. This shift will not be easy. There are some tough practical issues from the teacher's perspective – the

student–teacher ratios in government schools at the top end of the basic level can be 60:1 (MoE 2015). Nevertheless, a pressing challenge for future pedagogic work in this area is to continue expanding civic education grounded in students making and negotiating meaning around age-appropriate and culturally relevant civic experiences. This contrasts strongly with a civic education agenda that is designed to socialize students into a predefined and idealized political order.

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