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Teaching Tolerance:

Multicutural and anti-racist education

Abstract

The need for multicultural and anti-racist education has rarely seemed so urgent. New episodes in the story of old hatreds in India, Bosnia, and Germany remind us of just how thin the veneer of civilization is. Nor can Canadians take comfort in the assumption that intolerance is something that exists elsewhere. Although our body count is tiny in comparison, racism has been a continuing problem here. The purpose of this paper is to establish the need for multicultural and anti-racist education to combat this and to present what the literature has generally identified as the most effective means of incorporating it into the curriculum of our schools. Naturally, a topic as controversial and politically charged as this has its share of disputes. These will also be included in order to complete the survey of the topic.

Résumé

Jamais l'urgence d'une éducation multiculturelle et anti-raciste ne s'est manifestée avec autant d'acuité. La résurgence des haines séculaires en Inde, en Bosnie, et en Allemagne témoigne une fois de plus de la fragilité du vernis de la civilisation. Non pas que les Canadiens puissent prétendre que l'intolérance n'existe qu'ailleurs. Même si notre poids numérique est intime en comparaison, le racisme a toujours été un problème dans notre pays. L'objet de cet article est de d'finir la nécessité d'une éducation multiculturelle et anti-raciste pour combattre ce phénomène et de présenter ce que les textes et ouvrages publiés sur la question ont généralement identifié comme le moyen le plus efficace de l'incorporer aux programmes d'études de nos écoles. Naturellement, un sujet aussi controversé et politiquement sensible que celui-ci soulève de multiples débats. Ceux-ci seront également pris en compte pour brosser un tableau aussi complet que possible de la question.

The Need to Teach Tolerance

Global trends in discrimination

Racism and other forms of intolerance have become a growing problem in contemporary society. The New World Disorder has featured high levels of communal violence. Old animosities have erupted into new atrocities throughout the world. In Bosnia, the ethnic cleansing campaign carried out by the Serbians has utilized mass murder and rape as a way of removing Muslims and Croatians from Serbian-held areas. In India, sectarian violence reminiscent of Partition broke out after Hindu fanatics destroyed the mosque at Ayodhya. In Europe, Neo-Nazism and other racist political movements have cashed in on high levels of discontent by scapegoating visible minorities, refugees, and immigrants. Their activities have included murder and fire-bombings. Racism and intolerance are global problems.

Discrimination in Canada

Although we are fortunate in not being faced with anything on this scale in Canada, we cannot allow ourselves to be complacent. We are not immune to discrimination, as our history shows us. For example, federal government policies towards Native Canadians were studied by the South African government when it was developing the Apartheid system. The internment of Japanese-Canadian citizens during the Second World War, the ban on Asian immigration, and the denial of voting rights to Asians on the West Coast are all indicative of a hostile attitude towards minorities.

Some teachers feel that despite the current world situation and Canada's history of racism there is no need for anti-racist education. This belief is based on the feeling that Canada is basically a fair and liberal amalgam of cultures. This attitude has, in many instances, led to ambivalence towards anti-racist education (Echoles & Fisher, 1992).

Although intolerance has not reached Bosnian levels, there is considerable grounds for concern in Canada. Racism, sexism, anti-Semitism, homophobia, and other forms of discrimination are widespread in Canada today. In January 1993, Trevor Kelly became the fourth black man and the seventh visible minority to be fatally shot by Montreal police since 1987 (out of a total of eight) (Picard, 1993). For many observers this reaffirmed the belief that racist attitudes predominate on the force. Discrimination against blacks is commonplace, and affects many aspects of their lives. Blacks are twice as likely as whites to be turned down when looking for an apartment, and ninety-four per cent of

Canadian job agencies are asked by clients to reject workers because of their colour (Statistics cited in March 21, 1992 anti-racist campaign material produced by Multiculturalism and Citizenship Canada, 1992).

Other forms of discrimination are also prevalent in Canadian society. Over the past two years several Montreal Synagogues and Jewish cemeteries have been vandalized by Neo-Nazis. Violence against women is rampant. *The War Against Women*, a parliamentary committee report, stated that at least ten per cent of Canadian women were sexually and/or physically abused by their current or former partners each year. Furthermore, 120 women were murdered by their partners in 1991, a thirty-three per cent increase over 1990 (Vienneau, 1993).

In January 1993 two gay men were killed in Montreal, which brought the number of murders of men presumed to be gay to eleven since 1989 (Lalonde, 1993). One can only conclude that discriminatory attitudes are alive and well, and that there is a need to address these issues in our schools.

The development of discriminatory attitudes amongst children

The prevalence of discrimination in society has a direct bearing upon the development of attitudes and beliefs amongst children. Research studies have shown that awareness of racial and ethnic differences begin to develop in children at the age of three or four, and that attitudes towards these differences mirror those of adults by the age of eight (Milner, 1987; Ramsey, 1987; Roe, 1982).

Stereotyping by children grows out of a variety of developmental factors. The Social Adjustment Theory emphasizes the need of children for emotional support from their immediate environment (Roe, 1982). As a result, they will adopt the attitudes of their families and friends out of the need to belong.

Children's attitudes towards early perceived differences are also shaped by the fact that they are usually exposed to a single, exclusionary point of view when they evaluate differences (Ramsey, 1987). Obviously, parental attitudes are very important, but they do not necessarily have to be explicitly discriminatory to foster negative stereotypes. For example, parental unease around certain people, the defacto segregation that exists in most family's social lives, as well as stereotyped media portrayals, contribute to children's attitudes towards those whom they perceive as different (Ramsey, 1987).

Children's avoidance of cognitive dissonance – the tension or discomfort experienced when a deeply held value or belief is challenged – reinforces their biases by impeding the incorporation of information

which would challenge their attitudes, such as having friends from a variety of backgrounds (Ramsey, 1987). Children learn to discriminate differences by the time they go to school.

Immigration trends

An additional reason why anti-discriminatory education is needed is based on the changing ethnic composition of the country. As reported in the *Globe and Mail* (Mitchell, 1992), Canada's declining birth rate and aging population are threats to the country's long term economic stability. Immigration levels have therefore been raised to 250,000 a year in order to fill the demographic short-fall, as well as to acquire needed skills and investment capital (Mitchell, 1992). Since the removal of racial barriers in immigration policy in the late 1960s, the origin of Canada's immigrants has shifted from Europe, particularly the United Kingdom and Italy to Asia, Latin America, and the Caribbean.

This has changed the face of Canada particularly in large urban centres. Over fifty per cent of the immigrant population has settled in Toronto, Montreal, and Vancouver. As a result, immigrants make up thirty-eight per cent of the population of Toronto, and thirty per cent and seventeen per cent of the population of Vancouver and Montreal, respectively (Statistics Canada, 1992). For many people, this change is an uncomfortable one. The Canadian sociologist John Porter has described Canada as a "vertical mosaic" (Porter, 1965). According to his analysis, the country has been dominated in socioeconomic and political terms by the charter groups, made up of anglophones and francophones. Beneath these groups, in a stratified arrangement, were those of other racial and ethnic backgrounds. Those that were most similar to the charter groups enjoyed higher status, whereas those more distant were allocated lower ones. As a result, nonwhites were seen as the most distant, foreign, and least desirable citizens, fit only to do the most degrading types of work. Blacks and Asians were not accepted as real Canadians, regardless of how many generations they were here. This was reflected in Canada's immigration policy until the 1960s.

Cognitive dissonance theory would dictate that many white Canadians do not easily accept a multicultural view of the country, despite the adoption of the policy of multiculturalism within a bilingual framework by the federal government in 1971. Nor does exposure to different ethnic groups alone guarantee that people will change their attitudes. In a comparative study of grade five and six students in schools with a high and low density of visible minorities (thirty and ten per cent) in Scarborough, Ontario, it was found that white students in both schools had a highly negative opinion of blacks and East Indians (Ijaz & Ijaz,

1981). Thus contact does not guarantee acceptance. It is obvious that a multicultural and anti-racist approach to education is needed to counter the prevalence of ethnic bias and stereotyping, and to help students adjust to an ethnically diverse society.

Multicultural and anti-racist Educational Programmes

Definition of terms

The concept of multicultural education has evolved over the past twenty-five years. It grew out of the social justice movements of the 1960s, when minority groups and other victims of oppression fought against discrimination and sought equal and fair representation in institutions such as schools (Grant, 1992).

Multiculturalism, as defined by the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, is: ". . . education which values cultural pluralism. Multicultural education rejects the view that schools should seek to melt away cultural differences or the view that schools should merely tolerate cultural pluralism . . . to endorse cultural pluralism is to endorse the principle that there is no one model America" (Grant, 1992, p.20).

Recently, the concept of anti-racist education has been included in the curriculum, in recognition of the fact that racist attitudes, which are acquired quite early by many children, must be addressed directly in the classroom (Milner, 1987). Multicultural and anti-racist education programmes can be analyzed in three major aspects which encompass the teacher and other staff, the curriculum, and special classroom projects. These will be analyzed in the sections below.

The teacher and professional staff

The fact that teachers play a vital, if not the primary, role in the success of multicultural and anti-racist education is well documented in the literature (Ashworth, 1982; Echols & Fisher, 1992; Grant, 1992; Hessari & Hill, 1989; Kehoe, 1984; Ramsey, 1987; Roe, 1982; VanBalkom, 1991). The first step in ensuring that teachers can transmit a sense of tolerance to their class is by ensuring that they recognize their own biases and try not to relay them to the students. For example, the teacher may have a tendency to call on boys more than girls, assume that Asian students are good at math, or expect blacks to be troublesome.

Given that teachers are role models and authority figures, their attitudes can reinforce or contradict stereotypes. In a survey of high

school children in Quebec conducted in 1990 by the Provincial Educa-
tion and Cultural Communities Departments, one-third of the students of
Haitian origin in the Montreal area reported that they felt that they were
less supported than other students at school and felt discriminated against.
This in turn contributed to a more general feeling of having less oppor-
tunity to succeed than other students (Bagnell, 1993). Thus a societal
bias was widely reproduced in the schools and helped to foster a sense
of learned helplessness amongst black students.

Teachers need to be trained to successfully teach a multicultural
and anti-racist curriculum. Mallea and Young (cited in VanBalkom,
1991) propose three areas of skills that are required to do this: the
personal, professional, and the community-oriented. Personal skills, ac-
cording to Cummings (cited in VanBalkom, 1991), relate to adopting
teaching methods that empower students. Professional goals include
cross-cultural communications skills, knowledge of other cultures, and
the ability to critically use teaching and assessment tools. Community
skills are the ability to involve different cultural communities in the
education of their children. Despite the need for these skills, not one of
the universities in Alberta surveyed by VanBalkom (1991) had manda-
tory multicultural instruction in their teacher training courses. Ashworth
(1982) promotes the use of in-service training not only for teachers, but
for all staff and administrators who work with students and the public.

There are also suggestions that the hiring and promotional prac-
tices of school boards should give more consideration to visible minori-
ties. It is felt that schools need to reflect the community's composition,
as well as provide positive role models for students. Henley and Young
(1981), however, state that quota systems have little support in Canada.

Curriculum content and materials

At the school board and classroom level, it is important to ensure
that the curriculum content and class materials reflect ethnic and cultural
diversity. School boards such as the Toronto Board of Education have
established task forces to review curriculum materials for cultural bias,
generate new multicultural material, and ensure that the curriculum rep-
resents ethnic diversity (Henley & Young, 1981).

The first step in implementing a multicultural programme is to
remove material that has an ethnocentric bias. For example, history
courses that portray the "discovery" of America by Europeans is inaccu-
rate and inappropriate. So is the portrayal of Natives as savages, either
noble or otherwise, or as history's perpetual losers. The social sciences
should generally include pluralistic representations of peoples and places.

Science courses can also employ diversity. Teachers can present inventors of various backgrounds and emphasize the scientific achievements of nonwestern societies. The fact that technological development is dependent upon the needs and materials available in a particular society should also be stressed. To realize just how silly an ethnocentric attitude towards scientific discovery can be, one need merely recall the character of Checkov in the television show *Star Trek*. In one Cold War inspired exchange, the character claimed that practically everything ever invented was Russian.

One must also be sensitive to the portrayal of stereotypes in choosing reading material. Tiedt and Tiedt (1990) recommend that books be assessed in terms of the realistic portrayal of ethnic groups, fair representation of other people (e.g. the elderly, women), and attempts made at breaking down existing stereotypes. They provide a scorecard for evaluating books on the basis of these criteria. The curriculum should include ethnic visibility, as well as a variety of family arrangements, such as divorced or deceased parents, nontraditional gender roles and the physically disabled. This not only exposes students to differences in a positive light, but also acts as reinforcement for those who are under or misrepresented. Bibliographies of reading material which features this diversity are available, and there are a number of works listed in Tiedt and Tiedt (1990).

In developing a curriculum that is inclusive, it is important to emphasize the common elements that are shared by many groups (Roe, 1982). Kamra and Wood (1987) have noted that too often multicultural education focuses on what makes people different. This can reinforce the discrimination that children develop at an early age, and thus work against stated goals. Highlighting the similarities amongst people is a more effective way to promote intergroup understanding.

Classroom projects

Classroom projects are an important addition to the multicultural and anti-racist curriculum, but they should not be the sole component of it. Nor should they be used indiscriminately (no pun intended). Although the literature abounds with projects and plans for the preschool to grade twelve level, it is necessary to assess their effectiveness. There are a set of guidelines which can be used to determine this.

A crucial first step is to assess the attitudes of children and their parents, as well as intergroup relations in the community (Ramsey, 1987). By doing this one can ensure that the activities undertaken in the classroom are relevant to the students.

It is equally important to assess programmes to gauge what their long-term effect on attitudes are. Ijaz and Ijaz (1981) found in their study of two elementary schools in Scarborough, Ontario, that students had highly negative attitudes towards blacks and East Indians, despite the fact that multiculturalism was promoted both in the curriculum and in extracurricular activities, and that the teaching staff and administration were dedicated to the programme. They concluded that this failure was due to the methodology and content of the programme, which emphasized cultural differences and was taught in the standard course approach.

Ijaz and Ijaz (1981) revised the programme by incorporating activities and role playing methods, and by emphasizing cultural similarities and the sources of cultural diversity. Traditional Indian folk customs and games were taught and performed by a member of the community during weekly seventy-minute sessions held over a nine-week period. By engaging students at the affective level as well as at the cognitive level, and by fostering a sense of kinship and understanding between Indian and Canadian cultures, the programme had a beneficial effect on the students' attitudes towards East Indians. This improved attitude was still there when measured three months after the programme concluded.

Class projects should be preceded by an assessment of the attitudes held by students and their families, and the conditions in the community. Their effectiveness should be measured after the programme is completed to see if it had a positive influence on attitudes. Multicultural and anti-racist curricula have also been under attack recently from those who feel that they have gone too far and have become a way for particular groups in society to promote ideas and values which are not accepted by the main stream. This situation is best displayed in the ongoing debate over the multicultural curriculum adopted by the New York Board of Education in 1989. *Children of the Rainbow* contains a section dealing with the changing concept of family. It encourages teachers to discuss families headed by same-sex couples so that children of these families do not feel alienated and so that all students are presented with a tolerant attitude towards gays and lesbians.

One local school district rejected the curriculum in whole, and four others removed the section on same-sex families. Opponents of *Children of the Rainbow* argued that the inclusion of gay and lesbian issues undercut the moral and religious values of the schools. Supporters of the curriculum argued that the opposition was ignoring reality and that their decision would encourage homophobia at a time when violent attacks against gays were increasing (Myers, 1992).

Conclusion

The need for a curriculum that combats discrimination is obvious. One need merely consider the degree of racism which exists in the world, its prevalence in Canada today, and its early acquisition by children to see this. Recent immigration trends provide yet another reason for the importance of a curriculum that prepares students to adjust to an increasingly diverse society, as well as one that reflects the changing face of the classroom. The literature shows near unanimous agreement on some fundamental aspects of multicultural and anti-racist curriculum. Quality multicultural programmes, which are student-activity oriented and which emphasize cultural similarities as well as the sources of cultural diversity, have shown that they can have considerable influence on children's attitudes.

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