STUDY TOURS IN INDIA: A TOOL IN THE INTERCULTURAL TRAINING OF TEACHERS

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INTRODUCTION

I will present here some explanations regarding my interest in Indian culture, politics and social life which has led me to organize study tours in India for teachers. I will also indicate how these study tours were integrated in the in-service training program for intercultural education I have developed at University of Sherbrooke.

When I obtained my Ph.D. in Philosophy of Religion at McGill University in 1970, Quebec society was very different from the one in which I was born in 1941. It was in the process of becoming a modern society, where religion would play only a minor role. Without realizing it, I was personally affected by these transformations. After finishing the eight years of B.A., I studied theology for five years, but I was more and more dissatisfied with Roman Catholic theology since I felt it did not deliver satisfying answers to fundamental questions about the nature of religion. The program of Philosophy of Religions at McGill University made it possible to approach religion in a broader perspective. It also included seminars on Hinduism, which were my first contact with this religious tradition.

After the completion of my Ph.D., I was hired at the Faculté de théologie of Sherbrooke University where a graduate program in social sciences and religion (Sciences humaines des religions) had just been created. I was asked to develop courses on Hinduism and Buddhism. During my first years of teaching, a program of "Culture religieuse" had been experimented in some schools of Quebec. This program was offered in the last three years of high school, as an alternative to the course of religious education. The teachers involved in this experimentation needed training in sociology of religion and world religions, so a professional "module" was added to the program of "Sciences humaines des religions" in order to fill that need. That professional "module" was structured around three main components:

1. *Theory.* The teachers had to become aware of the possibility of studying religion in a non-confessional way and they had to learn how to use the methodology of the social sciences.
2. *Experience.* The teachers had to select a religious tradition and to study in depth its complexity and diversity. They were invited to exchange with followers of that tradition.
3. *Experimentation.* The teachers had to create for their students pedagogical material reflecting the insights gained during their involvement in the training program.

It is within the framework of the second component of the training program that I organized four study tours in India for teachers of "culture religieuse" at the high school level. Each of these tours was prepared by intensive sessions on Indian culture, social life, politics and religions. Most of the courses in these intensive sessions were given by André Couture, an eminent specialist of Sanskrit from Laval University in Quebec City. The teachers who participated in these sessions were working full time and they did not spend much time at the university. A textbook containing articles on various aspects of Indian life and a selective bibliography was prepared for them so that they could complete their training at home. They were also invited to select a specific aspect of Indian life and religion that they could discuss with Indian correspondents during the trip in India. Colleagues from Indian universities helped in organizing those exchanges.

However, after some ten years of experimentation, the Quebec Department of Education decided to abolish the program of "culture religieuse." The program was re-established in a new form in 2004 when the Ministry of Education created a new program: *Ethics and religious culture.* For details about this program, see Ouellet (2005) and also Mc Andrew and Akhtar in this volume.

This led me to reorient the professional "module" I had created in order to satisfy the needs of teachers in the Roman Catholic network in Quebec. After the adoption of Bill 101, in 1976, all immigrants in Quebec had to send their children to the French schools. *"Bill 101 [...] made French the official language of the state and of the courts in the province of Quebec, as well as making it the normal and habitual language of the workplace, of instruction, of communications, of commerce and of business. Education in French became compulsory for immigrants, even those from other Canadian provinces, unless a 'reciprocal agreement' existed between Quebec and that province (the so-called Quebec clause)"* (Hudon, 2012). This created a new situation for the teachers in the French Catholic network

who had to teach to students from multiple cultures. This new situation generated many initiatives by teachers to deal with the new challenges and these initiatives gave birth to a new education field: intercultural/multicultural education. However, the initiatives of teachers had very often "perverse effects" (Ouellet, 1992) despite their good intentions. I have identified in the relevant literature seven "perverse effects" of initiatives focussing too much on cultural particularities:

- Confinement of individuals in a permanent and immutable cultural identity which deprive them of their freedom to choose their "cultural formula" (Camilleri, 1988/1990).
- Hardening of the boundaries between groups and accentuation of the risks of intolerance and rejection (Steele, 1990).
- Accentuation of the difficulties for immigrants and members of minority groups to have access to equality of opportunities (Steele, 1990).
- The paralysing perplexity of the relativistic master who does not know what to teach if he wants to show respect for the culture of minority students (Camilleri, 1988, 90).
- Stigmatisation and marginalisation of minority students to whom a socially depreciated identity is attributed (Nicolet, 1987).
- Reification and "folklorisation" of culture which is no more a living reality providing guidance in life for individuals (J. J., in Ouellet 1991).
- Fragmentation of curriculum as a result of particularistic demands (Ravitch, 1990).

INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION PROGRAM:

In the last 25 years of my career at the University of Sherbrooke, I have been in charge of a graduate program of intercultural training for teachers. This program was designed to equip teachers with the conceptual tools and the pedagogical strategies they needed in order to avoid these "perverse effects." I have been influenced by the double strategy proposed by Bernard Loreytte (1982) to shun these pitfalls: a "pedagogy of identity deconstruction," where the homogeneity postulated for "us" and for "others" is systematically deconstructed, and a "pedagogy of situation," where, in a given historic and social context, intercultural relations are analyzed in the concrete situation of contacts between individuals and groups. This approach is still very relevant and underlies the "roundabout strategy" that I have put forward (Ouellet, 1994). Rather than trying to respond directly to the expectations of teachers, the intercultural education program takes them in a triple "roundabout":

- The study of the main theoretical questions raised by any attempt to hold together three preoccupations/values: the acceptation of cultural diversity, the search for social cohesion in a common space of deliberation and the struggle against discrimination and inequalities;
- The exploration of some aspects of the socio-economic and political situation in a chosen foreign country and of the dynamics of the culture of its citizens who have immigrated to Quebec;
- The elaboration of a plan of intervention which could contribute to the quality of education offered to all students. The teachers involved in the program were invited to adopt the form of cooperative learning developed by Elizabeth Cohen (1994), in light of the new perspectives opened by the exploration of theoretical questions relevant to the three preoccupations/values mentioned before, and of a greater sensibility to the diverse experiences of minority cultural groups with whom they had interactions during the exploration of a foreign society.

Intercultural education is a controversial concept. In order to be able to take into account the cultural and religious differences which are more and more a reality in society and in the classroom, teachers need the intellectual tools which can help them understand the causes and the consequences of this situation. The program I have designed includes courses on some important theoretical issues related to cultural and religious diversity, social cohesion and equality. Table 1 provides a synthetic presentation of these theoretical issues.

Table 1: Intercultural Education/Citizenship Education

PREOCCUPATIONS/ VALUES	CONCEPTS/THEMES
Acceptation of diversity	Culture, ethnicity and identity in the context of modernity. Cultural relativism and the necessity to go beyond it. Obstacles to intercultural relations: - "ethnicisation" of cultural differences; - prejudice, discrimination, heterophobia, racism; - antiracism and its problems.
Social cohesion (Search for a "principle of collective belonging")	Nation, community, state. Nationalism, liberalism, pluralistic democracy, citizenship. Civic education, education for democracy.
Equality and equity	Equality of opportunity, exclusion and marginalization. The vicious circle of guilt-victim. Affirmative action and its perverse effects.
Critical participation to democratic life and democratic deliberation	Deliberative democracy and pluralism of values. Consensus VS modus vivendi. Politics of identit.

But the importance of the second component of the "roundabout strategy," the exploration of a foreign society, is much less evident. This component might be considered as a luxury for teachers facing urgent problems in their classrooms. I believe, however, that teachers need an opportunity to distance themselves from the climate of urgency and of tension which are all too often characteristic of intercultural relations. The exploration of some aspects of a foreign society's socio-economic and political context, particularly if it is connected to an eventual visit to the chosen country, introduces an element of pleasure to the program. The discovery of a new cultural world can be a very gratifying experience if it implies an initiation to a foreign literature, and to the religion, music, arts and culinary delights of a foreign country. Some teachers might even start learning the language of that country.

Another reason to include the exploration of a foreign culture as a component of intercultural education is that it provides teachers with an opportunity to test the validity and the relevance of some of the theoretical notions which have been under study in the first part of the programme. It also gives them a point of comparison which helps them better understand their own society. When they try to analyze the cultural and religious traditions of this country in the light of these theoretical notions, they learn how to comprehend cultural particularities in a broader socio-political framework. They are, then, better prepared to avoid the numerous "perverse effects" which can be produced by activities focussing on the discovery of other cultures. Last but not least, this multidimensional exploration of a foreign society gives teachers the opportunity to interact with citizens who have recently emigrated from their country and to develop with them relationships under a model of mutual discovery and enrichment rather than misunderstanding and confrontation.

All these reasons lead me to persist in my conviction that the exploration of a foreign culture in intercultural formation is far from being a luxury in a context of a global economy and of a widening gap between the life conditions in industrialized and those in poor countries. This component of the "roundabout strategy" might very well make an essential contribution to the development of a planetary vision which is required to face the new problems emerging in all countries today.

SECOND COMPONENT: STUDYING THE HOST COUNTRY

In this second component of the program, the teachers are invited to explore some aspects of the cultural model which is dominant in the country they would like to visit and to study the relations between majority and minority groups in that country. They must write a short monograph in which they give a synthetic presentation of some of the following points:

- Religious traditions and their contemporary transformations;
- Family and education of children;
- Education system;
- Tensions between tradition and modernity;
- Relations between cultural and religious groups and state policies in this area.

Teachers must consult scholars who can suggest relevant books and articles on the religious, cultural, social and political background of the country they want to study. They are also invited to evaluate with educated immigrants coming from that country the findings of their research, the transformation of their culture in the context of immigration, and the difficulties they have experienced in their integration to the new country.

The nature of this activity requires that teachers be free to select for themselves the country they will explore. When the teachers do not have any clear preference, they can be helped to select a country of origin of immigrants whose integration raises some difficulties. Some teachers eager to discover India joined the seven groups who traveled to India with me between 1984 and 2006, but their working conditions made it difficult for them to participate in great number. I organized ten study tours in India between 1977 and 2008 and approximately 120 persons participated in those trips. Less than 40 of them were teachers. But some of the participants have developed a great interest in India and have managed to visit this country by themselves. Some of those who had invested less time and energy in the preparation of the trip have experienced a "cultural shock." They were unable to see anything beyond overpopulation, poverty and dirt and they were eager to return to the comfort of "civilization."

READING: ANOTHER LEARNING TOOL

The study tours I organized have had a limited impact on the intercultural training of teachers. Fortunately, good novels and short stories by Indian authors are a more accessible mean to comprehend the complexity of Indian life and cultural and religious traditions. I have tried to make a small contribution to the discovery of Indian literature by French speaking readers by translating the main works of a giant of Hindi literature, Munshi Premchand. I have had the privilege of being assisted in this difficult endeavor by three colleagues whose expertise has been invaluable: Kiran Chaudhry, a specialist of French and literary translation from JNU, André Couture, a specialist of Sanskrit at Laval University in Quebec city and Richard Giguère, a specialist of literary translation at University of Sherbrooke. Three collections of short stories of Premchand, published in 1996, 2000, 2009, and two

major novels, published in 2006 and 2012, have already been published. A third novel is in the process of final revision and a first draft of the translation of two volumes of Premchand's writing has just been completed. Two more collections of Premchand's short stories will be translated hopefully in the next two years.

CONCLUSION

Training teachers for intercultural education is not an easy task. The "roundabout strategy" I have briefly described here might be helpful to overcome some of the problems faced by those who offer training in this field. Some initiation to the human and social sciences should certainly be an essential element of any training program. The exploration of the culture of a foreign country with the analytical tools of social and human sciences and an initiation to the literature of that country could also be an important component of this training program.

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LES VOYAGES D'ÉTUDE EN INDE: UN OUTIL POUR LA FORMATION INTERCULTURELLE DES ENSEIGNANTS

Je présente ici quelques explications concernant mon intérêt pour la vie culturelle, politique et sociale indienne, qui m'ont conduit à organiser des voyages d'études en Inde pour les enseignants. Je démontre aussi comment ces voyages d'étude s'intégraient dans le programme de perfectionnement en éducation interculturelle développé par l'Université de Sherbrooke.

Lorsque j'ai obtenu mon Ph.D. en Philosophie des religions à l'Université McGill, en 1970, la société québécoise était très différente de celle où j'étais né en 1941. Sans trop m'en apercevoir, j'étais personnellement marqué par ces transformations. Après avoir complété mon cours classique, j'ai étudié la théologie pendant cinq ans. Toutefois, la théologie catholique ne fournissait pas de réponses satisfaisantes aux questions fondamentales que je me posais sur la nature de la religion. Le programme de Philosophie des religions offert par l'Université McGill me permis d'aborder l'étude de la religion dans une perspective plus large et d'avoir un premier contact avec les traditions religieuses de l'Inde.

Ayant obtenu un poste à la Faculté de théologie de l'Université de Sherbrooke en 1970, je me suis intéressé au programme de « culture religieuse » introduit quelques années plus tôt dans quelques écoles secondaires du Québec. Les enseignants engagés dans ce nouveau programme avaient besoin d'une formation en histoire des religions et en sociologie des religions. Pour répondre à ce besoin, un volet professionnel fut introduit dans le programme de Maîtrise en sciences humaines des religions de l'Université de Sherbrooke. Ce volet professionnel était structuré autour de trois composantes:

1. Théorie. Les enseignants devaient apprendre à aborder les phénomènes religieux selon les perspectives des sciences humaines et sociales.
2. Expérience. Les enseignants devaient choisir une tradition religieuse, l'étudier dans sa complexité et sa diversité et avoir des échanges avec des personnes appartenant à cette tradition.
3. Expérimentation. Les enseignants devaient créer pour leurs élèves du matériel pédagogique reflétant ce qu'ils avaient appris dans les deux premiers volets du programme.

C'est dans le cadre de la seconde composante du programme que j'ai organisé des voyages d'études en Inde pour les enseignants en « culture religieuse ». Chacun de ces voyages était préparé par des sessions intensives d'été et un programme de lectures dirigées sur différents aspects de la culture indienne, de la vie sociale et politique en Inde et des religions de l'Inde. L'abolition du programme de « culture religieuse » à la fin des années 1970 m'a forcé à réorienter le volet professionnel du programme que je dirigeais et d'y inclure un volet de formation interculturelle. Ce volet professionnel ne cherchait pas à répondre directement aux attentes des enseignants confrontés aux défis du pluralisme ethnoculturel dans leurs salles de classes. Il les invitait plutôt à un triple détour:

1. Détour par la théorie. Étude des principales questions théoriques que soulève toute initiative visant à maintenir ensemble les préoccupations/ valeurs d'acceptation de la diversité culturelle, de maintien de la cohésion sociale dans un espace commun de délibération et de lutte contre la discrimination et les inégalités.
2. Détour par l'exploration d'une tradition culturelle étrangère. Étude de certains aspects de la situation socio-économique et politique d'un pays étranger et de la dynamique de la culture d'immigrants québécois qui viennent de ce pays.
3. Détour par la pédagogie. Élaboration d'un projet d'intervention susceptible de contribuer à améliorer la qualité de l'enseignement grâce aux apprentissages effectués dans le cadre des deux premières composantes du programme. Les enseignants étaient encouragés à intégrer les stratégies de l'« instruction complexe » développées par E. Cohen (1994).

L'importance du second élément de la stratégie du détour mise en œuvre dans ce programme est moins évidente. J'estime pour ma part que les enseignants ont besoin de prendre un certain recul par rapport au climat d'urgence et de tension qui caractérise souvent les relations interculturelles. L'exploration de la situation sociale, économique et politique d'un pays étranger, surtout si elle est liée à un projet éventuel de voyage dans le pays étudié, permet d'introduire un élément de plaisir dans la démarche de formation.

L'exploration de la dynamique socioculturelle du pays choisi constituait également une excellente occasion de tester la validité de plusieurs des notions théoriques analysées dans le premier bloc d'activités du programme. Elle permettait de voir concrètement comment la culture et l'ethnicité se combinent à divers facteurs sociaux et politiques dans une autre société et d'avoir des points de comparaison pour mieux comprendre comment les mêmes mécanismes sont à l'œuvre dans son propre univers culturel. Les enseignants pouvaient ainsi éviter les nombreux « effets pervers » qui guettent toute activité de formation centrée sur la découverte de la culture de l'Autre.

Cette démarche d'exploration d'un univers culturel étranger fournissait aux enseignants inscrits au programme l'occasion d'entrer en contact avec des immigrants et d'avoir avec eux des interactions qui pourront être vécues sous le mode de la découverte et de l'enrichissement mutuel et non sous celui de l'incompréhension et de la confrontation, comme c'est trop souvent le cas.

Toutes ces raisons m'amènent à persister dans ma conviction que le détour par l'exploration d'une culture étrangère n'est pas un luxe pour une formation interculturelle dans un contexte de mondialisation. Loin d'être un luxe, ce détour peut contribuer d'une manière significative au développement de la vision planétaire dont nous aurons besoin pour faire face aux défis nouveaux qui confrontent aujourd'hui toutes les sociétés. J'ai organisé dix voyages d'étude en Inde dans le cadre du programme de formation interculturelle et une centaine de personnes y ont participé. Le coût de ces voyages et le temps exigé pour la préparation ont empêché plusieurs enseignants d'y participer. Moins de la moitié des participants aux voyages étaient des enseignants. Heureusement, les romans et les nouvelles par des écrivains indiens constituent un moyen plus largement accessible pour mieux comprendre la richesse et la complexité de la vie et de la culture de l'Inde. J'ai tenté d'apporter une petite contribution à la découverte de la littérature indienne en traduisant les œuvres principales d'un géant de la littérature hindi, Munshi Premchand. Trois recueils de ses nouvelles et deux romans ont déjà été publiés. Un autre roman est presque prêt pour la publication et deux collections de ses écrits divers sont en préparation. J'espère également pouvoir, d'ici deux ans, publier deux autres recueils de nouvelles de cet auteur.