THE LIBERATING POTENTIAL OF MULTICULTURALISM IN CANADA: IDEALS AND REALITIES

Ratna Ghosh is James McGill Professor and William C. Macdonald Professor of Education at McGill University in Montreal, Canada, and was Dean of Education from 1998 to 2003. She was appointed to the Order of Canada and the Order of Quebec, and elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada (RSC). She has published books and articles on the topic of diversity in Canada and was featured in ***Time*** Magazine, Canadian Edition, 2003, in an article on "Canada's Best in Education". She is the incoming President of the Comparative and International Education Society (CIES). As President-Elect of CIES, she has organized the 2011 annual conference of CIES to be held in Montreal for the first time.

I do not want my house to be walled in on all sides and my windows stuffed.
I want the cultures of all lands to be blown about my house as freely as possible.
But I refuse to be blown off my feet by any.

Gandhi

The essays in this special volume of *Canadian Issues,* published for the 55th Annual Conference of the Comparative and International Education Society (CIES) to be held in Montreal (May 1-5, 2011), address questions still being raised about the concept of multiculturalism. Many of these essays point to some of the ambiguities and complexities of integration in Canadian society, several of which focus on the province of Quebec because of its distinctive linguistic and cultural makeup. The role of education and the challenges of diversity faced in schools by students, administrators, and policy makers alike, as well as the policies of multiculturalism and interculturalism are discussed. Many of the essays draw attention to the theme of this year's conference, which is *Education is That Which Liberates,* and the potential of education to liberate the mind from ignorance and prejudice. This will be a key topic in presentations, workshops, plenary sessions, and a theatre performance.

Canada is a country of immigrants; it is known as the first country in the world to have a policy on multiculturalism (1971). While French and British settlers conquered the landscape from the Native populations, many other groups of people also helped build the country. Presently, Canada's 33 million people reflect a vast diversity of cultural, linguistic, and religious backgrounds, skin colours and physical features – all of which ultimately impact the socio-economic levels and life chances of people.

EDUCATION AND LIBERATION

With the increasingly diverse nature of societies, and the dramatic impact of globalization, electronic media and communication technologies, disadvantaged and marginalized groups and individuals are clamoring for social justice and opportunities to be included in the globalization process. Changes resulting from a market economy and technological advances have influenced the goals of education. The traditional objectives of the development of values have shifted to skills training. However, as the recent events in North Africa and Japan have demonstrated, social justice issues and the moral imperative to work towards a sustainable world are ignored at great risk to all. Increasing diversity in societies around the globe must be supported by inclusive policies and educational institutions, and those who work within them have a moral, political, and ethical obligation to carefully rethink their role in producing future citizens.

Education can be a powerful tool for combating inequity and discrimination in today's conflict-ridden world. It must challenge the structures that maintain the uneven development within societies. It must be a process that liberates people not only from ignorance and poverty, but also from fear, vulnerability, injustice, and social inequality. In a knowledge society, ignorance will only create further inequalities.

Thinkers like Freire and Tagore[1] have stressed the need to liberate the process of education itself by using methods

that prevent depositing "knowledge" to the students. "The oppressed must learn to liberate themselves, and in turn, their oppressors, who are also dehumanized through the very process of oppressing others" (Freire, 1975: 27). Liberatory education prepares learners to expose and challenge oppressive social structures that are often hidden because they are normalized. Educational institutions have also been complicit in perpetuating these unfair social and economic structures.

LEGISLATION

In Canada, legal protections for equality and anti-discrimination legislation exist in several legal instruments starting from the international documents to which it is a signatory to federal, provincial, and municipal ones. How effective can legislation be in shaping society? Two issues are important with respect to this question. First, as Martin Luther King, Jr. once noted, legislation does not change the hearts of people but it restrains the heartless (King, 1964). Secondly, it cannot be assumed that legislation operates effectively to reduce inequalities. Legal protections are generated by groups in power and operate within societal and cultural contexts. These environments are influenced by norms and customs, which create "systemic, structural, and social obstacles... institutionalized and embedded in both official and unofficial law and custom… *apparently* neutral institutional rules, policies and practices… (that can have)… detrimental effects on the life chances, opportunities and well-being of minorities and women" (Sheppard, 2010: 3-4). Legal scholars have started to look at how the injuries of exclusion and discrimination are sometimes entrenched in practices, policies, and norms which appear neutral but work to prevent the fair distribution of societal privileges (Sheppard, 2010; Sturm, 2001). Citizens need to be educated to change the cultures of social institutions in order to transform society into inclusive spaces and not merely reluctantly accommodate groups of people within an established social order. This inclusive space is crucial in immigrant societies where diversity brings with it challenges to equality and human rights.

The basic liberal principles and philosophy of individual human rights had been established in Canada through common law, and explicitly recognized by the adoption in 1948 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.[2] However, legislation was based on an instrumentalist vision prohibiting discrimination based on several grounds such as race, ethnicity, sex, religion, disability, and later sexual orientation, so that people could challenge the discriminatory act in courts. The awareness of structural discrimination and the likelihood of its perpetuation with time led to some proactive policy initiatives (Abella, 1984). But the structural societal foundations into which these policies were inserted stayed intact. In other words, the underlying causes of inequalities were not addressed and new policies were merely grafted on to the existing frame. It was not until the 1980s that formal constitutional recognition was given to legal protection of minority and group-based identities and rights. This legislation was followed by several other legal instruments for equality such as the Employment Equity Act (1995). Currently, Bill C 389 is in its third reading in Parliament. If passed, this federal legislation will be a landmark statement on equality. It proposes to extend federal human rights protection against discrimination on the basis of transgender and transexual issues. It also amends the Criminal Code to include offenses as hate crimes when based on gender identity or expression.

Legislation on multiculturalism in Canada is a recognition of diversity in Canadian society. Multicultural Policy was based on an understanding of the need for formal recognition of differences in a democratic society built on a plurality of cultures, ethnicities and religions, gender, and sexual orientation. Prime Minister Pierre Elliot Trudeau's vision of a "just society" led to the Policy of Multiculturalism in 1971. This policy viewed multiculturalism as an "idea for social reform based on the premise of equality of *opportunity* for *individuals* regardless of biological inheritance or ancestral history" (Hutcheson, 1998). Yet it was not until 17 years later, in 1988, that the Multiculturalism Act was adopted; multiculturalism was firmly entrenched in the Canada Act (Canadian Constitution) in 1982. Thus, the scaffold for a just society was assumed to be secure. As Claudia Ruitenberg points out below, it is not that multiculturalism has been achieved in Canada, there are still many challenges, but multiculturalism is a work in progress. It provides a framework which allows innovative possibilities.

Nevertheless, two key questions that need to be addressed in the Canadian context are: What has the term multiculturalism come to mean? What is integration?

MULTICULTURALISM

On the 40th anniversary of the Multiculturalism Policy in Canada this year, it is important to evaluate the impact this policy has had on Canadian society and is likely to have in future. Multiculturalism was vaguely defined in the policy as the protection and retention of cultures and languages of the various cultural groups to offer equality of opportunity for all its citizens to participate in all aspects of Canadian society and provide opportunities to strengthen the use of the two official languages, namely, English and French. How equal opportunity for participation in all aspects of society was to be achieved was not specified, although federal government programs for learning the

two official languages were put in place possibly with the assumption that all that was needed for full participation was knowledge of the languages. The federal government focused on providing programs and funding for the maintenance of the cultural heritage of groups and on heritage language classes in after-school programs. The focus was on cultural and linguistic retention. The Multiculturalism Act (1988) and the establishment of the Canadian Race Relations Foundation Act (1991) changed the direction of the concept of multculturalism towards a vision of elimination of racism and discrimination. Thus, the meaning of multiculturalism was expanded to make race relations a primary focus of the multicultural policy.

As an ideology, multiculturalism is a radical departure from the policy of assimilation, which was the goal of education until the mid-20th century. Multicultural Education in Canada represents a paradigm shift from an assimilationist model to one that incorporates other cultures. It began, like the Policy, with an emphasis on cultural songs, dances, and foods and broadened gradually to the study of other cultures and multiple perspectives on issues. From the eighties, anti-racist and critical multicultural models have become more common in schools. However, since education in Canada is a provincial responsibility and the impact of the federal policy on education can only be indirect, the provinces differ in their emphasis on multicultural education and the extent to which critical perspectives are prevalent varies from region to region. Today, most federal multicultural programs attempt to focus on institutional change, race relations, and citizen participation in societal institutions. Since educational structures, policies, and practices have traditionally been Eurocentric, other perspectives now need to be given to reflect new realities and provide a liberating education that recognizes the complexities of diversity and equity. Analyses of power relations and values such as respect for other people have profound consequences for the goals and practices in education.

Multiculturalism is a federal policy, although most provinces and many larger municipalities have adopted the policy primarily in education, policing, social services, and the protection of human rights. However, the Policy remains until today, four decades later, a very hotly contested topic. On the one hand, it has been abused by ethnic minority groups to sometimes reinforce their traditional behaviors and customs however unacceptable in modern democracies, especially those related to restrictive gender relations. Others have used religion for political purposes and taken advantage of "multiculturalism", thus avoiding review, analysis and transparency of a community's internal dynamics that might involve some oppressive power relations. Furthermore, like language, religion is a cultural signifier and is used in "cultural fundamentalist constructions" (Yuval-Davis, 1997). On the other hand, in the absence of the institutionalization of race relations and discrimination legislation for 17 years after the Policy was announced, the focus on "ethnic cultures" and "cultural preservation" became the expression of the concept; and despite the later shift to economic and discrimination legislation in the 1980s, Multicultural Policy continues to be seen in static terms and remains a contentious issue. This is because it is still seen as a policy for maintaining cultures and languages of minority groups which, it has been argued, separates and divides people by creating ethnic ghettos rather than instilling in them a national Canadian identity.

An editorial in the well-respected national newspaper *The Globe and Mail* (Oct. 8, 2010) expressed some of the common concerns about multiculturalism. Entitled "Strike multiculturalism from the national vocabulary," it implied that multiculturalism represented cultural retention. The point of the editorial was to decry the belief that multiculturalism was about celebration of ethnic foods and dances that distance ethnic groups by putting them in separate silos. It argued that immigrants do not come to Canada to recreate what they have left behind but because of the opportunities and freedoms in Canada's ways of life – with its democratic institutions, freedom of religion and expression, and its respect for equality under the law. The fact, however, is that a majority of immigrants come to Canada for economic and educational opportunities; and many of them want to their traditional ways and customs.

Lack of conceptual understanding of the term multiculturalism has led to its misinterpretation. A major problem with focusing on heritage languages, tradition, and culture is that the focus of multiculturalism policy is on Allophones: those who are not Anglophone (English mother-tongue) or Francophone (French mother-tongue). According to the 2006 Census on immigration and citizenship (Statistics Canada, 2007), 58% of the Canadian population was Anglophone and 22% was Francophone (concentrated in Quebec), and 20.1% of the total population, a full one-fifth of the population had neither English nor French as its mother tongue (Statistics Canada, 2007). Also, nearly one-fifth (19.8%) of Canadians were born outside of Canada.

The complexion of Canada is changing rather fast. Whereas in 1971, about 62% immigrants came from Europe, in 2006 as much as 58% immigrants came from Asia (including the Middle East). So, the word "multiculturalism" has come to be associated with the word "immigrant" and the very word "immigrant" has a connotation of non-white groups: visible minorities. The popular perception is that it is a policy that caters to "ethnic groups" and this enables

the majority groups (Anglophone or Francophone) to watch from the sidelines so that white privilege is kept intact; it is never in question, never under attack (McIntosh, 1990). The Anglophone and Francophone groups who are white do not define themselves as "ethnic" and multiculturalism does not seem to affect them. Anglophones and Francophones are perceived not to have any ethnicity. The federal government refers to people from Asia, Africa and Latin America as "people of colour" or "visible minorities" while Quebec refers to them as "cultural communities." The majority groups do not assume a position in the framework of "multiculturalism." They not only distance themselves from identities of colour and culture, but they privilege themselves (as the majority) and do not see the disadvantages of discrimination, so that they do not have to share the power that they now have.

Another response to the concept of multiculuralism by neo liberalists has been to appear "color-blind." This implies treating everyone the same by appearing to be blind to differences in skin color (racial and ethnic differences). But human beings are deeply diverse – not only in their inherent characteristics (ethnicity, gender, age, physical attributes and aptitudes, physical and mental health) but also in their location or "positioning"(place of birth, socio-economic background, etc.) – which result in unequal power relations (Ghosh, 2002). The effect of ignoring such differences, in fact, may be unjust and inegalitarian (Sen, 1992). Studies indicate that how these differences are constructed has a great impact on student achievement and experiences in school, as well as on students' formation of their own identities. In effect, color-blindness condones and continues white privilege and the status quo of unequal power relations. Not to recognize the "location" (Bhabha 94) of a person or acknowledge that certain "differences" have disadvantages is "misrecognition". And, as Taylor (1992) points out, "Nonrecognition or misrecognition can inflict harm, can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted, and reduced mode of being" (p.25). Fairness, not color-blindness , is a fundamental principle of justice (Appiah, 96). Difference is seen as a problem and one way to deal with it is to fail to recognize it.

In school and in society, as long as multiculturalism implies nothing more than cultures in a static form it has been less challenging. A critical multicultural education approach that includes anti-racism, which deals with issues of structural and social discrimination, or power relations, becomes problematic.

INTEGRATION

The recent release of the 2011 report of the Migrant Integration Policy Index III (MIPEX) ranks Canada third after Sweden and Portugal in integration of immigrants.[3] MIPEX attempts to ***measure*** integration policies. This ranking does not, of course, provide a picture of or represent immigrants' subjective experiences in society. Nor does it convey the challenges in the daily encounters of their children in schools. This volume is a small attempt to satisfy some of the need for interpretive contributions in this area.

Can legislation guarantee to improve integration in society? With the idea of having been founded by the British and the French, the initial policy and vision of Canada was that of a bicultural and bilingual country. The Report of the Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism (B & B Commission), on which multicultural policy was based, discusses integration in Canadian society. In its view, nothing should prevent those of other than British and French ethnic origin from keeping their attachment to their original culture once they have been integrated into Canadian life.

The B & B Commission had been set up in the late 1960s in response to the province of Quebec's demands for sovereignty during the Quiet Revolution which focused on preserving French culture and language in a country where the Québecois felt threatened and marginalized, a feeling which was legitimate given their very low birth rate, the homogenizing dangers of globalization, and their position vis-à-vis the English speaking population in North America (2% of the population). Language had been an important vehicle for validating ethnic identity. A bilingual multicultural policy with its focus on retaining heritage cultures and emphasizing both English and French, was in conflict with Quebec's goal of francization – as it was with Native groups' goals to preserve their endangered cultures. Thus, the policy was rejected by both Québecois and Native groups.

Quebec was split between federalists and sovereignists. The latter saw multiculturalism as undermining Quebec nationalism by equating it with "other" ethnic groups in Canada. However, Quebec's low birth rate and an urgent need for immigrant labour brought diverse groups of people into Quebec. The incoming populations largely settled in the greater Montreal region, while rural Quebec remained rather homogenous. In 1977, the introduction of Bill 101, the French language legislation, forced all immigrants of diverse cultural, linguistic and religious backgrounds to attend French schools (with a few exceptions). The provincial government introduced its own policy of "interculturalism" as a model for integration of cultural communities.

Like multiculturalism, interculturalism is vaguely defined as a response to the new ethnic, racial and religious reality of Quebec. The intercultural programs are similar in many ways to those of the other provinces and the federal government. While multiculturalism is built

on the assumption of not pointing to a dominant culture, interculturalism in Quebec is based on the understanding of the predominance of francophone culture: to build and integrate other cultural communities into a common public culture based on the French language, while respecting diversity. Some Québecois see multiculturalism as an imposition by English Canada, as one member of the opposition *Parti Québecois* pointed out a couple of months ago that multiculturlism is a Canadian value, not a Quebec one! Both multiculturalism and interculturalism aim at respecting diversity and commitment to liberal democratic principles. There is the view that, given their similarity, the difference is merely semantic (Jedwab, 2011). However, "(a)ny model that seeks to manage Quebec's ethno-cultural diversity effectively must take into account the existence of an ethno-cultural majority and the uncertainty that is associated with its future," says sociologist Gerard Bouchard (Remiorz, 2011), who, along with political philosopher Charles Taylor, was appointed by Premier Jean Charest in 2007 to the Commission on Accommodation Practices Related to Cultural Differences.

Currently, a debate about secularism and religion is going on in Quebec education and institutions. The province is perhaps more vigorously secular than others given its all too recent domination by the Catholic Church. This debate revolves around the place of religion in society and in schools (Proulx, 1999).[4] This particular issue began in 2007 with the question of reasonable accommodation in this society that is largely homogenous throughout the province but has very diverse populations in Montreal, its largest city. Secularism has come into question in relation to religious symbols: the hijab and the niqab[5] seem to symbolize Islam and women's position in Islam (although only about 25 women in Quebec are known to wear the niqab). Another religious symbol which has raised issues of secularism in the state in the "kirpan" worn by orthodox Sikhs. The recent Bill 94 bans the niqab when providing or receiving public services in public institutions such as schools and hospitals. As much as 94% of the population in Quebec support the veil ban, more than in any other province. Nor has any other province taken the initiative to ban the niqab.

In the school system, where the problem with both these objects first surfaced, "reasonable accommodation" is made for all religious groups, ranging from Christian to Muslim and Jewish groups. While some of the cases have been resolved in courts, the rulings were made on the basis of rights legislation rather than on multicultural or intercultural values (Quebec and Canadian charters on human rights). The guiding principle in schools is about the students' success and their right to equality and freedom of religion, not about multi/interculturalism (Fluery, 2007).

An interesting controversy has developed around Quebec's new Ethics and Religious Culture course which is mandatory in all school, and is being challenged in the courts. It replaces courses on religion, which traditionally meant Catholic or Protestant. Within Quebec's framework of a secular society, the aim is to promote critical thinking and introduce different perspectives to students who can make informed decisions about religion and ethical issues.

CONCLUSION

The constitutional and other equality legislation mentioned above represent a major shift in societal thinking by explicitly recognizing diversity in Canadian society. While legislation remains extremely important, it does not ensure effective protection of equal opportunity and recognition of diverse identities in Canadian society (Sheppard, 2006). Legislation can, nevertheless, result in reshaping the existing power relations and structures in society. Interpretations of multiculturalism have to be nuanced and contextualized in order to avoid a binary system of representation which solidifies and normalizes the gap between the "us" and "them", and which at present makes multiculturalism and interculturalism issues for the "other" to deal with.

From an educational perspective, an education which implies that multiculturalism is relevant only to minority groups in order that they may adjust to the social order is ineffective because the majority group needs to be equally aware of the changing nature of Canadian society and their privileged position in it. They need to know about unequal power relations, the meaning of difference and the experiences of those who are "different." The need is to transform existing institutional practices to create a society in which integration does not mean accommodation of certain "ethnic" groups; rather, it must construct a common space where dominant and minority groups are not recognized as having different privileges. The task of education, therefore, is to induce critical thinking of the societal status quo so as to alter the foundations of practices and norms which produce unequal opportunities and life chances as well as influence individuals' assumptions.

In the context of the extraordinary social changes in Canadian society and the world, the basis of education is to question and examine the roots of injustice and intolerance. Thus, the liberation achieved through education can be a powerful force in our society to produce enlightened citizens. Multicultural education is not a static concept. It is changing in interesting ways. It can liberate the mind from bigotry, intolerance, and injustice – and nourish open dialogue and friendly exchange among people.

REFERENCES

Abella, R. S. (1984). *Report of the Commission on Equality in Employment.* Ottawa: Ministry of Supply and Services.

Appiah, K.A. (1996). Race, Culture, Identity: Misunderstood Connections. In K.A.

Appiah, K.A. and A. Gutman (Eds.), 1998. *Color conscious: The Political Morality of Race.* Princeton, NY: Princeton University.

Bhabha, H. (1994). *The Location of Culture.* London: Routledge.

Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, part 1 of the Constitution Act, 1982.

Fleury, B. (2007). Inclusive Schools: Dialogue, Values and Common Reference Points. Report of the Consultative Committee on Integration and Reasonable Accommodation in Quebec Schools, Ministère de l'Éducation, Loisirs et Sports (MELS), Québec.

Freire, P. (1970). Pedagogy of the Oppressed, New York: Seabury Press.

Ghosh, R. (2002 second ed.). *Redefining multicultural education.* Toronto: Nelson.

Hutcheon, P. D. (1998). Multiculturalism in Canada. World Congress of the International Sociological Association, Montreal.

Jedwab, J. (February 18, 2011) Beaudoin playing semantics in rejecting multiculturalism. *The Gazette,* Montreal.

King, M.L., Jr.(1964), Methodist Student Leadership Conference Address. Delivered in Lincoln, Nebraska.

Maher, F.A. and M.K.T. Tetreault. (1997). Learning in the dark: How assumptions of whiteness shape classroom knowledge. *Harvard Educational Review,* 67(2): 321 – 349.

McIntosh, P. (1990). White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack. Wellesley College Center for Research on Women, Wellesley, MA., USA.

Proulx, J-P. (1999). *Religion in Secular Schools: A New Perspective for Québec, Ministry of Education, Quebec.* Remiorz, Ryan (March 17, 2011). Quebec intellectuals promote wave of 'interculturalism', Canadian Press.

Sen, A. (1992). Inequality re-examined. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Sheppard, C. (2006). Constitutional Recognition of Diversity in Canada, *Vermont Law Review,* 30: 462-487.

Sheppard, C. (2010). Reducing Group-based Inequalities in a legally plural world. Working paper n° 75. Centre for Research on Inequality, Human Security and Ethnicity (CRISE). University of Oxford, Oxford, UK.

Statistics Canada (2007). Census 2006 data. Ottawa.

Sturm, S. (2001) "Second Generation Employment Discrimination: A Structural Approach." *Columbia Law Review* 101: 418-568.

Tagore, R. (1929). In Ideals of Education. *The Visva-Bharati Quarterly* (April-July): 73-4.

The *Report of the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism.* Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1967, Book IV: 14-16. Jedwab, Jack. (February 18, 2011). Beaudoin playing semantics in rejecting multiculturalism. *The Gazette,* Montreal Yuval-Davis, N. (1997). Gender and nation. London: Sage Publications.

FOOTNOTES

[1] "I try to assert in my words and works that education has its only meaning and object in freedom–freedom from ignorance about the laws of the universe, and freedom from passion and prejudice in our communication with the human world." (Tagore, 1929, 73).

[2] McIntosh (1990, 1) describes "white privilege as an invisible package of unearned assets that I can count on cashing in each day, but about which I was 'meant' to remain oblivious. White privilege is like an invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions, maps, passports, codebooks, visas, clothes, tools, and blank checks".

[3] The MIPEX is a comparative measure of integration policies in 31 European and North American countries. Its 200 plus policy indicators provide a multi-dimensional view of opportunities available for societal participation of immigrants in various institutions of each country.

[4] In 1999 , Jean-Pierre Proulx, President of the Task Force on the Place of Religion in Schools in Québec, presented the report entitled: *Religion in Secular Schools: A New Perspective for Quebec.*

[5] The niqab covers the face as well as the head.