

CONTEXTUALIZING DIVERGENT PERSPECTIVES : THE SEARCH FOR CANADIAN IDENTITY

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LA MISE EN CONTEXTE DE DIFFERENTES PERSPECTIVES: A LA RECHERCHE DE L'IDENTITE CANADIENNE

L'auteur traite de la problématique de la formation de l'identité. Il soutient qu'il y a un lien entre In façon dont une personne se définit elle-même et la notion même de citoyenneté canadienne. Il aborde la question de l'hétérogénéité des groupes minoritaires et celle de l'importance du choix des termes dans le processus de définition de l'identité. À la lumière de ses expériences professionnelles et personnelles dans le domaine de l'équité, l'auteur en arrive à conclure qu'il faut repenser et faire mieux comprendre le concept de "l'inclusivité" si on veut créer une vision uniforme et harmonieuse de la citoyenneté. Il insiste sur le rôle de l'éducation et explique comment une éducation antiraciste davantage axée sur l'intégration peut répondre aux préoccupations fondamentales des groupes et des individus marginalisés. Enfin, l'auteur présente une brève analyse de la discrimination institutionnelle, en mettant l'accent sur la nécessité d'examiner le concept de citoyenneté avec une approche critique.

INTRODUCTION

The concept of citizenship is the subject of much discussion in government, learned conferences, in education, and at the community level. The national Canadian obsession to develop a shared vision and promote unity has consumed much energy and resources over the past three decades. Why are Canadians consumed with the issue of identity? How does this pursuit mesh with the objective of creating a respect for, and understanding of, citizenship? In this personal reflection on the notion of Canadian citizenship, I would like to contextualize the debate, as much as possible, within the realm of education. The observations contained herein relate to work I undertook in the area of equity in education in the Ontario Ministry of Education and Training¹, and are also significantly shaped by research I conducted for my doctoral dissertation on anti-racist education. In order to contextualize and link my experiences, and the subsequent analysis of them, I will conclude with some comments on the need for inclusive, anti-racist education, which may help facilitate a further reflection on the concept of citizenship in education.

CONTEXTUALIZING IDENTITY

Like anyone else, I have had experiences which have

shaped who I am. Simultaneously, these experiences may have been shaped by who I am. I cannot escape the fact that I am an able-bodied, middle-class. White male of European origin, whose first language is English. I do not normally define myself in these terms, but the more I grapple with the issue of identity, the more I feel it necessary to situate, or locate, one's identity (Lee, 1985; McCarthy and Crichlow, 1993; James and Shadd, 1995). This brief description of myself does not inform the reader of other key influences on my identity: my interests, areas of study, time spent abroad, family experience, the role played by my daughters in my life, friendships, my political ideology, etc.. The description, however, does acknowledge the status or level of privilege that I have been accorded by society (Dei, 1996; McIntosh, 1990; Sleeter, 1994).

While citizenship is considered a birthright by some, many Canadians have come to learn that the right to vote, to work unencumbered by harassment or discrimination, and, theoretically at least, to be protected from discrimination in society, does not always lead to the enjoyment of full citizenship. I would like to advance the debate past the obvious tell-tale signs of exclusion that are obvious in the mainstream media. The media abound with stereotypical representations of racial minority Canadians, as it does for Aboriginal peoples, and many others. This is achieved through marginalization, trivialization, tokenism, inaccuracy, isolation or omission, all equally powerful in reinforcing the bias that certain people are more "equal" than others.

While Canada, undoubtedly, has its merits, and has garnered an international reputation in the area of human rights, I would like to argue that the voices of women who have been sexually violated, or racial minorities, people with disabilities, or aboriginal peoples, who have faced serious and constant systemic and individual discrimination in education, housing and employment, etc., and others who have been marginalized, must also be heard. Francophones also seek a collective space within the Canadian nation. After discussing the complexity of identity formation, I wish to present some thoughts on the merits of an inclusive approach to education in relation to citizenship. Much of my theoretical understanding for this proposed inclusive education framework is grounded in critical work undertaken in relation to anti-racist education (see, in particular, Dei, 1993; 1994; 1996; Dei et al., 1995).

PERSONAL REFLECTIONS ON IDENTITY

Working on anti-racism and equity initiatives from 1994 to 1996 in government within the context of minority French language education, I was exposed to an intricate web of competing visions. The

examples which follow elucidate my perception of various vantage-points on inclusion, representation and diversity, and are not intended as a criticism of government policy nor as an indictment of individuals or organizations.

I coordinated a number of policy, program and curriculum activities, especially in relation to the need to reconcile the differences, concerns and problems, real or perceived, concerning minority French language education and the integration of the principles and objectives of anti-racist education. While I will use some facets of the French language or francophone problematic to highlight the different ways identity formation can be viewed, I do not wish to imply that francophones are somehow more predisposed to higher degrees of stereotyping and other forms of bias, or are more ethnocentric, than other groups. Rather, I hope to underscore the complexities of identity formation, and make more explicit the ensuing linkages to Canadian citizenship through the examples presented.

Although many segments of the francophone population, especially those coming from racial minority communities, have demanded that the French language education system in Ontario become more inclusive and responsive to diverse needs, it remains that merely defining terminology, let alone reforming the structures, is problematic, and typically involves some form of evolutionary process. Who is a francophone? Who is a Franco-Ontarian? Some racial minority francophones claim that the term Franco-Ontarian is an exclusive one, potentially racist depending on the context, while others embrace it as an evolving concept, one which can be inclusive. Some francophones argue that they should be able to define themselves as they see fit, stressing that their identity must not be appropriated. They argue that they should not be tied to a definition created for, and used by, the "majority" population, which in the eyes of many francophones is the "anglophone" population. Who are the "anglophones", and do they form, in any tangible sense, an "anglophone" community?

Arguably, all of these terms, and the others to be used subsequently, speak to the concept of how our reality is socially constructed. The way the term "anglophone" is used by some francophones contains an implicit assumption that "anglophones" have little regard for "francophones", or worse, that "anglophones" are, in some way, working to undermine the existence of "francophones". While many francophones may not share these views, it might be argued that certain myths are still propagated in some of the elite circles of the community and the media, which reinforce an inward-looking vision.

To provide a fuller portrait, it is necessary to look at why this has come to pass. There has been a history of marginalization in Ontario, not only toward francophones, but one which includes provincial government legislation to significantly diminish the French

culture and language in Ontario (Churchill 1984; Churchill and Kaprielian-Churchill, 1991; Mougeon and Heller, 1986). Regulation 17, which was introduced in 1912, pushed French language education underground, and created two classes (English and French, the former being predominantly Protestant and the later predominantly Catholic) in the minds of many people. At a conceptual, and even practical level, the concept of a compact, or a contract, between the "two founding nations" may cloud any alternative examination and discussion of the issue of citizenship.

Francophones in Ontario were only give fully-funded secondary schools in 1968, and the first French language college opened only in 1990, after several years of lobbying. Studies have documented the comparatively higher illiteracy rates among francophones, the lower post-secondary education participation rates, the high assimilation rates, and other trends, which illustrate marginalisation and exclusion (Churchill, Frenette, and Quazi, 1985; Frenette and Quazi 1990; Wagner 1990; St. Germain, 1996). These comparisons are generally made with the "anglophone" population, and rarely is there much analysis done to further stratify and contextualize the data, especially in relation to racial and ethnic origin, although gender and region are often contained therein.

While it certainly would not be a publicly held position, the issue of opening up the French language education system, for which a certain measure of constitutional, political, social and financial control has been granted to francophones, has been challenged by some who argue that "francophones" have fought long and hard for their institutions, and diluting or diminishing them with non "francophones de souche"² influence, would be to the detriment of the existence of "francophones". Part of the backdrop to this discussion is the recognition of a massive demographic shift, with an increasing level of immigration coming from non-traditional sources, and the proliferation of ethnocultural and racial minority communities (Ontario Ministry of Citizenship, Culture and Recreation, 1996). While Ontario and Canada are becoming less "White", there is, in some quarters, the parallel concern of preserving, maintaining and expanding the "traditional" francophone and anglophone contribution and way of life. Despite the fear of being perceived as isolationist or intolerant, it is ironic to note that policies often intended to ensure minority survival and rights are also under attack, and are highly misunderstood. In other words, the struggle to find the appropriate and fair balance pertaining to francophones has been shaped by polarized positions and much turbulence.

To illustrate some of the tensions I witnessed while working on anti-racist education in the Ministry, I recall several events, which together, highlight to me the significance and relevance of identity. In recounting a few experiences, I am made aware of how my

own identity, the ambivalence of it. If I choose, comes in the form of privilege. As a youth, I remember the accepted premise by many that Canadians have no, or little, identity, that we frame our existence in response to what is American. At a general level, these experiences accentuate *how* individuals and groups view and perceive one another, *how* the notion of a Canadian is a somewhat limited one. Depending on one's own perspectives and life experiences, and, finally, how difficult it is to reconcile these perceptions.

To elaborate on the above discussion related to francophones, I recall two initiatives, both of which included community members.³ The first one aimed to develop a document related to "equity", another highly contentious term, in learning materials, while the second sought to produce a resource guide on Black Studies for teachers. The first committee became embroiled in an intractable discussion around who is a francophone, and how the resource guide could best be used to avoid negative bias vis-à-vis francophones. Some members of this committee argued that the problem was one of negative bias on the part of francophones toward marginalized groups within the francophone community, whereas others placed the emphasis on the limited resources available to francophones. There was an obvious tension between two visions, one challenging the perceived "anglophone" majority, and the other challenging the perceived "francophone" majority control of the French language education system.

The second committee became involved in an even more intractable discussion around the title of the document, which was originally proposed as Afro-Canadian Studies. Here, the issue became one of who is African? Is there a connotation that Africans are Black only? Are those of Arab origin from the Magrebin (northern African) countries not included in the umbrella term Africa? The emphasis on Blacks was debated, especially in view of the varied experiences of blacks from the Caribbean, as opposed to those from Africa or Canada. Seeking out an inclusive approach, it could be argued, involves dealing with separate, highly relevant concerns (i.e., the high degree of disenfranchisement among many Blacks) while, at the same time, ensuring that marginalized groups are not pitted against each other.

What struck me about discussing difference and identity was the implicit and explicit way that many racial minority participants, in this case francophones, referred to Whites as "Canadians", and never included themselves in that definition. It becomes clear when doing "equity" work that the emotions of participants cannot be overlooked, which makes me reflect on my own location when working on francophone, gender, race or other issues, where my physical identity and/or experience may make some feel uncomfortable or suspicious. It is telling that the notion of Whites as a group is generally refuted by most Whites, but the labelling of some groups by race

(i.e., the "racial minority community" or the "Black community") is accepted in mainstream society.

Another example of marginalization involved the implementation of anti-racism policies (Ontario Ministry of Education and Training, 1993). I became immersed in the uncomfortable role of having to ensure collegial respect and integrity, while, concurrently, attempting to do the job of ensuring the implementation of anti-racist education in schools. There are many compromises made when doing this kind of work, and ensuring the tone is not co-opted is a problematic state-of-mind. Is one an employee of the government, the governing party, the policies one is directed to implement (in this case, the anti-racist policy), the general public, or some Aspecial interest@? The issue of who should be able to speak out on these issues becomes an obvious feature to equity work. One colleague of racial minority origin confided in me that it is often difficult raising a concern about race issues, in particular, for fear of being isolated as a one-issue person, being professionally maligned, or being personally insulted and hurt.

A few other events in the space of about twelve months also served to clearly remind me of the unease associated with Canadian identity. While working on an anti-racist education resource document on Aboriginal education aimed at sensitizing teachers, there was a clear message from some of the Native participants that "White" or "European" society has undermined, and continues to undermine in many ways indigenous efforts to achieve self-determination.

Another incident relates to a meeting with a group of about fifteen racial minority francophone parents in Ottawa, some of whom had been in Canada for over fifty years. Their concerns ranged from generally being shut out of the education system, to being treated as newcomers, to continually facing multiple barriers (race, place of origin, accent, gender, etc.). I was struck, at this meeting, at *how*, almost collectively, reference would be made to administrators and teachers as "Canadians" if they were White, but almost universally to an ethnic origin if they were racial minorities.

PRESSURES INFLUENCING A RE-THINKING OF CANADIAN IDENTITY

Having briefly outlined my experiences on how poorly the concept of identity seems to be understood in such a vastly heterogeneous society as exists in Canada, I would like to highlight some points which may offer some hope. First, the fact that there seems to be some flexibility within the Canadian political and educational context to raise issues means that the high level of interest in many quarters will ensure that the discussion continues. Second, there are a number of initiatives related to diversity taking place across the country, which aim to better situate and illustrate identity and citizenship. I am not

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suggesting that centralisation is the key, but do feel that it would be helpful to have a more concrete, coherent strategy to inclusive education, which would openly dissect and discuss citizenship, combined with extensive local autonomy. Third, I would argue that there is now a greater recognition, notwithstanding the entrenched and vociferous opposition, on the part of educators and parents alike that inclusive education, and a fuller understanding of diversity linked to inequitable power relations, is a beneficial and necessary component to the education of every child. Fourth, since the concept of identity formation is relatively complex, it is becoming less easy and useful to make blanket generalizations or to create static categories related to the identity of an individual, especially in view of the number of mixed marriages. I use "mixed" here to relate to inter-racial, inter-ethnic, inter-religious, French-English and other forms of difference.

Finally, the heightened sense of living in a "global village" facilitates a greater understanding of the linkages and interdependence between all peoples, regardless of origin and nationality. The need to understand better who we are, as well as who our neighbours are, has become more than an economic and political necessity. There is also the need for social cohesion in order to resolve problems which link cities, nations, and continents together, whether it be in the form of underdevelopment, war, environmental disaster or oppression.

As I reflect on the concept of Canadian citizenship, I am intrigued by the multiple levels of identification, the importance it holds for some and the insignificance for others, as well as the critical role played by the state in shaping identity. It is also disheartening to note how many Canadians feel disenfranchised, marginalised, and voiceless. I am also struck by the thought, which I have often heard, that having no (definable) identity is our identity. Could it be a virtue? The interminable debate over multiculturalism, whether it has helped or hurt the Canadian state, and its relationship to identity formation, underpin my thoughts about who we are as Canadians. The problem is too complex to simply blame a federal policy, which, it could be argued, was never clearly articulated. While the area of human rights has arguably improved in Canada over the past few decades, many Canadians still feel uncomfortable in dealing with issues like Native self-government, violence against women, universal childcare, bilingualism, and discrimination in employment. Citizenship should imply the freedom to be able to participate fully, to feel accepted, and to challenge effectively the system when it requires being challenged. Being Canadian must also comprise a critical analysis of what and who we are.

SOME THOUGHTS ON INCLUSIVE EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP

Citizenship education is a weakly defined concept in Canada. In a recent study, Sears and I-fughs (1996) found that there are a range of approaches and models used in the provinces and territories pertaining to citizenship education. In their review of the literature, they found that the subject of citizenry is often compartmentalized in social studies courses, and that it is often over-shadowed by the predominant emphasis on "perceived economic priorities". They also found that much of the material on citizenship education relates to "knowledge, skills, values, and participation", but the struggle to articulate normative concepts of citizenship should underscore the complexity of the subject. Their review of formal texts and documents found that approaches to democratic citizenship vary greatly, ranging from elitist to populist conceptions. One of the areas of concern in relation to citizenship education is the lack of any tangible measurement and evaluation of the impact on the students.

My conception of inclusive education, or an inclusive form of anti-racist education, aimed at underpinning the concept of citizenship, involves several key components, held together by a critical pedagogy approach to teaching and learning (Freire, 1970; Simon, 1992). If we do not critique how knowledge is produced and re-produced, what goals and aims this knowledge serves to advance, as well as the impact concerning the perpetuation of inequitable power relations between groups and individuals, Canadian citizens will be unable to challenge and undo injustice in their society. This critical pedagogy approach should be incorporated in all spheres of the educational arena, at all levels, and across the curriculum. The ministries of education, the local school boards, the schools, the faculties of education, teachers associations, students, partners, community groups, and others interested in education should all become involved in the debate, as well as in the decision-making process.

This proposal includes basic framework in which all parties would be able to participate, and, moreover, one in which the accountability for diverse views and decision-making would become ingrained in the process.⁴ For the model to work, the key here is that, as in the example I provided earlier about recognizing my own status, the education system as a whole would embark on a process of internal and external reflection and transformational change. This meta-analysis would only be fruitful if there were acknowledgements from the outset that the system produces and re-produces inequitable power relations.

This process does not involve shaming those who are committed to teaching or to improving the education system. Good intentions must be acknowledged, but the systemic nature of inequitable power relations must also be brought to the fore. By systemic, I mean simply that structural barriers have prevented key

institutions in our society from achieving an accurate portrayal of the dynamic potential, vibrancy and qualities which reside in the peoples of Canada. It is easy to see that there are many role models available for able-bodied, middle-class, White males of European origin, if one looks at the senior levels in government, business, the media and education. Women, in particular able-bodied White women, are becoming increasingly visible at these levels, but there is still much to be said about the intersection of sexism, patriarchy, and exclusion.

The Toronto Board of Education, a national leader in the area of equity, only has slightly more than 10% of its teachers from racial minority backgrounds, whereas 45% of the students are racial minorities (Carr, 1995). Skin colour does not make the individual, but such a blatant under-representation does send messages to impressionable young people who need role models, and who want to feel comfortable with people who may be from similar or different backgrounds, or who may have had similar experiences. Thinking that all students are the same, when, in reality, they all bring into the school a multitude of identities and differences, does a disservice to the "community" (Cochran-Smith, 1995). The point here is not that skin colour or gender should be the key criterion for being a good teacher, but rather that the systemic nature of discrimination has an adverse effect on the staff, students and other interested parties in relation to recognizing and validating diversity.

Inclusive education must also confront the issue of a curriculum that may not reflect the diverse perspectives and life experiences of the students in the classroom. This goes beyond the predominant eurocentric notion of education to include a greater emphasis on individual and collective identity, as well as the ways in which identity is formed, changed and socially constructed. As Dei (1996) points out, understanding the intersection of diverse identities and differences is critical, if teachers are to be able to validate the experiences of a heterogeneous student body. In addition to spending more time allowing students to examine, critique and discuss their identities, and those of others, in a respectful and critical way, the curriculum should also review and integrate more effectively the ways that Canadian history and human rights are taught. Furthermore, the curriculum should include more comprehensive and integrated courses on development/underdevelopment, why and how some countries seem to be locked into impoverished situations, and the role and responsibility of countries such as Canada in perpetuating or ameliorating the situation. In sum, the widest interpretation possible should be given to the term curriculum, which should include all of the formal and informal aspects which constitute the learning experience for students.

While these changes need to be enforced in a Luanda-

tors fashion, I would caution expediting any process, or allowing for the perception that decisions are made in a top-down, heavy-handed fashion. For inclusive education to become a reality, the process of change must be an evolutionary one in which implementation is constantly reviewed, and those charged with the implementation, chiefly the principals in the schools, are given the required institutional support. Principals should be evaluated and promoted on how well they implement inclusive education, or related equity initiatives, as well as how well they facilitate tangible participation in education on the part of marginalised communities (Carr, 1977). In addition, school boards need to formally document their inclusive education strategies, and make themselves truly accountable for the outcomes. The lack of a coherent equity strategy becomes an immense barrier to overcome. Part of any such strategy would be the allocation of the necessary human and financial resources required to seriously address the concerns of all students.

Other suggestions for a model of inclusive anti-racist education, which would enhance Canadians' perspectives related to identity and citizenship, include the following: the twinning of schools from diverse regions (English and French speaking, urban and rural, racially diverse and those largely of the same racial group, Native and non-Native, the integration of students with disabilities with able-bodied students) with extended exchanges at least once during the school year, as well as joint work projects with the partnering school; incorporating a mandatory component in the learning program related to community service (i.e., a six-month program designed to give youth the chance to acquire diverse experiences, while doing relevant volunteer work); participating in local environmental projects in which one's physical identity is less important than the desire to work with other schools in other provinces and across the world; the mandatory integration of a plurality of parents and community members in various components of every class taught (i.e., inviting engineers to talk about mathematics, Native elders to talk about Native spirituality, community members to talk about the impact of human rights legislation, etc.).

CONCLUSION

This article has attempted to raise some of the problematic issues and concerns around identity formation, the reasons for the varying levels of attachment to citizenship in Canada, and the need for some form of inclusive education, as well as some suggestions on how it might be implemented and evaluated. While there are no simple solutions, I believe that a necessary starting point is to recognize the voices of marginalization, and then to devise credible strategies to ensure inclusion. Understanding how institutions function, and, more importantly, how systemic discrimination, is perpetuated, is key to this discussion. Educational institutions have a

special responsibility to be accountable to all students, parents, and members of the community, to be open for reform and to be prepared to challenge those practices which run counter to the principles of inclusive education.

The key components to this framework include a focus on the institutional environment and the implementation in the classroom, the centrality of identity as an issue and theme which must be infused in all learning activities, the concept of exchanges, whether it be in terms of computer networks, visits or community service, and an emphasis on critical pedagogy. While certainly not new as an individual concept, it is hoped that the re-configuration and exploration of identity in education, in the form of inclusive education, will contribute to further discussion on the subject of citizenship and inclusivity.

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signify for some that non-Whites will never be able to fully become Franco-Ontarians. Although there were French-speaking Blacks in Ontario in the early 1600s (Ontario Ministry of Education 1983), the primary identification of "francophones", whether it be in education, in the media, in government, or elsewhere, is almost universally and completely connected to those who are White and Christian, and historically came from France.

³My objective here is to describe how difficult it is to bring diverse people together to work on equity initiatives, and, moreover, how identity formation is a complex and problematic concept. My intention is not to isolate or appropriate the voices of various community group representatives or colleagues.

⁴The framework that I am proposing is based on the findings and recommendations contained in my doctoral dissertation, entitled "Anti-racist Education, Institutional Culture and the Search for Educational Transformation: A Case Study of the Toronto Board of Education's Secondary Panel", completed at OISE, University of Toronto, in 1996.



¹it should be noted that the views expressed in this article are mine alone, and do not necessarily reflect the official position or view of the Ontario Ministry of Education and Training.

²The usage of this terminology is problematic, and exemplifies the numerous issues which can cloud the debate.

"Francophones de souche" implies those who are "pure-bred" francophones. However, some might take the distinction further, and argue that it is those whose origins lay in French Ontario, who have been there for generations. In essence, the term may