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### 13. LIVING TOGETHER, GROWING TOGETHER

As part of all teacher education programs in Canada, teacher candidates are expected to complete an in-school teaching placement under the tutelage of one or more teacher associates (or cooperating teachers) and a faculty supervisor from the university. The length of the teaching placement can vary from program to program but all must meet at least minimum requirements established by respective provincial governments. A number of years ago I was, in my role as faculty supervisor, scheduled to visit a teacher candidate placed in a grade one class with a very experienced and supportive teacher associate. The teacher candidate had informed me that the students were going to be exploring ‘multiculturalism’ and that I would be observing as she introduced the concept to the children. I recall thinking that multiculturalism was a fairly sophisticated concept and that it might be a bit difficult for such young students to grapple with, however over the years I had come to learn that amazing things can be taught to youngsters with eager and open minds and I was looking forward to seeing the teacher candidate’s approach.

I settled into my seat while the teacher candidate had the grade one students gather on a carpet at the front of the classroom. She brought out a large glass plate and holding it up asked students what it was. Of course, they all knew it was a plate. The teacher candidate agreed and asked the students to use their imaginations because this glass plate was really a wondrous place called ‘Togetherland’.

“Where is it?” asked one little boy.

“It’s a place far, far away,” said the teacher candidate.

“Who lives there?” asked a little girl.

“That’s a very good question,” said the teacher candidate and all at once she brought out three plastic apples and placed them on the plate. Holding up one of the apples, the teacher candidate asked what type of fruit it was and they all called out ‘apple’ in unison. The teacher candidate continued, “The apple people lived in Togetherland. They all looked alike, spoke the same language and loved to celebrate the same holidays. The apple people got along fairly well because they understood each other. However, one day visitors arrived from another land.” The teacher candidate brought out two plastic oranges and placed them on the plate.

One fidgety little girl said, “The apple people are red but the orange people are orange!”

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“That’s right”, replied the teacher candidate. She continued, “Not only do the orange people look different from the apple people but they also speak a different language and celebrate different holidays. How do you think the apple people felt about the orange people?”

Answers flew from the students, “Scared.” “Confused.” “Fascinated.”

“You’re all right”, said the teacher candidate. “At first, the apple people were scared and confused by the orange people but they also liked some of the things they brought with them. They enjoyed their foods, clothes and dances but most importantly their ideas! The orange people decided to stay in Togetherland and live side-by-side with the apple people. Soon visitors came to Togetherland from other places as well and they too decided to stay.”

As I watched, out came plastic bananas, grapefruits, grapes and lemons and each was placed on the glass plate. The teacher candidate told the students that soon people of many looks, languages, beliefs and traditions lived in Togetherland. Despite the fact that it was sometimes scary and confusing to meet new people, eventually they all became friends and loved that their land had people with so many differences. No one who visited Togetherland would ever get bored because there was always something new to experience.

The teacher candidate continued the story, “Over time, the people of Togetherland realized that their new land was not quite the same as the lands they’d left behind. In their former homes, the people were all the same but in Togetherland people lived side-by-side, respecting each other’s uniqueness. The people of Togetherland decided to let the world know that they had found a way of living peacefully together while maintaining some of their cherished differences – those things that make them special.” The teacher candidate brought out a piece of rolled parchment paper that read, “We the people of Togetherland, living together with our fellow citizens peacefully and with respect, declare our land to be officially multi-cultural.”

The teacher candidate enunciated the final term slowly and clearly. She asked the students to repeat the word after her and the wide-eyed students all made their best effort to say ‘mul-tee-cul-chur-ul’. Though some students struggled with the word, most said it quite well, repeating it often throughout the remainder of my stay in the classroom.

The teacher candidate smoothly transitioned into a discussion of how their classroom was multicultural too. She asked students to share what was special and unique about each of them. Vocal students identified physical characteristics like hair, eyes and smiles and, with some prodding, students began to note their differing talents, social characteristics and family backgrounds. The teacher candidate wrapped up the class by noting that each person in the class had special characteristics (e.g., the fast runners, the tall people, the people who say kind things, and so on), that they shared these characteristics with others and that, “We learn to work and play together in our classroom.” She concluded by saying that perhaps the classroom space needed its own special name just like people of Togetherland had for their place. This sent a ripple of excitement through the children, with several calling out suggestions.

Soon students were voting on a name and preparing a multiculturalism policy for the classroom.

Later, at our debriefing session, I told the teacher candidate that her lesson served as a very fine introduction of the concept of ‘pluralism’ – one of the best introductions that I had witnessed. However, it did not introduce or explore many important aspects of multiculturalism (e.g., the importance of history, sense of identity for cultural and ethnic groups, official multicultural policies) or consider the concept in a realistic context. Still, these were very young children and her lesson did offer a solid grounding from which the children’s understanding could grow over time. Over the hour we spent debriefing the class, the teacher candidate and I also talked about next steps in the students’ conceptual development. I told her I’d be back in three weeks to see how things progressed.

#### WHAT IS ‘MULTICULTURALISM’?

The term ‘multiculturalism’ generally refers to a state of ethnic and cultural diversity within the demographics of a given social space (“Debate: Multiculturalism vs. Assimilation”, n. d.). The social space may be large (a nation-state) or small (a classroom). Official policies of multiculturalism have been passed in many countries with the aim of preserving cultural identities within a unified society. Commonly, this means the extension of equitable status to minority cultural groups that co-exist alongside a predominant, often indigenous group. Multiculturalism policies also frequently include official assistance (e.g., financial support) of cultural events in an ongoing effort to preserve and promote the uniqueness of different, usually minority cultures.

Multiculturalism’s origins can be found as far back as the Enlightenment. Voltaire (1734/2007) gave strong indications of the need to embrace pluralism when he stated, “If there were only one religion in England there would be danger of despotism, if there were two, they would cut each other’s throats, but there are thirty, and they live in peace and happiness” (p. 20). It became more formalized during the 19<sup>th</sup> century with the pragmatism movement arising in Great Britain and the United States, which in turn evolved into political and cultural pluralism in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Partially a response to European imperialist expansion into deepest Africa and partially a realization and acceptance of realities stemming from massive immigration from southern and eastern Europe to North and South America, cultural pluralism became part of academic discourse during this time period. Philosophers such as Charles Sanders Pierce, George Santayana, Horace Kallen, William James, John Dewey, W.E.B. Du Bois and Alain Locke integrated concepts of cultural pluralism into their works – ideas which eventually evolved into a contemporary understanding of multiculturalism. James (1909/1996) in particular espoused the idea of the pluralistic society in his book *A Pluralistic Universe*, suggesting pluralism was “crucial to the formation of philosophical and social humanism to help build a better, more egalitarian society” (p. 16).

Policies of multiculturalism stand in contrast to ‘monoculturalism’, a term that implies a normative cultural unity or cultural homogeneity within a given social space. Groups that seek a form of cultural unity often invoke assimilationist policies to encourage and, occasionally, force immigrants joining the group to relinquish their cultural attributes in favour of those of the dominant, often indigenous group.

Though Canada has never developed an all-encompassing concept of ‘monoculturalism’ for itself, the historical marginalization of indigenous peoples along with limited cultural spaces for French-Canadians evolved beside Anglo-Saxon, English-speaking, Protestant Christian dominance in most parts of Canada. Canadians of aboriginal, French, Jewish, Chinese, Ukrainian, Polish, Italian, Japanese, Indian, and other origins resisted this dominance by developing vibrant cultural and ethnic spaces for themselves, working to ensure the survival of their heritages and identities.

Multiculturalism was, interestingly enough, assisted by the emergence of the *La Revolution Tranquille* or Quiet Revolution in Quebec in the 1960s. In an effort to address the concerns of clamouring Québécois voices who felt marginalized in their own province, the Canadian government of John Diefenbaker established the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism in 1962 to consider the status of the two ‘founding races’. However, hearings undertaken by the Commission across the country revealed that frustrations expressed by French Canadians were shared by Canadians of other origins as well. By 1968, biculturalism was considered passé and the Commission’s report instead espoused the need for a policy of multiculturalism.

In 1971, Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau made multiculturalism the official policy of Canada. Then Secretary of State, Gerard Pelletier (1972), stated at the time, “the policy called into being a new vision of society; one which refused to sacrifice diversity in the name of unity and which placed the cultures of Canada’s many groups on an equal footing” (as cited in Mallea & Young, 1984, p. 418).

The policy became part of the Canadian Constitution in Section 27 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and Brian Mulroney’s government passed the policy into law with the Multicultural Act in 1988. Australia followed Canada’s lead with its own multiculturalism policy and in the years since multiculturalism has gained support and become policy in most states of the European Union. Government multicultural policies may include but are not limited to:

- Recognition of multiple citizenship identities
- Government support for newspapers, television and radio stations in minority languages
- Support for minority festivals, holidays and celebrations
- Support for music and arts from minority cultures
- Acceptance of traditional and religious dress in schools, the military and in society, in general
- Programs to encourage minority representation in politics, education, and in the work force, in general.

The United States, while as culturally diverse as Canada, has never embraced multiculturalism as official policy choosing the ‘Melting Pot’ as its central metaphor. The Melting Pot implies that each immigrant or group of immigrants to America assimilates and is assimilated into American society. This metaphor has as a parallel belief the need for national unity whereby the United States is a nation of peoples connected together by a common understanding of being ‘American’.

#### CRITICISMS OF MULTICULTURALISM

Not everyone is supportive of the concept of multiculturalism or its status as official policy. Skeptics wonder whether a “multicultural ideal of benignly co-existing cultures that interrelate and influence one another, and yet remain distinct, is sustainable, paradoxical or even desirable when housed by a single nation” (Miller, Vandome & McBrewster, 2010). Critics have identified failings with the concept of multiculturalism in practice. Coming from diverse perspectives, critiques include those of Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. (1998) who worries about the “cult of ethnicity” (p. 20), Dinesh D’Souza (1998) who is disturbed by the growth of ethnic studies program (e.g., Black Studies) which he believes undermine universalist values, and Susan Okin (1999), a feminist and political theorist concerned that preservation and respect of cultural diversity not be used as a basis to maintain and support discriminatory gender roles within traditional minority cultures.

In Canada, three noted critics of multiculturalism have emerged. Kenneth McRoberts focuses on the lack of acceptance of multiculturalism by French Canadians, who often view it as threat to their status as a founding people of Canada. Indeed according to McRoberts’ *Misconceiving Canada: The Struggle for National Unity* (1997), many in Quebec view official multiculturalism as a federal effort to dilute the two-founding-peoples philosophy and make the French just another ethnic group among many in Canada. Internally, Quebec is very pluralist, welcoming people from all around the world, but has insisted new immigrants assimilate into a *French* speaking society. The Quebec government terms this its ‘inter-culturalism policy’. In his book *Selling Illusions: The Cult of Multiculturalism in Canada*, Neil Bissoondath (2002) argues that official multiculturalism limits the freedom of minority citizens and relegates them to cultural and geographic ghettos. He also argues that cultures are complex and that Canada’s focus on festivals and cuisine is a crude oversimplification that leads to stereotyping. Like Susan Okin, Daniel Stoffman (2002) raises concerns in his book *Who Gets In: What’s Wrong with Canada’s Immigration Program and How to Fix It*, arguing that certain cultural beliefs and practices are simply incompatible with Canadian values and failure to recognize this can have serious implications for Canadian society. Likewise, he is very disturbed by the number of immigrants who are not integrating into Canadian society by learning either English or French.

Critics of multiculturalism have also long been concerned about people who embrace the concept as an equivalency to ‘equality’, suggesting they are misguided

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in this belief as it can inadvertently lead to implicit racist beliefs. For example, the ‘equality view’ allows someone who is told that all peoples are ‘equal’ under the law with the same rights and opportunities to also look about and see mostly white people in positions of power and authority. In such instances, someone could easily begin to assume the absence of diversity in positions of power is not the fault of the system—we’re all ‘equal’—but the fault of unintelligent, unambitious, and untalented minorities who simply ‘can’t make it’. To counter such narratives, Henry Francis and Carol Tator’s work in critical multiculturalism is significant. They recognize the concept’s limitations in the absence of a critical eye. Tator (1999) recognizes systemic racism and resulting power disparities stating,

critical multiculturalism challenges the traditional political and cultural hegemony of the dominant class or group. It calls for a profound restructuring and reconceptualization of power relations between different cultural and racial communities based on the premise that communities and societies do not exist autonomously but are interwoven together in a web of interrelationships. (p. 98)

It calls for a deeper conception of multiculturalism—a critical multiculturalism—that suggest we who engage with the concept can finally begin to realize the hope many of us had for it initially.

#### ACTIVITIES TO EXPLORE MULTICULTURALISM

Over the years, there have been numerous publications outlining activities which purport to have students celebrate multiculturalism by recreating Christmas in Denmark, cooking foods from the Punjab region of India or learning to dance the Argentine tango. There is nothing wrong with these ‘foods and festivals’ activities *per se*, though issues of cultural appropriation need to be deeply considered when developing such lessons and, from my perspective, these studies are very superficial and run the risk of distorting students’ conception of multiculturalism. I say superficial because they often only scratch the surface of what makes a cultural group unique. Danes are far more than their Christmas celebrations, the Sikhs of the Punjab are much more than their foods, and the Argentines are infinitely more dimensional than a quick lesson in the tango can suggest. As well, these activities only serve to illustrate difference that is only part of the larger concept of multiculturalism.

I am also concerned that contrary to a desire to have students appreciate different cultures, quick, ‘fun’ activities like those I’ve noted may simply caricature the cultures and/or ‘other’ them as foreign, alien or exotic. I am not suggesting that uniqueness should not be noted and appropriately celebrated but teachers need to push students deeper and further in their understandings. For example, it is vitally important for students to not only learn that fish is a staple of the Portuguese diet and to cook a fish dish based on a family recipe brought from Oporto. Students need to more deeply understand the integral place of fish within Portuguese culture.

Specifically, its relationship to Portugal's geography (i.e., it is geographically a small nation with an extensive coastline and some of the world's best fishing grounds), economy (i.e., Portugal has one of the largest fishing industries in the world), religion (i.e., it is predominantly a Catholic nation and fish has come to symbolize Christ, the Saviour, due in large part to the miracles he was to have performed), and history (i.e., fish became a staple of the culture because meat was less available due to limited grazing lands as well as being difficult to store. Further, under papal decree meat had to be relinquished in favour of fish during periods of Christian Friday fasting). As a teacher, I would also want students to note that many cultural practices travel in the same way as the recipe travelled via family migration from Portugal. All families have cultural aspects that are grounded in other places, moving with the flow of people as they travelled about the Earth looking for safe and economically viable places to live. As well, cultures and their practices are grounded in the past and passed from generation to generation, changing as circumstances required. In short, students should come to realize that in some ways, Portugal or China or Peru are here in Canada and that the past is also the present. With this understanding of cultural context as related to place and time, I believe that students are better informed and possibly more appreciative of the food they are sampling, which in turn provides a much better grounding for an evolving conception of multiculturalism.

The following are a number of generative starter ideas that teachers can use to introduce, explore and deepen students' understanding of the concept of multiculturalism and the issues involved:

#### *Learning*

- Research the evolution of Canada's multicultural policy and its enshrinement into law highlighting important cases along the way.
- Explore the differences between pluralistic and particularist conceptions of multiculturalism. Which is better? Why?
- Examine how recent terrorist activities have impacted on multicultural attitudes in Canada, the U.S. and around the world
- Explore how multicultural attitudes are reversing in certain countries around the world (e.g., the Netherlands, Denmark, and France). Why is this happening?

#### *Informing*

- Survey your class or school to ascertain how many people are new immigrants or the children or grandchildren of new immigrants. Using multimedia presentation methods prepare a report for the class/school to illustrate how multiculturalism has or has not been of benefit to you and your family.
- In a series called "Facing the Past" learn about Canada's past approach to new immigrants or Canadians of non-British origins (e.g., Chinese head tax; Ukrainian



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and Japanese internment; residential schools; Doukhobors) and how that has shaped Canadian conceptions of multiculturalism today. Share the results at a parent night presentation.

#### *Action*

- Debate the benefit of a multicultural society as opposed to a melting pot or a monoculturalist society in a class, grade or school wide Debate-Off.
- Review a book or article supporting or criticizing multiculturalism. Create a blog to post the results.
- Invite a Canadian or provincial politician charged with the multiculturalism portfolio to speak to your class via videoconference. Prepare powerful questions to explore the issues.

#### CONCLUSION

To continue the story of the teacher candidate that opened this chapter...I returned to her classroom three weeks later to see how the study of multiculturalism was progressing. As I waited for her to finish speaking with her associate teacher I wandered about the room looking at the students' posted work. As I passed a bulletin board I noticed a bright yellow sign that read "Living Together, Growing Together". Peppered over the board were little booklets created by the students. Inside each one was the student's name, a coloured drawing of the student along with family and friends, and various captions that said, "I am Tamil", "My family is from Italy", and "I love Canada". While some may critique this teacher candidate's approach to teaching the concept of multiculturalism, I had to appreciate the effort she made to have young students delve a little deeper into their respective cultures and identities.

Multiculturalism remains one of the most accepted of concepts in social studies and a cherished policy in Canada, signaling for many our transcendence beyond the tribal and national rivalries that have cursed many countries around the globe. Yet it remains fraught with controversy and criticism. I've introduced only some of the many dimensions of this concept, which are all ripe for investigation and exploration by students at various levels. However, to be truly generative, teachers must be open to assisting students in learning about the history of this concept and about the issues surrounding it, including those that challenge what has become a taken-for-granted notion for most Canadians.

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