

## **Multicultural Education, Diversity, and Citizenship in Canada**

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Multiculturalism in Canada refers exclusively to a concern with cultural diversity, thus addressing issues of immigrant integration, cultural identity, racism, religious diversity and linguistic diversity. These issues have been part of a discussion of Canadian identity that began at the time Canada officially became a country in 1867. From the outset, cultural diversity has been an important part of Canadian policy. Initially the concern was how to bring together the so-called “two founding nations” (the British and French colonizers), assimilate other immigrants, and administer the relationship between the State and the original peoples of the land. Education has always been seen as a key to ensuring that cultural diversity was managed properly. What has changed over time is the value and meaning that Canadians have attached to cultural diversity. In this paper we will outline the historical underpinnings of multiculturalism, discuss contemporary meanings of multiculturalism as it has been expressed in educational policies, and provide some examples of the practice of multicultural education in schools and classrooms.

### **Canadian context**

Canada is a country of about 31million people and covers an area of about 10 million square kilometers making it the second largest country in the world in terms of area but the 36<sup>th</sup> largest in terms of population. In the 2006 national census about 33 percent of the population claimed to be of British or French origin, and about 3.8 percent of First Nations ancestry (descendants of the original peoples of Canada). People of colour (those who identify as non-white) accounted for about 16.2 percent of the total population (up from 13.4 in the

2001 census) yet made up 25 to 48 percent of the population in the major urban areas (Statistics Canada, 2006). English and French are the two official languages of Canada; slightly less than one quarter of the population claims French as its first language and only about 18 percent of the population claims to be bilingual in English and French. In terms of religion, the vast majority of Canadians are Christian (77 percent) while about two percent are Muslim and about one percent each Jewish, Hindu, Buddhist, and Sikh. Approximately another one percent of Canadians are affiliated with a range of other religions and the remainder of the population claims no religious affiliation (Statistics Canada, 2001).

Education is formally a provincial responsibility in Canada. Each of the ten provinces and three territories has its own ministry or department of education. While these administrative units are responsible for establishing provincial and territorial policies and overseeing their operation, the implementation of these policies as well as the development of local policies falls within the purview of local and regional school districts. The relationship between provincial/territorial ministries and school districts is as often characterized by tension as it is by harmony of purpose. Policy implementation is consequently anything but seamless. Educational policies and programs can vary considerably across and within the thirteen jurisdictions.

Although there is no federal department of education the federal government has significant involvement in education. It is responsible for the direct provision of education for children of armed forces personnel living on bases and for First Nations children living on reserve. The federal government has also assumed particular responsibilities in areas that are deemed to be in the national interest. Both multiculturalism and citizenship fall into this category and the federal government has intervened in these fields using a variety of strategies.

### **Canadian Policy Context**

In 1837 the British colonies of Upper and Lower Canada were both torn by rebellions. The following year Lord Durham (1839) was dispatched by the new Queen Victoria to help sort out the mess and reported:

I expected to find a contest between a government and a people: I found two nations warring in the bosom of a single state: I found a struggle, not of principles, but of races; and I perceived that it would be idle to attempt any amelioration of laws or institutions until we could first succeed in terminating the deadly animosity that now separates the inhabitants of Lower Canada into the hostile divisions of French and English.

For much of Canada's history, diversity has been a defining characteristic of the country and has preoccupied and bedevilled policy makers. Until the mid-twentieth century policy and practice generally followed Lord Durham's sentiments in seeking to, as much as possible, stamp out diversity in favour of a single, shared (English-)'Canadian' identity. Since World War II, official policy has shifted first toward openness and then toward celebration of Canada's diversity including recognition of minority 'nations' within the Canadian State (Sears, 2010).

Kymlicka (2003: 374) posits that, over the past several decades, this trend toward greater recognition and accommodation of diversity has been common across virtually all Western democracies. He argues that this is true in several respects: increased autonomy for national minorities; a move away from policies of assimilation of immigrants toward integration; and greater recognition of the rights of indigenous peoples. Canadian policies have largely followed these trends and have not been particularly unique. However, 'Canada is distinctive in having to deal with all three forms of diversity at the same time' and 'in the extent to which it has not only legislated but also constitutionalized, practices of accommodation.'

Contemporary factors related to globalization including changing patterns of migration and citizenship have created 'a growing awareness of the multiethnic nature of most contemporary nation-states and the need to account for this aspect of pluralism in public policy' (Johnson and Joshee, 2007: 3). For Canada this is not a particularly new phenomenon. As Kymlicka (2007: 39) notes, 'issues of accommodating diversity have been central to Canada's history.' Jaenen (1981: 81), for example, argues that certain conditions of Canada's historical development uniquely suited it for pluralism. He posits four factors: the English-French dualism, which has been 'a fundamental characteristic of Canadian society' since the Loyalist migration at the end of the eighteenth century; the more diverse British, rather than exclusively

English, nature of early Anglophone Canada; the separation of church and state and relative religious liberty that has always existed in Canada; and the fact that control over education was made a provincial, rather than a federal, responsibility.

Joshee and Winton (2007: 22) contend this diversity was recognized early on in legal and constitutional structures. They note that The Royal Proclamation of 1763 recognized Aboriginal right to self-government and the Québec Act of 1774 provided for maintaining the French language and culture even though the territory of Québec had come under British control. The same ethos is reflected in the constitutional arrangements that established the Canadian state in 1867. ‘The founding compact of Canada,’ they write, ‘implicitly recognized the value of retaining a connection with one’s ancestral culture.’ Those constitutional arrangements included a division of powers between the federal and provincial governments largely established to protect ‘la nation canadienne française’ (Morton, 1993: 51) and prevent the kind of assimilation advocated by Lord Durham.

Constitutional reform since 1867 has broadened the range of national minorities accorded constitutional recognition and protection and has also embedded multiculturalism as an interpretive frame for the constitution (Kymlicka and Norman, 2000; Kymlicka, 2003). For example, Aboriginal rights, including treaty rights, are affirmed in the Constitution Act of 1982. The Act also establishes English and French as the official languages of the province of New Brunswick largely to protect the place of the Acadian People who have a definite understanding of themselves as a national group within Canada. Central to the Act is *The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* with a clause that states, ‘This Charter shall be interpreted in a manner consistent with the preservation and enhancement of the multicultural heritage of Canadians’ (Department of Justice, 1982).

*The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* also has a clause that recognizes and protects Canada’s official language minorities and their educational rights to French first language schooling (outside Québec) and to English first language schooling (in Québec). While Section 23 of the Charter provides for a constitutional guarantee of educational rights at the federal level, Alberta and Ontario have also introduced provincial policy documents that outline

the role and aims of Francophone education in particular. In 2001, the Alberta government introduced a framework for French first language education in the province that specifies the importance of Francophone education that focuses on community belonging and pride (Alberta Learning, 2001,). In 2005, the Ontario government also implemented a policy for the province's French-language schools and Francophone community. The Ontario policy specifically mentions that new admission policies, to take effect in January 2010, were developed in response to the changing composition of the province's Francophone community and the need to make French-language schools 'more welcoming' to French-speaking newcomers and to newcomers who speak neither French nor English (Ontario, 2009). The Government of Canada, in its commitment to Canada's linguistic duality and the future of official language minority communities, continues to target urban centres in Ontario, Alberta and New Brunswick to attract *and* retain more French-speaking immigrants (Jedwab, 2002; Quell, 2002).

### **Diversity in the Curriculum**

Since the 19<sup>th</sup> century in Canada, education has been a central institution for the implementation of policy in the area of diversity and multiculturalism. Joshee (2004) and others have documented shifts in educational policy and practice related to ethnic diversity over the years, from an emphasis on assimilation, to more contemporary efforts to promote understanding of, and respect for, diversity (Bruno-Jofré and Aponiuk, 2001; Hébert, 2002).

While there is evidence of a retreat from the activist social justice curricula which appeared in some jurisdictions in the 1980s and 1990s, developing understanding of ethnic diversity is a key goal of education generally and social studies education in particular across the country, including schools for Canada's Francophone minority communities (Joshee, 2004; Osborne, 2001; Sears and Wright, 2004). For example, Ontario guides curriculum development in all subject areas by stating that the principles of antiracism and ethnocultural equity 'should equip all students with the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviours needed to live and work effectively in an increasingly diverse world, and encourage them to appreciate diversity and reject discriminatory attitudes and behaviour' (Ontario Ministry of Education and Training, 1993). While this 1993 document applies to all Ontario's schools including Francophone

schools, the more recent *Aménagement linguistique* policy specifically guides Francophone curriculum development in all subject areas for French first language schools. One of its principles states that ‘French-language education is characterized by openness to diversity and contributes to the development of a sense of belonging to the Francophone community of Ontario, of Canada and of the world’ (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2005: 12). The *Foundation for the Atlantic Provinces Canada Social Studies Curriculum*, a policy document that outlines a framework for curriculum development in social studies across Atlantic Canada, sets overall standards for the subject area in general and the area of diversity in particular (Atlantic Provinces Education Foundation, 1999). One *Foundation* standard states that students should be able to ‘demonstrate understanding of their own and others’ cultural heritage and cultural identity...’ (p. 6). Another states, in part, that ‘students will be expected to demonstrate an understanding of culture, diversity, and world view, recognizing the similarities and differences reflected in various personal, cultural, racial and ethnic perspectives’ (p. 12). The Alberta social studies curriculum (Alberta Education, 2005: 5) also clearly identifies diversity as a central to its educational goals. The program rationale and philosophy reads, in part: ‘Students will have opportunities to value diversity, to recognize differences as positive attributes and to recognize the evolving nature of individual identities.’ The Alberta social studies programme also aims to provide learning opportunities for Francophone and non-Francophone students alike to understand both ‘the historical and contemporary realities of Francophones in Canada’ and ‘the multiethnic and intercultural makeup of Francophones in Canada’ (p. 4). As Sears and his colleagues (Sears, Carke and Hughes 1999: 113) note, this commitment to ‘the pluralist ideal’ is endemic in Canadian social studies curricula.

An examination of curricula and standards in social studies education in Canada reveals a clear assumed progression from knowledge of diversity, through acceptance and respect, to justice. For most scholars and educators in the field however, knowledge of difference is not enough: ‘justice demands the public recognition and accommodation of diversity (Kymlicka and Opalski 2001: 1). The desired end then, is not only an understanding of difference, but also willingness to adapt, to accommodate and, to advocate for accommodation (Joshee 2004; Varma-Joshi 2004). Kymlicka (2004 xiii) contends that diversity and accommodation of

difference is a question on the agenda of a growing number of countries around the world. He argues, there is ‘a striking worldwide trend regarding the diffusion and adoption of the principles and policies of multicultural citizenship’ which has reached way beyond the West, to “even the most remote regions of Peru, the highlands of Nepal, and the peripheries of Communist China.’ However, Banks (2009: xii) notes that ‘the attainment of the balance that is needed between diversity and unity is an ongoing process and ideal that is never fully attained.’ A central concern wherever cultural policy is discussed is, ‘how can we ensure that the recognition of diversity does not undermine efforts to construct or sustain common political values, mutual trust and understanding, and solidarity across group lines?’ (Kymlicka 2004: xiii).

### **Relationship between Diversity and Citizenship**

The centrality of diversity in Canadian history and contemporary circumstances has been a key factor in shaping policy in citizenship and citizenship education. In Kymlicka’s (2003: 368) words, ‘Learning how to accommodate this internal diversity, while still maintaining a stable political order, has always been one of the main challenges facing Canada, and remains so today.’

A key component of citizenship in any country is the people’s identification with the nation, in other words, their sense of national identity. One result of the significant diversity present in Canada has been the search to discover, or create, some sense of shared national identity. An American observer writes, ‘National identity is the quintessential Canadian issue.’ He goes on to argue, ‘Almost alone among modern developed countries Canada has continued to debate its self-conception to the present day’ (Lipset 1990: 42). McLean (2007: 7) documents early 20<sup>th</sup> century attempts by federal parliamentarians to create a national education system largely to address a perceived ‘crisis of citizenship’ including the lack of a sense of Canadian national identity. When the first Canadian Citizenship Act was proclaimed in 1947 a leading advocate of citizenship education wrote, ‘Canada is legally a nation, but the Canadians are scarcely yet a people’ (Kidd 1947: n.p.). More recent writers have made the point that, while Canada exists as a state, it is not a nation in the sense of Canadians sharing a profound sense of ‘group affinity and shared values’ (Resnick 1994: 6). The fear of deep

differences and lack of understanding among Canada's disparate peoples and regions has been a dominant theme in the literature in the fields of citizenship and citizenship education in Canada.

Curtis (1988:111) describes this process of 'public *construction*' in 19<sup>th</sup> century Ontario. He argues that in establishing early public education the state was concerned with the overlapping functions of institution building and 'political characterization of the population.' He documents the long and often contested process of centralizing state control over schools, curriculum and teachers, contending that this was a deliberate effort to take control of education away from parents and local communities so the state could be more effective in using education for political socialization. According to Curtis, the elites who pushed for, and achieved, universal public schooling in Canada in the 19<sup>th</sup> century were concerned about 'the creation in the population of new habits, orientations, [and] desires' that were consistent with 'the bourgeois social order' including 'respect for legitimate authority' and for standards of a 'collective morality' (p. 366). As Bruno-Jofré (2002: 114) writes, 'The public school was conceived as an agency for national unity and social harmony.'

The standards of collective morality to be inculcated in early English Canadian schools were essentially British in nature. In Canada's early years school history courses and other subjects focused on Britain and the Empire and patriotic ceremonies and symbols were not directed toward the new nation but toward the growing empire. 'English speaking children were raised with the historical myths of British nationalism, as conveyed by adapted editions of the Irish National Reader and authors as diverse as MacCaulay and G.A. Henty. What mere Canadian citizenship could compete with the claims of an empire that spanned the known universe?' (Morton, 1993: 55).

### **Diversity and Citizenship Education**

Bruno-Joffre (2002: 113) argues that citizenship education in schools, at least until the end of the Second World War, was focused on supporting this orientation. During this period, she writes, 'the aim of public schools in English Canada was to create a homogeneous nation built on a common English language, a common culture, a common identification with the

British Empire and an acceptance of [certain] British institutions and practices.’ While this approach to citizenship education did violence to the linguistic and cultural traditions of many, it was particularly devastating for Canada’s Aboriginal Peoples. Battiste and Semaganis (2002: 93) describe something of this ‘cognitive imperialism’ arguing it was, and largely still is, an attempt to extinguish ‘Aboriginal conceptions of society.’

The focus on Britishness as a state constructed, unifying national identity began to wane during World War II for several reasons including the decline of Britain and the British Empire as major forces in the world. Most importantly, however, it simply was not working. Although early public schooling was decidedly assimilationist, with the goal of ‘Anglo conformity’ around the ideal of the British Empire, it was largely unsuccessful in unifying the population. Non-British newcomers to Canada did not identify with the Empire and clung doggedly to their ethnic communities and loyalty to distant homelands (Granatstein 1993). Furthermore, French Canadians in Québec also did not identify with the British Empire, but rather relied heavily on the Catholic Church for governance from 1867 until the 1960s. Given the religious nature of the Québec educational system, religion was far more important as a social-educational institution than ‘social studies’ curriculum. To put it more accurately, the Church was the curriculum: teaching moral and patriotic values was the primary focus of ‘history’ and ‘geography.’ As Lévesque (2004: 58) writes,

This nation-building approach to history and geography was very much focused on the survival of the French Canadian nationality and the clerical ideologies that made this ‘église-nation’ unique in Canada. English Canada was treated as a separate imperialist nation, with a different language, culture, and religion.

Such a strong religious and nationalistic emphasis of a French-Canadian and Catholic nation suggests that, when it would come time to ‘catch up’ with English Canadian and American social studies initiatives, Québec would undergo unprecedented educational reform from the 1960s to the 1990s in order to ‘modernize’ their national-religious society. Currently in Québec, history and citizenship education does not focus on a nation-building approach, but rather on a more inclusive and pluralistic approach (Lévesque, 2004). Thus, the challenge remains to develop, teach and learn shared conceptions of citizenship, history, and identity.

## Current Challenges

In the 1970s and 1980s, the attempt to create civic cohesion around a largely British identity gave way to a focus on respecting, celebrating and accommodating diversity. While pluralism and inclusion continue to be central to the rhetoric of social studies and citizenship education policy and programs across Canada, we argue it has largely been an iconic rather than a deep pluralism. From the 1970s the idea of education as a doorway for individuals and groups to feel included in the mainstream civic life of the country in Canada has extended to at least attempt to include the voices of a range of previously marginalised or excluded groups. This has resulted in a widespread educational policy framework that promotes the ‘pluralist ideal’ (Sears, Clark and Hughes, 1999, p. 113). Central to this is an activist conception of citizenship in which every citizen, or group of citizens, will have the knowledge, skills and dispositions needed to participate in the civic life of the country and feel welcome to do so. As Sears and Hughes (1996: 134) put it, good citizens in this conception ‘are seen as people who are: knowledgeable about contemporary society and the issues it faces; disposed to work toward the common good; supportive of pluralism; and skilled at taking action to make their communities, nation, and the world a better place.’ It is important to note that what citizens are being included in, then, is not citizenship in the ethnic or sociological sense of belonging to a community but, rather, they are being included in the community of those who participate, who join in a process.

In this approach the deeper more potentially difficult aspects of difference are largely avoided, in part because they are complex, difficult to deal with and have the potential to generate conflict. In studies of policy and practice in several Canadian provinces Bickmore (2005a and b) found that schools and teachers generally avoided difficult issues with high potential for conflict including those involving ethnicity and identity. Instead, they focused on what she calls ‘harmony building’ and ‘individual skill building’ (Bickmore 2005a: 165), approaches rooted in conflict avoidance. The first includes attention to the ‘appreciation of diverse cultural heritages’ but does not explore the real difference between and among those heritages.

Additionally, policies that have developed primarily from the 1990s onward support the turn to neoliberalism that has swept much of the Northern and Western world. The hallmark of neoliberalism is a vision of society as a marketplace and neoliberalism “proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by the maximization of entrepreneurial freedoms within an institutional framework characterized by private property rights, individual liberty, free markets and free trade.” (Harvey, 2004). Within the framework of the Canadian neoliberal policy web multiculturalism is understood in two particular ways: 1) as a potential economic asset (e.g. a way of increasing ties to international markets (Fleras & Elliot, 1996)), and 2) as a potential source of disruption or division in society (Jenson, 1998). As a result equality is often redefined as sameness and social justice is narrowly cast as equity of access to economic opportunities (Joshee, 2007) and multicultural education is dominated by two goals: social cohesion and equity of outcomes.

Jenson (1998) has made the point that social cohesion is a response to the consequences of neo-liberal policies and programs. As she has stated, “[t]he paradigm shift in economic and social policy towards neo-liberalism is now identified as having provoked serious structural strains in the realm of the social and political” (pp.5-6). Social cohesion is invoked as a corrective measure that can help to increase social solidarity and restore faith in the institutions of government. It is important to note, however, that invoking social cohesion does not ultimately call into question the basic neoliberal project. Bernard (1999) has remarked that “social cohesion and related nebulous expressions such as social capital and mutual trust... rightly attract attention to the perils of neoliberalism, but in most cases they implicitly prescribe a dose of compassion and a return to values rather than a correction of social inequalities and an institutional mediation of interests” (p.3).

Lack of attention to equality is the first major challenge presented by this lens on multiculturalism. As an approach that stresses unity above all else and “calls for a return to a supposedly more golden but decidedly less just past” (Jenson, 1998, p.38) it implies that addressing inequality is divisive. While some, like Bessis (1995), see social cohesion as a positive force that can challenge social exclusion, even she admits that social cohesion is only one of

several issues that needs to be addressed in order to “go from a logic of economic growth to a logic of social development” (Bessis, 1995, p.19).

Bernard (1999) has asserted that in eliminating or reducing the State’s role in addressing inequality, “the responsibility for each community’s welfare [falls to] its members and their relations. This is often what lies, hidden or not, behind appeals to community accompanied by usually inadequate offers of state support” (p.14). Inequality thus is addressed in the framework of charity rather than social justice and becomes the purview of volunteer community groups. An additional problem with this approach in the Canadian context comes from the fact that, as a 1998 study shows, “people who volunteer are the centrist ‘pillars of society’ and are intolerant of political extremism, of those who break society’s rules (criminals) and those who deviate from social norms” (Woolley in Bernard, 1999, pp. 16-17).

Both Jenson (1998) and Bernard (1999) make the point that the social cohesion agenda does pay attention to citizenship and diversity, but in a particular way. In the words of one Government of Canada policy document, social cohesion is “the ongoing process of developing a community of shared values, shared challenges and equal opportunity within Canada, based on a sense of trust, hope, and reciprocity among all Canadians” (Policy Research Sub-Committee on Social Cohesion, 1997 in Jenson, 1998, p. 4). Importantly, in the social cohesion version of multiculturalism there is a recognition of diversity but there is no attention to social justice. With social problems defined as requiring charitable attention, citizens must develop shared values, mutual trust, and the willingness to care for those less fortunate. The development of these characteristics has become the focus of character education programs that have been developed throughout Canada since the early 2000s.

Diversity is characterized elsewhere in the Policy Research Sub-Committee document mentioned above as one of the “fault-lines” of Canadian society (Jenson, 1998, p.4). While Jenson (1998) and Bernard (1999) maintain that respect for diversity is part of the social cohesion framework, in the Canadian situation, rather than respect for diversity, policy documents and pronouncements from the early 2000s onward are proposing that it would be enough to simply recognize diversity. This view is evident in an internal policy document from

the federal Multiculturalism Program (2001) that emphasizes the need to address shared citizenship values as a way to “rebuild trust among communities” (p.5) and positions cultural diversity as a threat to “our attachment to one another and to the country” (p.5). While there is some discussion in the document of respect for diversity, it is an approach that is more compatible with assimilation than with the long cherished ideal of integration. Social justice is not even mentioned in the document, which somewhat ironically is titled, “The Multiculturalism Policy: 30 years and looking forward”. The result is a very weak version of multiculturalism.

More recently, the federal Minister for Citizenship, Immigration, and Multiculturalism has proclaimed that the focus on social cohesion is important so that young people from new immigrant communities ‘avoid getting into trouble’ (Kenney, 2009a). The Minister’s concern is not that Canadians learn to engage with each other in a deep and meaningful way about diversity but rather than diversity results in ‘ethnic enclaves’ and leads young people to ‘criminality or extremism,’ which undermines safety and security (Kenney, 2009b). Following from this logic, diversity is something to be avoided at all costs.

The social cohesion discourse is most evident in the specific policy work on safe schools and character development. The logic underlying policy statements on safe schools is that safety is a prerequisite for fulfilling the academic mandate of schools. In Ontario, for example, the focus of the Safe Schools Act, which came into force in 2000, has been primarily reactive, that is, on addressing violence after it occurs through lockdown procedures, suspensions, and expulsions. Although this area of policy was not initially identified as relating to multiculturalism or diversity, criticism of the Act based on its disproportionate negative effect on students of First Nations origins, students with disabilities, and students from some racialized groups (Bhattacharjee, 2003) has resulted in revisions to the official policy. The current policy framework for safe schools makes explicit reference to the Ministry’s Policy and Program Memorandum 119, a Policy on Anti-Racism and Ethnocultural Equity, and puts more focus on violence prevention but true to the logic of social cohesion, the focus of intervention is on specific individual behaviours, most particularly bullying (Safe Schools Action Team, 2006). As

Policy and Program Memorandum 144 on Bullying Prevention and Intervention makes clear, bullying is seen as an act of one individual (or a group of individuals) against another individual and thus should be addressed by teaching students how to behave appropriately. Although there is an acknowledgement that bullying may be linked to issues of social diversity, there is no discussion of addressing systemic issues such as racism or sexism that are related to direct violence (Bickmore, 2005; Smith and Carson, 1998).

In a similar vein, the character development strategy in Ontario focuses on teaching students behaviours and attitudes that will contribute to “safe, healthy, and orderly school environments” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2006, p. iii). In particular the focus is on helping students “to develop self discipline and the personal management skills that will make their communities, workplaces and lives the best that they can be” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2006, p. 2). There is recognition that Ontario communities are culturally diverse therefore the mission of character development must be to “find common ground” and build consensus (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2006, p. 4). The message with regard to diversity is clear: it is a source of conflict therefore we must move beyond it by focusing on commonalities. Focusing on social cohesion allows us not only to move beyond divisiveness but it also helps to create a safe environment within which students will be able to concentrate on academic success.

The equity of outcomes goal harkens back to what has been called first generation human rights, which grew out of traditions of liberal individualism (see, for example, García-Montúfar, Solís, & Isaacson, 2004; Ignatieff, 2000) and which focus on redistribution of goods in society. While recognising systemic inequalities and the need for the State to intercede on behalf of disadvantaged members of society, the key focus is on the relationship between the individual and the State. An important aspect of this approach to addressing inequality is that it tends to lead to remedies on the individual level rather than systemic change (Agocs, 2004).

The underlying logic of an equity of outcomes discourse assumes existing structures are fair and that all members of society want the same thing, namely to participate in the economy. As we see in the numerous initiatives designed to address “youth-at-risk” outcomes are defined in terms of a narrow understanding of academic achievement (mainly test scores). In addition,

inclusive schools are defined “by the extent to which *all* students make successful transitions to the postsecondary destination of their choice” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2005a, p. 2) and the legacy of educators is that their students “will take on the wide range of occupations and roles necessary to maintain thriving communities and prosperous provincial, territorial, and national economies” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2005a, p. 4). Thus students are valued not for the people they are but for the workers they will become.

### **Observations and concluding comments**

In a relatively short span of time the official State position on the policy of multiculturalism has gone from valuing diversity as a strength to decrying diversity as a threat to the safety and security of the country. Elsewhere Joshee has noted that one consequence of the combination of neoliberal and neoconservative discourses in multicultural education has been to construct diversity as a problem and to position minoritized students as having deficits that need to be addressed (Joshee, 2009). What is clear from the preceding discussion is that the social cohesion discourse, in its current variant, extends this view to position minoritized students as potential criminals. But is this the inevitable trajectory of multicultural education policy? Our answer to this question is absolutely not.

In Canada, various discussions continue to take place where the older view of diversity as a strength is reintroduced into policy dialogues. For example, at a 2007 round table on cultural diversity organized by the PRI participants noted, “multiculturalism has become an easy target for failings and challenges resulting from other policies. It was almost universally argued that recent backlash against multiculturalism can be traced to anxiety and fear about the unknown. Many participants described debates about multiculturalism issues, such as religious diversity and the effects of ethnic enclaves, as poorly informed and frequently simplistic” (Kunz & Sykes, 2007, p.4). In another initiative, policy developers within the federal Multiculturalism Program recently supported research and discussions on the issue of religious diversity that brought to light the fact that there is very little evidence to support the perception that religious communities in Canada are “radicalizing” their youth and that if this is happening we need to examine structures and systems in the dominant society that have the effect of

alienating these young people (Multiculturalism Branch, 2008). We believe that these examples provide hope that liberal social justice discourses continue to operate within State structures.

Finally, we believe that the growing interest in international dialogue on multiculturalism and multicultural education can help to provide more counter discourses that might be taken up in the Canadian context. As one example we offer the Indian understanding of “active respect” as an alternative to social cohesion as the means of creating a socially just and inclusive society. From this perspective, the State must actively support a community’s aspirations in some way in order to have the legitimacy to intervene in its internal functioning. This comes primarily in the form of meaningful inclusion in the economic, political, social, and cultural spheres of life. While we do not have the time or space here to elaborate on “meaningful inclusion” we will briefly say that it is inclusion based on a respect for people’s identities and values and I would argue that it has been the basis of the Canadian ideal of multiculturalism but we have not been very good at articulating it or acting upon it. Now would be a goodtime to engage this idea before we find ourselves deeply embedded in the difficult and unproductive conversations that are now occurring in the name of a neoliberal version of multiculturalism in Canada and elsewhere.

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