

**DÉBAT SUR L'ÉDUCATION INTERCULTURELLE  
ET LA COHÉSION SOCIALE — DEBATE ON INTERCULTURAL  
EDUCATION AND SOCIAL COHESION**

*Par Grace Li Xiu Woo\**

**Globalisation & Fear of Cultural Darwinism**

The discussion began with the observation that the English language and American media have become all pervasive. Given that children implicitly believe what they see on television and on the Internet, the speakers were asked: “How do we counteract the power of the media and create hope for multiculturalism?”

In response, Mathew Zachariah<sup>1</sup> suggested that we need to become more articulate about the nature of the problem. He noted that, while globalisation leads to homogeneity at one level, individual initiatives are increasing locally. According to some social science theories, centres have been able to articulate their interests better than peripheries in the past. Thanks to the Internet, people in the peripheries are now co-ordinating their responses to central authorities. Consequently, none of us can be sure what the coming transformations will be.

On the other hand, it was noted later in the discussion that economic globalisation can undermine and fragment local communities. Only the elite benefits from the type of curricula offered by the international baccalaureate organization. To counteract this problem, it was suggested that we need to bring programmes like UNESCO's work on education for international understanding and the associated schools project into the mainstream so they are more responsive to the needs of the young people who are going to grow up in the twenty-first century.

**We Must Break Taboos & Let People Speak For Themselves**

Dr. Esmeralda Thornhill<sup>2</sup> was asked if the failure of multicultural policy to eradicate racism was due to something in the policy itself or to the way it was interpreted. Her response addressed the issue of who forms educational policy at both advisory and practical levels. She pointed out that in our society we have a “tradition of inexplicitness” about things that make us uncomfortable. Years ago it applied to sex. Now it includes denial of “this r word ‘racism’.” And, because we have a tradition of celebration when it comes to law, we break a double taboo when we mention legal injustices involving race. She suggested that before we can deal with

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these issues at a cognitive level, we must become aware of, and overcome, our psychological barriers.

Dr. Thornhill finds multiculturalism as defined today legitimate in its own right, but she notes that we have not been fire-drilled to deal with the issues it raises or with the discomfort that people feel. As human beings, we are all value laden and we interpret multiculturalism according to our personal experience. This creates barriers that exclude sectors of the population. "The people who are the voices of authenticity for what needs to be done are not there", she said. Instead, we have people who do not identify in an intimate way with the oppression that needs to be eradicated. To clarify the importance of personal experience, Dr. Thornhill pointed out that an obstetrician who is also a mother can inform a woman who is giving birth for the first time much more intimately than a male obstetrician. In this country where four year olds know they have rights, she stated, there is no reason to presume that people who have been ostracised and shunted off to the margins are not articulate enough to plead for their own entitlement. As taxpayers, they also have a right to an adequate education that does not stunt their aspirations. They have a right to participate in decision-making like anyone else.

#### **Les dilemmes éducatifs de l'État : gratuité scolaire et enseignement des langues d'origines**

La question suivante concernait les tensions entre le droit de l'État de définir sa politique éducative et le droit de la personne de recevoir une éducation. Au moment où le Canada a soulevé la question de la dégradation des droits économiques, sociaux et culturels, une préoccupation du Comité des droits de l'homme, on se demande si le gouvernement a favorisé la gratuité de l'éducation aux dépens des langues minoritaires qui ne bénéficient que d'une heure de cours par semaine.

In response to this question about government funding priorities, Professor Zachariah observed that access to elementary education in English or French is guaranteed everywhere in Canada though there are problems on some of the reserves for indigenous peoples and in geographically isolated places. The Reaganite and Thatcherite revolutions of the 1980's led to budget cuts and the transfer of fees for books and supplementary materials to parents, while the salaries of university professors were cut by 5% in Alberta. The effect of budgetary cuts has been particularly acute for the provision of English as a second language. Without good English, the schooling of immigrant children suffers, creating a multiplicity of problems which must be addressed.

Marie-France Benes<sup>3</sup> a ajouté que la gratuité scolaire est un sujet de débat au Québec auquel le Ministère de l'Éducation est sensible. L'accès à la scolarisation est gratuit, mais on se demande ce que cela implique. Est-ce que la gratuité doit inclure les manuels scolaires, le transport et la garde des enfants pendant l'heure de dîner (cette dernière étant devenue nécessaire, puisque de plus en plus de parents travaillent

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<sup>3</sup> Directrice des services aux communautés culturelles et écoles montréalaises, Ministère de l'Éducation du Québec.

à l'extérieur)? Est-ce que le dîner doit être gratuit ou subventionné pour les enfants issus des milieux défavorisés ? Tous ces frais supplémentaires sont approuvés école par école par chaque conseil d'établissement: il existe donc des réponses variant d'une école à l'autre, puisque les parents vont décider différemment selon leur milieu socio-économique.

According to Professor Zachariah, there is a fear that anomie will result if the people of this country do not knit together on the basis of two languages. Thus, new approaches to multicultural education in Canada take into account our desire to be able to form consensus in society. Because of the political influence of people of Ukrainian descent, Ukrainian has become a recognized language with government support in Edmonton, but the prospects for other languages are difficult to define. Some First Nations' languages are being recovered, but for the foreseeable future the hegemonic languages will continue to dictate educational policy.

Au Québec, on a décidé d'offrir le français ou l'anglais comme langue de l'enseignement selon certains critères d'admissibilité. C'est également important pour les nouveaux arrivants de bien maîtriser leur langue maternelle: cela leur permet de faire le transfert et de mieux apprendre dans la langue de la communauté d'accueil. Il y a cependant une difficulté matérielle et financière relative à l'enseignement de toutes les langues. On ne peut pas mettre toutes les langues dans l'horaire, mais il est prévu qu'on ajoutera une troisième langue au secondaire. Étant donné l'ampleur des accords commerciaux et la proximité terrestre, l'espagnol, qui est la troisième langue de l'Amérique du Nord pourrait devenir une des langues apprises en tant que langue d'origine. La tendance générale est cependant l'enseignement des langues parlées par les vagues de migration précédentes. Ainsi, la moitié des élèves qui suivent des cours de langue d'origine au Québec apprennent l'italien, bien que la vague d'immigration italienne soit arrêtée depuis une trentaine d'années.

### **La culture de la paix: What Kind Of Values Are We Teaching?**

Some speakers drew our attention to the values covertly included in our curriculum choices. One aspect of this concerns the customarily transmission of symbols of victory and triumph which implicate us in an ethos of domination and war. Professor Zachariah suggested that we should, instead, be making greater use of religious symbols like Ashoka's Column of Peace.

Kishore Singh<sup>4</sup> nous a fait part du rôle normatif et politique de l'UNESCO qui consiste en la promotion d'une paix durable. La *Déclaration pour la promotion de la culture de la paix* de décembre 1994 était suivie en 1998 par une journée de réflexion sur le dialogue entre le droit et la religion monothéiste, rencontre à l'occasion de laquelle les dignitaires de toutes les confessions religieuses ont déclaré la diversité comme étant une des richesses de l'humanité et qui, comme la liberté de culte, constitue le fondement d'une paix durable. Compte tenu du besoin d'établir des valeurs communes, et considérant les efforts de l'UNESCO pour réunir toute la communauté internationale autour de valeurs minimales à respecter, M. Singh s'est

<sup>4</sup> Spécialiste du programme, Département de l'éducation pour une culture de la paix, UNESCO.

demandé quelle place devrait être accordée à des établissements privés en marge de l'éducation publique.

Un des participants a offert l'exemple du Québec où l'éducation à la citoyenneté est obligatoire pour tous. Ainsi, l'ensemble des programmes dans les écoles privées est soumis à la même politique que les écoles publiques. Pour clarifier la situation québécoise, on a expliqué que l'école privée représente 100 000 élèves, soit 10% des effectifs. Le Ministère subventionne ce secteur à raison d'environ 60% des frais. Environ 10% de ces élèves fréquentent ce que nous appelons, erronément, des écoles "ethniques", qui sont en fait de véritables écoles confessionnelles. Jusqu'à juillet 1998, nous avions un système d'écoles publiques confessionnelles avec deux réseaux, l'un constitué d'écoles protestantes et l'autre d'écoles catholiques, à majorité francophone ou anglophone. Au fil des années, nous avons dû satisfaire aux besoins d'autres religions, ce qui a conduit à la création d'un réseau d'écoles juives, orthodoxes, grecques, arméniennes et musulmanes. La préoccupation majeure n'était donc ni celle de la langue, ni celle de l'ethnie, mais bien une question de confession.

#### **The Distinction Between "Multiculturalism" and "Interculturalism"**

The discussion has revealed that there were many definitions of "multiculturalism." Asbjorn Eide, the Chairman of the United Nations' Working Group on Minorities, suggested that it was useful to distinguish between "multiculturalism" and "interculturalism" with reference to the *Declaration on the Rights of Minorities*<sup>5</sup>. He referred first to Article 4(2) and 4(3):

4(2) States shall take measures to create favourable conditions to enable persons belonging to minorities to express their characteristics and to develop their culture, language, religion, traditions and customs...

4(3) States should take appropriate measures so that, wherever possible, persons belonging to minorities may have adequate opportunities to learn their mother tongue or to have instruction in their mother tongue.

Both of the elements mentioned here refer to what he considers to be "multiculturalism" for they indicate ways of recognizing differences in society and give various groups the possibility of developing and sustaining that diversity. He considers that article 4(4) concerns the intercultural dimension where it says:

4(4) States should, where appropriate, take measures in the field of education, in order to encourage knowledge of the history, traditions, language and culture of the minorities existing within their population. Persons belonging to minorities should have adequate opportunities to gain knowledge of the society as a whole.

He explained that knowledge about the history of the minorities would be knowledge of their own history as they themselves understand it, including their understanding of how they have interacted with the majority in the past. Knowledge

<sup>5</sup> *Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious or Linguistic Minorities*, G.A. Res. 47/135, 1992.

about the traditions includes knowledge of how they evaluate them and culture includes the sum of language, traditions and the conceptual framework that the minorities have of their own situation. "Interculturalism" could include an understanding of the word "knowledge" that presupposes sympathy and empathy as well as facts.

Dr. Esmeralda Thornhill agreed that the distinction made by Asbjorn Eide was useful, though of little value to her as a modern African Canadian woman. Having sat on the Quebec Ministry of Education's task force on intercultural education, she found that the meaning of words keeps changing here in Canada. No matter how these terms are defined by international jurists, the societal transformations that are necessary to bring the rights they encompass into effect are not happening. All sorts of subtle barriers need to be addressed. Multiculturalism has led to the admission of people where they were not allowed before, but they are not promoted. As the last hired, they are the first fired and they are often subject to such a strict level of scrutiny that they voluntarily resign. Professor Thornhill calls this "constructive resignation" saying these people have been pushed out because they could not take the pressure. She suggested that it is important to pay attention to rates of retention when monitoring employment programmes and employment equity.

### **The Plight of Russian Speakers in the Former Soviet Union**

Igor Pimenov<sup>6</sup> observed that present legislation is fruitful for immigrants such as the Turks in Germany or Portuguese in France, but in the countries of the former Soviet Union, millions of people suddenly found themselves minorities in their own country without having made the choice to leave home. All at once, Russian speaking people outside the Russian Federation found their benefits had turned into privileges and they were subject to discrimination by the new regimes that came into being. He stated that this was linguistic, not ethnic, discrimination because, if one parent was Ukrainian and the other Lithuanian, the family's shared use of the Russian language was more important than ethnic origin. He suggested that international legislation needs to adapt to the challenges presented by groups in the former Soviet Union who have suddenly found themselves in a minority position.

Having visited several locations in Latvia and Lithuania, Asbjorn Eide added that he was very critical of the inflexible minority policies of the present Latvian government. He pointed out that the problem began with the forceful incorporation of Latvia and Estonia in the Soviet Union in 1940 and there had been a lot of transmigration in the fifty years since then. These states are now struggling to recover the linguistic landscape, but he suggested they would have to recognize that they had effectively become bilingual countries despite the dramatic background that produced this situation. He said that the High Commissioner for National Minorities has been encouraging the Latvian government to be more flexible and open to Russian language speakers which has helped to some extent, though probably not enough.

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<sup>6</sup> Head, Association for the Support of Russian Language Schools in Latvia.

Another commentator added that it was unfortunate that the Council of Europe had weakened its provisions for human and minority rights when the states of east central Europe and the Baltic republics joined. He hoped that in the future states like Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania that deny human and linguistic rights would not be allowed to join the European Union under the Maastricht treaty and its subsequent provisions.

Baiba Peterson<sup>7</sup> challenged anyone to provide a concrete example of discrimination in her country. When none was forthcoming, she explained that 95% of Latvians are bilingual, trilingual or even quadrilingual since German is very popular. However, about 30% of Russians are monolingual. Reforms are oriented to bilingual education with provisions being made for more than ten minorities. The Russian complaint is thus part of a very difficult historical problem and her country is doing its best to cope with it.

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<sup>7</sup> Director, Department of Education Strategy, Ministry of Education and Science, Latvia.