

THE MULTI-CULTURAL CHALLENGE TO FUTURE OF EDUCATION

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In the West, multi-culturalism has come to mean better representation of minorities in public and private sector positions of authority and equal opportunity in hiring practices. "Tolerance" for other racial, linguistic, and national groups has been the catch-phrase in the swing toward multi-culturalism, in the search for a rainbow culture. But among others, Speaker of the House of Representative of the USA, Newt Gingrich is suspicious. He has argued that multi-culturalism will destroy the idea of the American nation, indeed any nation. Multi-culturalism, particularly, multi-cultural education, is evil.

While it is easy to dismiss Gingrich as merely representing a type of fascism, in fact, multi-culturalism does threaten the nation-state. Bounded by the ideals of liberalism--individuality, one version of God, in the context of an efficient marketplace--the nation-state, if it were to yield to the demands of other cultures and civilizations, would find its very cultural existence threatened. It, the nation-state, would either (continue to) undergo a violent Balkanization or it could transcend its own limitations and become multi-civilizational and global. In a sense, Gingrich is thus right. Multi-culturalism is evil but only in the context of exclusive collective representations such as the nation-state.

For those committed to creating and participating in pedagogy that allows for the authentic voices of other civilizations--that overcome the limitations of the ego-bounded rationality of the Enlightenment--multi-cultural education is about transcending the text of

nationalism and creating a new type of globalism. This then is a plea for the recognition of differences that are part of the postmodern thrust but not its conclusion; a climax neither in capitalist homogeneity nor postmodern nihilism but in life-embracing unity.

But what worries Gingrich (and many others in North and South alike) is that a pedagogy of difference will eliminate the nation-state developmentalist project, will undo the hard fought gains of the Enlightenment, of progress. For the West, multi-culturalism means that the Other--for example, as Woman, as Muslim, as Taoist, as Aboriginal--will have categories of self, community and God, represented as part of normal day-to-day pedagogy. For Third World nations, this means that dissent must become part of the curriculum; that the views of religious and cultural minorities should not be seen as threatening to the dominant religion or State ideology but as part of national richness; that opposition can only strengthen the post-colonial self, not damage it.

BEYOND SHALLOW LIBERALISM

But a civilizational renaissance is not about a simple plea to pluralism. Pluralism in democratic society is about many voices vying for attention. The best ideas win out. The role of the teacher is to fairly present differing perspectives. However, pluralism remains contextualised by liberalism. Thus pluralism as currently valorized is shallow. A deeper pluralism would ask: how do differing civilizations articulate the rights of the Other and what are the points of unity in these differences?

For example, while in liberal pluralism all values are open to individual choice, in Hawaiian civilization one does not choose *aina* (land not real estate) or one's genealogical relationships with ancestors. They are deep givens. In Islamic civilization as well there are

certain fundamentals that bound what is possible. In ancient Tantra, as articulated in this century by Shrii P.R. Sarkar, before pedagogy begins there are moments of meditation. This permits for the intellectual mind to become pointed allowing the intuitive self greater understanding of the topic at hand. Certainly daily Tantric (or any other type) meditation sessions are not what most modernist educators have in mind when arguing for "multi-cultural education". Most either prefer a secular model where the day begins with the national anthem or a religious model where prayer towards a particular deity announces one's allegiances.

Multi-cultural education is about creating structures and processes that allow for the expression of the many civilizations, communities and individuals that we are. To begin this enormous task, we must first contest the value neutrality of current institutions such as the library. For example, merely including texts from other civilizations does not constitute a multi-cultural library. Ensuring that the contents of texts are not ethnocentric is an important step but this does not begin to problematize the definitional categories used in conventional libraries. We need to ask what a library would look like if it used the knowledge paradigms of other civilizations? How would knowledge be rearranged? What would the library floors look like? In Hawaiian culture, for example, there might be floors for the Gods, for the *aina* and genealogy. In Tantra, empirical science would exist alongside intuitional science. Floor and shelve space would privilege the superconscious and unconscious layers of reality instead of only focusing on empirical levels of the real. In Islam, since knowledge is considered *tawhidic* (based on the unity of God), philosophy, science and religion would no longer occupy the discrete spaces they currently do. Of course, the spatiality of "floors" must also be deconstructed. Information systems from other civilizations might not privilege book-knowledge, focusing instead on story-telling and dreamtime as well as wisdom received from elders/ancestors (as in Australian

Aboriginal) and perhaps even "angels" (either metaphorically or ontologically). A multi-cultural library might look like the emerging world wide web but include other alternative ways of knowing and being. Most certainly knowledge from different civilizations in this alternative vision of the "library" would not be relegated to a minor site or constituted as an exotic field of inquiry such as Asian, Ethnic or Feminist studies, as are the practices of current libraries. The homogeneity of the library as an organizing information system must be reconstructed if we are to begin to develop the conceptual framework of multi-cultural education. To do, we must further articulate the differences that define us.

METAPHORS OF DIFFERENCE

The metaphors we use about ourselves is one indicator of this difference. For example, while the image of the unbounded ocean might represent total choice to American culture--for Muslims, the image of the ocean is seen as absurd. It is direction, toward Mecca, that is more important. Choice is bounded by tradition and the collectivity of the Ummah (the global community). For those within the Tantric worldview, it is the image of Shiva dancing between life (knowledge) and death (ignorance) that is the defining metaphor. Shiva represents simultaneous destruction and creation--the cosmos and self in purposeful process. Within modernity, it is the dice representing randomness that holds sway on most. Things in themselves have no meaning or purpose. It is what humans choose to signify that is critical for moderns and postmoderns.

Differences in metaphors not only represent deep structures in terms of how civilizations view self, other, nature but also how we "language" the world. Language is not neutral but a carrier of civilizational values, actively constituting the real. Language has become

a verb, an interactive practice in the creation of new worlds. For example, it is not so much that many of us now speak English but rather that we "english" the world in our knowing and learning efforts.

Multi-cultural education is thus not only about learning and teaching more than one language but also about seeing how languages construct worldviews. Committed to avoiding the pitfalls of cultural relativism, a critical pedagogy would also investigate the epistemic costs associated with any particular language and civilization, asking which perspectives are enriched, which impoverished? We thus argue for a pedagogy of deep difference, not a shallow interest focused on advertisements that create a mythology of "we are the world".

These differences are critical not only at the civilizational level but at national and individual levels. How we constitute knowledge is not neutral but based on the structures of various knowledge cultures. American knowledge culture is far more focused on issues of empirical operationalization than in Indic culture, where theory a la spiritual knowledge is, in general, more important. The traditional vertical relationship between guru and disciple is central. German intellectual culture, while equally hierarchical, is more concerned with the great philosophies, with the thoughts of the Masters--Hegel, Kant, Marx, for example. True knowledge is about understanding these schools of thought.

How individuals search for information and truth within these cultures also differ. In one the search is for the best university, in another for the best guru, in the third for the best thinker. Of course, modernity has been about eliminating different styles and universalizing them in the university: where knowledge and non-knowledge have come to be defined by technocratic specialists; where dissent is manufactured by hierarchical experts; and, where all differences must be scrutinized by knowledge specialists. However, the structure of the past does not so

easily disappear. For example, in modern secular Indian culture, the traditional structure remains with the State and elite academic institutions now playing the role of guru.

Even avoiding or allowing for civilizational and cultural differences, individuals learn differently. We know that some learn best from doing; others from theoretical lectures; and still others through visual media. Some prefer professorial lectures; others small groups, and some one-to-one interaction. Some are analytic, others are synthetic. Some are intuitive; others sense-based; others reason-based; and still others learn through authority. Some focus on scientia (thinking), others on praxis (transformative action), others on techne (doing) and still others on gnosis (or contemplative seeing). Women and men also know and learn differently. In contrast to the individualistic style of men, research seems to support that women prefer learning in groups, working in win-win situations to achieve desirable outcomes.

However, we are not arguing from an essentialist position either with respect to civilization, ways of knowing, or individual styles. Differences in how we teach and learn are structural, based on our individual biography. Holistic pedagogy, even while it aspires for a unity of discourse, must first unravel these differences. Teaching multi-culturalism then is far more than ensuring that one's educational faculty is from diverse backgrounds. Civilization, language, cultural-national knowing styles, ways of knowing, and gender all confront univocal pedagogy. Pedagogical differences call for a deep pluralism in how we know and learn, for a critical political ecology of interpretation. Are we ready for such efforts? Most of us are not. It is far easier to teach by rote or to assume that one's audience is of one mind than to teach and learn in the context of deep variation. Teaching across civilization and ways of knowing involves constant interaction with self (problematizing one's teaching style) and with students (discerning what is happening within their worldview, in how they create meaning) as well as

the categories of "self" and "student". Dynamic cultural interaction, far more than liberalism can ever hope to aspire towards, is required.

SHARED BASICS

But to only teach differences does not suffice either. The issue is that given the Many that we are today, is there a One that can be learned about? Our futures depend on living such an ethical sensitivity. To begin with, we need to learn/teach the painful struggles we have overcome, the challenges that we have creatively resolved. But we should not only reflect on our own human history but as well include our complex interaction with Nature and the Divine. Our knowing of nature should not be as an Other to us, but as a living and breathing process that exists for itself. The divine should be conceived not as a entity that can be claimed and owned but as the ineffable, as the cosmic inspiration that leads to ever greater love, to ever greater understanding of others. The divine pulls history forward creating a progressive thrust that does not acede to narrow genderisms, nationalisms, culturisms, humanisms, or other exclusive forms of identity.

There are some basics that must be taught irrespective of difference. These are issues of how we treat one another (especially those vastly different from us), how we treat those weaker than ourselves, how we treat nature, and what our relationships with the Unknowable are. Each civilization has basic ethical guidelines. While new technologies such as gene therapy and artificial intelligence confront how we think and learn, they do not stop the more important process of asking what it means to be human. They do not stop the wondering and knowing process. Even as postmodernism relativism undoes the rationality of progress, we are called to new/ancient more inclusive levels of rationality. The true, the good, and the beautiful, or *sat*

(truth as benevolence), *chit* (existence) and *ananda* (endless bliss) in multi-cultural education must not be lost sight of. The routes to them, the meanings we give to them, the frames we know and learn from, however, are broadened. It is this wisdom culture that multi-cultural education seeks to recover and, indeed, reinvent. Deep multi-cultural education envisions a future where the multiplicities that we are, unite in the common neo-humanity that we can be.

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Appendix

EDUCATIONAL PARADIGMS

Religious model:

Education should be about teaching the Truth of God as defined by "our" tradition. Discipline is a prerequisite to Godliness. The teacher must be obeyed and honored. There is a central text that must be memorized. Other texts and perspectives are rarely important except as anthropology.

National/Social Control Model:

Education is about keeping children and young adults off the streets. Education helps prepare individuals to be responsible members of the community and nation. Education helps create a productive labor force so that one's nation can better compete in the world economy.

Bureaucratic Model:

This is based on the industrial factory model: "Ship them in and ship them out". Efficiency, effectiveness and accountability are the code words. Strategic plans often focus on reorganization.

Market Model:

Universities must meet the changing needs of the customer and the customer is always right. Students should be trained for the capitalist market. Technical skills for the real world is the guiding mission.

Humanistic Model:

The university is about the enlightenment ideas of progress and reason. Teachers should bring out the best and noblest qualities (reason) in students. The ancient classics of all cultures, but especially Greek culture, should be taught. Schools can be improved by improving the teacher/student ratio.

Electronic Information model:

Pedagogy should be individually-tailored and delivered through the new technologies such as the Web. Interaction should be between student-student; student-author, and student-teacher. Teachers are primarily guides. Education is life-long based and placeless. Information can rid us of our narrow minds. Technology can and will liberate us.

Spiritual model:

Education is about remembering who we really are, our deeper most selves. Teachers should not only be facilitators but moral, inspiring examples as well. They must nurture students' idealism and help them discover their true mission in life. Education is about learning about the inner self so as to transform society; inner and outer transformation. Technical, classical and spiritual knowledge are important in helping create the balanced person.

Dr. Sohail Inayatullah, The Communication Centre, Queensland University of Technology, Box 2434, Brisbane Q, 4001, Australia. Email: S.Inayatullah@qut.edu.au. He is on the editorial board of *Futures*, *Periodica Islamica* and *Journal of Futures Studies* and is co-editor of the *WFSF Futures Bulletin*. He is the author/editor of numerous books and over a 100 book chapters, journal articles, and magazine pieces. He recently completed a *Reader in Futures Studies*, a multicultural "book" available on the worldwideweb through Southern Cross University, Australia (url: <http://www.scu.edu.au/ewt/Futures/>). Forthcoming with Johan Galtung is *Macrohistory and Macrohistorians: Towards a Grand Theory of Social Change* (Praeger). The author would like to thank Anne Elliott of the Communication Centre for her editorial assistance and James Dator and Rick Slaughter for comments on an earlier version written for *New Renaissance*.