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Dealing with Diversity: Some Propositions from Canadian Education

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Abstract: Increasing diversity in the population is a major issue for educators in North America, presenting political as well as educational challenges. This paper examines Canadian educational policy responses to four kinds of diversity - bilingualism (French/English), multiculturalism, the situation of aboriginal peoples, and the problem of poverty. A description of each issue leads to some speculations or propositions on the nature of diversity and appropriate educational responses to it.

Issues of diversity and the schools' response to them are now a central part of debate about educational policy and practice. However, on the whole we find the treatment of diversity in the literature on educational administration to be sparse, assuming that the phenomenon is a simple one and that relatively straight-forward solutions are available. More illuminating discussions of the nature and impact of diversity can be found in other disciplines.

Among the writers who have influenced our thinking about these issues are Freeman Dyson (1988) in physics and biology, Peter Berger (1976) in sociology, and Richard Rorty (1989) in philosophy. Dyson provides an illuminating discussion of the role of diversity in biology and of the need for diversity in human enterprises, including science. Berger, in discussing contrasting ideological systems, warns of the dangers of elevating our own view of the world over that of others even though he also recognizes the likelihood of our doing so. Rorty, too, takes up these dangers, but he is hopeful that diverse peoples can find solidarity with each other as they become more aware of, and moved by, the corrosive effects of powerlessness and intentional or unwitting cruelty.

Moreover, much of the contemporary discussion is naively utopian, taking the position that diversity is a good thing to be encouraged. We share some of this excitement: diversity is a potential source of vitality, creativity and growth. At the same time, diversity can be a source of conflict which educators and others have difficulty channelling in constructive directions. Educational administrators will need to have a sharp sense of the various aspects of diversity in order to benefit from its potential contribution.

The Meaning of Diversity

People are different in many ways, but not all of those ways matter at any given time. Gregory Bateson spoke of information as "a difference that makes a difference" (Bateson, 1972, p. 451). Human variety can also make a difference -- can matter -- in different ways. In relation to education, some differences are the subject of a great deal of public and political attention (race, language, religion), while others receive much less attention, even though they may be equally important in terms of outcomes (social class).

Differences may also be considered as lying between individuals or between groups. Groups are not homogeneous, and in many cases the variance within groups is larger than the variance between groups. For example, there are as many differences among people of any given ethnic background as there are between people of one background and people of another. Nonetheless, for purposes of this paper we are concerned with differences between groups because these are often the subject of political attention in education.

This paper explores the nature and meaning of diversity in education using four examples from Canada: language, ethnicity and multiculturalism, the unique situation of Aboriginal people, and poverty. Other important issues of diversity, such as religion, are not taken up here. While the discussion bears mainly on implications for education policy, we also consider diversity more generally, as a social and political matter.

A Primer on Canada

Education in Canada is a constitutional responsibility of the provinces which they guard carefully. There is no federal office or department of education; the federal government does have various important involvements in education, but these are spread among many government ministries, usually without a direct link to what occurs in schools.

Questions of separate identity are fundamental to Canada's basic nature, and have always been central threads in its political and social history. Canada is officially a bilingual country (English and French) with a multicultural population. A third element, involving a distinct status for Aboriginal Canadians, is being added to this description. About one quarter of the population, largely though by no means entirely in the province of Quebec, has French as a mother tongue. There is a sizeable anglophone minority in Quebec, just as there are francophone minorities in other parts of the country. At the same time, Canada has a large population, living in all parts of the country, with other mother tongues and cultural backgrounds. Almost forty percent of the population lists an ethnic background other than British or French, and many have neither French nor English as a first language, especially in the larger cities. The approximately one million people of Aboriginal origin create yet a third element in our ethnic make-up, since these original residents of Canada quite properly do not see themselves as being "just another ethnic group".

Fundamental differences in the way Canadians see their country are at the heart of ongoing

constitutional debates, and have much to do with the friction between Quebec and the rest of Canada. Francophone Quebecers particularly tend to see the country as being made up of two equal founding partners, the French and the English. Quebec is regarded in this view as having a special role and status in Canada - half the country rather than one province out of ten. However, in parts of Canada where the francophone population is small and various immigrant groups large, the dominant view is of a country made up of many equal nationalities and of ten equal provinces. Aside from the debate about English and French, Aboriginal people everywhere in Canada have their own claims for constitutional recognition and autonomy.

Official Bilingualism

European Canada was French until 1763, when it was ceded to Britain after the Seven Years War. However, the new British governors agreed to maintain French civil law and religion, and to a certain extent French language and other institutions in Quebec.

In 1867, Canada was created by the voluntary merger of four British colonies. The Constitution they adopted specified that the rights of both French and English linguistic and Catholic and Protestant religious communities as they existed at the time of Confederation would be preserved and protected in the new country. In 1867 religion was more important than language (although the two largely overlapped, with Catholic francophones and Protestant anglophones).

As a result, in several Canadian provinces (Quebec, Ontario, Saskatchewan, and Alberta) there have been two sets of school boards, separate (usually meaning Catholic) and public, supported from public funds, and in one province, Newfoundland, the system is organized along denominational lines. Despite many challenges and some violent political disputes, the educational status quo of 1867 is still substantially intact.

In practice the constitutional rights of minority language groups have not always been respected. The anglophone community in Quebec, because it was large and economically powerful, was able to develop its own schools and universities with public financing. New Brunswick, with a substantial francophone minority, also maintained public schools in both languages. But in other parts of Canada French schools were not so fortunate. Manitoba, for example, eliminated francophone Catholic schools in 1890. Although the decision led to a national political crisis, it remained in force, and it is only in the last twenty years that francophone Manitobans have once again been able to have their schooling in French.

In 1982, a new Constitution and the associated Charter of Rights and Freedoms reaffirmed and strengthened the guarantees made in 1867 to official minority language groups (that is, French or English). Unlike the U.S. Bill of Rights, the Canadian Charter explicitly includes both individual freedoms and collective rights. In the latter category are recognition both of the educational rights of minority language groups and of the unique status of Aboriginal peoples. Also unlike the United States, the Canadian Charter is applicable only to governments and their agencies (such as school boards), but does not apply to private individuals or corporations.

There is debate about the impact that the Charter will have on education. A broad reading of its provisions on such matters as equality rights would have large effects on many aspects of schooling. However Canadian courts have, in the first decade of the Charter, been quite cautious about its interpretation. Even when courts have ruled that existing provisions are contrary to the Charter, they have tended to refer the issues back to legislative bodies for resolution rather than providing clear direction.

In the decade since the Charter was adopted, francophone minorities across Canada have been

working to extend French-language schools in many parts of the country and to secure their communities' management and control of francis schools (that is, schools for students whose family's first language is French; the term 'francis school' is used to distinguish them from French immersion schools, in which instruction is also in French, but the students do not come from francophone backgrounds).

In most provinces, the extension of francophone educational rights has been far from popular. Religious and linguistic educational issues have had tremendous force in Canada from its inception to the present. In Manitoba the provincial government almost fell from power in 1983 and 1984 because of its proposals to extend rights and services to francophones.

Most of the developments in francophone schooling have come as the result of court decisions, primarily using The Charter. Canadian courts have tended not to be prescriptive in dealing with constitutional compliance. Typically, court decisions which have ruled existing arrangements as illegal have then thrown the issue back to the political arena to come up with a new solution. However, with court rulings in hand governments have felt somewhat more able to confront hostile electors since they can argue that they are being forced to make changes by the judiciary.

Current arrangements for minority language schooling in Canada vary across provinces. New Brunswick is the only province which maintains a fully bilingual school system. In Quebec there have been several efforts over the past twenty years to increase the importance of French in the schools. These steps have been seen as part of the larger debate about the status of Quebec and the changing patterns of economic and social power in the province. There can be no doubt that the situation of anglophones in Quebec is less advantageous than it was twenty years ago, and many have left the province as a result. Some of the educational measures taken by Quebec government - for example the requirement that children of immigrants attend school in French regardless of their parents' wishes - have received an angry reaction both from anglophone Quebecers and from Canadians outside Quebec (for a good discussion of this history see Milner, 1986). The fact remains, however, that anglophones in Quebec are still better off educationally than are francophones elsewhere in the country.

In other provinces, provisions for francophone education are emerging only slowly. For example, Ontario, which has the largest number of francophones outside Quebec, first took the step less than a decade ago of adding francophone-only seats on its school boards in districts where there was a significant francophone population. From one to three additional board members were elected by francophone electors only, and this group had sole control over all school board matters having to do with francophone programs. In parts of the province with large francophone populations -- notably the Ottawa area, eastern Ontario and Toronto -- separate school boards have been created to govern francophone schools.

The federal government has played a major role in language education in several ways. It has for the last twenty-five years been a consistent proponent of official minority language education all across the country. Federal ministers have spoken out about the importance of the issue, and the need for respect for minority rights. The federal government has also channelled financial support to minority language education through agreements with provinces in which it reimburses the province for expenditures in this area.

In Canada, official minority language education is a matter of legal right, not simply of educational practice. Language questions are among the most powerful political issues Canadians face. Despite the divisiveness which the issue has created, one result of linguistic duality in Canada has been an awareness (if not always an appreciation) that there are important differences

among Canadians, and that these differences will have to be respected in some form. Even Canadians who are least tolerant of minority language rights recognize that the country could be irrevocably divided by the issue.

Immigration and Multiculturalism

Most Canadians are of European ancestry. The character of immigration to Canada has changed over time Anglo-Saxons, Germans and Irish in the mid-nineteenth century; Slavs, Jews, Mennonites and Icelanders early in this century; Italians, Portuguese, Germans and Poles after World War II, and, more recently, a predominance of immigrants from Asia, the Caribbean, and Latin America. Canada has a significant population whose mother tongue (defined as the language first learned and still understood) is not English, and an increasing proportion of visible minorities (about 6% in 1986). Moreover, large numbers of people who are not recent immigrants still identify strongly with their earlier ethnic origins.

For most of their history, Canadian schools were essentially agents of cultural and linguistic assimilation. Indeed, one rationale for the development of public schooling was assimilating immigrants, a purpose which remained strong until quite recently. Typical is this comment from an inspector of schools in Saskatchewan, in 1918:

The people of foreign countries who come to Canada after having reached maturity...will never become 'true Canadians'...but there is an important duty to perform in seeing that the children of these newcomers are given every opportunity to receive proper training for intelligent citizenship...[the] public school...is the great melting-pot into which must be placed these divers racial groups, and from which will eventually emerge the pure gold of Canadian citizenship. (Cited in Lawr and Gidney, 1973, 134,137).

In 1971, the federal government promulgated the policy of Canada as a multicultural as well as a bilingual country. Since then, schools have struggled with provisions which should be made in response to the multitude of language and ethnic groups in the country.

Across the country and especially in cities, where most of the recent immigrant population lives, there has been an increasing, though still by no means universal tendency to recognize cultural diversity in the schools; to be more accepting of different ways of living which Canadians of different origins may have. The accommodation has taken several forms. First, schools have begun to offer programs in the languages of immigrant communities (called heritage languages). These programs are primarily offered outside of regular school hours, and in many cases are taught by people from the communities who do not have teaching certificates. In some areas, however, schools offer bilingual programs in languages such as German and Ukrainian. Some schools have also tried to reach out to ethnic and minority populations by, for example, translating school communications into various other languages. The Toronto Board of Education recognizes more than 40 languages being spoken by sizeable numbers of its students' parents.

Second, schools have taken on the task of embodying cultural diversity as something to be promoted through the curriculum. Officially, assimilation has been replaced by cultural diversity. All provinces now have units in various parts of the curriculum which are aimed at pointing out to students the multiple origins and cultural backgrounds of Canadians, and promoting appreciation of cultural differences.

But the picture is not just one of steady progress in recognizing diversity. Several commentators have suggested that much of the schools' response is superficial (Cummins, 1988). There is recognition of non-official languages and minority cultures as long as these pose no real challenge to the status quo, either in the school or more generally. But different cultures may have highly divergent views of how to live, posing serious difficulties for schools. For example, parents from some cultures will want stricter standards of behaviour than Canadian schools typically enforce. Or parents may be very critical of school materials which promote views different from theirs. Schools have not generally been accommodating of these differences.

Ethnic communities have become increasingly well organized in Canada, and have developed considerable political influence in some areas. The federal government has played a major role in this development. After the 1971 policy pronouncement, the government created a series of multiculturalism programs, providing financial and other supports to ethnic groups and cultural activities across Canada. Many provincial governments have followed suit, developing their own policies and programs to support multiculturalism.

Still, many controversies over culture continue to occur in schools, often over symbolic things. Ethnic groups have used legal as well as political mechanisms to advance their claims for what they see as equitable treatment. Cases have been brought before human rights commissions in many provinces and, less frequently, before the courts. For example, the Peel Board of Education, a very large district in Ontario, lost a prolonged court battle to prevent a Sikh student from wearing a kirpan (a religious dagger) to school.

Aboriginal Education

In the 1986 Census, some 700,000 people identified themselves as partly or wholly Aboriginal. However, these numbers underrepresent significantly the number of Metis, non-treaty and non-status Aboriginal people in Canada. Aboriginal people are a small part of the population in much of Canada, but reach about 8% of the population in Manitoba and Saskatchewan, and constitute about half the population in The Yukon and the Northwest Territories. Speaking of First Nations, as they are now called in Canada, as a single group is itself misleading; they are distinguished by the diversity of their languages, cultures, religions, local economic opportunities, community laws and local systems of political organization. Over half of Aboriginals now live in urban centres, which presents an entirely different set of issues and challenges for education (McDonald, 1991).

Despite their diversity, the Aboriginal people of Canada have experienced several common problems, including repressive or assimilationist government policies and programs, geographic isolation from the political and economic centres of an increasingly urban society, and, until recently, lack of a unified political identity. In the name of what Canadian historians term "Anglo-conformity", Aboriginal people have been demeaned and devalued, with consequences that can only be described as disgraceful. Although the language seems harsh, it is warranted by the evidence (for example, Frideres, 1983).

The historic relationship of Aboriginal people in Canada is with the federal government through treaties. The Indian Act has regulated the way in which status Indians (as defined in the Act) have been treated by government. In 1969 the push to Anglo-conformity reached its peak when the federal government of the day released a White Paper on Indian Policy. The Indian Act was to be repealed; the special relationships that Indian people had with the Government of Canada would be eliminated; Indians would become full members of Canadian society, but as individuals without historic group recognition or rights. The double meaning of the phrase "White Paper"

was lost on the politicians and civil servants of the time, and can be seen as an indication of the insensitivity to Aboriginal people which then existed.

The understandable outrage of the Aboriginal leadership at these proposals, which were never adopted, has proved to be a marker event in the relationships between First Nations and all levels of government in Canada. It was the immediate impetus behind the movement toward the Indian control of Indian education, and First Nations self-government generally.

This movement has been under way for two decades, with changes occurring unevenly. The first Indian Bands to assume control of their educational systems did so in the mid-1970s. It seems safe to predict that nearly all of Canada's 600 Indian Bands will have taken control of their educational systems by the end of the century. The process has certainly had its difficulties; Aboriginal communities have had to develop for themselves the infrastructure necessary to operate schools and other social systems, all within the context of societies that are caught between their traditional ways of life and current North American practices (Hull, 1990; Henley & Young, 1990).

One of the outcomes of the movement to Aboriginal control of education will be a resurgence of the historic diversity of Canada's First Nations. There are now, for example, about 100 different languages in use in Aboriginal communities. Similarly, different forms for the political organization of education are likely to emerge. In Manitoba, for example, some Bands have elected school boards, others have boards appointed by the local Chief and Council, some have boards made up of clan representatives and others have no school boards at all. Some Bands operate their own schools directly; others have entered into agreements with schools in the provincial system or with the federal government, achieving a level of influence over general educational policy but no direct control over the day-to-day operations of schools.

The historic tendencies toward diversity are likely to be accentuated by the small population and relative isolation of many Aboriginal communities. Education in small Indian and Inuit communities is affected by community processes to a degree that is markedly different from large urban centres; over time it seems reasonable to expect that differences among communities will be reflected in their schools as well.

This also implies that there is likely to be more diversity outside of urban centres than within them. Within urban centres professional controls on schools are strong. Even where urban Aboriginal populations are very substantial, control over the schools is likely to remain with the existing political and bureaucratic structures. This has led urban Aboriginals to press for the creation of separate Aboriginal schools, with extensive Aboriginal involvement in governance; the first such schools now exist in cities such as Calgary and Winnipeg.

The trend toward diversity in Aboriginal education seems to have widespread support, although specific policies are not always as helpful as they might be. Certainly, governments have been anxious to find ways of relating to Aboriginal communities that are less dominating, or at least seen to be less so. The primary drive for change, however, has clearly come from the First Nations political leadership. Concepts such as decentralization and empowerment are currently fashionable in education, and will lend theoretical credibility to the practical aspirations of Aboriginal communities.

If current trends are any indication, diversity is likely to become more apparent in some aspects of Aboriginal education than in others. Languages of instruction, special programs and systems of governance will probably be the most varied, while curriculum and teaching methods will

change least. In curricular terms, few Aboriginal communities have been willing to move away from the official curriculum of the province in which they are located (for example, the Inuit of Baffin Island use the curriculum of Alberta, 4,000 miles away). The attempt to create independent curricula is fraught with political controversy if only because such a move could place the educational credentials of Aboriginal students in doubt.

Social Class and Poverty

Family income has been and continues to be a very strong predictor of how well Canadian children do in school. A great deal of research shows that poverty is related to lower achievement in school, to greater risk of dropping out, and to lower eventual occupational status and income. These relationships are at least as strong as is the relationship between measured ability and achievement.

It should be noted that the tie between poverty and educational outcomes is not uniform across countries. As Richard Jaeger has shown, the link between poverty indicators and school achievement is stronger in North America than it is in Japan or in some European countries (Jaeger, 1992). Low economic status may predict school success more strongly in countries where the disparities between rich and poor are greater. This is a form of double jeopardy; not only are people relatively poorer, but their poverty has more impact on their life chances. That the proportion of poor people in North America has remained significant seems paradoxical in light of the North American reluctance to speak in terms of established social classes. European countries, where class is an integral part of the social and economic vocabulary, have actually been more successful in reducing the degree of economic inequality. It appears that the recognition of one's own class identity may be necessary to find a legitimate role in the society. Perhaps Canada would do well to give more overt attention to the concept of social class and its enduring role, rather than continuing a mythology in which everyone is, or will soon be, in the middle class (except, of course, for the very wealthy).

Given both the very clear link of poverty to later social costs and the considerable documentation on poverty in Canada, it is remarkable that so little policy attention in education has been given to the issue. The federal government has not played a major role in this area. Provincial governments have taken few initiatives to address the impact of poverty on schools and children. Individual schools and school districts are left to grapple with the issue as best they can, which is often not very well.

Nor have schools and districts been particularly imaginative in their approach to poverty. The kinds of efforts which have been made essentially involve tinkering at the margins of the system providing breakfast and lunch, creating special classes for students who change schools very frequently, strengthening remedial programs, and so on. The substance of curriculum and teaching have not been altered on any significant scale. Maynes (1990) has pointed out in his study of Edmonton schools that administrators and school trustees did not see poverty as an issue that was their responsibility, or over which they had very much influence.

This may be partly because poverty is a different kind of identity issue than ethnicity or language. People may attach different meanings to their linguistic or ethnic background; they are, at least potentially, a source of strength and pride, and are increasingly seen as such. Poverty, on the other hand, is often seen as a sign of weakness. Fortunately, the historic stigmas associated with race and language have been diminishing, and negative stereotypes have begun to give way to positive images. The same is not true of poverty, which may carry even more negative implications today than used to be the case.

There is a danger that poverty becomes a rationalization for the failure of schools to help students. Ironically, efforts to recognize the particular problems of poverty by, for example, avoiding testing, can serve to hide the extent of the problem and excuse the failure to educate students properly. Educators and policy-makers may make the assumption that students from poor families cannot learn, so that failure is to be expected, and accepted. However, this is clearly a false and dangerous assumption. As has been noted, the association between poverty and school outcomes is much weaker in other countries. Moreover, there is convincing evidence from many places, especially in the United States, that education programs which address directly problems of poverty can result in dramatically increased success rates for students (for example, Slavin, 1991; Means & Knapp, 1991). In particular, success has come from efforts such as pre-school programs which help parents provide educational support to their children, and from school programs which stress high expectations while providing high levels of support. Canadian post-secondary institutions, although their overall contribution to promoting equal access has not been large, do have some notable success stories which show what can be done where there is a will to assist (Unruh & Levin, 1990).

An important difference between poverty as an issue and the others discussed earlier is that there are no strong educational lobbies focused on the poverty issue. There may be several reasons why this is so. Because poverty is seen as a transient status, people may be less willing to organize around it. Linguistic or ethnic pride have been major factors in the surge of politics in these areas; it is hard to envisage a movement based on pride in being poor. Indeed, poverty is still frequently viewed as a condition to be ashamed of, and which is one's own fault. Not only does this view limit political work around the issue, it also limits the respect or sympathy with which lobbying efforts will be met. The poor also tend to lack the resources to organize. For all these reasons, poverty is largely a forgotten issue in Canadian education policy-making.

Some Propositions about Diversity

Diversity is itself diverse. Each of the issues discussed has a different history, a different set of influences, different policy proposals and political implications. Each issue demands its own strategies and solutions. The "same" issue will vary from setting to setting. Ethnicity and language are major issues in some schools or districts, but hardly noticeable in others. Some groups want inclusion, while others want separation or distinctiveness. Nonetheless, educators are constantly faced with very real issues of how to respond. In the remaining part of this paper, we attempt to lay out some ways of thinking about diversity, which we characterize as "propositions" rather than "conclusions" in the hope that they might be helpful in framing our responses.

1. Diversity is likely to be of increasing importance in education. The Canadian population is becoming more diverse in various ways. More significantly, groups of people are more willing to organize themselves around what they see as their common interests, and to use judicial, legislative and political vehicles to advance those interests, rather than assuming that they will be looked after by the powers that be. Some may decry what is sometimes called the "rise of special interest groups" and the decline of concern for the common good. However it may be at least as appropriate to see such organization as the reasonable response of people to economic and political systems which have not given them sufficient opportunity. For most of our history, the common good has in practice meant the good of those who already enjoy income, power and social status.

Insofar as education has as one of its goals making people more aware of their situation and more

conscious of themselves as actors able to affect the world, we should perhaps see the increasing pressure on schools (and other institutions) as a positive outcome of education. People are more aware of what they think they want and more willing to work to obtain it. That is, on the whole, a positive development.

2. Diversity is not new, but our understanding of it and policy approaches to it have changed significantly. For much of Canadian history the dominant policy has been to limit or suppress diversity in the interests of a presumed commonality. The change in recent years is to think that perhaps some degree of diversity should be promoted or encouraged. Encouraging diversity has the potential to bring important benefits, but it also raises a whole new set of problems which we really haven't thought through. An essential question is how far the "tolerance" (a word which minorities dread) of diversity will extend.

As Tinder (1991) has pointed out,

There must be tolerance for beliefs we consider erroneous and actions we deem immoral. Tolerance must extend far enough to be dangerous. Otherwise it is a mere formality...and not a policy that accepts important disagreements...in an effort to make room for abounding life and serious communication. (p.180)

So far in Canada we have been more inclined to do the easy thing, and to recognize differences that do not change the status quo very much. Having multicultural festivals in schools with ethnic foods and costumes is a recognition of diversity, but hardly one that threatens the status quo. Giving political control of schools to various ethnic groups is much more significant and equally much more contentious.

3. The "successful" response to diversity may lead to less diversity, not more. Historically, language, ethnicity and social class have been linked, so that a particular ethnic identity also brought with it a particular economic and social status. An important accomplishment of the rights movements of the past few decades has been to begin to remove these links. As groups see their needs for identity, recognition, and success being met, their demands are likely to decline, or to become the same as anyone else's demands. The ability to participate fully in the economic and social life of the country is, we believe, more an issue of class than of ethnicity or religion (though class and ethnicity may be connected), and will increasingly be seen as such as there is more responsiveness to other aspects of ethnic or linguistic identity.

However there is far to go to achieve this state. So far, some groups have been far more successful in obtaining political recognition than they have in improving their economic conditions and social status. For example, Aboriginal people are now consulted all the time about policy measures that affect them, but they continue to have very high rates of poverty and unemployment.

4. The essential tension facing schools is how to combine diversity with solidarity in an appropriate way. The very notion of a society or country implies some degree of agreement about issues in laws, institutions, values. Yet these are precisely the items which diversity brings into the spotlight of debate and dissent. Individual schools and entire societies will face issues of diversity and will have to develop ways of dealing with them.

Whether we can be successful at this task is unknown; diversity may ultimately not be manageable in any real sense. The fact is that we don't really know what to do whether to accommodate differences to a greater degree within common settings, to push conformity more,

to create separate settings for different groups, or to find some other approach altogether. Each strategy is controversial and seems to be problem-laden. Diversity appears to fit well with the idea of a "wicked problem", one which is ongoing and has not evident solution (Rittel & Webber, 1973).

5. Despite the rhetoric, schools are not well adapted to dealing with issues of diversity. Their history is one of acting as integrating (some might say homogenizing) institutions, designed to reduce differences. Whether they can take on a very different role is at best an open question; it is always a difficult undertaking to shift an institution from one purpose to a very different one.

Schools' current responses to diversity are being driven primarily by external political pressures. Those constituencies which have been able to mobilize have had a response, with French Immersion being a case in point. This is quite different from a response based on a coherent view of educational purposes and needs. The adjustments which have been made are primarily marginal or token, involving increments to the curriculum, or additional programs for particular groups. Where attempts are made to alter basic structures, such as the abolition of primary grades in British Columbia or destreaming secondary schools in Ontario, they typically do not succeed, and often end up being reversed. The essential aspects of classroom and school organization remain largely unchanged and make it very difficult to do anything else, even if the will existed.

A particularly difficult problem is the issue of "standards." It is one thing to say that there will be curricular differences to meet the needs of different subpopulations; schools have always made these kinds of adjustments. But it could be argued that the critical function of schools is providing credentials. Is it possible to have differing credentials? Experience suggests that credentials created to accommodate differences, such as vocational diplomas, quickly take on inferior status. The continuing dominance of the university entrance qualification in Canadian schools, despite fifty years of efforts to change it, testifies to the powerful effect of certification standards on schools.

Yet to respond to pressures of diversity, schools will have to rethink many basic assumptions; business as usual may not be possible. Diversity poses fundamental challenges. Students cannot all be treated "the same"; professional authority is thrown into question; the legitimacy of governing structures such as school boards will be argued. Full recognition of diversity suggests not only changes in curricula, but also in basic instructional approaches and in school organization. We are nowhere near achieving this.

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