

## Promoting Multiculturalism through a Decolonising Process

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**Abstract:** The term multiculturalism is defined, and the emergence of policies of multiculturalism in countries of immigrants and Native communities, such as the U.S., Australia and Canada is discussed. This paper discusses the historical obstacles in terms of colonialism and neoliberalism that challenge the fostering of multicultural education in contemporary societies. To empower the Aboriginal people and to achieve real multicultural education, there is a need for carrying out a decolonising process, adopting critical pedagogy and developing global education.

**Keywords:** Multicultural education, colonising, decolonising, global education

### The development of multiculturalism and multicultural education

The term multiculturalism has been defined as “an approach to teaching and learning based upon democratic values and beliefs and that affirms cultural pluralism within culturally diverse societies in an interdependent world” (Bennet, 2003, p.14). Such a term emerged after a long struggle of the indigenous people who gained the support of some intellectuals and academics in different western countries including the United States, Australia and Canada. Historically, the Aboriginal people, as well as other ethnic minorities, have suffered from colonial policies and practices of the consecutive governments of these countries (Abdi, 2015; Napier & Majhanovich, 2013). Multiculturalism has been interpreted and implemented in different ways by different countries (Bridges, 2009) depending on the historical evolution and development of the term in each country.

As an example, in the U.S. multiculturalism has emerged from a history of racial conflict and identity politics (Bridges, 2009). In Canada and Australia, it

has been developed to address the different cultural groups that compose the modern societies in these countries. These groups practise their values, traditions and life styles that are usually different from the mainstream culture. For instance, the policy of multiculturalism in Canada is traced back to 1971 (Wood, 2005), when it was developed to decrease race, ethnicity, class and gender divisions through helping students acquire knowledge, attitudes and skills to become active citizens in modern democratic pluralistic societies (Banks & Banks, 2001; Valdez, 1999). Similarly, it was brought into light in Australia in 1973; however, it was not officially implemented before 1987 (Bingxun & Yanchun, 2010). In fact, it was considered as pejorative during the period of the conservative government, from 1996-2007, but it was brought back again to the political arena in 2008 (Bridges, 2009).

### **Historical obstacles for promoting multicultural education**

Historically, the Aboriginal people have suffered from colonial policies and practices of the consecutive governments of western countries including the United States, Australia and Canada. According to Abdi (2015), colonial education has intentionally constructed false knowledge about the natives aiming to deform the identities of the colonised in order to facilitate the process of colonising them and establishing superior-inferior relationships.

The attitudes of the governments of these countries towards minorities, mainly the indigenous people, stem from the colonial nature of these countries and the hegemony of their culture and language (Binda & Lall, 2013; Ladner, 2009; Napier & Majhanovich, 2013). As a result of the colonial policies, the history and culture of the local people were suppressed and their languages were eradicated.

Colonial institutions were also imposed through creating the Band councils for governance (Binda & Lall, 2013; Ladner, 2009). Ladner (2009) describes the policies and practices of former Canadian governments as political genocide since they were “designed to eliminate indigenous sovereignty, indigenous governments and indigenous constitutional orders” (p. 90). These policies resulted in not only destroying the local culture but also in sparking many social problems, such as high rates of unemployment, violence, alcoholism and starvation. To empower the local communities, local people should rebuild their self-determination and should take control of their affairs in the community building process. According to Ladner (2009), good governance requires self-administration and collective responsibility to address the needs, aspirations and demands of the communities. Therefore, the power should be shifted to the local communities to run their affairs (Binda & Lall, 2013).

Globalisation benefitted the rich northern countries not only economically but also culturally and technologically. On the other hand, it helped in devastating the immediate lives of indigenous populations (Abdi, Shultz & Pillary, 2015) and helped create neo-colonial and neoliberal ideologies that “delegitimate the needs and aspirations of marginalised populations” (p.3).

The need for structural change has been demanded by both Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal leaders. Identity construction in the face of the dominant discourses that globalisation and internationalisation have forged is needed to counter policies and practices of neo-colonialism and neoliberalism (Napier & Majhanovich, 2013). Therefore, a decolonising process is needed to achieve justice and quality (Abdi, 2015; Binda & Lall, 2013; Napier & Mjhanovich, 2013). The Chief Ernest Wesley (1993) defined decolonising as a process of rebuilding self-determination and community wellness (as cited in Binda & Lall, 2013). Community control recognises the interdependence of the home, the school and community (Binda and Lall, 2013). Such recommendations mean transforming the system from centralised to a decentralised one.

Binda & Lall (2013) discussed the reported recent positive impacts of decolonising indigenous education in Canada claiming that the changes in the education system required increased community involvement in terms of political control, relevant curricula, culturally based instruction and measurement methods which resulted in increased attendance, participation and graduation. However, implementing community control involved some difficulties. For example, handing over the power to untrained local staff posed a difficulty. The control over the education of the Aboriginal should have been granted gradually. Pre-requisite training and skills should have been provided to guarantee the utmost success. In addition, increased funding is essential for continuing the decolonisation process successfully.

### **The role of education in fostering multiculturalism**

Education has an essential role in personal and social development. It has been used as an instrument of domination across the entire colonial empires. Imposing an alien curriculum did not only harm the first nations but also the Canadian system as a whole (Binda & Lall, 2013). On the one hand, the language, culture and identity of the indigenous people were systematically eradicated. On the other hand, the majority of the White Canadian people had been unaware of these injustices for a long period of time. As a result, they were indirectly part of these oppressing policies and practices. To conclude, colonial education and the schooling system were ineffective, inappropriate and irrelevant to the lives of the local. Moreover, it established White supremacy and inferiority of the local cultures.

The attempts of assimilating the Aboriginals to the Europeans by imposing the language and culture of the colonisers not only failed but also resulted in damages (Binda & Lall, 2013). For example, the residential schools in Canada had been described as the horrible institutions where the Aboriginal kids were uprooted from their families and their natural surrounding and forced to reside there (Binda and Lall, 2013; Cherubini & Hudson, 2008; Napier & Majhanovich, 2013). Binda and Lall (2013) also talk about the negative role of the churches in the process of destruction of the natives because they were willing to comply with these policies by Christianising the Aboriginal people.

As a result of these colonisation policies, Aboriginal education in Canada, for example, suffers from lower quality teaching, inadequate funding and lack of local staff members. Teachers report that a significant proportion of students perform one or more grades below grade level (Towards Excellence: A Report on Education in the NWT, 2008). Improvements in education success rates for First Nations students have been reported in recent years; however, significant gaps remained, and they are in effect on the rise (Drummond & Rosenbluth, 2013).

Allocating adequate funding to Indigenous schools in Canada is a complex process since it is provided by both the federal and the provincial governments (Drummond & Rosenbluth, 2013). First Nations schools are funded under an outdated Band Operated Funding Formula (BOFF) created in 1987 (AFN School Survey Results, 2011). BOFF does not include essential education components such as technology, First Nations language immersion, sports and recreation, student data management systems or libraries. In addition, it does not consider other factors like populations who live in isolated small communities (AFN School Survey Results, 2011).

High school graduation adds to the challenges faced by the First Nations communities, especially for those living on reserves. Statistics show that 61% of Aboriginal people, and 68% of Inuit Peoples living in rural or remote communities did not complete high school (Statistics Canada, 2010). High school graduation in 2011 was summarised as follows: 35.5% in the reserves and 78% for the whole population (Drummond & Rosenbluth, 2013).

Despite the challenges faced by First Nations, progress is being made and many successes have been identified within their schools in terms of academic achievement, language and cultural programming, student attendance, student leadership, sports and recreation (Chiefs Assembly on Education, 2012). The improvements that are evident have occurred in part because of efforts to decolonise indigenous education (Binda & Lall, 2013).

Decolonising policies and practices are needed to empower marginalised minorities in western societies and “to endow their possibilities vis-à-vis

dominant members of their societies” (Abdi, 2015, p.2). The advocates of decolonisation call for fostering authentic solidarity from the hegemonic groups in western societies. Authentic sympathy requires active involvement in decolonising processes within the self and with the oppressed communities. Such kind of solidarity requires new arrangements in terms of power and quality, the need for capacity building, decision making and voice and representation. In addition, more inclusive ideas and multi-locational perspectives are required to facilitate to live together and learn from each other at both the individual and community levels (Abdi, 2015).

Education should be employed as “a vehicle for transformation and empowerment in independence struggles, post-colonial development and minority rights movements within societies” (Abdi, 20015, p.1). Napier & Majhanovich (2013) call for resisting the imposed educational mandates including the hegemony of English and others that have caused the destruction of local identities, disempowerment and the denial of equal access to education. The resistance to these policies should be done through raising the awareness of social, political, economic and environmental issues that impact the life of people all over the world (Abdi, Shultz & Pillay, 2015).

To respond to the multi-directional lives of citizens and communities, Abdi (20015) emphasises the need for redesigning and restructuring global education with multi-locational knowledge and cultural pluralism claiming that the current education in the Aboriginal communities resulted from neoliberalism, and describes it as unidirectional, disempowering, and deculturing because neoliberalism is characterised by continued injustices and reproduction of harm (Shultz, 2013). Abdi, Shultz and Pillary (2015) emphasise the need for global citizenship education to raise the awareness of the wide public to the consequences of the colonising and neoliberalising policies against the marginalised groups in the world, especially in western societies, and to demand justice for marginalised and oppressed communities. They highlight the need for reclaiming global social injustice and citizenship of education that will support ideas of inclusive citizenship.

### **Multicultural education as part of the decolonising process**

As part of the decolonising process, multicultural education should be designed to eradicate the policies of cultural hegemony of the colonial powers and to transform the education system to an inclusive one, to include the history, language, culture and contribution of the indigenous people (Abdi, Shultz and Pillary, 20015; Napier & Majhanovich, 2013). It should develop understanding and competence to live together in terms of understanding not only themselves, but also others, their history and culture (Carneiro & Draxler, 2008). It could also develop opportunities of cooperation and sharing. This type of understanding could be carried out by projects to teach

“fundamentals of democracy, equality, rights that make for societies [places] where people can live together” (p. 154). According to Carneiro & Draxler, contact and experience are also important to achieve this. Accepting students and recognising them as different members ethnically, racially, religiously or culturally is better than seeking assimilation to these groups (Jackson, 2010).

Teachers are seen as agents who can make the necessary changes (Bridges, 2009) in terms of developing competences based on the need and interest to live together in mutual respect (Carneiro & Draxler, 2008). As part of the decolonising process, educational institutions are expected to foster inclusion and to provide support to the individuals and communities that have been oppressed for many decades. To achieve that, a reform in terms of teacher identity and attitudes is needed (Napier & Majhanovich, 2013). Constructing a positive identity among local teachers is essential to let them feel that identity, culture and language are dominant rather than sub-dominant. On the other hand, teachers from the White majority are expected to change their negative attitudes toward the Aboriginal people to positive ones recognising their culture and contribution and working to achieve justice and equality to these oppressed people. However, the lack of qualified teachers who possess a strong degree of proficiency for Aboriginal Languages and Aboriginal studies is a major concern (Staying in School: Engaging Aboriginal Students, 2010). In many instances across Canada, courses with Aboriginal subject matter are being taught by unqualified teachers outside their area of expertise. While Aboriginal teachers are needed in Aboriginal schools, few Aboriginal students are graduating from high school and entering postsecondary institutes for further education (Binda & Lall, 2013). In addition, recruiting teachers and retaining them in First Nations schools are not easy tasks because such teachers are usually recruited from other parts of Canada.

Since teachers are expected to lead the change, they first should be aware of the colonial policies and practices and their implications in the current situation among the indigenous people. Secondly, they should be required to “be willing to deconstruct their own existing knowledge, explore alternative perspectives critically, research and include voices and ideas other than those traditionally presented to us, and to address their own roles in perpetuating racism and oppression” (Cumming-McCann, 2004, p.11). In addition, developing ethnic and cultural literacy could be achieved by emphasising the history and contribution of ethnic groups, replacing the biased images of these groups with more accurate and significant information, developing social inclusion and inclusive citizenship, and managing diversity through formal initiatives in the federal provincial and municipal domains (Leman & Dewing, 2006).



Curriculum could also be considered as a critical factor for enhancing quality of education and learning achievements (Nan-Zhao, 2010). Abdi (2015) discusses the deployment of local cultures, knowledges and cultural practices to counterweigh the colonising nature of current global citizenship education. According to Napier & Majhanovich (2013), justice has been sought by allowing the Aboriginal communities to take charge of their own education systems through the decentralisation process. As a result, these communities have reintroduced elements of their language and culture. Establishing a museum and cultural centres in their regions is a good example of the deployment of local cultures. The aim is to educate the Aboriginal people as well as non-Aboriginal neighbours about the history and culture of the indigenous people.

Since community values contradict the competitive characteristic of the western world, changes should include “increased community participation, increased level of political control, development of new education systems, new and relevant curricula, culturally appropriate instructional and measurement methods focusing on Aboriginal perspectives, increased attendance, participation and graduation rates” (Binda & Lall, 2013, p.1).

Curriculum change is also required for successful educational experiences in the 21<sup>st</sup> century that are based on inquiry and reorganisation. It could be implemented through integrating values and principles for learning to live together in teaching all subjects at school. While Aboriginal teachers are needed in Aboriginal schools, few Aboriginal students are graduating from high school and entering postsecondary institutes for further education (Binda & Lall, 2013).

According to Binda & Lall (2013), adopting a comprehensive curriculum and providing systematic cultural support has not only empowered the Aboriginal pupils in Canada, but also has acquainted the teachers with expanded knowledge of the local culture in terms of local people perspectives regarding nature, fire, healing and other practices. In this way, teachers are more knowledgeable and skilled in dealing with the community members in general and the pupils in particular.

### **The need for developing global education**

Abdi, Shultz and Pillary (2015) emphasise the need for global citizenship education to raise the awareness of the general public to the consequences of the colonising and neoliberalising policies against the marginalised groups in the world, especially in western societies and to demand justice for marginalised and oppressed communities. They highlight the need for reclaiming global social injustice and citizenship of education that will support ideas of inclusive citizenship adopting critical pedagogy concerning

the decolonising process. Critical pedagogy recognises the hegemony of the colonising policies and their consequences on the lives of the Indigenous peoples aiming to develop consciousness to social justice. To accomplish this, educators as agents are expected to create the necessary change for empowering the Aboriginal and to include them in the education system.

There is a need for creating an education that it is based on “democratic principles, equality and impartial justices” Malet & Majhanovich (2015, p.1). It requires adopting inclusive and democratic approaches that challenge the inequalities and injustices in the modern societies (Mclauphin &Whatman, 20015). Such kind of education requires educators to be reflective. Being reflective means considering actions through the perspective of their importance, evaluating the actions, and seeking possible solutions or alternatives (Ferraro, 2000). It also involves challenging and questioning current beliefs and assumptions (Murray & Kujundzic, 2005). Therefore, educators are required not only to question the colonising policies that have led to the hegemony of the White language and culture and the destruction of the Indigenous cultures but also to adopt inclusive pedagogies aiming to empower the oppressed people.

To do so, Mclaughlin &Whatman (2015) suggest including Indigenous knowledge and perspectives in the curriculum in order to engage educators “in restorative pedagogical justice” (Mclaughlin, Whatman, & Sharma-Brumer, 2013, p.69). Despite the fact that Indigenous knowledge, practices and perspectives are in constant conflict with Western knowledge systems, they should be included as part of the decolonising process (Binda & Lall, 2013; Mclaughlin & Whatman, 2015).

Integrating human values in education could also be part of the critical pedagogy since they determine human being u in society. According to Pinkley (2012), many parents and teachers acknowledge that classroom instruction of literacy and maths. is not enough, and it should be accompanied with values that would ultimately help in producing ethical and responsible members of society. For example, Shaaban (2005) claims that moral education gives the students the chance “to think in informed and reflective ways about controversial moral issues” (p.201). In fact, he encourages moral education in pluralistic societies to educate pupils of their rights and duties, discussing differences and making informed decisions.

## Conclusions

The emergence of the policy of multiculturalism in different countries has been discussed. It has been shown that it emerged as a result of the realities of modern societies that are constituted of immigrants and First Nations like the



US, Canada and Australia aiming to manage diversity, decrease racial and ethnic division and acquire knowledge and skills to become active citizens in modern pluralistic societies. However, these policies and their implications for the native populations did not stem from acknowledging the political and social genocides that indigenous people experienced as a result of colonising countries. For example, the Canadian model of dealing with the multicultural reality was also criticised in terms of not addressing the real cause of the harsh realities and the education level and needs in the communities.

A historical background of the oppressing policies and their results on the lives of the Indigenous has been discussed. Achieving social inclusion requires acknowledging the injustices and the oppressive policies of the past and adopting critical pedagogy, raising awareness for the injustices, empowering the Aboriginal, and including their knowledge and perspectives.

Multicultural pedagogy can be achieved as part of the decolonising process. As such, it is necessary to adopt a critical pedagogy that starts with acknowledging the injustices as a result of the colonial policies. This will lead to a deeper understanding of the pedagogy of the oppressed that resulted in identity and language losses in many cases.

The decolonizing processes can be fully and successfully achieved with strong political backing to support adopting of a critical pedagogy, involving Aboriginals and embedding the Indigenous knowledge and perspectives.

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