# BALANCING DIVERSITY AND COMMON SOCIALIZATION: COMPARING EDUCATIONAL DEBATES IN INDIA AND QUEBEC

**Marie Mc Andrew**, Professor, Department of Educational Administration and Foundations, and Chair holder, Canada Research Chair on Education and Ethnic Relations, Université de Montréal.

**Najma Akhtar**, Professor and Head, Department of Training and Capacity Building in Education, National University of Educational Planning and Administration, New Delhi.

## INTRODUCTION

Given its intensity and universality, schooling plays a major role in the production and the redefinition of ethnic boundaries and cultural markers. In this regard, there are many tensions between and within two central mandates carried out by school systems in modern pluralistic societies: the linguistic and cultural reproduction of majority and minority communities, and the common but pluralistic socialization of all students. Thus, everywhere debates thrive on the curriculum and structural arrangements most susceptible to producing the kind of citizens – and citizenship – deemed favourable by different segments of society (Mc Andrew, 2003).

In this article we compare three controversies that have touched India and Quebec in the past ten years regarding the teaching of history, values and religious education, and the legitimacy of separate minority institutions. Our objective is to explore the lessons that both societies can learn from one another on the management of diversity in education.

## HISTORY TEACHING: WHOSE MEMORY? FOR WHICH PURPOSE?

In both societies, the most visible debate focused on the teaching of history in secondary schools, with regard to the definition of what should be taught as "national history" and the purposes of such a curriculum in a pluralistic country. Traditionally, in India, textbooks have been influenced by successive Congress Party governments which put forward a non-communal, multicultural, although rather vague view of national history. However, from 2000 to 2005, with the rise to power of the BJP and the later return of the Congress, students were exposed to three successive, largely "single narrative" curricula where the centrality of majority community components and the place of minorities in national identity varied greatly. The same was true for the more or less nationalistic interpretation of various historical events (NCERT 2005). At the same time, experts accused each other of the worst sins in national newspapers, as well as on many other forums. These spectacular swings were often done with little regard for teachers and students, who were largely expected to passively adapt to these contradictions without much questioning.

More recently, a greater sensibility to that issue among curriculum developers has brought about the introduction of a multi-perspective and more active approach to history teaching through the exposure of students to documents reflecting competing visions (NCERT, 2005). But this evolution has also generated some resistance, especially around historical political cartoons deemed offensive by various groups (Roy, 2012).

In Quebec, ever since education reforms at the end of the 1990s, constructivism stressing the development of skills and critical thinking, as well as the active involvement of students in the learning process, has been the dominant paradigm in the whole program (MEQ, 1997). But when these principles were applied to Quebec's high school history curriculum in 2005, a major controversy erupted (Mc Andrew, 2012). A perceived obliteration of the traditional Francophone "resistance" narrative, a greater space devoted to native and immigrant contributions, and an emphasis put on the mastery of historical methods by students were denounced by many nationalist intellectuals and spokespersons as a "multicultural plot." The association of history teaching with citizenship education also raised concerns that formerly contentious issues would be downplayed for the sake of promoting the harmony of current inter-

group relations. Opposition was intense enough to prompt a partial retreat on the part of the Department of Education, which produced in 2006 a revised version of the curriculum, that remained pluralistic and disciplinary, but put more weight on political history and traditional elements of French Canadian collective memory.

Without dwelling here on specific contents or events, an analysis of arguments brought forward by opposing (Mc Andrew, 2009) sides shows that many theoretical, ethical and curricular issues raised in one society have a clear resonance in the other. Common controversial questions include:

- When does "genuine" Indian or Quebec history begin and when does it end?
- What criteria should be used to determine the respective weight of various historical periods in the curriculum?
- To what extent should the core group at the center of the nation (*i.e.* respectively Hindus and French Canadians) *own* history and decide who should be included or not in the common narrative?
- How long does it take for groups who could be considered as *former colonizers* (*i.e.* Muslims in India or Anglophones in Quebec) to belong?
- Should minority groups develop their own curriculum? If not, what control should they exercise on what is said about them in common textbooks?

What is also striking in both debates is the extent to which many citizens still hold a positivist conception of "historical truths" and a generally limited interest for pedagogical issues. Moreover, while in Quebec this element is discussed more often, until recently in India little attention has been paid to the opportunity that competing historical narratives represent for the building of historical skills among students. The necessity to balance the two competing goals of history teaching, an instrument of nation-building and an opportunity to develop critical thinking among students, has also been more widely addressed, if not resolved, in Quebec.

## MORAL AND RELIGIOUS EDUCATION: WHAT ROLE IS THERE FOR RELIGIOUS AND CULTURAL VALUES?

The relevance of two new courses developed largely in response to concerns about the loss of the sense of duty and responsibility, as well as the lack of religious culture among youth has also been the focus of an important social debate in both societies. In India, *Value Education* was introduced in a largely secular school system by the BJP as a compulsory subject in 2000, prompting the development of a wide variety of curriculum and pedagogical material reflecting the cultural, religious and ethical heritage of India, especially its Hindu components (NRCVE 2004). Proponents of this movement argued that the mere teaching of constitutional principles was not enough to insure a sense of belonging and a commitment to national identity among students. They also denounced as a western conception of social cohesion strict secularism and the limits it sets on the transmission of religious values. Meanwhile, opponents saw this *Saffronization of education* as an undue attempt to impose Hindu values on religious minorities and as a withering of the commitment of the Indian State to foster the transmission of common secular values to all students. Over the five years of its implementation, the *Value Education* course evolved significantly from *saffron to rainbow*, with the development of more multi-denominational perspectives and teaching materials. Nevertheless, positions were so entrenched that almost nothing of the approach survived the coming back to power of the Congress Party, and the Department of Education is now developing a new citizenship education program.

The origins of Quebec's *Religious Ethics and Culture Program*, introduced in 2007, are quite opposite (Bouchard & Taylor, 2008). It was one of the main tools to ease the transition from a denominational school system (Catholic and Protestant) to a secular one, more adapted to the growing multi-religious and non-religious sectors of Quebec society. Instead of teaching *a single* specific religion, schools would now teach *about* all religions, even if a larger place would be devoted to native spirituality and Judeo-Christian beliefs. This choice was justified by the stronger historical impact and present sociological role of these faiths in Quebec, which echoes some of the "reality check" arguments of the supporters of *Value Education* in India. This compromise is considered by many to be a promising avenue between denominational education, strict secularism (which precludes any teaching of religion) and pure multiculturalism (which advocates treating religious traditions on an equal footing regardless of their centrality in a given society). Nevertheless, the program is at the centre of an ideological war. The main theme among traditional nationalists is identity loss linked to the lessening of religious practice and the consequent expectation that schools act as counter balancing forces in this regard (or at least do not, for example by teaching that all religions are of equal value, interfere with the religious influences of parents). Resistance also stems from proponents of a strict secular perspective who want teachings to be limited to ethics. Thus, the future of the program is uncertain within the current context of political transition in Quebec.

While circumstances are quite different, debates in India and Quebec clearly address similar questions regarding the legitimacy of firm values that reflect a specific

historical trajectory to be transmitted by schools in a multicultural and multi-religious society (Bourgeault *et al.*, 2002). Extreme answers are either unrealistic (*i.e.* a neutral school that equally reflects all cultures and religions, and transmits only civic values) or are ethically unacceptable (*i.e.* a school subjected to the reproduction of the majority community, at the expense of individual rights and those of minority groups). Therefore, it comes as no surprise that in both contexts, programs seeking to strike an appropriate balance in this regard are still very much *works in progress*.

## MINORITY INSTITUTIONS: ASSETS OR OBSTACLES IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF A PLURALIST SOCIETY?

A last issue reflecting the tensions between cultural reproduction and common forms of socialization shared by India and Quebec is the legitimacy of state-funded minority institutions in a pluralist society. India's Constitution clearly supports the right of religious minorities (mostly Muslims, Christians, and Sikhs) to create and manage their own institutions. That position is linked to a strong normative commitment, but also to the specific socio-political situation that existed at the time of Independence. Moreover, some safeguards with regard to respect for the common curriculum and access by students and teachers of various backgrounds to such institutions have minimized potential contradictions with the larger goal of nation-building through common and pluralistic socialization (Government of India, 2006). Nevertheless, minority institutions are criticized by various sectors of society. Some minority spokespersons argue that this apparently successful compromise has actually been achieved at the expense of their institutional completeness and their capacity to control the very development of their schools.

At the other end of the ideological spectrum, nationalist leaders have denounced the fact that the right to set up religious institutions is limited to minorities and that this involves unfair treatment of the Hindu majority. Finally, secular media and public opinion have sometimes expressed fears that religious institutions are used to spread fundamentalism, a claim largely unsubstantiated by research. Furthermore, India's record for ensuring the compatibility of structural pluralism with equality of opportunity has not been impressive, especially with regard to the plight of underprivileged minorities, such as the Muslims. However, on that front, minority-controlled institutions are not doing worse than mainstream schools, and interesting programs to maximize their positive impact have been implemented. These include the scheme for the modernization of madrasah and better mechanisms to recognize the equivalence of qualifications received by their students (Akhtar and Narula, 2010).

Quebec stands out among Canadian provinces for its rather generous funding of religious schools, catering to the needs of families from the dominant Catholic and Protestant communities, as well as from minority groups (Jewish, Greek orthodox, Armenian and Muslim). Quebec inter-culturalism should actually incline it to be less lenient on that front than its multiculturalists' counterparts. Nevertheless, this choice was motivated by historical and political factors, such as the need to pacify private Catholic schools in the 1960s, when the Quebec State took over the responsibility of secondary education. Other factors included the desire to increase education in French within some religious communities, as well as the absence of a genuinely secular school system until the end of the 1990s (Proulx, 1999). The choice is also associated with clear requirements that such institutions follow the mainstream curriculum and teach cultural and religious content only as supplementary activities. Although the Quebec Charter of Rights and Freedoms allows minority institutions to select students and teachers on the basis of a specific religious affiliation, most of them hire a substantive number of teachers who do not belong to the religious community, and would be willing to admit students from other groups if such request was made.

Nevertheless, the legitimacy of separate schooling for religious minorities is a recurrent debate, centered around Jewish schools who represent half of such institutions catering for a large proportion of Jewish children (unlike the fewer Islamic schools attended by a small proportion of Muslim students). Both nationalists and leftist opponents voice concerns regarding the religious *brainwashing* of students attending religious schools, a claim that is also largely not confirmed by research findings. The most convincing argument in this respect is the lack of common socialization between children of different backgrounds—or at least between majority and minority children, as these institutions are often multicultural—and its consequences on the social integration of religious minorities. The newly elected Parti Québécois proposed in its platform the abolition of public funding for such schools, rendering their future uncertain.

Although there are common elements in the debate surrounding separate minority institutions in India and Quebec, differences on this last issue appear greater than with other topics discussed in this article. First, an overall assessment of religious institutions and attitudes toward such institutions is much more positive in India, which reflects a stronger commitment to religious pluralism, but also puts less emphasis on a united school space in this emerging multicultural country. In that country, such schools also play a role in providing access to education and fighting educational inequalities among

disenfranchised sectors of society, contributing to their higher legitimacy than in Quebec, where they are often seen as pursuing only a mandate for the reproduction of cultural and religious identities.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

As can be seen by this comparison of debates regarding the balancing of diversity and common socialization in Indian and Quebec educational contexts, collaboration could prove very fruitful both at the policy and research levels. In both contexts, issues at stake, policies and programs put forward, as well as strengths and weaknesses exhibit enough common trends and specificities to warrant increased exchanges.

It would first appear that Indian educational decision-makers and program developers could benefit from curricular expertise from Quebec with regard to handling the teaching of a contested national history, especially the use of that complexity as an asset in the development of critical thinking and citizenship skills among students. The two societies may also come to a better understanding of their respective attempts to develop moral and ethical education programs, where the religious component of their historical trajectory and their current pluralistic situation are equally taken into account, including the origins of resistance to such an endeavour. Finally, the openness of Indian society to minority institutions, as well as their generally favourable impact on the preservation of minority cultures and on the sense of allegiance to Indian society should also be studied with greater depth in Quebec, where attitudes in this regard are generally more negative. Increased exchange would favour, on both sides, the development of a more critical perspective on the shortcomings of one's society and schools, as well as a renewed questioning of dominant national assumptions regarding ethno-cultural diversity and education.

### REFERENCES

Akhtar, N. & Narula, M. [2010] The role of Indian madrasahs in providing access to mainstream education to Muslim minority students: a west Bengal experience. *The Education of Minority Muslim Students: Comparative Perspective. Journal of International Migration and Integration (JIMI)*, 11(1): 91-107.

Bouchard, G. & Taylor, C. [2008] *Building the Future. A Time for Reconciliation.* Report of the Consultation Commission on Accommodation Practices Related to Cultural Differences (CCAPRCD). Quebec.

Bourgeault, G., Gagnon, F., Mc Andrew, M. & Pagé, M. [2002] Recognition of cultural and religious diversity in the educational systems of liberal democracies. In Y. Hébert (Ed.) *Citizenship in Transformation*: 81-92. Toronto: *University of Toronto Press.*

Government of India [2006] *Social, Economic and Educational Status of the Muslim Community of India.* Sachar Committee Report. India: Ministry of Minority Affairs.

Mc Andrew, M. [2009] Ethnocultural diversity and education: A Canadian perspective on India's policies and debates. In C. Raj, A. Nafey & M. Mc Andrew (Ed.) *Multiculturalism: Public Policy and Problem Areas in Canada and India.* Delhi: Manak Publishers.

Mc Andrew, M. [2012] *Fragile Majorities and Education. Belgium, Catalonia, Northern Ireland, and Quebec.* Montreal: McGill-Queen'sUniversityPress.

Ministère de l'Éducation du Québec (MEQ) [1997] *Quebec Schools on Course.* Educational Policy Statement. Quebec: MEQ.

National Council for Educational Research and Training (NCERT) [2005] *National Curriculum Framework Review.* Position papers Teaching of Social Sciences.

National Resource Center for Value Education (NRCVE) [2004] *Recent Initiatives.* www.ncert.nic.in/sites/valueeducation/recent-initiatives.

Proulx, J.P. [1999] *Laïcité et religion. Perspective nouvelle pour l'école québécoise.* Report submitted by the Groupe de travail sur la place de la religion à l'école to the Minister of Education. Quebec: MEQ.

Roy, K. [2012] "The Constitution, Cartoons and Controversies: Contextualising the Debates." Economic and Political Weekly, 47(22): 18-20.

## L'ÉQUILIBRE ENTRE LA DIVERSITÉ ET LA SOCIALISATION COMMUNE: UNE COMPARAISON DES DÉBATS ÉDUCATIFS EN INDE ET AU QUÉBEC

### L'enseignement de l'histoire, quelles mémoires? À quelles fins?

Dans cet article, nous comparons trois controverses qui ont touché l'Inde et le Québec ces dix dernières années concernant l'enseignement de l'histoire, l'éducation aux valeurs et à la culture religieuse ainsi que la pertinence d'institutions contrôlées par les minorités. Dans les deux sociétés, le débat le plus visible a concerné l'enseignement de l'histoire dans les écoles secondaires, tant en ce qui concerne la définition de ce qui doit être enseigné comme « histoire nationale » que les objectifs d'un tel enseignement dans une société pluraliste. En Inde, de 2000 à 2005, les étudiants ont été soumis à trois curriculums successifs présentant une vision unifiée de l'histoire où la centralité de la majorité hindoue dans l'identité nationale était à l'opposé et où prévalait une interprétation plus ou moins nationaliste de différents événements historiques. Au Québec, à la suite du développement d'un nouveau programme d'Histoire nationale au secondaire en 2005, plusieurs ont dénoncé l'affaiblissement du récit traditionnel de résistance des francophones, l'espace plus grand accordé aux minorités immigrantes et nationales ainsi que l'accent mis sur les perspectives multiples comme un complot multiculturel. Ces deux controverses ont soulevé plusieurs questions communes telles les critères qui devraient être utilisés pour statuer sur le poids respectif de différentes périodes dans le curriculum, le degré où le groupe majoritaire doit contrôler le récit et décider qui peut y être inclus ou non et enfin, le rôle que devrait jouer les représentants des groupes minoritaires dans le traitement qui est fait de leur communauté au sein des manuels scolaires. Cependant, de façon générale, on peut noter que l'expérience québécoise, tout particulièrement sur le plan du curriculum, est davantage marquée par une utilisation originale des tensions mêmes de l'enseignement d'une histoire controversée et de sa complexité dans le développement des compétences citoyennes des élèves.

### L'enseignement moral et éthique: quel rôle pour les valeurs et les cultures religieuses?

En Inde, l'éducation aux valeurs a été introduite en 2000 au sein d'un système scolaire très largement laïque par le parti nationaliste hindou, ce qui a généré le développement d'une grande variété de matériel pédagogique reflétant le patrimoine culturel, religieux et éthique de l'Inde, mais tout spécialement sa composante hindoue. Les partisans de cette *safranisation de l'éducation* dénonçaient en effet la laïcité traditionnelle indienne ainsi que les limites qu'elle fixe à la transmission de valeurs substantives et religieuses comme l'imposition d'une conception occidentale. Mais ses opposants la voyaient plutôt comme une tentative d'imposer les valeurs hindoues aux minorités religieuses et une atteinte à la transmission des valeurs séculières communes à tous les élèves. Quant au programme d'Éthique et de Culture religieuse québécois introduit en 2007, il visait à faciliter la transition d'un système traditionnellement confessionnel vers un système laïque plus adapté à la présence croissante des minorités religieuses et des personnes non pratiquantes. Les écoles enseignent donc désormais toutes les religions, même si on continue à attribuer une plus grande place à la spiritualité autochtone ainsi qu'aux croyances judéo-chrétiennes, étant donné leur impact historique. Ce compromis est considéré par plusieurs comme une troisième avenue prometteuse entre l'éducation confessionnelle, la laïcité rigide et le multiculturalisme « pur ». Cependant, le programme a généré une guerre idéologique importante portée, entre autres, par les nationalistes traditionnels qui mettent de l'avant la perte d'identité liée à l'abandon des appartenances religieuses et voudraient que les écoles jouent à cet égard un rôle réactif.

Même si les contextes sont fort différents, les débats indien et québécois adressent clairement des questions très proches sur la légitimité que des valeurs substantives liées à la trajectoire historique spécifique de la majorité soient transmises par les écoles dans une société multiculturelle et multi religieuse.

### Les institutions minoritaires: atout ou obstacle dans le développement d'une société pluraliste?

La constitution indienne supporte fortement le droit des minorités religieuses à créer et à gérer leurs propres institutions, ce qui reflète un engagement normatif significatif, mais aussi la situation sociopolitique qui existait au moment de l'indépendance. De plus, plusieurs balises assurent le respect du curriculum commun et la présence dans de telles institutions d'élèves et d'enseignants d'origines diverses, ce qui a minimisé leur contradiction potentielle avec l'objectif plus large de construction de la nation. Cependant certains médias du camp laïque ont exprimé des craintes que les institutions religieuses ne soutiennent

le développement du fondamentalisme Les liens entre le pluralisme structurel et l'égalité des chances sont aussi problématiques, tout particulièrement pour les minorités défavorisées comme les Musulmans. Mais des développements intéressants pour maximiser l'impact positif des écoles musulmanes sont à signaler. Quant au Québec, il se distingue parmi les provinces canadiennes par son financement généreux des écoles spécifiques associées tant à la majorité qu'aux minorités religieuses. Ce soutien, qui résulte de multiples facteurs historiques et politiques, est balisé par des exigences claires que ces institutions suivent le curriculum commun et n'enseignent le contenu religieux et culturel que comme une activité complémentaire. Cependant, la légitimité d'une scolarisation séparée pour les minorités religieuses génère des débats animés et récurrents au Québec, tout particulièrement autour des écoles juives. Bien que les préoccupations d'endoctrinement religieux soient parfois exprimées, le principal argument des opposants est le manque de socialisation commune entre les élèves d'origines diverses et ses conséquences sur l'intégration sociale des minorités religieuses.

Bien que les débats indien et québécois présentent des éléments communs, l'évaluation globale des institutions ethnoreligieuses est beaucoup plus positive en Inde, ce qui reflète un engagement plus marqué en faveur du pluralisme religieux, mais également la moindre importance attribuée à l'existence d'un espace scolaire unifié dans un pays où l'accès à l'éducation pour tous est loin d'être encore assurée.

## Conclusion

Une collaboration accrue sur la gestion de la diversité en éducation en Inde et au Québec pourrait s'avérer bénéfique tant pour le développement des politiques que de la recherche. En effet, dans les deux contextes, les enjeux soulevés, les politiques et les programmes mis de l'avant ainsi que les forces et les faiblesses présentent à la fois suffisamment d'éléments communs et de spécificités pour justifier l'intensification des échanges.