Importance of incorporating cosmopolitan and multicultural principles in education in Canada

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Abstract

In recent years, immigrants from various backgrounds immigrated to Canada in search of a better life for themselves and their children. However, my personal experience points to the numerous problems immigrants face upon arrival. I immigrated almost four decades ago to Montreal, and experienced discrimination at my workplace and in public, as well as at my university during my studies. Hence, I will discuss my view of the importance of training adult educators to apply cosmopolitan and multicultural values in their classrooms in order to foster the inclusion of immigrants and their children. This essay examines references from various sources in how they apply to the importance of inclusion through cosmopolitan and multicultural approaches in education, and I will present my own experiences to support my claims. In addition, teaching empathy toward other humans and culturally responsive teaching while using universal appreciation for the arts can educate about various cultures and specific experiences.

Keywords Cosmopolitan and multicultural values · Education · Immigrants · Inclusion · Immigration policies

Introduction

When I visited Montreal for the first time in 1993, most of the people around me were white: either Anglophones or Francophones, or descendants of East/West European settlers. However, since my immigration in 1985, and especially since 1991, many diverse ethnic minorities have moved to Montreal. With the influx of individuals from such various backgrounds I feel as if I am living in a very different country than the one I first came to. My return to university study in 2012 presented a challenge not only academically, but I experienced exclusion, discrimination, microaggressions and bullying. During my graduate program in adult education I

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have learned about cosmopolitan and multicultural values that should be incorporated into the educational environment to ensure that all students feel accepted and included. To achieve this, teachers and educational professionals must be trained to embrace cosmopolitan and multicultural values in learning spaces for adults by applying teaching methods that facilitate the inclusion of diverse ethnicities. Even though, according to Jedwab (2011) on the 8th of October 1971, Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau announced a multiculturalism policy, which acknowledged cultural diversity in Canada, it did not affect change in government policy; it remained insignificant policy, while Quebec politicians rejected it altogether. Then, in 1988, the Canadian Multiculturalism Act was passed and it was the first act of its kind in the world which entailed the federal government's promise to promote and maintain a diverse, multicultural society (<https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/canadian-multiculturalism-act> <https://www.laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/c-18.7/page-1.html>). However, while multiculturalism values all cultures, it allows each one to remain in their cultural group and does not support appreciating others' cultures and building intercultural relations. This poses an obstacle in today's learning environments; thus, I will discuss the importance of incorporating cosmopolitan and multicultural values in adult education.

Relevance of cosmopolitanism and multiculturalism in adult education

Canada continues to receive many new immigrants from all over the world who are aspiring to have a better life in Canada. Yet, both immigrants and non-immigrants and the non-indigenous are struggling to relate to each other; many experience discrimination in their daily lives. Discriminatory attitudes persist and disrupt those relations, as I have personally experienced since immigrating to Montreal. Sometimes these attitudes are direct but most of the time they are covert in a form of microaggression such as the question "Where are you really from?" (Kohli and Solórzano 2012, p. 447). Martinovic et al. (2007) stressed that present educators are not trained to teach diverse students so "ethnic encapsulation and own-group cleavage" persists in Canadian society (p. 16). The lack of acceptance of diversity, hostility towards immigrants and lack of intercultural skills are linked to negative educational experience for students from non-Western backgrounds. I agree with Banks (2001) that teachers must stop promoting the "color-blind attitude" that assumes that all students are the same, and further reinforces the supremacy and dominance of mostly Western and white individuals (as cited in Martinovic et al. 2007, p. 18).

Struggles faced by immigrants

McCaskell (1995) stated that what we perceive as different behaviors are related to history and culture and are not biological. Thus, there is no reason to consider and treat various individuals as 'lower' and 'subordinate' because they are considered different. As so many people have immigrated and continue to immigrate to Canada

from many different corners of the earth, so they bring their cultural and linguistic heritages which reflect today's makeup of Canadian students. Teachers must acknowledge that fact and be able to teach such a great variety of students (Martinovic et al. 2007).

In the 1980s, in Montreal, there were mainly Francophones and Anglophones, the South Shore where I lived being predominantly Francophone. However, in the past decade, I have returned to my university studies and noted an increase of students from immigrant backgrounds at the undergraduate level (second generation immigrants). After finishing my undergraduate degree, I entered graduate level and noted that over sixty per cent of students in my classes came from other countries and less from a Canadian background (international students). Some of those students shared with me their intention to apply for immigration visas and wish to stay in Canada. They pay much higher tuition fees and bring valuable experiences and knowledge, but their professional degrees are not accepted by Canadian immigration. Reitz et al. (2014) stated that special training, policies and addressing the particular needs of immigrants are needed to help new arrivals to integrate and contribute to the Canadian economy and society (pp. 5–6). In addition, immigrants' previous education and work experiences need to be taken into account. In fact, they are expected to assimilate into Canadian culture while there is no acknowledgment of the role the host society plays in the integration process, which is "a two-way process requiring mutual adjustments by both newcomers and Canadian society" (Guo 2015a, b, p. 45). According to Guo, this very important aspect of the immigration process has been ignored by Canadian government immigration policies, and the host society.

In addition to the immigration policies' devaluation of foreign work experiences and education, the cultural, historical and specific personal life experiences of immigrants are ignored. They are treated as persons who inevitably need to change their way of thinking and are expected to "think like a Canadian" (Guo, 2015a, b, p. 46). Moreover, Guo emphasized that denial of one's ethnic identity and Canadian expectations for integration show the internalization of "a colonial mentality" that imposes its values on newcomers, as superior (Guo, 2015a, b, pp. 46–47). As Sfeir (2015) asserted, "A citizenship education that ignores learners' experiences stigmatizes and marginalizes minority groups" (p. 63). Furthermore, UrzuÂa et al. maintained that origin, language, faith or the way they look "could generate integration difficulties triggering a phenomenon such as discrimination and segregation by the host country" (p. 2). Lue (2021) wrote that discrimination is linked to "psychotic experiences, delusional ideation and attenuated positive psychotic symptoms" according to a 2015 study by the *Canadian Medical Association Journal*. In addition, the same study showed that, in Ontario, immigrants of Caribbean and East African descent suffered higher rates of schizophrenia. Lue cited Shaquiera Hamilton, a psychology student at McGill University, stated that the education system is to blame for the lack of black therapists for black people suffering mental health issues. Moreover, Hamilton stated that in twenty years of education she only had two black teachers, which matches my observation: I had no black teacher during my twelve years of university study in Montreal, Quebec. This shows that the educational system does not recognize the need to train professionals to cater to diverse needs of various individuals. Immigrants come from many different cultures and some from

cultures where people are more inclined to seek and offer support to others than in North America.

According to Dr. Jaswant Guzder, immigrants from first, second and third generations do not have the same experiences, and it is very important to acknowledge the main differences between communal and individualistic cultures (Share & Care, 2019, pp. 4–5). Thus, those involved working with immigrants need to be open and cognizant of diverse needs and issues of people from different cultures, and receive adequate professional training. Those professionals may be the only support an immigrant has and may play a crucial role in his/her adjustment in his/her new society.

Cosmopolitanism and multiculturalism foster acceptance

Mau et al. (2008) asserted that cosmopolitan values include “recognition of others because of their value and integrity as human beings, quite independently of their national affiliations” (p. 5). They stated that those who embrace cosmopolitan standards are open-minded towards diverse cultures and recognize the economic, political and cultural exchanges among world nations, and they are not intimidated by them (p. 5). Furthermore, Mau et al. noted that “cosmopolitans are individuals who are positive about the greater role of international bodies and their accountability for global problems” (p. 5).

In addition, according to Letseka (2013), people need to be introduced to distinct cultures from an early age; he stated that “by implication then, in a humane society, there has to be respect for variety and difference” (p. 340). Likewise, Nussbaum (2002) stated that “the accident of where one is born is just that, an accident; any human being might have been born in any nation” (p. 2). Thus, “We should recognize humanity wherever it occurs, and give its fundamental ingredients, reason and moral capacity, our first allegiance and respect” (p. 2). Nussbaum presented the arguments for “cosmopolitan education”, in which humanity is viewed as one entity (pp. 1–2).

During the Roundtable symposium II on cosmopolitanism for Canada’s growing diversity: A better strategy than multiculturalism? (October 1st, 2021) Dr. Dei stressed that “cosmopolitanism upholds the philosophical ideology that human beings have equal and political obligations to each other based solely on their humanity” and is a better strategy than multiculturalism. This view is valuable in teaching and it does include appreciation for one’s own background while valuing all humans. Moreover, ‘cosmopolitan education’ can help us become aware of how we act in comparison to the other cultures’ ways of knowing (Nussbaum 2002, p. 3). Otherwise, as Nussbaum warns, “we risk assuming that the options familiar to us are the only ones there are, and that they are somehow “normal” and “natural” for the human species as such” (p. 3). Thus, a cosmopolitan approach to teaching is important to developing an appreciation for others and exploring other ways of knowing. Moreover, as Dei asserted, there is a need to incorporate cosmopolitan values in the curriculum, the ways of teaching, treating students from diverse backgrounds fairly, while incorporating activist and anti colonial approaches. Dei stressed that the

Covid-19 pandemic has shown differences among poor students' access to technology in online learning modes (which need to take into account various difficulties faced by those students and a of equal access to all students. Moreover, he expressed that students should have opportunities to learn through community based events and encouraged to present papers in various formats to foster creativity and thinking "out of the box".

In addition to the cosmopolitan stance, teachers need to apply multicultural policy in the classroom, and Guo and Wong (2018) agreed with Kymlicka (2010) that there is a need for "the continuation and the strengthening of Canada's multiculturalism policies" (as cited in Guo & Wong 2018, p. 256). Those policies should encompass educational institutions, and apply critical multicultural education, according to Ghosh (2002) cited in Galczynski et al., in order to treat fairly marginalized students (as cited in Galczynski et al., 2011). Moreover, MCE must "tap into the consciousness of both dominant and subordinate groups in order to challenge the status quo and fulfill the objectives of Canada's multicultural policy" (Galczynski et al. 2011, p. 5). Galczynski et al. presented five strategies in teaching about differences and applications of the 'redefined concept of multiculturalism': attracting students' interests by more relevant subject matters and inviting them to construct the meanings; openly discussing controversial issues; encouraging and guiding empowering communication; promoting critical thinking and reflection about the world and using current events to gain a better understanding of the 'bigger picture'. Ghosh pointed to the importance of recognizing that differences enrich human interactions and today's world's interconnectedness and global issues show that cosmopolitanism is a necessity. Within the cosmopolitan framework, students need to be taught global citizenship by the implementation of the Global Citizenship Education (GCED). According to UNESCO web page, GCED "aims to empower learners of all ages to assume active roles, both locally and globally, building more peaceful, tolerant, inclusive and secure societies". Furthermore, "GCED is based on the three domains of learning—cognitive, socio-emotional and behavioral". Students would acquire the following skills incorporated in the educational process:

Cognitive: knowledge and thinking skills necessary to better understand the world and its complexities.

Socio-emotional: values, attitudes and social skills that enable learners to develop effectively, psychosocially, and physically and to enable them to live together with others respectfully and peacefully.

Behavioural: conduct, performance, practical application and engagement (<https://en.unesco.org/themes/gced/definition>)

Importance of training culturally skilled adult educators

Donald (2007) stated, "As humanities scholars, we have to ensure that our programmes respond thoughtfully and creatively to changes in the world and changes in our disciplinary fields" (p. 289). He wrote that cosmopolitanism recognizes "an imaginative and self-questioning encounter with extrinsic cultures through which individuals and collectivities develop a self-defining relationship to a globalized,

culturally complex” world (p. 292). According to Donald, both cosmopolitanism and multiculturalism can help us to develop a view of culture as an “inherently unstable process of negotiation and change, a process of becoming rather than a state of being” (p. 295). In Donald’s view, at the center of the cosmopolitan outlook is “the willingness to make the effort to negotiate coexistence with actual others when there appears to be no common ground, only mutual incomprehension” (p. 299). He poses the very important question of what cosmopolitan and multiculturally sensible graduates look like, and “what knowledge and expertise would enable them to be what they need to be and to do what they need to do?” (p. 296). Those questions I will attempt to answer by discussing education for global compassion, and subsequently by discussing cosmopolitan and multicultural values in adult education.

Education for global compassion

Nussbaum (2002) and Donald (2007) both point out the cosmopolitan acceptance of those that do not share our cultural background and a need “to develop a realization of the contingency of how we live and the strangeness of who we are” (p. 304). Thus, a compassionate perspective involves not just the modification of personal attitudes but “an ability to translate a whole cultural framework of meaning-ascription and interpretation” (Donald 2007, p. 304). In a Canadian multicultural context, teachers can create a space for learners’ participation in discussion; “a difficult process that entails a capacity for narrative imagination, creative understanding, cultural translation and agonistic respect” (Donald 2007, p. 306). This process can start by means of including cosmopolitan and multicultural principles in various learning environments.

Integrating cosmopolitan and multicultural values in adult education

Introducing cosmopolitan and multicultural values in the learning environment is necessary because Canada is a non-homogenous society and continues to receive new immigrants. Professionals who teach and receive them play an important role in their adaptation to and successful inclusion in Canadian society. They need to sincerely show that immigrants are welcome here and realize how important is the acceptance they show (Guo 2015a, b). New arrivals are dependent on receiving information, but also need to feel valued and accepted for who they are, not being ashamed of their ethnicity and stigmatized for it, as Guo stressed. This is important because it may help diminish problems that immigrants are increasingly facing such as poverty and unemployment, racial disparities and discrimination (Reitz 2014, p. 535). In addition, Guo (2015a, b) stressed that immigrants are negatively affected by the lack of acceptance by the host society (p. 47). Thus, educational institutions that train service teachers need to apply principles that value different cultures and individuals.

On the other hand, many immigrants who come to Canada were raised in ethnically, culturally, religiously and racially homogenous societies and encounter

different people in Canada for the first time. Hence, they need to learn how to coexist with diverse individuals in Canada's multicultural society. Therefore, educators must be able to demonstrate their ability to function amid diversity and guide learners through their reflective processes (Sleeter and Carmona 2017, p. 129). According to Sleeter and Carmona (p. 85), adult educators must avoid the oversimplification of any particular ethnic/racial group's complexities; educational programs and immigration policies need to be more inclusive and recognize immigrants' intellectual and cultural assets, as well.

Embracing cultural diversity in teaching

Gay (2000, 2011) recommended "using the cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits of teaching" to enrich their learning experience (as cited in Larke 2013, pp. 39–40). According to Larke, "Culturally responsive teaching (CRT) is an instructional pedagogical strategy whose main purpose is to address the needs of all students" (p. 39). Kallen (1956) stated that according to the cultural diversity model, everyone's contribution should be appreciated, and all learners should be seen as equal (as cited in Larke 2013, p. 41). Thus, CRT entails that educators show to learners that they value them by acknowledging "their language, culture, history, and ancestors" (Larke 2013, p. 41). Furthermore, inclusive approaches need to be "implemented as part of a comprehensive institutional plan" (Yazedjian 2013, p. 59).

Diversity also entails some possible conflicts and misinterpretations, as different cultures sometimes have contradictory ways of expressing themselves. Hwang and Matsumoto (2013) highlighted that "how people manage their emotions may differ based on their learned cultural norms", despite some universal common traits (p. 119). Though there are some very distinctive features across cultures and they may appear strange, having a cosmopolitan outlook will enable the acceptance of this strangeness and even its appreciation (Nussbaum 2002; Donald 2007). Guo (2009) urges Canadian adult educators to "adopt a critical multiculturalism approach that challenges their own deficit perspective of deficit" (as cited in Guo 2015a, b, p. 48).

For example, adult educators can include "transnational experiences into curriculum and explore the meanings of Canadian citizenship from immigrants' perspectives" (Guo 2015a, b, p. 49). In addition, more instructors and professionals need to be hired to help immigrants from various backgrounds to settle in Canada. Ensuring that not only mainly white Canadian born professionals help and teach immigrants upon their arrival would reflect the multicultural feature of Canadian society. Unfortunately, Myles et al. (2006) acknowledged that educational institutions in Canada still use conventional teaching methods, fail to include students from minority backgrounds and do not offer training to teachers to face culturally and linguistically diverse students (as cited in Martinovic et al. 2007).

Benefits of arts-based teaching

Learning encompasses diverse types of places and experiences, and people generally like to have fun. Learning spaces such as public spaces and museums, like the McCord Museum in Montreal, offer distinctive and entertaining ways to learn. McCord Museum presented an interactive display by Montreal art duo Mere Phantoms (titled *Shadows without Borders*: Shadowland of refugee camps grows in lightness and dark (2018). This interactive artistic display offered experiential insight into the refugee camps in Greece and Turkey. So, visitors can comprehend and empathize with refugees who go through war traumas and displacement, which can lead to better acceptance of those people.

Furthermore, art-based learning tools such as stories, theater, and community projects at universities and community organizations incite a better understanding of cultural differences, and create a deeper understanding and appreciation of diversity, as well (Clover 2006; Wesley 2007). According to Wesley, “The interplay and tension between the individual and the contextual is dynamic and essential in learning about cultures” (p. 17). Wesley also expressed her appreciation for the arts because the arts have a transformative influence on people regarding their acceptance of diversity (p. 14). Hence, the arts can help in teaching people about the cumulative negative effects of microaggressions for those affected and bring awareness to those who commit microaggressions but are ignorant of their actions (Sue et al. 2007, p. 279). The latter, according to Sue et al., is a major step in achieving cultural competence (p. 283).

Mezirov (2000) acknowledged that education aims to alter students’ points of view to incite their critical thinking about their perceptions and their background (as cited in Berger 2004, p. 337). Thus, adult educators can use art to help learners overcome their anxieties while exiting their comfort zones and encourage them to overcome the human inclination to favor what they are accustomed to (Berger 2004, p. 344). Berger defined three responsibilities of a ‘transformative teacher’: “1. helping students find and recognize the edge, 2. being good company at the edge, and 3. helping to build firm ground in a new place”.

Adult education that incorporates the arts has the potential to teach individuals “intercultural competence such as knowledge of others, skills to interpret and relate, valuing others, world knowledge” and occasions to meet others (Sfeir 2015, pp. 63–73). Community art projects, such as the Vancouver Project Monumental Mural, which reflected the Medicine Wheel, represented spiritual, emotional, physical and mental interconnectedness between races on the globe (Clover 2006, p. 59).

Importance of changing immigration policies

Guo (2015a, b) proposed to create “an inclusive education that acknowledges and affirms cultural difference and diversity as positive and desirable assets”, which corresponds with cosmopolitan and multicultural values, and accepts the transnational characteristic of immigrants’ attachments to multiple countries. According to Miskovic and Curcic (2016), there were positive results by incorporating “more

culturally adaptive form of schooling” in Alaska, Canada and New Zealand (p. 4). They found that obstacles to inclusion for Roma students, in the European context, were ignorance of the stigmatization toward Roma people and lack of social policies on a larger scale (p. 3). Guo also stressed the importance of changing policies and initiatives in adult education to improve immigrants’ experiences in Canada (p. 15). Hence, to remain true to the discourse of equal respect for humanity, Canadian immigration and educational practices need to integrate ideology that all humans are equally worthy of respect (Nussbaum 2002, p. 3).

Conclusion

My own immigration experience prompted me to write this paper and present the need for incorporating cosmopolitan and multicultural values in adult educational practices. Canada continues to accept immigrants and refugees of various ethnic origins from many diverse countries (from all over the world). I have experienced some negative attitudes by fellow students and teachers upon my return to university studies. This is not in harmony with the Canadian multiculturalism policy; there is a need for change in the way instructors and educational professionals are trained and teach in the twenty-first century. This can ensure better integration of immigrants and lead to more open attitudes being demonstrated by local individuals when it comes to the acceptance of immigrants from diverse cultures. Educational spaces and institutions bring people together and offer social learning opportunities that can help in the understanding of the great variety of humanity and the perception of commonalities. Moreover, educators themselves need to show fairness and adapt methodologies to help create cosmopolitan curriculums. One of the effective methods to teach about other cultures and help in developing empathy is art-based education. Finally, the Canadian government needs to acknowledge the value of immigrants’ previous experiences (and knowledge in the classroom) and in this way show that they value newcomers’ contribution in enriching Canadian society.

Data availability The data supporting the findings of this study are available within the article.

Declarations

Conflict of interest The author does not have any conflicts of interest to declare. The author has no relevant financial or non-financial interests to disclose. No funding was received to assist with the preparation of this manuscript.

Ethical approval No human participants were involved. The author did not receive support from any organization for the submitted work.

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