

schizophrenics (as sub-competents) would generally do worse and tend towards the lower or less functional strata of the population, ignoring that this implies that schizophrenics in India are upwardly mobile and that schizophrenics in smaller towns and the countryside are stable socio-economically.

In any event, the Friends of Schizophrenics are quick to respond to any development that might have an impact upon schizophrenics. They oppose the current patient's advocacy legislation that the NDP in Ontario is introducing because it removes the family as the primary locus of social action. Their articles appear in the newspapers where they spread disinformation and instil a sense of fear in the general population about madness in the streets, and so on. The recent killing in Toronto of a schizophrenic by a cop is a good example. The Friends of Schizophrenics responded that this was unfortunate and that families should be better informed, but they did nothing to alleviate the public impression that schizophrenics are dangerous. Nor did they make a plea for training programmes for police officers. In fact, schizophrenics are less dangerous than

so-called normals, but this is another issue. The basic point which the Friends of Schizophrenics make is that the family is the proper locus of analysis and treatment and that any legislation which purports to deal with issues on a broader social basis amounts to an attack on the family. Notice as well that they do not call themselves families of schizophrenics or relatives of schizophrenics, but rather the cosier 'Friends' of schizophrenics. As the saying goes, "with friends like these..."

The family may have been given too much exposure during this entire debate and we can learn something from what is common to the failures of R.D.Laing and Dan Quayle. Insisting in public debate that complex issues be brought back to the family for analysis might well be a losing proposition, whether this is done on the left or the right. The best thing to do may be to ignore this ideological construct (and most efficient consumption machine) called the nuclear family and hope it just goes away. At the very least it is a mistake to use a theory of family interaction to critique the family (i.e., Freud) and it is confusing at best to blame families (i.e., Laing), for what are broad issues of subjectivity and power.

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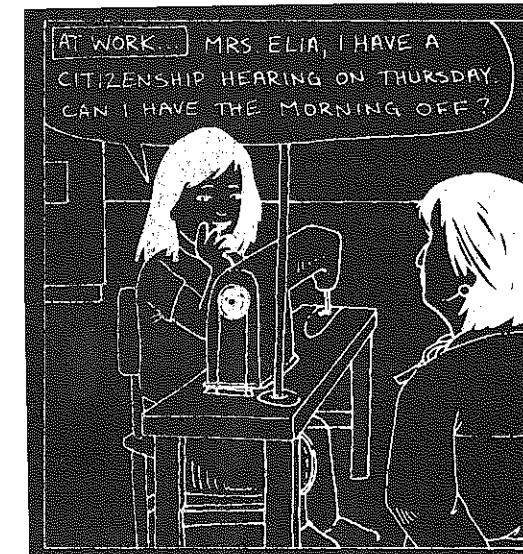


HERE INDEED ARE SYMBOLS OF CANADA'S GLORIOUS PAST...

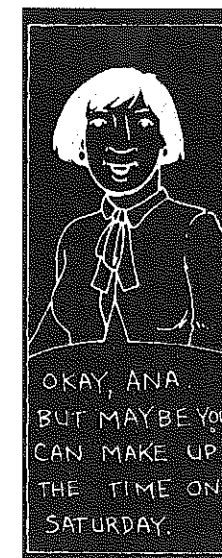
**WHOSE HISTORY?**

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# MULTI-CULTURALISM IN THE ESL BUREAU-CRACY



by Jeremy Stolow



I have always thought I knew what multiculturalism meant. After all, I'm supposed to be living it, aren't I? I'm a Jewish anglophone and my 'co-' is a Catholic francophone. I enjoy Indian food, I listen to African music and I wear South American sweaters. I've got friends from Argentina, Haiti, Hong Kong, St. Lucia, Italy, Ghana and Germany. 'Being' multicultural feels good.

EXCURSIONS

# But

what is this word supposed to refer to? Those who 'practice' it fancy that they are partaking

in a 'national dialogue' that weaves the ever-growing fabric of our 'cultural mosaic.' Indeed, Canada is a nation filled with many people of distinct ethnic, cultural, and geo-political origins, who speak different languages and live in different communities: a society where people share, exchange, and (mis)interpret each other's cultures, languages, heritages, and even the symbols and images of each other's cultures.

We often construe the intricacies and implications of living in such a 'multicultural society' as being defined in and through a 'dialogue' about its meaning. As citizens and as critics we assume that we have the power to propose — if not impose — our ideas and dreams about the kind of society we live in, and the kind of society it could be. Be that as it may, there must be more to multiculturalism than saying that we 'believe in it.'

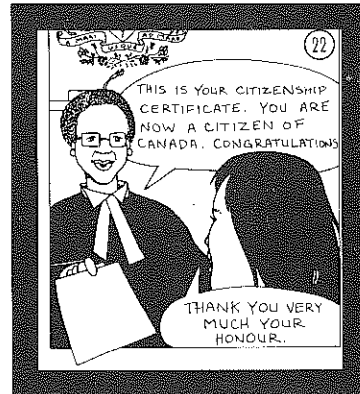
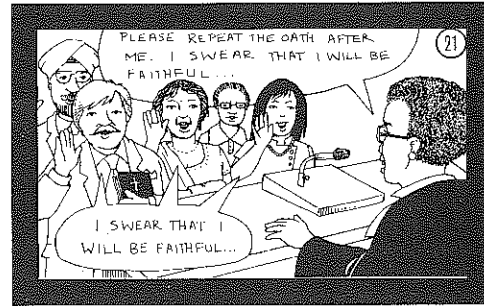
Whatever the pleasure we might generate employing such homilies, we cannot escape the fact that our colloquial sense of the word is entangled in a morass of institutional definitions: government statistics, race relations guidelines, policy statements for newcomer services, and so on. This merits a pause for consideration if only because there is no way to understand our 'national dialogue' without seeing the ways in which its very words are being put to use by our government bureaucracies today.

Working as an instructor of English as a Second Language (ESL) for the Toronto Board of Education (TBE) and the Ontario Ministry of Citizenship and Culture (OMCC) over the past few years has acquainted me with the definition of multiculturalism as it is found in government services which come into direct contact with a diverse range of communities. ESL instructors — as agents of the Canadian government bureaucracy — are some of the principal disseminators of this pre-packaged multiculturalism; it dribbles out of the pen of every memo-writer and off the tongue of every petty bureaucrat in the ESL racket. But there is

more to this than saying that people use the word because it has become 'official policy.'

What strikes me is rather how it is increasingly seen as a priority for bureaucracies to explain what multiculturalism means to all the immigrants and refugees who come to Canada. If you're going to stay here, you had better learn about our multicultural society. But please don't 'pick it up' on the streets. Let the government take care of this. Excepting matters of classroom 'management' in a multi-racial and multi-ethnic environment, why should ESL instructors be so concerned with the meaning of multiculturalism? If this question is unimportant to some, ESL bureaucrats have given this matter a great deal of thought. Their answer is found in the 'preface to the instructor' of any Canadian ESL manual, where it is argued that the business of teaching ESL must amount to more than merely imparting needed language skills and information; it must also consist in preparing one for the practice of 'participation in Canadian society at large.'

The ESL instructor is thus supposed to share with the student (read: potential citizen) an examination of the 'practical significance' of assimilation as it pertains to the 'ordinary' everyday life practices of 'ordinary people.' Lesson number one: our society is a multicultural mosaic in which everyone is tolerant of everyone else, and all traditions are maintained within the strict boundaries of this 'peaceful co-existence.' Lesson number two: believe what the ESL instructor has to say because she is the moral authority so far as the business of preparing for everyday life in Canada is concerned.



However well-intentioned we may be, when we seek to 'inform' immigrants and refugees about life in Canada, we promote a distorted image, and thus involve ourselves in a process of indoctrination as to how one ought to live. For it is one thing to spell out one's ideas about what makes a good society in the context of a 'dialogue'; it is quite another to present these same ideas to people not equipped with the historical and linguistic baggage to decide for themselves what Canada is like, and hence what being a Canadian might mean. Despite the disclaimers that pepper all the books — that there is no single way to define being Canadian for all people — there is an iconography at play in most ESL material I have come across regarding both the image of the good life in Canada and the corresponding image of 'the good Canadian.'

The good 'newcomer-Canadian' not only works hard (read: doesn't stay on welfare for too long) and obeys the laws about behaving in public (read: doesn't drink or urinate in public), but also celebrates the diversity of Canadian heritages (read: learns to conceal racism the way all other Canadians do). What is of interest to me here is that ESL instructors — and with them, all the various agents of government settlement services — have not always operated with such directives in mind. In fact, it doesn't take a historian of Canadian immigration policy to know that there was a time when the issue of how newcomers are to assimilate into Canadian society was articulated quite differently. Arriving at the shores of a nation where 'concerns' about potential 'migration risks' — enemy aliens, strike leaders, religious pacifists, the yellow threat — were openly voiced, the immigrant's experience of the government was at best that of an unsympathetic host. Often, this meant falling prey to those (read: sweatshop owners and their friends) eager to take advantage of a cheap labour force unable to speak the dominant language and ignorant of the law.

Canadian governments of the past held little interest in whether immigrants 'sank or swam,' and certainly didn't bother to entertain considerations of cultural assimilation and integration with respect to the newcomer. By contrast, the governments of today assure us that they are concerned about settling immigrants and refugees, and more specifically, that they understand it to be their responsibility to help newcomers assimilate into our 'multicultural soci-



ety.' In other words, even if bureaucracies such as Employment and Immigration, Citizenship and Culture, the boards of education and Metro Services still seem to harbour 'cold shoulder' policies, what has become an issue now is the question of how newcomers are supposed to understand themselves in relation to their new 'hosts.'

If the concrete, material terms in which newcomers to Canada are expected to assimilate into 'our' society have not changed all that much, there has been a decisive shift in concern about how smoothly and how effectively this process of assimilation is being carried out, and in tandem with this, a far-reaching rationalization of the government services responsible for keeping this process from straying off course. Consider the redefinition of the role of the ESL instructor in Toronto. I began teaching ESL in Toronto for the TBE when teachers were hired according to the exigencies of demand rather than their merit or their conformity with the aspirations of a 'profession.' If the questions raised at my job interview indicated that my superiors had begun to take interest in what kind of people should be teaching ESL, this was certainly something new. Most of the teachers who were hired a couple years before me found that the only identifiable prerequisites for working as an ESL teacher were 'a good command of English grammar' and 'clear diction.'

The ESL instructors of today, however, are expected to articulate and monitor their own advancement as 'professionals' through a systematic procedure of mutual surveillance, and to express their professional aspirations, among which figures the promotion of multiculturalism, in process-

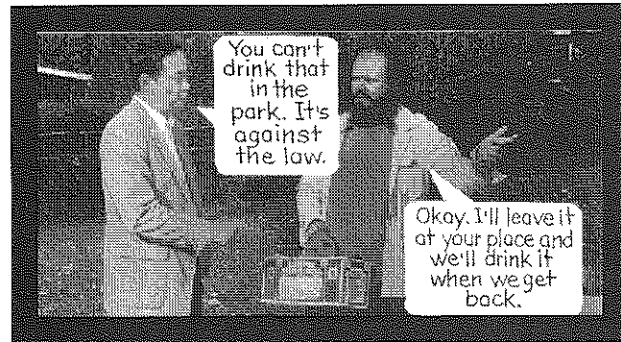
es which have been borrowed from manager training courses. What is of significance here is that ESL instructors have come to assume the role of managers, not just of language learning but also of classroom behaviour — the prolegomenon to functioning in a regulated public space 'out on the street' — and of the representation of Canada's multicultural society. Nowadays, what with the careful planning of materials designed to respond to all the anticipated questions and concerns of the newcomers — everything from chatty newspapers replete with 'immigrant success stories' to prudish lesson materials from which one learns how to obey the law and 'behave normally' — instructors have effectively been relieved of all responsibility for representing Canadian society to their students on their own terms. We perform our duties in tandem with the interests and exigencies of a bureaucratic apparatus formed to manipulate this intrinsically 'malleable' and 'powerless' immigrant population.

Prior to this 'managerialization' of ESL instruction, there seems to have been a virtual absence of coherent policies with respect to the conduct and behaviour of the instructor. ESL instructors used to be left to their own devices, to 'fend for themselves' or at best consult each other in the adoption of any measures. The 'quality' of adult ESL education was subject to the whims of the instructor. Some teachers behaved abominably, and reflected the prejudices and ignorance of white, middle class, Canadian society about other cultures immediately and without much deliberation; others demonstrated a bit more self-consciousness with respect to their position as teachers, and were more disposed to treating their students not like children, but like people from whom a great deal could be learned. But whatever their individual disposition, all teachers were expected to cope with the flood of 'cultural' questions they faced daily from their students largely as they saw fit.

Now, whatever one may wish to say about which way is better, what I find so crucial to note is that the newcomers of the past were not so decisively delivered into the hands of smarmy bureaucrats who have made it their business to 'take care' of everything newcomers might and ought to think about life in Canada. The adoption of official policies like the 'promotion of multiculturalism' by the OMCC or the TBE has effected very few material transformations in the conditions of labour or social co-existence for Canada's 'diverse mosaic.' The question obtrudes, then, why so much attention has been given to this policy: why it appears to be implemented so universally and so vigorously, and yet so insincerely. To phrase this somewhat differently I would like to ask why in a school like Ontario Welcome House (jointly run by the TBE and the OMCC), which prides itself on meticulously adhering to the 'official' policy of multiculturalism, are students harassed, subjected to trivializing prejudices, and brushed aside precisely when their day-to-day needs are brought to the fore, by the very same people who act as the agents of these official policies?

The ever-growing litany of 'incidents' I have wit-

nessed, participated in, or heard about in my experience as an ESL teacher has led me to conclude that these cannot simply be dismissed as coincidental or unrepresentative. Stories constantly surface, such as when a student complained that his teacher, who was easily bothered by cigarettes, would not allow him back into the classroom after he had been smoking unless he first brushed his teeth and washed his hands. Another story reports a teacher who locks the door of his classroom before he begins class so that, as he puts it, "latecomers can't sneak in," despite his knowing that most of his students come rushing to class after a long day of cleaning toilets at the Eaton Centre, working in sweatshops, or hanging around the welfare office only to be told to return the next day. Or is the 'point of view of the student' really taken into consideration when another instructor dragoons her classes into memorizing the Canadian national anthem without her students being able to understand most of the lyrics?



Such stories could fill volumes: OMCC-sponsored Santa Claus contests, lessons about dental hygiene, Father's Day poetry, warnings about urinating in public, meritocratic 'self-worth' sessions. Nothing is too trivial to be considered as the basis for something that newcomers should worry about, what they should find funny, what to buy, how to behave. Nothing is left out in the 'preparation' of the

newcomer for her/his public life in 'our' multicultural society. This institutionalized response to the inter- and multi-cultural production of life is essentially a 'bureaucratic' endeavour; it is one which seeks to claim responsibility for the welter of the quotidian experiences of contemporary Canadian society.

This notion of responsibility merits further thought. For if we (government agents, politicians, lobby group members, or even just 'concerned' citizens) wish to say we are 'responsible' for multiculturalism, then we are saying that we have power over it, that we wish to determine it, to manage it, to legislate it. Multiculturalism thus increasingly comes to be seen as a situation in need of a definition: a host of social relations that 'must be controlled.' But what does it mean to say that things appear out of control? "Without a multiculturalism policy, there would be racism and ethnic conflict." I'll bet you've heard that argument before. But should any proposal for syncretism of supposedly 'warring ethnic cultures' be left to stand above critical examination? If multiculturalism is supposed to 'bring us together,' what kind of a 'together' are we invoking?

One might be tempted to ask whether there really is such a thing as a 'multi-culture' *per se*, and not just different cultures. Perhaps even the use of the word 'culture' in the plural (as if one could talk about discrete, bounded cultural entities) is suspect, and we should restrict ourselves to speaking about 'culture' and its production and reproduction. But however we might wish to tackle this problem, it seems that within the confines of government bureaucracies this question has been addressed by construing multiculturalism as a Canadian incarnation of Esperanto: an utterly con-

structed state of affairs where all cultures are 'blended together' and homeomorphized. It is precisely at this point that the inherent contradiction of the term multiculturalism emerges. It purports to speak of a utopian conviviality, but achieves nothing (except relieving a bit of guilt), since it doesn't refer to anything. It claims to present an ideal context for cultural differences to co-exist, but instead it merely idealizes the context in which different cultures do exist.

In the hands of the bureaucrats, the word multiculturalism lacks positive content. At worst, multiculturalism policy is nothing but the attempt to 'place' us on the map of the status quo. At best, it is the promotion of certain cultural stereotypes — in this case those propagated by the Canadian middle class (of which I and many other ESL teachers are a part), phrased in terms of a dehistoricized and decontextualized iconography which can appear anywhere at any time: Thai food, world beat music, third world clothing, and so on. And what is eradicated formally (i.e., cultural differences) is tolerated in practice: segregation, division, unequal treatment, and institutionalized sexism and racism.

Of course, one would do well by asking whether instructors actually bother to read the books that the bureaucrats write, and whether what is enacted in the classroom in any way resembles what is spelled out in these official guidelines. The short and obvious answer is that there are hundreds of versions of what happens in the ESL classroom, ranging from the strictest adherence to the letter of OMCC and TBE materials to outright subversion of these doctrines. The longer and less clear answer involves the problem of whether the idea of resistance or subversion — of the instructor to the ESL bureaucracy or the student to the instructor — is really the key issue given circumstances where the force of the word has moved from the mouth of the instructor to the printed text with which she comes armed every day. The ESL discourse I have invoked here has not 'replaced' the instructor; but it has transformed the context in which she functions, as have the massive transformations in the institutional structures which define ESL instruction in general.

My point has not been so much to sketch the contours of a tentacular, 'Big-Brother' styled bureaucracy that

sets itself the task of controlling the few cubic centimetres left where resistance to the status quo might germinate. Bureaucracies, after all, are still composed of people whose efforts are as much determined by 'culture-at-large' (shopping, reading *The Sun*, swapping fishing stories, listening to the radio) as by the fully explicit and supposedly rational interests that sociologists speak about. Given this, perhaps there is no way to speak about how bureaucracies communicate with 'society-at-large' without at the same time perpetrating a myth about their coherent and bounded identities, if not their outright omnipotence.

The more interesting question, it seems to me, is one of how the instrumentalist mentality — part and parcel with the formation of the model of a 'successful newcomer' — which at one time signalled the presence of Big-Brother bureaucracy comes to inhabit the numerous discursive positions in the social space I have been trying to characterize, just as it inhabits, in another shape, other social roles which end up taking on similar characteristics: the realms of consumption, entertainment, leisure, therapy, and so forth. The 'management' of ESL students can provide an interesting illumination of the practice of our own self-administration in this bureaucratic society of controlled consumption. What concerns us about the newcomer is what concerns us about ourselves: a regulated public space where whatever differences that emerge can be managed or controlled.

This might cast a different light on any critique of multiculturalism in general. I have mentioned the unease that some experience over the terms in which inter-cultural activities are spiralling out of the control of the official organs which were set up to 'manage' such things. For my part, I have had to come to terms with the fact that my students had various reasons for coming to my ESL class, most of which did not conform to

my own expectations as the class 'leader,' and with the fact that the many cultures I have dealt with did not so perfectly fit into my model of 'multiculturalism.' I remember a Halloween party where my students were not particularly interested in what I had to say about 'what halloween means,' but instead grafted to it their own ideas about Harvest festivals. I also remember having had a Lebanese student in my class who was more interested in learning Vietnamese than English since it proved to be quite useful among the circles he traversed. Perhaps concrete 'multicultural' events such as these can never be reined in by institutional frameworks. The frustration that 'we' (?) ESL instructors sometimes feel about how different (how much more 'racist,' how unlike 'us') many of our students seem might not be the terrible thing that 'we' suppose. At the very least, it should provide an occasion to reconsider what I am trying to do when I begin a sentence with "In Canada, we ...."

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