

## MULTICULTURALISM BY ANY MEANS

Bramwell begins by asserting that one's "attitude towards others is at least as important in this respect as information about them."<sup>1</sup> Quickly he alters that assertion: "A person's attitudes are likely to be affected by what he knows – though not always to the extent that teachers might have hoped for,"<sup>2</sup> that last phrase patronizing: after all, how does he know that "teachers" expect information to alter attitude? "Correspondingly," Bramwell continues, "as his attitudes change, so does a person's willingness to accept certain items of information and to accommodate them in his mental schemata,"<sup>3</sup> an acknowledgement of the intertwined character of apprehension and comprehension the Canadian theological and political philosopher George Grant made central to his understanding of human experience.<sup>4</sup>

"Clearly," Bramwell writes, "attitudes are not easily changed by exhortation or admonition,"<sup>5</sup> a statement he might modify had he witnessed recent right-wing populism and the rise of demagogues like U.S. President Donald J. Trump. "It would therefore," he continues, "be inadvisable to push the culture of one peoplehood upon another," not for ethical reasons mind you, but because "the pushfulness itself might be counter-productive because it could fortify the antagonism which seemed to call for the pushing in the first place."<sup>6</sup> Instrumental rationality rules:

The educational strategy which appears more likely to succeed here would be infiltration, not frontal attack. In effect, approach whatever problem exists from a number of different directions over an extended period of school life in the hope – indeed, in the expectation – that the learner would draw some appropriate conclusions and formulate some appropriate prescriptions for action. It might be better to not direct these approaches specifically at the problem, but rather to pin it down by surrounding it or by containing it, so to speak.<sup>7</sup>

Soft power is preferable to physical violence, but Bramwell doesn't seem to have been thinking of the present-day imperialism but of political socialization, e.g. "the informal curriculum of all schools, namely, the ambience of the school itself as a community."<sup>8</sup>

Ethics joins instrumentalism – an affair which present-day progressives enjoy too – when Bramwell writes: "What is referred to here is the responsibility of the school to promote by its ethos a concern for other people and for the observance of certain rules of conduct,"<sup>9</sup> an echo of John Dewey's conception of the classroom as a laboratory of democracy.<sup>10</sup> "In other words," he concludes, cleverly, "perhaps attitudes are caught rather than taught, and better learned in action than in discussion."<sup>11</sup>

While discussion shouldn't be sidelined, surely subtlety is to be recommended and that Bramwell demonstrates if with a surprising conclusion: "Suppose, then, that

educators accept the need to approach questions of attitudes and values with circumspection; does it follow that there should be no teaching which bears directly upon this delicate matter?"<sup>12</sup> No teaching at all? It seems Bramwell wants discussion not only sidelined but shuttered.

He does allow that certain topics be discussed; however, among them "the trials and tribulations of the Hutterites," the "circumstances of Ukrainian immigration to Western Canada," and (condescendingly?) "*le fait français du Canada*."<sup>13</sup> He even endorses discussion of "race"<sup>14</sup> While inclusion "of such matter is obviously to be commended," it should "not seem by teacher or student to be tendentious."<sup>15</sup> On the side of civility Bramwell repositions himself, appearing to question the instrumentalism he has so far implicitly endorsed. "[W]hen someone in the world of education propounds a problem," he reports, "someone else almost immediately offers a solution to it, usually in the form of a new *ad hoc* course to be provided in the schools. Unfortunately, the immediate solution or response, the course proposed, may not be the wisest."<sup>16</sup> With wisdom now in the picture, Bramwell backtracks to issues of curriculum development, imagining that the "advisability" of such coursework being judged by a "curriculum development officer," one armed with "at least three questions."<sup>17</sup>

First, is the content valid - is it likely to do what it claims to do? Second, if the course is, indeed, needed, should it be as a self-contained unit, or could much the same result be achieved - at least in terms of content - by revamping and supplementing parts of the existing curriculum? Third, suppose that a new, self-contained course appears to be called for; what can reasonably be dropped from the present curriculum in the school to make time for it?<sup>18</sup>

Notice that ethics is now nowhere to be found: these are instrumental questions, questions of ends and means that determine value by assessing effects. Consequentialism it's called.<sup>19</sup>

Reminding us that the "affective and cognitive are closely allied," Bramwell analyzes the questions he has posed (in the guise of a curriculum development officer), concluding that "the fostering of a multicultural society may lie not in the provision of special courses in multiculturalism at all, but rather in the ultimate reorientation of the thinking processes of students."<sup>20</sup> Why these are not interrelated Bramwell ignores, instead asking us to accept the world as phenomenological, which for him means that "generalities must be realized in particulars – and probably in particulars foreign to the curriculum as it now exists."<sup>21</sup> He seems to hold no preference for particularity in itself; its value is its utility: "We must therefore now ask, "Through particulars of what kinds might teachers hope to make such generalizations meaningful to their students?"<sup>22</sup> Why are generalizations the pay-off? Prejudice, certainly stereotypes, are all about generalizations.

Such reasoning leads Bramwell to the arts – he calls them “cultural universals or constants” finally “features” - but he means “music and dance,” subjects that can “be explored,” but (again) not because they are significant or satisfying in themselves but because they can illustrate those “universals,” allowing the curriculum (and specifically the Eurocentric Canadian curriculum) to remain in place, if not extended, showing how “constants” show up everywhere.<sup>23</sup> As that concept invites, generalization enters, as teachers (he suggests) might “deal severally and at different times with a number of constants from a given culture so as to produce a kind of profile of it,” or they must compare and contrast cultural expressions of these constants, “always with a view to mitigating the ethnocentric.”<sup>24</sup>

Sounds cosmopolitan, if in a spectator-like fashion, e.g. as if one could cultivate a perspective transcendent of culture. He calls this strategy “infiltration,”<sup>25</sup> as that concept acknowledges that “values and attitudes are notoriously difficult to change by admonition or by argument.”<sup>26</sup> So, instead of a “frontal attack,” “teachers might therefore be wise to deal with aspects of multiculturalism by infiltration,” which provides “two possible approaches.”<sup>27</sup> The first involves examination of the “semantic bases of ethnocentricity and stereotypy”; the second requires reshaping “the content of what they teach so as to include items related to appropriate constants in other cultures,” which he imagines useful in helping (Anglophone?) students understand “the cultures of their ethnic neighbors.”<sup>28</sup> The “advantages” of such an “approach” is that it avoids conceptual wind shear, e.g. ‘ad hoc courses devoted to the cultures of ethnic neighbors would not be added to a curriculum already overburdened, and might contribute to rather than detract from its coherence.’<sup>29</sup> We might land safely then, the Eurocentric curriculum intact.

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## COMMENTARY

The research assistant who brought this essay to my attention – Anton Birioukov-Brant – thought the piece “racist,” an accusation he tempered by noting the time of its composition. Phrases such as “ethnic neighbors” are tip-offs, but Anton is right to note that what passes as cosmopolitanism in one historical moment seems racist in another. The effect, as Anton noted in his commentary, is that Western cultures remain “implicitly held as an ideal.” He also noted that the reference to the arts can retrospectively be regarded as “a beginning of the ‘song and dance’ multiculturalism that came under scrutiny in later years.” Anton’s insight I supplement with noting the instrumental rationality that permeates the piece, casting as the arts utilitarian only, positioning teachers as manipulators (infiltrators) of students’ thought. As we have seen in previous research briefs, relegating the curriculum to a means to an end is almost (to borrow Bramwell’s concept) a “constant” inside curriculum studies,

and not only “inside,” as capitalism converts everything into something to be sold, the value of which is its exchange value. In so doing, the particularity of cultures is effaced, as the rules of exchange require standardization and homogeneity, not difference.

## REFERENCES

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## ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Bramwell 1981, 93. One would have thought the two are interrelated, something he acknowledges in the sentences that follow. This emphasis upon “attitude” is often associated with the concept of prejudice, itself associated with the canonical research of Gordon Allport. The psychological, social, political, economic and structural elements of prejudice became subsumed in gender in my queer analyses (Pinar 2001, 2006).

<sup>2</sup> Bramwell 1981, 93.

<sup>3</sup> Bramwell 1981, 93.

<sup>4</sup> It is Anselm’s celebrated formula: *Credo, ut intelligam*: understanding arises from

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belief: Pinar 2019, 187.

<sup>5</sup> Bramwell 1981, 93.

<sup>6</sup> Bramwell 1981, 93.

<sup>7</sup> Bramwell 1981, 93.

<sup>8</sup> Bramwell 1981, 94.

<sup>9</sup> Bramwell 1981, 94.

<sup>10</sup> “For Dewey,” Levine (2007, 80) explains, “the reconstruction of society and the reconstruction of education were aspects of the same process. The capacity to solve social problems required intellectual habits needed to perceive problems, identify their features, and entertain in imagination diverse options for their solution. In order to promote such habits at all levels of learning, Dewey maintained that new forms of teaching were needed, forms in which curiosity and imagination were awakened through direct encounter with puzzling experiences.” Not a decade later, Dewey had lost his confidence in what could be achieved by such “new forms” of teaching. By the eve of World War I,” Westbrook (1991, 192) reports, “Dewey was more fully aware that the democratic reconstruction of American society he envisioned could not take place simply by a revolution in the classroom, that, indeed, the revolution in the classroom could not take place until the society's adults had been won over to radical democracy.”

<sup>11</sup> Bramwell 1981, 94.

<sup>12</sup> Bramwell 1981, 94.

<sup>13</sup> Bramwell 1981, 94.

<sup>14</sup> Bramwell 1981, 94.

<sup>15</sup> Bramwell 1981, 94.

<sup>16</sup> Bramwell 1981, 94. He seems not to have noticed that he himself has employed this very strategy, “solving” the problem of the school curriculum’s relative success in altering attitudes by sidelining “tendentious” topics in favor of installing an “ethos” of “school life,” an idea (as noted earlier) invoked and employed over a century ago in the United States, a nation whose subsequent history cannot confirm the idea’s effectiveness.

<sup>17</sup> Bramwell 1981, 94.

<sup>18</sup> Bramwell 1981, 94.

<sup>19</sup> <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/consequentialism/> Accessed January 17, 2021.

<sup>20</sup> Bramwell 1981, 94-95.

<sup>21</sup> Bramwell 1981, 95.

<sup>22</sup> Bramwell 1981, 95.

<sup>23</sup> Bramwell 1981, 98.

<sup>24</sup> Bramwell 1981, 99.

<sup>25</sup> Bramwell 1981, 99.

<sup>26</sup> Bramwell 1981, 101.

<sup>27</sup> Bramwell 1981, 101.

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<sup>28</sup> Bramwell 1981, 101. Apparently, ethnicity is a property of “others” in Bramwell’s view, a structure of thought (“othering”) associated with a “spectator” sense of knowing, somehow separate and above whatever one views.

<sup>29</sup> Bramwell 1981, 101.