

Title: When Reading Skews the Self and “Puts One in the Margins”: Reflections on French Teaching Methodologies

Author: Sheilagh Knight (Trent University; sheilaghknight@trentu.ca)

*«Il faudra reprendre la route
Devenir français coûte que coûte
Réfugié dans un tiroir
On passe le temps, on garde espoir
C'est ça être français j'en doute »*
From the song El dulce de leche by Tryo

As global citizens, young migrants are “doubly smart” in that they possess two cultures to the “native Canadian’s” one, yet in the hierarchy of Canadian society, they are *déclassés* (lowered in status) by State law, suffer the backlash of “labeling of the whole group” by the media, and go to school where textbooks do not reflect their reality. One may ask, for example, why an important history of immigration of Québec has been called « Tracer les *marges* de la Cité » (*Tracing the Margins of the City*, our emphasis) (Pâquet, 2005). Looking both at the Canadian classroom in a wide sense and in the mirror of self-identity, it is important for teachers in Canada to examine the following specific questions: Who is the migrant child from a Canadian social perspective? What do French teaching methodologies truly reflect about migration? How and when is everyone going to appear “on the same page”?

The Child Migrant Within Canadian Society

In their analysis of Canadian society, parents of immigrant children express particular concern about the Canadian education system:

The education we imagined before migration is quite different from the reality. At that time, we thought the education must be very good. After we came here [to Canada], I feel that the education is not anything great. Sometimes, I’m even worried whether we might have ruined the child (Teo, 2007, p. 12).

Children’s well-being at school is very much linked to immigrant families’ social status in Canada. While able to cross the language barrier and acquire a new language, and while able to earn a living, immigrant families still feel that they are living in what sociologist Louise Fontaine has termed “the quadrature of the circle” (Fontaine, 1993). Thus, new migrants to Canada have the impression they are “circling outside of the [dominant majority’s] circle”, that they “do not enter society” and this is “the greatest failure” (Teo, 2007, pp. 11-12).

The backdrop for the feeling of being “in a square” while others are “in a circle” has its roots in State immigration policies and the type of national identities which have developed in Québec and Canada (see Fontaine & Juteau-Lee, 1996, pp. 192-194). In Table 1, the various historical categories for international migrants to Canada are outlined. In a study of Québécois government immigration documents from 1960-1993, Fontaine and Shiose (1995) show how categorization of immigrants by the State has led to viewing immigrants as “Others”/non-nationals.

In the Québécois Charter of Rights and Freedoms of the Person, adopted in 1976, “persons belonging to *ethnic minorities* are granted the right to maintain and advance [*faire progresser*] their own cultural life with the other members of their group”. This is to say, those who are not part of the “francophone people” and not part of the “anglophone minority” are granted the right to “get ahead” within limits, providing that their cultural life does not infringe upon that of the “majority”, whose existence is affirmed in a “rather mythical way” (Fontaine & Shiose, 1995, p. 100). Similarly, starting in 1981, the Québec State applied the term “cultural communities” to immigrants who have arrived in Canada and to their children who are born in Canada. This is a conceptual model of “ethnic fragmentation” which attributes lower hierarchical status (*déclassement*) to immigrants as compared to members of the “Québécois nation” (Fontaine & Shiose, p. 101).

State usage of categorization has also been studied by sociologist Peter Li who notes that a federal government-sponsored Ekos Research Associates public survey carried out in 2000 contained the question, “Forgetting about the overall number of immigrants coming to Canada, of those who come would you say there are too many, too few or the right amount who are members of visible minorities?” Based on this, and other evidence, Li suggests that the term “visible minorities” is a “convenient label that can be innocently adopted to discuss the social worthiness of ‘race’ and ‘non whites’ without running the risk of being branded ‘racist’”. Li notes that public polls of Canadians’ inability to “tolerate diversity” and of their “cultural insecurity” are thinly veiled means for Canadian immigration policymakers to be able to set “caps” on non-white immigration (Li, 2003, pp. 172-173).

Table 1.
From Stranger/Foreigner to Visible Minority

| Administrative Category for Newly Arrived Populations | Geographic Area | Time Period |
|--|------------------------|---|
| Strangers/Foreigners | BNA/New France | 1627-1760 |
| Immigrant (ethnic group, religion) | Upper/Lower Canada | 1840-1945 |
| Citizens | Canada | 1947 (Adoption of the Canadian Citizenship Law) |
| Refugees | UNHCR | 1951 |
| Ethnic groups | Canada | 1971 (Federal Policy of Multiculturalism) |
| Peuple francophone (Majorité)/Minorité anglophone/ Autres | Québec | 1972 (Commission d’enquête sur la situation de la langue française et sur les droits linguistiques (Commission Gendron) |
| Ethnic minorities | Québec | 1976 (Charte québécois des droits et libertés de la personne) |
| Cultural communities | Québec | 1981 (Creation of the Ministère des communautés culturelles et de l’immigration) |
| Visible minorities | Canada | 1981 (Statistics Canada census) |

Source: Fontaine & Shiose, 1995; Pâquet, 2005; Nyers, 2006.

Schools as a Point of Juncture

Migrant-citizens seek “the right to be understood”, a difficult goal to attain when mass media exacerbates social inequalities and reinforces the values and interests of dominant elites (Jakubowicz, 2007, p. 7).

Schools unwittingly teach social conflict through explicit or hidden pedagogies when they distribute resources unequally, legitimize chauvinism/blame/intolerance, do not interrupt harassment, or disadvantage certain groups through language or grouping practices (Bickmore, 2008, p. 250). Mitigating social conflict is a particularly complex task when student “migrant-citizens” have hybrid allegiances and loyalties (Isin, 2008, pp. 283-284). In Canada, the classroom panorama now includes *fifteen* major languages spoken alongside English and French (see Table 2).

Table 2.
Canadian Population by Mother Tongue, 2006

| Mother tongue | Population | % | Mother tongue | Population | % |
|-------------------------|------------|-------|---------------------------|-------------------|-------------|
| Single responses | | | | | |
| 1. English | 17,882,725 | 57.2% | 13. Ukrainian | 134,500 | .4% |
| 2. French | 6,817,655 | 21.8% | 14. Dutch | 128,900 | .4% |
| 3. Chinese ¹ | 1,012,065 | 3.2 % | 15. Greek | 117,285 | .4% |
| 4. Italian | 455,040 | 1.5% | 16. Cree | 78,855 | .3% |
| 5. German | 450,570 | 1.4% | 17. Inuktitut | 32,380 | .1% |
| 6. Punjabi | 367,505 | 1.2% | 18. Other | 1,956,060 | 6.3% |
| 7. Spanish | 345,345 | 1.1% | Multiple responses | | |
| 8. Arabic | 261,640 | .8% | 19. Eng. & other | 240,005 | .7% |
| 9. Tagalog | 235,615 | .8% | 20. Eng. & Fre. | 98,625 | .3% |
| 10. Portuguese | 219,275 | .7% | 21. Fre. & other | 43,335 | .1% |
| 11. Polish | 211,175 | .7% | 22. Eng., Fre.& other | 10,790 | .03% |
| 12. Vietnamese | 141,630 | .5% | Total population | 31,241,030 | 100% |

Source: Statistics Canada. (2007a). 2006 Census of Canada.

As Isin, Brodie, Juteau and Stasiulis (2008) state, “citizenship involves the art of being with others, negotiating different situations and identities, and articulating ourselves as distinct yet similar to others in our everyday lives, and asking questions [pertaining to] justice” (p. 7). For teachers in Canada, successfully negotiating different situations and identities should include speaking at least one other national language besides English and French (see Table 3 for the list of languages spoken by groups of over 100,000 people), for as Ludwig Wittgenstein has said, “the extent (*frontières*) of my language is the extent (*frontières*) of my world” (cited in Pâquet, 2005, p. 239).

In their study of citizenship and migration, Castles and Davidson (2000) note that to live together in a global society, making multiethnic communities work implies a new sort of education, one that will:

give up the search for a common memory or history [which signifies] the end of an education towards the Periclean warrior defense of the cultural patrimony, whether it

¹ Chinese languages include Mandarin, Cantonese, Hakka, Taiwanese, Chaochow (Teochow), Fukien and Shanghainese as well as a residual category (Chinese languages not otherwise specified.)

is a defense of democracy or of Islam. In its place, there must be an educational project of working with all others as if there were no prehistory of cultural predeterminations.” (p. 218)

According to Castles and Davidson (2000), four key values should characterize the “new civics” required to promote conviviality, bind together global societies and (to quote Teo above) “not ruin the child”. Probity and modesty have been added to complete the list (see Table 4).

Table 3.

Most common non-official languages spoken in Canada, by urban area

| Urban Area | Mother tongue | Number | Percentage |
|------------------|-------------------|---------|------------|
| Toronto | Chinese languages | 419,755 | 19 |
| | Italian | 194,620 | 8.8 |
| | Punjabi | 137,730 | 6.2 |
| | Tagalog | 113,870 | 5.2 |
| | Portuguese | 113,015 | 5.1 |
| | Spanish | 112,875 | 5.1 |
| | Urdu | 105,555 | 4.8 |
| Vancouver | Chinese languages | 331,795 | 38.4 |
| | Punjabi | 122,255 | 14.2 |
| Montréal | Italian | 125,575 | 16 |
| | Arabic | 109,730 | 14 |

Source: Statistics Canada. (2007b). 2006 Census of Canada.

Table 4.

New Civics Values

| New Civics Value | Implications |
|------------------|--|
| Tolerance | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Shows where nonacceptance of the Other rests on inveterate, emotional, irrational prejudices - Refusal to subscribe to a strong Cartesian reason, coupled with willingness to revise one’s own opinions |
| Mildness | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Holding on to our belief about the Good in the face of rival and disputing views, and yet not imposing our own views even when we have the desire, the anger or the power to do so |
| Trust | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Implies mutuality, non-immediate recompense and incommensurate value |
| Love (caritas) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Refusal to reduce anyone to their cultural characteristics, need to accept at “face value” - “Rootedness” (overattachment to sedentary things) is secondary, and other forms of faithfulness and responsibility are primary |
| Probity | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Involves not living from “ill-gotten gains”, not cheating, not lying and not stealing - Pre-supposes both strong ethics and a community network in which others are ready to help in times of need |
| Modesty | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Entails not “blowing your own horn” and recognizing all the gifts (intellectual, spiritual, technical, physical, etc.) that others may possess - Implies dressing in a way which is acceptable to the social groups that one lives and works with |

Source: Castles & Davidson, 2000.

Challenging the Textbook

Educational leadership entails challenging the contents of textbooks which do not reflect the values and aspirations of the people reading them (Alter, 2009).

In his treatise *Sorry, I Don't Speak French: Confronting the Canadian crisis that won't go away*, Graham Fraser touched very briefly on the dearth of French language teaching materials in Canada (Fraser, 2006, p. 198). Looking at three French teaching methodologies used in Canada (an American text, *Vis-à-vis*; a French text, *Reflets I*, and a Canadian text, *Pause-café*), it is clear that while textbooks are relatively good at teaching grammatical content, their underlying sociological content definitely needs nuancing. Some student readers are left “outside the circle” because of inappropriate categorization, inaccurate descriptions of the Global South², propagation of class hierarchies and inculcation of inappropriate values (see Table 5).

Table 5.
What of New Civics?: Categorizing, Lowering and Inculcating

| | Vis-à-vis | Reflets I | Pause-café |
|--|--|--|---|
| Categorizing | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of term « <i>mariage interculturel</i> » which implies that exogamy is abnormal • Pejorative depiction of low-income housing: « <i>Ici, en banlieue, on trouve de grands complexes où habitent surtout des familles d'ouvriers et d'immigrés. Leurs immeubles s'appellent des H.L.M. (Habitations à Loyer Modéré).</i> » • Use of terms « <i>étudiants étrangers</i> », « <i>Juifs polonais</i> » and « <i>Afrique noire</i> » | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individuals from Europe are depicted as having a « <i>léger accent</i> » • In the only depiction of youth “of colour”, they dance hip-hop and loiter around the community centre • “White” youth are portrayed as being able to afford private tutoring and private martial arts instruction • Marginal/Different-looking individuals are refused as tenants and subject to mockery | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A multicultural depiction of a wide variety of students and young professionals • A rather “flat”, sugar-coated depiction of multicultural interactions: very little legal, economic, political or social wrangling occurs |
| Nuances or Lack of nuances regarding the Global South societies and immigrants from the Global South | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Africa is “a destination for safaris” • Muslims are shown drinking, while they do not condone the use of alcohol • Sylvie tries to get into a mosque wearing a mini-skirt, with no explanation of what appropriate dress would be (hijab, long skirt) • It is suggested that one is safe sleeping « <i>à la belle étoile</i> » on the beaches of Martinique • Use of the term « <i>traite négrière</i> » rather than « <i>traite des esclaves</i> ». • Use of expression « <i>c'est un vrai souk ici</i> » without discussing the nuances of it | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Total absence of references to/non-existence of, the Global South, however, characters portrayed are a good reflection of the foibles of French society | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Depicts a variety of role models, both female and male, from across the francophone world |

² The term “Global South” is from Patel (2007), economist and author of *Stuffed and Starved*.

| | | | |
|-----------------------------------|--|--|---|
| Superior-inferior class structure | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paris is the “apex of culture” • New immigrants (Hassan & Hector) have lower socio-economic status than Léa and Juliette (born in France). • Professions are depicted as a pyramid with the « <i>chef d’entreprise</i> » on top and the « <i>ouvriers</i> » on the bottom | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The comic idiosyncrasies of adult professionals are portrayed, but these individuals, from Japan and Brazil, are not permanent residents or citizens of the French Republic | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of depth in the dialogues depicting International University characters. Everyone is intellectual and successful, therefore there is little understanding gained of the “stakes” of class struggle • No explanation is provided as to why <i>créole</i> is a minority language and French “a superior class” language, however an in-depth study of the origin of the word <i>créole</i> is provided • Lack of nuances concerning First Nations in Québec and Acadia • The reader is introduced to major literary and cinematic figures whose works discuss historical and contemporary social dilemmas |
| Values | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of verb « <i>séduire</i> » which individuals of strict moral upbringing will find offensive • « <i>Paris, ville de l’amour</i> » promotes stereotypes of Parisians • Certain dialogues promote consumerism rather than humanitarianism (« <i>Ah, si j’étais riche</i> », p. 417) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Backbiting is depicted as a normal form of humour • The “seductive nature” of “female cars” is examined and is presented as a “logical” explanation for a change in car styles • In dealing with the themes of street people and celebrity culture (p. 97), it is suggested that certain goals are beyond the reach of “the poor” and “the not beautiful enough” | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key political issues (environmental, health, consumerism, literacy) are introduced, but not discussed in depth • Vacations in Guadeloupe and moving into a spacious house with an en suite bathroom are a reflection of consumerism rather than humanitarianism |

Source: *Vis-à-vis Beginning French* (Amon, Muyskens, & Omaggio Hadley, 2008³), *Reflets I* (Capelle & Gidon, 1999) and *Pause-café* (Avitzur & Michaël, 2006).

In conclusion, current textbook writing for student migrant-citizens is terribly lacking in refined sociological content. We have a *faim de loup* (we are famished) for the new civics textbooks. *Pro tem*, Table 6 contains some supplementary materials that we have successfully used in our teaching.

Table 6.
Musical Resources for Teaching French

| Song and Artist | Sociological Theme |
|---|---|
| <i>Nuit et brouillard</i> by Jean Ferrat | The Holocaust |
| <i>Mon pays</i> by Gilles Vigneault | The struggle to be <i>maîtres chez nous</i> and sharing with all of humanity |
| <i>Terre</i> by Corneille | Home, land as a source of conflict, safety and “homeland” versus fatherland |
| <i>Qu’en est-il de la chance</i> by Pierre Lapointe | Ecology, humanity’s role in the disappearance of birds (can be accompanied by the article « <i>Périlleuse traversée</i> » (<i>l’Actualité</i> , 5 octobre 2008)) |
| <i>Évangéline</i> by Michel Conte, sung by Marie-Jo Thériot | The English Conquest, the fracturing of French families, the essence of Acadian identity |
| <i>Un moment ma folie</i> by Amélie Veille | The importance of dreams, travel and freedom |
| <i>Tomber la chemise</i> by Zebda | Disenfranchised youth in France, underemployment, social conflict |
| <i>Qu’on s’en va</i> by Taktika | Social justice in Québec: parent-child relationships in a consumer society, stress, marginalization of young and old, poverty |
| <i>Aujourd’hui</i> by Luc Tardif/Louis Del Vecchio | Poverty and happiness |

³ Note that Memorial University is currently revising this textbook for use in Canada.

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