TOLERANCE

1995 Presidential Address
Comparative and International Education Society of Canada

Deo H. Poonwassie
The University of Manitoba

If we were all exactly the same we would, more than likely, not be concerned about tolerance; instead we would probably speak about boredom, repetition, and the need for genetic engineering to create differences. Tolerance is borne of the reality that we live in a state of human diversity, locally and globally.

I have chosen the topic of tolerance partly because UNESCO and the British Commonwealth of Nations have declared 1995 the year of Tolerance, and because Canada is re-examining its commitment to diversity, which has major implications for the proper conduct of our business of harmonious living. I will proceed by unraveling some of the complexities of the concept of Tolerance; give an overview of global tolerance; examine some issues of Tolerance within Canada; and finally, I will look at some implications for education in Canada. Most importantly, I am interested in exploring theoretically the central theme of Tolerance; in other words, there will be many questions (not answers) which I hope we will think about in order to find some answers.

The Concept of Tolerance

I will not make a distinction between tolerance and toleration only because the philosophical complexities of such explanations will take us beyond the scope of this address. In addition, I will restrict the meaning of this term to human beings, and not include other areas such as the biosphere, chemical, and physical reactions.

At first glance the term tolerance appears to be benign and forgiving; but, as the above diagram shows, the nuances include condescension and superiority on the part of the tolerator; the meanings and feelings in this instance are negative and unacceptable. Moving slightly to the centre, the idea of "live and let live" provides us with a neutral stance; however, neutrality is often seen as an escape from action - is it enough to be indifferent? The positive meaning of tolerance takes us into the realms of understanding, empathizing, assisting, fostering, accepting, and appreciating.

UNESCO asks the question "What is Tolerance?", and provides us with some thoughts:

Tolerance is respecting others' rights and freedoms. Tolerance is recognition and acceptance of individual differences. It is learning to listen to, communicate with and understand others. Tolerance is the appreciation of cultural diversity. It is openness to other thoughts and philosophies, derived from interest and curiosity, and refusal to reject the unknown. Tolerance is recognition that no individual culture, nation or religion has the monopoly of knowledge of truth. Tolerance is a form of freedom, freedom from prejudice, freedom from dogma. A tolerant person is master of his own opinions and actions. Tolerance is a positive attitude towards others with no trace of condescension. (UNESCO. 1994.)

In her Commonwealth Day message Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth cited tolerance as, "something we in the Commonwealth can teach the rest of the world about, because it was at the heart of our unique association"

(Commonwealth Secretariat, March/April, 1995, p.2.). She continued to point out that it was important to understand the other's points of view even though we may disagree.

What then are the conditions or circumstances when tolerance must be exercised? Mendus (1989), a philosopher, clearly states that diversity is a necessary condition for tolerance coupled with disapproval, dislike, and disgust. Like racism or genocide this is not a particularly pleasant picture, but it is a reality. Mendus (1989) goes further to say that another condition for tolerance is that the behaviour of the tolerated is alterable. In other words, only if we believe that a particular behaviour is temporary and is mendable to acceptable levels, then we can exercise limited tolerance; if not, the circumstance requires zero tolerance, and possibly immediate action for improvement. Thus a question to ponder is: in order to exercise tolerance, is the probability of change a necessary condition?

Major areas of diversity are racial, religious, sexual, and social class. And each area provides a unique set of circumstances; for example social class provides us with a view of a stratified society with different socio-economic conditions, opportunities, and aspirations. People are generally categorized according to social stratum, and stereotyped accordingly; a result of this is conflict in the workplace, education, opportunity, and conditions for a desired level of living.

Sexual differences and sexual orientation are both sources of disapproval, dislike, and, to some, disgust. Are those who form these minorities required to accept less in terms of respect, social benefits, and economic opportunities?

Religious differences have played a major role in world affairs throughout history. Today we still have conflicts based on religious diversity as seen between India and Pakistan and in the former Yugoslavia. Closer to home we have witnessed incidents involving the Sikhs' turban and the RCMP, and swastikas painted on synagogues.

Racial differences have been the source of many conflicts; this issue is very complex, involving human rights, economic and educational opportunity, employment, and social mobility. Is the difference between races a condition for tolerance? If Mendus (1989) is correct that the behaviour of the tolerated is alterable, and if it is true that behaviours or characteristics differ, and that such differences are racially linked, then, because races cannot be changed, different behaviours or characteristics should be tolerated. In addition, color or sex, also being unalterable, cannot be a basis for intolerance.

What then are the requirements of tolerance? Mendus (1989) poses several questions:

Does it require forbearance only, or is there an obligation to protect and preserve? Does (tolerance) require more than merely letting alone? Does it require assisting and nurturing? Finally, it is a matter of dispute what the proper objects of (tolerance) are: can we properly include only that which is alterable, or is it legitimate to speak of tolerating a person in respect of something over which he has no control? May we speak of tolerating people themselves, or must we tolerate (or be intolerant of) practices, attitudes, and beliefs? (pp. 17, 18.)

Answering these questions will reveal the paradoxes of moral dimensions, contradictions, and complexities inherent in the concept of tolerance. Pursuing answers, tentative as they may be, hopefully will not produce paralysis, but will give us reasons for the judicious exercise of tolerance.

The above diagram includes generic factors that determine the level or degree of tolerance. Tolerance is the focus with four major factors that determine each others existence; these are HUMAN RIGHTS, DIVERSITY, JUSTICE and PEACE. These are all related in a very complex web of influences. A dynamic two-way relationship exists between each of these factors and tolerance, except for the existence of DIVERSITY which is basic to the need for tolerance. In addition, each of these factors affect the realization of the others in fundamental ways that can determine human survival. Every individual, group or organization must possess patience, judiciousness, autonomy/control, and knowledge in every section of influence that may produce tolerance. The foundation of tolerance is influenced by economic, political, and social conditions. Other considerations for the existence of tolerance include: (a) moral approval of a requirement to change; (b) the question of kinship between tolerance and scepticism; (c) religious cannons that may be impediments to tolerance; and (d) distinctions between tolerance and unbridled licence.

In summary, the conditions for tolerance are grounded in respect for self and others where there is diversity, combined with disapproval, dislike, and disgust. Tolerance requires understanding based in knowledge and appreciation, affirmation, and the celebration of life-enhancing human qualities.

Global Tolerance

The need for tolerance globally as a starting point towards peace and human rights is of utmost urgency. The end of the cold war and the demise of a super power (the Soviet Union) were regarded as the conditions for a new and peaceful world order. Instead we are witnessing an upsurge in conflicts within nations in every region of the world.

Despite the end of the cold war, the global community continues to be confronted by devastating conflicts. Most of these conflicts do not erupt between warring countries but are internal hostilities in nations afflicted by such ills as the deterioration of the environment and poor governance. (Sahnoun, 1994, p. 4.)

Conflict as a major result of intolerance must be examined critically in order to arrive at possible solutions and thus reduce or remove intolerance. Apart from the environment and governance, there are other causes of conflict, such as economic disasters, inflation, nationalism, ethnic cleansing, famine, factionalism, insecurity, and isolation.

Sahnoun (1994) provides several causes of conflicts. First, the lack of integration during the establishment of the nation-state, e.g. Chad, Somalia. Second, colonial imposition of boundaries in creating new States, e.g. India and Pakistan, Nigeria and Cameroon. Third, liberation movements/social revolts that later become prolonged conflicts, e.g. Afghanistan, Cambodia. Fourth, conflicts derived from ethnic tensions, e.g. former Yugoslavia, Rwanda. Fifth, conflicts associated with religion, e.g. Cyprus, India. Sixth, conflicts centred in socio-economic and political tensions e.g. Peru, Congo. Seventh, wars of aggression, e.g. Iraq's invasion of Kuwait. In addition to the above there are several other factors that support conflict and intolerance, such as arms export (France, Canada), foreign interference (USA in Nicaragua), ambitious leaders (Iraq's Saddam Hosein), damaged infra-structure, weakened traditional processes of conciliation, and inadequate response to human tragedy.

Regionally, major conflicts are often seen in Latin America, Asia, and Africa. In general, some common factors applicable to all these regions are: (a) they have a colonial past; (b) they are mainly primary producers; (c) they are burdened with large international debts; (d) there is an imbalance of imports over exports; (e) there are comparatively high rates of illiteracy; and (f) there is lack of widespread use of modern technology. This is not to say that conflicts are not seen in other parts of the world, such as Northern Ireland, the USA, and Eastern Europe; but generally the scale and occurrence are somewhat limited in these areas.

As most conflicts (and intolerance) are created by human beings, the power to prevent and/or resolve these must lie within the scope of human effort. The most violent solution to a conflict is to obliterate opponent(s); clearly, this is unacceptable. A more comprehensive peaceful approach involving all organizations (international, national, regional, local) will clearly be more desirable, but also more difficult as is seen in the example of fighting between the factions of the former Yugoslavia.

The improvement of the resource bases in developing countries will go far in eliminating conflicts, especially in nations where the small ruling elite controls the lives of the peasants. Indigenous initiatives must be cultivated using the creative capacities of those who are willing to become autonomous. Problems must be dealt with at their source to provide the basic physical necessities of life - when people are poor and starving, it is extremely difficult to consider tolerance (who can afford tolerance?). As long as the "North" continues to oppress the "South", tolerance, peace, justice, and human rights on any appreciable scale will remain in the ethereal world of dreams - this is a reality of economic domination and ideological hegemony. Indeed, some of this oppression occurs within nations. Development strategies must be devised

in order to reduce sources of conflict; these strategies must be based on an understanding of the complexity of under-development from the "South's" point of view - the "donor-recipient" relationship must give way to a co-operative partnership on an equal basis. The dominant World Bank and IMF perspective of structural adjustment must be relinquished in its present forms if countries from the South are to exercise a vital form of autonomy. Structural adjustment programs (known as SAP's) initiated by the IMF are seen by Africans as a "new imperialism for recolonization" and further underdevelopment (E.C.E.J., 1990). This type of international aggressive economic oppression does not foster tolerance in any form.

Peace keeping, peace making, and peace enforcing all involve a military presence; the UN forces in Somalia and Bosnia have not had much influence on preventing the on-going killings in these countries. As quoted in the IDRC Reports (October, 1994):

The international community should place less emphasis on UN peacekeeping and more on development strategies that promote good governance, in response to the spread of armed conflicts around the world. (p.7.)

Good governance can assist in reducing conflict and promoting tolerance; the process of providing leadership in any form should not mean that opponents are to be killed; in other words, absolute and ruthless power cannot be a component of good governance. When governments fail in their responsibilities, peace, human dignity, vital needs, human rights, and the rule of law become casualties. An informed, responsible, and caring citizenry supported by economic, social, and cultural, well-being bodes well for tolerance in any society.

Much effort is placed on national security but, in spite of this, countries have been plunged into prolonged internal conflicts. Attention to human security needs to be increased:

Throughout today's world, traditional measures for protecting national security are failing to prevent tragic violations of the most basic aspects of human security. Territorial sovereignty and military capacity become scarcely relevant when human security concerns such as ethnicity, religion, the environment, governance, the economy and human rights turn into flashpoints for violent conflict. (Buttedahl, 1994, p.14.)

The intricate complex of factors affecting human dignity such as personal and physical, economic, social, political, and ethnic and cultural security must be recognized and every effort made to preserve and promote these. When these

securities are eroded or removed, the impending decay of that society soon turns to reality: conflict is rampant and tolerance is absent.

At a press conference on February 21, 1995 the United Nations Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali launched the UN Year for Tolerance, and declared that: "Tolerance is respect for diversity, through recognition of our common humanity" (UNESCO Sources, 1995. p.5.). Despite the "we" and "they", the "in group" and the "out group" dichotomies, human beings have more in common than they have differences: we all have the ability to adapt; we experience grief, happiness, birth, death; we have celebrations; we need food, sex, shelter, clothing, strategies for survival; and the list goes on. This common humanity, sometimes called human nature, is the core of tolerance and international co-operation. We can prevent most conflicts if we concentrate on our common characteristics, needs, beliefs, and values. This clearly calls for a re-evaluation and re-structuring of our international and transnational financial and humanitarian organizations; in addition there is a need for a new world order in which priorities become economic equity, peace, human rights, justice, and acceptance of diversity (which constitute tolerance) instead of power, influence, economic superiority, and a competitive edge (which form the structural economic basis of national agendas for continued aggression and insecurity).

Issues of Tolerance in Canada

In Canada we have legislation to protect human rights and the use of language; for example, we have the Charter of Rights and Freedoms (1982) and the Official Language Act (1969) enshrined in the laws of the land. Canada has even gone so far as to surrender a degree of its sovereignty in human rights to international agencies through the protocol of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966). This legislation allows individuals or groups to bring their grievance to international committees set up by the UN (Ray, 1993). Official regulations and laws may not be enough to guarantee tolerance, because tolerance requires tolerant attitudes in society as well as protective legislation. Another example is the Act in respect to Multiculturalism - official support is provided by governments in recognizing the diversity within Canadian society. In Canada we are very fortunate to enjoy a comparatively high level of personal security, high economic standard of living, and an enviable quality of life; however, we are not without our problems.

First, it is scandalous and unconscionable that we have a high level of child poverty in this country. In Winnipeg, where the level of child poverty is highest in Canada, we have witnessed an unprecedented community action

to keep a hockey team in this city; this was also supported by three levels of government in the form of millions of tax dollars. If this sum of over \$100 million was injected into a system to eradicate child poverty, I believe we would be a lot closer to restoring dignity to thousands of powerless children.

Second, in spite of legislation we have witnessed incidents of hate and disapproval of certain ethnic groups. The case of the refusal of a muslim student from attending school because she wore a hijab and the hate literature against Jews produced and distributed by Ernst Zundel are only two of the many incidents that have surfaced in recent years. This type of rejection does not promote tolerance in our society.

Third, Aboriginal peoples from Canada have made representation to the UN committee on human rights violations. The general poverty and unemployment levels have created unacceptable living conditions for most Aboriginals in their own communities. Indeed, in 1990, prompted by a land claims issue, we witnessed an armed confrontation between the Mohawks and the Canadian army at Oka. As Aboriginals seek to re-establish their rights and self-government, the Canadian public will be required to demonstrate a higher level of genuine tolerance in the forms of understanding and acceptance. As highlighted in the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry Report of Manitoba (1991), Aboriginals are not only seeking social and economic justice, but also their own legal system; the present imposed system is unfair and does not recognize Aboriginal culture and values.

Fourth, issues of acceptance of gays and lesbians will continue to be politicized in Canada. Human rights issues have been raised in courts of law and will continue to be highlighted as sexual orientation and benefits for same sex couples are contested as inequitable conditions of employment for these groups.

Fifth, a major issue in the workplace is equity for women and minorities. Acceptance of the principle "equal pay for equal work" is still not the practice in many organizations. Valuing the contributions of women to the well-being of our society is a major issue of recognition for the worth of women's work. Is tolerance a first step? Undoubtedly, but there are still the tasks of eliminating bigotry, and cultivating a sense of fairness.

Sixth, the ever present threat of Quebec separation from the rest of Canada raises many questions of integration, assimilation, distinct society, economic and sovereignty association, language rights, and cultural survival. The invocation of tolerance at its highest level is required to keep Canada from breaking up.

Seventh, in the same vein as the Quebec issue, political issues between the federal and provincial governments often create conflicts over jurisdiction and responsibility. Economic issues, transfer of payments, regional disparities, and

inter-provincial trade are some of the problems that question our forms of governance. As pointed out earlier, analysis of jurisdictions and structures for viable governance must continue to be an essential part of maintaining our quality of life.

Lastly, recently there were many clashes between industry and environmentalists. The maintenance and restoration of our environment are crucial for our quality of life now and in the future. The destruction of our forests, rivers, lakes, and the pollution of the atmosphere has created conflicts in our society. For many years people have been tolerant of environmental abuse; the situation is critical in many parts of Canada, and this may be the time to advocate for renewal and zero tolerance for environmental destruction.

In summary, we as Canadians enjoy a high standard of living and quality of life; in order to maintain this, we must be continuously vigilant over our actions, governance, our human rights, structures for social justice, and acceptance of diversity. Above all else, the celebration of human dignity in our multicultural society and the affirmation of individual worth regardless of differences are reasons for promoting tolerance and peace.

Implications for Education

The terms schooling and education are used interchangeably in this section to mean the acquisition of knowledge in a morally acceptable way. As tolerance is rooted in diversity it seems logical that schools should be primarily concerned with exposing students to diversity if they are to understand and accept the need for tolerance.

Schools are too often asked to solve the many problems of society, and the problem of intolerance is no exception. The diversity that exists within our society has already been discussed; what can schools do? Again, under the title of multiculturalism many programs have been developed in schools and by governments throughout this country. Yet the problem still exists to varying degrees depending on the geographic location. UNESCO Director-General Federico Mayor stressed that:

education for tolerance (is) the best investment we can make in our own future society... We do not want young people to be docile... We want to encourage debate and even dissent. But no violence. ...this year we want to do more than deplore, condemn, denounce and decry. We want fresh thinking, new tools, policies and legislation... we must strike at the roots of violence: poverty, ignorance and exclusion. (UNESCO Sources, March, 1995. p.5.)

If Mr. Mayor is correct about striking at the root causes, then the schools' responsibility must lie in removing ignorance; this will not necessarily

eliminate intolerance, but it will certainly go a long way towards reducing it, and possibly promoting tolerance. The task is too large and complex for schools alone. Parents need to be educated (although this is not the main function of the school). Government, church, and community organizations all have a role to play in informing and convincing parents of their responsibilities. The media is a major player in promoting sensationalized stories; they can instead be used to educate the public in strategies to combat intolerance.

School curricula have included many strategies to promote tolerance; some of these are anti-racist education, role-playing, use of relevant literature, discussion groups, use of film, debates, multi-cultural week (days), international festivals with ethnic foods, dances, and costumes. We need more liaison officers for home-school relations, greater representation of diversity on school staff, and less attention on immutable differences. Strategies must be devised to change negative attitudes towards diversity.

Teachers are key persons in promoting tolerance in schools. First, they must be exposed during both their pre-service and in-service training to the issues involved in producing a tolerant person -- human rights, peace education, requirements of security, and a culture of understanding and acceptance. Second, teachers must decide what they can reasonably and effectively teach within the boundaries of existing constraints. The adoption of inclusive curriculum must be considered where real problems of gender, race, and class can be addressed with the seriousness they deserve.

Experience and critical exposure are excellent teachers; field trips are probably one of the best methods to teach youth and adults about other peoples' worlds. A "world view" is not easily formed, nor is it easily explained. A particular form of a field trip is student exchange - that is to live like other people do. I am aware of successful efforts made between urban students and a First Nations community students to bridge the gap in understanding between two cultures. Carefully planned, the experiences gained and the insights gleaned in this encounter (two weeks) could not be matched by 10 months of textbook study. This method of teaching for learning and practising tolerance has not been used often enough and should be promoted among schools.

Two other effective teaching methods that can be used in the classroom include: (a) critical incidents; and (b) the analytical/theoretical approach. The critical incidents method involves the re-counting of stories that illustrate situations (or incidents) of tolerance or intolerance. These stories are analyzed not from the point of assigning blame, but to take apart the problem and examine why such an incident took place; should it be encouraged or prevented in the future? The analytical/theoretical approach involves the

separation and examination of issues. A common source of issues, in addition to personal encounters, is the newspaper or magazine article. At the higher grades, stories such as wearing the turban as part of the RCMP uniform, the Keegstra story, or the KKK in Canada, can be used effectively to examine our own level of tolerance in Canada. Internationally there is no shortage of stories from which to frame issues for discussion and research essays; some of these are conflicts in the Middle East, Bosnia/Serbia/Croatia, Somalia, and South Africa.

In essence, the changing of attitudes for practising tolerance cannot be the responsibility of any one institution or agency. There has to be a concerted co-operative effort by all peoples and organizations in society to promote and practise tolerance; the target cannot be youth alone, but must include adults as well. All media must be charged with the responsibility of attacking intolerance.

Conclusion

Tolerance is an all-encompassing and complex term with different meanings depending on where it is placed on the continuum explained earlier. This raises the very significant question of: what level of intolerance is tolerable? While working towards zero intolerance and the ideal of perfect peace, reality dictates that degrees of intolerance will be temporarily tolerated, provided that personal security and the availability of basic needs are not threatened. This provides a basis from which to launch effective assaults on the nefarious presence of punitive intolerance.

As we witness intolerance which results in major conflicts around the world, it becomes necessary for us to mobilize our resources to explain, understand, appreciate, and accept diversity. In times of plenty this is relatively easy, but when the basic necessities of life are difficult to obtain and life itself is threatened, it becomes very difficult to be tolerant. Greed, lust for power and control, and the desire to secure the world resources for ourselves increase economic expansionism and threaten world peace. Seeking tolerance will be a continuous quest with some gains; we are compelled to persevere and advance the search for a stable and tolerant society.

References

- Buttedahl, P. (1994). True measures of human security. International Development Research Centre (Canada) Reports. 22 (3), 14-15.
- Commonwealth Secretariat. (1995, March/April). Commonwealth Currents. London: Marlborough House, p. 2.
- E.C.E.J. (Ecumenical Coalition for Economic Justice) (1990). Recolonization or Liberation. Toronto: Ecumenical Coalition for Economic Justice.
- Mendus, S. (1989). Toleration and the limits of liberalism. New Jersey: Humanities Press International.
- Ray, D. (1993). Emerging issues in human rights education. In L. L. Stewin and S. J. H. McCann, (Eds.), Contemporary educational issues the Canadian mosaic. Second edition. Toronto: Copp Clark Pitman.
- Sahnoun, M. (1994, October). An environment for peace. International Development Research Centre (Canada) Reports. 22 (3), 4-6.
- UNESCO (1994) Information Publication. 1995 - A year for tolerance. Paris.
- UNESCO Sources (1995, March), No. 67.