EDITORIAL

How is the World Changing?

IAN WINCHESTER
University of Calgary

This issue is the second in a series devoted to the topic of how teacher education might live well in a changing world. But this presupposes that we already have some sense of how the world is changing. In the Canadian context the assumptions of this issue are largely connected with a few central themes: the increasing diversity of the Canadian population, and thus the increasing diversity of a typical Canadian classroom; the transformation of sexual mores and especially laws relating to these that affect questions of tolerance and prejudice; the American progress towards racial equality that creates a picture in Canada that is sometimes inspirational and sometimes misleading; the transformation of the place of women in the economy and the subsequent transformation of the home, of marital norms, or parenthood; the changing face of the workplace in the Canadian and the global context. And finally the view that Canada is simply a Christian country with a rough equality between protestant and Catholic versions of that religion have been seriously challenged by large waves of immigration from Asian countries in the last 25 years or so. This also has implications for the kinds of languages spoken in Canada and, given multicultural legislation, the kinds of educational support given for these.

Although one might quickly list such features that one might emphasize as part of the change that affects the 21st century and its educational context, it is nonetheless rather difficult to get a very good picture of what these changes amount to. It is arguable that of the last three thousand years or so the last hundred years has been the most stable during that entire time. By this I mean that our picture of civilization has been more or less stable during that time in the sense that our picture or our ideals of agriculture, transportation, communication, war, education, health care, and government, and the migration of peoples have been remarkably constant all over the world, not just in Europe and North America. It is true that there are splinter groups more or less everywhere who, knowing what it is that is taken for

Journal of Educational Thought
Vol. 42, No. 3, 2008, 237-239.

granted with respect to these things, wish to combat them. But they too share the general picture which they oppose. And the means of agriculture, education, transportation, communication, health care, and government, while changing in details nonetheless continued in a strikingly common way throughout the century.

Let us look at some of the apparently striking innovations of recent years. For example, we all have mobile or cell phones now. But the telephone was with us a hundred years ago. The automobile is ubiquitous in many parts of the world. But the internal combustion engine that drives it was invented over a century ago. Our means of mass production, whether of cars or cell phones, are just like the means of mass production pioneered in Britain in the 18th and 19th centuries and developed by Henry Ford with respect to the automobile before the First World War. We have been flying like birds since the Wright brothers early in the 20th century and while airplanes are now more or less everywhere they are still based on the same principles that let the Wright Brothers fly. Our means of transportation remain the large, diesel engine driven boat, the large high-test gasoline fuelled airplane, and the diesel fuelled locomotive. The fuel has changed from coal, but otherwise the means of transportation remain as they were. Our means of war are based on those pioneered first by the Americans in their Civil War 150 years ago which was based on transportation and supply using the railway. We don't always use railways in our day, but we use the other means of transport, the truck and the large airplane, to do much of what the railway permitted. Our powers of civil destruction by means of war are much greater now than they then were, but they are the same means. As Churchill remarked "For bashing skulls, steel is best." And we have found numerous innovative other ways of bashing skulls by using steel. Our government ideals, though there are a number of dictatorships still with us, are generally democratic, though the understanding of democracy in, for example, China, India, Cuba, and the United States are not everywhere the same. And even the dictators, led by Mussolini and Hitler half a century ago were happy to trumpet that they had gained their power by democratic means, even though they shortly thereafter suspended democracy.

Agriculture, though there are still some small family plots, is largely something done on a much larger scale and as an activity in which transportation, and communication, are central to the foodstuffs going to market. In the Canadian context whole regions are specialized. Thus Prince Edward Island grows potatoes. Saskatchewan and Alberta grow

wheat. Mixed farming is common in Ontario. Fruit and grapes are grown in the Niagara Peninsula and in the Okanagan Valley of British Columbia. We depend upon the states of Florida and California for much of our citrus fruit and on South America for bananas. The Chinese count on us to provide them with the extra wheat they need. But though I have characterized Canada all too briefly in these terms, every country has much the same story to tell agriculturally. Where it doesn't, small, poor, ill-cultivated family plots are still the order of the day and poverty and disease are rife. Mugabe has returned the formerly rich Zimbabwe to this state, though surely these cannot be his ideals.

Education is considered to be a universal right and most countries claim that right for their children by means of common, publicly funded schools. Where education is still left to the families the education received is rather like that received in European countries before the industrial revolution: rudiments of home-making, rudiments of back-yard agriculture, rudiments of animal husbandry, and little or no literacy to speak of.

So what are we to make of this *changing world*? There are some things that began in the 19th century or early in the 20th century that are only now becoming serious developments, though the ideals have been with us for all that time. I mean the universal agreement of the equality of women and men. I mean the universal agreement of the equality of people of all races and religions within a democratic state. But though there has been remarkable progress here, and to that degree there has been change, the ideals have been constant. It is a mark of that constancy that there are and have been in recent years many heads of state who were women. It is a mark of that constancy of ideals that the next president of the United States is born of a black African man and a white American woman of mixed European background.

It seems to me that if we are to conceive of a changing world that is not merely a superficial conception of such ideals, then we need to look to ideals beyond those that have been our constant companions for nearly two centuries and beyond the stability of the technologies that have been with us for at least 100 years. But what kinds of ideals might these be? Perhaps this issue will offer us some ways to approach them.

Ian Winchester
Editor