MULTICULTURALISM ISSUES IN CANADA

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ABSTRACT

The author answers the following questions on the topic of Applied Policy Research:

1) How can we most effectively measure the impact of multiculturalism, both as a policy and in the message it conveys to Canadians?
2) What are the policies and initiatives of other government departments that influence multiculturalism?
3) What type of research would you recommend be conducted to enhance our understanding of multiculturalism and diversity the most?

Introduction

In 1971, Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau described the objectives of the Policy of Multiculturalism as "preserving human rights, developing Canadian identity, strengthening civic participation, reinforcing Canadian unity and encouraging cultural diversification". In implementing the policy, the government was to provide assistance in four ways: to support the cultural development of ethno-cultural groups; to help members of the ethno-cultural groups to overcome barriers to full participation in Canadian society; and to promote creative encounters and interchange among all ethno-cultural groups to assist new Canadians in acquiring at least one of Canada's official languages. The policy was seen as an instrument to rupture ethnic hierarchies and to establish more equitable relationships between the increasingly diverse ethnic groups in Canada (Helly, 1993).

Over the years, the focus of Multiculturalism has evolved from celebrating differences in the 1970s, to managing diversity in the 1980s and constructive engagement in the 1990s. The focus of the policy in the 2000s is inclusive citizenship (Fleras and Kunz, 2001). The integrative multiculturalism of the 2000s emphasizes rights and responsibilities of being Canadian. The key metaphor also changed over the years – from 'mosaic' to 'level playing field' to 'belonging' and, in the 2000s to 'two-way street.' (Fleras and Kunz, 2001).

The *Canadian Multiculturalism Act* (1988) along with the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* (1982) and the *Employment Equity Act* (1986) was to ensure that all Canadians could participate fully in the economic and social life of the country.

Mulholland and Biles (2004) provide an extensive account of the activities of various government departments to foster integration among Canadians from diverse backgrounds.

A quick review of research on multiculturalism identifies a number of topics/themes that have been identified in measuring the impacts of multiculturalism in Canada. These are: identity; economic marginalization and social inequalities; discrimination and racism; and integration.

The Evidence Series: Facts about Multiculturalism (1998) for example, summarized studies on ethnic identity and attachment to Canada; economic marginalization of visible minorities and, multiculturalism and integration. Countering popular criticisms regarding the promotion of ethnic identity, the Evidence Series presented findings from a number of studies, which suggest that by protecting ethnic identity of minority groups, Canada's multiculturalism policy promotes mutual acceptance between various groups. Studies on economic marginalization of immigrants and visible minorities consistently provide evidence to the increasing poverty rates among immigrants and visible minority population in Canada. There is overwhelming evidence that Canadians of visible minority origins experience discrimination and racism. Defenders and critics of multiculturalism alike examine integration as an intended outcome of the multiculturalism policy. In response to the criticism of multiculturalism by Neil Bissondath and Richard Gwyn, Kymlica(1998) examined four crucial ingredients of integration: "adopting a Canadian identity rather than clinging exclusively to one's ancestral identity; participating in broader Canadian institutions rather than participating solely in ethnic-specific institutions; learning an official language, rather than relying solely on one's mother tongue; having inter-ethnic friendships or even mixed marriages, rather than socializing entirely within one ethnic group" (pg. 2). While acknowledging that these factors do not form the elements of a comprehensive theory of integration, Kymlica demonstrates the positive effects of multiculturalism, using both domestic and international evidence. Based on the Ethnic Diversity Survey, Reitz and Banerjee (2007) examine seven indictors related to social integration: sense of belonging to Canada, trust in others,

self-identification as Canadian, acquisition of citizenship, life satisfaction, volunteering and voting in elections. The implications of the findings according to the authors is that economic integration is a necessary condition for integration, but not a sufficient condition, as experiences of discrimination and vulnerability can slow down the integration of minorities.

In proposing a research agenda for multiculturalism, a number of strands can be identified.

First is a clear definition of the specific goals and objectives of multiculturalism policy.

> *"Multiculturalism doesn't have specific goals and objectives. The majority of the population thinks too much is being done already, while the minorities think the policy lacks credibility" (Reitz as quoted in Jimenez, 2007, pg. 3).*

The lack of conceptual clarity around terms such as integration is well documented (George, 2006). If the goal of multiculturalism is integration, the objectives of the policy are to be identified and operationalized so as to make measurements of outcomes and impacts possible. Within the federal department of Citizenship and Immigration Canada, integration is identified by Mulholland and Biles (2004) as the outcome of successful settlement of newcomers to Canada. They propose the "Canadian Diversity Model" for integration with some core elements, which include nurturing a culture of inclusion, bringing together Canadians of diverse backgrounds, and committing to the values of acceptance, accommodation, equality, and reciprocity. Notwithstanding the source of definition, it is important more than ever before to have a commonly accepted definition and operationalization of integration. Creating a framework and indicators to measure the impact of multiculturalism policy is essential to understanding the effectiveness or otherwise of the policy. The priorities of the federal multiculturalism program have to be in line with the re-defined goals and objectives of the policy so that we are able to assess the outcomes and impacts of the programs and eventually that of the policy.

If we are to adopt the more recent definition of integration as a "two-way street", an additional area of research is how Canadian institutions are changing to integrate minorities and immigrants or what the barriers to integration in these institutions are. Even more interesting will be an exploration of the gap between rhetoric and action within some of the mainstream institutions.

The shifting emphasis of multiculturalism, which signals the flexibility of the policy to the changing socio-political environments, although a great asset in challenging times, is very little known outside government and NGO circles. The average Canadian still thinks of multiculturalism as ethnic celebrations of song and dance. A public information and education campaign may be of great value in disseminating the goals and objectives of multiculturalism.

As with any policy or program, the outcomes and impacts of the multiculturalism policy have to be assessed through impact assessment and program evaluation. With well defined goals, frameworks and indictors, assessing the success of the multiculturalism policy will be an exciting inquiry of great relevance to Canadian society and polity.

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