FEDERAL SETTLEMENT AND INTEGRATION PROGRAMS AND CIVIC PARTICIPATION IN CANADA[1]

ABSTRACT

This article outlines Citizenship and Immigration Canada's approach to immigrant integration as it intersects with citizenship as participation. The author provides a brief discussion about the ways in which CIC helps to initiate that process, by looking at the underlying principles of integration policy, the bridging role of settlement programs, and the importance of fostering welcoming communities. She suggests that responsibilities exist for both the newcomer and the host society if integration is to be successful – not only is there a need to develop the capacity to engage in broader Canadian society, but the opportunities to participate must also be available.

"There is a strong consensus that the practice of citizenship in a multicultural country such as Canada needs to continue to move towards citizenship as a way of participating in one's country, rather than as a bundle of rights, or even responsibilities, conferred by the state. There is considerable contingency built into the process of what is variously called 'lived', 'deep' or 'social' citizenship, as the population changes as a result of immigration and other factors of demographic and cultural change. All parties – the state, community organizations, researchers and policy makers – have a role in influencing the ways in which citizenship is imagined and lived." (Kobayashi, 2001)

According to Audrey Kobayashi, citizenship is understood as clearly more than just status. Certainly when looking at the intersection of citizenship and newcomer integration, the concept of citizenship as participation is viewed as the ultimate policy objective of Canada's integration continuum, a process that begins with the initial settlement and adaptation of newcomers to their new country in the early years after their arrival. Integration is achieved, however, over a longer period of time, in many cases beyond the formal acquisition of citizenship.

Citizenship and Immigration Canada's (CIC) most immediate interest in immigrant integration is the initial settlement needs of newcomers to Canada. As such, the department's role in fostering civic participation, one of the policy goals of Canada's Multiculturalism Policy, might seem less obvious than that of other government actors.[2] Nevertheless, CIC funded settlement programs and citizenship promotion activities are critical components in helping newcomers develop the skills that might foster civic engagement, belonging and attachment to Canada. This is very much in line with the government's multiculturalism policy goals to develop "… active citizens with both the opportunity and the capacity to participate in shaping the future of their communities and their country." Even the manner in which citizenship status is conferred "in public ceremonies of accomplishment, of welcome" is one that suggests the prime message of citizenship is one of membership, and part of becoming a member is "participation in one's community, political processes, the school system, in the voluntary sector" (Duncan 2003).

This paper will briefly discuss the ways in which CIC, through its integration programming, helps to initiate that process, by looking at the underlying principles of integration policy, the bridging role of settlement programs and immigrant and refugee serving organizations, and the importance of fostering welcoming communities.

Integration involves more than helping a newcomer find a job and a place to live.[3] It involves helping newcomers adapt to and understand the values and customs of their adopted society; the ways in which Canadian institutions work; and their rights and responsibilities. At the same time, Canadian society itself must grow and evolve, as it welcomes new people and cultures and adapts to their needs. Integration is, therefore, a two-way street that requires accommodations and adjustments on both sides. Successful integration for a newcomer to Canada is about the ability to contribute free of barriers, to every dimension of Canadian life – economic, social, cultural and political.

Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) is the federal government department with the primary responsibility for the provision of a range of settlement programs and services to eligible newcomers

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through the integration continuum; from pre-arrival through the initial settlement period in Canada and up to and including acquisition of citizenship.[4] Normally, services are provided within the first 3 years of a newcomer's arrival in Canada, but newcomers are still eligible for CIC funded services up until they become citizens.

Settlement programs and services are integral features of the Immigration Program in that they follow as a natural consequence of the decision to admit someone to Canada as an immigrant or refugee. Accordingly, federally funded support provided to newcomers through the Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC), Immigrant Settlement and Adaptation (ISAP), and Host programs not only serve initial newcomer needs related to reception and orientation, translation and interpretation, referrals to mainstream services, employment assistance, paraprofessional counseling, and basic instruction in one of Canada's two official languages. By their very nature, these programs also help to bridge newcomers and make connections beyond their ethno-cultural community. They teach about customs, culture and shared values. Additionally, they help to form networks of social relations, encourage participation and build trust in the broader host society, particularly when that society is open and welcoming.

Language itself is one of the key tools needed for participation in the social, economic, cultural and political life of Canada. Newcomers need to be able to communicate in the language where they live, and not just to access services and find a job. Learning to speak either English or French is imperative to their integration beyond that of their ethnic group. It is necessary for them to become Canadian citizens, in a formative sense, but it is also a prerequisite to the practice of citizenship *as participation.* In absence of a formal citizenship education program for adult newcomers[5], the LINC program not only provides basic language instruction for adult newcomers, but its curriculum guidelines provide a mandate to instruct learners about Canadian laws and norms. As well, because student participation is multi-ethnic, by their very nature LINC classes serve as a microcosm of the multicultural makeup of Canada, allowing for informal lessons on multiculturalism and cross-cultural awareness.

In order for the two-way street approach of integration to be effective, however, it is critical that settlement programs and services also promote an acceptance of immigrants by Canadians. Newcomers need both the tools to develop the capacity to participate, as well as the opportunities. As Voyer has suggested, "…the acquisition of social capital is a two-way street. To accumulate bridging capital not only requires the willingness of immigrants to connect with the society at large, but also the willingness of the receiving society to accept newcomers." This point is underscored in the objectives of the *Immigrant and Refugee Protection Act* (2002) which suggest that in order for CIC to help newcomers become contributing members of society, it must also be recognized "that integration involves mutual obligations for new immigrants *and Canadian society*" (emphasis mine). The success of the overall immigration program is very much dependant on both the financial investment and the necessary public support for immigrant integration in Canada, particularly as the level of immigration to Canada increases and diversifies.

At first glance, programs such as Host and ISAP might be viewed primarily as settlement orientation measures targeted squarely toward the newcomer side of the two-way street. However, activities funded through these programs can also create connections across cultures and encourage participation. By matching newcomers with Canadian resident volunteers in order to better familiarize newcomers with life in Canada, programs like Host can provide the initial means to developing a network of social relations, the bridging social capital, which will eventually enable newcomers to develop the capacity to participate and engage in the life of their community, the school system and eventually (it is hoped) political processes and institutions. In many cases, newcomers participating in the Host program go on to volunteer as Hosts themselves, or to participate in other voluntary activities in their communities. At the same time, Host engages members of the receiving society in the immigrant integration process and raises awareness about the immigrant experience and the contributions that newcomers are able to make to Canada.

Various ISAP activities also help to create more welcoming communities. The Settlement Workers in Schools activity, funded through ISAP, places multicultural liaison workers in schools to assist with initial orientation and adjustment issues. Settlement workers act as cultural brokers to facilitate a bridge between parents, newcomers, teachers, the school board and students. Apart from helping newcomer youth and their parents adapt to a new school environment, the initiative also teaches conflict resolution, encourages students to participate in school clubs, increases the cultural competency of schools to deal with diversity issues and race relations, and even sees newcomer parents volunteering on parent teacher advisory associations. It is an excellent example of a settlement activity that not only develops the capacity but provides the opportunities for participation, and eventually, the trust, in Canadian institutions.

While volunteerism is not necessarily a guarantee that newcomers will go on to participate politically and vote, it could be argued that these are all activities that help to foster inclusion, leading newcomers to develop an attachment to their new country by providing them with a vested interest in decisions that affect them.

The idea of full membership, the reciprocal relationship and mutual obligations of both newcomers and the host society, and the personal as well as public policy investment needed to ensure the success of such a model is articulated by Duncan within the context of citizenship policy: *"A vibrant citizenship policy that encourages all Canadians, including those born here, to understand and to adopt the values that Canadian citizenship implies, that expects all to accept the principle of full societal membership for all citizens, might well have tangible effects. For a national citizenship regime to carry this off, however, it may require it to wear an even more public face than it now does, to display more prominently the rights, duties, and societal benefits that flow from it"* (italics mine: 80:2003).

Notwithstanding any suggested constraints of current citizenship policy, or the fact that as a society, we could all do more to focus on the other side of the two-way street of integration, CIC's integration promotion activities do

attempt to put a public face on the rights and responsibilities of both newcomers *and* Canadians. While the focus of citizenship promotion activities is, however, mostly on children and youth, it is one of the immigration program areas that has rated strongly in terms of performance in public opinion polling.

CIC develops promotional activities and products related to both settlement needs and experiences of immigrants as well as the celebration of citizenship with the intent of helping to foster more welcoming communities. *Canada's Citizenship Week* is celebrated every year in October. Schools and community groups, along with CIC, hold events and celebrations across the country. *Canada: We All Belong* was an overarching concept developed in 2000 and activity guides are available for educators and youth leaders each year. In 2000 the initial theme of Belonging saw messages of welcoming from children across the country for immigrants about to receive their Canadian citizenship.

Of particular note is CIC's partnership through seed funding to *The Passages to Canada Dominion Institute's Immigrant Speakers' Bureau,* a unique on-line resource containing the names and profiles of community leaders who are ready to visit classrooms or community organizations to share their experiences of immigration. It was launched in Toronto in 2001, and there are now Speakers' Bureaus up and running in Calgary, Montreal, Vancouver, Halifax and Winnipeg.

In addition to these outreach activities, CIC also funded a special issue of TEACH magazine exploring the nature of Canadian citizenship as well as values like respect, freedom, belonging and peace. The goal was to encourage dialogue, learning and understanding among youth on how these concepts provide the basis for a strong commitment to Canada, and to stimulate thought and debate about citizenship, and how to be accepting of different backgrounds and cultures.

CIC also provided funding to Classroom Connections for the award winning *Cultivating Peace* initiative which creates classroom-ready resources to help teachers and community leaders deal directly with issues such as bullying, racism and terrorism while meeting the objectives of provincial curricula. Activities encourage students to recognize their own personal responsibility in creating change and emphasize the practice of skills such as compromise, negotiation and conflict resolution. Ultimately, the resources engage children and youth in the search for a culture of peace in their homes, schools, neighbourhoods and global community.

In this respect, CIC's citizenship promotion activities not only promote the values of respect and belonging as responsibilities of all Canadians, but they could be seen within a similar context as Hebert and Wilkinson's discussion of citizenship education from a global perspective; a model which "can also be used to begin conversations about common human values, such as respect, that transcend nationality, culture, and heritage. This will move the debate away from focusing on the values that constitute a unique Canadian identity and towards a more thought-provoking discussion of issues that contribute to patterns of conflict and paths of peace" (41: 2003).

Arguably, more could be done to promote citizenship. CIC does not necessarily have a mandate for formal citizenship education or to create "citizens of the world" per se, but active citizenship is certainly a goal of the integration program. The department recognizes the need to prepare both newcomers and Canadians if integration is to be successful. In helping newcomers adjust to life in Canada and in helping to foster the creation of welcoming communities, CIC's settlement and citizenship promotion activities certainly facilitate a path for both newcomers and the host society that allows for connections and dialogue of this nature.

There are many steps that need to be taken in order for newcomers to be able to contribute to their full human potential. Acknowledging that newcomer integration is not done alone, CIC's integration programming and partnership activities to a certain extent provide some of the initial tools necessary not only for socio-economic participation but as a means to eventual "citizenship as participation" for all Canadians.

Notes

To view the author's full notes and references, please cisit the ACS website at www.acs-aec.ca

[1] The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and not necessarily those of Citizenship and Immigration Canada or the Government of Canada.

[2] The department of Canadian Heritage has the lead responsibility for Canada's multiculturalism policy.

[3] This is not to suggest that access to the labour market for newcomers to Canada is not a present and critical issue. In fact it is a priority for the Government of Canada given disparities between foreign-born professionals and their Canadian-born counterparts, and it is being addressed in partnership with provinces and territories, regulatory bodies and other immigration stakeholders through a range of targeted measures that include enhanced language training.

[4] Although integration is a shared federal/provincial-territorial responsibility, the actual services provided often fall under the jurisdiction of the provincial authorities in combination with the local municipal authorities. While different immigrant and refugee groups often have very different needs, they all rely on the health, education and other social services that provincial, territorial and municipal governments deliver to all members of society. Newcomers also have special needs for language training and other integration services – services that have been funded, to a great extent, by the federal government. Both orders of government share an interest in ensuring that newcomers get the services they need to integrate successfully, and that these services are delivered as efficiently and effectively as possible. And in fact, CIC does have bilateral agreements for administration and delivery of settlement programs and services with provincial governments, BC and MB, and with Quebec via the Canada-Quebec Accord.

As such, partnership with all levels of government, and with the private and voluntary sectors, is essential to achieve effective results in the integration of newcomers to Canada. Additionally, the work of community-based immigrant and refugee-serving organizations has proven invaluable in assisting newcomers with their immediate and ongoing settlement needs. These organizations are sensitive to the needs of the local community as well as to the diverse cultural backgrounds and experiences that recent immigrants and refugees bring to Canada.

[5] In their comprehensive overview of citizenship education for adult immigrants in Canada from 1947-1996, Derwing and Joshee suggest that there are challenges of "doing" citizenship education in the LINC classroom due to the emphasis on survival language skills and the fact