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The Ideal Path for Integration? Multiculturalism

Multiculturalism can be defined as a policy that supports the inclusion of many ethnic and immigrant identities within existing national institutions. Thus, immigrants are not necessarily required to abandon traditions and customs associated with their cultural origins in order to co-exist with others in their host-societies. Noted political theorists such as Will Kymlicka support this ideology as aligned with liberalism.

As official government policy, multiculturalism is challenged for its effect on the host country. Critics cite a lack of national solidarity in ethnically diverse societies as well as lower trust levels between citizens. Furthermore,

some scholars argue that multiculturalism can undermine the distinct culture of adoptive country with an influx of immigrants from a plethora of ethnic backgrounds.

In many countries, the public debate surrounding immigration has deepened in the past decades. Citizens have seemingly tired of mass permanent immigration, a shift that is having lasting impact on government policies. Some countries, like Denmark, have halted applications for permit residence and/or citizenship while applying strict integrationist legislation to ensure the assimilation of successful applicants. Other states, such as Canada, have pursued robust immigration programs coupled with a multicultural approach to integration.

One indicator that can measure the effectiveness of integration policies is linguistic aptitude. In 2009, The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OCED) released its Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) survey. This study revealed that a child's reading abilities were directly linked to their immigrant status. If first or second-generation immigrant children do not receive the necessary linguistic support, they often have lower test scores than children of native-born parentage in the education system.

Canada and Denmark have utilized different methods to integrate immigrant children into the mainstream school system. In Canada, immigrant children are immediately integrated into mainstream classes with native-born children, regardless of language ability. However, they are linguistically supported with supplementary English classes that begin as early as childhood education. The continued use of the student's native language is also encouraged. In Denmark, immigrant children are separated from their native-born peers until they achieve proficiency

in the Danish language. Language support is mostly offered in the early stages of education until students are deemed integrated by school officials. However, bilingualism is not necessarily viewed as a positive factor with Danish language prioritized over the pupil's first language.

These policy differences impacted the PISA reading test scores of immigrant children in Canada and Denmark. In Canada, immigrant children performed only slightly worse than their native-born counterparts. While in Denmark first and second-generation children scored far below native-born pupils. Thus, comparing these two case studies, it can be concluded that Canada's multicultural policy is a more effective integration tool than more uni-cultural legislation. Therefore, I argue that a multicultural approach is the best possible policy mechanism for both immigrants to become integrated into their new country.