

# Canada's multiculturalism creates unique society

Think of a country whose citizens speak more than 60 different languages, and where one city boasts more than 112 ethnic-language publications. Imagine a nation whose leading English-language writers have names like Dabydeen, Urbanzi, Skvorekey, Tahir and Kagawa.

Such a country is Canada today.



In some nations, cultural diversity might be regarded as a recipe for internal strife and disintegration. Canada, however, has found it to be a source of national unity and cultural enrichment.

For nearly 20 years, the policies of the federal government have been designed to foster multiculturalism – a concept that has found increasing favour among all Canadians, and a concept that makes a lot of sense, because apart from the native peoples, all Canadians are either immigrants or the descendants of immigrants.

The majority can trace their roots to Europe – most notably to Britain and France, but also to Germany, Italy, Hungary and Czechoslovakia. In addition, there are many others who came from Vietnam, China and other nations in Asia, as well as Latin America and the Caribbean. For all these people, Canada now spells home.

## Education's key role

The first step towards an official multicultural policy in Canada occurred in the late 1960s with the appointment of a Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism. Among the Commission's recommendations was one for 'a policy of multiculturalism within a bilingual framework'.

Canada had decided not to become a 'melting

pot'; instead, it had opted for a 'nation of nations' that would make it culturally unique.

In 1971, the official policy came into being and focused on four main areas: assistance to cultural groups, help in overcoming barriers to full participation in Canadian life, promotion of cultural exchange in the interests of national unity and assistance in official language training.

The new policy presented Canadian educators in particular with an important challenge. Multicultural programmes were established in schools across the country to help promote cultural awareness and to enable pupils to understand and appreciate one another's backgrounds.

Apart from language tuition and orientation courses for new arrivals, pupils are now given every encouragement to study their 'mother-tongues'. Since it is not always possible to provide such instruction in school, numerous heritage language courses have been established out of school hours.

Language tuition is actively supported by the federal government, which among other things, has set up a heritage language institute to develop Canadian oriented teaching materials. The institute now caters to more than 125,000 students, studying a total of 62 languages.

## Multiculturalism forges ahead

In some provinces, where ethnic groups form a sizeable minority, many schools offer bilingual and multilingual education programmes. In Alberta, for example, it is possible to study many subjects in Ukrainian, German, Hebrew, Cree, Arabic and Mandarin Chinese, as well as in English and French.

The federal government has also turned its attention to multicultural studies at higher education levels. As a result of this initiative, the University of Toronto, for example, now has a chair of Estonian Studies; while the University of British Columbia has a chair of Punjabi Language, Literature and Sikh Studies.

