

Systemic Influences of Newcomer Violence in Canada

Izzeddin Hawamda

Abstract

As a result of the perception that newcomer youths are inherently dangerous, there is a limited understanding of the systemic factors in Canadian society that contribute to newcomer youths susceptibility to involvement in criminal activity or violence. Therefore, there is also limited information about what can be done to better support newcomer youths that are vulnerable to involvement in dangerous or illegal activity. It is my contention that while existing research is valuable in that it discusses how family, education, and community impact newcomer youth violence, the degree to which these factors are systemic is under-represented. In order to adequately intervene and prevent newcomer youth violence and criminal activity it is necessary to avoid demonizing the individual and, instead, focus on holding public policy accountable and changing social, political, and economic systems.

There are numerous media reports about the high rates of newcomer (for the purpose of this paper the term newcomer includes immigrants and refugees, unless otherwise specified) violence and the susceptibility of newcomer youth to the threat of gang involvement and criminal activity¹. There are various salient factors in the experiences of newcomer youth that make them vulnerable to becoming involved in gangs, crime, and acts of violence. Research into the statistical data of newcomer youth involvement in these activities in Canada, however, is difficult because Canada does not publicize crime statistics based on ethnicity (except Indigenous peoples) or citizenship status². That said, research has been conducted through surveys and observational data collection that has contributed to a body of work that has narrowed down the potential risk factors for violence and crime involvement among newcomer youth. These factors include family, education, and community. I argue, however, that while there is significant value in understanding how family, education, and community impact newcomer youth violence, the degree to which these factors are systemic is under-represented.

The research into newcomer violence and criminal involvement in Canada is limited. However, when the research that exists is examined it becomes clear that when newcomer youth are involved in violence, gangs, and criminal activity, there are consistent contributing factors and experiences. However, the rate at which newcomer youth become involved in these activities is low compared to that of non-newcomer youth. Frank Cormier, a professor of criminology from the University of Manitoba, includes immigration in his examination of nine reasons crime rates are decreasing in Canada. He states that, "[In] just about every country, immigrants are less

¹ Marian Rossiter and Katherine Rossiter, "Diamonds In The Rough: Bridging Gaps In Supports For At-Risk Immigrant And Refugee Youth", *Journal Of Migration And Integration* 10, no. 4 (2009): 409-429.

² Rossiter and Rossiter, "Diamonds In The Rough", 409-429; Darnell Hawkins, *Violent Crime: Assessing Race And Ethnic Differences* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Hieu Van Ngo, *Unravelling Identities And Belonging: Criminal Gang Involvement Of Youth From Immigrant Families* (Calgary, Alberta: Centre for Newcomers, 2010).

likely to commit crimes than the people who were there before them”³. Despite these findings, the perception of the public towards newcomers has become increasingly negative as a result of public policy, messaging, and the media. The socially constructed concept of the ‘dangerous immigrant or refugee’ increasingly shapes the way the public views newcomers and the way newcomers view themselves⁴.

Caxaj and Berman provide insight into the “experiences of inclusion and exclusion” and the concept of belonging among newcomer youth through both intersectional and postcolonial perspectives and examine the “processes of normalization and mainstream rhetoric...conceal experiences of racial discrimination”⁵. They, then, relate their findings to implications within the healthcare system, specifically related to the role of nurses⁶. The analysis they provide not only expressed the importance of understanding the factors that influence newcomer youths’ sense of belonging, but through their analysis of the systemic discrimination and ignorance that exists in the healthcare system, highlighted the lack of information regarding systemic influence on other factors affecting newcomer youth and their potential to act out through violence or criminal activity. Rossiter and Rossiter also acknowledge the importance of an intersectional lens. Intersectionality acknowledges systemic flaws that account for the need to focus on the idea that everyone experiences the world differently and that race, class, religion, gender, and other constructs heavily influence the privileges afforded to some and actively withheld from others⁷.

³ Laura Glowacki, "9 Reasons Canada's Crime Rate Is Falling", *CBC News*, 2016, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/manitoba/9-reasons-crime-rate-1.3692193>.

⁴ Susana Caxaj and Susana Berman, "Belonging Among Newcomer Youths: Intersecting Experiences Of Inclusion And Exclusion", *Advances In Nursing Science* 33, no. 4 (2010): E17-E30; Laura Dunbar, *Youth Gangs In Canada: A Review Of Current Topics And Issues* (Public Safety Canada, 2017).

⁵ Caxaj and Berman, "Belonging Among Newcomer Youths", E18.

⁶ Caxaj and Berman, "Belonging Among Newcomer Youths", E17-E30.

⁷ Rossiter and Rossiter, "Diamonds In The Rough", 409-429.

Due to the fact that every newcomer experience is different and that there is limited statistical data in Canada regarding the ethnicity or citizenship status of people accused of acts of violence⁸, existing research focuses on finding similarities between the experiences of immigrants and refugees and connecting them to the issues. Rossiter and Rossiter, as well as Ngo, point to previous research that indicates the four different models used to examine newcomer crime and its causes: the importation model, the cultural conflict model, the strain/frustration model, and the bias model. Other research suggests that there are common risk factors which can be categorized as follows: family, individual, peer, school, and community⁹. In addition, there are a number of different theoretical backgrounds and perspectives used to analyze newcomer youth violence. Rossiter and Rossiter explain that research into newcomer violence comes from learning-behavioral theory, ecological theory, strain theory, social control theory, labeling theory, and conflict theory¹⁰. As discussed previously, intersectional theory has also, recently, been introduced into the landscape of perspectives. While each theory offers insight into the factors contributing to involvement of newcomer youth in violence and crime, they fail to acknowledge to what extent systemic structures are involved in the cause or maintenance of obstacles in the daily lives of newcomer youth.

Family

Across perspectives and theories, the role of family in the lives of newcomer youth is consistently recognized as a primary factor in determining whether a young newcomer will or

⁸ Rossiter and Rossiter, "Diamonds In The Rough", 409-429; Hawkins, *Violent Crime*; Ngo, *Unravelling Identities And Belonging*.

⁹ Rossiter and Rossiter, "Diamonds In The Rough", 409-429; Ngo, *Unravelling Identities And Belonging*.

¹⁰ Rossiter and Rossiter, "Diamonds In The Rough", 409-429.

will not become involved in acts of violence or crime¹¹. Family relationships play an important role in the lives of newcomer children and youth and can shape the way they learn to adapt to their new surroundings. Most newcomer youth arrive in Canada with their families and often come from cultures where the connection to community and family is central to everyday life¹². In many cases, the strong connection to family is cited as one of the primary reasons newcomer youth are involved in acts of violence and crime at lower rates than non-newcomer youth. That said, some families struggle to adapt to life in a new country and the impact of these struggles begins to affect the family dynamic.

In many cases, particularly in the experiences of refugee families, the parents and children have witnessed or experienced traumatic events in their past. In such cases, the parents may have diagnosed or undiagnosed mental health challenges such as anxiety, depression, or post-traumatic stress disorder which limits their ability to be attentive to their children¹³. The negative effects or perception of neglect may be amplified for some youth if they also suffer from mental health issues¹⁴. What is lacking from the existing research and data is an analysis of the systemic structures and policies that contribute to the sense of frustration and isolation faced by newcomers with mental health issues¹⁵. An internet search of mental health clinics, crisis centres, psychologists, or teen clinics that provide services in languages other than French or English in most major cities in Canada returns limited results (primarily religious centres), if any

¹¹ Rossiter and Rossiter, "Diamonds In The Rough", 409-429; Brandi Christmas and Bob Christmas, "What Are We Doing To Protect Youth In Canada, And Help Them Succeed?", *Journal Of Community Safety And Well-Being* 2, no. 3 (2017), <https://journalcswb.ca/index.php/cswb/article/view/52/112>; Laura Dunbar, *Youth Gangs In Canada*.

¹² Caxaj and Berman, "Belonging Among Newcomer Youths", E17-E30.

¹³ Rossiter and Rossiter, "Diamonds In The Rough", 409-429; Christmas and Christmas, "What Are We Doing To Protect Youth In Canada, And Help Them Succeed?"; Laura Dunbar, *Youth Gangs In Canada*.

¹⁴ Caxaj and Berman, "Belonging Among Newcomer Youths", E17-E30.

¹⁵ Caxaj and Berman, "Belonging Among Newcomer Youths", E17-E30; Laura Dunbar, *Youth Gangs In Canada*.

are found at all. In addition, the availability of mental health services and providers with a clear understanding of different cultural dynamics, values, traditions, and perceptions is inadequate¹⁶.

Many newcomer families also struggle with financial stability which can put added pressure on youth to help support the family¹⁷. Financial stress can also add to the impact of mental health issues or other stressors in the home. Many newcomer youths arrive in Canada with very few employable skills and often have a limited command of the dominant language which can make finding legitimate employment nearly impossible. When families arrive in Canada, they frequently have high expectations of what life will be like and what opportunities will be available to them¹⁸. However, the reality is typically very different. Research shows that in interviews with newcomers many of them point to the high prioritization of money in their new country which is unlike their experience in their country of origin¹⁹. The high financial demands and limited access to jobs can lead some newcomer youth to take on the burden of supporting the family through criminal activities or gang involvement. The involvement in gangs and criminal activity can also have further repercussions for families in that if one family member is involved, the risk of others, especially younger siblings, becoming involved increases²⁰. This risk is again increased in cases where the parents knowingly ignore or condone the participation of their children in gang or criminal activities out of desperation for money²¹. Even though the goal was initially to make money and to support the family, these young people often become involved in acts of violence²².

¹⁶ Rossiter and Rossiter, "Diamonds In The Rough", 409-429.

¹⁷ Rossiter and Rossiter, "Diamonds In The Rough", 409-429.

¹⁸ Rossiter and Rossiter, "Diamonds In The Rough", 409-429; Laura Dunbar, *Youth Gangs In Canada*.

¹⁹ Caxaj and Berman, "Belonging Among Newcomer Youths", E17-E30.

²⁰ Rossiter and Rossiter, "Diamonds In The Rough", 409-429.

²¹ Rossiter and Rossiter, "Diamonds In The Rough", 409-429.

²² Rossiter and Rossiter, "Diamonds In The Rough", 409-429; Laura Dunbar, *Youth Gangs In Canada*.

For newcomer youth financial pressure comes not only from the need to pay for living expenses such as food and shelter or the repayment of transportation fees for refugees and the costs associated with moving from one country to another for other immigrants, but also from the desire to fit in with their peers²³. The social culture of youth in Canada places considerable weight on outward appearance and the status that comes with spending large amounts of money on clothing, accessories, and entertainment. In order to feel as if they belong, many newcomer youths want to be able to buy the trendy brand names and take part in the same activities as their peers from eating out to attending gatherings. The inability to afford such luxuries can create a sense of exclusion or otherness among newcomer youth that further isolates them from their peers, but can also act to distance them from their families as they begin to develop “poor perceptions of both themselves and their parents”²⁴. Newcomer youth blame themselves or their parents for their inability to find employment opportunities or for not adapting to language and qualification requirements quickly enough.

Like mental health issues, financial stress on newcomer youth and their families and its effects can be connected to systemic issues. Many employers in Canada, require previous Canadian work experience or employment references before hiring a new employee. Unfortunately, when many newcomer youth arrive in Canada, they are lacking relevant or recognized employment skills²⁵. The inability to fluently speak, read, and write in English or French also hinders the ability for newcomer youth to find jobs that will allow them to help support their families. While there are some programs aimed at helping newcomer youth develop employability skills and to connect them with work placements in order to gain work experience,

²³ Rossiter and Rossiter, "Diamonds In The Rough", 409-429.

²⁴ Rossiter and Rossiter, "Diamonds In The Rough", 415.

²⁵ Rossiter and Rossiter, "Diamonds In The Rough", 409-429.

the number of services are limited and are often at capacity (NEEDS Centre Employee, personal communication). Another barrier is simply the amount of time required to build basic language skills and develop social skills expected in the workplace. Research in language acquisition shows that the average amount of time to develop functional conversational skills in a new language is two to three years. However, the amount of time required to develop fluency and to begin to understand complex or academic ideas is five to seven years²⁶. When a family is desperate for money to pay for basic necessities, two to seven years is not a reasonable timeframe. As a result, gang and criminal activity may seem as if it is the only viable option. The lack of employment opportunities available to newcomer youth due to language and experience barriers then directly contributes to newcomer youth turning to illegal avenues of income earning with a high potential for violence.

Many employers or customers are unaware of culturally diverse social skills, expectations, and behaviors which can result in newcomer youth not being hired for jobs or from being let go soon after being hired. For instance, in some cultures it is inappropriate for a woman to shake a man's hand. In a job interview or customer service situation, this can sometimes lead to situations of awkwardness or can be misconstrued as rude or socially unacceptable behavior which could result in not being hired or being fired. Systemically there is little done to ensure that employers develop an understanding of diverse cultural behaviors or an awareness of varying perceptions of experience²⁷. A lack of understanding among employers and businesses as to how actions, phrases, or tones of voice can be interpreted differently based on culture or prior experience can have a significant impact on the perceived employability of newcomer

²⁶ Rossiter and Rossiter, "Diamonds In The Rough", 409-429.

²⁷ Caxaj and Berman, "Belonging Among Newcomer Youths", E17-E30.

youth. Given that many people in a position of authority experience various forms of social, political, and economic power and privilege, there may also be a limited understanding of the circumstances faced by newcomer youth and judgement toward their limited awareness of social norms, colloquial uses of language (such as idioms or allusions to popular western culture), or cultural bias in application forms, pre-employment tests, or during training.

Education

Education plays an important role in the process of adaptation for newcomer youth. Like family, education has the potential to have either a positive or negative effect on the lives of newcomer youth²⁸. When examining the factors associated with newcomer youth that have become involved in acts of violence or gang activity, it is agreed that education must be considered²⁹. In the same way that family is identified as one of the reasons newcomer youth violence and crime rates are lower than those of non-newcomers, education also factors heavily. Many immigrant and refugee families place a strong emphasis on the importance of education for their children. The understanding among newcomer families is that in Canada, education provides the opportunity for young people to work hard and to become successful adults. Therefore, many newcomer youths are determined to study and to make themselves and their families proud. However, regardless of a young person's determination, there are several obstacles that newcomer students face when entering the school system and a variety of systemic barriers that can contribute to feelings of frustration and isolation among newcomer youth in schools³⁰.

²⁸ Rossiter and Rossiter, "Diamonds In The Rough", 409-429.

²⁹ Rossiter and Rossiter, "Diamonds In The Rough", 409-429.

³⁰ Caxaj and Berman, "Belonging Among Newcomer Youths", E17-E30; Laura Dunbar, *Youth Gangs In Canada*.

High expectations of academic success among newcomer parents and youth can often lead to feelings of disappointment or inadequacy when students receive grades below their expectations³¹. The adjustment to a new school, new social structure, new language, and overall new environment, can be difficult for newcomer students. While most school systems in Canada are based on a model of inclusion, observational research and research conducted through interviews with newcomer parents and students identifies that when students are integrated into mainstream classes they find it difficult to “keep up with their Canadian peers and suffer from feelings of inadequacy and low self-esteem if they fail to do so”³².

In addition, the research indicates that teacher-student ratios do not allow teachers to provide the necessary to sufficiently support the needs of newcomer students³³. In Manitoba, there is no requirement to have English as an Additional Language (EAL; also often referred to as English as a Second Language, ESL) supports³⁴. While most schools have identified the need to support the language needs of newcomer students and have implemented some EAL programming or system of support, there is no consistent guideline for implementation³⁵. At this point in time, in 2019, the current Manitoba EAL Curriculum accessible to schools and teachers is a document from 2011 that has remained incomplete in ‘Draft’ form for the past eight years³⁶. Classroom teachers, particularly in the senior years, also have very little, if any, training, professional development, or guidance in the area of supporting English Language Learners in

³¹ Laura Dunbar, *Youth Gangs In Canada*.

³² Rossiter and Rossiter, "Diamonds In The Rough", 418.

³³ Rossiter and Rossiter, "Diamonds In The Rough", 418.

³⁴ Manitoba Education and Training, *Manitoba Kindergarten To Grade 12 Curriculum Framework For English As An Additional Language (EAL) And Literacy, Academics, And Language (LAL) Programming, Draft For Consultation And Review, June 2011.*, 2011.

³⁵ Manitoba Education and Training, *Manitoba Kindergarten To Grade 12 Curriculum Framework For English As An Additional Language*.

³⁶ Manitoba Education and Training, *Manitoba Kindergarten To Grade 12 Curriculum Framework For English As An Additional Language*.

the classroom unless it is implemented by the school. This lack of understanding and support could account for the statistics presented by Rossiter and Rossiter indicating that “studies of school dropout rates of immigrant youth have indicated that 46-74% of immigrant youth whose native language is not English fail to complete high school”³⁷.

The inability for classroom teachers to assist properly in the effective acquisition of language is compounded by the fact that many teachers remain unaware of the cultural beliefs, traditions, and values of the students that they teach. While Caxaj and Berman’s research is tied to the health care system, much of their work can easily be applied to other public services and systems. They point to research that indicates that “...a legacy of colonialism and racist discourses enable a monocultural “nationalist” identity. The historical context works to legitimize white constructions of “Canadian,” ...while problematizing racialized others as deviant individuals who are depicted as “failing to integrate” ”³⁸. Although professional development in the area of cultural sensitivity takes place, many teachers are unaware of the pressure they put on students to adapt to the dominant culture. This becomes particularly problematic when the school encourages students to adopt new ways of thinking or behaving that contradict the beliefs or values of the parents. As a result, of the lack of support and the feelings of judgement and inadequacy, students can become involved in acts of violence for a number of reasons. A lack of understanding among staff and students about cultural differences including religious practices, food, language, and values and the fact that parents are unable to assist with homework or advocate for their children due to language barriers can lead to a further sense of isolation for newcomer youth and can even result in bullying³⁹.

³⁷ Rossiter and Rossiter, "Diamonds In The Rough", 412.

³⁸ Caxaj and Berman, "Belonging Among Newcomer Youths", E27..

³⁹ Caxaj and Berman, "Belonging Among Newcomer Youths", E17-E30; Laura Dunbar, *Youth Gangs In Canada*.

Newcomer students are frequently the targets of bullying. As a result of bullying, they can become both a target of violent acts and a perpetrator of violent acts. In many societies and cultures, conflict is dealt with through physical violence⁴⁰. There is often an understanding that walking away from a bully is a sign of weakness. Therefore, an act of physical aggression is used to assert dominance or to prove worth. While fighting is not uncommon among Canadian youth, they are accustomed to the consequences of being caught bullying others or fighting in school. Newcomer students, on the other hand, are often unfamiliar with the disciplinary measures implemented by Canadian schools. In some cases, particularly for refugee students, they have experienced alternative educational settings and periods of interrupted schooling⁴¹. The rules of education in a refugee camp are vastly different from those in Canadian schools. For other immigrant students, some come from school settings far more strict than the Canadian system, while others come from settings where fights between students were allowed to happen without punishment or consequence⁴². As a result, when newcomer students are suspended or expelled due to acts of violence on school property, they are not only confused, but are further alienated from their peer group as they are forced to spend time away from school limiting their ability to develop language, academic, and social skills⁴³. When newcomers respond to acts of bullying, discrimination, or racism through acts of violence, it is often the violent act that is addressed while the ongoing harassment is allowed to continue. Moreno and Chuang quote an interview with a parent discussing the issue of racism in their child's school: "Our children experience

⁴⁰ Rossiter and Rossiter, "Diamonds In The Rough", 409-429.

⁴¹ Rossiter and Rossiter, "Diamonds In The Rough", 409-429.

⁴² Rossiter and Rossiter, "Diamonds In The Rough", 409-429.

⁴³ Rossiter and Rossiter, "Diamonds In The Rough", 409-429.

racism at school and we, as parents, are left to pick up the pieces. The psychological damage to our children is immense”⁴⁴.

Feeling pressured by teachers and students to adapt to the dominant culture is reminiscent of the assimilation processes of colonialism and, in many ways, has similar effects on newcomer youth. The pressure to fit in and the desire to develop a sense of belonging can lead newcomer youth to begin changing their attitudes and behaviors toward their culture and traditions⁴⁵. This process is often difficult for young people, but it can also become a source of tension and conflict in the home. Newcomer parents tend to want their children to maintain a strong connection to their cultural values, beliefs, and ways of life despite living in a new environment⁴⁶. The youth, on the other hand, must find a balance between their new life in Canada and the life their parents want them to live. While students turn to teachers and counselors for guidance, parents are often unable to communicate their concerns due to a language barrier or because the traditions or values that they are afraid of losing are not understood or seem to conflict with the values of the dominant culture⁴⁷. Parents can end up feeling judged or ridiculed by those within the school system for parenting in their traditional manner. As the youth becomes more distant from their family, they are more likely to act out in a violent or aggressive manner toward family members that force them to maintain aspects of their cultural lifestyle that they no longer want to follow or if their sense of belonging or agency is challenged⁴⁸.

Community

⁴⁴ Susan Chuang and Robert Moreno, *Immigrant Children: Change, Adaptation, And Cultural Transformation* (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2011), 38.

⁴⁵ Rossiter and Rossiter, "Diamonds In The Rough", 409-429; Caxaj and Berman, "Belonging Among Newcomer Youths", E17-E30.

⁴⁶ Christmas and Christmas, "What Are We Doing To Protect Youth In Canada, And Help Them Succeed?".

⁴⁷ Laura Dunbar, *Youth Gangs In Canada*.

⁴⁸ Caxaj and Berman, "Belonging Among Newcomer Youths", E17-E30.

Newcomer youth are affected not only by the new community that they have moved into but are also influenced by the ethnic or cultural community made up of refugees or immigrants from their own background. The new community is made up of a diverse group of people, places, and social norms that newcomer youth must learn to adapt to in order to begin to develop a sense of belonging in their new surroundings⁴⁹. Fitting in to this new community is reliant on newcomers developing an understanding of the dominant culture, learning the dominant language, and adapting to dominant social behaviors. Within the new community, there are a number of issues that can lead newcomer youth to become involved in acts of violence, gangs, or criminal activity⁵⁰.

When adapting to the new community, newcomers often experience a sense of loss and isolation⁵¹. Many newcomers come from cultures that are more communal and place considerable emphasis on the importance of connecting with the community. Research consistently shows that when asked about the challenges they face when becoming settled in their new communities, newcomers respond by commenting on loneliness and a sense of isolation from their neighbors⁵². Canadian neighbors are often seen as “cold and uncaring” by newcomers⁵³. The lack of connection between newcomers and the members of their community is often perceived by newcomers as an indication that they are unwelcome or insignificant in their new community. These experiences can also be a reminder of the various losses many newcomers have suffered in their journey to their new country⁵⁴. Many newcomer youths mourn the loss of loved ones, both those that may have died as a result of violence or conflict in their

⁴⁹ Caxaj and Berman, "Belonging Among Newcomer Youths", E17-E30.

⁵⁰ Caxaj and Berman, "Belonging Among Newcomer Youths", E17-E30.

⁵¹ Caxaj and Berman, "Belonging Among Newcomer Youths", E17-E30.

⁵² Caxaj and Berman, "Belonging Among Newcomer Youths", E17-E30.

⁵³ Caxaj and Berman, "Belonging Among Newcomer Youths", E23.

⁵⁴ Caxaj and Berman, "Belonging Among Newcomer Youths", E17-E30.

country of origin, as well as those that they have had to leave behind⁵⁵. The physical distance between newcomers and their loved ones not only requires a period of adjustment, but for some can be traumatizing. The inability to connect with members of their new community only acts to highlight their loneliness. Newcomer youth also face the potential loss of various cultural beliefs and traditions that have been of great importance within their family for generations⁵⁶. Many young newcomers are faced with losing their language, losing an appreciation for their religion, and losing awareness or appreciation for traditions such as cooking cultural food, dancing, or music which in turn can cause a loss of connection between generations and family members⁵⁷. For newcomer youth the inability to connect and the perception of being rejected by their new community and feelings of loss toward their cultural community, can push them toward gangs or peer groups that are resentful toward the community or society which often leads to involvement in acts such as “assaults, stabbings, shootings, and drug use”⁵⁸.

As was previously discussed, financial stability is a common concern for many newcomer families. As a result, the housing options available to them are limited⁵⁹. Newcomers often live in communities that struggle with high rates of poverty, crime, and violence affecting the existing members of the community including those from the dominant culture⁶⁰. The high rates of criminal activity in these areas make access to this lifestyle easy. Many gangs actively recruit newcomer youth with an understanding that they are often struggling to develop a sense

⁵⁵ Rossiter and Rossiter, "Diamonds In The Rough", 409-429.

⁵⁶ Caxaj and Berman, "Belonging Among Newcomer Youths", E17-E30; Christmas and Christmas, "What Are We Doing To Protect Youth In Canada, And Help Them Succeed?".

⁵⁷ Caxaj and Berman, "Belonging Among Newcomer Youths", E17-E30; Christmas and Christmas, "What Are We Doing To Protect Youth In Canada, And Help Them Succeed?".

⁵⁸ Rossiter and Rossiter, "Diamonds In The Rough", 409-429.

⁵⁹ Rossiter and Rossiter, "Diamonds In The Rough", 409-429.

⁶⁰ Rossiter and Rossiter, "Diamonds In The Rough", 409-429.

of belonging and are in need of protection and money⁶¹. Research shows that newcomers identify high rates of discrimination and racism directed towards them and that this leads to feelings of being alienated and in danger of becoming victims of acts of hate and violence⁶². Gangs offer newcomer youth the illusion of a familial bond, protection, and power.

Researchers indicate that within the new community, there is a lack of role models from diverse cultural and ethnic background to provide support and guidance to newcomer youth⁶³. They also express that there is a lack of diverse representation when it comes to people in positions of power and authority in the community. Newcomer youth need to be provided with viable options to address their concerns about safety, discrimination, and financial stability and they need to be able to see that people that look like them and see the world through the same cultural, religious, and experiential lens as they do can become successful in this new community. Systemically there is not enough attention paid to ensuring that newcomer youth have access to positive, representative role models in positions of power and authority in the community, including politicians, teachers, and police officers.

The portrayal of newcomer youth in the media is also a systemic issue that influences the perception of the public as well as the perception newcomer youth have of themselves in their new community⁶⁴. For example, the following headlines are reflective of news stories covered in 2018 and 2019 by prominent Canadian news sources: “A lot of people facing potential deportation’ under upcoming changes to DUI penalties: immigration lawyer”⁶⁵; “Botched

⁶¹ Caxaj and Berman, "Belonging Among Newcomer Youths", E17-E30; Laura Dunbar, *Youth Gangs In Canada*.

⁶² Rossiter and Rossiter, "Diamonds In The Rough", 409-429; Chuang and Moreno, *Immigrant Children*.

⁶³ Rossiter and Rossiter, "Diamonds In The Rough", 409-429.

⁶⁴ Caxaj and Berman, "Belonging Among Newcomer Youths", E17-E30; Laura Dunbar, *Youth Gangs In Canada*.

⁶⁵ Karen Pauls, "'A Lot Of People Facing Potential Deportation' Under Upcoming Changes To DUI Penalties: Immigration Lawyer", *CBC News*, 2018, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/manitoba/manitoba-impaired-driving-penalties-deportation-1.4917026>.

handling of gangster refugee claimant exposes Canada's screening weaknesses"⁶⁶; "Canada is failing to deport criminals. Here's why it can take years, sometimes decades"⁶⁷; "Millions more needed to tackle Canada's refugee claims backlog: internal documents"⁶⁸; "Somali with criminal past who crossed border into Manitoba loses refugee bid"⁶⁹; "How millionaire migrants duped Canadian immigration"⁷⁰; "Conservatives call for audit of immigration system after gangster twice released in Canada"⁷¹; "Ordered out but still here: An inside look at Canada's immigration system"⁷²; "Police keeping an eye on several 'newcomer' gangs popping up in Winnipeg"⁷³. The number of headlines regarding newcomers and immigration in Canada that focus on negative aspects of the immigration system or violent, criminal, or dangerous acts perpetrated by newcomers significantly outweigh positive messages. The common ideas among these headlines and the stories that follow them are that dangerous, dishonest, and criminal newcomers are able to easily come into Canada, that newcomers that do commit crimes see few consequences, and that immigration and refugee settlement results in increased spending and taxation for Canadians.

⁶⁶ Rusnell, Charles. "Botched Handling Of Gangster Refugee Claimant Exposes Canada's Screening Weaknesses". *CBC News*, 2018. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/edmonton/gangster-refugee-canada-immigration-screening-1.4943292>.

⁶⁷ Stewart Bell and Andrew Russell, "Canada Is Failing To Deport Criminals. Here'S Why It Can Take Years, Sometimes Decades", *Global News*, 2018, <https://globalnews.ca/news/4087292/canada-deporting-dangerous-criminals-ineffective-still-here/>.

⁶⁸ Teresa Wright, "Millions More Needed To Tackle Canada'S Refugee Claims Backlog: Internal Documents", *Global News*, 2020, <https://globalnews.ca/news/4834938/refugee-claims-backlog/>.

⁶⁹ Hoye, Bryce. "Somali With Criminal Past Who Crossed Border Into Manitoba Loses Refugee Bid". *CBC News*, 2019. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/manitoba/somali-man-refugee-claim-denied-1.5036625>.

⁷⁰ Global News, *How Millionaire Migrants Duped Canadian Immigration*, video, 2018, <https://globalnews.ca/video/4436342/how-millionaire-migrants-duped-canadian-immigration>.

⁷¹ Charles Rusnell, "Conservatives Call For Audit Of Immigration System After Gangster Twice Released In Canada", *CBC News*, 2018, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/edmonton/immigration-border-gangs-crime-1.4945440>.

⁷² Global News, *Ordered Out But Still Here: An Inside Look At Canada'S Immigration System*, video, 2018, <https://globalnews.ca/video/4092624/ordered-out-but-still-here-an-inside-look-at-canadas-immigration-system/>.

⁷³ Brittany Greenslade, "Police Keeping An Eye On Several 'Newcomer' Gangs Popping Up In Winnipeg", *Global News*, 2018, <https://globalnews.ca/news/4054465/police-keeping-an-eye-on-several-newcomer-gangs-popping-up-in-winnipeg/>.

These messages not only reinforce stereotypes and negative perceptions about newcomers but can also contribute to the rising rates of discrimination and hostility directed toward newcomers⁷⁴. Identity and belonging play an important role one's ability to adapt and succeed in a new environment⁷⁵. The increased cynicism towards refugees and immigrants entering Canada, only acts to further alienate them from the dominant culture⁷⁶. The 2017 report *Youth Gangs in Canada*, showed that many newcomer youths become vulnerable to gang activity because within their new Canadian community they develop "internalized racism" or, alternatively, cling to their ethnic and cultural identity "resisting Canadian culture"⁷⁷. These messages can also shape the ways in which newcomers are viewed in terms of law enforcement and the ways newcomers expect to be viewed by authority figures. When the messaging indicates that newcomers are unwanted and are under unique scrutiny and observation by members of the community including law enforcement, a lack of respect and trust between the two can develop. The study expressed that perceptions of inequality and injustice often leads newcomer youth to view themselves as victims or targets⁷⁸. In response for these feelings of powerlessness, newcomer youth with these perceptions are drawn to gangs as they offer "social support", "acceptance", "social status", "respect", and protection⁷⁹. As a result, the negative messaging that has become systemic in Canadian media contributes to a potential cycle of violence by and towards newcomer youth⁸⁰.

⁷⁴ Rossiter and Rossiter, "Diamonds In The Rough", 409-429.

⁷⁵ Caxaj and Berman, "Belonging Among Newcomer Youths", E17-E30.

⁷⁶ Rossiter and Rossiter, "Diamonds In The Rough", 409-429; Caxaj and Berman, "Belonging Among Newcomer Youths", E17-E30.

⁷⁷ Laura Dunbar, *Youth Gangs In Canada*, 15.

⁷⁸ Laura Dunbar, *Youth Gangs In Canada*, 15.

⁷⁹ Laura Dunbar, *Youth Gangs In Canada*, 15.

⁸⁰ Rossiter and Rossiter, "Diamonds In The Rough", 409-429.

Newcomer youth are also influenced by their own cultural community that exists in their new community. Dependent on the cultural background of newcomers, in some cases there are very large, powerful communities, while in others there are very few people from the same background. In cases where cultural or religious communities exist, newcomers can be influenced in both positive and negative ways. For many newcomer youths, the ability to connect with people with similar beliefs, traditions, and languages is a welcome opportunity to take a break from trying to adapt to the new culture and to develop a sense of identity and belonging⁸¹. However, for others these cultural communities can act to further alienate them from the dominant culture and can create a sense of confusion about how to adapt to the new culture⁸². In many ways, this cultural community becomes an extension of the family dynamic. As was discussed previously, a generational gap can form where parents and older members of the community are fearful of seeing the youth lose their cultural identity and values⁸³. When newcomer youth feel pressure from their new community, peers, and schools to conform to the dominant culture, the interaction between the youths and the members of the older generation can become volatile. Interactions can escalate and become violent or newcomer youth can feel alienated further by their own community and, as a result, seek acceptance from disenfranchised peer groups or gangs both of which can lead to acts of violence or criminal activity⁸⁴.

Although it is important to understand the unique factors that contribute to the involvement of newcomer youth in acts of violence, a better understanding of the systemic influences on these factors must be developed. It is also important to acknowledge that the

⁸¹ Caxaj and Berman, "Belonging Among Newcomer Youths", E17-E30.

⁸² Rossiter and Rossiter, "Diamonds In The Rough", 409-429.

⁸³ Christmas and Christmas, "What Are We Doing To Protect Youth In Canada, And Help Them Succeed?".

⁸⁴ Rossiter and Rossiter, "Diamonds In The Rough", 409-429.

perpetuation of negative perceptions and stereotypes of newcomers, despite statistical evidence showing not only that newcomers are contributing members of society but that as the number of newcomers increases, crime rates decrease, is a systemic issue that is contributing to the involvement of newcomers in acts of crime and violence. In addition, there must be a sense of accountability from within governments and members of the dominant culture for contributing to the family, education, and community factors that potentially lead newcomer youth to become involved in acts of violence. There must be greater emphasis placed on developing an awareness of cultural differences and acceptance of varied perspectives without judgment in order to protect the newcomer youth that are falling through the cracks.

Intervention and Prevention

A variety of factors can contribute to newcomer youth becoming involved in acts of violence or criminal activity. Newcomer youth often struggle to find a sense of belonging or to develop an identity that balances their old culture with their new one. Limited access to money or financial support can also put a strain on newcomer youth and their families. These struggles, and others, can all lead newcomer youth to turn to criminal activity or gang involvement which often leads to acts of violence. Research on the issue of immigrant and refugee youth involvement in violence and gangs consistently breaks contributing and protective factors into five categories: family, peers, individual, school, and community⁸⁵. Each of these categories can then be broken down into many parts (for example: family includes parents, grandparents, etc.; school includes teachers, classes, learning support services, etc.) and can also be connected to show overlapping influences and responsibilities. The one aspect that links every category and

⁸⁵ Rossiter and Rossiter, "Diamonds In The Rough", 414; Matthew Fast, *Finding Their Way Again: The Experiences Of Gang-Affected Refugee Youth* (Halifax: Fernwood Publishing, 2017), 24.

Hawamda, I. (2019). Systemic Influences of Newcomer Violence in Canada. *Journal for Peace and Justice Studies*, 29(1), 47–78.

their parts together is the concept of education. In order to prevent and resolve issues of violence, criminal activity, and gang violence among newcomer youth, it is first necessary to educate those involved in schools and the school system on issues facing newcomer students and to evaluate the effectiveness of the current education model in light of changing student demographics⁸⁶. It is then critical for schools to better educate families, peers, members of the community, and newcomer youth arriving in Canada to foster greater awareness of struggles or misconceptions, as well as to increase opportunities to build connections and systems of support.

Existing research on the involvement of newcomer youth in violence or gang activity points to schools as one of the primary sources of frustration for newcomer youth and their families⁸⁷. However, schools also have the greatest capacity to provide support, skills, and access to services⁸⁸. Unfortunately, school systems in Canada have been slow to implement programming, training, and policy changes to address the needs of an increasingly diverse student population⁸⁹. In Canada, public schools operate based on a hierarchical structure with the government at the top, followed by the school divisions, school administrators, and teachers. The curriculum, created at the government level, has been slow to change and rarely accounts for the experiences of newcomer youth. For instance, the most recent update to the Manitoba English as an Additional Language curriculum began in 2011. For the past eight years, the document has remained an incomplete draft⁹⁰.

⁸⁶ Fast, *Finding Their Way Again*.

⁸⁷ Christmas and Christmas, "What Are We Doing To Protect Youth In Canada, And Help Them Succeed?"; Fast, *Finding Their Way Again*.

⁸⁸ Christmas and Christmas, "What Are We Doing To Protect Youth In Canada, And Help Them Succeed?"; Chuang and Moreno, *Immigrant Children*, 30; Fast, *Finding Their Way Again*.

⁸⁹ Rossiter and Rossiter, "Diamonds In The Rough", 409-429; Christmas and Christmas, "What Are We Doing To Protect Youth In Canada, And Help Them Succeed?".

⁹⁰ Manitoba Education and Training, *Manitoba Kindergarten To Grade 12 Curriculum Framework For English As An Additional Language*.

This lack of attention then trickles down the hierarchy to all areas of the school system. Classrooms are not designed to support newcomer youth and language learners, teachers are not adequately trained or educated in areas of language acquisition or cultural awareness, school staff are not sufficiently representative of the student body, and curriculum content is unrelatable⁹¹. These are only a few examples of the challenges facing the school system with regard to supporting newcomer youth. Each issue impacts students and the community in a variety of ways and failure to address these issues results in newcomer youth feeling overwhelmed and frustrated by the system that is often expected to be a primary source of support.

Problem: Placing Youth in Grade-Levels Based on Age

While many of these issues impact newcomer students at all ages, students that arrive in Canada past the age of elementary school are particularly at-risk for feeling isolated or alienated in the school setting. These feelings are amplified if students have experienced limited formal education or have significant gaps in schooling⁹². In most Canadian schools, students are placed in grade-levels based on their age⁹³. Students that arrive in Canada at a young age, are typically able to adapt to the elementary school classroom⁹⁴. In early years education, much of the focus is on teaching foundational knowledge and skills. All students in early years are still actively acquiring language skills and reading, writing, and vocabulary skills are taught explicitly. As a result, by the time these students arrive in high school, they often have English language skills

⁹¹ Rossiter and Rossiter, "Diamonds In The Rough", 426; Manitoba Education and Training. *Grade 11 History of Canada: A Foundation for Implementation* (2011).

⁹² Rossiter and Rossiter, "Diamonds In The Rough", 409-429.

⁹³ Rossiter and Rossiter, "Diamonds In The Rough", 409-429; Fast, *Finding Their Way Again*.

⁹⁴ Hee Jin Bang, "Newcomer Immigrant Students' Perspectives On What Affects Their Homework Experiences", *Journal Of Educational Research* 104, no. 6 (2011): 408-419.

equal to their Canadian-born peers. However, students that arrive in their pre-teen or teenage years face increased levels of difficulty adapting to the school system and finding success in school⁹⁵.

Students that arrive in Canada between the ages of eleven and thirteen are typically placed in a middle school setting. Middle years education scaffolds learning in order to prepare them for high school. However, for newcomer students that arrive during this period, the primary focus is on social adaptation and language acquisition. As a result, by the time these students arrive in high school, they have a good understanding of how the school system works and have adapted to Canadian culture. They also tend to have conversational English skills on par with their Canadian-born peers. Despite being able to speak English fluently, they struggle academically and with reading and writing tasks, but have also developed coping mechanisms so as to disguise their weaknesses. Many of these students complete an early years education in their home country, in their first language. Upon arriving in Canada, they are placed in a middle years school where the focus of their learning is on English language skill development. Therefore, by the time they arrive in high school within three years, they have learned how to speak English, but have a significant gap in skills and knowledge. When they arrive in high school, these students are not identified as English language learners and their teachers are frequently confused as to why a student that pleasantly and actively participates in class, fails to hand in any completed work. This group of youth, tend to struggle in school to a greater degree than do students that arrive in Canada at high school age⁹⁶. Outside of students that have experienced gaps in their education, students that arrive between fourteen and eighteen have

⁹⁵ Bang, "Newcomer Immigrant Students' Perspectives On What Affects Their Homework Experiences", 408-419; Fast, *Finding Their Way Again*; Ngo, *Unravelling Identities And Belonging*.

⁹⁶ Ngo, *Unravelling Identities And Belonging*, 55-56.

often completed school in their first language and have acquired the basic foundational skills to understand patterns, logical reasoning, and critical thinking.

Solutions

In order to address the needs of the students arriving in Canada at middle school age, it is necessary to clarify what is meant by a ‘gap’ in educational experience. For the most part students with educational gaps are considered to be those that have missed school for an extended period of time or those that have had their education interrupted hindering their ability to complete a grade level⁹⁷. However, a ‘gap’ in education should also include circumstances where students are present in the school setting and are receiving an education, but due to language levels or the need to bridge previous gaps in education, the student has been unable to meet grade level outcomes. In Manitoba, students are not, typically, held back in middle school which means that a newcomer student who has not met grade six, seven, or eight academic outcomes can still move on to high school. While there are benefits to this system, there is not sufficient communication from the middle years level to the senior years level as to what content the student was exposed to or what knowledge or skill outcomes were met prior to completing grade eight.

It would also be beneficial for school divisions, school administrators, and teachers to develop a process through which students could transition out of middle school into high school more smoothly. By increasing the amount of information shared between the schools, high schools would be better able to develop programming and support services to ensure students that seem to speak English well, but are experiencing gaps in academic knowledge and skills do

⁹⁷ Fast, *Finding Their Way Again*.

not fall through the cracks. Ideally, government policies on education would include guidelines for the implementation of transitional programming and the sharing of information specific to newcomers and English language learners. However, it is not necessary for school divisions or teachers to wait for policy. Creating closer relationships between high schools and their feeder schools could help improve the transition for all students from middle years to senior years. It could also help inform the need for specific programming, learning support services, and course design. Developing a better understanding of the learning behaviours of newcomer students during this period of development could also allow for a re-evaluation of the current senior years education model⁹⁸.

While some students are successful in the four-year model, it may be time to examine models that no longer require the grouping of students into grade levels allowing students the time and support needed for them to grasp skills, knowledge, and concepts without risk of failure and further alienation from their peers. For newcomer students entering high school, the four-year model does not provide enough time to develop fluency which studies have shown, on average, takes at least seven years⁹⁹. As a result, many newcomer students, come to realize that four years in high school, will not meet prepare them to meet admission requirements for post-secondary education, despite their goals and the expectations of their family¹⁰⁰. Creating a senior years education model without grade levels has the potential to create an environment where all students are better able to succeed. However, in regard to newcomer students specifically, a model of this kind: 1) would eliminate the expectation for them to follow the four-year timeline allowing adequate time for language acquisition, development of social skills, and adequate

⁹⁸ Fast, *Finding Their Way Again*.

⁹⁹ Chuang and Moreno, *Immigrant Children*; Fast, *Finding Their Way Again*.

¹⁰⁰ Fast, *Finding Their Way Again*.

preparation for post-secondary education or other future goals; 2) would reduce the alienation from peers as a result of failing courses multiple times; 3) would allow students to build deeper connections with peers and adults in their community resulting in a more well-developed circle of support.

Problem: Lack of Diverse Representation in Schools

Schools are limited in their representation of diversity in two significant ways: 1) school board members, administrators, and teachers and other school staff are predominantly White; 2) the materials used and content covered focuses primarily on an understanding of the world through a Western, White lens. As a result, newcomer students, particularly those that are not from European heritage, rarely see themselves represented in the school setting¹⁰¹. Newcomer students do not have role models in the school that reflect their culture, ethnicity, or traditions and they often struggle to find staff members in the school that understand or share their experiences of being an immigrant or refugee in Canada¹⁰². Not only does this lack of representation affect newcomer students' ability to form connections with adults in their school and to feel understood, but it also shapes their own self-perceptions and understanding of their place within the school and Canadian society¹⁰³.

Newcomer youths often struggle with their identity and developing a sense of belonging in their new country¹⁰⁴. The lack of diverse representation that exists in schools only acts to amplify the feelings of being 'Other' and can result in newcomer youths seeking out acceptance making them vulnerable to involvement in gangs or other criminal activity. Therefore, it is

¹⁰¹ Fast, *Finding Their Way Again*, 32-37.

¹⁰² Rossiter and Rossiter, "Diamonds In The Rough", 419.

¹⁰³ Rossiter and Rossiter, "Diamonds In The Rough", 409-429; Fast, *Finding Their Way Again*, 32-37.

¹⁰⁴ Fast, *Finding Their Way Again*.

important for a conscious effort to be made in order to improve the diversity of ethno-cultural representation among staff at all levels of the school system, as well as within curriculum and available materials.

Solutions

Although teachers do not control staffing decisions, there are a number of things teachers can do in their own classrooms to improve the diversity of ethno-cultural representation in the school setting. For instance, when teachers invite guest speakers in to speak to students they can make an effort to find speakers from diverse backgrounds regardless of the topic being discussed. Arranging for students to attend panel discussions where people of diverse racial, cultural, and gender identities are represented can also provide an opportunity for students to see aspects of their own identity represented. Additionally, it could help students develop an understanding that a sense of belonging is not reliant upon having the same opinions, experiences, or perspectives as everyone else.

Teachers can also become more aware of the materials used in their classrooms and the activities, tests, and assignments they design. The majority of books that are made available to students in schools and those that are taught in class are more often than not written by White, Western authors¹⁰⁵. While there is value in reading these books, teachers must begin considering the impact of leaving out stories representative of different ethno-cultural and historical perspectives. For newcomer students, not only are they not represented by the novels, but, in many cases, they also struggle to understand the allusions, idioms, and point of view expressed. References of these kinds also lead to problems for students in assignments and testing, as well.

¹⁰⁵ Amina Mohamed, "Voicing The Voiceless: Including The Stories Of Marginalized Students In Classroom Literature", *Language Arts Journal Of Michigan* 32, no. 1 (2016): 35-42.

Hawamda, I. (2019). Systemic Influences of Newcomer Violence in Canada. *Journal for Peace and Justice Studies*, 29(1), 47-78.

Phrases and events that may seem clear and obvious to teachers and Canadian-born students, need explicit scaffolding for students that do not share in the reference. Therefore, by using books and materials that are not representative of different cultures, races, and genders, students are alienated in multiple ways at the same time¹⁰⁶. They struggle to understand how they are to personally connect with the characters and lessons in the novel, while at the same time failing to understand the language, historical, and popular culture references. The fact that students are often graded on their understanding and interpretation of these materials, as well as their ability to connect the text to themselves, other texts, and the world, only adds to their feelings of inadequacy, Otherness, and exclusion from their peers. Teachers have a responsibility to meet the needs of all students in their classrooms and to provide them with the support and opportunities to be successful. Authentically diversifying the ethno-cultural representation in classroom materials is a simple way for teachers to build a more inclusive environment for all students, including historically underrepresented newcomer students¹⁰⁷.

It is then the responsibility of school administrators to support teachers' efforts to diversify their classroom and school libraries. Administrators are in the position to provide both funding and encouragement to teachers in order to oversee the creation of more inclusive materials, lessons, and workshops. Administrators are also positioned in such a way that they can influence the school board to create division-wide initiatives to increase the availability of representative materials. Administrators are also able to hire teachers or influence the hiring practices of the school division. Ensuring that schools include more diverse race, culture, and gender representation in their hiring practices can create an environment where an increased

¹⁰⁶ Mohamed, "Voicing The Voiceless", 35-42.

¹⁰⁷ Mohamed, "Voicing The Voiceless", 35-42.

number of students are able to create close relationships with staff members and develop a sense of belonging and being understood. Diversity in school staff also provides students with role models that reflect their own identity, demonstrating the potential for future success and value in the community and Canadian society¹⁰⁸.

At the government level, there is a need to revisit existing curriculum, particularly at the senior years level, in order to evaluate the accessibility of content for newcomer students that are new to the Canadian school system. For students that begin high school upon arriving in Canada, learning the language is the first priority in most school settings. However, even after students have developed basic language skills, many of them struggle to understand the material taught in classrooms based on the curriculum¹⁰⁹. As a result, if they do not have teachers or support staff to adequately support their specific learning needs, they can have a difficult time meeting the outcomes required in order to pass the course. The current curriculum for most courses does not explicitly account for cultural diversity in that it does little to ensure the inclusion of culturally diverse traditions, perspectives, or experiences and does not account for the differences in prior learning between newcomer students and their Canadian-born peers¹¹⁰. For instance, in Manitoba, topics in Canadian history are taught multiple times between kindergarten and grade eleven, at which point students are required to take Canadian History before they are able to graduate. The grade eleven Canadian History curriculum, however, is built on the understanding that students have been exposed to certain topics in their past educational experiences. However, for newcomer students this is not true.

¹⁰⁸ Rossiter and Rossiter, "Diamonds In The Rough", 419.

¹⁰⁹ Rossiter and Rossiter, "Diamonds In The Rough", 409-429; Ngo, *Unravelling Identities And Belonging*.

¹¹⁰ Manitoba Education and Training. *Grade 11 History of Canada: A Foundation for Implementation*.

Not only is grade eleven Canadian History their first exposure to topics in Canadian history, they also often have a limited understanding of foundational knowledge required to meet curricular outcomes. For instance, newcomers often have very little awareness of the types of animals native to North America or their names in English. As a result, the concept of the fur trade, a primary focus of Canadian history, is difficult to comprehend. Newcomer youths also typically have little background knowledge of North American geography. Therefore, making connections between the historic locations of events and peoples and how they have shaped their current locations is nearly impossible. The implied expectation within high school curriculum that students have previous experience with the Canadian school system and that content has been scaffolded is not in keeping with the current inclusion-based model of education. The government needs to make a more concerted effort to finalize the English as an Additional Language curriculum and to include tips and suggestions for teachers to adapt content area curriculum specifically to meet the needs of language learners¹¹¹.

In order to improve the diversity of representation of staff in schools, governments also need to be more assertive in developing programs that allow newcomer teachers to re-certify effectively and efficiently. This is of particular importance for refugees that come to Canada with prior teaching experience. Re-certifying as a teacher after immigrating to Canada is a long and expensive process. Refugee families are particularly at risk as they struggle financially and often have difficulty finding meaningful work. Allowing those that have had teaching experience in other countries to get back into the schools would not only benefit the person working, but would also increase the diversity students see in the schools. Despite a continually growing number of refugee students in Canadian schools, the refugee experience is not represented among staff.

¹¹¹ Rossiter and Rossiter, "Diamonds In The Rough", 409-429.

Given that refugee youth are the most at risk among immigrants to become involved in violence or gang activity, the government should make every effort to ensure these students are provided with role models representative of their own identity and experiences, as well as the opportunity to develop a sense of belonging¹¹². Immigrant and refugee staff members can become defenders of cultural beliefs, behaviours, and practices that are questioned or criticized by students or staff and can also help newcomer students understand that it is possible to belong in Canadian culture without losing the culture of their heritage. Increasing diversity among school staff not only improves the self-perception of newcomer students but can also act to eliminate misconceptions and stereotypes among staff and students resulting in a more inclusive, empathetic school and community.

Problem: Inconsistent English as Additional Language Support

Teachers, School administrators, school divisions, and the government need to come together to develop a consistent plan for the implementation of English language learning support in schools. The current system sees implementation of EAL programming decided upon individually by each school. While there are some benefits to the flexibility this offers in meeting the specific needs of each schools unique demographics, it also means that some schools have no programming or support designed to support English language learners at all¹¹³. As indicated above, completing the Manitoba EAL curriculum would be a step in the right direction. However, more needs to be done in order to best support English language learners in schools, especially those that enter school in middle or high school where language skills are no longer explicitly taught as part of the prescribed curriculum. In my experience as a teacher, I have

¹¹² Rossiter and Rossiter, "Diamonds In The Rough", 419.

¹¹³ Christmas and Christmas, "What Are We Doing To Protect Youth In Canada, And Help Them Succeed?".

recognized two consistent problems with the way English as an Additional Language programming is viewed in the school system.

Solutions

The first problem is that EAL learning support is often viewed through the same lens as other learning support services. It is important for everyone involved in the school system to understand that the inability to speak English fluently is not equivalent to learning disabilities or cognitive and developmental delays. Most newcomer students have had the ability to attend school regularly for the same time period as their Canadian-born peers and have reached or exceeded the grade level benchmarks expected by the Canadian school system. In cases where students have experienced gaps in their education, it is equally important to understand that while there are gaps in their academic knowledge and skills, they are not cognitively impaired. Therefore, the inclusion model that has been successful in building safe and empathetic school communities for students with learning difficulties or cognitive and developmental delays, has been less successful with newcomers in need of English language support. Unlike students that require modifications and adaptations throughout their educational experience, EAL students are often frustrated that because of their struggles with language they are not able to communicate ideas, opinions, and concepts that they are already familiar with in another language¹¹⁴. Many newcomer students request and welcome the opportunity to take part in English as an Additional Language classes where they are able to meet other students with similar experiences, share their struggles and successes, and receive language specific instruction from qualified teachers¹¹⁵. In my experience, English language learners rarely see these classes as exclusionary, but rather see

¹¹⁴ Fast, *Finding Their Way Again*, 32-37.

¹¹⁵ Fast, *Finding Their Way Again*, 32-37.

them as an opportunity to move toward being included and successful in their other classes more effectively.

That said, the second problem I have observed is that some schools develop English as an Additional Language programming but fail to provide explicit opportunities for newcomer students to interact with non-EAL peers. In some schools, EAL students are required to complete certain levels before they take any classes with their non-EAL peers¹¹⁶. While these students are being supported from a language development standpoint, their social development is limited to other newcomer students. As a result, the non-EAL students in the school are more likely to see these students as ‘Other’ because they do not interact on a regular basis and the EAL students are less likely to develop a sense of belonging within the greater school community. It is important for schools to ensure there is a balance between providing the necessary support and ensuring that all students in the building have the opportunity to learn about the experiences, cultures, traditions, and beliefs of their peers.

Problem: Inadequate Access to Culturally Specific, Multilingual Mental Health Services

In addition to inconsistent support for language acquisition and development for newcomer students, access to mental health care services that allow youths to receive care in their preferred language and that takes into account cultural norms and beliefs is limited, if it is available at all¹¹⁷. In my teaching practice as an EAL teacher, I have on many occasions attempted to get help for students from a variety of cultural backgrounds. In each case, I have reached out to school counsellors and the school psychologist only to be told that none of them were clear on what services are available to students that do not speak English. The only

¹¹⁶ Bang, "Newcomer Immigrant Students' Perspectives On What Affects Their Homework Experiences", 410.

¹¹⁷ Rossiter and Rossiter, "Diamonds In The Rough", 409-429; Chuang and Moreno, *Immigrant Children*, 161.

recommendation I have received is to look into outside services such as immigrant or settlement services. While there are some outside services available, they are limited and are not specific to the needs of youths.

Solutions

In order to better provide mental health care for newcomer youths a number of changes must take place between policy makers and the school system. First, programs designed to meet the mental health care needs of immigrants and refugees must begin to collaborate and form partnerships with schools and school divisions to ensure that newcomer students have the same access to services as all other young people. Second, much like the government needs to streamline the recertification process for newcomer teachers, there should be increased initiatives to recertify newcomers with backgrounds in mental health professions and to license people with multilingual, multicultural awareness. Third, administrators, teachers, guidance counsellors, and school psychologists must be provided with education and training regarding the different views and taboos surrounding mental health issues in many cultures¹¹⁸. In order to better support students that may be in need of mental health support it is important for those working with newcomer youths to be well-informed about available services and how to determine the best avenue for each student. It is important for anyone helping a student to avoid alienating the student from their peers or family and to ensure they are not criticizing aspects of the student's cultural identity while guiding the student to the help that they need.

Problem: Family Expectations

¹¹⁸ Chuang and Moreno, *Immigrant Children*, 37.

Newcomer students often struggle with balancing their family's expectations with the expectations of their new social environment¹¹⁹. In a short period of time after arriving in Canada, newcomer youths begin to adapt to the new way of being. Their parents, on the other hand, are less exposed to Canadian culture and being adults are, generally, less concerned about fitting in. Parents are frequently fearful that their children are growing up in a culture that they themselves do not understand. The distance between youths and their parents grows as the young people begin to learn the language, make new friends, and question aspects of their culture that are of great importance to the parents¹²⁰. Frequently, the result is that as parents attempt to hold on to their children more tightly by implementing more rules and stricter consequences, their children increasingly distance themselves from their family and aspects of their cultural identity. In some cases, young people are told to leave their homes, sent back home or to another province, or are punished for expressing views different from those of their family¹²¹. Feelings of abandonment, rejection, and isolation can make newcomer youths with no other support system toward involvement in gang or criminal activity as a means of creating a new system of support¹²².

Solutions

Students spend at least six to eight hours a day in school, which means in many cases students spend more time at school than with their family. In relation to newcomer youths and family conflict, schools are well-positioned to help prevent young people from seeking out

¹¹⁹ Rossiter and Rossiter, "Diamonds In The Rough", 409-429; Bang, "Newcomer Immigrant Students' Perspectives On What Affects Their Homework Experiences", 410; Fast, *Finding Their Way Again*, 25-26.

¹²⁰ Bang, "Newcomer Immigrant Students' Perspectives On What Affects Their Homework Experiences", 410; Fast, *Finding Their Way Again*, 26.

¹²¹ Fast, *Finding Their Way Again*, 42-49.

¹²² Fast, *Finding Their Way Again*, 42-49.

unhealthy systems of support. Becoming connected with services that provide translators, or when possible, having a list of school division staff that can serve as translators would be a first step in helping to facilitate meetings with students and their families. The next step, similar to the solutions discussed previously, would be providing teachers and administrators with cultural awareness training would better equip them to engage with the student and the family in hopes of moderating an understanding. It is important for teachers and administrators to have a clear understanding of and respect for the cultural beliefs and dynamics of the families they meet and to ensure that families do not feel judged or criticized. In the event that a student and their family are unable to reconcile or come to a resolution, staff members in the school setting also have the ability to create a mentorship relationship with student or to help the young person become involved in groups, clubs, or activities to foster a sense of accomplishment and belonging¹²³. The implementation of career experience programs can also help newcomer youth gain knowledge, skills, and work experience which allows them to be financially independent and to begin broadening their connections with people in the community¹²⁴.

Problem: Lack of Belonging in the Community

Newcomer youths can struggle to find places where they feel a sense of belonging in their community due to an inability to speak the same language as other people or because of a lack of understanding of cultural norms and expectations¹²⁵. Some communities are also less willing to accept newcomers than others¹²⁶. Many people develop misunderstandings or believe negative stereotypes perpetuated by politicians and the media that make them resistant to the

¹²³ Fast, *Finding Their Way Again*.

¹²⁴ Fast, *Finding Their Way Again*.

¹²⁵ Fast, *Finding Their Way Again*.

¹²⁶ Fast, *Finding Their Way Again*, 37-38.

arrival of refugees and immigrants in Canada. Racism and discrimination based on religion, language, or cultural dress are frequent occurrences in the lives of newcomers¹²⁷. For newcomer youths the effects of these events can be particularly damaging as they affect the way they view themselves in their new community.

Solutions

In addition to helping student become involved in clubs, teams, or events which was discussed previously, schools also have a responsibility to educate all students about media biases and the impacts of racism and discrimination. By educating the young people in the community, there is an increased potential for the ideas and misconceptions of the other members of the community to be challenged as students begin to question the beliefs held by family members or friends. There is also a responsibility in schools to ensure that all students are appreciated and that there are opportunities for students to share, discuss, ask questions, and celebrate cultural differences and human connections. By holding cultural celebration events that invite or involve the larger surrounding community, people can come together in order to share their own experiences and practices, but also to learn about others. Providing people with knowledge can help eliminate attitudes and perceptions created out of ignorance and fear in order to create more accepting, inclusive communities.

Conclusion

While there are a number of factors that make newcomer youths vulnerable to involvement in gang activity or violence, existing research indicates that schools are a primary source of frustration and alienation. Given that newcomer youths are expected to spend most of

¹²⁷ Fast, *Finding Their Way Again*; Ngo, *Unravelling Identities And Belonging*.

Hawamda, I. (2019). Systemic Influences of Newcomer Violence in Canada. *Journal for Peace and Justice Studies*, 29(1), 47–78.

their time everyday in the school setting, it is logical to look to schools as a place to start when considering how to improve the supports and services available to newcomers. The number of newcomers arriving in Canada has risen steadily over the past decade and is likely to continue rising as Canada looks to compensate for the aging population and low birth rates. The education system failed to anticipate the increasing needs and support services newcomer students would demand of the system and it has been slow to adapt or develop solutions.

Although some changes may require large amounts of money or changes to policy, there are a number of solutions that can be implemented with little effort. Creating school or classroom libraries that reflect the diversity of the student population can include books written by students. Holding cultural celebrations or potlucks where students are encouraged to bring in food that reflects their cultural or familial identity can help students learn more about what is important to their peers. Ensuring there is no cultural bias in assignments or tests can prevent students from failing because they do not understand a pop culture reference or unfamiliar concept.

Most importantly teachers, administrators, school board members, and policy makers need to be willing to have conversations, question the status quo, develop new strategies, and hold each other accountable. Creating school spaces where newcomer students are supported academically and socially has the potential to decrease their vulnerability or desire to seek out belonging through involvement with gangs or acts of violence. When newcomer students feel that they belong, that they are valued, that they are supported, and that they are celebrated within their school community, it is one less place they face the challenges and frustrations of adapting to life in a new country.

Bibliography

- Bang, Hee Jin. "Newcomer Immigrant Students' Perspectives On What Affects Their Homework Experiences". *Journal Of Educational Research* 104, no. 6 (2011): 408-419.
- Bell, Stewart, and Andrew Russell. "Canada Is Failing To Deport Criminals. Here's Why It Can Take Years, Sometimes Decades". *Global News*, 2018.
<https://globalnews.ca/news/4087292/canada-deporting-dangerous-criminals-ineffective-still-here/> .
- Caxaj, Susana, and Susana Berman. "Belonging Among Newcomer Youths: Intersecting Experiences Of Inclusion And Exclusion". *Advances In Nursing Science* 33, no. 4 (2010): E17-E30.
- Christmas, Brandi, and Bob Christmas. "What Are We Doing To Protect Youth In Canada, And Help Them Succeed?". *Journal Of Community Safety And Well-Being* 2, no. 3 (2017).
<https://journalcswb.ca/index.php/cswb/article/view/52/112> .
- Chuang, Susan, and Robert Moreno. *Immigrant Children: Change, Adaptation, And Cultural Transformation*. Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2011.
- Dunbar, Laura. *Youth Gangs In Canada: A Review Of Current Topics And Issues*. Public Safety Canada, 2017.
- Fast, Matthew. *Finding Their Way Again: The Experiences Of Gang-Affected Refugee Youth*. Halifax: Fernwood Publishing, 2017.
- Global News. *How Millionaire Migrants Duped Canadian Immigration*. Video, 2018.
<https://globalnews.ca/video/4436342/how-millionaire-migrants-duped-canadian-immigration>.
- Hawamda, I. (2019). Systemic Influences of Newcomer Violence in Canada. *Journal for Peace and Justice Studies*, 29(1), 47–78.

Global News. *Ordered Out But Still Here: An Inside Look At Canada's Immigration System.*

Video, 2018. <https://globalnews.ca/video/4092624/ordered-out-but-still-here-an-inside-look-at-canadas-immigration-system/>.

Glowacki, Laura. "9 Reasons Canada's Crime Rate Is Falling". *CBC News*, 2016.

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/manitoba/9-reasons-crime-rate-1.3692193>.

Greenslade, Brittany. "Police Keeping An Eye On Several 'Newcomer' Gangs Popping Up In

Winnipeg". *Global News*, 2018. <https://globalnews.ca/news/4054465/police-keeping-an-eye-on-several-newcomer-gangs-popping-up-in-winnipeg/>.

Hawkins, Darnell. *Violent Crime: Assessing Race And Ethnic Differences*. Cambridge, UK:

Cambridge University Press, 2003.

Hoye, Bryce. "Somali With Criminal Past Who Crossed Border Into Manitoba Loses Refugee

Bid". *CBC News*, 2019. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/manitoba/somali-man-refugee-claim-denied-1.5036625>.

Manitoba Education and Training. *Manitoba Kindergarten To Grade 12 Curriculum Framework*

For English As An Additional Language (EAL) And Literacy, Academics, And Language (LAL) Programming, Draft For Consultation And Review, June 2011., 2011.

Manitoba Education and Training. *Grade 11 History of Canada: A Foundation for*

Implementation, 2011.

Mohamed, Amina. "Voicing The Voiceless: Including The Stories Of Marginalized Students In

Classroom Literature". *Language Arts Journal Of Michigan* 32, no. 1 (2016): 35-42.

Ngo, Hieu Van. *Unravelling Identities And Belonging: Criminal Gang Involvement Of Youth*

From Immigrant Families. Calgary, Alberta: Centre for Newcomers, 2010.

Hawamda, I. (2019). Systemic Influences of Newcomer Violence in Canada. *Journal for Peace and Justice Studies*, 29(1), 47-78.

Pauls, Karen. "A Lot Of People Facing Potential Deportation' Under Upcoming Changes To DUI Penalties: Immigration Lawyer". *CBC News*, 2018.

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/manitoba/manitoba-impaired-driving-penalties-deportation-1.4917026>.

Rossiter, Marian, and Katherine Rossiter. "Diamonds In The Rough: Bridging Gaps In Supports For At-Risk Immigrant And Refugee Youth". *Journal Of Migration And Integration* 10, no. 4 (2009): 409-429.

Rusnell, Charles. "Botched Handling Of Gangster Refugee Claimant Exposes Canada's Screening Weaknesses". *CBC News*, 2018.

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/edmonton/gangster-refugee-canada-immigration-screening-1.4943292>.

Rusnell, Charles. "Conservatives Call For Audit Of Immigration System After Gangster Twice Released In Canada". *CBC News*, 2018.

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/edmonton/immigration-border-gangs-crime-1.4945440>.

Wright, Teresa. "Millions More Needed To Tackle Canada's Refugee Claims Backlog: Internal Documents". *Global News*, 2020. <https://globalnews.ca/news/4834938/refugee-claims-backlog/>.