

Supports for Student Learning Program: Exploring the Educational Terrain of Newcomer and Refugee Students in Canada

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Abstract : This literature review explores current research on the educational strengths and barriers of newcomer and refugee youth in Canada. Canada's shift in immigration policy in the past three decades, from Europe to Asian and African countries as source continents of recent immigrants to Canada, has tremendously increased the ethnic, linguistic, cultural and religious diversity of the population, including that of students in its education system. Over 18% of the country's population was born in another country, of which 70% are visible minorities. There has been an increase in admitted immigrants and refugees, with a total of 226,203 between July 2020 and June 2021. Newcomer parents and their children in all major destination countries, including Canada, face tremendous challenges, including racism and discrimination, lack of English language skills, poverty, income inequality, unemployment, and underemployment. They face additional challenges, including discrimination against those who cannot speak the official languages, English or French. The severity of the challenges depends on several intersectional factors, including immigrant status (asylum seeker, refugee, or immigrant), age, gender, level of education and others. Through the lens of intersectionality as an explanatory perspective, this literature review examines the educational attainment and outcomes of newcomer and refugee youth in Canada in order to understand their educational needs, educational barriers and strengths. Newcomer youths' experiences are shaped by numerous intersectional and interconnected sociocultural, sociopolitical, and socioeconomic factors—including gender, migration status, racialized status, ethnicity, socioeconomic class, sexual minority status, age, race—that produce and perpetuate their disadvantage. According to research, immigrants and refugees from visible minority ethnic backgrounds experience exclusions more than newcomers from other backgrounds and groups from the mainstream population. For many immigrant parents, migration provides financial and educational opportunities for their children. Yet, when attending school, newcomer and refugee youth face unique challenges related to racism and discrimination, negative attitudes and stereotypes from teachers and other school authorities, language learning and proficiency, differing levels of acculturation, and different cultural views of the role of parents in relation to teachers and school, and unfamiliarity with the social or school context in Canada. Recognizing discrepancies in educational attainment of newcomer and refugee youth based on their race and immigrant status, the paper develops insights into existing research and data gaps related to educational strengths and challenges for visible minority newcomer youth in Canada. The paper concludes that the educational successes or failures of the newcomer and refugee youth and their settlement and integration into the school system in Canada may depend on where their families settle, the attitudes of the host community and the school officials (teachers, guidance counsellors and school administrators) after-school support programs and their own set of coping mechanisms. Conceivably a unique approach to after-school programming should provide learning supports and opportunities that consider newcomer and refugee youth's needs, experiences, backgrounds and circumstances. This support is likely to translate into significant academic and psychological well-being of newcomer students.

Keywords : deficit discourse, discrimination, educational outcomes, newcomer and refugee youth, racism, strength-based approach, whiteness

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