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Canada is increasingly becoming  
home to more newcomer families  
each year. For newcomer youth,  
integrating into a new school system  
can be challenging and isolating.  
Teachers can be a positive support  
for these students but may  
experience challenges meeting their  
complex and diverse needs.



THE UNIVERSITY  
OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

# Supporting Newcomer Students at School

Tips for Teachers

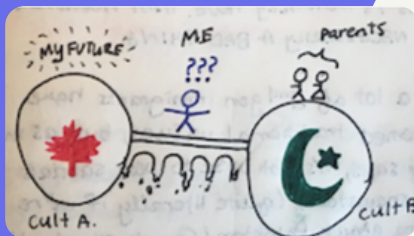
# Our Research

In our research, we talked to newcomer youth (immigrants and refugees between the ages of 14 to 24 who migrated to Canada within the past ten years) about their experiences of school integration. Defined broadly, school integration represents the adjustment of newcomer youth across all aspects of student life – both inside and outside the school context.

Eight high school and ten university newcomer students shared their experiences of immigrating to Canada and integrating into a new school system. We used an Arts-Based engagement ethnography, which included the use of cultural probes (i.e., maps, journals, photographs), individual interviews, and focus groups.

Students shared that they were more engaged and connected with their school and community when they received direct support from school staff, and this impacted their academic success and social-emotional well-being in a positive manner. We have taken the experiences they shared with us and created this resource to support administrators in their ongoing work with newcomer students.

This is an example of a drawing produced by one of our participants, Malia. It is titled "The Cultural Barriers" and it depicts bridging the different parts of her identities.



This graphic represents the ways in which newcomer youth experience school integration.

## Creating Supportive Learning Environments

### BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

Newcomer students told us that building strong relationships with trusted teachers early in the process of school integration provided important support, academically and socially. They found that teachers who had empathy for their situation allowed them to feel comfortable reaching out for assistance.

### NAVIGATING PARENTAL EXPECTATIONS

Bridging the gap between school culture and parental expectations is a challenge faced by newcomer students. Teachers who are empathetic to the values held by newcomer parents and approach them in supportive, non-threatening ways help students navigate these conflicting values.

## Supporting Newcomer Students

### INCORPORATING DIVERSITY PROGRAMMING

Ethnic identity promotion in schools can foster a sense of acceptance. This includes offering diversity clubs, ethnic studies courses, peer mentorship programs and opportunities for cultural expression through academic projects and assignments.

### ENCOURAGING SOCIAL SUPPORTS

Supporting newcomer students in building multicultural, diverse peer groups helps to "bridge the gap". Helping these students get involved in school activities that are aligned with cultural values supports them in developing peer groups and fosters a sense of acceptance.

### REDUCING THE ACADEMIC GAP

Newcomer youth need academic support. This includes options for testing modifications and extended time, English language programming, homework support and programs that provide accessible information about continued education.

**"Educational systems have a cultural and social responsibility to create welcoming and engaging spaces for newcomer youth in order to maximize their academic success and civic potential."**

**DR. ANUSHA KASSAN**  
University of British Columbia